

What Travel Brands Need To Know About China Social Media And Influencer Marketing in 2019

*Presented by Lauren
Hallanan*

China's digital landscape changes at an incredibly rapid pace and so do the preferences of Chinese consumers.

New social media platforms come and go.

New policies and content types appear.

If you stick to the same marketing playbook you used last year, it's unlikely you'll achieve the same results.

But first, let's understand why social media and influencer marketing are essential to reach Chinese travelers...

90% of Chinese Consumers Buy Products Based on Their Reputation

The Chinese consumer, more than any other consumer in the world, relies on word of mouth and online product recommendations when making purchasing decisions.

They lack trust in ads and internet search engine results, even reviews on e-commerce sites have been known to be faked

Over 75% of Chinese internet users post feedback /reviews on their purchases at least once a month. In comparison, in the U.S., it's less than 20%.



Source: 2018 Research Report On Chinese Consumer Cross-Border Purchasing Behavior by Westwin & Nielson

Tip: I recommend you familiarise yourself with your brand or product's advantages from the perspective of Chinese consumers, not from the perspective of your own brand. Having clear brand positioning is crucial in China, it has to be presented in a right way and on the right channels.

People and Strong Personal Connections are the Driving Force That Inspire and Influence Travel Decisions and Behavior

The 2018 China International Travel Monitor asked Chinese travelers what are their key sources of travel inspiration

62% said film and television

52% said social media

51% said video sharing

Not surprisingly, social media is particularly important for millennials, with 56 per cent of post 90s and 50 per cent of post 80s saying this was a key travel influence.

For almost a third of millennials, bloggers and celebrities also play an important role in influencing decisions.

Non-millennials are indirectly influenced by social media through their children, with a third of non-millennials saying their children influenced their travel decisions and behavior.

Partners and spouses are a major influence for two thirds of all age groups, while friends and colleagues are influential for around 40 per cent.

So which Chinese social media platforms should travel brands be using in 2019?



The Classics: Weibo and WeChat

Weibo

Although often likened to Twitter, I think Weibo is more similar to Instagram in terms of user behavior and the style of the content

Wide Variety of Content Types:

- 2000-character limit posts
 - Photos
 - Videos
 - Live-streaming
 - Articles
 - Stories
 - Mobile payments
 - Ecommerce
-
- Weibo is generally a place for inspirational content
 - Open platform with tons of celebrities and KOLs makes it a popular place for promotion
 - Having a presence on Weibo is almost a given
 - Good platform for awareness and brand-building campaigns

我的旅行小马甲 (设置备注)

旅行达人、摄影师、知名旅行玩家、微博签约自媒体

已关注 私信

他的主页 他的相册

558 关注 | 2538478 粉丝 | 3787 微博

全部 热门 更多 搜索他的微博

我的旅行小马甲 2015-12-19 22:07 来自 卖照片换的iPhone 6 Plus

#旅行十年# 斯里兰卡游记我憋出来了! 有人说, 你对东南亚国家的所有幻想, 都可以在斯里兰卡得到满足, 真的是这样的, 一路拍了2000多张照片也是拍到吐, 只能说景色太美, 讲句真心话, 趁着斯里兰卡还没有那么商业化, 赶紧去看看吧。

收藏 | 11923 | 4216 | 11878

我的旅行小马甲 9月18日 20:00 来自 微博weibo.com

先不要纠结下半年的旅行计划啦~快来看看@DJI大疆创新 为热爱自由的你准备的#天空旅行者#计划吧! 只要你向往远方, 喜爱摄影, 并期待在旅行中记录不一样的风景, 就有机会与“御”Mavic Pro无人机一起享受迷人海滩风光、俯瞰火山群貌、体验国际度假酒店.....哈哈先停止小幻想, 快右戳大疆指定报名渠道—— ... 展开全文

粉丝群 添加粉丝群

- 驴友互动交流 群成员952人 申请加入
- 旅行, 我在路 群成员594人 申请加入
- 一起走遍中国 群成员250人 申请加入

查看更多

微关系

共同关注(39)

MO... 李... 北... 阿...

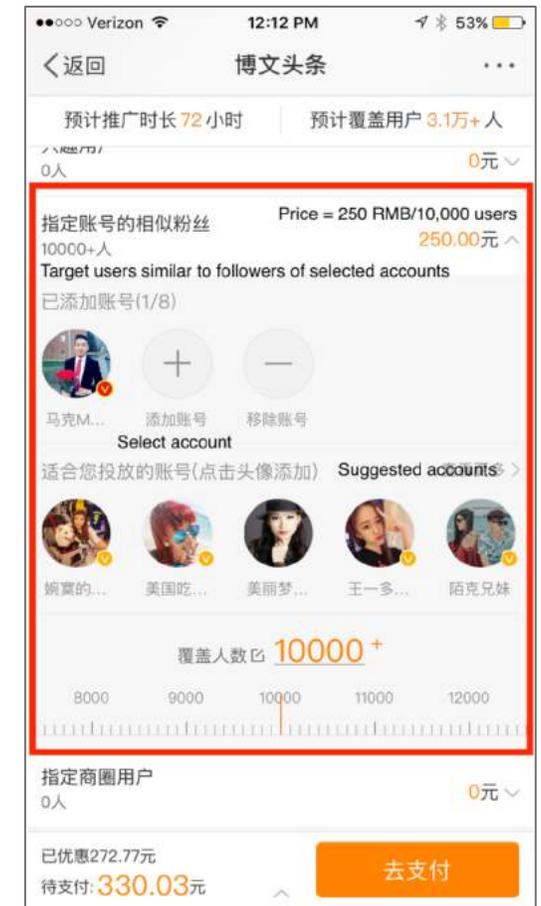
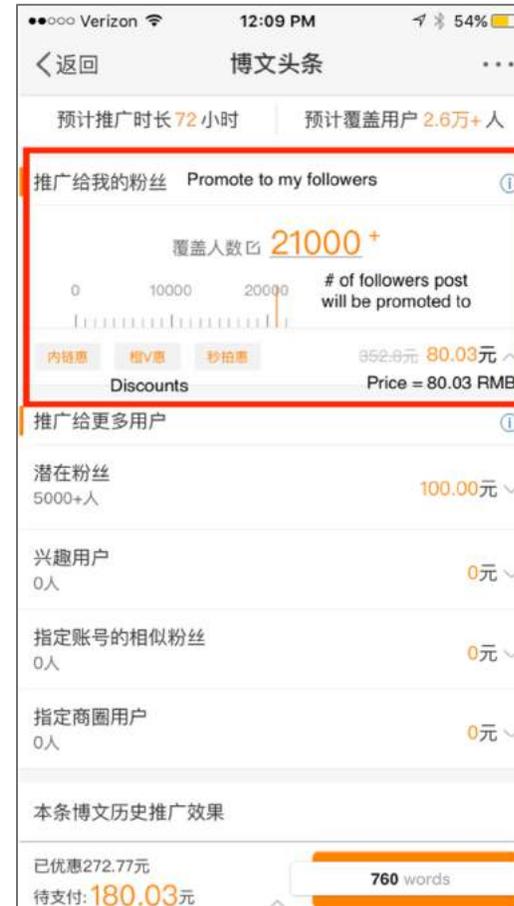
While it is a go-to platform it is also...

- Mature, saturated and expensive
- Limited organic reach
- Difficult to organically grow a following
- Not necessarily the best platform to reach young Chinese consumers anymore
- Not a place people go to search for content. Content is mainly discovered through accounts they already follow and content reposted by friends
- Unless you already have a large following on the platform, you must work with influencers otherwise you will never be seen/found



Tips for Using Weibo

- Pay to promote your posts and account in order to jumpstart organic growth
- Consistently collaborate with KOLs
 - Be aware of sponsored post rules
 - Get permission to re-purpose their content
 - Select carefully to avoid fakes
 - KOLs outside of the travel industry may be more likely to accept free travel



Organic Growth and Article Open Rates Declining

- The average read count of articles published on WeChat decreased 24 percent in 2017 from the previous year
- The average open rate for these articles has fallen to under 5 percent in 2017.
- The share of mobile time consumers spent on social platforms like WeChat decreased from 28 percent in 2017 to 23 percent in 2018, likely taken away by UGC platforms like Douyin and Xiaohongshu (RED)
- Many find acquiring new followers on WeChat to be increasingly difficult and expensive.
- Investing in WeChat without clear objectives and strategies may lead to huge disappointments and monetary losses.



Use WeChat to Solve Consumer Painpoints

Brands need to look beyond Official Account follower numbers and article views and instead use WeChat as a tool to address customer's needs:

- CRM
- Customer service
- Mobile payments
- Mini-programs (ticketing services, guides, maps, translation)

When Chinese travelers were asked what destinations could do better:

59% said they want to be able to pay via QR code scan on WeChat

57% said acceptance of mobile payments

34% said self service counters

30% said booking methods

WeChat Mini-Programs

- In 2017, WeChat announced the release of mini programs. Prior to that, brands were only been able to create an Official Account to interact and engage with fans, but now that has all changed.
- They took a while to catch on, but have taken off in 2018 and are now extremely popular.
- Mini programs are light apps (less than 10 MB) that exist within WeChat. They are convenient, fast, and can usually be developed quickly at a lower cost.
- Mini programs are complementary to Official Accounts and give brands the ability to engage with and provide services to consumers within the WeChat ecosystem in ways they were unable to before
- Travel brands are using mini-programs for:
 - Map navigation
 - Audio guides
 - Real time safety updates
 - Concierge
 - Information search
 - Online booking
 - Rewards programs

There is now even a new Intercontinental Hotel that is completely integrated with a WeChat mini-program!



Social Commerce on WeChat

Another trend that has been very popular this year in China is social commerce

This typically means games and campaigns where people are incentivized to share with their friends in order to receive discounts, coupons, free products, and special offers

While many platforms have been trying to incorporate these types of features, social commerce works especially well on WeChat because people can easily share things to WeChat groups and their WeChat Moments

Case studies:

- Air France
- Coffee Box
- Luckin Coffee
- Pinduoduo

How can travel brands take part in this trend?

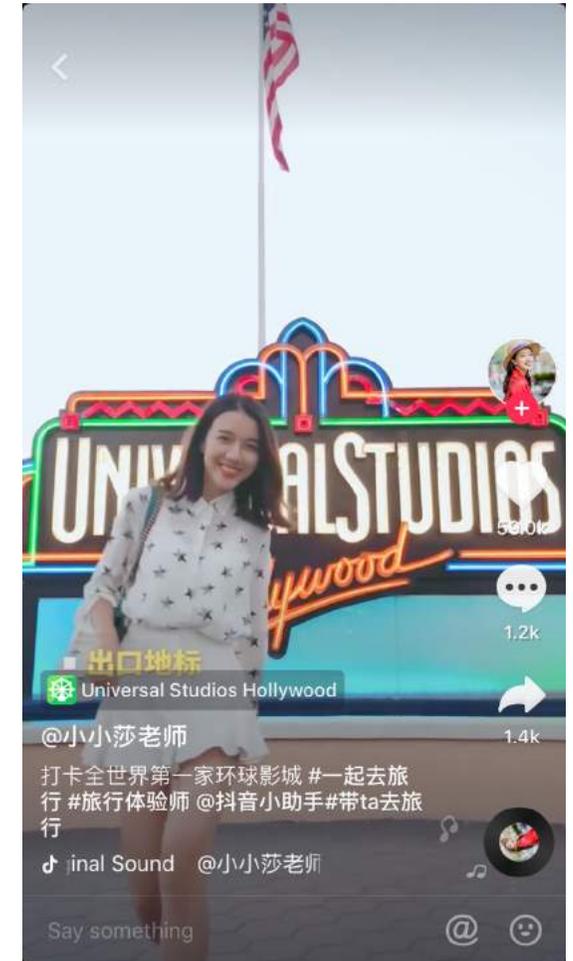
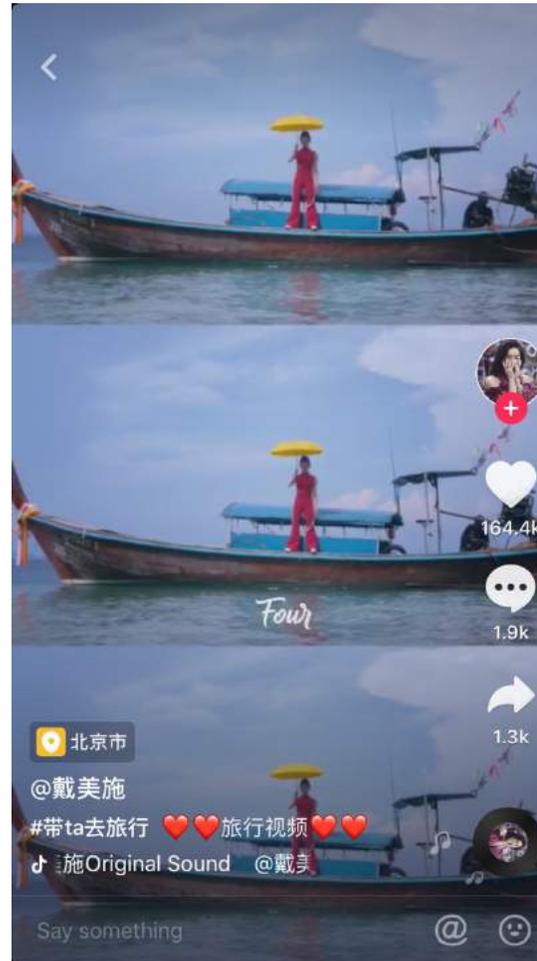
A great method to attract local Chinese community



**New Platforms to Consider:
Douyin and Xiaohongshu (RED)**

Douyin

- Douyin is a Chinese short-video streaming app that launched in September 2016, and has skyrocketed in popularity since the start of 2018.
- You may be familiar with the international version Tik Tok (Douyin is more mature and advanced)
- According to numbers released by Douyin in June 2018, the app has 150 million daily active users, and 300 million monthly active users.
- 72% of Generation Z (that's 'post-95s' in Chinese) open Douyin every day, and 32% spend more than an hour a day on the platform.
- The platform started as a way to create short music videos, but the content has diversified, and there is an abundance of travel-related videos, mostly featuring scenery, attractions and food.



How Travel Brands Can Use Douyin

- Brand Account

- Content must be shot in portrait mode
- 15-seconds long (can unlock ability to post 60-second videos after the account reaches a certain follower level)
- Accounts must post frequently
- Having a narrative keeps users coming back

- Collaborate with KOLs

- They are experts at creating popular content and already have large audiences

- Create a Challenge

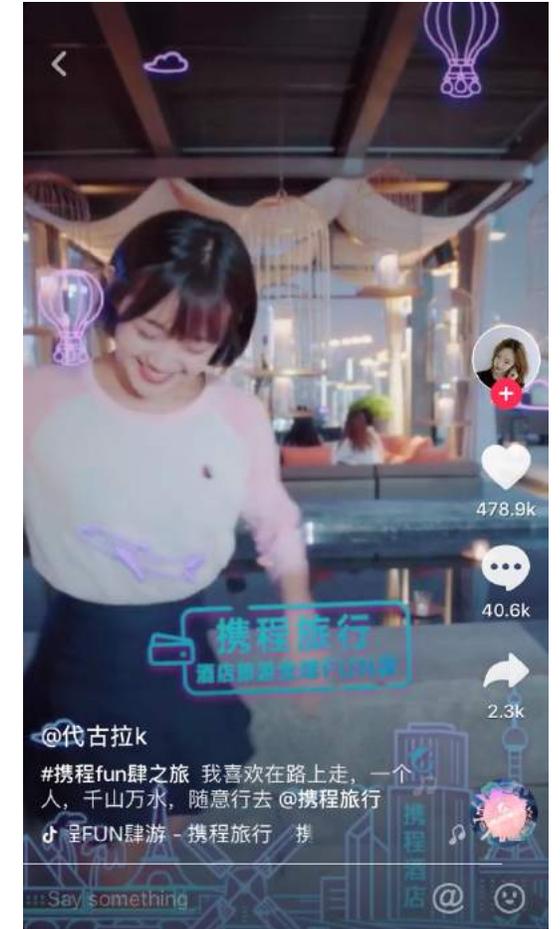
- A Douyin 'Challenge' is essentially a hashtag prompt that users create videos around, competing to get the most views – which is often incentivized by the brand hosting the Challenge.
- This is an excellent way to drive user-generated content, and can work particularly well for travel brands

Advantages:

Travel is one industry perfectly suited for having brand accounts on Douyin because it is easy to create a lot of content as well as get people involved in Challenges

Drawbacks:

Content short – best used for inspirational content
Hard to predict how content will perform
Working with KOLs and hosting official Challenges has now become expensive



Xiaohongshu (RED)

Xiaohongshu (小红书) also known as “Little Red Book” or “RED” is one of the largest and fastest growing social e-commerce apps in China.

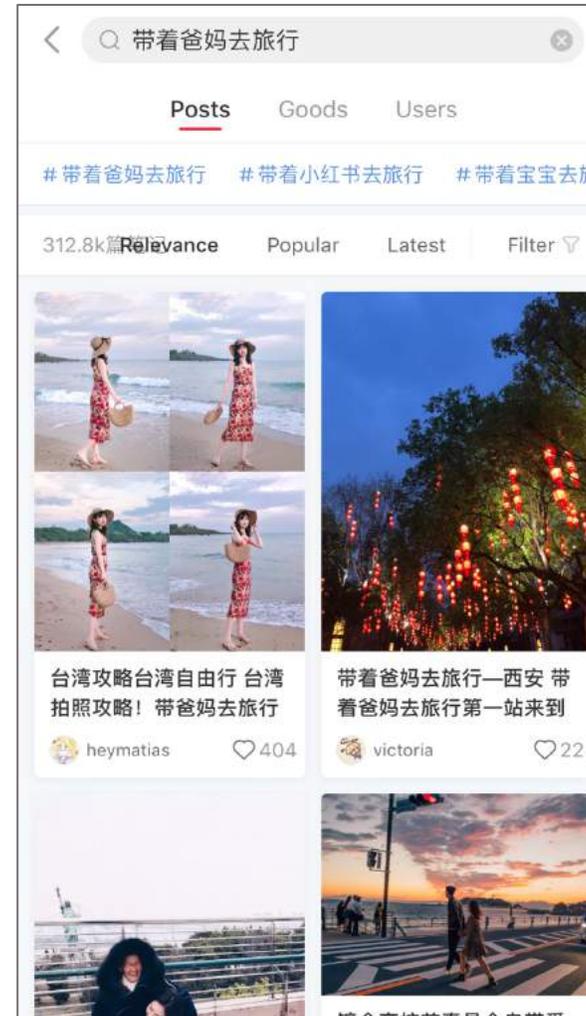
- 150 million users, 30 million monthly active users
- 85% of users are female, 84% are under age 30

Xiaohongshu describes itself as “a sharing platform for young people's lifestyles through deep-rooted UGC shopping sharing community”

The platform is designed to help users discover and purchase products, share recommendations, and provide helpful tips.

Users often go on Xiaohongshu to investigate products and look for in-depth reviews and tutorials created by other users.

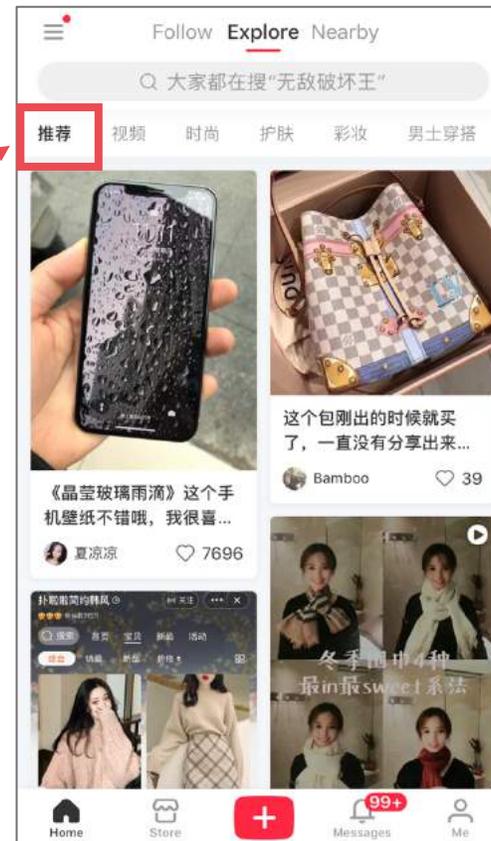
Think of Xiaohongshu as a combination of Instagram and Pinterest. Just like both platforms, you can save posts you like, interact with content and other users, create your own content, connect with brand pages etc. But with Xiaohongshu, you get the added bonus of in-app purchasing, a stronger sense of community, and more lengthy, detailed blog-post type content.



User Behavior: Browse

Users go on Xiaohongshu with no intention, just to browse, see what others are posting about, discover new products, learn from tutorials, and pass the time.

- These users will likely scroll through the homepage, check accounts they follow, and see what is trending in search
- Xiaohongshu's algorithm creates a customized homepage based on what type of content each user frequently views and interacts with, what type of content they post, and who they follow
- The default homepage is recommended content, followed by videos, then additional categories such as beauty, fashion, skincare, etc.
- Tab for followed accounts
- Browse posts that are uploaded nearby (e.g. someone posts photos about a nearby restaurant)
- Popular content tends to go in-depth, informative more important than entertaining



Default homepage is recommended content

Homepage (above) looks similar to Pinterest, however once you click into the post (right), unlike Pinterest, the content itself is more in-depth like a blog post.



Post comparing 40 different Japanese face masks extremely popular with over 24.2K likes, 1.3 K comments, and 100K collects.

User Behavior: Search

Users go on Xiaohongshu to research a specific product, brand, or topic

- Think of Xiaohongshu as a product search engine
- Users will search specific keywords and hashtags to find posts about the product, brand, or topic they are interested in learning more about
- Users generally believe the quality of the information shared by other users on Xiaohongshu is of higher quality and more reliable than traditional search engine results



Clicking the search bar on the homepage will automatically bring up the search page. The search page shows trending searches as well as your recent searches.



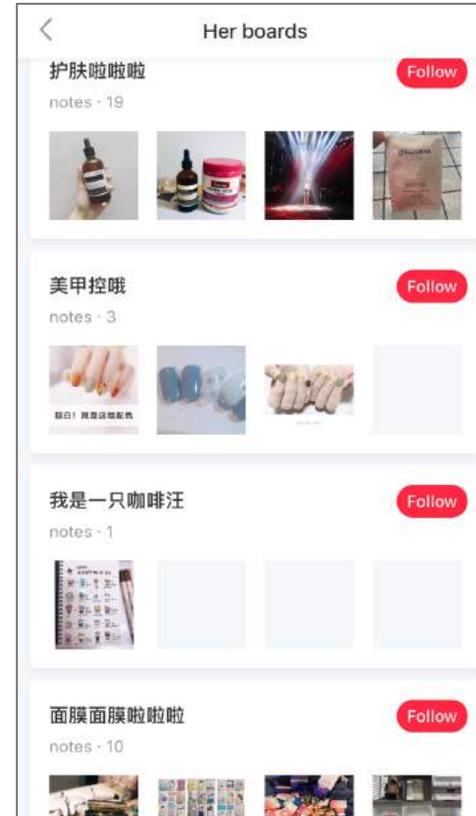
Top search results for the phrase “moisturizing lotion” brings up posts about products by Origins, Kiehl’s, and Clarins, as well as a 9-product comparison post.

User Behavior: Create Content & Interact With Other Users

- Xiaohongshu users tend to be very active, and enjoy interacting with other content as well as sharing their own content
- Forms of interaction: Users are able to like, comment, collect, or share other users' posts
- Note: users can share posts to other social media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat, but cannot share (repost) within the app
- The quality of comments on Xiaohongshu tends to be higher than other platforms. Users will share their experiences with the products mentioned in the post, ask questions about the products, and give advice to other users who have left comments

“Collects” are a key way to measure engagement on Xiaohongshu:

Unlike on Weibo, Xiaohongshu users cannot repost but they can collect posts they like or find useful and save them to boards for future use. It is essentially the same concept as a Pinterest boards.



This user has created boards on a variety of topics including skincare, nails, and face masks.



Long, detailed comments are common on Xiaohongshu

Why Travel Brands Should Consider Xiaohongshu

- While Xiaohongshu was originally known for cosmetics, skincare, and fashion reviews, the types of content have expanded
- The platform started as a place for Chinese travelers to share where to find the best products abroad
- Xiaohongshu's users are generally more cosmopolitan, many have lived abroad, are seasoned international travelers, or are currently living abroad
- Travel is now one of the most popular topics and there is a dedicated tab for it on the homepage
- Nowadays travel topics frequently appear in the trending search results



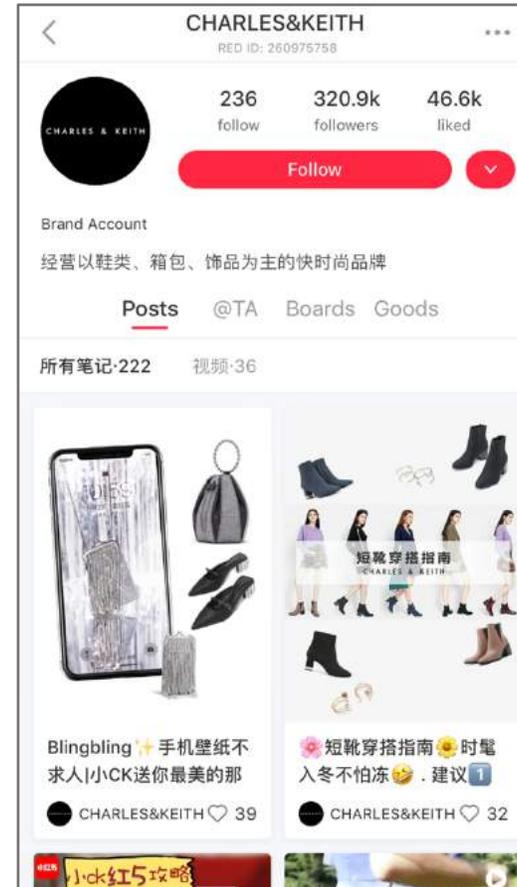
How Can Travel Brands Use Xiaohongshu

- Brand Official Account

- Brands can create their own posts and share posts from users who tag them
- If users are already talking about your products on XHS, a brand account allows you to respond to comments and turn enquiries into purchases.
- In cases where there is no Brand Official Account, these questions are left unanswered and result in the possible loss of potential customers for the brand.

- Work with influencers

- While users will pay attention to high quality content shared on a brand account, they will always place greater value on user-generated content → Many consumers turn to KOLs to help them filter through all the clutter and make quick purchasing decisions
- The more content there is on your destination or product, the more desirable it will seem → If a consumer goes on Xiaohongshu to research your destination and sees little to no user-generated content about it, they will start to worry that it is not a good place to visit.



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