

Chapter 102

Cyber Behavior of Chinese Internet Users

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ABSTRACT

While China has the world's largest Internet population, understanding of this huge group of Internet users still falls short. In this entry, the authors aim to provide an overview of literature on cyber behavior of Chinese Internet users. They focus on characteristics of Chinese Internet users, how they use the Internet and how the Internet influences them. The authors examine different aspects of their cyber behavior: (1) general Internet use, (2) use of specific Internet services such as blogs and social networking sites, (3) online communication and relationships, (4) problematic Internet usage, and (5) cross-cultural comparisons between Internet users in China and in other countries.

INTRODUCTION

Cyber behavior of Chinese Internet users can be characterized by a variety of online activities engaging in E-mail, the Web, Instant Messaging (IM), Social Networking Sites (SNS), Bulletin Board System (BBS), online games and online commerce sites. We focus on Internet users in Mainland China.

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OVERVIEW

Since the Internet was first formally opened to the Chinese general public in 1995, China has undergone an explosive growth in Internet usage and coverage. By the end of 2008, China topped the United States with the largest number of Internet users in the world. We have witnessed an increasing interest in studying Internet usage in China. The China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) was founded on June 3rd, 1997. It published the first Chinese Internet Develop-

ment Condition Report in November, 1997. This report mainly focuses on Chinese Internet users' demographic information, Internet using condition and behavior. Since then it publishes this report every 6 months. Zhang and Jiang (1998), Zhou and Su (1999) published the earliest papers in China on Internet users' behavior. However, their discussion was primarily based on foreign Internet users' behavior. They did not really investigate Chinese Internet users' behavior. The research in this field was very limited in China in 1990s. Ma (2000) first tried to focus on Chinese adolescence's online communication behavior and discussed how to correctly understand the characteristics of online communication, how to help protect adolescence from unsafe online conditions and how to correctly guide adolescence to use the Internet. Subsequently, research on behavior of Chinese Internet users, especially college students, gained momentum.

1. GENERAL INTERNET USE

1.1 CNNIC Report

According to the 27th CNNIC's report published in 2011, there are 457 million Internet users in China which have already accounted for 23.2% of the global Internet population. They defined Internet users as people who are older than 6 years old and use Internet in the last 6 months. More specifically, Chinese Internet users included broadband Internet users, mobile Internet users, desktop computer Internet users, rural Internet users, urban Internet users, and adolescence Internet users (younger than 25 years old). The general condition of demographics of Chinese Internet users are as follows: (1) Gender: there were more male users than female users; (2) Age: Internet users' age spreaded from younger than 10 years old to older than 60 years old, and 10-39 years old Internet users accounted for 80% of all Chinese Internet users; (3) Education level: the

majority of Chinese Internet users had middle school and high school education; (4) Occupation: the majority of Internet users were students; (5) Income: the majority of Chinese Internet users' monthly income was lower than 3000 CNY (about 460 US dollars). CNNIC report provided figures with more details about Chinese Internet users' demographic information. We simplified those figures and presented them as Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

The report also included the condition of how and where Chinese Internet users access Internet. Chinese Internet users most frequently adopted personal computer when they accessed the Internet. The second and third frequently adopted devices are mobile phone and laptop. Home was the favorite location Chinese Internet users would love to choose to access Internet, followed by Internet cafe, work place, school and other public places. The following graphs are simplified graphs from CNNIC report. They provide more details about the Internet access device and location information. (see Figures 6, 7)

CNNIC (2011) found that search engine is the most frequently used Internet application, followed by online music, news, instant messaging, games, blogs, email, social networking sites, commerce, and videos. Notably, Internet commerce is strongly increased in recent years in China.

1.2 Young Chinese Internet Users

Academic researchers also contribute to the understanding of general Chinese Internet users' behavior. The most widely used research method is survey. College students were studied the most because they are not only the primary group of Chinese Internet users but also the group of people who has the greatest potential to influence the society.

Liu, Sun and Chen (2007) conducted a survey study to explore undergraduate students' Internet behavior in five universities in Guangdong province. The results included various kinds of normal

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