



Burma Media Use 2012

Methodology

These research results are drawn from a nationally representative, face-to-face survey of 3,000 Burmese aged 15 and older. The total 15 and older population covered by this survey in Burma is 38,880,000. Interviewing was conducted from May 5 to June 20, 2012, in Burmese. Gallup excluded Chin and Kayah, two of the smallest states, from the sample, and Kachin state because of fighting between the government and ethnic forces. Together these three states account for 4.1% of the total Burmese population. Results are weighted by age, gender, and the urban/rural population ratio within states and divisions.

General Media Environment

The media environment in Burma has recently benefitted from greater freedoms allocated to journalists, including the abolition of pre-publication censorship in August 2012. The government has vowed to take further steps in a new media law to end the country's extensive censorship regime. It remains to be seen how well the improved freedoms will encourage continued growth in the radio and television markets, and how it may spur the development of new media, which has just begun to gain a foothold in Burma.

Despite the country's long history of censorship, Burmese do not currently appear to be apathetic about news coverage. Almost half (47.5%) say they access some type of news – whether via radio, TV, Internet, newspapers, etc. – at least daily, and 78.5% do so at least once a week.

Radio remains the primary medium to which Burmese turn for news. Currently, 62.8% of Burmese say they listened to a radio program in the past week. The results indicate past-week FM listenership continues to rise -- and suggest that AM listeners have migrated heavily toward new options on the FM spectrum. In 2012, just 18.3% of Burmese say they used a MW/AM band to listen to the radio in the past week. However, shortwave radio use remained steady in 2012, continuing to garner a strong weekly audience at 34% of all Burmese.

Television is the secondary source, with almost half (44.7%) tuning in for news at least weekly. Overall, 56.8% of Burmese have a working television in their household, with TV ownership far more concentrated in urban areas (82.9%) than small towns and rural areas (45.7%). Just under half of Burmese overall (45.2%) say they watched television in the last seven days, again with a stark difference between those living in urban areas (68.9%) and those in small towns and rural areas (35.1%).

There are marked differences between Burmese living in small towns and rural areas, who make up more than two-thirds of the population, and their city-dwelling counterparts. In particular, urban Burmese are almost twice as likely as those in small towns or rural areas to use TV for news at least weekly (67.5% vs. 35.1%, respectively), while rural Burmese are more likely to rely on radio. Newspapers and magazines are also considerably more prevalent in urban than rural areas, as are news journals.

Use of new media, including the Internet and SMS-based news services, remains rare.

Mobile phone ownership has also grown more prevalent among urban than rural Burmese. One in six Burmese overall (16.6%) currently say they have working mobile phones in their household. This is up from 6% in 2010-2011, which suggests that mobile phone ownership is beginning to take off. Burmese were also asked whether they have their own mobile phone; 13.9% say yes, with a wide gap between those living in cities (28.5%) and those living in small towns/rural areas (7.7%). In Yangon and Mandalay, almost half of residents (45.7%) now have a mobile phone in their household.

Because the country's longstanding military regime aggressively limited and controlled Internet access until recently, Burmese Web-based infrastructure remains sparse. Though authorities have eased many Internet constraints and unlocked a wide variety of banned websites over the past year, access remains out of reach for the vast majority of Burmese. Just 4.1% say they have ever used the Internet, while 1.3% have used it in the last seven days. These figures are not perceptibly different from those recorded in the 2010/2011 survey:

3% and 1%, respectively. Among urban Burmese, about one in 10 (10.3%) have ever used the Internet, though just 3.7% have used it in the past seven days.

Day-to-day concerns top media interests, though political and international news follow close behind.

Presented with a variety of topics they might see or hear about in the media, Burmese were most likely to say they were “very interested” or “fairly interested” in three topics prone to directly affect their day-to-day lives. Weather reports interest the vast majority of residents (86.7%) in a country with a largely agricultural economy and a tropical monsoon climate, followed closely by religion (84.3%) and health and healthcare (80.7%). About half of Burmese overall claim to be interested in international news (51.9%) or political news (51.6%). Science, technology and IT topics fall at the bottom of the list, likely reflecting widespread lack of access to modern information technology.

Women are as likely as men to be interested in the top three items; however, men are more likely to be interested in most other topics, including political, international and business news. Relative interests show some variation by age group, with the youngest Burmese somewhat less likely than their older counterparts to be interested in religion and political news, and more likely to be interested in sports and arts and culture. Even among the youngest age group, only about one-third (33.8%) are very or fairly interested in science and technology issues.

Key Takeaways

- Radio remains the primary source of news for Burmese living in small towns and rural areas, where 67.3% say they get news from radio at least once a week. City dwellers are less likely to get their news over the radio on a weekly basis (50.8%); two-thirds (67.5%) get news from television at least weekly.
- Current results point to a sharp drop in past-week listenership to MW/AM radio since the 2010-2011 survey as FM listenership continues to rise. However, shortwave radio use remained stable in 2012, continuing to garner a strong weekly audience at 34% of all Burmese.
- More than half of Burmese adults (51.9%) said the domestic media is more trustworthy than it had been six months before the survey was conducted, with 6.2% saying it was “much more trustworthy.”

- Overall, Myanmar Radio National Service MW/SW was the top source of news named spontaneously by respondents, followed by the official Myanmar Television (MRTV) and the private FM network, Shwe FM, which was launched in 2009. However, MRTV 4, a station jointly operated by the government and the private Forever media group, is the overwhelming top news source for residents of Burma's two largest cities, Yangon and Mandalay.
- Television ownership remains far more concentrated in Burmese cities (82.9%) than in small towns and rural areas (45.7%). Almost two-thirds of Burmese TV owners (62.7%) use antennas for reception, while 10.3% use satellite dishes. Satellite dish use is unusually common among Burmese TV owners living close to the Thai border (19.6%).
- One in six Burmese overall (16.7%) currently say they have a working mobile phone in their household, an increase from 6% reported in the previous survey. A sharp divide has emerged between large cities and small towns/rural areas in terms of mobile phone ownership. Though the government has reduced the cost of SIM cards for CDMA and GSM phones, they remain too expensive for most Burmese.
- Burma's rapid growth in private FM and television stations has been fueled largely by the Shwe Than Lwin Group. The group recently moved into media from its traditional operations in agricultural and automotive trade, mining and construction. Its main media products, Shwe FM (launched 2009) and SkyNET (launched 2010) focus on pop music, sports and entertainment but also have included a C-Span-like news channel and other news products.
- While overall Internet use is very low, 10.3% of urban residents have used the Internet, 3.7% in the last week. The vast majority of Burmese who have gone online say it was at an Internet café.

Contact

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