

MARKETING

## Why Big Monster holds the key to Chinese Gen Z sneaker fans

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Guo Yanbo "Big Monster" at a meet-and-greet event in January. Image courtesy of Guo Yanbo

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***KOL Confidential** reports on the world of China's luxury and streetwear key opinion leaders. In our new column, we explore how these popular influencers position themselves, how they work with brands, and what the future of influencing means to Chinese young consumers.*

Guo Yanbo 郭彦博, known as "Big Monster" to his 13.2 million **Douyin** fans, saved two months for his first pair of Air Force 1 White sneakers in high school. He grew up in Changchun, a sprawling city in China's northern Jilin Province that is famous for its skiing and ice sculptures, and studied civil engineering at college before transitioning to a full-time content maker.

The pivotal moment for Mr. Guo, now 27, to change his career was what happened to his sneakers while interning at a construction company.

"Going to construction sites ruined my **Air Jordan 1 Black Toe**, I was pissed and said I'd never do this again," he said, only half-jokingly.

But he sees similarities in building houses and being a **KOL**: "The most important thing in construction is building a foundation. My foundation now is my content."

His identity is a sneaker KOL but most people know him through his Douyin non-sneaker related account, "Guai Le Ge Shou" (乖乐哥手) (@).

Last year, his short videos about "The Things That Devastate You In Life," with him looking up to the camera in slow motion after dripping noodle soup on his white hoodie, for example, went viral.

As a result, his supplementary account now has six more million followers than his main sneaker account.

To him, "Guai Le Ge Shou" is an entry point to make the public take notice of his personal brand, which is now promoted through multichannel networks to platforms in addition to Douyin.

Across three accounts his third account is called "Monster Diary," which streams his sneaker store visits to 1.6

million followers he has worked with brands from luxury cars such as [Porsche](#) to Chinese and Western sneaker brands such as Lining, Peak, Nike, Adidas and [Vans](#).

In a conversation with *Jing Daily*, Mr. Guo talks about what marketing campaigns make [Chinese consumers](#) tick, the ever-changing consumer landscape in China's sneaker world, and what might take place in the future.

How did you get started with this career path?

[Sneakers](#) are my interest. To differentiate myself from other sneaker bloggers, I decided on the angle of sharing interesting things I discovered while I buy shoes and make snarky comments about the sneaker world.

For example, one of my earliest videos is about professionals who authenticate sneakers. The news was saying at that time that they take money from the sellers. So I did a sketch video about a pair of traditional Beijing cloth shoes something Chinese grandparents would wear with an Air Jordan label and said it was the hottest thing people can buy.

How do you measure success? Influence among followers? Authenticity? Collaborations with brands? Sales is important but what comes first is content, because it's the foundation for everything that comes afterward.

Only if your content is appreciated, the number of clicks and likes can then be converted to fans and you get a voice in the field as a return. That's how your videos might lead to a certain phenomenon, which is something KOLs should focus on.

Can you tell us a bit about who your typical follower is?

They are usually under 24 years old. Eighty percent of my followers are guys, 20 percent are women. And they are mainly from big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and [Chengdu](#).

Do you have any views on the rise and interest of sneakers/streetwear in China versus the U.S.?

Many people first got into sneakers through the [NBA](#) or skater culture.

Celebrities these days also include viral sneakers into their streetwear.

Perhaps some others choose their sneakers for styling purposes.

Everyone's entry point is slightly different.

How do you think the streetwear trend in China will look in five years?

I think people will become more sophisticated instead of just blindly following trends. Their own judgments will grow: Do these shoes suit me? Does the price make sense for the market?

People's expertise is gradually growing. For example, around last September and October, the prices of certain models like Air Jordan 4 Wings soared for no good reason, but now they've already gone down, which means people have become more cool-headed.

I think in the next five years, rationality will become even more common.

What changes have you noticed among the needs of your followers since you started your channel? What do sneakerheads in China want today?

I will keep looking for phenomena in the sneaker world to talk about, and try to stay away from regular "unboxing" videos.

I also want to do more recommendations on sneakers on the cheaper end.

We as KOLs don't want to promote popular shoes too much and end up hyping up the prices.

The pain point for sneaker fans in China is that they rarely get the shoes at the original price. These days grandmas would line up for sneakers to buy and sell them you end up seeing the shoes you want being resold for three times.

Sneakerheads may want to raise the public awareness of sneakers. They want people to know the design background and the culture of the sneakers, which basketball players have worn, and make more people like shoes.

How do you see your own business model change in the next 5-10 years?

I don't think the relationship between brands and KOLs will change much. It's symbiotic, no one can survive without the other.

KOLs appear to be more down to earth compared with celebrities and basketball stars, which is a huge plus.

KOLs will also become more professional and the content they make will be more diverse. And maybe some people will just focus on Chinese brands in the future.

What type of brands/campaigns do you find your audience responds to?

**Nike** invited me to promote its collaboration with the Chinese Space Program. I did an "unboxing" video and participated in their offline events, which got a good response.

Another example is about Peak's Taichi series, for which I did a review, as well as offline events and store visit. People liked that, too.

On average, these videos get 200,000 likes and are played 5 million to 6 million times.

The product quality, first and foremost. If they are copying other brands or it gets bad reviews, I won't consider working with them.



*Guo Yanbo talks about the models Nike released in collaboration with China Space Program. Image credit: Screenshot of Guo Yanbo's video*

What factors do you look at and consider when you start a new collaboration with a brand?

The product quality, first and foremost.

If they are copying other brands or it gets bad reviews, I won't consider working with them.

What type of brands would you want to work with in the future?

I'd love to work with HOKA ONE ONE [French athletic shoe company] because I think their shoes are great.

I also want to work with brands that make daily necessities. They might do different crossovers to target different groups, and I think that's really fun.

For example, it's really interesting to combine the concept of razors with sneakers and combine elements of Porsche with sneakers.

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