

WEIBO AND ITS POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS ON CHINA

YANG Lijun & CAO Shenshen

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Executive Summary

1. China has witnessed rapid growth of micro-blogs or weibo since 2007. Weibo users surged from 63 million in 2010 to 250 million in end 2011. In comparison, it took Twitter four years to reach 195 million users. The weibo penetration rate is 48.7% of Chinese netizens.
2. China's Weibo users are higher educated than its ordinary internet users. About 67% of Sina Weibo users hold a college degree or higher compared to only 23% of the netizens.
3. Weibo users are younger. About 76% of Sina Weibo users are between 19 and 30 years old. They reside mostly in economically developed regions such as in coastal provinces and metropolises like Guangdong, Beijing and Shanghai.
4. The rapid growth of weibo has social and political consequences. In 2011, seven out of ten crises were related to weibo disclosure or live broadcasting. Weibo-related social events include the "7.23 high-speed train crash" and "Guo Meimei-Red Cross scandal."
5. As each weibo message is limited to 140 characters, the fragmented information accelerates the speed, frequency, reach and impact of information. Users can develop a personalized source of information on weibo platform by the "forward" and "follow" features.
6. Netizens now play an important role in the media as they are able to generate, disseminate and receive messages at the same time. With weibo, information can be posted online anytime, anywhere and by anyone. There is no longer a hierarchy when it comes to sources of news. Weibo has greatly lowered the entry barrier to voicing one's opinion.

7. Opinion leaders are key disseminators. After receiving the news, they will resend it with their own comments to their followers; so news spread like wildfire.
8. Although the Chinese government has exercised tight censorship over the internet for many years, netizens have managed to evade internet control. Chinese netizens have thus gained political power in their own way.
9. Weibo is also an effective platform for the government to communicate with the public. By the end of 2011, the number of certificated Chinese government weibo accounts had reached 50,561, a 777% increase from the previous year. Through the weibo, the government can react to a crisis or accident within a short time.
10. Weibo plays an important role in supervising government officials; it helps the Chinese government to take action or make adjustments to its policy practice as well as improve its governance and strengthen its legitimacy. However, how to manage weibo effectively in an age of globalization and fast changing technology remains a daunting challenge for the Chinese government.