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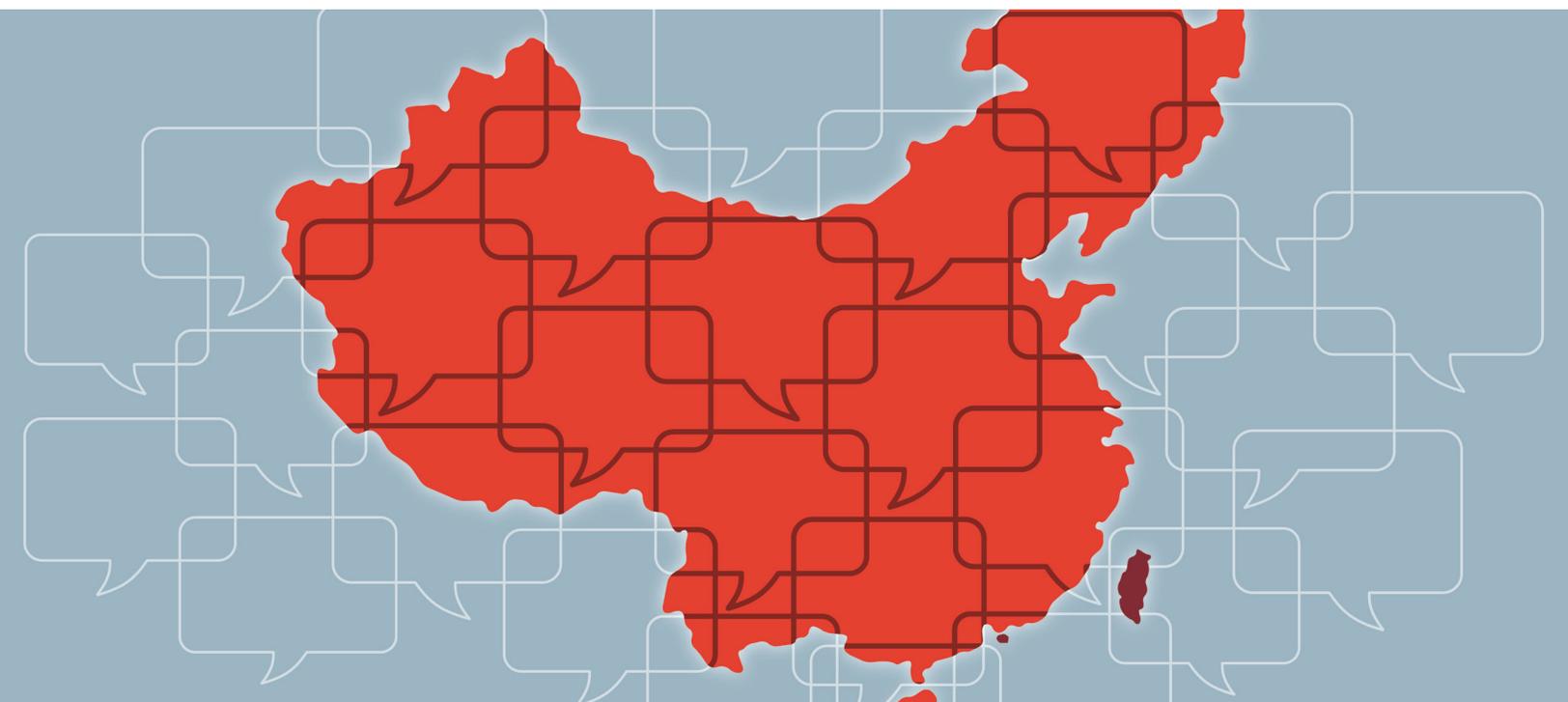
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China's social-media boom

The country has by far the world's most active social-media users, a new study finds.

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Social media is exploding worldwide, and China is leading the way. A new McKinsey survey of 5,700 Internet users in China has found that 95 percent of them who live in Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 cities are registered on a social-media site;¹ in addition, the country has by far the world's most active social-media population, with 91 percent of respondents saying they visited a social-media site in the previous six months, compared with 30 percent in Japan, 67 percent in the United States, and 70 percent in South Korea. The survey, which explores the behavior of Chinese consumers on social networks, is the first of its kind in China. (Read the full report, *China's social-media boom*, on McKinsey's Greater China Web site, mckinseychina.com.)

One aspect of social-media usage in China stands out compared with that of other countries: it has a greater influence on purchasing decisions for consumers in China than for those anywhere else in the world. Chinese consumers say they are more likely to consider buying a product if they see it discussed positively on a social-media site, and more likely to actually purchase a product or service if a friend or acquaintance recommends it on a social-media site. This can be explained at least in part by a cultural difference: Chinese consumers disproportionately value peer-to-peer recommendations, as the Chinese are more skeptical of formal institutions.

China's unique social-media landscape

Chinese consumers gain access to the Internet primarily through personal computers; however, they are moving quickly to mobile devices. About 50 percent of mobile-phone users in our survey said they were planning to buy a smartphone in the next six months, 35 percent said they have used a tablet computer, and one-fourth of consumers who do not own a tablet computer said they plan to buy one in the next year.

Local social-media sites dominate the landscape—while Facebook and Twitter are fixtures of daily online use in the West and in other Asian countries, China has no access to these sites. In our survey, Chinese consumers identified the following social-media sites as their favorites: Qzone, which 44 percent of respondents said they use the most; Sina Weibo and Renren, each favorited by 19 percent of those surveyed; Tencent Weibo, 8 percent; and Kaixin, 7 percent.

The survey elicited several other important findings:

- Chinese social-media sites are already nearly as important as portals are as an entry point to obtain content; 40 percent of personal-computer users said portals are their preferred sites for this use, while 36 percent opted for social-media sites. Search is still by far the largest source of content, with 80 percent of users employing that tool.

¹The Tier 1 Chinese cities are Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. Tier 2 cities have a population closer to 5 million people, and Tier 3 cities have about 2.5 million people.

- Chinese Internet users spend more time on social-media sites than their counterparts do in Japan and the United States. Consumers in China, for example, spend 46 minutes a day visiting social-media sites, compared with 7 minutes in Japan and 37 minutes in the United States.
- Different social-media sites attract different kinds of users. For example, consumers who favor Sina Weibo tend to be in higher income brackets, earning more than 8,000 renminbi (about \$1,300) a month, and are much more likely to live in Tier 1 cities.

China's distinct social-media users

To better understand Chinese social-media users, we segmented them into six groups based on motivation and behavior:

- *Social enthusiasts* spend a large portion of their time maintaining friendship networks; they account for about 15 percent of social-media users.
- *Resenders*, who account for 15 percent of participants, actively repost messages, such as jokes, from other sources. Although they do not post original material, they often have large numbers of followers.
- *Readers* generally do not participate but read what others have posted. They make up about 14 percent of users.
- *Opinionated users*, comprising about 14 percent of participants on social-media sites, express their own (often strong) opinions and build large personal followings.
- *QQ spillovers* gain access to social-media sites through their use of Tencent's QQ instant-messaging service. While this group accounts for 21 percent of the audience for social media, participation from these users is minimal.
- *Inactives* belong to social-media sites but do not participate in a meaningful way.

The eager adoption by Chinese consumers of social media has created unique opportunities for companies that want to gain insights about, and to engage with, a vast and increasingly affluent market. Companies that want to tap into the power of social media should understand the landscape and different types of users to glean insights and engage consumers. ○