


Chapter 49

An Examination of Motivation and Media Type: Sharing Content on Chinese Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the motivations and priorities of Chinese Millennials' use of social media with regard to the sharing of content. A commercially important demographic, this group are highly active on social media. The amount of content that is shared online is immense. Some shared content "goes viral" and can be seen by vast numbers of users. The findings of this study are based on the results of over 650 online surveys and include both theoretical and practical contributions to the body of knowledge regarding the nature of viral propagation of content in Chinese social media. This contribution to the understanding and insight social media activities of this significant and commercially consumer demographic may be of value to online promoters and marketers as well those interested in the use of social media for commercial purposes in the design and management of their online and social media presence, marketing, and advertising strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

The largest and fastest growing commercially active demographic worldwide are the emerging Chinese middle class (Garner, 2005; H. Li, 2006; Zipser et al., 2005). As internet accessibility worldwide has increased, the adoption and frequency of smart phones and hand-held devices has also increased dramatically. This trend is of special interest in China due to both the large population, and the rapidly emerging middle class (He, 2009). For end users, the integration of social media and social networking with daily activities is nearly immeasurable (Kelly et al., 2013). Social media sites (SMS) like Facebook and Twitter provide abundant and diverse benefits for users, and are increasing in number steadily. Meanwhile, messaging services are also vying for end user time and attention and are rapidly becoming more comprehensive (Bouwman et al., 2010b).

The numbers of users on various type of social media in China, including social networking sites, microblogs, blogs as well as other virtual communities, is over 300 million. By comparison, this is greater than the combined population of France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Chiu et al., 2012a). In the fastest growing market, China, growth is expected to increase by roughly 30 percent annually for the foreseeable future (Chiu et al., 2012b).

Chinese social media platforms Sina Weibo and Wechat have experienced unprecedented rates of adoption in recent years. Weibo is the largest social media site in China and is used frequently for collecting data from users and consumers (Xu et al., 2016). It serves as the combination of Twitter and Facebook providing a new approach for both interpersonal communication, and for acquiring domestic and international news (Han & Wang, 2015). WeChat has become the most extensively used mobile instant-messaging service in China with users exceeding 600 million worldwide as of April 2014 (Pang, 2016). At the same time, WeChat is emerging as a combination between traditional online business and social networking interaction (Yang et al., 2016).

Chinese social media is a dominant way to collect and share information, make social connection as well as entertain (Zhang, 2014). It is noteworthy that reposting, users' major activities online, is one of the most frequently adopted information sharing behaviors among users (X Chen et al., 2019; Sangwan et al., 2009).

Information contains text, pictures, audio and video are able to be spread by mobile social network in a rapid speed (Lu et al., 2014). Compelling content, known as an ignited online hotspot, can be virally disseminated and spread to thousands of users, often within a few seconds. Reposting, users' major activities online, is one of the most frequently adopted information sharing behaviors among Chinese mobile phone users (Bouwman et al., 2010a).

Millennials are well known as extensive users of mobile technologies and the Internet (Mu et al., 2019). This is consistent with the data collected for this study. Considering both the penetration of social media use, smart phone adoption, and frequency of reposting activity, it is apparent that the demographic of Chinese millennials is worthy of study.

When considering the nature of viral messaging, the circumstances that make viral messaging proliferate and the potential for promotion and marketing, users of all social networking sites and platforms are potentially customers whose attention can be attained by online information (Bronner & de Hoog, 2014). In addition to its potential promotional and marketing value, viral content can also impact consumer behavior by influencing consumer perceptions, attitudes and views and has the potential to emerge as a key element of a company's promotional mix (Kirby & Marsden, 2006). Awareness of the potential value of exploiting viral reposting is not new, but the potential continues to grow. With increases in

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