Panorama of media contact behaviours of present-day urban dwellers: Descriptions and analysis based on diary reports

Guoming Yu
Beijing Normal University, P.R. China
Translated by Wanting Huang

Abstract
As Internet, particularly mobile Internet, is playing a more and more critical and trend-leading role in connecting key social elements and restructuring social life, users are shifting from their passive role in the past to an increasingly dominant position, playing a pivotal and decisive role. With the vigorous support of CVSC Sofres Media, the Research Center of Journalism and Social Development of Renmin University of China conducted a major research programme on 'The Status of Media Contact and Use by Chinese Urban Dwellers in the Age of Mobile Internet' from five aspects. A panorama of contact between present-day urban dwellers and media is finally demonstrated. The research results have significant cognitive value in terms of grasping the status of media use and communication among modern urban Internet users.

Keywords
Behaviours, media contact, media research, panorama, urban dwellers

As Internet, particularly mobile Internet, is playing a more and more critical and trend-leading role in connecting key social elements and restructuring social life, users (even to date we still habitually refer to them as receivers) are shifting from their passive role in the past to an increasingly dominant position, playing a pivotal and decisive role. Understanding and grasping contemporary groups of media users have become a key task with particular significance in media study and practice.

Consequently, with the vigorous support of CVSC Sofres Media, the Research Center of Journalism and Social Development of Renmin University of China conducted a major research programme on 'The Status of Media Contact and Use by Chinese Urban Dwellers in the Age of Mobile Internet' from five aspects. A panorama of contact between present-day urban dwellers and media is finally demonstrated. The research results have significant cognitive value in terms of grasping the status of media use and communication among modern urban Internet users.
programme on ‘The Status of Media Contact and Use by Chinese Urban Dwellers in the Age of Mobile Internet’. The research lasted 2 weeks (between 20 July and 3 August 2014) and adopted the mode of homogeneous sampling based on diary reports and questionnaire survey. Totally, 2204 valid random samples were collected from Tianjin, Qingdao and Xi’an. The research results have critical cognitive value in terms of grasping the media use and communication by modern urban Internet users. Following are the analyses and findings of the research on the general status of media contact by urban dwellers.

**User reach and contact of different media**

In terms of the weekly reach of the media, radio, television and film media and Internet demonstrate significantly higher percentage than paper-based media, with television and Internet monopolizing the situation at present. More specifically speaking, at 94%, television has the highest reach, followed by Internet at 70%. The reaches of television and Internet are decidedly higher than other media. Radio occupies the third place at 58% and books the fourth at 44%, which is slightly better than newspaper at only 41%. Magazines, also a paper-based medium, whose reach is even lower than that of films at 34%. At 28%, they barely beat building/mobile/outdoor mobile videos. It may thus be concluded that the magazine market is shrinking (see Graph 1).

In terms of media contact by users, that is, the time urban dwellers spend on different media, television and the Internet occupy nearly 80% of the total time of media contact. Research statistics show that television and the Internet are the two major media on which modern urban dwellers spend most time, which is significantly longer than on other media. Concretely speaking, the daily

**Graph 1. Weekly reach of the different media.**
average contact time for television is 130 minutes, which is 41% of the total daily contact time. This is closely followed by the Internet with 121 minutes, which occupies 38%. Radio, at the third place, occupies only 31 minutes or 10%, which lags far behind. Books have exceeded newspaper to be at the fourth place with 13 minutes. The daily average of newspaper reading is only 8 minutes, while movies account for 7 minutes and magazines and building/mobile/outdoor videos occupy a similar amount of time at 4 minutes, respectively (see Graph 2).

The data above show a positive correlation between the weekly reach of media and the daily average amount of time spent on particular media. Currently, the media market is monopolized by two media: television and Internet. The two are far ahead of other media in terms of weekly reach and daily average contact time; when combined, their daily average contact time occupies 79% of the total. Compared to Internet, television currently has a slight superiority. However, compared to Internet conditions in the past few years, Internet is catching up, and it may be expected to overtake television within the next few years to become the top medium. Among the other media, radio enjoys a comparative advantage in reach and daily average contact time, while the other five may be divided into two groups: one has medium reach and low contact (i.e. the daily average media contact time is rather low), including newspaper, books and films, while the other has low reach and contact, including magazines and building/mobile/outdoor videos.

**Media use by urban dwellers throughout the day**

The Internet is a full-time medium, while the television is the ‘king of the evening’ and radio is the ‘king of the morning’. In whole, media use by urban dwellers is dominated by television watching, Internet surfing and radio listening in any given day, and the different time of day calls for different dominating media. The dominance during different time period is analysed below:
1. *Internet clearly dominates between 00:00 and 01:45*

Internet contact reaches 1% between 00:00 and 01:45, which is significantly higher than other media. Internet surfing is the predominant activity during this time.

2. * Basically no media is used between 01:45 and 05:45*

During this time, urban dwellers are basically all asleep and media contact is 0.

3. *Radio contact maintains its leading position between 05:45 and 08:45*

Radio is the medium to ‘kick off’ first in the morning. While the use of other media still remains at 0 between 05:45 and 06:00, radio contact begins to climb to 1% and slowly rises over time. By 07:15–07:30, its contact reaches 5% and remains so until 08:45. During this time when radio enjoys a clear superiority, other media, except magazines and films, are also started successively. Television and Internet both start off at 7:00 and their reach arrives at and then exceeds 1%, while building/mobile/outdoor videos start off at 7:45 and newspaper and books start off at 8:00.

4. *Internet remains the dominating medium between 08:45 and 18:00*

Internet maintains its leading position between 08:45 and 18:00. Meanwhile, two peaks appear at 10:30–11:30 and 14:45–16:45, and its contact is at 14% and 16%. Despite its leading position in the morning, radio contact begins to slide after 8:45 and is overtaken by television and Internet. Although its contact rises slightly between 17:00 and 18:45 to 4%, it still lags far behind television and Internet. Television contact continues to rise from 1% at 7:00 to 5% at 10:00; its contact fluctuates between 7% and 10% from 10:00 to 18:00, peaking between 16:00 and 17:00 to reach 10%. Newspaper contact during the day remains constant at 1%, and that of books is also around 1%, except at 10:30–10:45, when it reaches 2%. Building/mobile/outdoor video contact also oscillates between 0% and 1% during the day, except at 7:45–9:45, 12:15–12:45 and 17:00–18:00, when the contact rises to 1%. Urban dwellers begin to read magazines and watch movies in the afternoon, reading magazines starts at 14:30 and ends at 16:45 and watching movies starts at 13:30 and ends at 18:00, whose contact remains at 1%.

5. *Television wins out between 18:00 and 22:30, and its use intensity is the highest of the day among other media*

The superiority of television is obvious between 18:00 and 22:30, particularly between 19:00 and 22:00, when its contact exceeds 30%, significantly higher than other media. It is evident that night time is television prime time, especially between 20:45 and 21:00, when its contact reaches the peak of the day at 40%. The figure is far higher than the contact peak of other media. For example, among the media, Internet is only preceded by television, but its contact peak in a whole day is only 21% between 21:00 and 22:00, which is only half of that of television. Films also reach its contact peak during this time between 20:00 and 21:15 at 2%. Television and Internet fundamentally monopolize the night time, leaving other media trailing far behind.

6. *The Internet once again resumes its leading position between 22:30 and 00:00*
Television contact dramatically drops to nearly that of Internet but slightly lower after 22:30. Late night is almost exclusively reserved for Internet surfing. Urban dwellers have basically stopped using other media except television, radio and Internet during this time, and, among them, Internet contact far exceeds that of radio and television.

**Media use of urban dwellers in different domains**

Personal houses and office (study) places are the basic domains of media contact, while indoor public areas, outdoor public areas, personal cars and public transport are the extended domains. Among the different media contacted by people, Internet is an all-round medium. According to research, urban dwellers fundamentally contact television, radio and Internet the most. Television contact is significantly higher than that of other media in the living room, while in bedroom or other spaces, the contact of television is equivalent to that of Internet, while Internet contact leads by a slight margin (see Tables 1 and 2).

During commuting, the different domains influence the media used. Radio dominates private cars, with as many as 75% of users, while radio and Internet surfing dominate taxis at 44% and 36%, respectively. In public transport, the primary media contact behaviour is Internet surfing, building/mobile/outdoor videos and radio, which are at 34%, 33% and 19%, respectively. On the streets, Internet, radio and building/mobile/outdoor videos dominate at 33%, 25% and 23%, respectively.

In other’s house, urban dwellers primarily watch television or surf Internet at occurrence rates of 37% and 44% with average contact time of 1.19 minutes and 1.41 minutes, which are significantly higher than other media.

Urban dwellers primarily surf Internet at work or study places, with an average time of 40.77 minutes and an occurrence rate of 84%, far exceeding other media.

Urban dwellers primarily surf Internet and watch movies and television in indoor public spaces, with occurrence rates of 48%, 18% and 11%. Internet still has a higher proportion.

In general, Internet is one of the key media with the longest and most frequent contact time in any space. Internet behaviour characteristics of different terminals in different spaces are further analysed. Using a PC terminal to surf Internet is more popular at home, other’s house or office/study places. Urban dwellers prefer using mobile terminals to surf Internet while commuting or at indoor public areas or other outdoor venues. In other words, they are more inclined to use mobile terminals for surfing Internet in transient spaces, while in long-stay spaces, they prefer to use PC terminals for surfing Internet.

**Media use by urban dwellers in different social relationships**

Among different social relationships, media contact together with family ranks top, followed by alone and with colleagues or acquaintances (see Tables 3 and 4).

The most frequently used medium when urban dwellers are alone is the Internet, followed by television and radio. When alone, the average daily contact time of the three media is 36.92, 22.69 and 10.67 minutes, respectively.

When with family, urban dwellers mostly watch television; the day average time is as high as 103.96 minutes, which occupies 60% of the time spent on media with family. Internet surfing and radio listening tails behind with a daily average time of 39.51 and 15.25 minutes.

When with relatives or friends, urban dwellers mostly contact Internet, followed by television and films. Although the difference in contact time is not noticeable, the occurrence rate shows
Table 1. Average daily contact time of different media in different domains (unit: minute).

|                               | Television | Radio | Newspaper | Magazines | Books | Movies | Internet | Building/mobile/outdoor videos | Total |
|-------------------------------|------------|-------|-----------|-----------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------------------|-------|
| Living room of own house      | 97.09      | 10.12 | 4.13      | 1.43      | 3.11  | 3.12   | 31.55    | 0.11                          | 150.66|
| Bedroom of own house          | 22.64      | 5.30  | 1.12      | 0.62      | 2.87  | 0.77   | 29.89    | 0.04                          | 63.25 |
| Other spaces of own house     | 7.07       | 5.49  | 0.75      | 0.24      | 4.64  | 0.37   | 7.97     | 0.10                          | 26.63 |
| Personal car                  | 0.07       | 3.55  | 0.03      | 0.04      | 0.06  | 0.03   | 0.79     | 0.17                          | 4.74  |
| Taxi                          | 0.01       | 0.28  | 0.01      | 0.01      | 0.02  | 0.02   | 0.23     | 0.06                          | 0.64  |
| Public transport              | 0.21       | 0.99  | 0.16      | 0.08      | 0.17  | 0.07   | 1.74     | 1.72                          | 5.14  |
| Streets                       | 0.16       | 0.69  | 0.10      | 0.06      | 0.08  | 0.14   | 0.90     | 0.63                          | 2.76  |
| Other people's house          | 1.19       | 0.18  | 0.04      | 0.07      | 0.13  | 0.14   | 1.41     | 0.03                          | 3.22  |
| Office/study places           | 0.81       | 2.84  | 1.30      | 0.93      | 1.54  | 0.38   | 40.77    | 0.23                          | 48.8  |
| Indoor public area            | 0.74       | 0.39  | 0.14      | 0.25      | 0.55  | 1.20   | 3.15     | 0.17                          | 6.59  |
| Outdoor public area           | 0.40       | 0.97  | 0.12      | 0.10      | 0.19  | 0.73   | 2.33     | 0.69                          | 5.53  |
| No answer                     | 0.07       | 0.04  | 0.01      | 0.00      | 0.00  | 0.14   | 0.00     | 0.00                          | 0.26  |
Table 2. Occurrence rate of different media in different domains.

|                     | Television (%) | Radio (%) | Newspaper (%) | Magazines (%) | Books (%) | Movies (%) | Internet (%) | Building/mobile/outdoor videos (%) | Total (%) |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|-----------|------------|--------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Living room         | 64             | 7         | 3              | 1             | 2         | 2          | 21           | 0                                  | 100       |
| Bedroom             | 36             | 8         | 2              | 1             | 5         | 1          | 47           | 0                                  | 100       |
| Other spaces        | 27             | 21        | 3              | 1             | 17        | 1          | 30           | 0                                  | 100       |
| Personal car        | 1              | 75        | 1              | 1             | 1         | 1          | 17           | 4                                  | 100       |
| Taxi                | 2              | 44        | 2              | 2             | 3         | 3          | 36           | 9                                  | 100       |
| Public transport    | 4              | 19        | 3              | 2             | 3         | 1          | 34           | 33                                 | 100       |
| Streets             | 6              | 25        | 4              | 2             | 3         | 5          | 33           | 23                                 | 100       |
| Other people's house| 37            | 6         | 1              | 2             | 4         | 4          | 44           | 2                                  | 100       |
| Office/study places | 2              | 6         | 3              | 2             | 3         | 1          | 84           | 0                                  | 100       |
| Indoor public area  | 11             | 6         | 2              | 4             | 8         | 18         | 48           | 3                                  | 100       |
| Outdoor public area | 7              | 18        | 2              | 2             | 3         | 13         | 42           | 12                                 | 100       |
| No answer           | 27             | 15        | 4              | 0             | 0         | 0          | 54           | 0                                  | 100       |
significant dissimilarity, with Internet at 40%, television at 25% and films at 11%, when people are with relatives or friends.

When with colleagues or other acquaintances, urban dwellers mostly contact Internet, which has an occurrence rate of 80% and daily average time of 40.22 minutes, making it significantly higher than other media.

When among strangers, Internet, building/mobile/outdoor videos and radio are the three most used media, whose daily average contact is 1.97, 1.56 and 1.40 minutes, respectively, and at occurrence rates of 38%, 28% and 25%, respectively.

It is thus evident that in scenarios of different social relations, Internet surfing is one of the key media use behaviours. Apart from being among strangers, urban dwellers primarily use PC terminals to surf Internet, while largely mobile terminals are used when among strangers.

**Emotional characteristics of media contact behaviours of urban dwellers**

The psychological effect brought about by media contact is in general active and positive, and this is most evident with television use. Unlike conventional social cognition, the ‘positive energy’ brought about by Internet far exceeds its ‘negative energy’ (see Tables 5 and 6).

Compared to other media, the positive emotion generated by television, Internet and radio contact lasts longer. However, they also produce the longest neutral and negative emotions, which may be attributed to their total daily average contact time. Further inspection of the different emotions evoked by different media use shows that radio evokes the most positive emotion, followed by

---

**Table 3.** Media contact time in scenarios of different social relations (unit: minute).

|               | Television | Radio | Newspaper | Magazines | Books | Movies | Internet | Building/mobile/outdoor videos | Total  |
|---------------|------------|-------|-----------|-----------|-------|--------|----------|-------------------------------|--------|
| Alone         | 22.69      | 10.67 | 2.41      | 1.07      | 6.20  | 1.48   | 36.92    | 0.74                          | 82.18  |
| Family        | 103.86     | 15.25 | 4.05      | 1.64      | 4.84  | 3.67   | 39.51    | 0.87                          | 173.69 |
| Relatives or friends | 2.63 | 0.80  | 0.20      | 0.17      | 1.01  | 1.22   | 4.28     | 0.34                          | 10.65  |
| Colleagues or acquaintances | 1.84 | 3.17  | 1.22      | 0.93      | 1.26  | 0.74   | 40.22    | 0.60                          | 49.98  |
| Strangers     | 0.18       | 1.40  | 0.09      | 0.09      | 0.15  | 0.18   | 1.97     | 1.56                          | 5.62   |

**Table 4.** Occurrence rate of media use behaviours in scenarios of different social relations.

|               | Television (%) | Radio (%) | Newspaper (%) | Magazines (%) | Books (%) | Movies (%) | Internet (%) | Building/mobile/outdoor videos (%) | Total (%) |
|---------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|-----------|------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Alone         | 28             | 13        | 3             | 1             | 8         | 2          | 45           | 1                                 | 100       |
| Family        | 60             | 9         | 2             | 1             | 3         | 2          | 23           | 1                                 | 100       |
| Relatives or friends | 25   | 8        | 2             | 2             | 9         | 11         | 40           | 3                                 | 100       |
| Colleagues or acquaintances | 4   | 6        | 2             | 2             | 3         | 1          | 80           | 1                                 | 100       |
| Strangers     | 3              | 25        | 2             | 2             | 3         | 3          | 35           | 28                                | 100       |

---
television and movies. Magazine and book reading and Internet surfing evoke relatively lower positive emotions, while magazines, books and newspapers evoke comparatively more neutral emotions. Movie watching and Internet surfing are more likely to generate negative emotions.

It is therefore evident that audio-visual media are more likely to generate positive emotions, while newspaper reading calms the readers down. Different media thus have dissimilar effects on emotions.

Further analysis of the emotional characteristics of using different terminals to surf Internet illustrates that, based on daily average time and compared to other terminals, PC terminals for surfing Internet generate comparatively more positive, neutral and negative emotions. In terms of proportions of different emotions generated by the use of different terminals, proportion of the positive emotion evoked by the use of PC terminals to surf Internet is comparatively higher than that generated by other terminals. The use of a network set-top box or a smart television to surf Internet tends to evoke more neutral emotion, while the use of mobile terminals is more likely to produce negative emotions compared to that of other terminals.

In general, the research shows that television and Internet currently monopolize the market and have distinct advantage in user reach and contact among different media. From the media contact by urban dwellers throughout the day, Internet is the full-time media, while television is the king of night and radio is the king of morning. According to research, houses and office (study places) are the basic domains of media contact, while indoor and outdoor public areas, personal cars and public transport are the extend domains of media contact. Among the different media used by people, Internet is an all-domain media. Furthermore, in terms of social relationship, media contact for Chinese people tends to belong to the private sphere. Media contact with family tends to be the commonest followed by being alone; the two are the most fundamental forms of media contact among Chinese urban dwellers. Finally, the research illustrates that for people as socialized animals, social communication has the most significant and the clearest positive impact on people, particularly that from the television. Unlike conventional social cognition, Internet generates far greater ‘positive impact’ than ‘negative impact’.

Table 5. Daily average time of emotions evoked through contact of different media (unit: minute).

|                      | Television | Radio  | Newspaper | Magazines | Books  | Movies | Internet | Building/mobile/ outdoor videos | Total |
|----------------------|------------|--------|-----------|-----------|--------|--------|----------|---------------------------------|-------|
| Positive emotions    | 70.82      | 18.02  | 4.11      | 1.94      | 6.80   | 3.94   | 62.01    | 2.07                            | 169.71|
| Neutral emotions     | 58.19      | 12.38  | 3.66      | 1.81      | 6.29   | 2.83   | 54.94    | 1.71                            | 141.81|
| Negative emotions    | 1.29       | 0.33   | 0.12      | 0.09      | 0.28   | 0.19   | 3.75     | 0.20                            | 6.24  |
| No answer            | 0.17       | 0.11   | 0.01      | 0.00      | 0.00   | 0.01   | 0.17     | 0.00                            | 0.47  |

Table 6. Emotions evoked through contact of different media.

|                      | Television (%) | Radio (%) | Newspaper (%) | Magazines (%) | Books (%) | Movies (%) | Internet (%) | Building/mobile/ outdoor videos (%) |
|----------------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|-----------|------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Positive emotion     | 54             | 58        | 52            | 51            | 51        | 57         | 51          | 52                                |
| Neutral emotion      | 45             | 40        | 46            | 47            | 47        | 41         | 45          | 43                                |
| Negative emotion     | 1              | 1         | 2             | 2             | 2         | 3          | 3           | 5                                 |
| No answer            | 0              | 0         | 0             | 0             | 0         | 0          | 0           | 0                                 |
| Total                | 100            | 100       | 100           | 100           | 100       | 100        | 100         | 100                               |
Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Author biography
Guoming Yu is head of this particular research topic. Guoming Yu is Professor of Journalism and the Executive Dean of the School of Journalism and Communication at Beijing Normal University. Author and editor of 21 books, and has published more than 400 academic articles in different important Chinese and English journals. He is one of the pioneer scholars in the field of Chinese journalism and communication.