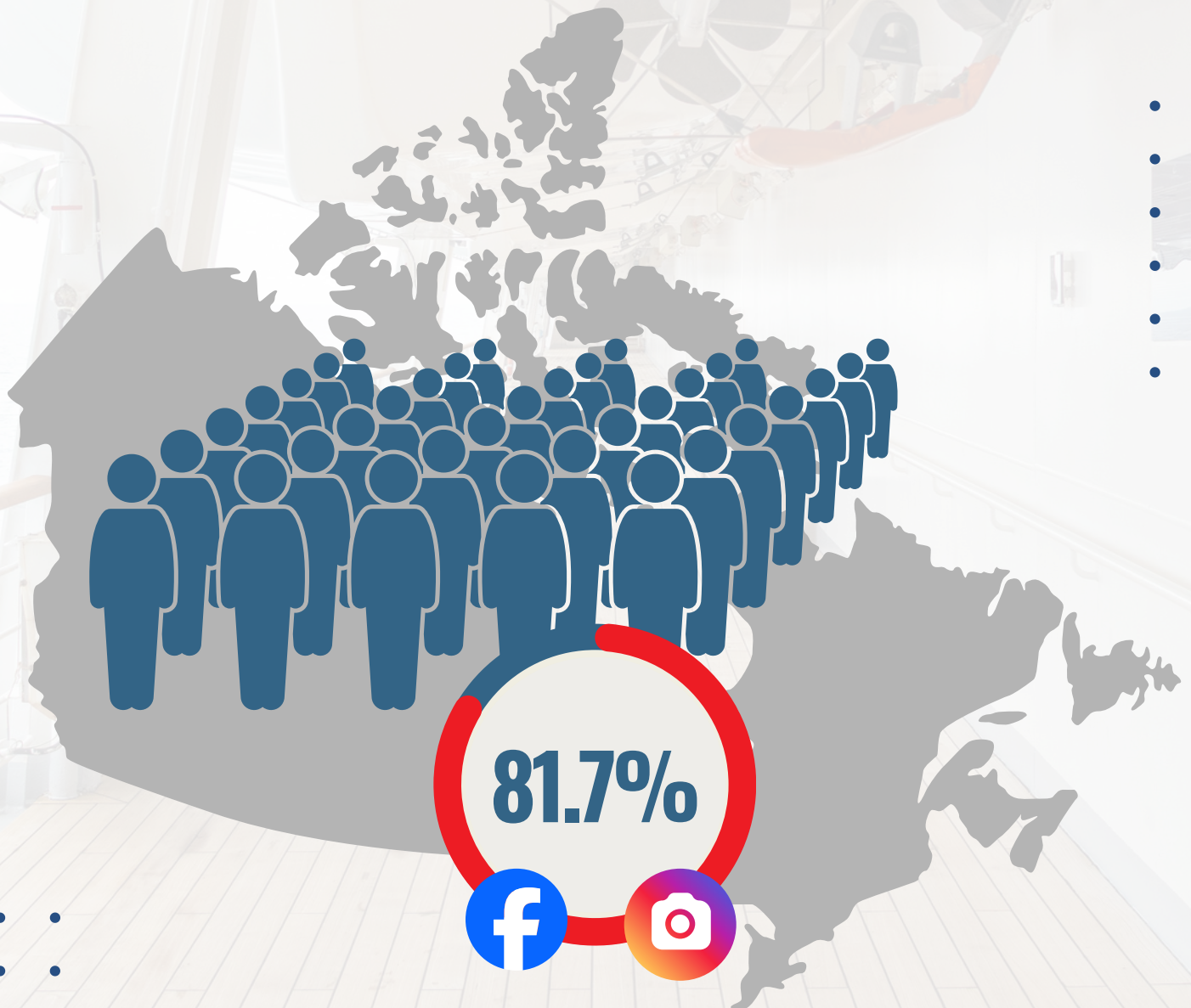


# 2025 TWO YEARS LATER META CANADA'S DEVASTATING IMPACT ON TRAVEL JOURNALISM

While Meta's Canadian news ban initially devastated travel journalism's social reach, the industry is emerging stronger by building owned audiences, mastering new platforms, and creating direct relationships that no algorithm can disrupt.



Two years after Meta blocked Canadian news from Facebook and Instagram in response to Bill C-18, travel journalism in Canada continues to navigate a fundamentally altered digital landscape. For travel publications, editors, writers and photographers who once relied on social platforms for distribution, audience development and ad revenue, the ban has meant lost reach, fractured discovery paths and a renewed scramble to rebuild direct relationships with readers, all while **over 31 million (that's 81.7% of Canada's population) continue to use these platforms daily.**



## What Happened: The Backstory

In August 2023, Meta imposed a comprehensive news ban on Facebook and Instagram in Canada, opting to block all news content rather than comply with the compensation requirements outlined in the Online News Act. The legislation, similar to laws enacted in Australia, required large tech platforms to negotiate fair payment with news publishers for content shared on their services. While Google eventually reached a \$100-million annual agreement with Canadian media, Meta chose a different path. It made news articles and broadcaster posts completely invisible to Canadian users on its platforms.

The impact was immediate and severe. According to the Media Ecosystem Observatory (MEO), a research collaboration between McGill University and the University of Toronto, **Canadian news outlets lost 85% of their engagement on Facebook and Instagram within the first year.** This translated to approximately 11 million fewer daily views for Canadian news content, a staggering reduction that has fundamentally reshaped how travel stories reach their audiences.



85%

# The Travel Journalism Toll: When Visual Storytelling Lost Its Biggest Stage

Travel content has thrived on social media because of its inherently visual, aspirational nature. Destination features, photo essays and experience-driven narratives perform exceptionally well on Instagram and Facebook, where users seek inspiration and share discoveries with their networks. The ban severed this vital connection.



## Traffic Losses Hit Local and Niche Publishers Hardest

Research from The Hub found that local Canadian news outlets experienced a 58% decline in overall social media engagement, while national outlets saw a 24% drop. For travel journalism, which often lives in the local and niche publisher space, these numbers have been catastrophic. Overall, Canadian news engagement fell 43% across all platforms, with losses on Meta's platforms not being compensated by gains elsewhere.

Particularly telling: approximately one-third of local news outlets that were active on social media became dormant within the first year of the ban. Among the 212 outlets that went inactive, 98% were local publishers, exactly the type of organizations that produce regional travel coverage, destination guides and community event features.

The case of Narcity Media illustrates the struggle faced by digital-first publishers. CEO Chuck Lapointe told Digital Content Next that his social-first platforms, which had thrived since 2013 by building audiences on Facebook and Instagram, saw an "immediate hit to revenue" when Meta blocked access. Facebook pages for Narcity and MTL Blog, with over 3 million combined followers, went dark overnight and took years of audience investment with them.

For travel journalism specifically, the loss of social distribution has meant:

1  
Fewer spontaneous reads of destination features that once found audiences through social sharing


2  
Diminished reach for visually compelling photo-driven posts that previously went viral

3  
A narrower funnel for converting casual readers into newsletter subscribers or premium content buyers


4  
Reduced visibility for time-sensitive content like seasonal travel guides and event coverage

# The Revenue Triple Threat

The direct ad revenue lost from fewer pageviews tells only part of the story. Travel publishers report three interconnected revenue impacts:



**Lower display ad performance:** Fewer sessions mean reduced inventory and weaker negotiating power with advertisers. When traffic declines, CPMs (cost per thousand impressions) typically fall as well, compounding the decline in revenue.



**Underperforming sponsored content:** Tourism boards and travel brands pay for measurable reach and engagement. When organic social distribution collapsed, sponsored posts lost their amplification engine. Great West Media president Brian Bachynski noted that *"ad volume is predicated upon page views, the Meta ban has depressed traffic to our websites and therefore our ability to drive revenues."*



**Slower subscription funnels:** Social media traffic historically fed newsletter sign-ups and trial conversions, when readers clicked through from Facebook or Instagram posts to publishers' websites. Without that top-of-funnel discovery path, subscriber growth has stalled for many publishers. The MEO study confirmed this dynamic, noting that outlets heavily dependent on social media referrals saw the most severe impacts.

For boutique travel sites and freelance collectives operating on thin margins, this chain reaction has directly constrained commissioning budgets, reduced travel assignments and limited photography opportunities.




## The Distribution Paradox: Canadians Still Use Facebook, But Can't Find Travel News

Here's the troubling paradox: Canadians haven't abandoned these platforms. With approximately 31-32 million active Facebook users (representing 77-82% of the population), Facebook remains a dominant force in daily digital life, but news content (including valuable travel journalism) has been removed from their feeds.

What filled the void? According to CBC News reporting on studies by the Media Ecosystem Observatory and NewsGuard, engagement with "unreliable" sources climbed to 6.9% in the 90 days after the ban, compared to 2.2% in the 90 days before. The algorithms repurposed attention toward non-journalistic content: memes, community posts, commercial travel ads and influencer material, often unverified and sometimes actively misleading.



This matters profoundly for travel journalism because:



**Misinformation fills the gap:** Community groups and meme pages now amplify unverified travel tips and destination misinformation, displacing reliable reporting from professional journalists



**Discovery has become fragmented:** Publishers must now invest significantly more in SEO, newsletters, podcasts and paid social advertising on other platforms to regain scale








**Alternative platforms demand different skills:** TikTok has emerged as the largest social media purveyor of Canadian news (growing Canadian news engagement by over 1 million), but audience behaviour differs dramatically (short-form video versus long-form storytelling) and monetization remains uneven

Perhaps most concerning: only 22% of Canadians are aware the ban exists, according to MEO research. The vast majority believe they're still consuming news on these platforms, when in reality they're encountering recycled screenshots, aggregated content and non-journalistic sources.

## What Practical Steps Travel Media Can Take

This isn't a call to despair, it's a call to adapt strategically. The most successful travel outlets have responded with these concrete moves:

-  **Double down on owned channels:** Newsletters, membership communities and direct subscription offers achieve higher conversion rates when fuelled/powered (you choose) by compelling storytelling. Build email lists aggressively and treat them as your primary distribution channel.
-  **Invest in search-first content:** Evergreen destination guides and "best of" lists that rank well on Google generate steady referral traffic that's less fragile than social bursts. SEO has become essential, not optional.
-  **Incorporate short-form video:** TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts require different storytelling skills, but they represent the new frontier for discovery. Create video teasers that drive audiences to your long-form content.
-  **Build strategic tourism partnerships:** Tourism boards and travel brands still need measurable audiences. Travel publishers who can supply clean attribution and demonstrate reach through owned channels are finding success with sponsored campaigns.
-  **Develop platform-specific strategies:** As recent research on Instagram engagement demonstrates, news organizations must treat each platform as a distinct publication space, using visual formats and analytics to maximize reach where news sharing is still possible.

## An Industry Reset Two Years On

Meta's news ban has been a forcing function for Canadian travel journalism: painful and uneven, but ultimately clarifying. It exposed dangerous over-dependence on a single distribution channel and accelerated a necessary shift toward diversification.

For travel journalism (a visual, experiential field that once thrived on social virality) the path forward blends creativity with discipline: better SEO practices, smarter newsletter strategies, platform-aware storytelling and direct reader relationships. The audience hasn't disappeared. Over 31 million Canadians still use these platforms daily. But publishers must meet readers through different channels and build true ownership of those relationships.

The hardest-hit have been local and independent publishers, the very outlets producing the regional travel coverage, community event guides and destination features that enrich Canadian travel journalism. As MEO director Aengus Bridgman noted, *"This represents a continual decline in the starving of local populations of news about their cities, about their communities, about important events happening that matter to them."*

Yet resilience persists. Publishers who anticipated the change and diversified early have weathered the storm better. Those investing in owned channels, search optimization and alternative platforms are finding new pathways to audiences. And the travel journalism community (through organizations like the Travel Media Association of Canada) continues to share strategies, support one another and advocate for sustainable solutions.



The next chapter of Canadian travel journalism won't look like the last. But two years into this forced evolution, one thing is clear: quality storytelling, authentic voice and genuine reader relationships remain the foundation. The channels may have changed, but the mission hasn't.



[travelmedia.com](http://travelmedia.com)

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