

Five Surprising Facts About China's Internet Users

ARTICLE | **FEBRUARY 23, 2018**

Man-Chung Cheung

As China enters the Year of the Dog, the latest data from [China Internet Network Information Center \(CNNIC\)](#) shows how the country's digital landscape has changed over the past 12 months. Here are five surprising facts about digital usage in China.

No. 1: There Is Room for Much, Much More Growth

The number of internet users is growing quickly, but the market is nowhere close to saturated.

During 2017, China added 40.7 million new internet users, bringing the total to 772.0 million. That's the largest single internet market in the world by far, but still represents just 55.8% of China's population. So there is plenty of room to grow.

What's stopping people from accessing the internet? Two obstacles cited by CNNIC are computer illiteracy and the inability to type in Pinyin (the romanized version of Chinese).

Emerging technologies like voice recognition could play an important role in bringing the internet to the rest of the population.

No. 2: It's a Mobile Market

By the end of 2017, 752.7 million internet users in China accessed the web on their mobile devices, representing 97.5% of all internet users in

the country. That compares with 95.1% a year prior.

Other access methods trailed far behind, the CNNIC data showed: For instance, barely half (53.0%) of all internet users went online via desktop. For laptops, the level was 35.8%. And for tablets, it was 27.1%.

No. 3: Rural and Unconnected

At 2017's end, rural internet users made up 27.0% of all of internet users in China, the CNNIC found. However, 42.7% of the country's population resides in the countryside, based on data from the [National Bureau of Statistics China](#).

In effect, rural areas are China's biggest untapped internet market.

No. 4: Internet Time Is Growing Rapidly

People in China are spending an unprecedented amount of time online. In 2017, average weekly time spent reached 27 hours, up about 36 minutes from a year ago—the fastest that measure has grown in three years.

Growth drivers are about what you might expect: video-on-demand (VOD), live streaming, social networks and online shopping.

No. 5: The Online/Offline Blur

In a country where mobile payments are far more common than in the US and other markets, online-to-offline (O2O) activity has soared.

Food ordering, ride hailing (taxi or private car) and travel purchases all saw rapid growth. The latest CNNIC data showed that 44.5% of China's internet users ordered food online in 2017, an increase of 64.6% vs. 2016.