



Community

Its Magic in Triggering
Viral Sports Trend

Community's Magic in Triggering Viral Sports Trend

Community is leveraged as a convenient business tool that can cast a powerful influence and initiate viral trends. Individuality is not to be concealed but rather seeks to prosper via community. Privacy and rules, however, remain necessary within group settings, just with a few modern tweaks.

Executive Summary

- Sports communities are a highly commercialized tool in China. Online communities are mostly category-based while offline ones evolve around social surroundings of the members. Locating the most fitting platform or the group is key for corresponding brands.
- A tested success model is the complementary combination of online and offline sports communities. Systematic observation and analysis of consumers' virtual and physical behaviors will help pinpoint more relevant touchpoints.
- While KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) are still dominant, their actual ROI gets misty, especially in the sports industry. KOCs (Key Opinion Consumers) are on the rise as they present a more down-to-earth experience.



Chinese Sports Community Landscape

The understanding of sports communities in China is drastically different from that in the West. According to *Nielsen Sports' 2018 World Football Report*, Chinese fans exceeded 187 million. In the era of internet, the development of football entertainment manifests in engaging in comment wars while wishing for enhanced offline experience, watching live-streaming at home while forging bonds in football apps. And for the 22.4% of female fans (360 Digital Marketing Centre), ranking the hotness level of football players has always been a passion that has huge commercial potentials.

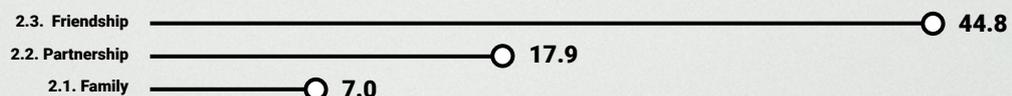
1 VALUE COMMUNITY: DETAILED CONTENT OF POSTS

Main focus of social media talks about communities is about friendship and partnership. More general postings discuss definition/common goals or interest of communities and that one feels supported by communities.

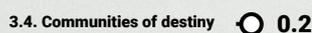
General aspects of communities



Individual communities



Communities oriented towards idea / involuntary



Unit: Percent

Source: Chinese Consumer Value Index 2019 (Trendbüro, 2019)

According to QuestMobile, up until May 2019, the MAU in the sports and fitness industry has surpassed 64 million. Both international and domestic brands have been launching arrays of WeChat mini programs in order to complete the digital tentacles for sports consumers. Besides distributing sports information, online communities are usually where discussions happen when new national policies on sports come out. Individuals, no matter if just sports lovers or those who work in this industry, all voice their interpretations in terms of what trends might follow. Comprehensive sports community platforms like HUPU cover a wide range of sports categories and have up to 55 million monthly active users, and HUPU's NBA section in particular enjoys great authority in this field. Dong Qiu Di is an app curated to fulfill all possible needs of football fans, even attracting many professional players, coaches, and commentators.

Similar platforms for relatively new and more or less popular sports categories are not yet mature in the market.

Besides relying on the spontaneous gathering of people based around the same interest to sports, Chinese offline sports communities are heavily influenced by national policies as well. The Chinese Ministry of Sports released The Promotion of Youth Physical Activity Plan in 2018, expecting all Chinese adolescents exercise at least one hour every day in school, and build at least 15,000 sports clubs over the country by 2020. Aligning with President Xi's "soccer dream", the plan demands the campus football development to promote football among youth, aiming to build 70,000 new football grounds by 2020. Besides school, workplace and family are two other major areas where sports communities can take form for the purpose of improving interpersonal relationships, according to the *Data Analysis Report of Beijing Sports Crowd* by WIFI PIX in 2016. For example, it is common for companies in China to have their own football or badminton teams which often have friendly competitions with each other.

Best Practices



Zhibo8 provides the live-streaming service of most of the international and domestic major sports matches, compatible with the digital trend of Chinese consumers' attachment to their mobile phones. Since 2010, its soccer section has become known as one of the most professionally influential forums. In 2018, an audio live broadcast function was launched that enables sports fans to conveniently listen to matches.



Fuchi Sports is dedicated to the community of soccer-playing juniors and corresponding gear. As soccer training for younger generations gains unprecedented policy favors, Fuchi's sustainable co-operations with schools and local sports bureaus secured its seat in this field.



Hiking communities started to thrive in China since 2014 when the first favorable national policy came out. From comprehensive platforms such as Chinawalking.com to more segmented hiking groups such as LOHIKE—China's first CEO-targeted hiking community where resources are also exchanged for social innovation during hiking. With a relatively low threshold and a strong replicable nature, hiking communities are expected to keep growing with huge commercial potentials, facilitated by the newest technologies like 5G for enhancement of participant experience. The 10th **Beijing International Mountain Walking Festival** in 2019 was held in Xinyang where 5G technology was first used to live-stream the whole competition. Audience can also experience the beautiful mountain view and competing vibe more vividly through VR gears in the 5G hall.

THOROUGHLY UNDERSTANDING THE ORIENTATION OF EXISTING ONLINE AND OFFLINE SPORTS COMMUNITIES IN CHINA IS KEY IN SHAPING A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY.

Online communities have evolved into various formats with different engagement techniques. Besides the traditional way of information feeding and forum-style user discussions, new additions include live-streaming with bullet-screen comments and competition of body-transformation etc. Offline sports communities are highly dependent on social environment and national policies. While it is not always necessary for brands to build their own communities, having active presence in the local dynamics is essential.

The Synergy of Online and Offline Communities

Having comparably separate origins, online and offline communities are creating a productive synergy. How messages are delivered to online communities initially can strongly affect the reaction and dynamics of offline communities. Communities could be largely overlapping as an individual often undertakes multiple roles that might involve various sports activities.

Chinese consumers' impression of a brand is affected by opinions from both online and offline communities to different degrees. Reading online comments has undoubtedly become a common habit of modern consumers in China, however, face-to-face exchange of purchasing experiences with friends, colleagues, and families are just as necessary in completing the consumers' perception and trust cognition. Hence the interaction between online and offline sports communities is essential in making the experience seamless. KEEP's step-by-step building of a mega fitness app made the launching of KEEP virtual mall within the app the most natural decision. The conversion of loyal customers is generated by its cohesion in online and offline communities.

Modern consumers also have multitude in different communities.

A 38-year-old programmer could be a member of the local gym, a marathon runner in his circle of friends, a midfielder in his department's football team, a sporty father of a ten-year-old son and a participating guardian of a school football interest class. Meanwhile, he is also likely to be a HUPU user and a follower of BVB Borussia Dortmund's official Weibo account. This means segmented markets deep down in the daily lives of individuals are inter-connected. Any link in this sports circle could be a consumption touchpoint.

Best Practices



Fitfam is a social, volunteer-led fitness organization that aims to build meaningful communities of passionate members. All of their workouts are free and designed into quality sessions that are accessible and adaptable to everyone. Search and sign up via WeChat mini program, and participate offline directly. No superfluous process and no commercial strings attached.



The iconic joining of **LI-NING** and China's high-end automobile brand **HONG QI** is a paradigm in reinforcing their common brand value—patriotism by creating the style of Chinese swag. Their joint product of sports hoodies has received unanimous compliments on the customers' end. More importantly, for **LI-NING** this greatly expanded their audience to **HONG QI** car owners.



MIGU Charity Run is an app that skillfully combines charity with sports. **MIGU** organizes offline marathons or city run events where every attendance and every mile covered can be transformed into various forms of donations in relation to the sponsorship situation. In addition, the **MIGU** app allows registration as a company or organization and supports extensive interactions of its members, creating a docking joint for employees to bond both online and offline.

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REALIZING THE MULTI-IDENTITY NATURE OF CONSUMER GROUPS IS ESSENTIAL IN BUILDING SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS FROM ONE CONSUMPTION SCENE TO ANOTHER.

The modern persona of a consumer should be as complete as possible, including their virtual and physical habits. The necessity of this can be proven by the viral phenomenon of crossover marketing in China that goes beyond just combining logos. Brands that can trace their customers in a seamless circle make sure they are always one step ahead in terms of both purchasing and participation.

The Focus Shift from KOLs to KOCs

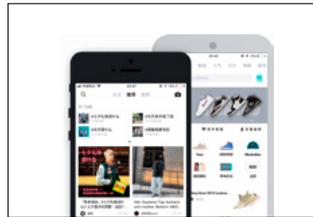
A KOL's credibility gets diluted gradually as it is becoming a profit-driven occupation rather than an umbrella term for influential people who give practical and sincere recommendations. Compared to KOLs, KOCs have fewer fans and smaller impact, but their advantage is a more vertical and relatable image towards consumers. They are often willing to give comments and write experience reports without rewards even though their content and presentation might not be as delicate as KOLs.

The KOL sensation in China is incomparable in the world's marketing industry. In 2018, the number of KOLs with more than 100,000 followers still grew at the rate of 51% (iResearch, 2018). However, KOLs are losing trust because nowadays consumers realize that KOLs have an operational team behind. The power of KOLs now starts to shift towards consumers who have fewer followers but produce attractive content. As the *2018 Accenture Chinese Consumer Insights Series Report* points out, sports consumers are more likely to be influenced by peers within their interest circle. KOCs become influential as they are those who eat and work out together with potential consumers, and consumers believe that micro-influencers provide authentic reviews of products. In addition, interesting comments produced by users can create memes and spread quickly in the community.

Best Practices



HUPU has always been the most active platforms in terms of providing an inclusive forum for sports fans and consumers to express their opinions freely and objectively. Along the way it has cultivated many sports KOLs who later became professional columnists or TV commentators because of their influence on HUPU. However, as the credibility of KOLs weakens along with the expansion of their business lines, HUPU's loyal and low-key consumers are now the trustworthy resources that beginners turn to.



Invested by HUPU in 2015, “Du” (Poison) used to be a platform where users are invited to examine the authentication of sneakers and provide knowledgeable reports surrounding certain sports product. Urged by the great market reaction, it jumped into the blue ocean of e-commerce focused on niche sports shoes. Its major audience—the late post-90s and post-00s, already have generation gaps with the seniors and want to stay away from the mass trends led by KOLs.



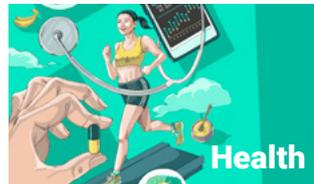
China's first outdoor **KOLsummit** was organized by MAX Outdoor: they not only rewarded sports KOLs, but also launched the MAX Experiencer Plan, which is a cultivation of KOC who will become natural ambassadors and cast influence on a more grass-root level.

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FOR BRANDS THAT WANT A MORE SUSTAINABLE IMAGE AND BOTTOM-UP CUSTOMER LOYALTY, WORKING WITH A SELECTED GROUP OF KOCs MITIGATES THE RISKS OF UNSTABLE KOL REPUTATION AND LOWERS THE COST.

The KOL economy had its peaks in the Chinese market and although it still a major marketing force, brands that are visionary are planning long-term strategies when the effect of KOLs is used up. Sports brands especially, due to their focus on quality and buyer retention, should consciously cultivate KOCs who are real sports lovers and can relate more to consumers.

Six More Chinese Values that are Relevant for Your Business in China.



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The 7-part whitepaper series *Chinese Sports Consumer Values* builds on Trendbüro's *Chinese Consumer Value Index 2019* – the first-ever quantitative and qualitative analysis of Chinese consumer values, based on 7.7 million user-generated posts from Sina Weibo and WeChat. An international team of researchers applied the CCVI's findings to the Chinese sports and outdoor industry, complete with best practice examples and business implications.

Pictures: The images shown are pictures from companies were selected as best practices, otherwise sketch illustrations were created to underline the context of the values.