Book Section:
Bolsover, G orcid.org/0000-0003-2982-1032, Dutton, WH, Law, G et al. (1 more author) (2014) China and the US in the New Internet World: A Comparative Perspective. In: Graham, M and Dutton, WH, (eds.) Society and the Internet: How Networks of Information and Communication are Changing Our Lives. Oxford University Press , Oxford, UK , pp. 117-134. ISBN 9780199661992

https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199661992.003.0008

CHINA AND THE US IN THE NEW INTERNET WORLD: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Gillian Bolsover, William H. Dutton, Ginette Law, and Soumitra Dutta

The Internet's Shifting Center of Gravity

The Internet was an American invention and it was in the Western context that the technology was built and matured, but US users no longer drive online developments.[1] China's online population surpassed that of the United States' in 2008, and today there are more Chinese Internet users than there are Americans on the planet. With more than half the Chinese population still offline, this shift in the Internet's centre of gravity is likely to continue to accelerate over the next decade.

While China, with its massive population, accounts for much of the Internet's shift away from the West, the trend is not limited to the Asian giant alone. As the percentage of worldwide Internet users located in North America and Europe has halved over the past decade, from 66 percent in 2002 to 33 percent in 2012, the percentage located in Asia has grown from only 5 percent in 2002 to 45 percent in 2012. Other regions in the Global South have also seen their influence grow dramatically. The percentage of worldwide Internet users located in Latin America and the Caribbean has risen from less than 1 percent in 2002 to 10 percent in 2012, and users in the Middle East and Africa, who collectively accounted for approximately 2 percent of the world's Internet population in 2002, now make up more than 10 percent of the total.

These changes are set to accelerate rather than abate. The extension of Internet connectivity to five billion new users over the next decade, the vast majority of whom will be located in non-Western countries (Schmidt and Cohen 2013), will likely prove as, or more, revolutionary than the changes seen in the developed, Western countries that first adopted this technology. However, despite the scale and importance of these changes, the bulk of academic scholarship in Internet Studies has yet to account for, or fully understand, the gravity of this changing population.

One concept that foregrounds this shift and invites a reconsideration of established theories in light of these changes, is that of the New Internet World (Dutta et al. 2011). The theory proposes that the Old Internet World, dominated by the English-speaking West and developed East Asian countries has passed, and we are now operating in a New Internet World that is increasingly shaped by the users, companies, and conditions in nations of the Global South.

A key, but as yet unanswered question, is how this influx of new users might change the way that we understand the Internet and its effects. Reflecting the conditions of its development, key American values of privacy and freedom of expression were built into the code and structure of the technology (Norris 2011: 232). The Internet was seen as a technology that would spread American values of freedom of expression across the globe, embodied by Bill Clinton's famous comment, in reference to China, that trying to control the Internet was like trying to nail jello to the wall. However, this optimism has proven premature. While the Internet has undermined government control of the flow of information and increased official

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at China and The New Internet World, an International Communication Association (ICA) Preconference, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, 14 June 2013.

responsiveness to local grievances, China has largely succeeded in constructing an Internet with Chinese characteristics behind the, so-called, Great Fire Wall.

Using data from an online survey of Internet users in more than sixty countries, this chapter will provide empirical evidence to support the concept of the New Internet World and describe the nature of this new world.

The first section of this chapter will illustrate the concepts of the Old and New Internet worlds by asking what similarities and differences exist between users in nations that were prominent in the Old Internet World and those that are driving its transition into the New.

The second section of this chapter will turn its focus to the two countries that were most influential in shaping the Old and New Internet Worlds, the United States and China. It will ask whether, given their distinctive Internet sphere, Chinese users differ from other users, both in established and emerging Internet nations, in terms of their Internet uses and values. Will the influx of users in China, operating in what might be an increasingly different Internet sphere to Western users, result in a fundamental shift in net global understandings of the Internet as a place for free organization, information sharing, and discussion?

Methods

Two world-leading online research companies, Toluna and comScore, fielded our survey online between July and September 2012. The 209-question survey was offered in nine languages (Arabic; English; French; German; Italian; Japanese; Korean; Spanish, both traditional and Latin American; and Simplified Chinese) and garnered 11,225 respondents in sixty-three countries (Table 7.1).

Online surveys are not without limitations; however, given that our research sought to study the opinions and practices of Internet users, this methodology was deemed the most appropriate. Surveys also often suffer from self-selection and non-response bias, yet by utilizing two major commercial survey companies, each with a user base of more than five million, and by employing mandatory answers, we sought to mitigate these limitations.

Table 7.1 Countries represented in dataset

North America	Key Countries: Canada (n = 512) and the United States (n = 800)
Europe	Key Countries: Germany (n = 328), United Kingdom (n = 307), France (n = 303), Italy (n = 301), and Spain (n = 303) Supplementary Countries: Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Portugal
Oceania	Key Countries: Australia (n = 327) Supplementary Countries: New Zealand
Asia	Key Countries: China (n = 527), India (n = 507), Japan (n = 319), and Korea (n = 301)

	Supplementary Countries: Bangladesh, Hong Kong,[2] Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan,[3], and Thailand
Latin America	Key Countries: Argentina (n = 301), Brazil (n = 305), Colombia (n = 306), Mexico (n = 305) and Peru (n = 307) Supplementary Countries: Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela
Middle East	Key Countries: Jordan (n = 243), Saudi Arabia (n = 511) and the United Arab Emirates (n = 245) Supplementary Countries: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Israel, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Yemen
Africa	Key Countries: Algeria (n = 229), Egypt (n = 529), Morocco (n = 270) and South Africa (n = 332) Supplementary Countries: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Tunisia

Despite our efforts at global reach, few panelists could be found in small countries and those with low Internet penetrations, limiting our coverage to certain parts of the global Internet population. This made it difficult to collect samples that were large enough for a country-level analysis in some countries. Within our dataset we restricted country-level analysis to nations with more than 200 survey respondents, giving us the ability to compare uses in twenty-four individual nations (Table 7.1).

Notwithstanding these limitations, this survey is one of the most comprehensive studies of cross-national Internet uses and attitudes conducted and, thus, provides unique and valuable insight into the Internet's changing geographic and demographic characteristics.

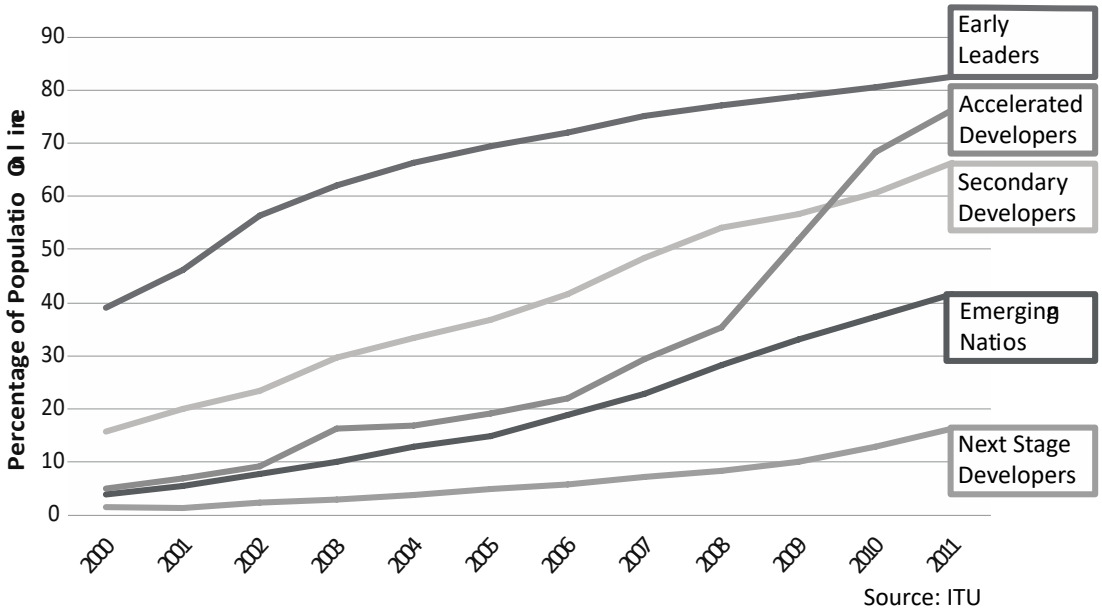
A Schema for Categorizing Countries According to Internet Development

In order to address our first research question of whether there is a significant difference between Internet users in countries that were prominent in the Old Internet World and those that only joined in the New, it was necessary to divide counties in our dataset based on their historical Internet development. Five distinct patterns of development stood out, when the sixty-three countries in our dataset were compared (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1 Average Internet penetration rates by developmental group

[2] Hong Kong and Taiwan are examined as independent units for the purposes of this paper due to their substantially different Internet development histories compared to Mainland China.

[3] See footnote 2.



The group that we have called Early Leaders represents the most prominent nations of the Old Internet World, Western, and developed East Asian countries that played a major role in shaping the Internet's development (Table 7.2). These nations have had more than half their population online for the past decade and currently have at least three-quarters of their population online.

Complementing the Early Leaders were Trailing Leaders, countries that were online in the Old Internet World, but due to their more modest Internet populations, did not play a major role in shaping it. This includes countries in southern and Western Europe as well as early non-Western adopters such as Israel, Chile, and Malaysia.

Accelerated Developers were a small group of nations in the Middle East whose Internet penetration has risen from approximately 5 percent in 2000 to 76 percent in 2011, primarily in the last five years. They became connected only in the New Internet World period, but the Internet is likely to be more integral to everyday life in these countries compared to other newly connected countries with lower penetration rates.

Table 7.2 Breakdown of Internet development groups for surveyed countries

Early Leaders	Europe: Germany, Norway, Finland, Denmark, The Netherlands, UK East Asia: Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore North America and Australasia: Canada, US, Australia, New Zealand
Trailing Leaders	Europe: Poland, Ireland, Italy, France, Portugal, Spain

	Middle East: Israel, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates South America: Chile Asia: Malaysia
Accelerated Developers	Middle East: Kuwait, Oman, Qatar
Emerging Nations	South and Central America: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela Middle East and North Africa: Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia Asia: China
Next Stage Developers	Africa: Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Yemen, Algeria South and South East Asia: Iran, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Thailand, Sri Lanka South and Central America: Bolivia, Paraguay, Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua

The Emerging Nations are those whose populations are driving the transition of the Old Internet World to the New, rapidly developing countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, and China, with relatively new but rapidly expanding Internet populations. The countries in this category are particularly relevant to understanding the potential effects of the Internet's changing demographics on global Internet users and values.

The final group within our dataset were the Next Stage Developers. This group, which includes most of Sub-Saharan Africa, much of South and South East Asia, and later developing countries in Central and South America, are likely to play an increasingly influential role in the future Internet, but their current influence is outweighed by the earlier developers and the Emerging Nations group.

Examining the development of the global Internet across these five developmental categories raises many interesting questions. For example, how did Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar achieve such accelerated Internet development, and what are the effects of this unusual path? Also what changes might we expect in the future as a larger percentage of users in Next Stage Developing countries moves online? However, this chapter will focus on the two most influential of these developmental groups, Early Leaders and Emerging Nations, asking whether a significant difference exists between users in these two categories, why this might be the case, and what this might mean for the future of Internet policy and practice.

Emerging Nation Users: More Sociable, Produce More Content

Previous research conducted in 2010 by our team found that users in emerging nations produced more online content, and were more willing to explore and meet new people online rather than using the Internet only to support and solidify their offline connections (Dutton et al. 2011). However, this research was limited to fourteen countries and was conducted only in English, so we sought to further investigate these initial findings using this larger sample and more robust methodology.

In order to investigate sociability and online openness, we asked respondents to indicate their willingness to be friends or make connections with someone they did not know offline, whether they would meet someone online that they had not met in person, and whether they would meet someone offline that they had first met online. For each of these three measurements, Internet users in the Emerging Nations were significantly more sociable online ($p < 0.00$) than their counterparts in Early Leading countries.

A similar result was found regarding content production: users in Emerging Nations were significantly more active in producing online content. Survey respondents were asked how frequently they contributed eleven different types of content online (Figure 7.2). In each of these areas, users in Emerging Nations produced significantly more content ($p < 0.00$) than those in Early Leading countries. On average, users in Emerging Nations contributed about three times as much content than users in Early Leading Nations.

While some argue that differences between users in emerging and established Internet countries could be due to early adopter effects, or demographic and structural differences in online populations, we found that these differences remained when controlling for age, gender, education, income, time using the Internet, and reported interest in the Internet. Furthermore, we found that while in Early Leading Nations, like the United States, content production falls dramatically for users who have been using the Internet for longer, this is not the case for users in Emerging Nations, where content production remained both high, and stable, however long a person had been using the Internet (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.2 Percentage of respondents who perform selected content production activities at least monthly

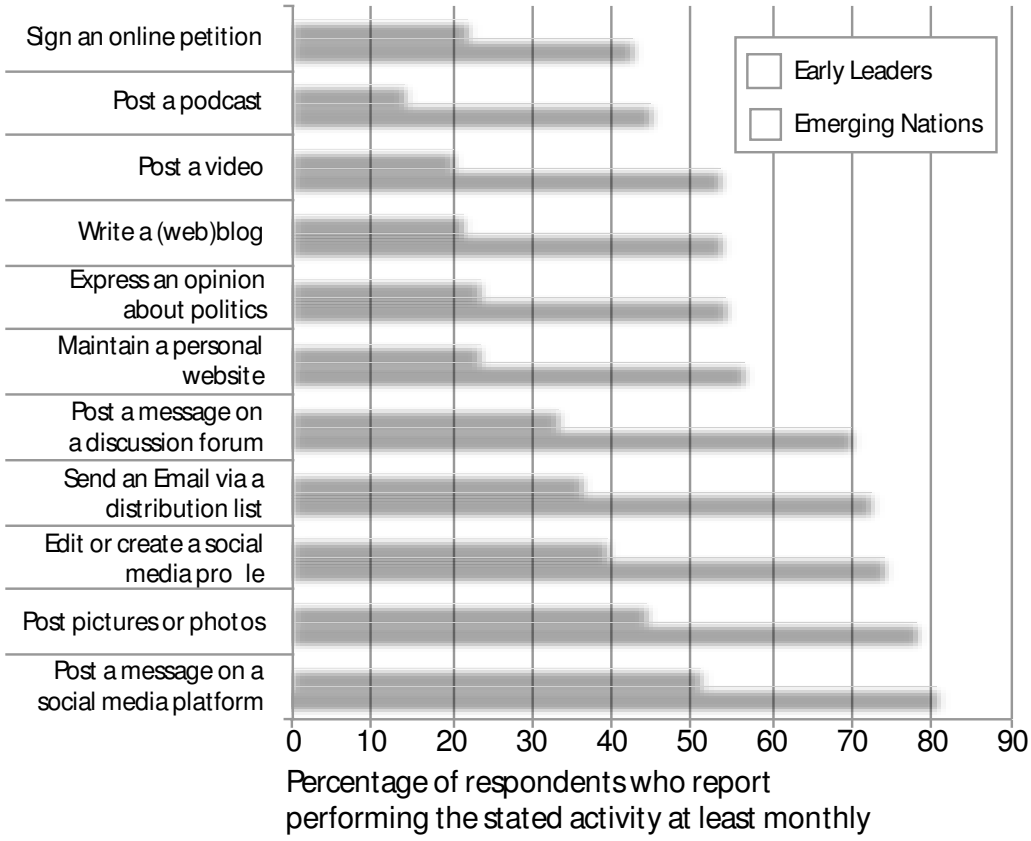
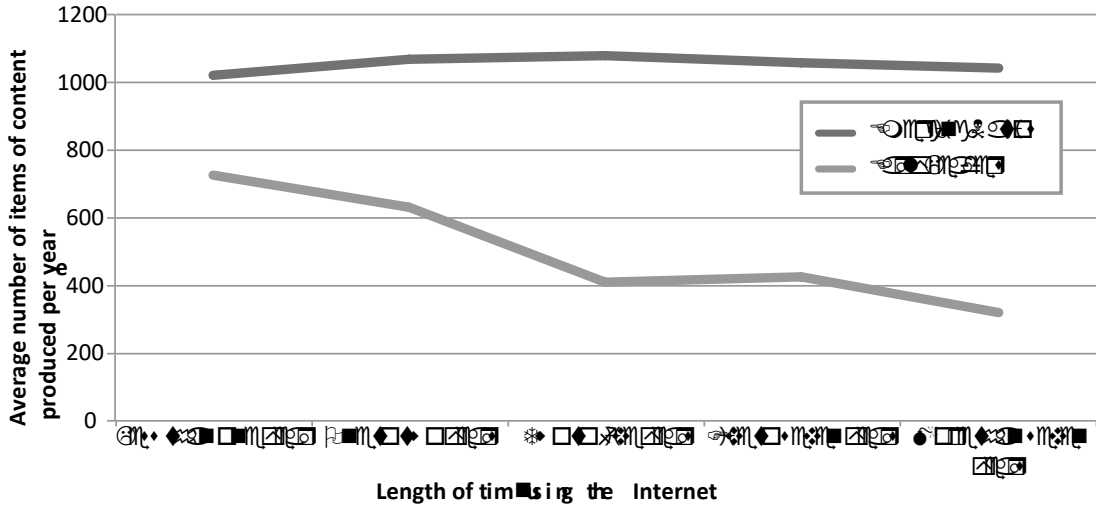


Figure 7.3 Average number of items of content produced per year



These findings lend more support to the conclusion that differences between these two groups are not simply a matter of yet-to-be-domesticated technology and early adopter effect, and may instead be related to the cultural, social, economic, and political conditions of typical countries in these groups.

Given these findings, it is even more important to understand how users in particularly influential nations, such as China, differ from their counterparts in the Old Internet World, offering explanations for why this might be the case and predictions for how these differences are likely to affect the future of the global Internet.

Chinese Users Lead The World in Online Entertainment and Shopping

Our survey asked users about the frequency of a wide variety of Internet activities as well as their opinions on these activities. Within our dataset, we were able to compare users in twenty-four nations, representing a diversity of geographic locations and developmental histories.[4] Compared to users in other nations, Chinese users clearly stood out for their high levels of Internet use for entertainment, leisure, and commerce.

[4] Countries were analyzed individually if there were at least 200 valid survey respondents in that country. These countries were Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Korea, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Chinese respondents were the most frequent online shoppers of any country surveyed, with 60 percent reporting making online purchases at least weekly, twice the worldwide average (Table 7.3). They also engaged in many types of online entertainment and leisure activities significantly more frequently than non-Chinese, reporting, for instance, more frequently getting music online (gamma = 0.47), and more frequently watching videos online (gamma = 0.31). In contrast, American respondents used the Internet much more infrequently for entertainment and leisure activities, with 23 percent reporting making an online purchase, 19 percent getting music and 39 percent watching videos online weekly.

While many of the most frequent online shoppers were located in the economic powerhouses of Emerging Nations, there was little difference overall between the frequency of online shopping for users in the Early Leading and Emerging Nation groups, with online shopping frequent in Mexico, Algeria, and Jordan, and very frequent in Brazil, India, and China. Levels of online shopping were also very high in South Korea, an Early Leading nation, with 54 percent of respondents reporting making a purchase at least weekly, second only to China. One possible explanation for this is the economic and cultural closeness of China and South Korea, which could have created a similar and potentially shared online marketplace.

Chinese respondents were also more likely than respondents in many other nations to report using the Internet to download music. However, unlike shopping, which was not associated with the Early Leading and Emerging Nations categories, the frequency of downloading music was significantly higher among users in Emerging Nations compared to those in Early Leading countries (gamma = 0.60).

Table 7.3 Leisure, entertainment and shopping in Early Leading Countries, Emerging Nations, China, and the United States

	Early Leaders	United States	Emerging Nations	China
Percentage of respondents reporting making an online purchase at least weekly	27%	23%	30%	60%
Percentage of respondents reporting using the Internet to get music at least weekly	30%	19%	69%	80%
Percentage of respondents reporting using the Internet to watch videos at least weekly	46%	39%	83%	85%
Number of Respondents	3567	800	3857	527

A similar result was found for the frequency of watching videos online. Chinese respondents had the third highest percentage of respondents who reported watching online videos at least weekly (85 percent), after Saudi Arabia (87 percent), and Egypt (86 percent). Watching videos online was a much more frequent activity among respondents in Emerging Nations compared to respondents in Early Leading countries (gamma = 0.63).

Differences in the enforcement of copyright could potentially explain these differences. In many Emerging Nations, and China in particular, copyright is enforced much less strictly than in Western countries, meaning more content is available for

consumption and download online, leading to more frequent use. This interpretation is supported by the fact that respondents in Emerging Nations were significantly more likely to report using the Internet to download content than their counterparts in Early Leading countries (gamma = 0.65).

However, another potential explanation is that in Early Leading countries, the use of online resources is more likely to be complementary to an existing pattern of consumption that includes television and portable music devices, reducing the reliance on the Internet for entertainment and leisure activities, whereas in Emerging Nations devices are likely to offer a greater range of programming and choice than that which is otherwise available to the user.

While further research is necessary to investigate the reasons for the more frequent use of the Internet for entertainment, leisure, and commerce in Emerging Nations, one thing is certain. China's rapidly developing consumer culture, supported by online shopping and entertainment activities, will shape the economic and environmental fortunes of the early twenty-first century (Garth 2011), possibly to a greater extent than any other nation in the world.

On 11 November 2012 (Singles' Day or Chinese Valentine's Day), Chinese online shoppers broke records, spending nineteen billion yuan, approximately three billion US dollars, in twenty-four hours (CCTV 2012). This is three times more than the amount spent online by US consumers during Black Friday on 25 November 2012 (Rao 2012). Although Chinese consumer culture is often said to be attempting to mirror that of the United States, Chinese Internet users far outstrip Americans as well as other nations in their online commercial activities, in part due to the low cost of the personal delivery of merchandise in urban areas.

The Internet was introduced in China as a means to facilitate economic development and trade, and our survey results confirm that this technology has become an integral part, not just of the nation's economy, but of the everyday lives of the majority of Chinese Internet users in a way that surpasses that of the other nations surveyed.

Driving the Transition to a Mobile Internet

In tandem with the Internet's shift from the Old to New Internet Worlds has been the shift from fixed machines towards more mobile, multi-platform usage patterns. Across Emerging Nations, Internet users engage in more activities on their mobile phones than their counterparts in Early Leading nations such as the United States (Table 74).

Table 7.4 Mobile Internet in Early Leading countries, Emerging Nations, China and the United States

	Early Leaders	U.S.A.	Emerging Nations	China
Percentage of respondents who own a smart phone	51 %	35 %	59 %	86 %
Percentage of respondents reporting playing games on their phones	50 %	34 %	76 %	88 %

Percentage of respondents reporting listening to music on their phones	47 %	30 %	83 %	92 %
Percentage of respondents reporting using their phones to browse the Internet	57 %	40 %	79 %	91 %
Number of respondents	3567	800	3857	527

Chinese users were the most likely of all the twenty-four countries examined to own a smart phone, with 86 percent reporting owning a device, compared to only 35 percent of users in the United States. Again, South Korean respondents displayed remarkable similarities to those in China with 85 percent reporting owning a smart phone. This widespread adoption is not limited to young people: while in the West and Japan, smart phone ownership drops dramatically among those older than 34, smart phone ownership in China and South Korea remained high among older users.

Compared to smartphone users in other countries Chinese (and South Korean) respondents also used their phones more frequently for entertainment and leisure activities, with 90 percent reporting that they used their phones to listen to music, compared to 30 percent in the United States. Clearly, Internet users in the Emerging Nations, led by the Chinese, use ICTs more frequently for entertainment and leisure activities compared both to countries that were earlier adopters of the technology and to the worldwide average.

While the percentage of respondents reporting using their phones for playing games and listening to music declines with age, it declines much faster among users in Early Leading nations. While in the 18–24 age group 82 percent of users in Emerging Nations reported playing games on their cell phones compared to 77 percent in Early Leading nations (a difference of five percent), in the 45–54 age group the difference rises to 19 percent (61 percent in Emerging Nations and 42 percent in Early Leading countries). This is further evidence that ITCs play different social roles in established and emerging Internet nations, and that the variables that affect ICT uses have different effects in these two populations.

It could be argued that those who use their mobile phones heavily for entertainment and leisure activities in Emerging Nations might do so because they do not have access to other technologies that perform this function; however, individuals who play games on their phones are also likely to report owning a personal gaming system, and those who listen to music on their phones are likely to report owning a portable MP3 player, supporting the conclusion that mobile phones generally do not offer new functionalities to users but rather enable them to do more of the things that they already do online using other devices (Blank and Dutton 2013).

These results suggest that Internet users in Emerging Nations, led by China, are driving the Internet's transition towards a more mobile pattern of Internet use. This is particularly significant in China, where more than half the country's population remains offline, particularly in rural areas. These individuals are expected to be connected over the next decade and will likely rely on mobile devices, rather than fixed machines, to access the Internet. In catering for these populations, China will likely lead the way in shaping the new, more mobile Internet. Already mobile Internet innovations developed in China, such as the text and voice messaging service WeChat (微信),are diffusing worldwide, in line with this thesis.

A Global Internet Culture

In contrast to the previous sections that focused on Internet uses, finding that users in China and other Emerging Nations were more sociable, innovative, and mobile, this section shifts its focus to consider the attitudes and values of these Internet users towards issues such as privacy, government control, and freedom of expression.

The Internet has been hailed as a technology of free expression, but the Chinese government, among others worldwide, actively seeks to control online speech, employing many censors and rapidly responding to sensitive posts (Zhu et al. 2013). Both the press and academics have produced varied assessments of Chinese Internet policy. Some have argued that policy is becoming more conservative (Qiu 2013), while others have argued that the Internet is having a liberalizing effect (Yang 2009). Few of these studies, however, address the attitudes of ordinary Internet users, particularly in comparison to users worldwide.

We found that a majority of Chinese respondents (70 percent) believed the Internet was free. However, this is lower than average for users in Emerging Nations and the lowest of all the twenty-four countries examined except South Korea (62 percent). Additionally, more than half of Internet users in China agreed that the government should monitor content online, although this is not significantly different from users in other countries (Table 7.5).

Table 7.5 Attitudes toward key Internet values in Early Leading countries, Emerging Nations, China, and the United States

	Early Leaders	United States	Emerging Nations	China
Percentage of respondents who say they think the Internet is free	89%	92%	80%	70%
Percentage of respondents who agree that the government should monitor content posted on the Internet	47%	43%	46%	52%
Percentage of respondents who agree that the government should not censor political content online	56%	65%	42%	50%
Percentage of respondents who say they are concerned about their online communication being monitored	68%	68%	59%	64%
Number of respondents	3567	800	3857	527

Despite operating within an Internet that is significantly more controlled than the majority of survey respondents, Chinese users tended to mirror the values and concerns of others in both Early Leading and Emerging Internet Nations. We found little difference between Chinese and non-Chinese respondents on the subject of Internet control and censorship, and no major difference between respondents in Emerging and Early Leading Nations on these issues (except on the issue of the censorship of racist or discriminatory content where respondents in Emerging Nations exhibited slightly greater levels of agreement).

The remarkable similarity across surveyed nations suggests that there is a distinctive set of global Internet values, supporting privacy and freedom of expression that cuts across geographical, economic and social boundaries. These values are rooted in the Internet's development in the United States and are intertwined with its rhetoric as it spreads worldwide, demonstrating that despite distinct policy priorities of national governments, Internet users largely adhere to the principles the technology has come to embody.

However, some differences exist between Chinese and non-Chinese users on the question of the censorship of political information. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with government, authorities, or regulators tracking their online activity, censoring political content, or knowing whom they communicate with offline, Chinese respondents were, on average, more likely to express a neutral view, and were also less likely to respond that they strongly agreed or strongly disagreed when compared to non-Chinese respondents, or with respondents from other Emerging Nations or Early Leading countries.

This result could be indicative of a pragmatic view towards government control and censorship on the part of Chinese respondents. Living in a society where they must consider the arguments both for and against Internet censorship, they might see both its pros and cons more strongly than those for whom government control is less expansive and overt, and political-administrative traditions oppose censorship. However, another possible explanation is that of acceptance of the status quo: knowing that they cannot change the state of government regulation within China they choose a neutral view, unlike respondents in more democratic societies who take a more polarized view because they feel that their opinions can shape policy and practice with respect to freedom of expression, and also feel freer to be critical of government policy.

Consistent with attitudes toward censorship of the Internet, Chinese respondents did not stand out in their concern over the monitoring of online activity. Instead it was users in liberal democratic countries in both Early Leading and Emerging Nations, such as Brazil, France, India, the UK, and the United States, with the exception of users in Germany, who showed the highest levels of concern about their online behaviours being monitored. In Japan, Korea, China, and Germany, most respondents expressed moderate, but not high, levels of concern about their online activity being monitored. A third pattern, evidenced in the Middle Eastern and North African countries of Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia, showed the greatest number (between 30 and 40 percent of respondents) expressing no concern for their online activity being recorded (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4 Concern about online monitoring cuts across developmental groups

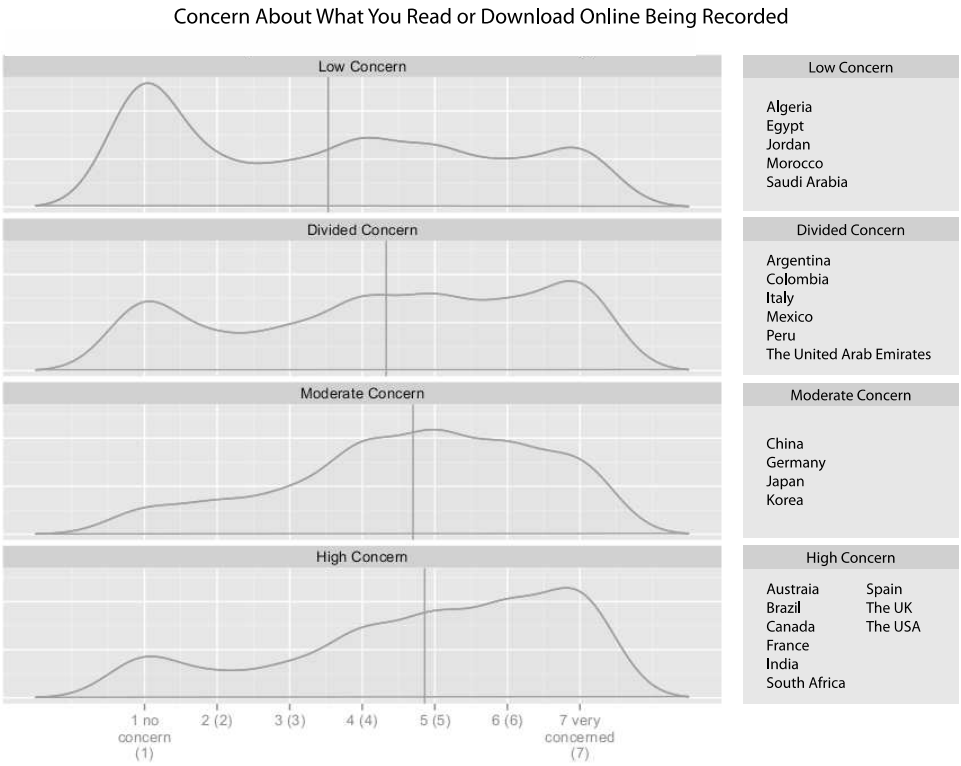


Figure 7.4 suggests that respondents' concern about their online activities being recorded may have a cultural basis that is separate from whether they live in early or later adopting countries, and separate from opinions about the desirability of monitoring. There was no correlation between whether respondents, either in China or in the general population, agreed that governments, regulators, and authorities should know who they communicate with online, and concern about whom they e-mail or about a message online being recorded.

Respondents in China had very similar views to their neighbours in Korea and Japan, despite a greater realistic chance that their online activities might be monitored. Chinese respondents who reported posting about politics online and those with more education were no more likely to be concerned about online monitoring than others. However, younger Chinese respondents particularly those in the 25–34 age group, were more likely to express concern about online monitoring.

Concern about one's personal activity being monitored had no correlation with support for the monitoring of the same activity, and countries in which the Internet is generally seen to be free exhibited statistically significant, higher levels of concern about monitoring than countries where more monitoring takes place. Although, concern had little correlation with actual reality, it will likely have a strong influence over individual behaviours.

Political Expression Online

Another important aspect of online civil society is the ability for the Internet to facilitate information sharing, information seeking, and discussion on political and

social issues. Studies in the West have consistently shown low levels of participation in online politics (Hindman 2008), reflecting low levels offline.

In contrast to the staggeringly low numbers of users in Early Leading countries who reported expressing a political opinion online (25 percent in the US, 26 percent in the UK, 15 percent in Canada, and 7 percent in Japan), over half of the respondents in Emerging Countries reported expressing a political opinion online at least monthly. In Emerging Countries 40 percent of respondents reported posting weekly, compared to only 15 percent in Early Leading nations.

Surprisingly, users in China, did not exhibit significant differences in their frequency of political posting compared to other Emerging Nations, with 48 percent posting online at least monthly. This demonstrates that restrictions on political speech in China do not have a chilling effect on the ability to post opinions and discuss issues online. This finding aligns with previous empirical work on Chinese microblogs which found that posts expressing critical political opinions were unlikely to be censored: it was posts that attempted to mobilize participants offline that were censored (King, Pan, and Roberts, 2013).

We have found that Chinese users hold attitudes towards freedom of expression, privacy, and control that are similar to users in the West. They also post political expressions online much more frequently than users in the West. Thus we can conclude that there is a strong social foundation in China that supports freedom of expression online.

We also found that the Internet has become integral to the Chinese economy. Chinese companies and Chinese Internet users are as much, if not more, reliant on the Internet as users in the West. China also exhibits a particularly well-developed mobile culture and Chinese netizens use the Internet frequently for entertainment, shopping, and leisure.

Taken together, these findings provide a basis for greater optimism about the future freedom of the Chinese Internet than is evidenced on the basis of policy rhetoric, given that the infrastructure that exists to support entertainment and commerce in China can also potentially support the free expression and information-seeking activities that a majority of Chinese users support.

Conclusion: Innovative Users, Persistent Values

Internet users in Emerging Nations, such as China, are significantly different from those in Early Leading Nations, such as the United States. They are more likely to produce new online content and more likely to establish new social connections online. While a smaller proportion of the population in Emerging Nations are currently online, these new Internet users are using this technology in more innovative and varied ways than the users in early adopting nations. These differences remain when controlling for demographic and structural factors known to affect Internet uses and values in the Old Internet World, including age, gender, education, income, time using the Internet, and reported interest in the Internet. This suggests that these differences are likely to persist as the Internet population in these nations grows. In short, the centre of gravity of the Internet is shifting, not only in numbers but also in patterns of use, with Emerging Nations, such as China, moving in directions that could make them central to future innovation in the production and use of online technologies.

While Internet users in China are among the world's leaders in Internet use for entertainment, leisure, and commercial purposes, they align with other nations in their

levels of political discussion, and views on government censorship and online monitoring. Based on these patterns of public attitudes, values, and use, China's policy makers are likely to value the unusually strong commercial and economic significance of the Internet. In combination with the support of users for the traditional values and attitudes underpinning the Internet, there may be more reason to be optimistic about the future of an open Internet in China and across the New Internet World than might be expected on the basis of the rhetoric surrounding national policy.

However, while the values and attitudes of Internet users are important, they are only one element shaping the future of the Internet and its societal implications cross-nationally. These opinions need to be tracked over time and examined in the context of other factors shaping the use of the Internet, including Internet policy and governance cross-nationally and globally, in order to fully evaluate how the Internet's changing demographics can shape its future.

References

Blank, G., and Dutton, W. H. (2013). "Next Generation Internet Users: A New Digital Divide," in M. Graham, and W, H. Dutton (eds), *Society and the Internet*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, [pp. forthcoming]

CCTV. (2012, November 11). *China's e-Shoppers Break Record on Singles' Day.* Retrieved March 28, 2013 from <http://english.cntv.cn/program/newsupdate/20121112/103465.shtml>

Dutta, S., Dutton, W. H., and Law, G. (2011). The New Internet World: A Global Perspective on Freedom of Expression, Privacy, Trust and Security Online: The Gobal Information Technology Report 2010–2011. New York: World Economic Forum, April. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1810005>

Dutton, W., S. Dutta. and G. Law. (2011, September 18). *Emerging Contours of a New Internet World: Shifting Patterns of Adoption, Attitudes and Behaviour.* iCS-OII Symposium on "A Decade in Internet Time," an OII-iCS Symposium on the Dynamics of the Internet and Society, University of Oxford, 21-24 September 2011. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1929791> (accessed 17 July 2013).

Garth, K. (2011). *As China Goes, So Goes The World: How Chinese Consumers Are Transforming Everything*. London: Hill and Wang.

Hindman, M. (2009). *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.

King, G., Pan, J., and Roberts, M. (2013). "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression," *American Political Science Review* 107, number 2 (May): 326 – 343.

Norris, P. (2001). *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty and the Internet Worldwide. Cambridge*, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Qui, J. L. (2013). "China's Network Society: A Three-Phase Trajectory—Asteroids,

Bees, Coliseums." Talk given at the Center for Study of Global Media and Democracy, Goldsmiths, University of London, 29 May.

Rao, L. (2012, November 25). "E-Commerce Spending On Black Friday Tops $1B For The First Time; Amazon Is The Most Visited Retailer." Retrieved 28 March 2013 from <http://techcrunch.com/2012/11/25/e-commerce-spendi ng-on-black-friday-tops-1b-for-the-first-time-amazon-is-the-most-visited-retailer/>.

Schmidt, E. and Cohen, J. (2013). The New Digital Age. London: Random House.

Yang, G. (2009). *The Power of the Internet in China*. New York: Colombia.

Zhu, T., Phipps, D., Pridgen, A., Crandall, J., and Wallach, D. (2013). The Velocity of Censorship: High-Fidelity Detection of Microblog Post Deletions. Retrieved 19 June 2013 from <http://arxiv.org/abs/1303.0597>