

CANADIAN TELCOS: NAVIGATING HEADWINDS IN THE ENDURANCE ECONOMY



AN IPSOS CANADA
POINT OF VIEW ON
THE ENDURANCE ECONOMY



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Cameron McFadyen

Vice President, Business Development

Based in Vancouver, Cameron leads business development for Ipsos across Western Canada and in key national sectors. With over fifteen years of telco experience, he has held Canadian leadership roles spanning marketing, GTM, retail account management, and C-Suite secondments. This background uniquely positions him to lead our national telco practice and makes him confident that the only faster way to kill a conversation at a party than saying you work in market research, is to say that you work for a wireless company



CANADIAN TELCOS: NAVIGATING HEADWINDS IN THE ENDURANCE ECONOMY

Telcos, especially the incumbents, are facing exceptional headwinds right now. Government intervention has reshaped the competitive landscape by [mandating Freedom undercut the rates of legacy national carriers](#), and that Bell, Rogers and Telus offer MVNOs access to both their [broadband](#) and [wireless](#) networks under favourable terms. This provides Freedom, a national challenger brand, and regional brands such as Cogeco an opportunity to expand their wireless footprints with regulatory backing designed to challenge the Big 3. On the broadband side, network sharing policy now allows the incumbents to piggyback on each other's broadband networks, [removing traditional competitive boundaries](#) based on their fiber footprints. At the same time, [subscriber growth has slowed](#) as immigration has decelerated. And now, more than ever, Canadians are taking a hard look at their expenses (41% cite "affordability" as their top concern). This latter point has been coined "the affordability crisis," a term we at Ipsos believe is outdated and will cause companies to misjudge the future.

A Crisis is a Point in Time... "Welcome" to the Endurance Economy.

The Endurance Economy is defined as an *extended* period where people/consumers feel stretched, uncertain about their prospects, and intensely focused on stability and predictability. We feel confident in challenging the idea of an "affordability crisis" because our data reveals that:

- Canadian optimism about their personal financial situation has plummeted from net +30% to just +7% over the past decade
- Over a third now borrowing money to cover basic living expenses



- 58% of Canadians saying price is either the determining factor (15%) or very important (43%) in their purchase decisions; price has now become a hard gate versus one of Marketing's 4 P's

In this Endurance Economy, many households feel less enthusiastic about long-term commitments or paying for premium services unless the value is unmistakably clear. Operators risk Canadians switching plans and potentially carriers more frequently, particularly to value-oriented brands and regional challengers. And while cost is a driving force, it's not the only factor.

Now more than ever, there is the potential for tension between what operators hope to achieve and what consumers will accept. Many telcos are focusing on their flagship brands and steering households into [larger bundles](#) (with multi-year contracts). The risk is that in an Endurance Economy, this can sound off key, particularly when Canadians' 10-year financial outlook has turned net negative for the first time in Ipsos' 15-year history of tracking this metric.

The Consumer Reality

45% of Canadians said "Internet services became less affordable over the year in 2025"

Canadians will increasingly gravitate toward plans and brands that help them feel responsible rather than indulgent, brands that let them say "this is smart" rather than "this is all I can afford." When budgets tighten, they will move down the value ladder, recalibrating based on these priorities.

Telecom services occupy a unique place in household budgets. Unlike many discretionary categories, connectivity has become essential, enabling work, education, banking, and social connection. Canadians cannot easily opt out. In the Endurance Economy this creates a distinct tension: households are under pressure to control costs, but they remain deeply reliant on the services themselves. As a result, consumers are less likely to abandon the category but will be more likely to question pricing, switch providers (something the CRTC is responding to by [banning switching fees](#)). As a result, they will favour operators that offer transparency, predictability, and a sense of fairness.

What This Means for Operators

- 1. Fairness over flash.** [CRTC complaints grew 17% YoY from 2024 to 2025](#), driven primarily by billing issues. Clear, predictable plans will outperform flashy promotions because they respect the customer's need for control and stability. Bundles can still play a major role, but the focus should be on how they reduce friction - fewer bills, fewer decisions, fewer surprises.
- 2. Portfolios as adaptation pathways, not status ladders.** Flanker and prepaid brands aren't a problem to solve, they're how you help customers stay in the ecosystem when circumstances change. This is critical when many Canadians, especially Gen Z, are already [borrowing to meet basic expenses](#) and will inevitably need to trade down. If operators remove those rungs, customers will simply leave for competitors.
- 3. Reliability as emotional reassurance.** Most Canadians [believe they can count on the high-speed network where they live](#); in this

new economic context there is an opportunity to provide increased peace of mind through steps such as proactive communication regarding service interruptions and to offer product enhancements that provide customers more visibility and control over their consumption and costs.

The Bottom Line

The Endurance Economy represents a new normal for Canadian consumers and brands. Constraint is the operating context, not a temporary disruption. The winners will be those who help Canadians make these limitations manageable: telecom operators who deliver seamless reliability, fairness without fine print, and flexibility without judgment.

In a market shaped by endurance, the brands that thrive won't be the cheapest. They'll be the ones that understand how to help Canadians feel like they're successfully adapting, not just surviving.



For more insights on the Endurance Economy, visit the Ipsos Canada Endurance Economy Hub or reach out to discuss what this means for your brand :



Cameron McFadyen

VP, Business Development

cameron.mcfadyen@ipsos.com