

# 2021 Census: Pre-Testing of Advertising Concepts

## Executive Summary

Prepared for Statistics Canada

Prepared by Narrative Research

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## Background and Research Methodology

Statistics Canada is responsible under the *Statistics Act* for conducting the Census of Population every five years. By law, completion of a Census questionnaire is mandatory for every household in Canada, and to support compliance efforts, an advertising campaign will be deployed to encourage participation. An advertising agency was given the mandate to develop a creative strategy for the 2021 Census advertising campaign, update the creative concepts/taglines from 2016 Census, and produce three video concepts for testing. The campaign will inform Canadians that the Census is important, relevant, secure and mandatory, while emphasizing its benefits to individual Canadians and their communities.

Prior to finalizing the development of the advertising campaign, Statistics Canada wished to obtain feedback from the public to ensure that proposed concept elements resonate with Canadians and are contributing to a strong call-to-action. The feedback will help identify which concepts should be further developed into the final campaign. Three concepts were included in the testing, each consisting of a 30-second video (both English and French). Included in these videos were different taglines, key messages and use of imagery for testing.

The main goal of the testing was to determine which advertising materials would engage Canadians and convey the importance of partaking in the census. Specific research objectives included the following:

- Evaluate three variations of a 30 second video (in animatics format) to determine if the content is:
  - clearly understood by the audience(s);
  - recognized as a credible source by audience(s);
  - relevant and of value to the audience(s);
  - appealing and attention-grabbing to the audience(s);
  - memorable in the minds of the audience(s); and
  - able to motivate the audience(s) to take intended action(s).
- Examine if the concepts clearly specify who needs to complete the Census.
- Ensure the concepts demonstrate why it's important to complete the Census.
- Determine if the concepts clearly identify how to complete the Census.




To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was undertaken. This entailed a total of 10 online, real-time focus groups conducted from June 1<sup>st</sup> to June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 with Canadian residents who are 25 years or older. Specifically, two sessions were conducted with residents of each of the following locations: Wolfville (NS), Montreal (QC), Toronto (ON), Saskatoon (SK), and Vancouver (BC). With the exception of Saskatoon, one group in each location included Canadian residents who are between the ages of 25 and 39 years old, while the second group included residents 40 to 85 years old. In Saskatoon, a mix of ages were included in each group. Montreal sessions and one of the two groups in Saskatoon were conducted in French, while all other focus groups were conducted in English. Group discussions each lasted approximately 1.5 hours with participants each receiving \$100 in appreciation of their time. A total of 100 participants were recruited across all 10 groups, and participation totalled 82.

All participants were recruited per the specifications for the Government of Canada. Recruitment was conducted through qualitative panels stored on Canadian servers, with follow-up calls to confirm the details provided and to ensure quotas were met.

This report presents the findings from the study. Caution must be exercised when interpreting the results from this study, as qualitative research is directional only. Results cannot be attributed to the overall population under study, with any degree of confidence.

### Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify as a Representative of Narrative Research that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the ***Directive on the Management of Communications***. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed   
Margaret Brigley, CEO & Partner | Narrative Research  
Date: June 23, 2020



## Key Findings and Conclusions

Findings from the **2021 Census: Pre-Testing of Advertising Campaigns (POR-003-20)** reveal that all three concepts tested clearly communicate the message to expect the Census questionnaire in the mail, and that filling it out will result in community improvements. The videos were constantly described as believable and trustworthy, with the government logo and flag enhancing credibility.

Despite similar reactions across concepts, 'Floating Dots' elicited a greater emotional response and thus consideration should be given to further develop this version. The concept stood out for its ability to effectively convey age diversity, as well as a sense of family and community. It was considered to be upbeat, energetic, engaging, displaying a community spirit, as well as showing greater diversity in age, ethnicity and family settings. In addition, seeing the infrastructure being built while characters completed their questionnaires helped establish a clear link with the message and conveyed a strong sense of community. Altogether, this helped grab viewers' attention and provided a more compelling argument to fill out the Census questionnaire, albeit more so among middle-age suburban participants.

The 'Platforms' concept held some appeal, notably among younger participants and those residing in rural areas or smaller communities. Though it did not convey a strong sense of family, following fewer personas throughout the video placed a greater focus on an individual's story. Seeing the same individual completing the Census and then using the resulting community infrastructure or service, helped convey the relationship between Census completion and community improvements, as well as implying a direct benefit to those involved. While it provides some ethnic representation, the concept was still considered lacking in age, socio-economic profile, and geography to effectively represent all Canadians.

The 'Your Community' campaign was the least preferred concept tested for being too generic. This campaign lacked personal relevance to many residing in rural locations and seeing community mailboxes was a particular sticking point among this group. In addition, it was believed to be missing diversity in terms of ethnicity, geography, and socio-economic profiles. Additionally, showing an African Canadian single mother was seen as perpetuating racial stereotypes. Both the 'Your Community' and 'Platforms' videos clarified the confidential nature of the Census, which was considered important to reinforce a sense of trust in the message.

Overall, all three concepts were seen as targeting upper-middle class suburban families, thus lacking relevance for downtown urban or rural residents, as well as younger and older people. The representation of single-family dwellings, the use of community mailboxes, showing transit and playgrounds, as well as the birds-eye view of the map all contributed to reinforcing this perception. Findings also indicate a clear desire among participants to see diversity within any final campaign, in terms of ethnic background, age, family type, neighbourhood, dwelling, income level, and physical ability. Lack of diversity was by far the leading criticism across all three videos, particularly when participants did not feel represented themselves. Regardless of which concept is ultimately produced, it is imperative that a vast range of characters and communities are depicted in order to establish relevancy and representation among a diverse Canadian audience.



There was some confusion across all three concepts with regards to how the Census is to be filled out and returned. The scenarios implied that while the Census questionnaire will be distributed by mail, the response would have to be submitted online, without an option to mail back the completed survey. Although it is anticipated that clear instructions will be provided along with each Census survey, there is merit in clarifying in the final video that there are various completion methods, without necessarily mentioning them all. The addition of a URL or toll-free telephone number for information should also be considered at the end of the final video.

While the videos tested provided a reminder to look out for the Census questionnaire in the mail and invited people to fill it out, it was believed that it should include a stronger call to action and a greater sense of urgency. It was believed that this would serve to inform people who have not previously completed the Census of the importance of their participation and that it is mandatory.

As for some of the design elements, the floating black dots used in the 'Floating Dots' and 'Your Community' concepts were generally understood to mean that information collected in the Census provided direction for needed services at the community level. Moreover, the approach of having the dots join together to form the maple leaf at the end of the video was well liked and strengthened the message that information obtained from the Census helps to shape communities. There was also an appreciation for, and understanding of, the use of the black disks in the 'Platforms' concept to illustrate how Census completion would result in community improvements. Using the black disks to represent communities on the Canada map was also seen as a strong conclusion indicative of the country's togetherness. As such, the use of either the black dots or platforms are effective at grabbing attention and conveying the relationship between Census participation and community improvements.

Overall, the tagline 'Your Census. Your community. Your future.' was slightly preferred to the tagline '2021 Census: Help shape your community.' Indeed, it was considered more personal, engaging and created a sense of responsibility and accountability. On the other hand, the '2021 Census' tagline was thought to be more specific, as it suggested a topic and timeline. The word 'help' was also considered engaging and encouraging action, although in some instances, it was believed to be less directive and taking the onus away from the individual.

Despite a limited recall of the 2016 Census advertising campaign, many participants recalled completing the last Census. Those who did remember filling out the Census generally considered it straightforward and easy to complete, albeit time consuming. This experience is generally reflective of the feelings expressed in the videos, and thus strengthened the message's credibility.