

Chinese micro-bloggers pay cash for followers

August 9 2011



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"Why use our services?" one company called Yangcheng Media asks on

its website. "Who would you follow? Somebody with 2,000 followers or 20,000 followers? The answer is easy: most people have a herd mentality."

The firm offers up 100 followers for just one yuan (\$0.15), in a bid to make users of China's popular Twitter-like weibo services stand out from the pack.

Micro-blogging is hugely popular in China, where other more traditional media such as newspapers are heavily censored. As with [Twitter](#), people with huge amounts of followers achieve a much sought-after type of cyber-standing.

The number of weibo users more than tripled from January to June this year alone, reaching nearly 195 million -- roughly equal to Brazil's population -- according to the semi-official China Internet Information Center.

And this number may continue to rise. By the end of June, there were a total of 485 million Chinese online users, more than half of whom are not yet sending weibo bursts of about 150 Chinese characters each.

One company called Gaodeding -- which translates as "Yes We Can!" -- goes a step further, offering weibo addicts a package of 20 active followers for one yuan, according to a man surnamed Liu who works at the firm.

Active [followers](#) are people who update their accounts daily, rather than so-called "corpses" who seldom post or spread information from netizens they follow.

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Citation: Chinese micro-bloggers pay cash for followers (2011, August 9) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-08-chinese-micro-bloggers-cash.html>

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