Facebook, Twitter and Youtube have become phenomenon and ecosystems for the evolving society. They are being used to start revolutions. They are being used to locate your friends and relatives in catastrophe like Japan’s earthquake. And most commonly just to ‘be in touch’. Still China, the largest population on the planet, has banned all 3 websites.

The reasons

1) July 2009 Xinjiang independence movement in which facebook and twitter became media for the groups to invoke protests around the world against Chinese Government

2) Better control by China’s Communist government

As per Chinese officials all the limits of normal cyber activities were overstepped in July 2009 and to this day, you cannot access facebook, twitter etc in China. Even Google is not spared in China. Google also operates with lot of restrictions in China.

So coming to the big question ? So is there no web based social networking in China ? Is there no video streaming trend in China ? The answer is there are sites which do exactly the same as facebook,twitter and youtube but with a difference which doesn’t seem to be much except for the Chinese interface.
Thanks to the ban on facebook, twitter etc, Chinese versions gained market share and userbase.

Let’s look at the top sites in china (alternatives to google, facebook, twitter)

1) Baidu (Chinese Google)

2) RenRen (Chinese facebook)

3) Sina Weibo (Chinese twitter)

4) YouKu (Chinese Youtube)

As the big boys of the internet faced trouble in China, the Chinese alternatives rose as anything. A perfect substitute for every site was made.

Today RenRen (referred to as copy of facebook) targeting elite audience has 95 million registered users. A similar site Qzone whose target audience is 2nd tier cities and lower rung cities have approx 190m people on its user base. RenRen is notorious to have everything what facebook has to offer. Profiles, pages, games, applications etc. Whereas facebook is free for pages, RenRen is not. It charges huge sum of money for corporate pages on RenRen but still it sells.

Similarly Sina Weibo has rose to an Alexa rank of 15 world over. If you carefully see Sina, it’s no different from Twitter. It’s also a basic micro blogging site. Also YouKu is what Youtube is to rest of the world. Stream Videos for Free.
Baidu is number one search engine in China and caters exclusively to Chinese content on the internet. China is not an English Speaking country as when we compare it to India. So also such Chinese versions of the big boys appeal more to the people than translated original sites.

Also the censorship is too high on such Chinese sites. Words related to politics, government policies, recent Chinese controversies cannot be published. This makes it safer for China when compared to facebook and twitter which are completely free platforms.

All of these are big sites, earn revenue in millions of dollars and are highly successful but none of them can boast to be original idea. These all are highly inspired by their so called global counterparts.

Even facebook was accused of stealing an original idea as shown in the movie ‘The Social Network’.

So is copying an idea not bad in today’s world given the conditions are favorable?

Can an idea be copied? Can a business just be made with an idea? These are some questions which come to the mind.

An idea is nothing until and unless it takes shape. If every person who took an inspiration (or copied) somebody’s idea would have been successful, then we would be surrounded by millions of brands selling the same thing. In real world not every idea can be sold again and again.

And just copying an idea doesn’t finish the job, a business has to be nurtured from inception to implementation and has to be run for a period of time before it can be called successful.

If competition exists in today’s world, its only because same idea or concept was explored by a number of people or companies. Still there is a brand which brought that idea out to the world for the first time. If there is a Mercedes Benz there is a BMW, if there is an Airtel, there is Idea
or Vodafone and if there is Facebook, there can be an equally successful RenRen (even if limited to China.) Banning of Facebook definitely helped RenRen and similar sites but even for them there was a competition within their territory i.e. China. Users accepted RenRen and not others even if we call RenRen a copy of Facebook. It gave what people wanted after Facebook was banned. This is business. Right?