

China microblog users top 300 million: reports

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People are seen here at an internet cafe in Beijing. More than 300 million people in China now have microblogging accounts, a state-run newspaper reported, as the country's fast-growing online population seeks to bypass tight media controls.

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China, which has the world's largest online population with more than half a billion users, constantly strives to control the Internet, blocking sensitive content as part of a vast censorship system known as the Great Firewall.

After Chinese censors blocked Twitter in 2009, several homegrown versions known as weibos emerged with enhanced services such as photo

and video embedding, and proved wildly popular with web users.

On Monday, the State Internet Information Office announced at a conference in the central city of Wuhan that the nation now had more than 300 million registered users of weibos, local newspaper the Changjiang Daily reported.

The rise of the weibos has exposed the difficulty of controlling access to information as more and more Chinese turn to microblogs to vent their anger over government corruption, scandals and disasters.

A weibo user is believed to have broken the news of a deadly high-speed rail crash in China in July that provoked widespread condemnation of the government -- much of it online.

Footage of bodies falling from train carriages as [heavy machinery](#) lifted them off the tracks just hours after the accident triggered a particularly furious response.

Authorities have vowed to step up efforts to crack down on "rumours" generated online, which are then often reported by traditional media.

In September, the head of [Internet giant](#) Sina said the company, owner of China's most popular weibo, had set up "rumour-curbing teams", apparently in response to government pressure.

And at a secretive annual meeting in Beijing last month, the country's Communist Party chiefs agreed on directives that included stricter control of [social networking sites](#) and a crackdown on "vulgar" material on the web.

The government also said in October that police had begun to detain and punish people for spreading rumours online.

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