

Abstract

The rapid development of the Internet and its fast diffusion among journalists in China have attracted considerable academic attention. However, empirical research on the interplay between the Internet and journalists is fairly limited. This study makes an initial attempt to investigate the dynamic process of the diffusion, use, and effects (DUE) of the Internet from a holistic perspective. Based on data from a nationwide survey of 1130 reporters and editors in 56 news organizations (e.g., newspaper, television, radio, and news agency) in 16 cities in China, this study examines: i) the adoption of the Internet among Chinese journalists; ii) the use of the Internet among Chinese journalists; and iii) the impact of Internet use on Chinese journalists' professional values.

The theoretical framework of the multi-stage DUE process incorporates a variety of diffusion theories (i.e., diffusion of innovation theory and technology acceptance model), media use and media choice theories (i.e., uses and gratifications paradigm, media richness theory, and model of mass audience behavior), and media effects theories (i.e., media determinism theory, social learning theory, cultivation theory, media dependency theory, and media credibility theory). In total, 26 hypotheses are tested on the key relationships involved in the DUE process.

At the diffusion stage, this study extends the innovation adoption approach to the intra-organizational level and draws a line between voluntary adoption (i.e., the individual journalist adopts the Internet before his/her organization does) and forced adoption (i.e., the individual journalist adopts the Internet after his/her organization does). Journalists are early adopters of

the Internet in China (92% penetration rate in this study). Voluntary adopters account for 50% of the sample and forced adopters account for 42%. A clear-cut distinction emerges between predictors of voluntary adoption and predictors of forced adoption. Perceived relative advantage, perceived ease of use, perceived popularity of the Internet in the society, and individual characteristics (e.g., age and gender) are most significant in affecting voluntary adoption, whereas perceived usefulness and organizational characteristics (e.g., job title, media staff size, website infrastructure, and Internet connectivity) are most significant in affecting forced adoption. Also, it is found that voluntary adopters tend to adopt more Internet technologies than forced adopters do.

At the use stage, the survey data indicate that Chinese journalists are active users of the Internet. The Internet users in the sample averagely spend four hours online per day and utilize the Internet to assist news reporting six times per workday. Statistical analyses identify the underlying forces that compel them to use the Internet for different purposes (i.e., work-related vs. private purposes) in different places (i.e., office vs. home). Perceived need for the Internet is significantly positive in predicting all types of use. Forced adopters spend more time online in office for work and utilize the Internet to assist news reporting more frequently than voluntary adopters do. Whereas perceived richness and organizational environment are more related to journalists' use of the Internet in office/for work, household setting and traditional media consumption lifestyle are more related to journalists' use of the Internet at home/for private purposes.

At the effects stage, findings of this study support a "moderate effects

model” in the relationship between the Internet and journalists’ professional values. The Internet is found to contribute to the downplay by journalists of some orthodox media roles (indoctrination role in particular) and propaganda-oriented news judgment criteria (e.g., *zhengduixing*, *pubianxing*, *dianxingxing*, and *shiyixing* in particular), and the lean toward some modern media roles (e.g., watchdog role, public forum role, and entertainment role in particular) and news-oriented news judgment criteria (e.g., timeliness, importance, proximity, prominence, human interests, and the unusual). In addition to testing the linear effects of Internet use, this study extends the traditional cultivation perspective to the Internet context and finds that heavy users attach more importance to internationally practiced mainstream roles and news judgment criteria than light users or non-users do. Furthermore, this study provides support to the two sub-processes of cultivation, namely, mainstreaming and resonance: the gap between liberal and conservative journalists’ professional values vanishes among heavy users but widens between liberal heavy users and conservative non-users. Internet dependency and relative credibility of the Internet are found to mediate the impact of Internet use on professional values.

Overall, this study identifies a causal relationship between Internet diffusion and use, as well as an association between Internet use and attitudinal effects. Therefore, the three stages of the dynamic diffusion, use, and effects (DUE) process are chronologically and logically related to each other. Findings of this study underscore the benefits of taking a comprehensive and integrated approach to examine the role of a newly imported global medium (like the Internet) in changing not only people’s way

of working/living but also their way of thinking. As an initial study in the field, its framework can be applied to other media and other social or occupational contexts.

This study can be challenged for its limitations in integrating various theories into one model and ignorance of media content in conceptualizing Internet use. Methodologically, it is limited in its non-probability sampling procedure and deficiencies in questionnaire design. In the future, in-depth interviews and field observations are needed to better understand the role of the Internet in journalists' routine practices and value transformations. Content analyses can be conducted to examine the impact of Internet use on journalists' news products.