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Nike, Apple score in China

BEIJING: Brands including Nike, Apple and Li-Ning are all attracting considerable attention on China's emerging range of microblogging sites, new research has revealed.

Consultancy R3 interviewed 1,500 people across ten major cities, and found 55.7% are utilising these services, known as Weibo, at present.

Another 13.9% planned to use such platforms in the future, 13.2% had previously done so, 17% stated this pastime held no appeal, and only 0.3% claimed to be unfamiliar with the rapidly-emerging channel.

Some 15.2% of individuals currently or formerly active on the Web 2.0 portals in question had followed sports specialist Nike, which has signed up 57,700 fans through Sina Weibo alone.

"They are leveraging this fan base well to showcase some of their latest products and reporting on sports news in China to maintain interest in the site," said Sunny Chen, a consultant at R3.

Totals stood at 13.2% concerning electronics pioneer Apple, enjoying significant buzz among netizens even though it does not have a formal presence on Weibo properties.

Li-Ning, a local rival to Nike, registered 11%, and was trailed by fellow competitor Adidas, which delivered 9.3% on the same measure.

Lenovo, the IT firm, secured 8.6% here, beating the 6.4% supplied by handset manufacturer Nokia, and the 5.1% received by appliances group Haier and fast-food expert KFC.

Soft drinks giant Coca-Cola hit 3.6% on this metric, a figure matched by quick-service chain McDonald's.

But Apple scored over 13% in terms of actual participation, due in part to the user-generated nature of the brand conversation on such sites.

"Despite having no official Weibo site, Apple's fans have created a Weibo fan club, where they can discuss new apps and new products coming into the market," said Chen.

"Apple's success on Weibo is down to the fact that many users are Apple loyalists and download and access the tool daily- they go hand-in-hand."

Roughly 10% of consumers had engaged with Nike, falling to approximately 8% for Li-Ning and Lenovo.

Adidas and Nokia were both around the 6% mark, demonstrating that nearly all of the latter company's followers positively sought to make a connection with the Finnish operator.

Of the microblogging audience drawn from four of the market's biggest players, 54% follow friends, peaking at 62% for Tencent, ahead of 58% for Sina Weibo.

A further 52% post updates and "record feelings", 48% track the accounts of celebrities, and 44% enter discussions, re-paste or share information, with Sina Weibo leading in each of these areas.

Sina Weibo retained its preeminent status when it came to discovering details about products, acting as a source of insight for 31% of members.

Relative ratings reached 29% for Netease's microblog, 28% for Sohu's alternative, and 25% for Tencent.

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For taking part in brand activities, Sohu and Sina both logged 26%, compared to 24% for Netease's community and 19% for Tencent.

In assessing the most popular celebrities, athlete Liu Xiang boasted 15.6m fans, almost doubling the 8m for actress Yao Chen, also a high-profile blogger.

Chen suggested this widespread attention may encourage advertisers to adopt new strategies for employing celebrity advocates on the web.

"It'll be interesting to see in the next study whether these brands will start using these 'Weibo stars' to engage with their target audience, rather than favorite celebrities," she said.

Data sourced from R3; additional content by Warc staff, 9 June 2011

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