

China's biggest microblog tops 200 million users

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Chinese web surfers are seen at an Internet cafe in central China's Anhui province. A popular social networking service used by Chinese people to vent their anger over a deadly July train crash now has more than 200 million users.

A popular social networking service used by Chinese people to vent their anger over a deadly July train crash now has more than 200 million users, owner Sina.com said Thursday.

Users of Sina Weibo -- China's answer to Twitter -- sent millions of messages criticising the official response to the disaster, which killed 40 and forced the government to halt the expansion of its high-speed rail programme.

It was credited for prodding China's state-run media into an unusually critical response to the disaster, accusing authorities of ignoring safety

concerns in their rush to develop the world's biggest high-speed network.

"Launched less than two years ago, Weibo.com has become an online phenomenon with registered accounts recently surpassing 200 million," Sina.com chief executive Charles Chao said in the company's second-quarter earnings statement.

China -- which has the world's largest online population with 485 million users -- constantly strives to exert its control over the Internet, blocking content it deems politically sensitive as part of a vast [censorship](#) system.

But the rise of China's weibos -- microblogs similar to [Twitter](#), which is banned by the communist authorities -- has exposed the difficulty of controlling access to information.

A microblogger living near the accident site in the eastern city of Wenzhou is widely believed to have broken the news of the crash, while millions of others kept up a steady barrage of criticism in the days that followed.

The scale of the response appeared to take authorities by surprise. Shortly after the accident, the People's Daily, the mouthpiece of China's Communist Party, urged officials to use the weibos more to communicate with the public.

Sina Weibo is by far the biggest of the country's [social networking sites](#).

It is China's third most popular website overall after search engine [Baidu](#) and QQ.com, an instant messaging service, according to the [Internet Society](#) of China.

Sina.com's net income in the second quarter fell to \$10 million from \$25.2 million in the same period a year earlier. But sales in the period

rose 20 percent to \$119 million.

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