

Advanced Project

Whether or not social media will help American companies penetrate the Chinese Market

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F-11: Can design and produce a significant product that gives evidence of advanced competence.

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Introduction and Research Question

Are there any demands for American-made products in China? Will Chinese consumers be willing to pay more for American-made goods? The answer is “Yes”. There is a growing demand for U.S. made products among middle-class consumers in China. The rapid growth of China’s economy in the past few decades has made some middle-class people in China become richer and richer. The growing affluence has enabled them to seek high quality U.S. imports to reflect their unique lifestyle and social status. More and more U.S. companies have realized the great potential of China’s market. So, how could the American companies penetrate the Chinese market? This is an interesting topic for me to explore further because I have multinational experiences of working in China, Singapore and U.S in the field of Sales and Marketing as well as supply chain management.

When I was working for a big Foreign Trade Group in China, my job was to figure out how to penetrate the U.S. market by offering more product varieties and volume discounts. Now I am working in the U.S. as a supply chain management consultant, helping American companies bridge social, cultural and business practice gaps when doing business with China. It would be interesting for me to investigate how American companies can enter into the Chinese Market. I hope this paper will be beneficial to those American companies who are seeking ways to gain market shares in China.

To narrow this topic down further, I would like to focus my research on exploring “whether or not social media will help American companies penetrate the Chinese Market”. With the rapid development of information technology, social media has become an inseparable part of our daily life. People not only use it to connect with their families and friends but also use it to

promote their business. Social media has become one of the most powerful marketing tools for the local and multinational corporations to reach out to the U.S. consumers and penetrate the U.S. market. Therefore, I am interested in finding out if social media can also help American companies penetrate the Chinese Market.

My findings below indicate that social media marketing is beneficial to American companies seeking to penetrate the Chinese market as China has the world's largest social media users (CNNIC, 2015). However, there are some challenges because China's social media landscape is completely different from the rest of the world including the United States. I elaborate on my findings as follows.

Research Methodology

Ebscohost research database was used to conduct this research. Before entering the search key words, “all databases” was selected to ensure the full coverage of this search. Based on the research question, a search strategy was created by using some search key words as search parameters. “China or Chinese” was entered in the first search box, “social media in marketing” in the second search box, “consumer or customer or brand or shop” in the last search box. When the “search” button was hit, there were 222 search results. All of them are all types of articles ranging from Academic Journals, Journals to Trade Publication, Magazine, News and so on.

To narrow the search results further, the period of publication date was narrowed further from 2007-2018 to 2013-2018. Also, the “Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals” was selected to limit the search further. Because of that, the search results were reduced to 40. Most of them came from Academic Search Complete and Business Source complete.

The inclusion criteria used to decide what resources to include were that the articles must be related to Chinese social media sites or Chinese social media marketing or Chinese consumers and netizens. The articles which focused on the study of social media marketing on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube or the study of how to enter into U.S. market would be excluded.

Literature Review

1. Social media marketing in China

1.1 Social media landscape in China

What is social media? Why do Chinese people use local social media platforms instead of globally dominant social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and so on? Social media is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media has become one of the most powerful marketing tools in the modern society because of its two-way communication platform enabling people to “write, share, evaluate and discuss content” (Zhou & Wang, 2014, p. 28). It fulfills the need for “interactive dialogue” among internet users, online communities and organizations (Zhou & Wang, 2014, p. 28).

Though Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are very popular worldwide, those social media platforms are forbidden and inaccessible in China, that’s why local Chinese corporations develop their own social media applications in China (Xia & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015, p. 202). Xia and Pedraza-Jiménez (2015) agree with Sullivan (2014) that Chinese social media platforms are not simply the copycats of the western counterparts, instead, all the applications are uniquely designed and built by the local Chinese corporations to cater for “Chinese netizens’ habits and behaviors” (p. 202). They think some of the Chinese social media innovations have become the global leading trend in social media development. For example, after evaluating the features offered in WeChat, a “fascinating mobile app” launched in 2011 (p. 202), some experts have

already considered WeChat better than WhatsApp, a U.S. counterpart of WeChat, founded in 2009 (p. 203).

According to the report by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2014), Sina Weibo is the most popular microblogging platform in China. Founded in 2009, it has more than 167 million active users per month (Jianrui, 2014). Together with WeChat (355 million monthly active users), they become the top two social media platforms in China (Xu, 2014).

Besides Sina Weibo and WeChat, other popular Chinese social media platforms are Tencent Weibo, Qzone, Renren, Youku and Tudou (Xia & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015, p. 203). With 649 million Internet users (netizens) in December 2014, China has the world's largest social media population (CNNIC, 2015). The report indicates that more than half (55.7%) of Chinese netizens rely on their social networks' recommendations to make their purchasing decisions (CNNIC, 2015).

Xia and Pedraza-Jiménez (2015) believe that social media is a promising and powerful tool that can be used to penetrate the China's market. However, their research also shows that a lot of foreign companies fail to reach the Chinese consumers because they are either not familiar with the Chinese social media platforms or have difficulty identifying the right platforms (p. 207). That's why they suggest that companies, especially foreign companies, should do the market research and attend the training courses to fully understand the local social media platforms and the Chinese digital consumers before launching any social media marketing activities (p. 207-208). They also suggest paying attention to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (p. 207) because of their great influential power on brands and services (Chu & Kim, 2011).

1.2 Sentiment analysis of China's social media data in Chinese

After English, Chinese is the second most used language in the world (Fan, et al., 2013). More than 24% of the world's population speak Chinese. So, not surprisingly, a considerable amount of user-generated social media data is written in Chinese (Fan, et al., 2013). Considering the growing importance of the Chinese market in the global business and economy, it is very important to understand the opinions and ideas that Chinese consumers expressed via social media platforms (Fan, et al., 2013). Therefore, researchers introduce a new approach to help companies better understand the Chinese market and the Chinese consumers. That is to conduct Chinese sentiment analysis on the popular Chinese social media sites where there are substantial number of user-generated contents in Chinese language (Fan, et al. (2013).

To show the effectiveness of using Elastic Net technique in Chinese sentiment analysis, the researchers developed an integrated system framework to conduct such analysis on two popular Chinese Web forums. One is Chinese stock forum, the other is a forum about Dell laptops. Both of them are business and marketing related (Fan, et al., 2013).

To demonstrate the objectivity of these two experiments, the researchers also included a “performance comparison between SVM and Elastic Net” in their proposed system framework for experiments (Fan, et al., 2013, p. 240) as SVM (Support Vector Machine) is “one of the most popular machine learning based approaches” (Fan, et al., 2013, p. 240). The result showed that Elastic Net “achieved a similar level of (and slightly higher) performance” in terms of accuracy and interpretability as compared to SVM in sentiment analysis on Chinese social media data (Fan, et al., 2013, p. 240).

The researchers emphasize the importance of conducting sentiment analysis on Chinese social media data. They believe those “opinion-rich data” will help companies formulate better business strategies about their products and services so as to better serve Chinese consumers’ needs (Fan, et al., 2013, p. 239).

2. Cross-cultural comparison between the U.S. and China on consumer engagement on social media

Culture has an overarching influence that not only impacts the way that brands communicate with consumers in term of the style and content of their marketing messages, but also affects consumers’ communication preferences and their interactions with brands (Barnet & Sung, 2005; Kim, Coyle & Gould, 2009).

A study was conducted to examine how culture influences consumers’ activities and interactions with brands on the social network sites (SNSs) by comparing two culturally distinct countries, China and the U.S. (Tsai & Men, 2017). A total of 245 Chinese (average 43 years old) and 280 Americans (average 33 years old) participated in an online survey. The characteristics of the Chinese and American participants were relatively similar. 91% of the Chinese participants had used Renren, a Chinese social networking site or Sina Weibo, a Chinese microblogging site for a least one year. 93% of the American participants had used Facebook for more than a year.

The results indicate that as compared with American users, Chinese users are more active and engaged in both content-consuming (such as watching videos, reading product information) and content-contributing (such as commenting, asking and answering questions) on brand Social Network Sites (SNSs) (Tsai & Men, 2017). Therefore, it is important to include SNSs as one of the marketing tools when targeting Chinese consumers. (Tsai & Men, 2017).

The results also show that accessing information was the top reason for Chinese users to visit or follow a brand's SNS pages while remuneration (such as free sample, coupons, awards, and promotions) was the most important motivation for American users to engage on brand's SNS (Tsai & Men, 2017). Therefore, culture-specific marketing tactics should be applied to ensure the effectiveness of the marketing campaign in different countries (Tsai & Men, 2017).

Despite the culture differences, the researchers also find similarities between Chinese and American SNS consumers. For example, entertainment was among the top three reasons for both countries' consumers to visit or follow brand's SNS pages (Tsai & Men, 2017). Social media dependency, parasocial interaction (PSI), and community identification were found to "have significant influences on consumer engagement regardless of the user's cultural orientations" (Tsai & Men, 2017, p. 17). The "profound findings" of user similarities "provides strategic foundation for cross-cultural SNS campaigns" (Tsai & Men, 2017, p. 16).

3. Application of social media marketing in China

3.1 Hotels and hospitality industry

Unlike traditional media which employs "top-down control approach" (Levinson, 2011), social media platforms enable the hospitality industry to build an interactive online community among their hotels and customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). A study aimed to evaluate the performances of social media marketing among the top 133 hotel brands in China was conducted. This study focused on understanding how well the hotels "disseminate information, engage with consumers and distribute products through social media" (Denizci Guillet et al., 2016). The top 133 hotel brands in China at the time of study consisted of 46 international high-

end brands, 26 domestic high-end brands, 28 middle-range brands and 33 economy brands (Denizci Guillet et al., 2016, p. 790).

The researchers used “The 6Is Social Media Monitoring Framework” developed by Stevenson and Hamill (2012) to examine how well those 133 top hotel brands in China do in these six categories on the top four Chinese social media sites such as Sina Weibo, Wechat and so on. The 6Is criteria comprise “Involvement, Interaction, Intimacy, Influence, Insight, and Impact” (Stevenson et al., 2012). Those are very useful Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as they “recognize the complexity of social media marketing” while including “the most up-to-date marketing factors” (Denizci Guillet et al., 2016, p. 787).

The results show that the majority of those top 133 hotel brands “conduct their marketing through Sina Weibo and Wechat platforms” (Denizci Guillet et al., 2016, p. 791). This study also reveals some major issues that those hotels were facing in conducting social media marketing such as not properly registering and getting verified of their social media account, not fully taking advantage of all the features and functions provided by the social media platform due to lack of such kind of knowledge, not fully integrating “marketing” and “sales” in the social media platform, slow or no response to customer’s complaints, lack of interaction activities in promoting their affiliated brands and so on (Denizci Guillet et al., 2016, p. 795-799).

The researchers provide some recommendations for resolving the problems they discovered, such as cultivating and hiring social media talent to manage social media marketing activities, developing convenient and effective “sales” systems such as providing reservation hotline and online booking to increase the effectiveness of converting social marketing efforts into actual sales gains, “strengthening the collaboration with affiliates”, learning to understand the customer

and be more attentive to their complaints by “developing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for handling social media complaints” and so on (Denizci Guillet et al., 2016, p.799-802).

Another study was conducted to investigate international luxury hotels’ social media marketing strategies targeted for the Chinese market by comparing and analyzing the messages those hotels posted on their U.S. Twitter and Chinese Sina Weibo. They focused on examining the international luxury hotels which have both Twitter and Sina Weibo accounts (Wen, et al., 2016).

The researchers found that out of 90 global luxury hotel chains, only 15 of them had both Twitter and Sina Weibo accounts (Wen, et al., 2016, p. 140). Also, the total posts on the twitter account were 3.7 times more than that of in Sina Weibo during one-week timeframe of study when the data were collected from both accounts. This suggested that the potential of Sina Weibo hadn’t been fully utilized by international luxury hotel segment (Wen, et al., 2016, p.143).

Content analysis and Chi-square tests were conducted to analyze those hotels’ social media marketing strategies towards Chinese market (Wen, et al., 2016, p. 139-140). The results indicated that international luxury hotels do employ different social media marketing strategies to communicate with customers in China. As compared with Twitter postings, they offered additional promotions activities on Sina Weibo to attract Chinese customers (Wen, et al., 2016).

3.2 Luxury branding

“With its fast-growing economy and huge population, China has become one of the most lucrative markets for luxury brands” (Zhan & He, 2012). In fact, “China surpassed Japan and became the No. 1 luxury products’ spender in the world, accounting for more than one-quarter of

the global luxury brand expenditure” (Yousuf, 2012). “Chinese middleclass consumers have thus become the target market of luxury brands” (Zhan & He, 2012).

Recognizing the increasing popularity of social media in China, Western luxury brands have started using social media to connect with Chinese consumers online. For example, "Burberry launched an online shopping site for Chinese consumers, offering a 24-hour customer service through online chat systems” (Spillecke & Perrey, 2012). Burberry also has accounts on Chinese social media sites such as Weibo, one of the most popular microblogging sites in China. Its Weibo followers had increased from 90,000 in early 2011 to 180,000 in January 2012 (Spillecke & Perrey, 2012).

A study was conducted to examine the luxury branding strategies on WeChat, the most popular social mobile application in China, by analyzing the messages that seven Western luxury brands posted on their public WeChat accounts during one-year period in 2015 (Chen & Wang, 2017). Seven luxury brands “was compiled based upon The World’s Most Valuable Brands List by Forbes” (Forbes, 2015), which includes Gucci, Hermes, Prada, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Cartier and Coach (Chen & Wang, 2017).

Results show that Western luxury brands used rich media content, such as videos and images, to “build social presence”. The focus of their self-presentation was to “communicate a brand’s social meaning and dissemination brand information”. They encouraged low-level consumers’ engagement activities such as “read more” or “download the coupon” while restricting high-level consumers’ interactions such as “commenting” or “discussing”. “Most of the messages (93.4%) did not allow consumers to comment. The luxury brands rarely solicited consumer’s feedback” (Chen & Wang, 2017), but on the other hand, “offline consumer activities, like the purchase of products and store visits are promoted through mobile social media” (Chen & Wang, 2017).

During this study, researchers also investigated Chinese consumers' perception and interpretation of such kind of social media luxury branding strategies by conducting in-depth interviews with seventeen female luxury products consumers aged between 25-44 (Chen & Wang, 2017) as "female consumers are bigger spenders on luxury products than their male counterparts" (Business Wire, 2016). Also, more than 80% of all Chinese luxury consumers are between this age and "90% of them are using WeChat" (Buchwald, 2015).

The results showed that, in terms of interpretation of luxury brands, "although some participants associated luxury brands directly with high price, many participants described luxury brands as something imbued with subjectivity... highlighting the fit between their personal style and the culture meaning of the brand(s)" (Chen & Wang, 2017). "Luxury brands have become something mundane and relatable, and intertwined into daily activities" as many luxury brands have "changed their market positioning strategy by making their products more available to general Chinese consumers" (Chen & Wang, 2017). Participants perceived luxury brands' social media marketing strategies in China as "conservative, inactive and distant" (Chen & Wang, 2017).

Findings from both studies revealed the gaps between consumers' communication needs and Western luxury brands' social media marketing strategies in China (Chen & Wang, 2017). Therefore, researchers suggest that Western luxury brands should "adjust their social media advertising strategies to better meet Chinese consumers' communication needs" by "shifting the focus and resources more from informing to entertaining consumers", by communicating more on brand's personal meaning instead of largely social meaning, by allowing more higher-level consumer interactions on their public accounts (Chen & Wang, 2017).

Another study used five pioneering luxury brands (Burberry, Gucci, Dior, Louis Vuitton and Hermes) in social media to examine the influence of social media marketing on brand equity creation and consumers' responses to brand preferences, brand loyalty and the willingness to pay a premium price (Godey, et al., 2016). The two dimensions of brand equity explored in this study are brand awareness and brand image. This brand equity concept was proposed by Keller in 1993 (Keller, 1993).

The researchers recognize the importance of the five elements in social media marketing efforts (SMMEs) in the luxury brands, which include entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth (WOM) (Kim & Ko, 2012). The framework they developed for examining SMMEs is based on those five dimensions (Godey, et al., 2016).

A total of 845 luxury brand consumers were engaged in this quantitative survey. All participants came from four countries and two distinct types of customer groups. French and Italy represent the consumers from well-established mature luxury market while China and India represent the consumers from emerging rapid growing luxury market. Average of 200 people per country were gathered (Godey, et al., 2016). The researchers believe that the samples from those two distinct consumer populations would help them "better generalize the research results" (Godey, et al., 2016).

The study result across those five luxury brands and four countries consistently shows that SMMEs do have "significant positive effects" on brand equity and consumer responses (Godey, et al., 2016). The result also indicates that the five dimensions of SMMEs jointly contribute to the creation of brand equity, therefore, all of them should be considered holistically when designing social media marketing activities (Godey, et al., 2016). In terms of the effect of SMMEs on the two dimensions of brand equity, the researchers find that the effect is "more on

the luxury brand image than on its awareness” (Godey, et al., 2016), therefore, we should consider SMMEs not only a way to reach new consumers and increase brand awareness but also a cost-effective tool for brand image building (Godey, et al., 2016).

3.3 Imported personal care products by focal flash-sale retailers

“Flash sales refer to an emerging e-commerce practice in which a firm offers one or more products/service at a substantial discount within limited time” (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015). Flash-sale tactics is relatively new in China. Many flash-sale retailers in China focus primarily on selling imported products as they appear to meet the needs of many middle/low-income customers who are looking for high quality products with significant discounts. Those well-known imported brands or Western luxury brands are typically perceived and marketed as “high quality”, “high social status” and “prestigious” products in China (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015).

There is “substantial difference in economic development across the regions of China” (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015). The level of economic development in each region will affect consumers’ income and ability to purchase imported products (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015). “Consumers’ residence can generally be divided into four different tiers in China. Tier 1 refers to the metropolitan areas (municipality), such as Beijing and Shanghai. Tier 2 includes the capital cities of each province (provincial capital city). Tier 3 refers to small to medium-sized cities (prefectural level city). Tier 4 includes smaller cities, towns and villages. The level of economic development decreases as the tier number increases” (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015).

A study aimed to investigate Chinese consumers’ purchasing behaviors from different regions and tiers under flash sales was conducted. Large-scale survey data were collected from a big flash-sale website in China. This retailer specializes in the imported personal care products and “has more than five million registered users”. Among them, “18,856 registered consumers

participated in the survey”. The number of participants from each tier category were relatively balanced: “5,947 from tier 1; 5,564 from tier 2; 3,308 from tier 3; and 4,037 from tier 4” (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015).

The findings reveal that “purchase behavior differs substantially across regions and, within each region, purchase propensity is moderated by income”. “Flash-sale retailers are more likely to draw attention from consumers in small cities and towns, and mid-/low-income consumers in large cities” because those people cannot afford to buy imported goods at full price and yet are “under pressure to imitate their aspiration group” (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015). The findings also reveal that high-income consumers in large cities care more about “superior store experience” than the “deep discount offered by flash-sale websites” (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015). Therefore, the researchers emphasize the great importance of developing “regional marketing strategy” (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015).

As for “where to place the advertisement for flash-sale websites” (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015) , the findings indicate that “consumers are most likely to find flash-sale websites through their social media/friends and TV commercials”. Social media and TV commercial are currently the most popular ad media in China (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015).

3.4 City marketing

Just like companies and products, cities have their own “target customers” such as investors and visitors (Cao, 2011), therefore, cities can also employ a marketing mix to promote themselves (Guo & Liu, 2006). Social media provides the ideal platform to “build and promote the overall brand image of a city” (Zhou & Wang, 2014) because of its “participative, interactive,

open and transparent nature” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). It has been used to promote both Chinese and foreign cities in China (Zhou & Wang, 2014).

In a study, researchers introduce the application of social media marketing by city governments in China to promote their cities to attract tourists, investors, potential residents, organizations and so on. To demonstrate the rising popularity and effectiveness of utilizing this marketing tool for city promotion, the researchers examined the “current state of social media utilization in city marketing” (Zhou & Wang, 2014). They also reviewed several cases of “social media application in the main Chinese cities, such as Guangzhou, Chengdu and Nanjing cities” (Zhou & Wang, 2014).

This study shows that social media is indeed a convenient and effective tool for city marketing and its utilization in city marketing is still rapidly increasing in China (Zhou & Wang, 2014). The study also reveals that social media cannot completely “replace” traditional media in China as there are some “disadvantage groups” in China who still rely on traditional media such as radio and TV to attain information and cannot afford to use social media (Zhou & Wang, 2014).

Another study used a successful social media campaign organized by Tourism New Zealand (TNZ) as a case study to examine how Chinese local celebrities’ endorsement on social media in China “can be utilized” for marketing “Western-based tourism destination” and how the local government agencies and business involved can leverage the campaign for capital gains (Fath, et al., 2017).

The purpose of TNZ social media campaign was to raise the awareness of New Zealand as “a tourism destination among young, affluent, free and independent travelers (FITs) from China and

“establish a channel to reach out to this customer segment” (Fath, et al., 2017). TNZ used Chinese actress Yao Chen, who has 10.9 million followers on her Sina Weibo account, as a celebrity endorser. Sina Weibo microblog is one of the most popular social media in China and she is considered “Weibo Queen” in terms of the numbers of followers she has. She helped create the awareness of NZ by sharing her travel experiences as well her wedding in NZ on her “Weibo” in China (Fath, et al., 2017).

The findings of this case study have showed the effectiveness of using this strategy for attracting potential Chinese travelers. It further demonstrates that celebrity endorsement on social media is indeed “suitable for raising awareness of, and familiarity with, a destination” (Fath, et al., 2017). The result also indicates the importance of finding the right match between the celebrity endorser and the target audience. Yao Chen, the “Weibo Queen”, had developed “a large community of followers on Sina Weibo that fitted the customer segment” TNZ was targeting. It was because of that this social media campaign was very successful (Fath, et al., 2017).

To better understand how the local tourism agencies and businesses involved can leverage such kind of collaborative campaign to maximize their capital gains, the researchers conducted 20 “semi-structured in-depth” interviews with the participants who had direct involvement with the TNZ campaign (Fath, et al., 2017).

These interviews reveal that those agencies and businesses benefitted most from the campaign are those who “captured emerging themes on the celebrity’s social media network and incorporated these in the company’s own product and service offering or brand stories” (Fath, et al., 2017). Therefore, the researchers point out that the most effective way to “realize the tangible

benefit” from the campaign is to “monitor” the content of the celebrity endorser and “alter” their product offerings accordingly (Fath, et al., 2017). The researchers also attribute the lack of resources, Chinese language and cultural skills to the failure of capitalization on the campaign for some smaller agencies and businesses.

4. Artifact

The artifact of this research project is the Power Point presentation. Mann (2017) believes TED style presentation is an effective way of grabbing audiences’ attention to the messages they deliver (Mann, 2017).

After turning to TED Talks to learn “how the greatest TED speakers prepared for their 18 minutes of fame on the red circle”, Mann (2017) concluded that creating emotional connection with the audience by using storytelling, stunning visuals or humor is a key for dynamic presentation. She also emphasized the importance of have a “common theme” throughout the presentation so as to ensure the listeners “walks away with that one big idea” (Mann, 2017). She suggested ending the presentation with “a call to action” so that the audience will know “what you want your audience to do with your message” (Mann, 2017)?

Schmaltz and Enström (2014) offer some suggestions and resources to help instructors create more strong and effective Power Point slides. They believe that strong PowerPoint presentations can enhance students learning experiences in the classroom and help them “retain information” (Susskind, 2005) while weak PowerPoint presentation tune out the students and “impede learning” (Savoy et al., 2009).

To create a unique look, Schmaltz and Enström (2014) recommend “avoiding the use of templates that are included with PowerPoint” when possible. They suggest paying attention to

the font, animations and the color of the text as they believe it “can have a major impact on a presentation” (Schmaltz & Enström, 2014). They also suggest avoiding using distracting animation. They think we should avoid having “color schemes with red on green or blue on yellow” as some people may be color blind. They recommend not to load the slide with heavy text. They believe with less text on the slides, students would be more attentive to instructor’s lecture (Schmaltz & Enström, 2014).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper explores whether or not social media will help American companies penetrate the Chinese Market. Prior studies showed that China has a very unique social media landscape. Unlike the rest of the world where Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are dominant, Chinese people use their own local social media platforms developed by local Chinese corporations due to the Chinese government's restriction of access to the Western social media platforms (Xia & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015, p. 202). Sina Weibo and WeChat have become the top two social media platforms in China (Xu, 2014).

With 649 million Internet users (netizens) in December 2014, China has the world's largest social media population (CNNIC, 2015). Among them, more than half (55.7%) of Chinese netizens "make purchasing decisions based on the recommendations on their social networks" (CNNIC, 2015). Therefore, it is important to include social network sites (SNSs) as one of the marketing tools when targeting Chinese consumers. (Tsai & Men, 2017).

This paper also reviews the application of social media marketing in China in the field of hotel and hospitality industry (Denizci Guillet et al., 2016; Wen, et al., 2016), luxury branding (Chen & Wang, 2017; Godey, et al., 2016), imported personal care products (Wei Shi & Ming, 2015) and city marketing (Zhou & Wang, 2014; Fath, et al., 2017). All those studies demonstrate that social media is a promising and powerful tool that can be used to penetrate the China's market (Xia & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015).

Reviews from prior studies also discover some common issues and challenges that multinational corporations may face when launching social media marketing campaigns in China. For example, a lot of foreign companies fail to reach the Chinese consumers because they

are “unfamiliar with Chinese social media platforms,” “lack of understanding of Chinese digital consumers” and have difficulty “identifying the right platforms” (Xia & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015, p. 207). Based on the findings and issues discovered in this study, recommendations are made below for effective social media marketing practices in China.

1. Become familiarized with the functions and features of major social media

platforms in China. As mentioned earlier, China has a very unique social media landscape. Unlike the rest of the world, there is no Facebook or Twitter or YouTube in China, but there are equivalent platforms. For example, Sina Weibo and Tencent Weibo are the equivalents of Twitter, Qzone and Renren are the equivalents of Facebook; Youku and Tudou are the equivalents of YouTube (Xia & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2015, p. 203). It would be hard to develop effective social media marketing strategies in China without knowing the functionalities and features that each of those platforms can offer.

2. Set up a business account with proper verification on each social media platform.

There are many fake accounts and fake products in China, so Chinese people become skeptical about everything. They don't trust unverified social media accounts easily. Without the verification process, a company's social media accounts can still be detected on the social media sites, however, having the account verified is definitely beneficial to the company as it will increase the company's credibility and customers' participation. It can also help the company keep a good reputation by avoiding fake accounts or fake information from fraudsters. Once the account is verified, customers can locate the company's account more easily because the social media search engines prioritize accounts with verification. In addition, getting the account verified can help the company

gain privileges to access additional marketing, advertising and data analyzing tools and features.

Those companies who register their official business accounts and submit all the documents required by the social media platform for the account verification will have a verification symbol (such as a symbol of “V” in Sina Weibo) on their account once it is verified by that social media site (Denizci Guillet et al., 2016, p. 790). This symbol will differentiate them from individual accounts as well as those unverified business accounts.

- 3. Understand the unique characteristics of Chinese online consumers.** The cross-cultural comparison study between U.S. and China on consumer engagement on social network sites (SNSs) has shown that as compared with the American counterparts, Chinese consumers’ behaviors and attitudes towards brands’ SNSs are different in certain aspects because of the cultural influence. For example, the study results show that information seeking is the most important reason for Chinese consumers to visit or follow a brand’s SNS pages while remuneration is the most important motivation for American consumers to engage on a brand’s SNS (Tsai & Men, 2017). Therefore, culture-specific marketing strategies are crucial for successful social media marketing campaigns in China (Tsai & Men, 2017).
- 4. Make the brand’s social network sites (SNSs) more entertaining and enjoyable.** The cross-cultural comparison study between U.S. and China on consumer engagement on social network sites (SNSs) also shows that entertainment is one of the top reasons that Chinese consumers visit or follow brand’s SNS pages. They “appreciate the entertainment value provided on brand’s SNS pages and enjoy the venues for relaxation and esthetic pleasure” (Tsai & Men, 2017). Therefore, to attract more Chinese followers

to brand's SNS page, it is important to keep the SNS page not only current but also entertaining and enjoyable.

5. Pay attention to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC)'s report (2015) shows that 55.7% of 649 million Chinese netizens rely on the recommendations on their social networks to make buying decisions (CNNIC, 2015). The cross-cultural comparison study mentioned above also suggests that "Chinese users were highly likely to visit a brand's SNS page to gauge whether the product or company is well liked by others, to seek opinions from product users... before making any major purchase decisions" (Tsai & Men, 2017). No doubt that eWOM via social media has great influence on product brands and service related sales (Godsmith & Horowitz, 2006) as it not only provides companies with valuable "industry information" but also helps companies "evaluate a brand's online reputation" (CIC, 2011). Therefore, it is very important to listen to eWOM.

As for the form of the artifact, it is a Power Point Presentation with speech script. I believe that's the most effective way to depict the findings and provide solutions and recommendations.

Learning Statement

Before working on this advanced project, I expected this process would help advance my academic research and writing skills. I also expected to become an “expert” on the subject I research through this process. I end up gaining much more than I expected.

My academic research, reading, writing and analytical skills have been enhanced during this process. I learned to effectively locate the resources needed for the project by developing searching strategy and inclusion and exclusion criteria. I learned to deepen my research by approaching my research topic from different angles and search for the information accordingly. I learned to examine the sources from different perspectives and make use of the findings as a guide for my own research though the sources may not directly relate to my topic. In a word, I have gained a deeper understanding of the social media landscape and the impact of social media marketing in China. As a result, I have been able to make recommendations and artifact for effective social media marketing practices in China.

I also learned a great deal from my fellow classmates and the guest speakers. Their research topics interested me and opened my mind, their experiences inspired me, their feedback and opinions enlighten me.

I am now working as a supply chain management consultant, helping American companies bridge social, cultural and business practice gaps when doing business with China. From time to time, I am asked by my clients how to penetrate the Chinese market. So, there is no doubt that the knowledge gleaned from my library-based reading and analysis is beneficial to my work. It will enable me to better serve my clients. This experience and the knowledge I gained have greatly boost my confidence in life as well. Seeing weeks of hard work turning into a solid research paper and artifact, I feel a sense of satisfaction. Now I know I could tackle the

challenges in my life just like tackling this project by breaking them down into a smaller component and deal with it one at a time.

This is a painstaking and yet enjoyable learning process. This level of learning is important to me as I plan to go to graduate school after completing this program. This would equip me with the knowledge, skills and mindset for my further education.

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