

A Comparative Study Exploring the Impact of Internet Activities, Use of New Media, and Leisure Activities on Quality of Life in Beijing, Taipei, and Hong Kong ¹

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Abstract

Globalization and rapid advances in information technology offer us vast, unprecedented opportunities to improve quality of life (QoL). Yet, this opportunity may also be burdened with undesirable consequences. With the Internet, people – living in the most plugged-in and mechanized society in history – may be working harder than ever. Rather than creating time for leisure, our technology is creating ways that make it possible to undertake more work at home. Industry, consumer groups, academics, and policy makers have sought to better understand how the Internet contributes to or detracts from society. For the time being, both theoretical and empirical researches on the impact of the Internet are still in their infancy. Little research has been carried out to explore the potential relationship between the Internet and quality of life. As Beijing, Taipei, and Hong Kong share a common culture, it would be interesting to comparatively examine the possible influence of the Internet with particular emphasis on the roles of Internet activities, use of

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new media, and leisure activities on QoL in these three socio-politically different cities.

Taking the three cities as a whole, correlational results showed that Internet activities (such as using the Internet for sociability, fun seeking, e-commerce, and information seeking) and new media use, correlate positively with one measurement of quality of life -- 5-year outlook. However, use of the Internet, especially for sociability, computer use, and computer games were inversely linked to another measure -- QoL index. This suggests that QoL can be enhanced if suitable amounts of time are spent on media-related activities, namely, less time on using the Internet for intimate self-disclosure and in playing computer games, and more time on listening to music on CD/MD/MP3. As expected, leisure activities (such as talking to family and friends face-to-face, visiting karaoke bars, doing physical exercises, participating in community or religious services, and window shopping) were positively associated with life quality.

In a 3-city comparison, ANOVA results showed that Hong Kong scored the highest in the QoL index while people in Beijing had the best 5-year outlook. In Internet activities, Beijing people were the heaviest users of the Internet for information seeking, fun-seeking, sociability, and e-commerce. As for new media use, Hong Kong people were most attracted by ICQ, talking on the phone, playing computer games, and watching VCD and DVDs. On the contrary, people in Taipei enjoyed listening to music on CD/MD/MP3 the most. In traditional media use, Hong Kong people appeared to spend more minutes per day on reading newspaper, watching TV, and listening to radio. In comparing leisure activities, people in Hong Kong spent most of their spare time window shopping and talking to family and friends face-to-face, while people in Taipei used most of their leisure time visiting karaoke bars, doing physical exercise, and participating in community services.

To examine the predictive power of Internet activities, use of new media technologies, and leisure activities on quality of life, regression analyses revealed that

higher income and less work hours per week were the key factors influencing their evaluation of life quality for the people in Beijing. Neither media-related nor leisure activities were significant predictors. However, people in Taipei felt that the more they used the Internet for information seeking, the more time they could afford talking with family and friends, more exercises, and less time in bars singing karaoke, the better the life quality they would have. In contrast, being older and women who spent more time listening to music on CD and MP3, talking to family and friends, and higher household income are the strongest determinants of quality of life in Hong Kong. Furthermore, life quality, as indicated by 5-year outlook, can also be enhanced if more time are spent on the Internet for sociability (as found in Beijing), for fun seeking (as in Taipei), and for information seeking (as in Hong Kong). Implications regarding policy formulation to improve life quality are discussed.