

Analysing the Marketing Strategies of Chinese Universities on Social Media Platforms ---- Taking Weibo as an Example

Min Xu *

Department of Spanish, Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 202111680048@stu.blcu.edu.cn

Abstract. With the growing popularity and increasing richness of the internet, social media platforms such as Weibo have become the main platform for universities to promote themselves to the public. Chinese universities have also developed a set of promotional and marketing strategies to suit their audiences and the functional characteristics of social media platforms. This paper investigates the relationship between such marketing strategies and the influence of universities in China by collecting data on the content published by some Chinese universities on Weibo SuperTopics, topics, inter-college cooperation and interaction models, and conducting case studies and quantitative analysis of the data. The study found that SuperTopics, topics, inter-college cooperation and interaction models had a significant impact on the influence of universities. However, the neglect of communication between Chinese universities and their users and the homogenization of their unique culture had a negative impact on the influence of universities. This paper aims to provide effective suggestions for the future development of Chinese universities on social media platforms.

Keywords: Weibo; Chinese universities; SuperTopic; Beijing area.

1. Introduction

As society progresses, the way people socialize with each other is no longer limited to word of mouth or letters, but has developed in a more convenient and diverse way. With the rapid development and iteration of the Internet, various social networking platforms have emerged. Those platforms have rapidly broken down the physical distance between people. At the same time, the dissemination of information has evolved from a one-to-many mode of communication from the office to the masses to a many-to-many mode of discussion and interaction by the masses. According to CNNIC's 50th Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China, as of June 2022, the number of Internet users in China was 1.051 billion, and the Internet penetration rate reached 74.4% [1]. Weibo was launched in August 2009 and is based on an open platform structure that allows for instant interaction through multimedia. It is also now one of the most important ways of attracting Weibo users and increasing their visibility [2]. The scope of information dissemination in universities is often limited by the profession or school, and the scope of information dissemination is relatively small. Weibo, one of the most popular Internet platforms in China, is one of the most popular social media platforms used by students in universities. Therefore, Chinese universities choose Weibo as one of the main social media platforms for further development. It was highlighted that Supertopics has created a new online participatory cultural ecology by using its circle structure + chain structure community interaction model, its strong productive consumers as community engagement subjects, and its distinctive data-based engagement practices [3]. Also, it was suggested that while it seems that colleges and universities have achieved a win-win situation with the microblogging platform in their admissions activities, the complexity and uniqueness of emotions have not been revealed at all, and even the opposite characteristics of labour and marketization have been shown [4]. Besides, there were some problems exist in the integration of campus media in Jilin Province: the concept of integration of campus media teams is not strong; the positioning of communication is not clear; media organizations operate in different ways; the lack of original and unique communication brands; the lack of funds to achieve technological empowerment; and the lack of professionalism in talent training [5]. The analysis of these problems has important implications for the development and improvement of universities' marketing strategies on social media platforms such as Weibo in the

future. Thus, the author quantifies the influence of universities by means of microblog reading and interaction and divides the research into four aspects: SuperTopics, topics, inter-college cooperation and interaction models. The paper classifies and integrates the content published by some Chinese universities on Weibo and its related data. On the whole, the author conducts case studies and adopts quantitative analysis for several cases.

2. Marketing Methods and Characteristics of Chinese Universities on Weibo

2.1. SuperTopic

In Weibo's community building, the SuperTopic is a derivative of the "hashtag" similar to Twitter. It is a new type of media product that combines the structure of a topic with the attributes of a community, making it a "microblog topic + interest content community" [3]. Compared with topics, SuperTopic is more private and targeted. Chinese universities use this product medium to provide a platform for students and alumni to share information and give users a community-like experience. In Weibo SuperTopic, when users are strangers to each other, the symptoms of social fear seem to disappear. They can communicate with each other as if they were acquaintances, showing the phenomenon of "mock-acquaintance" communication [6]. People can escape the awkwardness of communicating with strangers and instead build more dynamic and intimate social relationships. For example, the BJTU SuperTopic grants users an 'alumni title' that they can display when posting through tests on details such as the school's motto and geographical location, which are screened to ensure message accuracy. At the same time, the college SuperTopic often has several sections under the main topic, such as "interest life", "college entrance examination", "study exchange", etc. In order to categorize posts properly, users can either choose a section on their own when posting, or the college operation team will later catch partition by keywords. It can effectively let the outside users who participate in or are interested in the school understand the relevant information more efficiently.

2.2. Operation of Topics

In the operation of topics, topics on Weibo are similar to the Hashtags on Twitter. University officials generally launch two kinds of topics, school-related and popular-related, in an attempt to trigger the participation of users who pay attention to the topics. At the same time, through the influence of the university itself, the reading volume of users' posts can be increased when following up on the topics. Hence, university officials and users are playing a complementary role. Weibo, as one of the mainstream social networking platforms in China, also has a unique feature in its topic operation: the sophisticated management of topics. In this feature, Chinese universities make full use of this condition. Firstly, in terms of section setting, there is an education section in the topic type, and the topics of relevant universities are screened separately, the screening mechanism can attract users interested in the topic more precisely. Further, for those users who do not actively pay attention to university-related topics, universities can make use of the "fan headline" function to promote the blog posts. Through the system, universities can promote highly relevant blogs published by universities to users' home pages depending on users' gender, region and interests. In this way, posts from universities that are highly relevant to the topic are promoted to the home pages of these users, increasing readership and interaction.

At the same time, for the topic itself, Weibo has set up "topic host", which is only open to some of the users authorized by Weibo, and universities can obtain this permission by cooperating with Weibo and joining Weibo's campus channel. It allows universities to use the topic moderator's permission to be on top of the topic, and publish topic-related polls to filter the quality content published on the topic, thus making the content more specific and relevant, and attracting more general users to read and participate.

2.3. Inter-college Cooperation

This channel provides a new way of marketing between universities. Firstly, Weibo will provide a series of recommended activities for universities to carry out similar activities across multiple universities within a certain time period. The universities use Weibo as a platform to launch their activities online, while on the actual campus, they are responsible for laying the groundwork for the activities, and Weibo will provide the universities with the necessary materials and funding to set up the Weibo brand in the universities. Meanwhile, in terms of online cooperation, Weibo will provide some recommended topics for the universities, which will be jointly released by different universities to achieve a win-win situation in terms of increasing the attention of the universities.

2.4. Interaction Model

In order to increase the amount of interaction on official Weibo to increase the popularity, Chinese universities usually use lucky draws and post polls to attract interaction. First of all, with the emphasis on campus image building in Chinese universities, many of them design creative products inspired by the university's emblem, motto and history. Official university Weibo often posts draw tweets to give away these products in order to mobilize the interest of the account's followers. In turn, users interested in the school will be willing to access these products through retweets, frequency and likes, increasing the amount of interaction. In terms of publishing polls, the official Weibo account of BLCU, for example, applies the language features of the school to its operations, publishing polls related to English word learning and the analysis of ancient Chinese texts on a day-by-day basis. This type of interaction, which requires only one click to gain knowledge and is of interactive interest, has led to a significant increase in interaction.

3. Analysis of Marketing Effectiveness--A Selection of Universities in the Beijing Area as Examples

3.1. Analysis of the Effect of Super Topics

Table 1. Data collation for the College Super Topic—basic figures
(data as of January 2023, capturing the top 15 universities in Beijing in the ranking).

University	official Weibo directly manages SuperTopic	the number of sections	alumni status test & title	Cumulative reads (ten thousand)
Beijing Foreign Studies University	Yes	12	Yes	1.2
Beijing Forestry University	Yes	13	Yes	1.3
Beijing Institute of Technology	Yes	12	Yes	1.2
Beijing Jiaotong University	Yes	15	Yes	2.3
Beijing Language and Culture University	Yes	12	No	0.41
Beijing Normal University	No	4	No	0.73
Beijing Sport University	Yes	15	Yes	0.77
Capital Normal University	Yes	8	Yes	1.3
China University of Political Science and Law	Yes	14	No	2
Communication University of China	Yes	14	Yes	2.3
Peking University	Yes	19	Yes	3.8
People's Public Security University of China	Yes	15	Yes	3.6
Tsinghua University	Yes	12	Yes	6.2
University of International Business and Economics	Yes	15	No	0.71
University of Science and Technology Beijing	Yes	13	Yes	1.8
AVERAGE	/	12.87	/	1.97
PERCENTAGE of Yes	93.40%	/	73.34%	/

Table 2. Data collation for the College Super Topic—posts/fans
(data as of January 2023, capturing the top 15 universities in Beijing in the ranking).

University	Total posts (ten thousand)	Total SuperTopic fans (ten thousand)	Average number of posts per fan
Beijing Foreign Studies University	1.3	4.1	0.32
Beijing Forestry University	1.3	2.4	0.54
Beijing Institute of Technology	1.1	2.6	0.42
Beijing Jiaotong University	1.3	2.2	0.59
Beijing Language and Culture University	0.51	1.3	0.39
Beijing Normal University	0.68	2.5	0.27
Beijing Sport University	0.67	1.7	0.39
Capital Normal University	1.3	3	0.43
China University of Political Science and Law	1.1	6.8	0.16
Communication University of China	1.6	21.4	0.07
Peking University	1.8	17.3	0.1
People's Public Security University of China	1.4	13.8	0.1
Tsinghua University	1.9	45	0.04
University of International Business and Economics	0.68	3.1	0.22
University of Science and Technology Beijing	1.4	2.9	0.48
AVERAGE	1.2	8.67	0.3

Table 3. Data collation for the College Super Topic—fans
(data as of January 2023, capturing the top 15 universities in Beijing in the ranking).

University	official Weibo followers (ten thousand)	official Weibo followers /fans in SuperTopic rate (%)	Interactions between the official Weibo and users within the super topic in 2022
Beijing Foreign Studies University	19.2	21.35%	0
Beijing Forestry University	6.1	39.34%	26
Beijing Institute of Technology	8	32.50%	0
Beijing Jiaotong University	46.6	4.72%	44
Beijing Language and Culture University	4.8	27.08%	13
Beijing Normal University	131.4	1.90%	0
Beijing Sport University	23.4	7.26%	1
Capital Normal University	6.1	49.18%	0
China University of Political Science and Law	37.8	17.99%	1
Communication University of China	109.2	19.60%	28
Peking University	485.5	3.56%	1
People's Public Security University of China	20.7	66.67%	0
Tsinghua University	532.7	8.45%	2
University of International Business and Economics	20.3	15.27%	3
University of Science and Technology Beijing	16.3	17.79%	0
AVERAGE	97.87	22.18%	7.93

Table 1, 2, 3 show the data of the top fifteen universities in Beijing in terms of super topics activity as of January 2023. The source of the data is the official data shown in Weibo SuperTopic, which includes: 1 whether the university's official Weibo directly manages SuperTopic 2 the number of SuperTopic sections 3 whether there is an alumni status test 4 the total number of posts 5 the total number of fans 6 the accumulated reading volume.

As shown in tables, among the top 15 universities in terms of activity, more than 90% of the universities' official microblogs have already engaged in SuperTopic, and more than 60% of the SuperTopic has opened the alumni identity test function, with each SuperTopic having more than 12 sections on average. Meanwhile, the average number of posts made by each SuperTopic follower ranged from a high of 0.59 to a low of 0.04, with an average value of 0.30. And the ratio of SuperTopic followers to official Weibo followers was the highest at 54.17% and the lowest at 4.22%, while the average was 30.34%. Also, the highest number of interactions between the official Weibo and users within the SuperTopic for these fifteen universities was 44, the lowest was 0, and the average was 7.93. To conclude, there is no doubt about the effectiveness of the SuperTopic marketing strategy, but there are still major problems in terms of conversion of interaction and followers.

3.2. Analysis of the Effect of the Topic Operation

Table 4. Collection of topics relevant to Beijing universities.

University	Topics
Beihang University(BUAA)	#GoodmorningBeihang, #GoodnightBeihang, #BUAA 70th anniversary
Beijing Jiaotong University(BJTU)	#LittleJiaoShare, #BJTUerMorning, #BJTU Online Graduation Ceremony
Beijing Language and Culture University(BLCU)	#AskBLCUer, #BLCUnews, #BLCU 60th anniversary celebration
Communication University of China(CUC)	#CUC Campus, #CUC Good Night, #CUCer and the Spring Festival Gala
Peking University(PKU)	#PKUpeople, #Listening to Lectures at PKU, #PKUer Soul Station
Tsinghua University(THU)	#Tsinghua student vlog, #THUAnswer, #Research Express
University of Science and Technology Beijing(USTB)	#GoodMorningUSTB, #GoodNightUSTB, #USTB graduation season
Beijing Sport University(BSU)	#Here is BSU, #GoodMorningBSU, #Awesome BSU
University of International Business and Economics(UIBE)	#UIBEer photography, #Listen with UIBE, #I Love My Teacher
China University of Geosciences,Beijing(CUGB)	#GoodMorningCUGB, #CUGB Gramophone, #CUGB 70th Anniversary

Table 4 shows a partial list of topics run by the official microblogs of some universities in Beijing. Through the above table, this paper finds that most universities choose to use their own school names or nicknames as part of the topics. The names of universities are unique. It implies the regional characteristics that the universities are located in on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is a comprehensive embodiment of the main image and spiritual and cultural image of various universities in the past [7].

At the same time, at important activity points, such as university celebrations and parties, the university will open new topics with a more official tone of content, tending to show the history of campus culture in order to attract more people to the university itself. Take the topic #Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics 70th Anniversary as an example, the official microblog of BAU became the host of the topic through cooperation with Weibo, and sent out 28 related tweets on the same day, with a topic contribution of over 300, attracting 71,426,000 readers and 4,362 followers, leading the topic to the highest number 5 of the day's hot search, with the official blog of the university having 760,000 followers The topic attracted nearly 100 times the number of readers. In conclusion, topic marketing can leverage the attention of more people to university topics and can significantly increase the popularity of the topic.

3.3. Analysis of the Effect of Inter-college Cooperation

Table 5. Followers of the official Weibo of the university.

University	Number of official Weibo followers (ten thousand)
Minzu University of China	34.8
Beijing Language and Culture University	4.8
Beijing Technology and Business University	12.7
China University of Labor Relations	6.3
China University of Petroleum,Beijing	8.1
People's Public Security University of China	20.7
China University of Geosciences,Beijing	7.3
Beijing Forestry University	6.1
Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications	14.1

Table 6. Related topics read.

Topic	Number of topic reads (ten thousand)
#Beijing campus welcomes the Year of the Rabbit	348.5
#Beijing College Chinese New Year Sense of Ritual	107
#Beijing College Blessings	335.6

In terms of inter-college cooperation, this article will take the "Year of the Rabbit Hand Gesture Dance Relay" launched by the Beijing channel of Weibo Campus as an example. Table 5 and 6 show the official Weibo followers of the nine universities that participated in the relay and the data on topics related to the campaign.

Through the table, the paper found that the number of topics read in the joint campaign was much higher than the original follower base of the universities.

3.4. Analysis of the Effect of Interaction Model

Table 7. Original Weibo category statistics-BLCU December 2022 original posts are voting or not.

Voting post or not	Count: Voting post or not	Average: Reposts	Average: Comments	Average: Likes
Yes	72.00	0.85	1.32	90.17
No	231.00	3.59	3.48	17.85
Grand Total	303.00	2.94	2.97	35.04

In terms of interaction, this paper will compare the interaction volume of voting posts in BLCU's official Weibo in December 2022 with that of other tweets, so as to conduct a comparative analysis. Table 7 lists a total of 303 original posts published by BLCU in December 2022, of which one was a voting post with an average of about 90 likes per post, while the remaining posts had an average of about 18 likes per post. The number of reposts and comments decreased, but the average number of likes increased significantly in the interactive mode of "voting". In summary, it follows that the interactive mode of "voting" can considerably increase the amount of interaction on official university microblogs, especially the number of likes.

4. Suggestions

Nowadays, with the high development of the Internet, although universities have given a certain degree of importance to platforms such as WeChat, Weibo and Tiktok, it has to be admitted that nowadays, the majority of university publicity programs tend to be homogeneous, and the publicity and marketing of Chinese universities' social media platforms need to be pushed to the next level.

4.1. Enhancing Branding of Universities

Universities should strengthen the branding of universities and incorporate the unique campus culture and traditions of each school into the actual media campaign solutions. In order to achieve this goal, universities shall pay more attention to the construction of social media platforms such as Weibo, etc. The operation of new media such as schools should not still be operated in the form of a simple student-teacher association. Universities may invest funds, recruit professionals and build a reasonable and efficient team framework. Meanwhile, with keen insight into campus culture and the general environment of the Internet, universities can build a unique brand of universities. At the same time, it is important to focus on creating a connection between students and the university. Personal image is an essential element of the organizational image system and an important part of the organizational image [7]. As the largest part of the university, the student image is the epitome of the image of the university and the specific presentation of the image of the university [7].

4.2. Content Design for Different Audiences

The social media platform of universities is a platform for the public. Colleges should not be limited to topics or information on campus, but can pay more attention to derivative information related to the school. Taking themselves as the origin, colleges should design different content according to the characteristics of different audiences and platforms. Target posts and promotions according to the different algorithmic rules of each social media platform, otherwise they will be ignored by the social media algorithms and reduce the distribution rate of the account's content [8]. At the same time, it is important to focus on hot spots, but the existing hot spots should be used reasonably. For example, universities can invite alumni in related fields to conduct interviews, and do some expansion and learning of existing hot spots with a college demeanor and knowledge level. Meanwhile, it is also possible to invite some influential people from all walks of life to cooperate with university officials on the platform for preaching and live broadcast, etc., so as to drive the account traffic through their influence.

4.3. Prepare for Bigger and Broader Platforms

Compared to the active presence of universities on China's major social media platforms, the influence of Chinese universities on overseas platforms such as Twitter and Instagram is scarce. There is a common phenomenon of "emphasizing internal and despising external" in Chinese colleges and universities' online communication: they attach great importance to the use of domestic new media, Weibo, WeChat, etc. have become important means of publicity, but the use of overseas social media is basically still in its infancy or completely blank [9]. According to the results of a survey on foreigners' perception of Chinese culture conducted by the Capital Institute of Cultural Innovation and Cultural Communication Engineering, nearly 2/3 of the respondents regard the Internet as the first channel for accessing Chinese cultural information. The higher the academic level, the higher the proportion of choosing the Internet to obtain information related to China [10]. The higher the academic level, the higher the proportion of foreign people who choose the Internet to obtain China-related information [10]. Therefore, Chinese universities should open overseas social media platform accounts or improve their operations in order to enhance the visibility and influence of Chinese universities overseas.

5. Conclusion

From the above analysis of the current marketing strategies used by Chinese universities on the social media platform Weibo, the authors found that, firstly, in the use of the strategy of SuperTopic, most universities are using SuperTopic as an intermediary to classify their potential Weibo users. But even with diverse classifications, the low level of participation of official Weibo on SuperTopic cannot effectively attract users to share enough content. Also, low participation makes it difficult to convert the official Weibo followers into SuperTopic community members. Secondly, in terms of

topic marketing, the topics of most universities tend to be homogeneous and are not designed according to the characteristics of the school, which has no cohesive force and sustained attraction for the fan groups. Thirdly, the significant increase in readership during the intercollegiate collaboration process is good evidence that intercollegiate collaboration works well as a referral and can effectively bring potential fans together. Finally, according to the analysis of the voting method in the interaction, the total number of likes for this mode of voting swelled by 500 percent compared to other categories, suggesting that this simple voting mode may be worthwhile for more universities to use to build their Weibo presence. Hence, the study explores the further development of Chinese colleges and universities on social media platforms in the future, and also provides reference value for colleges and universities that have not systematically managed their own social media platforms. However, as this paper only uses some of the examples of universities' strategies on the Weibo platform in the Beijing area for analysis and research, and the time span of the data taken in this paper is still small, the current situation and the problems that exist are not comprehensive as listed. It is hoped that future research will be able to conduct further research on more social platforms and colleges and universities nationwide with a larger number and a wider time range.

References

- [1] CNNIC. 50th Statistical report on the development status of the Internet in China, 31/8/2022, 3/2/2023, <http://www.cnnic.cn/n4/2022/0914/c88-10226.html>.
- [2] Li Mengyuan. Analysis of social networks of users of the official microblogs of university library fans using the Beijing University Library microblog as an example. 2022 Social and Economic Development Forum, Online Conference, 2022, 5.
- [3] Qi Xu. A participatory cultural study of fans in Weibo's Super Topic community. Huazhong University of Science & Technology, 2022.
- [4] Li Xinlai, Ming Junren, Zhao Rongying, et al. Research on the evaluation of new media influence of universities incorporating emotional features---Taking the official microblog of universities as an example. *Intelligence Theory and Practice*, 2022, 45(6): 106-113.
- [5] Ge Yu. Research on the countermeasures for the innovation and development of college campus media in Jilin province under the background of media convergence. Changchun University of Science and Technology, 2021.
- [6] Tai Xiaoxia. A study on the phenomenon of "Mock Acquaintance" communication in Weibo SuperTopics. *New Media Research*, 2021, 23: 89-92.
- [7] He Jieli. Research on the construction of media image of three famous universities' official microblogs from the perspective of framework theory. Southwest Jiaotong University, 2021.
- [8] Lu Xianxia, Wang Yuzhun, et al. On the overseas social media communication of Chinese universities: An example of the external platform of Zhejiang Institute of Science and Technology. China Press, 2022.
- [9] Cao Ning, Fang Zengquan, Liang Shuang, Zheng Wei, et al. Analysis of the current situation of overseas online platform construction and communication of Chinese universities (volume II) - taking Google, Facebook and Instagram communication platforms of 211 Chinese universities as examples. *International Communications*, 2016, (03): 58-60.
- [10] Teng Yishu, Yang Yueming. Research on foreign people's perceptions and impressions of Chinese cultural symbols--one of the series of reports of "2017 Research on Foreigners' Perceptions of Chinese Culture". *Foreign Communication*, 2018, 263(08): 50-53.