

**“I’LL HAVE A DOUBLE-DOUBLE, PLEASE”
THE ROLE OF TIM HORTON’S IN THE MAKING OF THE CANADIAN IDENTITY**

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The seemingly simple question “What is a Canadian?” is often answered by blank expressions. The varied geography, regions and ethnicity of Canada, the second largest country in the world, leave its citizens searching for a unifying identity, grasping to things that could potentially help define them as “Canadian.” Canada prides itself on its multicultural society, which, however, raises a question: If what we have in common is diversity, do we really have anything in common? There are popular notions about Canadian characteristics, things recognised internally and externally as uniquely Canadian. The two traditionally considered the root of Canadian identity are the nation’s love for hockey and its need to be distinct from America.

The fast food restaurant Tim Hortons has adopted these identity markers and itself become part of the answer of what it means to be Canadian. This paper intends to explore how Tim Hortons incorporated the few accepted aspects of the Canadian identity in order to establish itself in the Canadian market. This business strategy was successful because, lacking a national identity, Canadians adopted Tim Hortons as an icon that all Canadians could relate to: rich, poor, educated, blue collar, spanning all regions, ethnicities and even political party lines. The Canadian embrace of Tim Hortons has led to the formation of new “Canadianisms” that Canadians are proud to use and be associated with. Language reflects identity and Canadians’ embrace of Tim Hortons as part of their identity is reflected in their vocabulary.

From its inception, Tim Hortons made a connection with Canadians. Founded in 1964, Tim Hortons was named after its co-founder, the Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman Tim Horton. For the millions of Leafs’ fans, the very name of the restaurant evokes “memories of the Leafs’ four Stanley Cup wins and the glory days of hockey of the 1960s” (S. Harper, 2009). Thus, the name Tim Horton (we discuss the shift to Tim Hortons below) was crucial to establishing a relationship with its Canadian customers.

This association with hockey, however, goes far beyond merely profiting from one popular sports team’s (historical) success. Instead, “Tim’s” evokes Canada’s national identity. Hockey has long been described as an integral part of the collective Canadian identity. Having emerged in the late nineteenth century as a distinctly Canadian sport, it became one way in which Canadians could distinguish themselves from Americans. For this reason, “anything that appears to infringe on the sport and Canada’s conception of ownership is highly contested” (Mason, 2002, p. 142). Canadians are defensive about

"their" sport because hockey is the one of the few things that unites the people of Canada and transcends all their differences. Being such a young and diverse nation, Canada faces difficulties when constructing and defining its national identity. To build a national image successfully requires "a shared history and mythologies that best suit the identity imagined," prerequisites Canada lacks due to its varied histories and patterns of settlements (Robidoux, 2002, p. 209).

Hockey, therefore, is one of the few things Canadians collectively consider expressive of their identity. Unlike the American sports of baseball and football, hockey is Canadian in origin and character: it resembles the First Nation sport of lacrosse in design and manner and was born post Confederation. The sport also incorporates Canada's most well known feature: its long, cold winters. Obviously, a game of hockey can occur on any surface, but playing hockey on a "frozen landscape perfectly embodie[s]... the life [of] a Canadian colonist" (Robidoux, 2002, p. 218).

In addition to being known primarily as a winter sport, hockey has always been associated with violence and aggression. This aspect, too, contributed to making the sport more Canadian. This use of excessive force distinguished it from the less violent sports being played in America and Europe (Robidoux, 2002). In fact, within 20 years of the formation of the first organized hockey leagues, hockey was "internationally known as being first, Canadian and second, notoriously violent" (Robidoux, 2002, p. 220). During the first half of the twentieth century, Canada remained closely linked to the British Empire yet was under the increasing influence of the United States. Hockey was an expression of independence and a symbol of resistance against these two powers. Thus, hockey became an enduring symbol of the Canadian identity.

The chain Tim Hortons reinforces the continuing value which Canadians place on hockey through its sponsorship of the Timbit Minor Sports Program. Named after the popular Tim Hortons children's treat, this program sponsors young participants of community sports teams, such as hockey, and provides player jerseys and medals. Timbit hockey teams are also given the opportunity to take part in an intermission feature during National Hockey League games ("Local Programs," 2009). The Timbit Minor Sports Program, while a good cause, also has the effect of further associating Tim Hortons with hockey and, by extension, the Canadian identity.

In addition to hockey, anti-American sentiment is central to the elusive Canadian identity. In 1776, a wave of American Loyalists immigrated into Canada because they refused to participate in the American Revolution (Chambers, forthcoming). Along with their manners and accents, they brought an anti-American sentiment and a dislike for all things American which persists today (O'Connor, 2007). This Loyalist tradition has frequently been identified as a key element of the Canadian identity, leading most Canadians to define themselves in terms of what they are *not*; above all, Canadians will say they are not American (O'Connor, 2007). However, Canadian trade is heavily reliant upon the American market and there is a continuous Americanization of culture through the increase of American movies and television aired in Canada (O'Connor, 2007).

Despite this convergence of economies and culture, the anti-American sentiment is deeply ingrained. This key aspect in the Canadian identity has often been used by Canadian leaders to garner the support, respect and trust of the Canadian people; the trend that began with John A. MacDonald's successful campaign for Prime Minister in 1891 (Wood, 2001) was evident still in 2003, when former MP Carolyn Parrish said to a reporter "Damn Americans . . . I hate those bastards!" ("MP apologizes for calling Americans 'bastards,'" 2003).

In trying to distance itself from its powerful neighbour, Canada tends to be drawn to things which are distinctively Canadian or at least seem so. This can be seen in the case of Tim Hortons. Much national pride in "Timmie's" stems from the fact that it is a home grown corporation. However, in 1995 Tim Hortons partnered with the American Wendy's International Inc. and expanded into the American market. Tim Hortons moved its headquarters to America, officially becoming an American managed company. Despite their national symbol becoming American—unCanadian—there did not seem to be an effect on the connection Canadians felt with their Tim Hortons. On September 29, 2009, Tim Hortons moved its headquarters back to Canada and Prime Minister Stephen Harper commented, "I'm not sure many Canadians would believe you actually ever moved away" (S. Harper, 2009). The fact that this business move to America was not heavily advertised or well known in Canadian circles suggests Tim Hortons' awareness of the detrimental effect it would have had on the company's image, and profits, if Canadians had come to associate their beloved Tim Hortons with America.

In eschewing all things American, Canadians rejected the American idea of their immigrant nation as a "melting pot" and adopted a different metaphor for Canada—the "mosaic" style society (Zolf, 2006). Both America and Canada were built as immigrant nations, but their approach to cultural diversity varies greatly. America adopted a pattern of assimilation expecting immigrants in the country to adopt the American way of life and culture (Jacoby, 2004). Canada, on the other hand, adopted the model of a mosaic society, enabling people to keep their cultural identities while still being an integral part of Canadian society. This social model is recognized in the Canadian constitution (Gannon, 2003). Canada has legislated multiculturalism and the acceptance of diversity; it has also proclaimed itself to be a bilingual country in recognition of a historical language divide. The policies of multiculturalism and bilingualism have resulted in a profusion of disagreements regarding identity.

This complex identity situation within Canada is epitomized by the difficult relationship between French Canada and English Canada. In 1995, Quebec held a provincial referendum proposing separation from Canada, and, although it failed, the margin was extremely close: 50.5% to 49.5% (Gannon, 2003). The idea of parting from Canada is ever prevalent in Quebec due to the distinct identity of French Canada. However, in accordance with the multicultural practices of Canada, the rest of Canada has embraced Quebec's identity differences. This can be seen in the acceptance (grudging) of Quebec's language laws. Despite being surrounded by a sea of English, Quebec can lay

claim to being a distinct society within Canada where French is the official language. Canadians are divided by history, region, religion and especially language. With the aim of appealing to all within Canada, Tim Hortons removed the apostrophe from its corporate name, changing it from the possessive English form, "Tim Horton's," which is ungrammatical in French, to the language neutral "Tim Hortons." This change was in response to Quebec's language laws, in particular Bills 22 and 101, which in seeking to enforce the use of French as the provincial language prohibited dominant store signage and corporate names in English. The removal of the apostrophe was done discreetly so as not to offend English Canada while appeasing French Canada. This move maintained the chain's ability to resonate with all Canadians.

In addition to policies embracing all Canadians, its continued presence over the years has ensured Tim Hortons' inclusion in the Canadian identity. For almost fifty years, Canadians have been going to Tim Hortons for their coffee and donuts. Tim Hortons has been part of people's routines for so long that "going to Timmie's" is akin to visiting a friend. The former slogan, "Always Fresh, Always There," highlights this fixed and honoured position as "an integral, indispensable, and dependable part of ordinary Canadian life" (Cormack, 2008, p. 370). Canadians from all walks of life are customers at Tim Hortons. In contrast to Starbucks, Tim Hortons is described as being the "humble, plain-Jane" of the coffee scene (Cormack, 2008). This image is similar to the ways in which Canadians describe themselves. According to Cormack, "Even the company's perpetually beige-and-brown packaging . . . fits in with Canadians' notion of themselves as strong, principled people who don't grasp at fads" (Proudfoot, 2008, p. A3). Tim Hortons has often been described as the place where the average Joe can get his cup of Joe. Tim Hortons overrides conventional boundaries in society based on earnings, political views, and age and appeals to all.

Tim Hortons has emphasized its role in the lives of everyday Canadians with its "True Stories" television commercials. These advertisements feature "genuine" customers and store owners sharing personal life-altering or learning experiences that in some way involve Tim Hortons. For example, a few of these ads have featured Canadians who reluctantly travel abroad and, in order to ease their homesickness, request that Tim Hortons coffee be sent to them. One ad told the story of an elderly woman, Lillian, who each day trekked up a steep hill, cane in hand, just to get her Tim Hortons coffee. The general plot of these stories is of hardship endured by the main character, who finds comfort in rituals involving Tim Hortons (Cormack, 2008). Thus, as these "True Stories" demonstrate, Tim Hortons has become a comforting and enjoyable aspect of the lives of Canadians.

The idea that home can be transported through a cup of coffee has also connected Tim Hortons with Canada's international and military image. Tim Hortons opened a store in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in 2006 as a way of bringing a "little piece of home" to Canadian soldiers stationed. Gen. Rick Hillier, then chief of defence staff, urged Tim Hortons to open the war-zone store in order to raise morale and to make military life in

Afghanistan a little easier ("Tim Hortons in Kandahar," 2008). To Canadian soldiers, a "double-double" was like Canada in a cup.

Canadians' affection for and attachment to Tim Hortons is reflected in the language they speak. In 2004, "double-double" was added to the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* ("Double-double," 2004). "Double-double," referring to a coffee with two creams and two sugars, began as a term used exclusively in Tim Hortons coffee shops and has become a generic Canadian term forming an isogloss at the Canada-US border. Although "double double" is the only example of Tim Hortons lingo to be included in a dictionary, there are many other phrases that originated at Tim Hortons that are now in common use. Examples include "triple-triple," for three creams and three sugars, "four by four," for four creams and sugars (an order popular in Kandahar), "ice cap," for iced cappuccino, and "timbit," for a bite-sized doughnut. "Timbits" can also be used to refer to young children, especially those participating in the Timbit Minor Sports Program. The fact that these terms have become part of the everyday speech of Canadians is a testament to the impact and penetration of Tim Hortons in Canadian culture.

Canadian diversity has resulted in the lack of a cohesive national identity. Nevertheless, Canadians seem to agree on three aspects of their identity: their separateness from the United States, their love of hockey, and their affection for Tim Hortons coffee and baked goods. Tim Hortons secured its position in Canada by associating itself with the other established aspects of the Canadian identity. The lack of a more concrete Canadian identity enabled Tim Hortons to fill the void. By doing so, Tim Hortons has become part of the answer to the question "What makes a Canadian?" Canadians can now accurately be described as a people who drink their double-doubles while watching a hockey match between the United States and Canada. (And we all know who they're cheering for.)

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