



How Sina Weibo can be used to extend your reach in Mainland China

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Learn how the top 10 global apparel brands are using social media marketing in Mainland China.



Klarity Reports

INTRODUCTION

In May 2013, WPP and Millward Brown released their **2013 BrandZ Top 100 List** naming the most valuable brands in the world. In the apparel category, Zara, with a brand value of over \$20 billion, surpassed Nike as the most valuable apparel brand worldwide. H&M, Zara's biggest competitor, took third place at almost \$13 billion while Canada-based yoga and lifestyle brand Lululemon, with a value of over \$3.7 billion, is a new face on the list, which came into the 6th place.

According to eMarketer's research, Facebook is the leading social media platform in the world. Data shows that 51% of all Internet users visit Facebook at least once a month. Actually, this is not a surprise.

However, following Facebook, things get more interesting. The remaining 4 of the top 5 social media networks fall in very close competition, with Sina Weibo, the popular Mainland Chinese platform, coming in fifth place. It accounted for 21% penetration of active Internet users, just 1% less than Twitter. That's definitely a surprise.

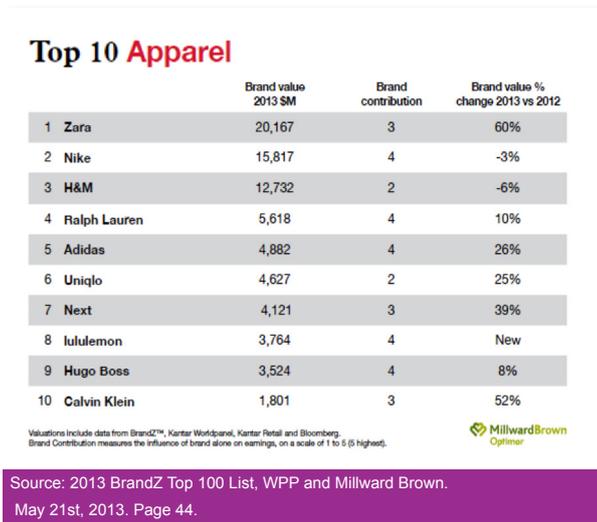


Diagram 1: Top 10 Apparel Brands

It cannot be denied that the competition among the apparel industry is increasingly fierce. As social networks become increasingly popular and social technologies become more mature, companies are quickly being convinced of the power behind social media. A new battlefield for online marketing and promotions is developing, and brands are scrambling to position themselves to gain the competitive edge.

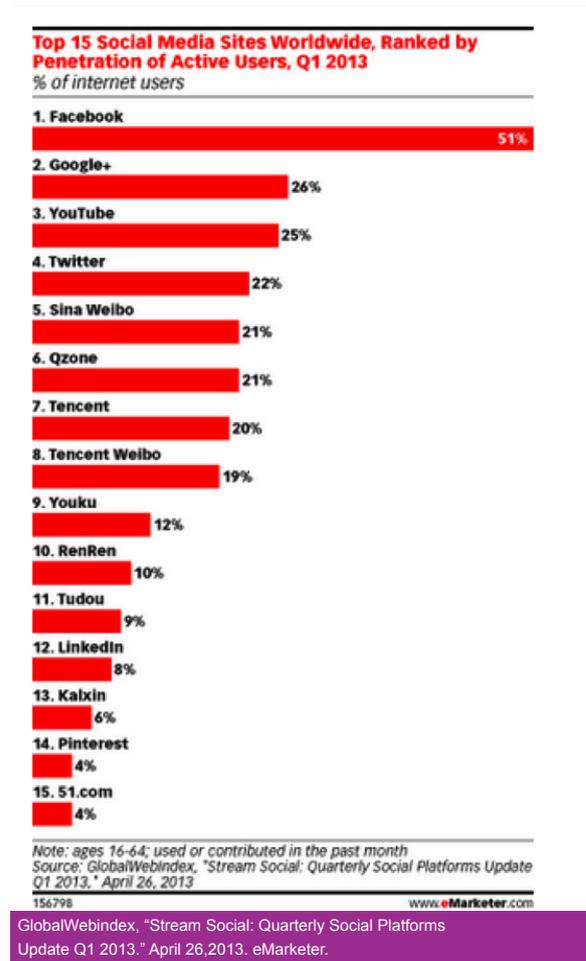


Diagram 2: Top 15 Social Media Networks

Furthermore, 9 out of the 15 top social media sites in the world are based in Mainland China. That accounts for 60%.

According to Sina Weibo's March 2013 financial report, the social network had over 5.36 billion registered users with 498 million being daily active users. Research from DCCI says Sina Weibo users accounts for 87.67% of Internet users in Mainland China. Without a doubt, Sina Weibo is the leading Chinese social media platform.

Following the trend of online marketing, a large number of companies, both local and abroad, spend a large fortune and a lot of time in managing their Sina Weibo official account. From this, the term "Weibo Marketing" was coined.

As of February 2012, 130,000 companies had official Sina Weibo corporate accounts. Among them, about 5,000 are within apparel business, being 4% of the total.

How are the top 10 international apparel brands performing on Sina Weibo? It is interesting to note that only 7 of the 10 have registered accounts. Ralph Lauren (no. 4), Next (no. 7) and Lululemon (no. 8) have yet to register an official Sina Weibo account.

In this report, we will explore the performance of the 7 apparel brands with Sina Weibo accounts, and highlight what the other 3 brands are missing out on. Data was collected from 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2013. We will provide an in-depth analysis from two perspectives in terms of Followers' information (the extent of their reach) and Wallpost performance (effectiveness of their engagement), along with relevant case studies to comprehensively evaluate how the top apparel brands are using Sina Weibo, whether they are successful, and to shed new light providing references to other apparel brands on Sina Weibo marketing.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- The sports/casual wear brands performed better in the number of Followers compared with fashion apparel brands.
- Among the top 7 apparel brands with Sina Weibo corporate pages, female Followers accounted for a large portion, especially for Zara and H&M. But Hugo Boss and Nike attracted more male Followers than female.
- People from China's coastal provinces/cities are more likely to follow apparel brands on Sina Weibo.
- By Wallpost count, sports/casual wear brands were more active than fashion wear ones.
- Measured by number of Comments and Reposts, Uniqlo had the best-quality Wallposts, with H&M taking second place.
- Zara used the Sina Weibo network as one of their advertising platforms to promote its online shopping service and products. Due to this, it successfully increased its brand awareness in China.
- Reposts are the key to make things go viral on Sina Weibo.
- Since 2011, Uniqlo organised 43 online events which proved to be a cost-effective method to increase people's attention and Repost number.
- Nike is experienced in associated account interactive marketing. With this marketing strategy, a Wallpost may reach Followers more than once which produces continual influence on Sina Weibo.

FOLLOWERS INFORMATION

Followers Growth

The 7 top apparel brands that have Sina Weibo corporate pages can basically be divided into two sub-categories, namely fashion wear i.e. CalvinKlein, H&M, HUGO BOSS and Zara, and sports/casual wear i.e. adidasHK, Nike Store and Uniqlo.

From an overall perspective, the sports/casual wear brands performed better in developing an audience-base compared with the fashion wear ones. As of 30 June 2013, sports/casual wear had an average of about 400,000 Followers while the fashion wear averaged about 246,000.

During the analysis period, sports/casual wear brands had the most Followers and showed to be faster in growth. Uniqlo, a Japanese-based casual wear brand, attracted 992,380 Followers to its official Sina Weibo page increasing 289.71% over the six month period, far outstripping the rest of the Sina Weibo accounts. H&M (502,863 Followers) and Zara (326,819 Followers) ranked second and third place respectively.

Brand	Followers	Followers Growth
 ZARA_CN	326,819	36,200 ↑12.46%
 HM中国	502,863	122,089 ↑32.06%
 雨果博斯HUGOBOSS	101,916	43,894 ↑75.65%
 CalvinKlein	53,807	16,983 ↑46.12%
 NikeStore	131,213	42,047 ↑47.16%
 adidasHK	80,591	13,093 ↑19.40%
 优衣库_UNIQLO	992,380	737,733 ↑289.71%

Diagram 3: Number of Followers & Follower Growth

Followers Gender

Among the 7 top apparel brands, female Followers accounted for a large portion for most of the Sina Weibo accounts, especially in the case of Zara and H&M. For these brands, female Followers accounted for 80.7% and 73.9% respectively, over twice as much as their male Followers.

This is due to their male-dominated marketing position, which was their niche from the start.

The exception to the rule was Hugo Boss and Nike, which attracted more male Followers than female.

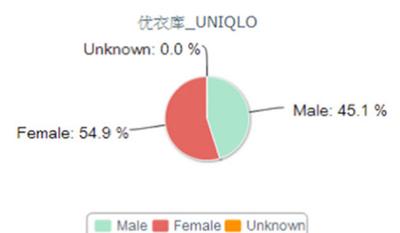
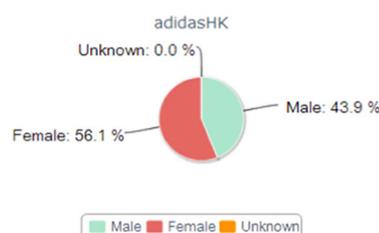
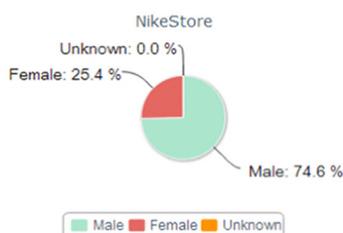
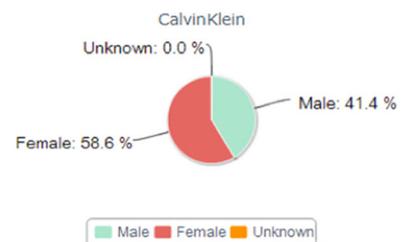
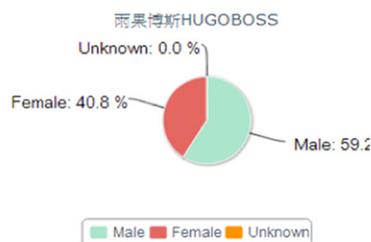
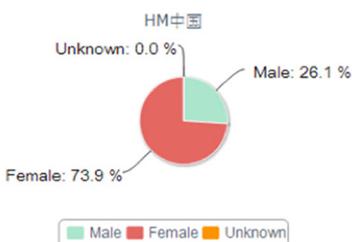
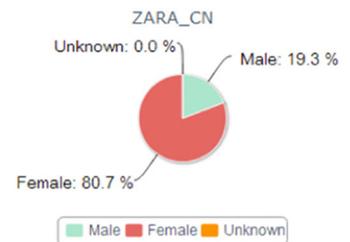
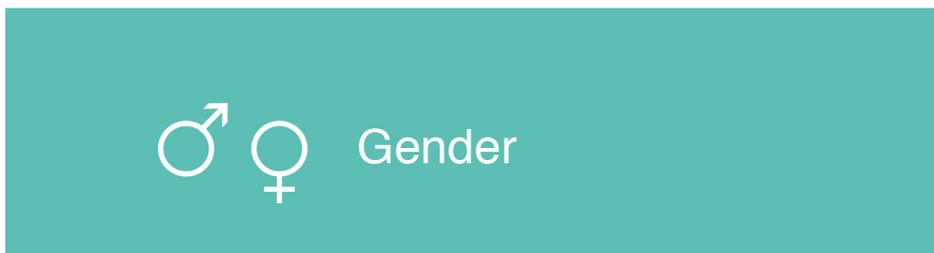


Diagram 4: Followers Gender

Followers Geographics

Diagram 5 shows that people from Mainland China's coastal provinces/cities – Guangdong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces and Shanghai city for instance – are more likely to follow apparel brands on Sina Weibo. It is also noteworthy that Guangdong province came in top in regards to location of Followers for all the 7 brands. Following Guangdong province, Beijing and Shanghai cities, Zhejiang Province and Fujian

Province all were very close to second and third place.

With an absolute geographic advantage and government support, Mainland China's coastal provinces/cities are generally more economically prosperous. Therefore, these locations definitely hold tremendous market potential for international apparel brands.

Followers Location

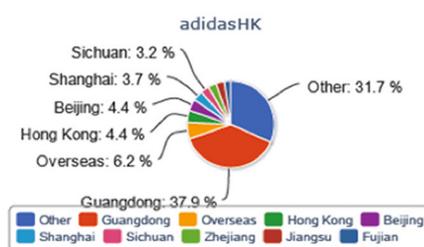
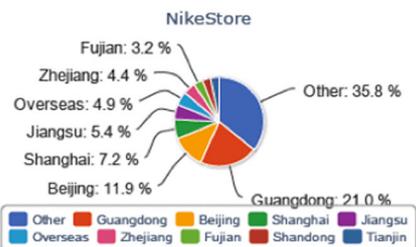
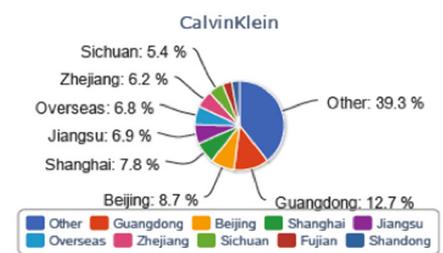
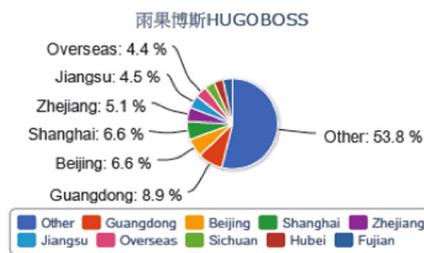
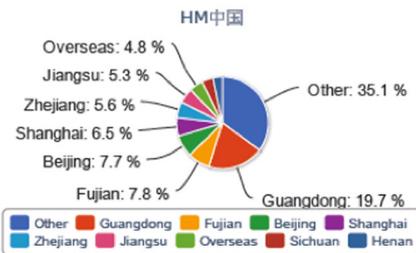
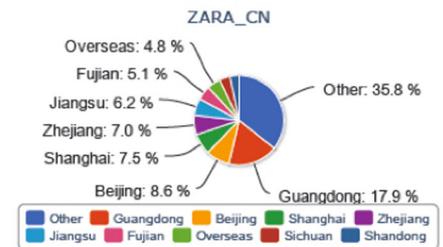


Diagram 5: Followers Location

WALLPOST PERFORMANCE

Wallposts - Quantity

A quick way to evaluate a company's attention to Sina Weibo marketing is to look at the number of Wallposts. By comparison, sports/casual wear brands put more emphasis on management of the social platform versus fashion wear brands.

From 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2013, Uniqlo took the lead by a significant margin with the most Wallposts, 2,323. Uniqlo published on average between 10 to 18 Wallposts per day, and reached over 20 posts for some days.

However, the rest brands maintained less than 1,000 Wallposts during the entire 6-month period. In fact, Zara only posted 46 messages.

Total Number of Wallposts	
ZARA_CN	46 Wallposts
HM中国	819 Wallposts
雨果博斯HUGOBOSS	343 Wallposts
CalvinKlein	96 Wallposts
NikeStore	348 Wallposts
adidasHK	504 Wallposts
UNIQLO 优衣库_UNIQLO	2,323 Wallposts

Diagram 6: Number of Wallposts

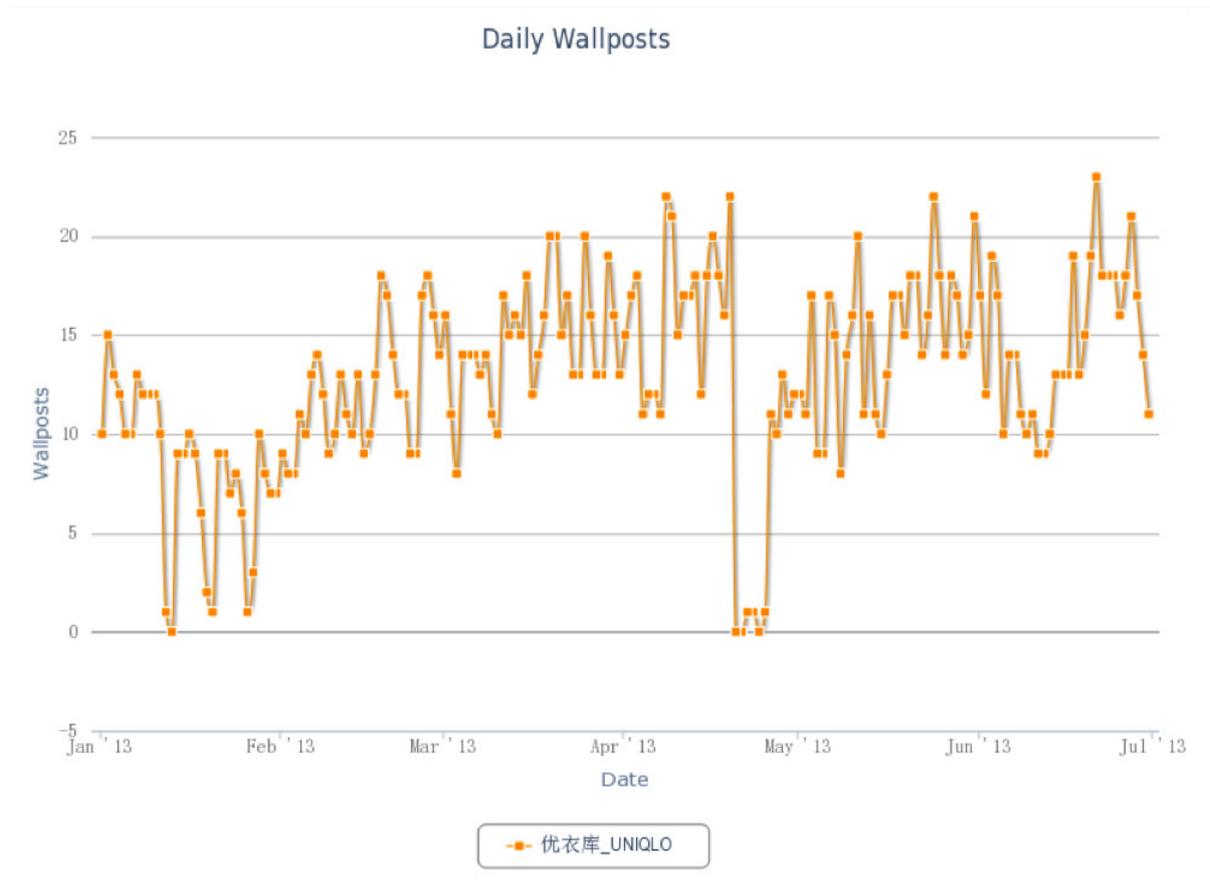


Diagram 7: Number of Wallposts published by Uniqlo

Wallposts - Quality

On the Sina Weibo platform, Followers' interaction can be divided into Comments and Reposts. These two aspects are directly interrelated with the content of the respective Wallposts. But many marketers are still wondering what is the true relationship between Comments/Reposts and the quality of a Wallpost? Do more Comments and Reposts mean a more successful Wallpost?

Let's examine the Reposts first. Reposts are essentially sharing a Wallpost with others. A higher number Reposts can be directly linked to a more interesting Wallpost. Therefore it can be truly said that more Reposts reflect a more successful Wallpost.

Comments are a little more tricky. As Comments are very subjective, they could be conveying positive as well as negative messages. So, one cannot just look at the numbers. To get an accurate understanding of the success of a Wallpost in regards to Comments, one also has to analyse the sentiment as well.

Uniqlo and H&M, which had the most and the second-most number of Wallposts, do follow the so-called "quantity" rule. Diagram 8 illustrates that on average one published Wallpost will have about 468 Comments and 534 Reposts for Uniqlo, while in the case of H&M, approximately 135 Comments and 234 Reposts. If measured solely by quantity, the Uniqlo Wallposts performed better than the H&M ones.

More interestingly, adidasHK which had the third highest number of Wallposts among the brands actually received the lowest number of Comments and Reposts. If adidasHK posts a message on Sina Weibo, we can roughly estimate that it will get 11 Comments and 22 Reposts. However, as the publisher with the fewest number of Wallposts, Zara only had 46 Wallposts during the 6-months. They received an average of 79 Comments per Wallpost, making it the ranking third in terms of Wallpost quality.

What is the secret to the success of Zara's Wallposts? The case study provides more insight.

Brand Name	Wallpost Number	Comment Number	Comment per wallpost	Repost Number	Repost per wallpost
Zara	46	3,623	78.76	3,873	84.20
H&M	819	110,500	134.92	192,007	234.44
Hugo Boss	343	3,985	11.62	37,234	108.55
CalvinKlein	96	1,723	17.95	6,859	71.45
Nike	348	23,356	67.11	37,670	108.25
Adidas	504	5,381	10.68	11,225	22.27
Uniqlo	2,323	1,088,061	468.39	1,239,827	533.72

Diagram 8: Wallposts Quality

Comments

To gain a thorough understanding of the interactive behaviour of Followers, it is necessary to in-depth and analyse their comments.

From Diagram 9, we see that Uniqlo leads the pack in the number of Comments with over 1 million in total during the 6-month period. H&M, receiving just over 100,000 Comments, came in second place. Following at a distance third was NikeStore with just over 23,000 Comments.

If we only look at the quantity of Comments, then Zara's performance might appear quite poor – achieving only 3,623 Comments and ranking second last. However, as mentioned, comparative to the number of Wallposts published, the ratio can be considered quite high.

It's important to understand that a high interaction rate and high-quality Wallpost is not a one-way causal relationship. Put simply, Followers interact with a Sina Weibo page not only because of the Wallpost itself, but they are also guided consciously and unconsciously to do so. For example, a Follower tends to leave a Comment when he or she sees that many other Sina Weibo users have left Comments or someone he or she is familiar with has already left a Comment. Many times a Wallpost's content actually takes second place. Peer imitation plays a significant role in pushing users to interact with a Sina Weibo homepage.

Total Number of Comments	
ZARA_CN	3,623 Comments
HM中国	110,500 Comments
雨果博斯HUGOBOSS	3,985 Comments
CalvinKlein	1,723 Comments
NikeStore	23,356 Comments
adidasHK	5,381 Comments
优衣库_UNIQLO	1,088,061 Comments

Diagram 9: Number of Comments

Followers' first interaction is very hard to achieve. However, when the first interaction is done, it's much easier for users to interact for the second time and the third time, and thus user behaviour is unconsciously shaped. You might even discover that users will leave a Comment or Repost a message even though the Wallpost itself may not be very interesting or engaging.

This has been basically the path that Uniqlo has followed. Over the past 6-months, they have been flooding their Followers with Wallpost, relying on this psychology. However, Zara has used a much more focused strategy, develop a select number of Wallpost with premium content to create engagement and value.

Case Study - ZARA

Zara is a Spanish clothing and accessories retailer. It's quite similar to H&M in operation mode and custom design, but Zara pitches to a higher-end consumer market than H&M does.

Below are the top three Wallposts with the most Comments from 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2013. Do you see anything in common? All of them are about sales and products. But is this strategy too much of a hard-sell?

Translation:

All the Zara shops in mainland China are on sale from today!

#ZARA Sale# SALE starts today 今天起Zara中国大陆所有门店开始打折！



6月21日09:00 来自皮皮时光机

转发(1195) | 收藏 | 评论(916)

#ZARA##Lookbook# Kids February <http://t.cn/zYJaaC8>



2月13日17:08 来自iPad客户端

转发(419) | 收藏 | 评论(258)

Translation:

In order to celebrate Chinese New Year, Zara is now selling two limited- edition ladies shoes.

為迎接中国传统新年即将到来，Zara推出了两款新年限定款女鞋。 <http://t.cn/zWRz1Xr>



1月25日17:42 来自专业版微博

转发(141) | 收藏 | 评论(119)

Photo cached from Zara Sina Weibo @ZARA_CN

Diagram 10: Top 3 Zara Wallposts

To answer this question we need to look at some background information in regards to Zara's business strategy in Mainland China. Zara has long been competing with H&M in the Chinese market. H&M pumped a lot of capital into product promotion and shops all over the country. Zara, however, is relatively low key. Chinese consumers' demand for Zara's clothing is quite high, but the number of local shops cannot satisfy this demand. Some cities in Mainland China don't even have one Zara store.

To address this problem Zara launched an online shopping store, and used Sina Weibo as one of their advertising platforms to promote it. Zara only published Wallposts about their new products and new store openings in Mainland China. When introducing products, every Wallpost also included the online shopping link. And for this season, Zara promoted a free delivery service for customers if they purchased over 299 Yuan online

In summary, from the Zara case study we can see that even a small number of Wallposts can still generate large audience interest, foster interaction and create engagement.

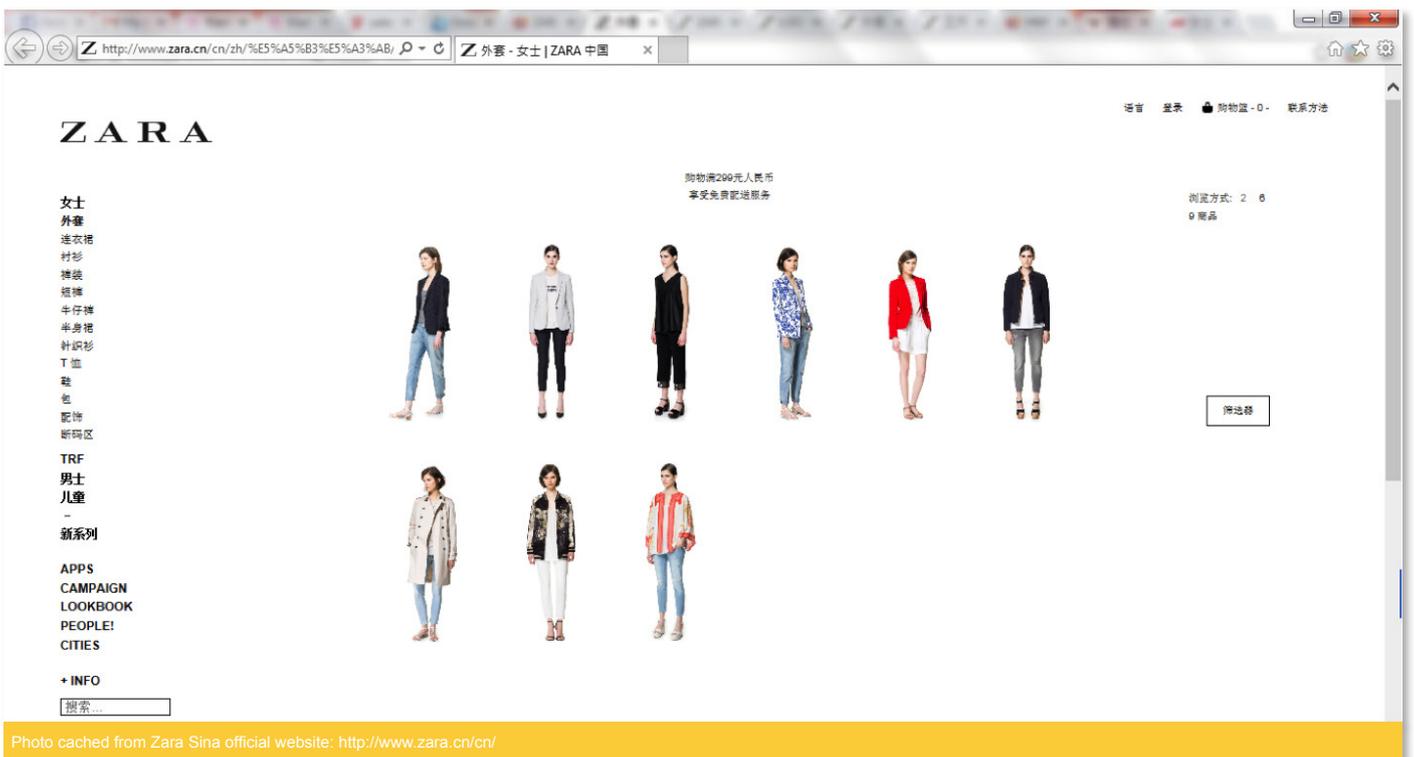


Diagram 11: Official Zara China Website

Reposts

We have often heard that certain stories can go viral on social media. But how can one actually achieve this? Is Reposting truly the “magic” of Sina Weibo?

Generally marketers have a very high expectation of the marketing power of Reposts on Sina Weibo due to its so-called “magic” of spreading messages. Comments are only bilateral interactions between a brand and a Follower. Reposts, however, are equivalent to sharing a message on the Follower’s own page or even tag someone in the shared post, so that Followers of the Follower can also see the message. Depending on the number of friends a Follower has, Reposted messages may even give rise to another wave of discussions on the Sina Weibo platform, which is called “second spreading”. This multidirectional interaction is much more effective to make things go viral.

According to statistics, Uniqlo received just over 1.2 million Reposts (or shares) during the past six months. This ranks the brand in first place in terms of number of Reposts. Falling in very distant second and third places are H&M and Nike respectively.

The following case study looks in detail as to the Uniqlo strategy.

Total Number of Reposts	
ZARA_CN	3,873 Reposts
H&M 中国	192,007 Reposts
雨果博斯HUGOBOSS	37,234 Reposts
CalvinKlein	6,859 Reposts
NikeStore	37,670 Reposts
adidasHK	11,225 Reposts
UNIQLO 优衣库_UNIQLO	1,239,827 Reposts

Diagram 12: Number of Reposts

Case Study - UNIQLO

This case study analyses Uniqlo's Sina Weibo promotional strategy, which is an excellent example on how to achieve interaction and engagement.

According to diagram 13, Uniqlo was able to generate over 300,000 Reposts on 8 April 2013. This was the highest daily response during the six-month period from 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2013.

But what spawned this engagement from its Followers?

On 8 April 2013, Uniqlo published 22 Wallposts – 15 of which were product-related, 4 promotional events and the remaining 3 were general greeting messages. One specific online event launched at that day stirred up more than 257,000 Reposts. Using this online event strategy on the Sina Weibo platform was the key to Uniqlo's success in fostering interaction and engagement.

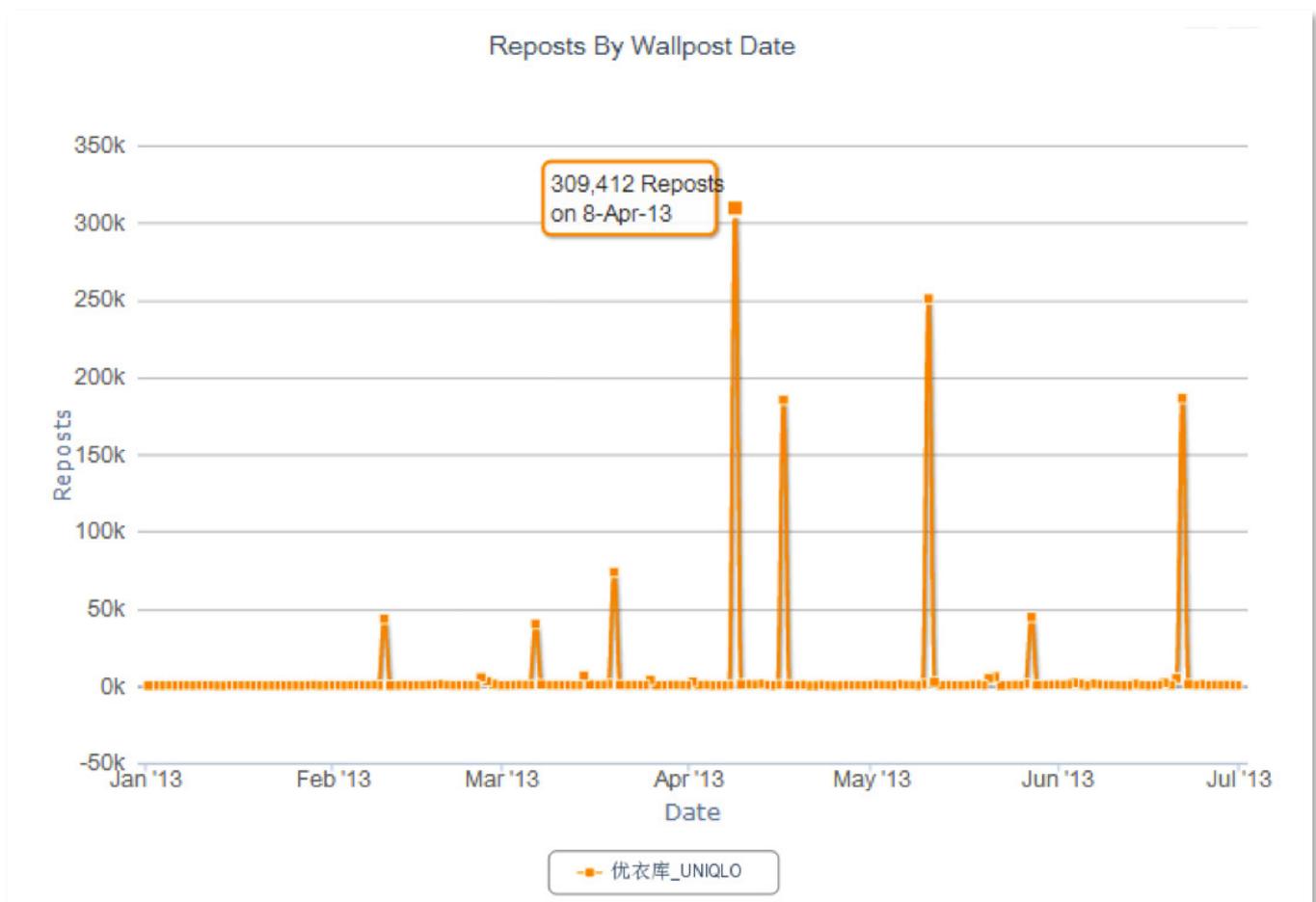


Diagram 13: Uniqlo Reposts by Wallpost Date

#店庆 四周年# 优衣库官方网店已经成立四周年啦！为感谢优星人对优衣库的支持与喜爱，4月8日至4月11日，优衣库天猫旗舰店全品8折，转发此微博并@三位好友，还有机会获得千元优衣库网店红包！赶快行动起来吧！活动仅限优衣库天猫旗舰店：<http://t.cn/hbr0dG> <http://t.cn/zTb5m0o>



4月8日10:54 来自微活动-优衣库天... 转发(257548) | 收藏 | 评论(283525)

Photo cached from UNIQLO Sina Weibo @ 优衣库_UNIQLO

Diagram 14: Uniqlo Wallpost Event on 8 April 2013

Translation: #Four year anniversary# Uniqlo's official website has been set up for 4 years. To thank our Followers' for their support, Uniqlo online shopping store will have a 20% discount from April 8th to April 11th. Followers who share this post with 3 friends will have an opportunity to receive a prize worth CNY1,000, only for online shopping. Come on and join us! This event is only available on the Uniqlo online shopping store.

In order to celebrate the four-year anniversary of Uniqlo's official website, the brand used its Sina Weibo page to launch a "Repost with prize" type of online event on 8 April 2013. Uniqlo's Followers were encouraged to Repost this online event Wallpost, and share it with three friends by tagging their Sina Weibo account. By doing this, they would have an opportunity to win a prize. As a result, a large number of Followers joined in the event.

In fact this was not the first time Uniqlo used this strategy. Since 2011, Uniqlo organised 43 similar Sina Weibo online events. Actually, the prizes themselves were not expensive, for example a T-shirt worth 100 Yuan. Therefore, these types of continual online events on Sina Weibo can be very cost-effective while creating significant brand awareness. So the secret is not necessarily a big prize, but just to make the promotion fun and engaging.



Photo cached from UNIQLO Sina Weibo @ 优衣库_UNIQLO

Diagram 15: Uniqlo has organised 43 online events since 2011

CASE STUDY: Learning Sina Weibo Marketing Strategies from Competitors

Nike: Associated Account Interactive Marketing Strategy

Associated account interactive marketing utilises the advantages of group power to expand the coverage of information. Within a group of Sina Weibo accounts, a Wallpost can reach Followers more than once, which produces continual exposure on platform. For instance, Nike established 9 Sina Weibo accounts with different themes for different target audience, including NikeFootball, NikeBasketball, NikeRunning, NikeiD, etc. Once a promotional event is launched on Sina Weibo, all the Nike accounts work together to share the Wallpost on their respective pages. Thus, a promotional event can spread to all Nike

fans at lightning speed and last for weeks. One of Nike's recent promotions is a typical example of associated account interactive marketing. Nike wanted to sell an idea – to encourage people to come out and exercise in the summer night. The slogan for this event was #出来出来# (come out, come out), which was also the main hashtag for the event.

Just do It, Nike's leading official Weibo, published a Wallpost "if we don't do outdoor exercise in the cool summer night, do you want wait until the cold winter night? From tomorrow night, a fascinating summer is about to begin." This launched the come out, come out event.

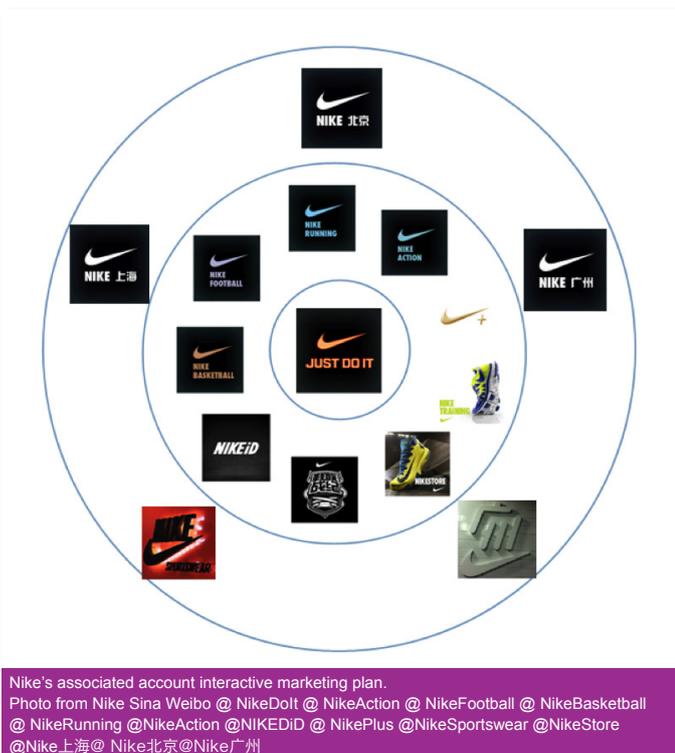


Diagram 16: Nike's Associated Account



Diagram 17: Nike Promotional Video screenshot

The next day, six of the Nike Sina Weibo accounts, including JustDolt, NikeWoman, NikeFootball, NikeBasketball, NikeRunning and NikeAction, simultaneously published a well-made promotional video at 7 p.m., 3 July 2013. Then location-based Nike accounts, such as Nike上海(Nike Shanghai), Nike北京(Nike Beijing) and Nike广州(Nike Guangzhou), shared the video one after another.

To-date, more than 900-million people participated in "Come out, come out" discussion! Showbiz stars and sports celebrities, for example 李响 and 黑人建州, also joined in the discussion, making the event even more popular and successful. Here are some tips when deploying associated account interactive marketing.

Firstly, some rules need to be followed when setting up associated accounts. When registering different brand-related Sina Weibo accounts, it is suggested to base them on products features and target audience interest.

Secondly, marketers should have a clear idea on the associated account's market positioning. The different Sina Weibo accounts should publish different types of content to maintain the interest of Followers and avoid Followers receiving the same message repeatedly.

Finally, an associated account shouldn't share another account's Wallpost blindly. Sharing must also be based on the theme and audience interest. For example, basketball-targeted NikeBasketball can share Wallposts from NikePlus or Nike上海 (Nike Shanghai), but not from NikeFootball.



Translation: HIBA team is in Shanghai this weekend, joining in the Nike Invitational Basketball Match. The sponsor has saved 100 tickets for supporters of Beijing HIBA basketball team. The first 50 people who share this post will have two tickets, which can be picked up with ID card at appointed sites. We will see you guys in Shanghai this week! #Come out, come out# @JustDolt

Translation: We will practice basketball after work today. Lovelife Basketball Team is going to play the game in Shanghai this weekend. We share our love by playing basketball... Lovelife Basketball Team will see you in Shanghai! #Come out, come out# @JustDolt

Translation: During daytime, the streets belong to travelers, passengers, businessmen and cars. But now, the streets belong to those who are on the streets. #Come out, come out#

Diagram 18: Nike's #出来出来# (#Come out, come out#) discussion board on Sina Weibo

CONCLUSION

As the largest social media platform in Mainland China, Sina Weibo plays a significant role in digital marketing and reaching that enormous population.

Among the top ten apparel brands released by WPP and Millward Brown, Zara, Nike, H&M, Adidas, Uniqlo, Hugo Boss, and Calvin Klein have already started to explore the Sina Weibo marketing world. Particularly, Uniqlo, H&M, Nike and Zara are all launching innovative promotional activities and taking advantage of the social network. Unfortunately though, Ralph Lauren, Next and Lululemon are missing out.

By looking at how these brands are using Sina Weibo, we were able to gain some insights on the different marketing strategies used by the top 10 apparel brands. We also see that when used properly, the Sina Weibo platform can be an excellent way to interact and engage with your audience.

Stephy Tang is a Social Media Professional at the Social Media Broadcasts (SMB) Limited Hong Kong office.

REFERENCE

1. GlobalWebIndex, "Stream Social: Quarterly, Social Platforms Updated Q1 2013." 26 April 2013. eMarketer.
2. 2013 BrandZ Top 100 List, WPP and Millward, Brown. 21 May 2013. Page 44.
3. The Sina Weibo data for this report was obtain through the Klarity analytical dashboard. Klarity is a dashboard-styled platform aggregating social media "big data", analysing the information collected and presenting it in a meaningful manner.

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