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Local endorsers key in China

BEIJING: Brand owners using celebrities in Chinese marketing campaign need a nuanced approach, particularly as local stars boast greater equity than their counterparts.

R3, the consultancy, [drew on data](#) from over 10,500 respondents in a survey on spontaneous recall, engagement and the qualities well-known figures would like to embody.

Basketball player Yao Ming, who appears in the NBA for the Houston Rockets, topped the charts after posting an index rating of 105.7 points.

He was praised for regular work in support of good causes, such as teaching children to read, Shark Savers and asking people to stop eating shark fin soup, thus protecting endangered animals.

"Yao Ming continues to be the most engaging star because he is widely regarded as the best Chinese sports person, and for his strong moral values, and for his involvement in many CSR events," said Sunny Chen, a senior researcher at R3.

Kobe Bryant, another basketball player, was the sole overseas member to top the charts and is allied with operators including Nike and Sprite.

The NBA has placed considerable stress on cracking China, and named Steve Nash as its new national chief executive last month.

"I have been able to witness first-hand the immense popularity of basketball in China, and the success of the NBA in China," he said.

Athlete Liu Xiang took second in R3's rankings on 105 points, having suffered an injury which kept him out of the Olympic Games in Beijing to claim a silver medal during the 2010 Asian Games.

"Liu Xiang is viewed as a passionate star, and since his outstanding performance in the 2010 Asian Games, he has become a household name in China."

Asian Games last year, he now drives strong brand linkage for his sponsor Coca-Cola and Nike," said Chen.

Nike consistently emphasised the fact it was standing by Liu Xiang following the 2006 Asian Games and ran ads with the tagline "Let your power do the talking" when he triu Asian Games.

Completing the top five were actors Jackie Chan and Andy Lau with 73.71.5 points in turn, ahead of actress and singer Faye Wong, registering

Elsewhere, actor Ge You scored 51.5 points, and as a long-time spokesman for Mobile also helped the wireless giant connect with current and potential

"Since his appearance in three new movies over the New Year, there is interest in him," said Chen.

"Consumers now actively link Ge You with China Mobile, and this has contributed to the company's new ranking as most engaging brand this

Jack Ma, chief executive of ecommerce site Alibaba, was the leading brand with 48.2 points, and has recently implemented a major in-house shake-up to combat fraud among some sales staff.

"This is the trust issue," he said. "We are probably the only company in the industry where senior management takes responsibility

Li Ning, a former athlete and founder of one of China's premier sports brands, featured in the top 30, lodging 44.5 points.

When discussing the organisation's full-year results in March, reporting a 13% increase to 9.4bn yuan, Li suggested attitudes and preferences in the consumer market are evolving rapidly.

"The increasingly competitive market, growing sophistication of consumers and rapid urban development in China prompted changes in the sporting goods industry in China," he said.

Data sourced from R3, Added Value, Forbe, China Daily; additional content from Warc staff, 1 April 2011

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