

[Home](#) » [Agencies](#), [Digital](#), [News](#) »

Opinion: AI is missing Canada's fastest-growing consumers

By the time brands connect with newcomers in a way that resonates, many of the most important purchasing decisions have already been made.

By Guest

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By Nikki Stone

Canada's AI economy is facing a critical but overlooked issue. Biased data is quickly limiting our growth potential and growth opportunities.

As we all know, AI "talk" these days focuses on speed and efficiency. Why would it not? But while we are all doing more things in less time, we are missing a larger risk and opportunity.

Although often overlooked, AI systems are not necessarily neutral. They gather information based on historical data and when that information is incomplete, AI doesn't just reflect those gaps, it enlarges them, limiting audiences, reinforcing assumptions and potentially amplifying the wrong information. This, in turn, can limit economic growth.

In a country as diverse as Canada, particularly in cities like Toronto, this creates a paradox: the more companies rely on AI for optimization and make decisions based on information generated by AI systems, the more they risk excluding the very audiences that can represent future growth.

In fact, **more than 70% of Large Language**

Models (LLMs) – the AI systems that are

able to comprehend, process and predict human language – are being trained in

English, despite the fact that according

to **2026 data**, less than 20% of the world's

population speaks English. While English is the world's most spoken language (with approximately 1.5 billion total speakers worldwide) and may be the global business language, only about one in five people worldwide actually speaks it.

What's more, is that according to the latest 2021 **census** information in Canada, English is the mother tongue of only 50% of Canadians, with French being the mother tongue for approximately 20% of our population. It will be interesting to see whether the most recent census will reveal the same. And what about those whose mother tongue is an Indigenous language? How will LLMs serve them?

The share of Canadians who learned English as their first language has seen a long-term gradual decrease. That's not surprising given that high-volume immigration growth is how we have grown lately as a population in this country.

Our population is increasingly becoming more diverse, with newcomers immigrating to our country regularly. And in Canada, growth depends on reaching these newcomers.

This is where AI's algorithms are limiting growth.

In Canada, for example, it can take up to two years before a new arrival feels confident using search tools or large language models in English, meaning that for that entire two-year period, brands are effectively not recognized by this demographic.

Meanwhile, life moves quickly. Banking relationships are established. Phone plans are purchased. Home furniture is bought and car agreements are made. By the time the majority of companies finally connect with newcomers in a way that resonates, those decisions have already been made and are often locked in for years.

And a competitive "conquesting" which is more than +500% more costly, and +5 times longer sales cycle, will erode those marketing budgets fast.

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Canadian companies are spinning their wheels on campaigns, outreach and decisions using incomplete information because AI systems can't keep up with Canada's constantly changing demographic.

This is just one critical example of how AI-driven decision-making can "optimize out" diverse or emerging audiences. While it's healthy to use AI data to predict the future and make business decisions, we must ensure that we don't rely on historical and incomplete data to make those decisions.

The future of AI leadership and growth isn't about adopting more tools, but about asking better questions and building smarter guardrails. We need human intervention in data decision-making and "human-in-the-loop" systems that prioritize real-world behaviour over data assumptions.

Canadian consumers, business leaders and marketers alike need a clearer lens on how AI is reshaping opportunity, and risk, in Canada. Ultimately, we need to remember that inclusivity isn't just a moral checkbox, but a measurable growth strategy tied to reach, innovation and long-term ROI.



*Nikki Stone is a C-suite advisor, a board member of Spark Centre and a former senior executive at Publicis and WPP. Earlier in her career, she was CEO of Wavemaker Canada and EVP and managing director at Zenith. More recently, she **launched YQ Business Advisory**, a growth-stage consultancy focused on helping founders and C-suites scale sustainably.*

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