

# Understanding Chinese Internet Users

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**Abstract.** User experience as an exotic concept has introduced into in China for about a decade, however, it have had a profound impact on Chinese Internet and the Chinese people and attracted more and more attention from academia and industry. From three aspects, this article discusses the user experience in China's evolution and development: first, it's the birth of the user experience and history in China, and Chinese practitioners' efforts for promoting it; Second, with the rapid development of China's society and Internet industry, Chinese people have changed a lot both in their thoughts and life. Meanwhile Chinese Internet companies also take actions on new design and products forcing on these changes; Third, it's about the potential chances and challenges for user experience and its practitioners in traditional industry as well as emerging industry.

**Keywords:** User experience · Chinese internet · UX practitioners

## 1 Introduction

User experience (UX) has become more and more fashionable in China in the tide of Internet+ and entrepreneurship. In all industries, UX plays an important role in product development and design. People focus on the user's characteristics and analyze user's habits. As for what the user experience really is, however, the answers are open. Some people think that the user experience is inviting users to try and experience products. Some people think that the user experience is the design of the user interface. Some people think that the user experience is the user-centered development process. In 2008, ISO defined UX as user experience is a person's perceptions and responses that result from the use or anticipated use of a product, system or service, which is widely accepted and recognized. One survey of UX practitioners also found that practitioners believed that the user experience was "dynamic", "the context - dependent" and "subjective" which is pretty consistent with this definition of ISO (Law et al. 2009).

The concept of UX was introduced into China for about ten years, however, in the decade, UX changed from an academic, foreign word gradually into a more Chinese characteristic one. In all these efforts, the practitioner of Chinese Internet user experience make an important contribution to promote and popularize it, which also makes Chinese Internet industry the least different compared with the international level. For Chinese user experience, however, the related literature is relatively scarce, so in this article, the author will systematically discuss the development of UX in China. From three aspects, this article discusses the user experience in China's present situation and the future:

first, birth of the user experience and history in China; Second, in the tide of China's Internet, user experience localizes in China and the product and design focus on Chinese people; Third, it's the opportunities and challenges for China UX practitioners in future China.

## 2 The Concept of UX and Its Localization

### 2.1 The Birth and Development of UX

UX is still a relatively young concept. From an academic perspective, it is an interdisciplinary subject covering design, psychology, human computer interaction and many other subjects. However, looking back, the development of the user experience is not simple and can be divided into three stages (Yuan 2015).

The first stage is UX's germination. The earliest concept can be traced back to the Second World War in last century 40s. In this stage, user experience research focuses on physical human-computer interaction, which is also called ergonomics. The results of these researches were also used in military industry and other public areas. For example, in the design of aircraft instrument panel, different color of the characters and background had different effects on instantaneous memory, which was a famous finding of this period.

The second stage appeared in the 1980s, during which time personal computers became popular. At that time, UX was on large screen products. Besides, human-computer interaction was concerned about not only physiology issues but psychology ones as well. The concept of user interface design was raised in this period. Although the exact word 'UX' was not clearly put forward then, what people thought and felt was taken into consideration in the process of product designed and developed.

The third stage is from the end of the twentieth century up to now. The start point is the definition of UX. About the appearance of UX, academic, American designer Donald Arthur Norman is recognized as the originator. Norman joined apple in 1995 as a User Experience Architect, which was the first position of UX. Norman thought that UX was a user's purely subjective feeling built in the process of using products and accepting services. Later, American economist B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore put forward the theory of experience economy. Their writings "Experience Economy", points out that under the fierce market competition pressure, in order to pursue the unique selling point, a new economic form, experience economy is separated from the service economy. It is the fourth stage after the product economy, commodity economy and service economy. The arrival of the experience economy means a further improvement of people's needs and it is the inevitable result of social productivity development to a certain extent. And one of the most critical milestone for UX is the appearance of iPhone. At MacWorld 2007, Mr. Jobs introduced the iPhone, which was with the most advanced capacitance screen technology and excellent software experience. The birth of iPhone was a revolutionary change to the mobile interaction pattern of physical buttons at the time and it also made apple once again become a successful company. Apple's success let the world see the tremendous power of the user experience. Since then, UX is no longer a vocabulary in the field of design and UX began to enter all walks of life.

As three stages of UX's development, UX practice in people's life also has experienced changes from public areas to personal areas. In the initial stage of public use, UX was in military industry, aerospace and other special areas. When used in personal area, UX first occurred in the computer field, then turned to the manufacturing, services, etc.

User experience is gradually appearing in China at the beginning of this century. Unlike the west, UX first appeared in China's electrical appliance industry, which was affected by west companies' UX practice such as Siemens and IBM. Lenovo, Haier and other large electrical appliance companies set up the user experience related department, introducing UX theory and methodology. Due to the openness and popularity of Chinese electrical appliances industry, UX roots and grow in China. Later, the Internet industry, IT industry and communication industry also gradually introduce and slowly attaches great importance to UX. "User experience" has become a fashionable word in China. The most intuitive performance is the Baidu index. Since about 2011, "user experience" and related queries from Baidu have been in a state of rapid growth, which suggests that more and more people want to learn and understand UX. The wind of UX blows in all walks of life in China. One of the most famous cases is Haidilao hotpot. As a traditional food and beverage services brand, one of the best-known features of Haidilao hotpot is its user-centered service. Haidilao provide many interesting services when costumers are waiting tables such as nail arts and shoeshine service. And when they seated on, elastic, apron and cell phone sets are provided. It is the service that makes many customers would like to wait for hours for dinner at Haidilao. Although UX entered in China for only a decade or so, its development is very breathtaking to which Chinese Internet companies make a great contribution.

## 2.2 UX's Localization and UXer in China

Although UX was not first introduced into China by Internet industry, the concept of UX gains a great growth benefiting from Chinese Internet industry. With the explosive growth in the Chinese Internet in the last five years, Internet user experience practitioners have proliferated and the Internet industry has become professional schools for UXers. By now, the Internet industry has become synonymous with "user experience" in China and when mentioning user experience, people always think about Internet. Not only does Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent and other Internet giant set up UX department, but many emerging, young Internet companies put UX on the very important position as well. They focus on user research and experience design, bringing a lot of amazing products for Chinese users.

Although Internet UX has developed rapidly, it is a young discipline indeed. Besides, UX has a complicated background across design, psychology, human computer interaction. By now, there has been no complete UX training system or a course in Chinese colleges and universities and even relevant content is rare. Fortunately, thanks to the natural openness and sharing spirit of Internet, Internet UXers volunteer to promote UX and provide the young with professional trainings. Internet giant's UX team publishing UX related writings and websites, such as Tencent CDC's "Around you, design for you" and Baidu UED's "Experience & Du". These books not only introduce professional UX methods and theories which are accumulated during years of product research and

development by these successful teams but also present cases of outstanding Internet products. In addition to writings, the Internet giants have various practices. They hold professional salons and record online courses. All these efforts are to help the young to understand UX and start their career.

When Internet giants spare no effort to promote UX, Chinese UXers have also taken actions. They establish practitioners association, such as UXPA, HBUED, UXREN etc. These organizations build professional websites, release information about UX knowledge, UX recruitment, translation of foreign UX passages. At the same time, they carry out offline activities such as forum and seminar. These organizations not only provide young people with the chance to understand UX, but also provide UXers to communicate with each other. In addition, UX related competitions also played an important role in UX's promotion and popularization. UXD Award, is a very famous domestic user experience design competition for college students. In the competition, college students will join the whole process of product innovation, which is no doubt a valuable experience for them.

### **3 Internet Development in China and UX**

#### **3.1 Chinese User in Changing and Internet**

On May 21, 1994, in the computer network information center, Chinese academy of sciences, scientists completed the server settings of Chinese national top-level domain names (.cn), which changed the history that Chinese national top-level domain names relied on the foreign server. Since then, Internet has been in China officially. The development of Internet in China can be divided into three stages.

The first stage is from 1994 to 2002 years or so. The commercial value of Internet rapidly developed. Forces from private sector, commercial capital, and application began to join aggressively into the Internet. Internet showed vigorous development trend. Represented by Sina, Sohu, Netase, Internet portals was created and listed. Tencent, Alibaba and Baidu also began to sprout. Internet giants that constitute China's current Internet business structure were all founded in this period. According to statistics, from 1997 to 2000, China has the largest site quickly from 1500 to 260000. The rapid growth of the Internet has brought huge bubbles, because there is no mature profit model in China. Influenced by the United States, starting in 2000, the bursting of the dotcom bubble started the Internet winter that continued until 2002 when China Mobile carried out value-added service making the Internet companies make profit and get through the winter.

The second stage is from 2001 to 2008, which is often called that the Web 2.0 era. Spent the winter, Chinese Internet companies has formed mature profit pattern of network advertising, network game, search engine and e-commerce and BAT, the big three were listed, which developed a new pattern of the Chinese Internet. More importantly, during this period, the Internet has entered a period of prominent social value. Different from the users at the first stage who is of small amount and passively accepted information, users in this period gradually expand the scale and content, and began to produce content. BBS, blogs and other network media became popular. The influence

of network media extended and the citizen-leading Internet culture was taking shape. And Internet also received national attention. President Hu and Premier Wen both had online communications with citizens at this time, which also reflected the trend of Internet that gradually entered the mainstream media.

The third stage is from 2009 to the present and Internet has entered the era of Instant Internet in which time mobile Internet begins to spread. During this period, the Chinese Internet had a full-blown. In many indicators China has become the world's first and China's Internet companies have also begun to rank among the world's top Internet Co. In 2015, "the Internet+" policy develops a favorable environment for Internet and the Internet began to enter traditional industries, changing the Chinese society. With the era of Instant Internet, SNS sites raised. Weibo and WeChat became the representative products and lead a new Internet culture of universal participation. Grass root, post 90s, goddess, fresh meat, Chinese Dama and many hot words and groups became popular because of Internet. With the Internet, people show their personality and express their views. Thus, how to grasp the mentality and characteristics of different users is an important issue for Chinese UXers.

### 3.2 Design for Chinese Internet Users

Complex users and Internet culture make it difficult to design one product for all. So Chinese Internet companies have to aim at the different user groups and design for them. Among all the user groups, Diaosi and Dama are two important groups, and each has its own character.

Diaosi originated in the Baidu Tieba, referring to those who were born mediocre, and live at the bottom of the society without future and love. The antonym of Diaosi is "GaofuShuai", of which the literal means is someone tall, wealthy and handsome. In terms of its own meaning, Diaosi is a derogatory and indecent word, but with the fermentation of the Internet, Diaosi slowly is endowed with a self-deprecating spirit and significance of resistance. People claim to be a Diaosi and "the success of Diaosi" has also become an inspirational synonymous. In fact, the portrait of Diaosi just represents the characteristics of most Internet users in China now. Three lows – low age, low education, low income – is the typical characteristics of Chinese Internet users as well as Disoasi. The popularity of Diaosi reflects the lost and struggles of the young people in the era of dramatic changes in the value. So how to guide and make use of this value is not only the chance for the Internet but a major event related to the future of the society. As the birthplace of Diaosi culture in China and the gathering spot for grassroots, Baidu Tieba has launched Diaosi festival, letting Disao voice out and set Diaosi right, which triggers a social attention. With Diaosi culture, electronic business platform and hardware vendors play the feelings cards. They use the 'youth', 'dream' as a packaging, creating a classic case of Internet marketing. Some people say that Chinese users are most willing to pay for the feelings.

Different from hot-blooded Diaosi, Dama represents the other side of Chinese characteristics that is conservative but a little blind impulse. Unlike the Poor Diaosi, Dama hold the family finances and are well off. In recent years, Dama become famous for their buying gold and square dance and their actions and their purchasing power is surprising.

Another feature of Dama is that they are new to Internet and smartphones. They are not used to complicated operations and they are used to wind and rain. For them, dream means far less than the discount toilet paper. In 2014 and 2015, with half off of the money, Alipay's double 12 shopping carnival had a success in making Dama install and use mobile Alipay. After the gold rush, Dama begin to interest in Internet finance services. Data shows that per capita investment of women over 55 years is 43 %, higher than the average, which is nearly three times of the post 80s. Not only are the Internet financial products aimed at Dama, in health, beauty, tourism and many other areas, the 'square dance entrepreneurs' have begun Dama design. At present, China has about one hundred million square dance Dama, behind whom, it is likely to be the next one trillion marketing opportunity.

## 4 Chances and Challenges for Chinese UXers

### 4.1 New Changes in Internet Products

In the past 20 years, Internet has had a growth from zero to the world level in China. Complete business models and product systems have been formed in social products, e-commerce products, entertainment products and so on. However, we can still find these new chances in these fields for the future.

From the earliest to the BBS time to the WeChat era of instant communication, changing of social products in China can be divided into three stages: the first is the BBS time, represented by Tianya and Mop, which is the beginning of social products realizing the information collection and precipitation instead of the point-to-point communication; moving real interpersonal relationship from offline to online is the next form of social products, such as [renren.com](http://renren.com), Kaixin001, QQ Zone; the next stage is the current social product and that is micro era. WeChat is for acquaintances social-networking while Weibo for the Public information. In addition, online community and strangers' social networking maintain active. With the changing social product, users also change their habits and preferences. People become open and conservative, which brings many opportunities. First of all, it is about the entertainment of social products. Most of social products users are young people who are pretty curious and chasing for fun features. To be fun is a start point to impress them most. Many social products such as Xiaoka Show and Footprints, which use videos and photos, have ever created popularity. However, how to maintain this fresh attraction, continue it, and ultimately make it an irreplaceable product, is the most critical issue. In addition, population subdivision is another golden mine for social products. According to the characteristics and interest of the population to do the operation of the communities is a trend in the future.

Another important area is the e-commerce platform. After many years of double eleven carnivals, online shopping has become a lifestyle of Chinese users, and is playing a more and more important role. According to CNNIC statistics, until June 2015, China's online shopping users has reached 3.74 billion and the penetration rate of online shopping is up to 55.7 %, which has already surpassed the United States in the scale, becoming the world's largest online retail market. From the birth of e-commerce platform to now, e-commerce products keep a rapid development and finally reach a mature and stable stage. Getting

through the price war and logistical war, e-commerce products are also gradually changed and the bred variety of new opportunities in patterns. An important trend is the development of second and third class cities and rural markets. At present, people in first-tier cities are so familiar with online shopping and habits is already very mature. While in less developed areas lacking of resources in, the potential purchase power is really strong, especially in the rural areas. Limited by the network and logistic restrictions, the rural market has been unable to develop. Along with the construction of infrastructure and the popularity of smart phones, the vitality of rural consumers are gradually inspired, which requires a higher slandered of the logistics supporting, after-sales services and other services. Another opportunity is the vertical fields. An array of integrated e-commerce platform has been unable to meet the people deeper shopping needs so a professional platform is undoubtedly a better choice. Whether the new cross-border platform or the relatively mature maternal and beauty makeup platform, both prove the potential energy of the vertical markets.

## 4.2 Internet+ Traditional Industries

On March 2015, Premier Li Keqiang at the third session of the Twelfth National People's Congress proposed the development of a large table "Internet plus" action plan, the report pointed out that the formulation of "Internet plus" action plan, to promote mobile Internet, cloud computing, big data, networking and modern manufacturing industry combination, to promote e-commerce, Internet and Internet industry the healthy development of Internet financial, guide enterprises to expand the international market. "Internet plus" action plan released, the Internet is no longer confined to the IT industry, will penetrate into the broader field. "Internet plus" the combination of Internet and traditional industries, promote the development of all walks of life. O2O, finance, health care, education... The Internet is quietly changing.

O2O is the most close to the lives of people with the "Internet plus", catering, travel, beauty, massage... In all aspects of people's lives, the Chinese Internet is also experiencing the O2O's entrepreneurial boom, a large number of O2O companies appear, there are a large number of O2O enterprises to die. For O2O products, a good online experience is necessary, however, O2O as a business model, it is more important to provide consumers with quality products and services. Consumers can buy high quality and inexpensive goods always hope, hope can get value for money or value for money services. Therefore, the Internet should become a powerful tool for O2O, O2O cost savings, improve efficiency, to provide excellent support for the line service.

The first combination of financial and Internet should be online banking, but the role of online banking is nothing more than the Internet means to operate the banking business. At present, Internet finance services in China have been extended to the field of banking, lending, credit and other multiple fields. In early 2015, China experienced a stock mania, which brought a very large growth of financial tool products. Except for Internet financial products' nature itself, when people use Internet financial services, what they are most concerned about is nothing more than two points. The first is security. Financial security and the security of personal information are the biggest concerns when people using the Internet financial service. The second is the usability, which is the distinguishing feature between the Internet financial service and traditional financial

institutions. For example, Yuebao let people use and become familiar with Internet fund products by simple purchasing process. Future Internet financial products are obligated to make financial services simple and easy to use under the premise of ensuring the security.

In the field of more relationship to the people's livelihood, like education and medical treatment, Internet is no longer just a tool, but a part of the social productive forces, playing a role in resource coordination and promoting the development of the industry. Online education and wisdom health care provide solutions to problems in receiving education and seeing a doctor, so that social resources can be used more efficiently and the community can be more equitable. We can imagine that more problems can be solved with the combination of the Internet and these areas.

### 4.3 Chances and Challenges for UXers

Currently, Internet industry is becoming a sunrise industry in China, many passionate young people devote to Internet companies. Because of development potential and challenging work, Internet companies are favored by many job hunters, especially those who lack of computer professional background. We have several advices for those who have engaged in the work of UX and those who are going to join the UX:

For new recruits, we recommend that you should choose company or platform as large as possible. As a new area, education of UX industry gets behind, UX is not on the major list in universities of China. Small companies lack of professional UX growth systems due to their size. By contrast, large companies have to pay more attention to UX for the brand strategy and long-term interests. For large companies, the game between commercial interests and UX is a big issue concerning survival and development, if a deviation occurred, it may have unpredictable consequences. In large companies, new recruits can not only be access to best products in the industry, participating in product design process with millions or billions scale, but also harvest rapid growth in professional UX training system of large companies, becoming professionals who can stake a claim.

For colleagues in the industry, we suggest that we continue to maintain the state of learning and improving. UX is an interdisciplinary subject, involving product design, operations, user research, technology development, etc. It requires practitioners to be proficient in one area and grasp relevant knowledge as much as possible. This advice is to solve the growth problem of each individual practitioners, allowing practitioners to realize that outstanding UX design is a multi-disciplinary work and need different professional colleagues to work together. Only balanced synthesis of all aspects of knowledge, we can get the most suitable, the best solution to provide the best experience for users.

Finally, for the development of the entire industry, we hope that colleagues do not forget the beginning of the heart and grasp the fundamental. UX is born with the rise of the Internet industry, new direction and new products appears everyday. In the face of new changes, practitioners are often confused, following blindly. We recommend that UX practitioners need to pay close attention to needs of users and specific product forms in different social periods. In case of social products, for a decade, user's social and other



basic demands did not change much, but in different stages of Internet development, the product could be BBS, QQ, happy network, micro blogging or micro channel. Although products like adorable face or foot note caused a boom, but when their heat retreat, these products did not touch users or stimulate users' demand deeply, now it seems to be a flash in the pan. In a word, consider users as the center and understand users better is still the most basic work for UX.

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