



Asian Journal of Communication >

Volume 26, 2016 - Issue 1

8,268 43 | 2  
Views | CrossRef citations to date | Altmetric

Original articles

# Baidu, Weibo and Renren: the global political economy of social media in China

Christian Fuchs

Pages 14-41 | Received 15 Oct 2014, Accepted 12 Apr 2015, Published online: 03 Jul 2015

Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2015.1041537>

Check for updates

Sample our  
Information Science  
Journals  
 >> [Sign in here](#) to start your access  
to the latest two volumes for 14 days

Full Article

Figures & data

References

Citations

Metrics

Reprints & Permissions

Read this article

Share

## Abstract

The task of this work is to conduct a global political-economic analysis of China's major social media platforms in the context of transformations of the Chinese economy. It analyses Chinese social media's commodity and capital form. It compares the political economy of Baidu (search engine), Weibo (microblog) and Renren (social networking site) to the political economy of the US platforms Google (search engine), Twitter (microblog) and Facebook (social networking site) in order to analyse differences and commonalities. The comparative analysis focuses on aspects such as profits, the role of advertising, the boards of directors, shareholders, financial market values, terms of use and usage policies. The analysis is framed by the question to which extent China has a capitalist or socialist economy.

Keywords:

## Acknowledgement

I thank Yuqi Na for her help. She made translations of excerpts from Chinese platforms' terms of use, helped me understand Chinese texts and searched for specific information about the Internet in China.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

Christian Fuchs is a professor at the University of Westminster's Communication and Media Research Institute and the Centre for Social Media Research. He is editor of the Journal tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique (<http://www.triple-c.at>) and author of around 250 publications in the field of the political economy and critical theory of media, communications and the Internet. <http://fuchs.uti.at>, @fuchschristian.

## Notes

1. Data source: <http://www.alexa.com>, accessed on 8 April 2014.
2. <http://e-chaupak.net/database/chicon/1954/1954bilingual.htm>, accessed on 8 April 2014.
3. <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>, accessed on 8 April 2014.
4. Data: <http://www.alexa.com>, the top 500 sites on the web, accessed on 9 February 2015.

5. See <http://openmap.bbn.com/~tomlinso/ray/firstemailframe.html> and <http://openmap.bbn.com/~tomlinso/ray/ka10.html>
6. <http://www.zdnet.com/cn/china-has-618m-internet-users-80-percent-on-mobile-7000025291/>, accessed on 5 April 2014.
7. Data source: <http://www.alexa.com>, top 500 sites on the WWW, accessed on 9 April 2014.
8. [http://ir.baidu.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=188488&p=irol-faq\\_pf#26140](http://ir.baidu.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=188488&p=irol-faq_pf#26140), accessed on 5 April 2014.
9. [http://ir.baidu.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=188488&p=irol-faq\\_pf#26140](http://ir.baidu.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=188488&p=irol-faq_pf#26140), accessed on 5 April 2014.
10. <http://www.statista.com/statistics/216573/worldwide-market-share-of-search-engines/>, accessed on 5 April 2014.
11. <http://www.nasdaq.com/symbol/sina>, accessed on 6 April 2014.
12. <http://chinastockresearch.com/company-profiles/company-summaries/item/196-sina-corporation-sina/196-sina-corporation-sina.html>, accessed on 6 April 2014.
13. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-26588397>
14. <http://thenextweb.com/asia/2013/02/20/sina-ceo-admits-fall-in-weibo-usage-due-to-wechat-competition-but-says-service-has-critical-mass/>
15. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-26588397>
16. <http://techcrunch.com/2011/05/04/chinese-social-network-renren-prices-743m-ipo-at-14-per-share-at-high-end-of-range/>, accessed on 5 April 2014.
17. <http://techcrunch.com/2011/05/04/chinese-social-network-renren-prices-743m-ipo-at-14-per-share-at-high-end-of-range/>, accessed on 5 April 2014.
18. <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/feb/20/facebook-whatsapp-shares-stock-fall-acquisition-reaction>, accessed on 7 April 2014.
19. NSA Prism program taps in to user data of Apple, Google and others. The Guardian Online. 7 June 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/06/us-tech-giants-nsa-data>

20. XKeyscore: NSA tool collects 'nearly everything a user does on the internet'. The Guardian Online. 31 July 2013.<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/31/nsa-top-secret-program-online-data>

21. GCHQ taps fibre-optic cables for secret access to world's communications. The Guardian Online. 21 June 21, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/21/gchq-cables-secret-world-communications-nsa?guni=Article:in%20body%20link>

22. GCHQ and European spy agencies worked together on mass surveillance. The Guardian Online. 1 November 2013.<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/nov/01/gchq-europe-spy-agencies-mass-surveillance-snowden>

23. Democracy Now!, Dissent or terror: Counterterrorism apparatus used to monitor Occupy movement nationwide. 22 May 2013.  
[http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2013/5/22/dissent\\_or\\_terror\\_counter\\_terrorism\\_apparatus\\_used\\_to\\_monitor\\_occupy\\_movement\\_nationwide](http://www.democracynow.org/blog/2013/5/22/dissent_or_terror_counter_terrorism_apparatus_used_to_monitor_occupy_movement_nationwide)

24. Police tried to spy on Cambridge students, secret footage shows. The Guardian Online. 14 November 2013.<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/nov/14/police-cambridge-university-secret-footage>

25. See <http://www.infowars.com/british-police-used-a-secret-unit-to-spy-on-activists-for-40-years/>, <http://www.wsfs.org/en/articles/2014/07/29/poli-j29.html>, <http://www.wsfs.org/en/articles/2013/07/27/poli-j27.html> (accessed on 20 August 2014).

26. Starbucks, Google and Amazon grilled over tax avoidance. BBC Online. 12 November 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20288077>.

27. Starbucks, Google and Amazon grilled over tax avoidance. BBC Online. 12 November 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20288077>.

28. Amazon: £7bn sales, no UK corporation tax. The Guardian Online. 4 April 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2012/apr/04/amazon-british-operation-corporation-tax>. Google, Amazon, Starbucks: The rise of 'tax sharing'. BBC Online. 4 December 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-20560359>

29. Should we boycott the tax-avoiding companies? The Guardian Online. Shortcuts Blog. 17 October 2012.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/shortcuts/2012/oct/17/boycotting-tax-avoiding-companies>

30. Google and auditor recalled by MPs to answer tax questions. The Guardian Online. 1 May 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2013/may/01/google-parliament-tax-questions>

31. Starbucks, Google and Amazon grilled over tax avoidance. BBC Online. 12 November 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20288077>

32. In the UK, the main rate of corporation tax that applies for profits exceeding £1,500,000, was reduced from 28% in 2010 to 26% in 2011, 24% in 2012, 23% in 2013 and 21% in 2014.

33. Starbucks, Google and Amazon grilled over tax avoidance. BBC Online. 12 November 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20288077>

34 <http://www.baidu.com/duty/yinsiquan.html>, accessed on 7 April 2014, translation from Chinese: ‘医禁权，医禁权’

35. <https://www.google.co.uk/intl/en/policies/privacy/>, version from 31 March 2014, accessed on 7 April 2014.

37. <https://twitter.com/tos>, version from 25 June 2012, accessed on 7 April 2014.

38. <http://renren.com/info/agreement.jsp>, Renren Terms of Service, accessed on 7 April 2014, translation from Chinese: ‘本服务条款，本服务，本协议’.

39. [https://www.facebook.com/full\\_data\\_use\\_policy](https://www.facebook.com/full_data_use_policy), version from 15 November 2013, accessed on 7 April 2014.

40. Tencent Holdings Limited is a Chinese company operating online services such as the instant messenger QQ (launched in 1999) and the mobile phone-chat application WeChat (launched in 2011). WeChat is one of the first Chinese social and mobile media

applications that is fully available in English and is therefore aimed at commodifying personal data on an international market of users.

41. [http://www.wechat.com/en/service\\_terms.html](http://www.wechat.com/en/service_terms.html), version from 6 January 2014, accessed on 7 April 2014.
42. <http://www.whatsapp.com/legal/>, version from 7 July 2012, accessed on 7 April 2014.
43. <http://blog.whatsapp.com/index.php/2012/06/why-we-dont-sell-ads/>, accessed on 9 April 2014.
44. <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/feb/19/facebook-buys-whatsapp-16bn-deal>, accessed on 9 April 2014.

---

## Related research

People also read

Recommended articles

Cited by  
43

## Information for

Authors

R&D professionals

Editors

Librarians

Societies

## Opportunities

Reprints and e-prints

Advertising solutions

Accelerated publication

Corporate access solutions

## Open access

Overview

Open journals

Open Select

Dove Medical Press

F1000Research

## Help and information

Help and contact

Newsroom

All journals

Books

## Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources  
by email

 Sign me up

  

  

Copyright © 2026 Informa UK Limited Privacy policy Cookies Terms & conditions

Accessibility

 Taylor and Francis Group

Registered in England & Wales No. 01072954  
5 Howick Place | London | SW1P 1WG