FOREWORD

The Apps Issue

As mobile continues to make the world smaller and communication easier, the speed of change in society has never been faster. Our fingers are jumping between apps on our phones to chat, read, watch and express feelings. Apps are continually reshaping the way we communicate and consume content at a fundamental level.

Mobile trends influence all industries, few more so than sports. Digital technology, mobile data and new social media channels have dramatically changed fan’s behaviours and how they engage with their favorite teams and athletes through their phones, which have now become an extension of their arms and minds.

As the leader of your sports organisation, remaining informed about your fans through local top apps trends means a lot when devising your marketing strategy. When you understand your target audience better, you will see where opportunities lying.

This report is all about the top apps for sports fans in China. We are confident it will prove instrumental in helping you prepare for another big growth in this fascinating market.

We hope you enjoy reading it. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if you would like more information.

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TOP 10 APPS YOU NEED TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR FANS IN CHINA

How do mobile apps reshape fan behaviour? What does this mean to you?

Smartphones hold the attention of the world. Nowhere is this statement truer than in China where absolutely everything can be done through a smartphone, be it calling a friend, shopping or paying utility bills. As attention has moved mobile, so too have online resources. Having an app is now an absolute must for virtually all media, commercial and social platforms.

Sports apps have been relatively slow to take off in China, however, this is now changing and apps are seeing growth across the board. This increase in popularity comes down to the opportunities that apps afford. Some platforms have been encouraged to move from traditional websites to apps due to their ability to integrate many more features, including e-commerce platforms linked to the widely used WeChat Pay or Alipay.
One interesting trend that has recently become clear is how specific Chinese fan preferences are. Very few sports fans regularly use more than one app for their sports news and content. As such, choosing the right sports app to target or partner with is crucial and depends on the specific fan base of the club.

Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) have also emerged as being increasingly important in rallying fans. They are seen as trustworthy sources that are more relatable than traditional club outlets. It is very important to get the key KOLs on board when first growing your official presence on China’s sports apps.

Here is our list of the top 10 apps that you need to know about when looking to activate and engage with your Chinese fan base.
THE KEY PLAYERS

Monthly Active Users
Data source: Analysys (Feb 2017)

- WeChat (Weixin): 938,000,000 users
- Sina Weibo: 340,000,000 users
- Tencent Sports: 4,646,000 users
- LeSports: 4,112,600 users
- Zhibo 8: 3,822,400 users
- Dongqiudi: 3,026,000 users
- Hupu Sports: 1,934,100 users
- Sina Sports: 1,858,700 users
- Zhangyu TV: 1,588,100 users
- Baofeng Sports: 1,076,000 users
WeChat (Weixin)
938,000,000 monthly active users
Social Media Platform

WeChat is China’s biggest social network. Starting out as an instant messaging app, it now combines the functionality of Facebook, Whatsapp, Paypal, Viber, Shazam, Uber and many more, to make up the ‘super app’. It enables brands and organisations to push content to subscribers, and interact with them. It is the ultimate CRM tool.

OUR TAKE:
WeChat is an extremely powerful platform for established clubs and organisations to interact and deepen relationships with established fans, ensuring they’re kept close. WeChat is the ultimate CRM platform but only for those who have the luxury of a strong following.

Sina Weibo
340,000,000 monthly active users
Social Media Platform

Often referred to as “Chinese Twitter”, Weibo now boasts a larger userbase and is more valuable than the platform it began by emulating. It is a far more comprehensive platform, innovating and incorporating new features much better than its western counterpart.

OUR TAKE:
It’s where Chinese consumers go to find out new things so it’s the perfect place to begin to build your fanbase in China, an official, localised Weibo account is a must have.
**Tencent Sports**
4,646,000 monthly active users
Live Coverage & Community

The number 1 sports app in China. It offers customised sports news updates, fixture schedules, live coverage, online games and e-commerce services. Tencent Sports offers exclusive live content for the NBA, French Open, FIFA Confederation Cup and Wimbledon Championships in China.

👍 Well established sports fan community feature with strong links to the NBA and other sports which Tencent owns the rights to.

👎 The NBA community is well established however other sports are still playing catch up.

**OUR TAKE:**
The large user base offers opportunities to establish strong communities, however, it is not the best platform to service your core fans in any sport other than basketball.

**LeSports**
4,112,600 monthly active users
Live Coverage & Community

Provides customised sports news updates, game schedules, videos, gaming, e-commerce service and sports tourism products. LeSports offers live coverage for MLB, F1 and NFL games.

👍 Quite similar to Tencent Sports, the app has a well incorporated community feature, based on the broadcasting rights they used to have.

👎 Lack of high-end rights and the spending power to really move with the times and innovate.

**OUR TAKE:**
LeSports, and parent company LeEco, have fallen on very tough times and have been forced to surrender most of their headline broadcasting rights deals along with making huge spending cuts. They gambled on the Chinese fan being ready and willing to pay for content and lost big time. With the rights gone, the active users are in sharp decline.
Zhibo 8
3,822,400 monthly active users
Live Coverage
Zhibo 8 offers fixture schedules for basketball and football. It also links users to other apps for watching live coverage. Zhibo 8 has customised game reviews, news updates and athlete data.

A well established app with solid the reputation of Zhibo8.com behind it, there is also a well established fan community that uses the app.

It doesn't own any media rights and therefore may fall into issues over rights as it gets more popular and regulations tighten.

OUR TAKE:
The apps traffic is decent and fans are required to log in with an account so there is an opportunity for targeted advertising, however, there is a good chance the app will eventually fall foul of copyright issues.

Dongqiudi
3,026,000 monthly active users
Football News & Community
Dongqiudi offers global football news, in-depth coverage, live scores, athlete, team and game data, e-stores, gaming and football lottery community.

Popular with lots of football fans in China. The most active online fan community in China.

The CEO and senior management team of Dongqiudi are not very well know within the sports community which has lead to relatively slow growth.

OUR TAKE:
This is a great platform to interact with active and established fans. The user base is increasing along with its reputation. We expect this to be an industry leader in the near future.
HUPU Sports
1,934,100 monthly active users
Sports News and Fan Forums

HUPU started with popular sports forums and fan communities. Now, the HUPU app incorporates news updates, team & league introductions in various sports and e-stores. The app also integrated third party providers, for example sports facility reservation service, ticketing platforms and nutrition products.

One of the most well regarded sports fan apps in China. Well developed grassroots community that has been established for over a decade on their online platform.

Doesn’t offer any very worthwhile official presence benefits on the app.

OUR TAKE:
HUPU has developed a strong online community through their football and basketball forums but face a challenge to keep up with newer apps.

Sina Sports
1,858,700 monthly active users
Sports News & Coverage

Sina Sports app offers customised news for many sports including basketball, football, running, tennis, golf, horse riding and motor racing. For each game, it provides real-time updates, game highlights, live data and chat rooms. The social community discussion and team popularity ranking section is similar to an online forum. Sina have recently done deals with major sporting events like Wimbledon.

Backed by the most popular sports portal in China, Sina Sports.

Sina Sports no longer focuses on live sports content, instead working with sports organisations and clubs on contra deals.

OUR TAKE:
The app is still extremely popular and has become similar to the BBC Sports of China.
**Zhangyu TV**
1,588,100 monthly active users
Event Broadcasting
Zhangyu provides live sports broadcasts. Its USP is that it allows sports fans to act as commentators or hosts for any sports games, including snooker, wrestling, baseball and basketball. Commentaries can even be found in local Chinese dialects.

**OUR TAKE:**
Live streaming is still a great way of approaching fans. However, ever increasing censorship of live streaming content from the government is stifling once rapid growth. Live streaming from areas outside of China is now fraught with difficulties.

**Baofeng Sports**
1,076,000 monthly active users
Live Coverage
Baofeng Sports offers customised sports news updates, videos and VR content primarily focussing on football, including Premier Liga, La Liga, Bundesliga and European Cup. It also offers live coverage of the CBA, CSL and Bundesliga.

**OUR TAKE:**
The recent acquisition of one of the biggest sports companies in China shows the ambition and innovation in the company.

They are not popular in China at all. Not many sports fans really know the company so growth is unlikely to be rapid.

**OUR TAKE:**
Still trying to find its way in this competitive sports rights and news app landscape.
About RED CARD+
The RED CARD+ report is produced by Mailman. It offers a monthly inspection of digital trends, sports fans insights and essential news updates from China's sports industry.

About Mailman
Founded in 1999, Mailman is a digital sports marketing consultancy and technology company. We help global rights holders, athletes, and organisations build a successful business in China.

www.mailmangroup.com

We hope you have enjoyed this report and that it has helped you to better understand China's sports app landscape.

For more information on sports digital trends or if you'd like to know more about how to build successful business for your brand online in China, please contact:

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