

Online sports apps growing in popularity

Fitness platforms tracking progress, giving instruction attract increasing number of users

By ZHENG YIRAN
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Jin Chi, a 28-year-old white collar worker in Beijing, wakes up at 6 am every day. Wearing his smartwatch equipped with Codoon, a GPS-supported app that keeps track of his route and time, Jin runs for 40 minutes, a habit he has kept up for three years.

In the evening, Jin uses Keep, another mobile exercise app that instructs him in his personal strength training program.

"I use Keep for one hour every day, seven days a week," said Jin. "I can't live without the app now."

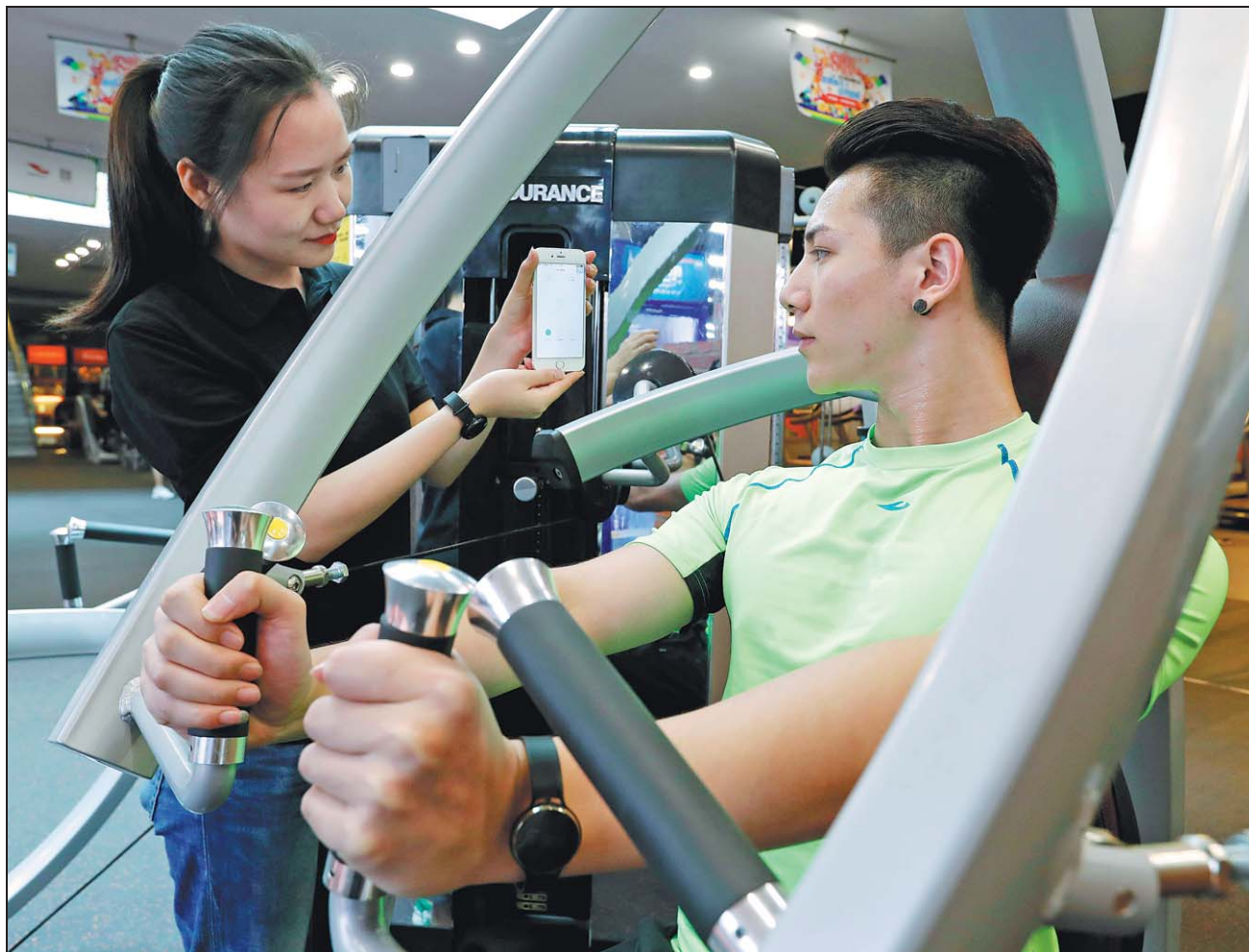
"After using mobile fitness apps, I seldom go to the gym. Using mobile apps to do sports is more flexible," he said. "I can enjoy extensive strength training or a yoga course whenever and wherever I want to."

Jin is just one example of how people today are increasingly relying on online products to support their sporty lifestyles.

A report from Beijing-based market research consultancy Analysys showed that by April this year, the number of active users on such online platforms had reached 68.48 million in China, growing 2.22 percent year-on-year.

Online apps in the walking, running and fitness categories grab the most traffic among users, accounting for 34.27 percent, 33.99 percent and 18 percent respectively, the data showed. *Guangchangwu*, or square dancing, cycling and yoga also represent a considerable proportion.

"We have now entered an era in which the number of internet users will not jump dramatically," said Chen Qiaoshan, a medical analyst at Analysys. "Traffic in the online



A man looks at data displayed by a mobile phone app, which tracks the time and energy consumed while he does exercise in a gym in Beijing. XINHUA

sports sector will experience a moderate increase, and enterprises must compete to win the market."

She said users in different sports categories have diversified demands for apps' functionality. While fitness enthusiasts value how the online apps track their sports data and plan out their training, those who aim to lose weight mainly rely on the apps to serve as a private tutor to guide, encourage and accompany them during training, Chen said.

Helen Yang, who took part in a 1,699 yuan (\$250) online weight reduction course for 45 days, said she liked the flexibility that the online course offered.

"The online course costs less than hiring a private sports trainer in a gym. In addition, users that take part in the same course have a virtual space for chatting. We talk about fitness topics often, and encourage each other in losing weight. The course has social features," Yang said.

"For online fitness, users are

more active during summer than they are in winter," Chen said.

The report from Analysys found that for the whole of 2017, the average daily usage time was around 0.5 hour. In July that year the average usage time reached 77 minutes. The peak times are usually the morning and evening.

The report said mobile apps related to fitness and running attract higher-earning users, while walking and square dancing apps are more popular in second and third-tier cities.

The National Development and Reform Commission said at a news conference on Aug 2 the nation's sports industry had continued its rapid development this year, becoming a new driver for economic development.

The added value of the sports industry is estimated to account for more than 1 percent of the nation's GDP this year, with related consumption reaching 1 trillion yuan, said Ou Xiaoli, director of the social development department at the NDRC.

There will be 20 percent growth in the number of sports institutions established, and the whole industry is expected to employ 4.4 million workers this year, according to Ou.

"The sports industry will play an increasingly significant role in promoting consumption, benefiting the public and stabilizing economic growth," he said.

In 2016, the General Administration of Sport issued a guideline that by 2020, the added value of the nation's

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Jin Chi, a 28-year-old white collar worker in Beijing

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number of active users on online sports platforms in China by April 2018

sports industry should surpass 3 trillion yuan, employing over 6 million people. The industry's added value should account for more than 1 percent of the nation's GDP, and that of the sports-related service industry should represent 30 percent of GDP.

According to a spokesperson from CCTV-5, China Central Television's sports channel, the channel attracted 27.8 billion online visits during the past 2018 World Cup in Russia, showing the great potential in the online sports market.

Chen from Analysys predicted that online sports users will pay more attention to medical health in the future.

"Our statistics show that online sports app users are more willing to spend money in healthcare.

"In addition, with technological advances in virtual reality and augmented reality, more content will be developed for the industry, in areas such as education, entertainment, personalized training and smart equipment," she said.

Zunyi boosts tourism through games

By ZHENG YIRAN

For individuals, sports might be a route to a fitter body and a healthier lifestyle, but for a tourist-focused city, the sports industry brings exciting business opportunities.

Zunyi, a city in Southwest China's Guizhou province, has seen rapid development in its tourism industry in recent years.

Rather than highlighting the local area's traditional "red tourism", which focuses on the Red Army's legendary revolutionary history, it is the sport industry that has spurred the city's tourism revenue.

According to the Guizhou Tourism Development Committee, a total of 118.8 million tourists visited Zunyi in 2017, surging 39.47 percent year-on-year. The tourism industry reported consolidated revenue of 114.3 billion yuan (\$16.7 billion), up 44.21 percent on the previous year.

In the first half of 2018 the city welcomed 73.82 million visitors, an increase of 31.35 percent year-on-year. The tourists brought in 66 billion yuan of revenue, up 36.7 percent on the same period last year.

One of the major reasons for the increase is the sports industry, the committee said.

In recent years, the local government has been vigorously developing the city's sports industry, which had promoted Zunyi's tourism sector, the committee said.

From Aug 8 to 18, the 10th Games of Guizhou Province were held in Zunyi. Operated by the city government, the games are the largest held in Guizhou, with over 20,000 participants involved.

The main stadium for the games, covering an area of 410,000 square meters, is



Children take part in a dance competition during the 10th Games of Guizhou Province in Zunyi in August. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“Zunyi has a long history in sports. Every year the city grabs the top spots in the provincial tournaments of many sports, such as boat racing, track and field, weightlifting, wrestling and boxing. Boxing champion Zou Shiming is from Zunyi,” Yuan said.

Yuan Hong, director of the Zunyi Olympic Sports Center

located in the Zunyi Olympic Sports Center in the city's Xinqu New Area.

"The stadium is newly built. The games held here promoted the local economy," said Feng Bo, deputy director of the publicity department of Xinqu New Area.

Yuan Hong, director of the Zunyi Olympic Sports Center, said tens of thousands of tourists came to watch the 10th Games. They also paid visits to local sightseeing spots, boost-

ing tourism revenue.

"Zunyi has a long history in sports. Every year the city grabs the top spots in the provincial tournaments of many sports, such as boat racing, track and field, weightlifting, wrestling and boxing. Boxing champion Zou Shiming is from Zunyi," Yuan said.

"Ever since Zou won the world championship, the local government has been sparing no efforts to develop sports tourism, which really benefits the public," he said.

In Zunyi, sports tourism is not only about big events. The 169-kilometer cycling road along the Chishui River in the city is the first of its kind in China. Cycling enthusiasts can bike along the road to enjoy the beautiful scenery, while exploring the same route that the Red Army took.

According to a national survey conducted by China Youth Daily, almost four in five Chinese respondents have taken part in sports tourism, demonstrating its growing popularity.

Shanping village of Tongzi county in southern Zunyi has taken advantage of sports tourism in its poverty-allevi-

ation activities. In 2014, the county government spent 75 million yuan transforming the poor village into a tourism spot, introducing various kinds of flowers and vast grasslands, which attract tens of thousands of visitors annually.

"We have held two spring running races here, and there are always hiking teams, yoga teams and cycling teams streaming in and out," said Lie Xiangkun, a local government official.

"The village, which was previously in severe poverty, had lifted its annual per capita income from 4,500 yuan in 2013 to 20,300 yuan in 2017," he said. "The village's collective annual income increased from minus 100,000 yuan to over 5 million yuan now."

In 2016, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the General Administration of Sport issued a guideline that by 2020, the country should set up 100 premium sports tourism games, 100 selected sports tourism routes and 100 sports tourism bases.

The sector should attract 1 billion visits, accounting for 15 percent of all tourism visits, and total consumer spending should surpass 1 trillion yuan, according to the guideline.

Chang Chun, co-founder of Runnar, a marathon organizer and promoter, said: "With the ongoing national consumption upgrade, the country's tourism industry has transitioned from its sight-seeing focus to an interaction-based model, while sports consumers have also transformed from merely being an audience to becoming involved participants."

"The integration of sports and tourism brings great economic benefits," he said.



The Channel Five Sports Space, a comprehensive public sports venue, holds a promotional activity to attract customers in Beijing this summer. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Cities offer more exercise spaces to meet demand

By ZHENG YIRAN

City dwellers no longer need to search for long to find a place to exercise, as the nation's sports industry boom is prompting urban planning to evolve to suit citizens' growing demand for fitness and exercise spaces.

Channel Five Sports Space, the first comprehensive public sports venue in Beijing, was launched on Aug 4. As a response to the nation's scientific health and fitness strategy, called Healthy China 2030, the Sports Space was established to integrate digital and physical resources for the public.

"We are aiming to build the Yelp of the sports industry," said Hong Ping, president of ZhongShiLiangZhong (Beijing) Cultural Media Co Ltd, the company responsible for operating the Sports Space.

"We are building a public sports service platform, integrating online and offline

resources in all fields in the sports industry."

In the 5,000-square-meter Sports Space, both young and old alike are able to enjoy a wide variety of activities, including table tennis, wrestling, taekwondo and aikido.

LeFit, a new concept gym chain startup, was among the first fitness brands to open an outlet within the new venue.

According to statistics from the General Administration of Sport, China currently only has 1.5 square meters of sports-dedicated space per capita, while the United States has 16 square meters.

Most sports stadiums in China are owned by the government or schools. Sports areas open to the nation's sports, education and military sectors account for over 60 percent of the total, of which only 29.2 percent is accessible to the public.

He Wenyi, executive director of Peking University's Chi-

na Institute for Sports Value, said the central authorities' guideline issued in 2014 to promote the development of the sports industry has not yet been fully implemented.

"The nation's public sports sector is in its infancy, but the potential is huge. Urban areas need to provide more facilities to boost participation in sports and satisfy the public's diverse needs and preferences," He said.

"We hope Sports Space's business model can be applied to other regions in China. In the future, we may tap into this model further, such as building sports leisure towns and sports amusement parks," he said.

According to ZhongShiLiangZhong, the company plans to open more Sports Spaces in other cities, including Shanghai, Tianjin and Xi'an in Shaanxi province. Its final goal is to establish more than 1,000 such spaces across over 100 cities in China.