

China's influencer industry: Not just a pretty face

Notes & Cues:**Article:**

Papi Jiang, a comedian, pokes fun at stardom and Chinese society in salty tirades. The Swiss watchmaker Jaeger-LeCoultre hired her for a video ad targeting young urbanites, including her 27m fans on Sina Weibo, a Twitter-like microblog.

Ms Jiang is wanghong, literally "red-hot on the web". Everyday millions of Chinese trawl social media for wanghong posts or tune in to live-streams for opinions. The fans are helping them to monetise their popularity—and to shake up the country's e-commerce industry in the process. Unlike conventional brand ambassadors, many wanghong have built their fan bases through compelling online content rather than a famous name.

The wanghong economy looks poised to grow. In 2016 it was already 15% bigger than the Chinese film industry's gross box-office sales. This year it could surpass 100bn yuan.

Like all branding, however, the influencer business is a delicate one. Many starlets expect to quit after a couple of years. Some brands have started to look for lesser-known influencers, who command smaller fees and retain a more authentic image among devotees. It is hard to stay red-hot for long.

Summary: