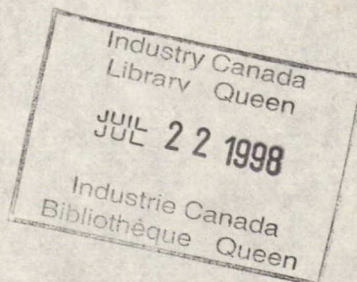


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PUBLIC CONCERNS ABOUT
TELEPHONES/TELEPHONE SERVICE

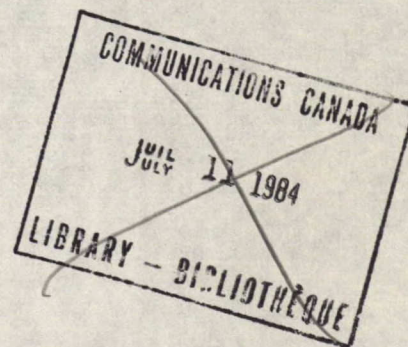


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I. BACKGROUND

The initial impetus for the telephone study came from the Government of Canada review of the Canadian Transport Commission decision of March 30, 1973 on Bell Canada's application "A", which recommended that "the Commission should examine the social impact of any additional increases in residential service charges, especially on low income subscribers."

This recommendation was supported at the 1974 Bell Canada "B" Application rate hearing by several groups, including the counsel for the Government of Ontario who suggested that the study be expanded to include examination of the impact of telephone rate increases on all levels of society.

On May 31, 1974, the Honourable John Rhodes, Ontario's Minister of Transportation and Communications, wrote the Honourable Gérard Pelletier, Federal Minister of Communications, to express his support for the study and to propose how it could be undertaken. He stressed that counsel for the Government of Ontario felt that "any such study should not be restricted to the economic impact of rate increases upon low income persons and those on fixed incomes. Such a study should address itself to the impact upon the entire spectrum of society."

Subsequently, the Canadian Transport Commission stated in its decision of August 15, 1974 that, "it is our hope that we will be

able to pursue at an early date with the provincial governments and with the federal Department of Communications, the subject of a broad study of the socio-economic impact of telephone rate increases on individual consumers."

II. PRELIMINARY RESEARCH AND CONSULTATIONS

Early in 1974, the Department of Communications commissioned Dr. Benjamin Singer, of the University of Western Ontario, to undertake a study on the social functions of the telephone. It comprised a review of the literature and a survey of attitudes and usage patterns of a small sample of individuals in and around the city of London, Ontario. The research was designed to establish an overview of the social functions and social dimensions of the telephone -- its advantages and disadvantages; its role in family, business and social relationships; its use as a scheduling device and as a substitute for travel; and emergency usage.

Although Dr. Singer's study was conducted under the Department's university research program and was not intended to be a "pilot" study for the present work, the Department started to use the results as a springboard for discussion when consultations with the provinces of Ontario and Quebec for the present study began.

In writing to the Provincial Ministers responsible for Communications to invite their participation in the study,

Mr. Pelletier, indicated that his Department had been formulating a general approach to a telephone study in order to determine the financial and human resources that would be required, and that departmental officials had met with Statistics Canada to discuss the technical aspects of the study, such as sample selection and methodology. Upon the completion of this preparatory work, he indicated that the Department of Communications would like to meet with provincial officials "to determine what needs the study (could) fulfill for (the provinces), to set the objectives for the project, and to select the best methods of proceeding".

The preparatory work that Mr. Pelletier referred to involved numerous exploratory discussions with departmental personnel, representatives of other departments and Canadian Transport Commission officials.

These discussions resulted in a shift in the orientation of the study both in methodology and the area of research. First of all, the original emphasis on a public attitude survey was rejected because it was felt that Dr. Singer's study examined these areas sufficiently and that to study them further with the same methodology would not be productive; it was decided that the primary objective should be to determine what problems and concerns people were experiencing with the telephone/telephone service/telephone company and that an attitude survey was too limited a vehicle for the project. What was needed was an in-depth examination of telephone problem areas, and of peoples' active concerns.

Secondly, the orientation was redirected from the socio-economic path because "social impact" was considered too nebulous a target, and "economic impact" was tautological because there was no need to prove that telephones become more expensive as telephone rates increase. Moreover, Bell Telephone rates have risen significantly less in the past ten years than those for other services, such as electricity and transportation, and considerably less than prices for most consumer products. In addition, the difficulties of correcting for such factors as inflation, differences in disposable income for telephone subscribers, and vastly dissimilar usage patterns would make it impossible to study the "value" of telephones empirically or to quantify their usefulness. Furthermore, the "knowns" of the situation did not have to be rediscovered: residence telephones are more important for the aged or crippled or shut-in individual and for those who do not have access to telephones at work; and rate increases have a differential effect on different income groups.

These reasons combined to steer the method even further from the attitude survey approach: if individuals were not concerned about rates, a question about rates would prod them in certain directions -- it is not probable that such a question could be phrased neutrally. It was, therefore, felt that the approach that would best ascertain the concerns of the public would be one involving open-ended group discussions; in this way, the spontaneous current, top-of-the-head concerns and feelings would be discovered.

Statistics Canada officials agreed with the open ended group discussion method and stated that they had had serious doubts about the efficacy of attitude survey techniques for a study of this nature.

This conceptual framework formed the basis for discussions with representatives of the two provinces. Ontario was immediately amenable to the qualitative approach; Quebec, however, initially favoured a quantitative approach and felt that the statistics that a questionnaire could provide would meet their needs more effectively. They were also primarily interested in a study of economic factors. Subsequent discussions resulted in the conclusion that a qualitative study would provide a broader framework for recommendations and that it would elicit, through the element of spontaneity, a more honest and valid representation of subscribers' problems and concerns. In order to ensure that the research fully met Quebec's needs, it was decided that a short questionnaire based on a listing of provincial requirements would be devised by the consultant conducting the study in Quebec and would be administered after a number of group discussions.

Once the provincial objectives had been ascertained and the methodology chosen, the Department of Communications, with the assistance of Statistics Canada and the Department of the Supply and Services, selected two consultants to conduct the field work: Goldfarb Consultants Limited of Toronto for Ontario, and Sorecom, Inc. of Montreal for Quebec.

III. FIELDWORK

A) The Sample

Once the overall objectives and methodology had been agreed upon by the Department of Communications and the provinces, discussions began with Statistics Canada and the two consulting firms to establish the nature of the sample to be selected and the phasing of the field-work.

In both provinces, the basic sample provided a socio-economic and geographic cross-section of the telephone subscriber population that was representative in terms of age, income, education and ethnic background. In addition, there were special groups in each province of deprived and/or unemployed family heads, retired people, children and individuals without telephones. The details on how individuals were chosen and how the group discussions were arranged appear in the consultants' reports.

The discussions were conducted with groups of approximately ten individuals and one moderator; occasionally, one or two observers - from the Department of Communications or the provincial governments - were also present. As the group responsible for the study was not disclosed these observers were identified as "associates" of the moderator.

B) The Group Discussion

In order to assist the groups in coming to grips with the issue, the discussion flow was organized in such a way that issues and concerns would be elicited and generated through the moderator's introduction of general principles at the start of each session.

These included:

- the way people use their telephone
- what they use it for - social interaction
 - scheduling
 - emergencies
- the telephone versus other forms of communication
 - face to face
 - letters
- the telephone: necessity or luxury
- telephone service versus other public utilities' services.

Once the moderator had established rapport with the group by demonstrating his ability to understand and appreciate the respondents' opinions, and had formed a general impression of each individual and of the personality of the group as an entity, he could begin to appraise the validity and strength of responses and attempt to probe for information lying below the surface of the spontaneous concerns.

C) Phase One

The group discussions were conducted in two phases so that results between the provinces could be compared early in the study. Each consultant did ten matched groups in each province -- in Quebec, there were six groups in Montreal and four in Granby; in Ontario, six groups in Toronto and four in Peterborough.

When this stage had been completed, Department of Communications officials met with the consultants and Statistics Canada to determine what modifications and adjustments were required in sample selection and methodology. The results were also reported to the provinces.

Only one change was made as a result of Phase One, that being the decision to compile a list of all the concerns that had emerged from the ten sessions. In the groups to follow, each subject would then be checked off as it occurred; once the spontaneity of the discussion had been exhausted, all remaining subjects on the list would be introduced and opinions elicited by the moderator. The moderator would note whether discussion of a topic was spontaneous or raised in probing and would assess the relative importance of each subject for the group. The list was essentially as shown in the following table:

TABLE ONE

1. Services

- obtaining information from the telephone company business office
- dealing with the telephone company business office
- availability of a private line
- ease with which the operator can be reached
- helpfulness of operators
- availability of various colours of telephones
- being able to use a pay telephone in an emergency without having to deposit money
- mistakes in the telephone bill
- availability and efficiency of repair services

2. Long Distance System

- the potential number of people that you can call without using long distance
- do people living in the city get better value for their money in terms of calling potential than people outside major urban areas?

3. Charges

- the basic charge per month
- the cost of long distance
- recent rate increases
- installation charges
- the 20 charge at some pay telephones

- a charge system based on the number of calls and length of calls as opposed to a basic monthly rate
- the charge per month for a Princess, Contempra or push-button telephone
- the charge per month for an extension jack
- the charge per month for an extension telephone
- the additional charge for a colour telephone

4. The Directory

- using the telephone book
- the 25 charge for directory assistance

5. General

- the profit level of the telephone company
- knowing how Bell Canada rate increases are controlled
- the fact that Bell Canada is a monopoly
- the overall efficiency of the telephone system
- the fact that you never own a telephone, you rent/lease it
- prank/obscene telephone calls
- solicitation calls
- knowledge of the various services available from Bell Canada

D) Phase Two

Phase Two involved 24 groups in Ontario, distributed as follows:

	Northern		Southwestern	Eastern
	<u>Ontario</u>	<u>Toronto</u>	<u>Ontario</u>	<u>Ontario</u>
Small businessmen		1	1	1
Immigrant-teens		1		
Immigrant-adults		1		
Working mothers*		1		
Non-working mothers*			1	1
Children 6 to 10*		1		
Deprived family heads*		1		1
Retired older people-mixed		1		
Adult-males-rural	1		3	1
Adult-females-rural	1		3	1
Teens-rural	1		1	

* working mothers with children aged eight (8) to fifteen (15)

* non-working mothers with children aged eight (8) to fifteen (15)

* children aged six (6) to ten (10) of working mothers

* deprived family heads (in public housing/poverty areas/depressed areas, some with telephones, some without)

In Quebec, there were 59 groups in Phase Two. The grid is more complex than the fairly simple representation above because of a more intricate sampling procedure, because of a larger number of special groups and because of the need for both French and English speaking groups. There were 16 groups from Montreal split into combinations of English-French, male-female, and further broken down by:

- three age groups - 22 and under
 - 23 to 45
 - 46 and over, and
- three educational groups - grades 0 - 7
 - 8 - 12
 - 13 and over

Seven groups from Quebec City and other urban areas were formed in the same way, except that all were French speaking.

There were also 20 rural and semi-rural groups from four regions, all involving individuals with less than 13 years of formal education, and separated into two age groups: 18-45, and 46 and over.

In addition there were 16 special groups from rural and urban areas involving children, French and English speaking working and non-working women, and retired people.

When the schedule for Phase Two groups had been established, the provincial representatives were informed and were invited to observe any sessions in which they were interested.

E) The Consultants' Reports

All the group sessions were taped. Goldfarb Consultants transcribed the tapes, and in the analysis stage, cut the transcripts up into idea piles or dockets. Actual verbatim comments were used to supplement the detailed analytical comment in the text of their report to provide as they say, "the natural flavour of the group input, which (they feel) is critical to this kind of reporting."

Sorecom did not transcribe, but worked with the tapes themselves and with detailed interviewer reports in their analysis. Part of their report is a compilation of verbatim excerpts divided by subject for individual groups.

Both consultants' reports are a summary and synthesis of what took place, as opposed to a recommendation-oriented analysis. Both reports attempt to indicate the strength or rank of concerns, but this aspect is not stressed.

The basic objective of the study design was exploratory and qualitative; that is, it was designed to understand feelings, attitudes and concerns, not to measure their extent. For this reason, no recommendations were made, although recommendations can be inferred from the discussion and analysis pertaining to each concern/attitude/feeling/belief in the list.

IV. THE RESULTS -- AN OVERVIEW

A) Ontario

The great majority of people regard the telephone as a necessity for today's way of life. They rely and depend on the telephone extensively, both in business and in their private lives. It is regarded as an essential organizational tool which saves time, money and energy by facilitating the rapid, efficient and expeditious flow of ideas and materials. Moreover, it seems to play a vital role in shaping social interaction by reducing the time required to maintain contact with people who cannot be seen easily and by enabling a great number of contacts to be made and their interaction organized.

In addition to these convenience factors, the telephone plays a critical security role in cases of emergency when instant communication is required. On a different security level, it offers a type of companionship or potential for contact; as one respondent mentioned, having a phone is like having someone else in the house.

1. The Urban Picture

People living in urban centres in Ontario are generally satisfied with Bell Canada service and consider rates to be fair and reasonable. They indicate that they rarely experience difficulties with their home phone, and that when something does go wrong, service

is usually prompt and efficient. In terms of an overall impression, Bell Canada is considered to be a fairly well-managed and efficiently operated company; Bell personnel are described as attentive, courteous and co-operative.

It is interesting to note, however, that when considering the fairness or reasonableness of the telephone rate structure, people think primarily in terms of the net benefits, both tangible and intangible, that the telephone provides. Only secondarily, if at all, do they relate rate levels to the cost involved in providing the service. When people think of the value of the telephone solely in terms of the benefits it provides, it becomes an almost priceless kind of service.

2. The Rural Picture

In rural areas of Ontario, people are generally less satisfied about Bell Canada rates and service than they are in urban areas. They are far less positive and far more open and vocal in expressing their complaints and concerns. Their two major problems are party lines and long distance calling; lesser, but still serious, are difficulties in obtaining operator and repair services. For these reasons, they feel that their basic monthly charges are not particularly good value when compared with the rates that people in urban areas pay.

B) Québec

Les principales opinions recueillies font ressortir de façon très nette les points suivants: les usagers du téléphone considèrent que le coût du service de base est raisonnable; de plus ils reconnaissent que le téléphone est maintenant un service essentiel. Une fois informé de ces deux points importants, on saisit mieux la portée de l'opinion qui a été exprimée avec le plus de force au cours de l'enquête, à savoir que les abonnés demeureraient abonnés même si les tarifs augmentaient. Cependant plusieurs autres points importants préoccupent les usagers. Les griefs les plus importants sont que le service se détériore, surtout en milieu urbain, où l'on trouve que le service est de plus en plus lent; que les appels interurbains coûtent cher, surtout en milieu rural; et que plusieurs coûts additionnels semblent injustifiés (p. ex. les frais d'installation, les frais mensuels de location d'équipement de base ou d'équipement de luxe, les dépôts au moment de l'installation).

En général, les régions rurales du Québec ont exprimé sensiblement les mêmes préoccupations que celles de l'Ontario, par exemple en ce qui a trait au service interurbain et aux lignes communautaires. Dans l'ensemble, cependant, les divergences d'opinions entre les milieux ruraux et les milieux urbains semblent un peu plus accentuées en Ontario qu'ici.

Les enquêteurs n'ont noté aucune différence très significative entre les anglophones et les francophones.

V. THE RESULTS - DISCUSSION

Although the problems in the two provinces are not identical, they will be treated, for the sake of uniformity and ease in comparison, under the same seven general headings;

1. Services

- private and party lines, repair service, operators, quality of equipment and transmission, installations, billings, etc.

2. Long Distance System

- charges, calling areas

3. Charges

- basic, monthly, options, installation

4. The Directory

- use of, and problems

5. General

- advertising, monopoly status, control over rates, abuses

6. Special Groups

7. Concepts and Suggestions

A. Ontario

1. Services

i) Quality of installation and workmanship.

People are generally satisfied with this aspect of Bell Canada service but some feel that service men do not take enough time or care in concealing wires or fixtures when installing a phone.

ii) Service Representatives.

Although people in urban areas had few problems in obtaining service men, people in rural areas say that they do not get quick, efficient repair service when their telephones are out of order - these delays can last for days, or even weeks. Moreover, billings are not reduced to take interrupted service into account.

iii) Information Operators.

Information operators are considered to be polite, but curt and abrupt. People complain that the search procedure is rigid and inflexible and that operators are unwilling to take extra pains or different approaches to problems. In rural areas, there was some concern about directory

assistance files not being current.

iv) Operators.

One of the most frequent criticisms of operators is that they can sometimes be difficult to contact. People seem to expect almost instant attention because they consider the operator a utility -- a vital utility when emergencies are involved.

v) Emergency Call System.

There is general agreement that the emergency number should be simpler, that it be as easy to dial as possible, and that there be free emergency dialing from pay telephones.

vi) Contacting the Business Office.

In rural areas, people expressed some frustration in being passed from person to person with their problems.

vii) Private and Party Lines.

There were no problems in this area in urban areas; in rural areas the complaints about party lines were numerous and bitter. Among the problems:

- invasion of privacy

- people dialing on top of conversations
- number of parties on a line
- weakening of reception when people listen in
- late night or early morning calls ring in everyone's home
- inconsiderate parties in system inconveniencing others
- a particular concern for business customers is the fact that non-business parties on the same line, getting the same service, and also tying up the business line, pay lower rates

For people who have become sufficiently frustrated to decide to pay the premium for a semi-private line, the next frustration is in obtaining the line; in some cases, the possibility is remote even if a customer is willing to pay the additional charge.

viii) Equipment.

People in general are extremely satisfied with the telephone itself and consider it a dependable, reliable and durable piece of equipment. The quality of transmission is regarded in the same light, except in rural areas, where party lines affect reception.

There was a small number of complaints in urban areas about non-availability of optional equipment and too narrow a range of telephone styles, and in rural areas, about non-availability of standard equipment.

2. Long Distance System.

In urban areas, a frequently voiced concern is that lines are difficult to get in special rate periods; moreover, it is felt that these periods are too short and should be extended so that more people can be accommodated.

In rural areas, people express dissatisfaction with local calling boundaries, saying that they can call a considerable distance in one or two directions but a limited distance in others. There are complaints about being required to telephone long distance to nearby neighbours.

As noted previously, some individuals in rural areas feel that their basic monthly charges are not particularly good value when compared with what people in urban areas pay. They talk about having to pay long distance charges for calling the same distance as people calling from one side of a city to the other.

3. Charges.

i) Basic Monthly Charge.

Considered to be reasonable by the great majority. The only problems are the previously mentioned ones that compare urban and rural calling areas with respect to long-distance charges and party lines.

ii) Long Distance Charges.

No comments other than those in the long distance section above.

iii) Installation Charges

This is a major problem area. Consumers do not understand why the charge is so high when actual working time is so short; they especially resent an \$11.00 or \$12.00 charge when a service man does not even have to come to their home.

A special problem in rural areas is the deposit and/or co-signature requirement that exists in some areas. Some feel that the deposit requirements are too steep. This was mentioned to a lesser extent in urban areas.

iv) 20¢ Pay Telephones.

The 20¢ pay telephone charge comes under strong attack because it was a doubling in price and because of the nuisance and inconvenience of the additional change one needs to carry.

Students are particularly vocal about the 20¢ pay phones in schools, and feel that they should be entitled to the lower rate that will be maintained in many other locations.

25¢ for Directory Information

People generally accept this charge but expressed some apprehension because they feel it may herald the beginning of a new Bell Canada policy -- charging for services that were formerly free.

Two special points were made -- free directory assistance for numbers which may be difficult to locate in a directory, particularly government numbers, and the problem that arises in rural areas, when a household may not have been provided with appropriate directories for its adjacent calling areas.

vi) Charges for Optional Equipment.

The additional or extra monthly charge for special equipment is objected to by many people. They feel that extra costs for some special equipment are unjustified. They do not believe that it costs, or should cost, that much more to produce or manufacture different coloured phones or different styles of phones. Some believe that the special equipment is simply used as an excuse to increase rates and augment revenues. There is almost a feeling that Bell is purposely trying to make its standard equipment as drab as possible so that people will have to turn to the more appealing and more expensive equipment.

Moreover, while they can accept the higher charge for optional equipment, people do not understand why it is not a one-time charge.

vii) Billing Errors.

One common problem of urban groups concerns billing problems or billing errors. Many of those interviewed say they have had problems with long distance calls being charged to their bill when in fact they had made no such calls. However, they indicated almost unanimously that Bell deducted these calls from their bills when informed. Bell's long distance billing system is generally considered unreliable. Some are of the opinion that the reason why the billing system is unreliable is because it is too easy to charge long distance calls. The feeling in both urban and rural areas is that the onus should be on the telephone company to make sure that its billings are accurate.

4. The Directory.

The present method of organizing the telephone book, especially the yellow pages, receives significant attention.

Many people say that they find it difficult to find numbers in the yellow pages because of confusing category breakdowns. Government and municipal listings, like school board listings, are frequently mentioned problem areas of special concern. People would like a yellow pages index defining the category breakdowns.

A few people also report having difficulty in obtaining a directory, or in getting a ruined directory replaced.

Some rural residents, primarily those who live in close proximity to urban or municipal areas, complain about the telephone listings for their local area being consolidated with the listings of the nearby municipality. This practice is resented not only because it fails to recognize and reflect the sense of community and identity of a local area but also because it makes for added inconvenience when individuals have to search through the sometimes lengthy local listings of an entire municipality to find local numbers.

Rural residents also report problems with the yellow pages, and with finding certain numbers under the sometimes confusing category breakdown.

5. General.

i) Bell Canada Advertisements

The principle of a monopoly advertising its services for the purpose of stimulating usage is strongly attacked for being senseless and a waste of money. Essentially, people feel that because Bell has no competition, and because the telephone is a basic and essential service, advertising to stimulate usage serves no purpose. In short, people feel that the ads do not pay their way and that the consumer

suffers because of higher rates to pay for the advertising.

Sensitivity about Bell's advertising its services is accentuated by the selection of television, the costliest of all media, for the advertising campaign.

The nature of the advertising itself is the subject of some concern. Ads that give long distance call rates are criticized for being misleading because they quote bare minimum charges only. The feeling is that this type of advertising can mislead the consumer into thinking that the cost of a long distance call will be lower than it actually is.

People are not totally against the principle of advertising, but the feeling is that Bell's approach should be geared more towards educating and informing the public about the services available as opposed to just promoting usage.

ii) Bell's Monopoly Status.

People accept monopoly in the telephone system as an inevitability and are not particularly concerned about Bell's monopoly status. Bell's being subject to government control is reassuring.

iii) Control Over Rates.

Most people understand that the government is involved or is responsible for regulating Bell's rates, but there is considerable confusion as to what is involved in the regulatory procedure.

People feel the government has a vital responsibility to exercise in controlling telephone rate structures, not only because of Bell's monopoly position in the industry, but also because of the basic and essential nature and role of the telephone service.

iv) Abuses of the Telephone System.

One of the more widespread problems or concerns that urban residents have with the telephone service regards abuse or misuse of the telephone system. Telephone soliciting is one abuse that people are particularly sensitive about.

What people dislike most about telephone soliciting is its intrusive nature -- the interruptions, time wasting and inconvenience that it causes, and they resent the intrusion into the privacy of the home environment. Their feeling is that telephone soliciting uses the telephone system for something that it was never designed for.

Prank or obscene phone calls are another widespread complaint. While these calls can be a genuine source of concern or even fear, it is the nuisance aspect of prank calls that bothers most people.

6. Special Groups

i) Small Businessmen.

Forced number changes represent a serious problem for small businessmen because of the costs involved in reprinting promotional material and because of the threat to repeat business potential and goodwill that has been built up over a period of time.

Another area of sensitivity for some small businessmen is the deposit requirement that the telephone company places on business telephones. While most can see the rationale behind charging a deposit, they feel that in some instances it is unnecessary and excessive..

ii) Senior Citizens.

The telephone plays an especially important role in the senior citizen's lifestyle. It is a companion for those who live alone, and it is vital in helping the senior citizen cope with limited or restricted mobility.

The cost of making long distance calls is a key concern for senior citizens. A problem that many senior citizens face

is that many of their children, friends or relatives live far away, and it becomes an expensive proposition to call these people as often as they would like when they are living on fixed incomes.

Another concern and problem raised by senior citizens relates to the present monthly billing procedure. Some feel that the billing period should be longer than one month. These people argue that they do not typically make that many phone calls in a one month period, and they do not feel that they should have to go to the expense of writing out and mailing a cheque for a relatively small total bill.

iii) Immigrant Household Heads.

These individuals have had experience with telephone systems in other countries and, in general, are more positive about Bell Canada services than other urban groups.

iv) Low Income/Deprived/Unemployed Household Heads.

These individuals consider the telephone to be a necessity of life; for the unemployed, it is seen as a vital link to potential employment, virtually as a life-line. They believe that not having a home telephone is a severe hindrance to finding employment because they cannot afford 20¢ pay telephone calls.

7. Concepts and Suggestions

i) Flat Rate Versus Paying by Call.

The overwhelming majority of people prefer the present, flat rate method of paying for telephone service.

Reaction to the "pay per call" concept is, however, not totally negative. People can see some positive features in such a system. Some feel that such a system would reduce abuse of the telephone system by prank and obscene callers and some feel such a system would be fairer for people who do not make use of the telephone very much - older people or deprived people, for example.

Some feel that a combination of the flat rate and European-type billing systems might have possibilities. The suggestion here is to implement a system under which the user is allowed a certain number of calls per month under a flat rate billing. Once he exceeds his allotted number of calls, he would then be charged on a per call basis for each additional call he makes.

ii) Government Takeover of Telephone System

The idea of the government taking over the telephone system meets with stiff resistance. The problem is that people do not have a great deal of confidence in the government and its ability to run a service like the telephone system.

Many feel the net result of a government takeover of the phone system would be less efficient, less reliable operation and service which would, in turn, lead to increased operating costs and increased rates.

On the other hand, some rural individuals felt that remote areas would benefit from a government telephone service because of the government's political sensitivity to problems in these areas.

iii) Special Long Distance Rates for Retired People.

The idea of offering senior citizens special rate privileges is favourably received, not only among senior citizens themselves, but among the population at large.

iv) Essential Services.

There was some feeling that certain types of calls be toll-free. Basically, these calls fell into the category of either essential services or emergencies - calls to doctors, ambulances, police, fire departments, hospitals, distress centres, and social assistance centers.

v) Two Practical Suggestions.

- a) Tokens for pay phones, particularly in view of change required to use new 20 pay phones.
- b) Device to easily disconnect phone, particularly in case of long absences from the home.

B) Québec

Dans la section qui suit, la centaine d'opinions exprimées par les quelques 700 participants aux discussions de groupe animées à travers le Québec, sont présentées en suivant les mêmes titres que dans la section précédente. L'importance de chacune d'elles fut évaluée par rapport aux autres opinions exprimées, de façon à tenir compte de leur importance relative telle qu'exprimée par les participants eux-mêmes. Dans cette étude, l'importance relative des opinions exprimées est avant tout un facteur qualitatif établi à partir du nombre de groupes ayant exprimé spontanément une opinion particulière et à partir du degré de consensus qui s'est réalisé dans ces groupes autour de cette opinion spontanée.

1. Le Service

Les principales opinions exprimées à ce sujet portent sur les lignes communautaires et la rapidité du service.

i) Lignes communautaires.

Même si très peu de gens doivent encore partager leur ligne téléphonique avec d'autres co-abonnés, l'opinion dominante de l'ensemble des usagers est que le système des lignes communautaires est inefficace, injuste et dépassé, en plus de permettre bon nombre d'indiscrétions. Très peu de personnes sont d'avis, contrairement, par exemple, à certaines

communautés du Nord du pays, que les lignes communautaires sont un divertissement ou un désennui.

ii) Efficacité.

Quant à la question du service, l'opinion la plus importante est que le service se détériore graduellement, qu'on est de plus en plus lent à répondre aux demandes des abonnés.

iii) Vente d'équipement.

On se plaint beaucoup également du fait qu'on ne répond pas exactement aux besoins du client. "On leur demande un bout de fil et ils nous arrivent avec un nouveau téléphone plus cher, plus beau...". La croyance est passablement forte que les hommes de service perçoivent une commission sur la "vente" d'équipements de luxe.

iv) Satisfaction générale.

Cependant, même si on formule ces critiques, on est aussi fortement conscient du fait que, comparé aux autres systèmes, notre système téléphonique est le meilleur au monde.

v) Personnel.

Parmi les opinions exprimées avec moins de force, quoique encore d'une manière significative, sur la question du service, on remarque que les gens trouvent que, dans l'ensemble, le service est bon et le personnel courtois. On se plaint au Québec que les opératrices en Ontario sont unilingues anglaises et que souvent les opératrices dans l'ensemble sont lentes.

vi) Taxiphones et urgences.

Un certain nombre d'opinions diverses ont été exprimées par quelques groupes, ici et là, dont les plus intéressantes sont qu'on considère que les téléphones publics (ou, taxiphones) sont souvent défectueux et sont, de plus, mal insonorisés; qu'il devrait exister un mécanisme pour interrompre l'utilisation d'une ligne communautaire en cas de besoin urgent; qu'on devrait avoir accès en tout temps aux services d'urgence; services médicaux ou de police, etc... en composant un numéro d'un chiffre.

2. Le service interurbain

i) Coût.

Dans l'ensemble, et ceci est une des opinions parmi les plus importantes de toute l'enquête (c.-à-d. que cette préoccupation a été exprimée spontanément dans bon nombre de groupes, qui ont de plus réalisé un consensus assez fort autour d'elle) les usagers du téléphone trouvent que les interurbains coûtent cher. Ils comprennent mal comment les tarifs du service interurbain se calculent en fonction de la distance à parcourir. Plusieurs personnes ont rapporté des contradictions à cet égard et ils demandent avec insistance plus de renseignements sur le sujet.

ii) Tarifs réduits.

De plus, ils disent manquer d'explications quant aux tarifs réduits pour les appels faits par l'utilisateur, même si par

contre ils apprécient grandement ce système de réductions basé sur les heures pendant lesquelles les appels sont faits.

iii) Utilisation.

Dans l'ensemble, ils considèrent les interurbains très utiles pour maintenir les relations avec des parents et ils les préfèrent de beaucoup aux communications écrites.

iv) Zones d'appels locaux.

Ils demandent de plus que les zones d'appels locaux (où ils peuvent téléphoner sans frais) soient agrandies, surtout en milieu rural, ou semi-urbain. Les abonnés en milieu rural reprochent assez catégoriquement aux compagnies de ne pas les relier aux grands centres de sorte qu'ils pourraient éviter de nombreux appels interurbains.

v) Satisfaction.

Pour ces raisons, les usagers des régions rurales ont le sentiment de subventionner les abonnés des grands centres. Par ailleurs, les abonnés en général se plaignent que les appels interurbains coûtent souvent plus cher s'ils sont placés à partir d'un téléphone public.

3. Le coût

i) Service de base.

Une des opinions énoncée avec le plus de vigueur au cours de

cette enquête soutient que le coût du service de base est raisonnable. Advenant une forte augmentation de ce coût, les abonnés réagiraient sûrement, mais ce n'est que faiblement qu'ils suggèrent l'idée qu'il faudrait alors abandonner son abonnement, puisqu'ils considèrent le téléphone comme étant un service essentiel.

ii) Equipements facultatifs.

En plus des frais d'interurbain, les coûts des équipements facultatifs sont considérés comme chers, et cette opinion est une des plus importante parmi toutes celles exprimées.

iii) Coûts d'installation.

Plusieurs abonnés considèrent que les coûts d'installation sont injustifiés; ils n'arrivent pas à établir un rapport étroit entre le service fourni et le coût à payer. De plus, un certain nombre d'abonnés trouvent que ce coût est trop élevé.

iv) Taxiphones et assistance-annuaire.

Ces préoccupations sont suivies, un peu plus loin, par celles au sujet du tarif de 20¢ dans les téléphones publics, jugé comme trop cher, (surtout dans les écoles) et par celles au sujet du 25¢ à payer pour l'assistance-annuaire qu'on trouve jusqu'à un certain point injustifié. A ce sujet, on reconnaît que souvent les gens sont paresseux et que ce nouveau coût en a incité plusieurs à utiliser davantage leur

annuaire.

v) Dépôt.

Parmi les opinions d'un peu moins d'importance, les abonnés ont exprimé celle que l'appareil ne leur appartient pas et que le fait d'exiger un dépôt au moment de l'installation est injuste, en règle générale, et même atroce, dans le cas des assistés sociaux.

4. Les annuaires

La plupart des opinions exprimées sur cette question sont peu importantes par rapport à l'ensemble des opinions discutées pendant l'enquête.

i) Difficultés d'utilisation.

Les griefs les plus sérieux portent sur la difficulté d'utiliser les pages jaunes, parce que trop compliquées, sur celle de repérer rapidement les numéros des services gouvernementaux et sur celle de lire les annuaires, parce que les caractères d'imprimerie sont trop petits.

ii) Milieu rural.

De plus, les usagers des milieux ruraux se plaignent que leurs annuaires sont souvent incomplets et ne correspondent pas toujours aux divisions municipales.

iii) Assistance-annuaire.

Des aspects plus positifs, on retient que les gens reconnaissent ne pas utiliser souvent les annuaires, peut-être par paresse; par contre, ils le font davantage maintenant qu'il faut payer pour le service d'assistance-annuaire.

iv) Pages jaunes.

Dans l'ensemble, on trouve que les pages jaunes constituent un service utile, bien que certains se sont plaints que leur dernière édition des pages jaunes n'était pas accompagnée d'un index. Aussi plusieurs considèrent que le petit bottin vert local, tel que publié dans certaines villes aux frais des annonceurs locaux, est un service pratique.

v) Numéro confidentiel.

En dernier lieu, on se plaint du fait que certains abonnés gardent leur numéro confidentiel, ce qui cause des ennuis aux autres usagers du téléphone.

5. Divers

i) Publicité.

On a mentionné l'opinion que la publicité était "mensongère", en ce sens qu'elle peut porter à croire, par exemple, que les tarifs interurbains annoncés sont les tarifs réguliers alors

qu'en fait ils sont ceux offerts à taux réduits pendant certaines périodes d'appel.

ii) Contrôle des tarifs.

Les participants aux discussions de groupe ont pour un grand nombre un sentiment d'impuissance face à leur compagnie de téléphone, parce qu'il s'agit d'un monopole; certains pensent même que celle-ci fait trop de profits et que le gouvernement doit s'en mêler.

iii) Abus du système.

On s'est plaint dans certains cas de recevoir des appels anonymes, ou obscènes, et de se faire jouer des mauvais tours au téléphone. On déplore que plusieurs organismes utilisent souvent les lignes téléphoniques pour promouvoir la vente de biens et services divers (surtout d'abonnements aux journeaux et aux systèmes de câblodiffusion, et même d'équipement téléphonique de luxe,...). On déplore également l'utilisation abusive des circuits pour des émissions de lignes ouvertes et des sondages d'opinion publique. On réclame une réglementation plus stricte de ces pratiques.

6. Groupes spéciaux

i) Les enfants.

Trois discussions de groupe ont été animées avec des enfants

pour tenter d'investiguer les possibilités de solution créatrices qu'ils pourraient imaginer. Les résultats de cette expérience sont plutôt minces. On peut toutefois retracer, à travers l'expression spontanée de leurs opinions, l'importance du téléphone comme objet culturel ancré dans nos moeurs. Pour eux le téléphone est naturel et essentiel. Seule l'invention d'une "machine à télépathie" pourrait le remplacer. De plus, ils ne s'expliquent pas pourquoi il faut payer des frais d'interurbain, car "les interurbains", disent-ils, "c'est le même fil".

ii) Les femmes au foyer.

Une des opinions exprimées plus fortement ici qu'ailleurs, est que le téléphone sert de désennui et qu'on s'en sert souvent par plaisir. Pour cette raison, on ne serait pas d'accord pour que le tarif soit établi en fonction de l'utilisation, c.-à-d. du nombre et de la durée des appels.

iii) Les personnes retraitées.

Ce groupe semble avoir une opinion plus positive que la moyenne sur la question de service. Les retraités se servent surtout du téléphone pour combler leur solitude et conduire leurs affaires personnelles. Ils ont plus de problèmes que les autres avec les annuaires (caractères trop petits) et dans l'ensemble, ils trouvent le coût mensuel de base très élevé. Par exemple, si ce coût augmentait à dix dollars, 50%

abandonneraient leur abonnement. Il semble qu'ils pourraient se passer du téléphone plus facilement que les plus jeunes, d'autant plus qu'ils estiment qu'ils étaient plus heureux "dans leur temps".

iv) Les non-abonnés.

Ceux qui ne sont pas abonnés le sont soit par choix, parce qu'ils l'utilisent déjà suffisamment à leur travail, soit par nécessité, parce que c'est trop cher pour leur besoin; ils l'utilisent très peu, du moins en dehors du travail, et si nécessité il y a, ils se servent du téléphone public ou de celui du voisin.

v) Matane et environs.

Les gens rencontrés dans cette ville affirment à l'unanimité que l'installation du téléphone devrait être faite gratuitement, "comme pour l'électricité". Par ailleurs, ceux de Cap-Chat se plaignent qu'ils doivent faire des appels interurbains pour à peu près tous les biens ou services dont ils ont besoin et que, même en se privant beaucoup, ils doivent, à cause des interurbains, payer jusqu'à vingt-cinq dollars par mois pour le service d'une ligne communautaire. Ce dernier facteur, lié à la lenteur extrême des opératrices, fait que plusieurs considèrent l'automobile comme un moyen de communications plus efficace. Les gens de Baie des Sables sont tous d'avis que le coût de base est trop élevé pour le

service qu'ils reçoivent. Ils réclament tous l'extension de la zone d'appels locaux (sans frais d'interurbains), même si le coût du service de base doit augmenter. "Donnez-nous du territoire, donnez-nous du service, agrandissez de Rimouski à Gaspé et on va payer".

vi) Les hommes d'affaires.

Cette discussion a porté principalement sur le téléphone d'affaires. Les participants sont dans l'ensemble très mécontents de ce service, pour plusieurs raisons. Le téléphone est essentiel à leur survie comme hommes d'affaires. Ils se sentent exploités, d'autant plus qu'ils n'ont pas le choix entre deux ou plusieurs compagnies de téléphone. Les coûts sont trop élevés et injustifiés dans l'ensemble. L'insertion de leur nom dans les pages jaunes devrait être gratuite, puisqu'ils payent déjà plus cher pour une ligne commerciale qui n'est d'ailleurs pas plus souvent utilisée, du moins dans certains cas, que certaines lignes privées. Pour eux, compte tenu de leurs besoins, le service est toujours trop lent.

vii) Les étudiants.

Ce groupe a réclamé des tarifs réduits surtout pour l'installation, à cause des déménagements fréquents auxquels la vie étudiante les expose. Ces réductions devraient également s'appliquer au tarif de base, à cause de leur

statut socio-économique. Ils souhaitent la nationalisation des compagnies de téléphone et trouvent révoltant qu'un service essentiel appartienne à une compagnie privée.

7. Idées et suggestions

i) Utilisation.

Dans l'ensemble, les participants aux discussions de groupe considèrent que le téléphone est utile, nécessaire ou essentiel, selon qu'ils l'utilisent pour les relations sociales, les affaires ou les urgences.

ii) Payer selon l'utilisation.

On a proposé à quelques reprises que le coût devrait être établi en fonction de la durée et du nombre des appels. La question de payer pour le service selon l'utilisation qu'on en fait, représente plusieurs avantages sur le plan social, surtout pour les personnes seules ou âgées. Ces abonnés sont parmi ceux qui utilisent le moins souvent le service téléphonique et pour qui ce service est tout à fait essentiel.

Cette possibilité aurait également des avantages pour les étudiants, les petits hommes d'affaires, les économiquement faibles, etc... mais représenterait sûrement un inconvénient pour ceux qui utilisent leur téléphone par plaisir, comme désennui.

iii) Les économiquement faibles.

On a émis l'opinion que le téléphone coûte cher pour les retraités et les pensionnés de toute sorte, et on souhaiterait que certaines personnes puissent jouir de tarifs préférentiels, en considération d'inégalités sociales ou personnelles qu'elles doivent subir.

Le téléphone est un service essentiel, dans l'opinion des gens, et on ne devrait pas être réduit à s'en priver parce qu'on est une personne âgée ou malade, un étudiant ou un travailleur éloigné de son lieu habituel de résidence.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

As indicated in the overview of results, the telephone is regarded by the great majority of people as an essential service and as a necessity of life. Since it is not considered as an optional purchase, it is regarded in a vastly different context than most other goods or services. This context involves elements of taking the telephone for granted; occasional frustration at not having alternatives, or competition, with respect to the obtaining of services; and greater expectations from the telephone company than from other organizations. There exists also an extremely personal dimension of identification with the telephone company and its services because of the social way in which the telephone is used.

In general, people living in urban areas are satisfied with telephone rates and service; the telephone company has an extremely positive image in terms of reliability and competence. As previously noted, people in rural areas are considerably less satisfied, and do not feel that they get good value for their telephone dollar. Their greatest problems are party lines and long distance calling.

The element of taking the telephone for granted was, for both rural and urban groups, one of the striking features of the group discussions. The majority of the individuals, especially in urban areas, did not know what their basic monthly charges were. Less than 5 % had firm ideas on how the telephone company is

regulated. Most people admitted that they accepted the telephone and the telephone company as a fact of life and as something they could not influence and, consequently, never had thought about concretely.

However, once the discussions began, problem areas and frustrations quickly came to the surface, particularly in the rural areas, where specific problems have been discussed under separate headings. General problems, common to both rural and urban areas, centered on Bell advertising, emergency services, pay telephones, directories, and the special needs of elderly and handicapped people.

Advertising was considered by most people to be unnecessary for a company in Bell's monopoly position. It was felt that Bell should not advertise at all, but that if it chose to advertise, that ads should be informative and educational, rather than image-boosting or sales oriented. The fact that Bell advertised on television was perceived as being extremely expensive.

Individuals who have had problems in obtaining emergency services, strongly urged that there should be one simple, easy-to-remember number for all emergency services and that it be available free from pay telephones. Some also felt that operators should be able to deal with emergencies.

Pay telephones received attention because of the recent increase from 10¢ to 20¢. Although some individuals accepted the need for an increase, a doubling of the cost was considered

unreasonable. Most people felt also that Bell had been arbitrary and had given too little study deciding where telephones would remain at 10 ; schools were frequently mentioned as deserving of continued 10 service.

Directories were another problem area, mostly with respect to difficult-to-find education and government listings. The yellow pages were considered by some individuals to be poorly organized.

In conclusion, aside from the general complaints regarding advertising and directories, it would appear that Bell Canada's only serious problems lie in the rural areas, and it is strongly recommended that Bell give attention to establishing a mechanism whereby these complaints could be more effectively received and treated.

The two recommendations, in the following section, that end the study are not necessarily Bell's responsibility, but would require their cooperation.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Bell Canada:

1. Reduce party-line load to a maximum of four parties per line.
2. Institute a more responsive complaint mechanism for rural areas with respect to service and repair problems.
3. a) Make advertising more educational and informative about Bell services and less commercially or public relations oriented.
b) Make greater efforts to educate and inform the public about costs of services and equipment.
4. Create a single emergency number for all services and make it available without charge from all pay telephones.
5. Establish more consistent and logical boundaries for long distance calling in rural areas.
6. Provide all schools, hospitals, residences for retired people and similar institutions with pay telephones that cost ten cents.
7. a) Include a yellow pages index in directories.
b) Improve white pages organization, particularly in education listings and government listings.

Further, it is recommended that the CTC explore, with Government Departments:

the possibility of providing financial assistance to retired individuals, welfare recipients and the unemployed to enable them to maintain telephone service in times of financial difficulty, and study the feasibility of providing free calls in rural areas to essential services such as Government, medical and/or emergency and educational authorities.