

INTERNET USE AND SOCIAL LIFE/ATTITUDES IN URBAN MAINLAND CHINA

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ABSTRACT

In addition to the Mainland China data collected by the Hong Kong research team, a separate five-city study in China was conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing that also included the basic UCLA study questions on social life. This study also developed a number of new attitude questions related to social life. Since most Chinese Internet users live in urban areas, the survey was concentrated in five major cities among citizens between the ages of 17–60. About 660 individuals were interviewed in each city leading to a total sample size of 3153 respondents across the five cities.

Internet users report more personal use of the home/cell phone than nonusers. Users also estimate about 40 percent more time in telephone contact and about 10 percent more time in contact with friends. In relation to the ten more general new social attitude items, Internet users emerge as more pro-social on three of them, less social on one of them and no different on the other six items.

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In addition to the Mainland China data collected by Lee and Zhu described in the previous article, a separate five-city study in China was conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing that also included the basic UCLA study questions on social life. This study also developed a number of new attitude questions related to social life. Because of the recent availability of these data and the limitations of conducting multivariate analyses, only the bivariate results are included in this article. These results will be subjected to multivariate analyses to adjust for other factors in the near future.

SURVEY DESIGN

Since most Chinese Internet users live in urban areas, the survey was concentrated in the five major cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Changsha. Male and female citizens between ages of 17–60 in households were chosen as respondents. Some 66 local residential communities in each city and 10 households in each local residential community were randomly chosen.

One person in each chosen household was then selected, usually the Internet user in the household. If no one in the household had used the Internet, the adult whose birthday was the closest to the day of the interview was chosen as the respondent. Considering that many of the Internet users in China are college students (43% of users in this survey) who are only home during vacation, the survey was conducted during the Chinese Spring Festival in 2001 (January 20 to February 5).

About 660 individuals were interviewed in each city leading to a total sample size of 3153 respondents across the five cities. The user samples are weighted in line with the user ratio in each of the five cities, and the nonuser samples are weighted in line with the nonuser ratio. So the original user sample size was 1451 and the weighted sample size is 1045; the original nonuser sample size was 1702 and the weighted sample size is 1086. Both the user and nonuser theoretical sample error is less than 3 percent at 95 percent confidence level.

RESULTS

It can be seen at the top of Table 1 that Internet users report more personal use of the home/cell phone than nonusers. Some 31 percent of users say they make more than 5 calls a day compared to 17 percent of nonusers. Some of this is due to the nonusers having no access to a telephone, as found in the first row of the table.

In terms of the UCLA questions on weekly hours of telephone use and contact with friends, Internet users are again significantly higher than nonusers on both aspects of social life. Users estimate about 40 percent more time in telephone contact and about 10 percent more time in contact with friends.

**TABLE 1: DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES
IN THE MAINLAND CHINA SURVEY**

Question	User (n = 1027)	Nonuser (n = 1073)
AL. How often do you make phone calls from home (include use of your cell phone but do not include work-related calls)?		
No telephone at home or seldom	6.0%	13.0%
1-6 times a week	10.8	14.3
1-2 times a day	25.1	27.9
3-4 times a day	27.0	27.1
More than 5 times a day	30.7	17.5
AM. During a typical week, about how many minutes do you spend ...?		
On the Telephone	3.4 hours (n=967)	2.5 hours (n=930)
Being with Friends	8.9 hours (n=889)	8.2 hours (n=832)
AN. How important are the following items as sources of information to you? (% SI = Somewhat important; VI = Very important)		
School or workplace	55%	49%
Family	55	62
Friends	65	66
Club or communities	26	19
AO. How important are the following as sources of entertainment? (% SI + VI)		
1. School or workplace	48%	45%
2. Family	57	67
3. Friends	76	69
4. Club or communities	32	24
AT. Do you think the following views or behaviors are suitable to you? (% Somewhat Suitable + Very Suitable)		
1. I'd like to know the ideas and things of those people who are totally different from me.	51%	39%
2. I like to express my opinion more than others.	32	27
3. I only want to be friends with those who can share my ideas.	32	35
4. I like to know those people whose living conditions are very different from mine.	38	34
5. I like to discuss questions with people who have different views.	50	46
6. Even if I disagree with someone, I am still interested in listening to his/her explanation.	60	57
7. I am used to finding new friends outside my workplace or family.	45	37
8. I can easily get along with those who are from different social positions	49	44
9. I can understand those who change their sex by surgery.	28	22
10. I often join some social activities for collective well-being.	29	37

**TABLE 2: ESTIMATED CHANGES IN COMMUNICATION AFTER INTERNET
(INTERNET USERS ONLY)**

CP. By using the Internet, has your time on other forms of daily communication (i.e., by letter, telephone, etc.) with...?	1. Increased	2. Same as before	3. Less than before	N
CP-1. Colleagues or classmates	18.0	74.9	7.1	1,040
CP-2. Friends (not including Web friends)	16.1	75.9	7.9	1,039
CP-3. Parent	2.0	89.9	8.1	1,039
CP-4. Brothers and sisters	4.1	84.7	11.2	1,037
CP-5. Relatives or neighbors	3.2	81.1	15.7	1,037
CP-6. Spouse or lover	6.9	86.6	6.5	1,005

Turning to the new questions on social life devised especially for this survey in Table 1, it can be seen that Internet users report less reliance on family members as sources of both information and entertainment than did nonusers; but they report greater reliance on clubs/communities, and to a lesser extent, on school or workplaces than nonusers.

In relation to the ten more general new social attitude items, Internet users emerge as more pro-social on three of them, less social on one of them and no different on the other six items. They are more likely to say they want to know people with totally different ideas, more used to finding new friends and better able to understand people who want to have a sex change operation. They are less likely to say they join social activities out of a sense of collective well-being.

Finally, in estimating the affect of the Internet on their lives, Table 2 shows that far more Internet users estimate that with the Internet they are spending more time with colleagues/classmates (18%) and with friends (16%) than less time (7% and 8% respectively). At the same time, more users report decreased time with parents, siblings and relatives or neighbors.