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**HOW FINNISH COMPANIES USE SOCIAL MEDIA IN  
CHINA AND ARE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES TAKEN  
INTO ACCOUNT?**



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## ABSTRACT

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This master's thesis focuses on Chinese social media and how Finnish companies are utilizing those social media services available in China. China has restricted the availability of 'western' social media like Facebook and Twitter. But there are similar social media sites available, like Sina Weibo, which is the most popular at the moment and WeChat, which is rapidly increasing popularity among Chinese users.

In the current economic situation, when Europe's economy is starting to recover from the debt crisis and the growth is still slow in America due to the sub-prime crisis, China offers companies great opportunities. China is still rapidly growing economy as well as society, where more and more people are in the middle class and can afford luxury items such as smartphones, which has increased consumption. Therefore companies should investigate the opportunities to expand to the Chinese markets.

Social media offers companies excellent ways for consumer communications and marketing. In China the rapidly increasing number of smartphone owners have opened new ways for consumer communication to companies operating in China. Therefore it is important for companies to know Chinese social media and its restrictions.

Finnish company that is starting to operate in China has to keep in mind the cultural differences as well as the social media restrictions, as cultural differences have an impact on the communication in every situation. This thesis offers Finnish companies a good basis on the cultural differences and information what to keep in mind when planning strategies for social media usage in China. The research was conducted by interviewing Finnish companies currently operating in China. The data collected via interviews was used to create few guidelines, which can help companies to increase their performance in Chinese social media

Keywords: Chinese social media, Cultural differences, Chinese internet censorship, Social media marketing, Finnish companies in China

## TIIVISTELMÄ

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Kuinka suomalaiset yritykset käyttävät sosiaalista mediaa Kiinassa ja ovatko kulttuurierot otettu huomioon?

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Tässä Pro Gradu työssä tutustutaan Kiinan sosiaaliseen mediaan ja siihen, kuinka suomalaiset yritykset hyödyntävät kiinassa satavilla olevia sosiaalisen median palveluita. Kiinassa pääsy länsimaisiin sosiaalisen median palveluihin (esim. Facebook ja Twitter) on estetty, mutta tarjolla on vastaavia palveluita, kuten Sina Weibo.

Nykyisessä taloustilanteessa, kun Euroopan talous alkaa vasta pikkuhiljaa toipua velkakriisistä ja Amerikassakin kasvu on vielä hidasta sub-prime -kriisin jäljiltä, tarjoaa Kiina yrityksille hyviä mahdollisuuksia liiketoiminnan kasvattamiseen. Kiina on nopeasti kasvava ja kehittyvä yhteiskunta, jossa kulutus on kasvussa. Siksi yritysten kannattaa tutkia mahdollisuuksia edetä Kiinan markkinoille. Sosiaalinen media tarjoaa yrityksille erinomaiset keinot kuluttajaviestintään ja markkinointiin. Kiinassa nopeasti lisääntyvä älypuhelimien ja tabletien määrä on avannut siellä toimiville uusien kanavien viestiä kuluttajien kanssa. Siksi yritysten on tärkeää tuntee Kiinan sosiaalinen media ja sen rajoitteet.

Suomalaisen yrityksen joka suuntaa Kiinan markkinoille on otettava huomioon myös kulttuurierot, joilla on vaikutusta viestintään niin sosiaalisessa mediassa, kuin muissakin tilanteissa. Tämä työ tarjoaa suomalaisille yrityksille hyvän pohjan siihen, mitä asioita kannattaa ottaa huomioon kun suunnittelee sosiaalisen median käyttöä Kiinassa. Tutkimus toteutettiin haastattelemalla Kiinassa jo toimivia ja sosiaalista mediaa käyttävien suomalaisyritysten edustajia. Haastatteluista saatuja tuloksia verrattiin aiempiin tutkimuksiin ja niiden pohjalta luotiin muutamia ohjeita, joita noudattamalla suomalaisyritykset voivat tehostaa omaa sosiaalisen median käyttöään Kiinassa.

Asiasanat: Kiinan sosiaalinen media, Kulttuurierot, Kiinan internetsensuuri, markkinointi sosiaalisessa mediassa, Suomalaiset yritykset Kiinassa

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Social media is very effective way for companies to use for consumer communications, as it is highly interactive and provides real time communications (Evans, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As media richness theory (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987) indicates the richer the media is (more interactive more better) the richer the communication and better results in consumer-company relations. But as with all communication there are some challenges included when dealing with different cultures. Cultural differences and understanding them play great role in the nowadays globalized world, where companies operate in multiple cultures and in multicultural teams. In this thesis the basis of the cultural differences is Hofstede's (2011) work. Nowadays when global economy is in turmoil, China is still a growing economy and offers lots of opportunities for different businesses as it has annual economic growth (GDP) of about 7,4%, compared to 2-3% in the Eurozone (Magnier et.al, 2015; Hannon et.al, 2015). For this reason it is important for companies to know the possibilities and challenges that the social media in China offers.

Chinese social media is however somewhat restricted and state controlled as are other mediums in China (Epstein, 2011). All the western social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube etc.) have been banned or have limited availability since 2009 (Epstein, 2011). This is one reason why it is important to know the Chinese social media channels to utilize them for business usage. And to effectively use social media in foreign country, one should keep in mind what effects the cultural differences will have on communication through social media.

## 1.1 Background and Meaning

Finnish know-how and skills are appreciated globally when it comes to technology, IT and education (Herring, 2011). There are numerous Finnish companies that are operating globally and in foreign countries and in China alone

there are almost 400 Finnish companies operating currently (Gustafsson, 2015). That is why it is important to know the cultural differences in business and especially in social media use, as it is nowadays one of the most used channels for consumer communications. China is one of the most rapidly growing economies/markets nowadays so it is important to know the cultural differences and possibilities that Chinese social media can offer (Magnier et.al, 2015). Also China has a very different field of social media at the moment than the rest of the world (Epstein, 2011). This is the reason why China was chosen as the target of my research as well as the fact that China and Finland are culturally quite opposite of each other (The Hofstede Centre).

There are some former researches made on the topic, mostly by comparing Chinese social media to “western” social media. For example Gao et.al (2012) compared Sina Weibo (the largest Chinese micro-blogging service) to Twitter and conducted research on how the user activity differed between these social media services. They found out that there are some major differences that can be explained by the cultural differences (see chapter 3.4). Other similar research has been made with similar results (see Mandl, 2009). But there are apparently no research made about how Finnish companies use the Chinese social media.

## 1.2 Aim of the Research

In this thesis focus shall be on the social media usage of Finnish companies in China. The main goal is to determine how these companies use the social media and can it be improved somehow. The main Chinese social media channels that will be introduced in this thesis will be Sina Weibo and WeChat, as they are currently the most popular ones for users (Gao et.al, 2012).

### **Research question:**

*How Finnish companies are utilizing Chinese social media and how are the cultural differences taken into account in the said usage?*

### **Sub-questions**

*What are the most popular social media platforms/sites in China at the moment of this thesis?*

Research method in this thesis shall be qualitative and exploratory, where cultural differences, social media and Chinese social media shall first be familiarized through literature review of academic literature and afterwards interviews will be conducted for Finnish companies that are currently operating in China to get their experiences about Chinese social media and how are they currently utilizing it. In the literature review part of this thesis, academic publications (articles, books semi-nar papers etc.) shall be read and knowledge collected from them. Information about Chinese social media shall be gotten from these academic publica-



tions as well as asking from our departments Chinese researchers and students. Research methods are further explained in chapter 5.

### **1.3 Structure**

This thesis starts in chapter two by giving insight on what actually is social media and what it means in this thesis. Then a closer look shall be taken on how companies are and should be using social media to gain good results effectively (chapter 2.3). After that a closer look shall be taken in chapter three on the Chinese social media, as China has its own social media services and most of the western ones are currently blocked. It is also important to understand the internet censorship conducted by Chinese government to effectively utilize social media in China. This internet censorship shall be introduced in chapter 3.1. Afterwards the most popular Chinese social media (Sina Weibo and WeChat) shall be introduced in chapter 3.2.

After the social media and Chinese social media are familiar, the focus will move to culture and cultural differences. Here Finnish and Chinese cultures shall be compared using Hofstede's models and adding some insight from other researchers as well. Here some former studies (for example Gao et.al, 2012) about Chinese social media versus western social media shall be familiarized, to get some basis for the empirical study conducted for this thesis. These former studies shall be used again in the analysis part to reflect the findings of this thesis to the former research. After the literature review part the actual research made for this thesis shall be introduced in the last chapters.

## 2 SOCIAL MEDIA

In this chapter a closer look shall be taken on social media and different types of social media platforms there are nowadays. Social media has grown extremely fast during the 2000's and new social media sites and applications are being published every year. Social media is also vastly used all around the world and nowadays communication with friends and family all across the world is effortless. Also social media shall be viewed from company's perspective as how they can employ social media for consumer communication purposes.

### 2.1 What is Social Media?

Social media is a relatively new term; it has been used in the context of digital media since 1980's. The social media emerged widely in the early 2000's, but has been present in some forms even from the beginning of the internet and before (Koskimaa, 2014). There is also a wide range of similar, but in some cases slightly different definitions for 'social media'. The term itself has two main parts. 'Social' means that it has some interaction between different people and participating in communities. 'Media' usually is used when referring to mass-media and the 'old' media, so in this context 'media' means the digital tools that allow social interactions in digital channels. (Heinonen, 2009)

Social media is also part of the Web 2.0, which offers user different ways to interact with each other (new platforms, technical intelligence and ways to have influence). With the help of Web 2.0 the social interactions are growing while the community creation is growing. It has led to more channels for sharing and creating user generated content, which is the basis of social media. For social media, the user activity is one of the key factors in social media, as well as the openness of the content (Heinonen, 2009). Also Kietzman and his colleagues define social media as mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content, which is highly tied to the Web 2.0

(Kietzman et.al, 2011). Barnes (2008) takes even more focus on the social side of social media. He defines social media to be a group of social applications/platforms that enable users to communicate, build social networks and gain social capital through this interaction. In these user communities the individual users want to express themselves and that is what keeps social media alive, which makes the social -side crucial. Good example for this self-expressing is nowadays the rising popularity of different picture-sharing platforms such as Imgur, Instagram and Flickr. (Barnes, 2008)

Mangold and Faulds give social media a very similar definition, as they define it to be a new form of media, which describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers. They also add that the intent in this activity is on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues. They then continue by stating that social media includes a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, discussion boards, chat rooms, product or service ratings websites and forums and social networking websites. The most known of these social networking websites are Facebook and YouTube and also Twitter is one of the most used social media platform. (Mangold & Faulds, 2009)

These definitions were quite straight forward. But Kaplan & Haenlein dived more deeply in to the term 'social media' and gave definition to what it is, and what it is not. Their main focus was to differentiate 'social media' from Web 2.0 and user generated content, when Heinonen (2009) and Kietzman (2011) tied social media very closely to Web 2.0. They see Web 2.0 as a platform for the evolution of social media whereas they define user generated content in their article as all the ways in which people make use of the social media. So in this light they define social media as 'a group of internet-based applications or platforms 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). Hintikka (2011) adds that how people in social media share, search and handle information is also relevant. Because the interaction in social media is more public compared to the 'traditional' web based forums, these habits have changed and this change is relevant to the social media as a concept. In social media, anyone can easily pick up the individual contents and share it to his/her own network. People also believe this information without much thought, even the actual information may have been cut out if its original concept and the message has thus changed. (Hintikka, 2011)

The terms Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers are often used interchangeably - largely because they are closely related. However, they are conceptually discrete. Web 2.0 can be thought of as the technical infrastructure that enables the social phenomenon of collective media and facilitates consumer-generated content. The latter are distinguished by the difference in focus: social media can be thought of as focusing on content, and consumer generation on the creators of that content. Simply, Web 2.0 enables the creation and distribution of the content that is social media. Web 2.0 technologies have caused three effects: a shift in locus of activity from the desktop to the Web; a shift in

locus of value production from the firm to the creative consumers; and a shift in the locus of power away from the firm to the consumer. (Berthon et.al, 2012)

Currently 86 % of US adults use at least one social media channel and if Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest country in the world after China and India. This new communication landscape of social media sites and services started forming already in the 90's and nowadays there exists a rich and diverse ecology of social media sites, which vary in terms of their scope and functionality. Some sites are for the general masses, others are professional networks; media sharing sites concentrate on shared videos or photos, and with the help of social bookmarking sites users can rank sites by voting on the value of content. In the 2000's the weblogs (blogs) have become very popular, because they are easy to create and maintain, and most recently, the phenomenon of micro-blogging focuses on offering real-time updates in very short messages. These can also be used by the companies to promote their business. Social media spending is already huge - it is expected to rise to \$3.1 billion in 2014 from \$716 million in 2008. (Kietzmann et.al, 2011; Zhang 2013)

With this rise in social media, it appears that corporate communication has been democratized. The power has been taken from organizations, as the consumers create, share, and consume social media content. Communication about brands happens with or without permission of the firms in question. It is now up to firms to decide if they want to use social media and participate in this communication, or continue to ignore it. Both have a tremendous impact. Although it is clear that social media is very powerful, many executives are reluctant or unable to engage effectively with social media. One reason behind this is a lack of understanding regarding what social media is, and the various forms it can take. (Kietzmann et.al, 2011)

Kietzmann et.al's (2011) "Honeycomb of Social Media" allow the firms to examine user experience in social media, and its implications. It has seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. Blocks are neither mutually exclusive, nor do they all have to be used by the firm. They are constructs that allow us to make sense of how different levels of social media functionality can be configured (Kietzmann et.al 2011). 21<sup>st</sup> century managers need to consider the many opportunities and threats that Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers present and the resulting respective shifts in loci of activity, power, and value. To implement this managerial recommendation, marketers must truly engage customers, embrace technology, limit the power of bureaucracy, train and invest in their employees, and inform senior management about the opportunities of social media. (Berthon et.al 2012)

For the purpose of this thesis, I define social media to be the different digital platforms used for communication and interaction between users. In these platforms and applications the user generated content is being created and shared between users and user networks. This definition brings together the technological side of social media as depicted by Heinonen (2009), Mangold & Faulds (2009), Kietzman et.al (2011) and Kaplan & Haenlein (2010). Also this

definition ties social media closely to the social aspect highlighted by Barnes (2008).

## **2.2 Forms of Social Media**

In the following sub-chapters a closer look to different types of social media shall be taken. These definitions are based mainly on the work of Kaplan and Haenlein with additions from other researchers. These five main types are blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, virtual social worlds and wiki-based sites.

### **2.2.1 Blogs**

Blogs represent one of the earliest forms of social media. They are websites that display user generated messages or entries in reverse chronological order. These messages usually contain information as who has posted it and when (date-stamp). These websites come in multiple variations and may serve as person personal webpage. Blogs range from personal diaries and channels to impress ones opinions to commercialized or research blogs. These blogs are usually moderated by one person, but most blogs have possibility for other users to comment on posts, which adds the social side to blogging (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Nardi, Schiano & Gumbrecht 2004). Kaplan and Haenlein also state that most common blogs are still the text based ones, but also multimedia blogs are gaining popularity. These multimedia blogs usually contain images or videos (vlogs) made by the blogger. Examples of these are for example different review blogs (like: [www.techradar.com](http://www.techradar.com)) that review phones, tablets cameras etc. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010).

There are lots of different blogs. The most famous of the sites that offer blogging for users are Livejournal, Blogger and Wordpress. Also microblogs are listed below this category. Twitter is probably the most known and widespread microblogging site and it's Chinese counterpart Sina Weibo. Some social media sites have also began their life as a blog. For example Tumblr was a blog in the beginning, but has since evolved into more social site, which allows people to form networks. Cha, Perez & Haddahi (2012) also noted in their research, that 20% of the most active blogs produce approximately 70% of all the content. These active blogs also use RSS feed to target their messages to the relevant audiences, which is important because otherwise the message might just be lost in the vast flow of entries that are produced. RSS feed allows users to "order" the contents they want to and the information is gathered from the blogs and sent to them (via email, other blog or to RSS feed reader program). (Cha, Perez & Haddahi, 2012)

### 2.2.2 Content Communities

Content communities are focused on sharing media content between users. There are number of different types of content communities based on the media type they are used to share. BookCrossing is a content community focused on sharing text-based content (books), Flickr, Imgur and Instagram are used to share pictures and photos, Slideshare and Prezi to share PowerPoint presentations, YouTube and Chinese YouKu to share videos. Content communities usually don't require users to create their own profile page, but if they do, the information needed is limited (date joined and number of content shared). This open sharing between users poses also a risk for misusing these content communities to copyright infringements. It is not uncommon that the new episodes of popular TV-series or new songs made by popular artists are found in YouTube within hours from release. Of course the major content communities have different policies to ban and remove such content, but it is very difficult to stop this action completely. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

But the popularity of these content communities can also be put to good use by companies. The popular content communities offer different ways to add advertisement to the sites and at the beginning of videos (in YouTube). Also many companies have their own profiles in content communities and they are active producers of content, which is aimed to inform consumers about their products and services. And these contents are not always strict and professional. One good example of this is the Will It Blend! -videos produced by Blendtec to show the capabilities of their blender. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Salmenkivi & Nyman, 2007, 155)

### 2.2.3 Social Network Sites

Social network sites are web-based services or sites that allow users to create public or semi-public profiles in that site. Then through their profiles they can connect to other users that have profiles in that social network site and after connecting with each other they can view the connections of their connections to find new connections. So in many cases the social network sites are based on the idea to allow users to make their social networks visible to themselves and others. Most social networking sites also allow users to find new connection outside their own and their connections' networks. These totally new connections may be found based on the political views, personal interests, activities, location and many more criteria depending on the networking site. These social network sites can also be used to communicate with selected group of contacts and share different kind of digital material through the site depending on the service. Most famous and widely used social network site is Facebook while Chinese Sina Weibo has some similar functions and therefore can be seen as a fusion of microblog and social network site. The ways of communication include private messages, public messages, comments, liking, poking, tagging etc. based on the social networking site. (Boyd & Ellison, 2008)

As mentioned before most social network sites focus on the existing connections and networks the users have and provide tools to interact with said network and maintain it. Then there are few services that focus more on some specific theme or focus of interest and help build networks through them. Although social network sites are usually open to everyone, many are consisting of quite similar users based on the nationality, age or for example level of education. Also many social networking sites restrict the visibility of user profiles to visitors or non-registered users. Some services identify themselves by focusing their sites/services directly to specific group based on ethnicity, sexual orientation or political/religious views of the users. For example Facebook is very open and wide network site that is not so much focused on specific group, whereas LinkedIn is focused to corporate use and for people to have work related connections and the profile works as a kind of curriculum vitae. The amount of these social networking sites is growing and new sites emerge every year. (Boyd & Ellison, 2008)

As mentioned earlier the social networking sites offer variety of methods to communicate between the users of said site. These tools can be divided to one-to-one methods and one-to-many methods. For example in Facebook these one-to-one methods include private messages, emails and chat. Of course the messages users places on his/her own wall or profile can be restricted to be visible to only certain group of users, so these may also be included in the one-to-one methods. Wall is the users own profile page that shows pictures, messages (from the user and his/her connections) and updates from different applications used by the user. Facebook also allows people to 'like' the content shared by others, share it forward and tag people in pictures. Other social networking sites offer similar methods of interaction. Messages that are public to everyone are one-to-many methods of communication in social network sites. These messages are usually generated into newsfeed (for example in Facebook) and it contains lots of different kinds of content (messages, links, pictures etc.) and the communications forming around that content. Also the user profiles and photo albums/pictures within those profiles are partly visible to everyone in and outside of the social network site. The amount of visibility varies in different services and the publicity settings made by the profile owner. (Burke, Kraut & Marlow, 2011)

Nowadays the smartphones are more and more common, so the possibility to use social network sites through mobile devices provide new dimensions to the usage of these services. Mobile applications provided by the social network sites give users more freedom as they allow them to use the service from basically where ever and whenever. These applications usually offer also different kind of information based on the location of the user such as shares their location in posts to social networking sites or give user generated recommendations of the services near the user. (Kayastha, Niyato, Wang & Hossain, 2011)

### 2.2.4 Virtual Worlds

Virtual worlds introduce the user to a three dimensional environment where user use personalized avatars to interact with each other as they would in their normal life in real world. This makes virtual worlds the ultimate form of social media according to Kaplan and Haenlein, as those worlds provide the highest level of social presence and richness of media included. These worlds are divided to virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds by Kaplan and Haenlein. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

Virtual game worlds are guided by strict rules of role-playing (MMORPG, massively multiplayer online role-playing game). Modern games offer vast range of multiplayer content, where players can simultaneously play with people from all around the world and interact with each other (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These multiplayer games are divided into two main types: open world and closed environment games. Open world games such as World of Warcraft or PlanetSide 2, offer extremely vast environments or worlds that the players can freely explore while completing missions in co-operation with others, or fighting each other. Players take their role as part of a faction (there are different number of factions depending on the game) and usually the main goal is fight the other faction(s). Closed environments are offered for example in Battlefield 4, where the action is situated in single map (significantly smaller than in open world games) and the main task is to defeat the opposing faction (own experience). The rules of these gaming worlds offer limit the possibilities for self-presentation, but still some users spend a lots of time to shape their characters so, that the characters start to resemble players real life personality or the personality he/she wants to have in real life. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

The second group is virtual social worlds. They allow users to choose their behavior more freely than the game worlds. In these virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life) users use their characters (referred as 'avatars') to live a virtual life similar to their real life. In these worlds there are no rules restricting the possible interactions and in that way these worlds provide new ways to interact with different people one normally could not interact with. Some virtual social worlds like Second Life allow users to create content (virtual clothes, furniture etc.) and sell it to other users using the in game currency. This in game currency can be bought using real money, and in the case of Second Life, the in game currency can be also exchanged back to real money. This has provided some experienced and successful gamers a new way to add to their real life income. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

### 2.2.5 Collaborative Sites

Wiki-based sites are built on the group effort of their users who co-create content to the wiki. Wiki-based sites are mainly used to create text-based content like encyclopedias. The basic idea in the wiki-based sites is that users that have similar interests co-create and edit articles that are then visible to other users of



that site. The editing of these documents is been made possible by providing tools to add/remove text and to insert links and pictures to the articles. Users may then use the wiki to learn new information and after getting further knowledge on the subject, provide their new information to the article. This way the articles are formed by melting together the knowledge and ideas of different users giving those articles more content than one user could provide alone. Most known wiki today is Wikipedia, which is an online encyclopedia, created by its users. Although it is not a 'valid' encyclopedia as it lacks the scientific checking of information, it is still widely used to get information on different topics. (Cress & Kimmerle, 2008; Hester 2011)

There are also collaborative rating sites that are used to rate and share links/other content within the user group of that site. Usually the sites contain links that lead outside the actual site, but are rated in the forums of that site. In these type of collaborative sites users create/contribute content, tag that content, evaluate it and therefore create social networks by participating in the action with similar users. For example in Reddit users send new links, images and other content to the forums for other users to evaluate and vote upon. (Lerman, 2007)

## **2.3 Social Media as B-to-C Communication Channel**

### **2.3.1 Marketing in the digital world**

To understand digital marketing, first a quick look shall be taken to what marketing means in this thesis. Marketing plays a central role in the modern business and is one of the most important factors for enterprise. As Silk says in the beginning of his book 'What is Marketing?' (2006), marketing is the process via which a firm creates value for its customers. And to create value for the customer, marketing is used to transfer information from a firm to its customers. And to do so, the firm should know the target group for the marketing. So marketing can be seen as a set of plans and actions to deliver information about products and/or services to selected customer group. (Silk, 2006)

More than a decade earlier McKennan had noticed a change in marketing. He then made a difference between the 'old' and 'new' marketing. He says that nowadays marketing is not a function but a way to do business. The new marketing aims not to fool the customer or to alter the company's image but the purpose of marketing should be to inform and integrate the customer into the design of the product for interaction that will create substance in relationship. He also points out that the reason for marketing is to own the market, not just sell the products, because when you own the market, you can create more specific products and attract the most talented employees. He also noted that marketing had shifted from monologue to dialogue. By this he meant that more and

more should marketing be about the dialogue between consumers and companies rather than companies shouting to customers to 'Buy my product'. (McKenna, 1991)

The importance of the consumer-company dialogue has even grown in the beginning of the new millennia because of the growth of the internet and social media, which are taking field from the more traditional forms of mass-media as a marketing channel (Karjaluo, 2010, 15-20). Karjaluo (2010) also pointed out the same thing that MacKenna (1991), that marketing has changed from functions to informing customer about products, creating value to customers and managing the customer relationships in order to benefit the company, to actions to create value for the customer and therefore create and develop profitability of the customer relationships. Karjaluo still points out that the marketing being a function has rooted itself in the core of most companies and it will take time before it completely has changed to activity rather than function. Karjaluo also mentions marketing communications as a part of marketing and the main focus of marketing communication is to inform markets about the company's products/services, including technics like advertising, personal sales, sales promotion and public relations. So Karjaluo means that in the core of the marketing is communications between companies and their customers. (Karjaluo, 2010, 10-14)

For the purpose of this thesis I define marketing according to Karjaluo as actions to create value for the customer and therefore create and develop profitability of the customer relationships as well as maintaining and managing those customer relationships.

### **Digital marketing**

The development of the internet has given marketers a vast variety of new tools to use in marketing. When earlier focused marketing was facilitated with letters or face-to-face in the streets or in conventions, nowadays marketer can simply send emails or use social media to connect with the focus group of the marketing activities. According to Karjaluo (2010) Digital marketing can be divided into digital direct marketing (email and mobile marketing, ) and into internet marketing (company's website, banner advertisement and search engine advertisement/optimization). Karjaluo also adds to these two main categories other categories such as social media marketing, online games and competitions and web-based seminars. Especially the opportunities provided by social media to the marketers have made many to take advantage of the possibilities that this new media offers in the field of marketing. But what is the difference in digital marketing and traditional marketing? According to Karjaluo the line between these two is vaguer, as many newspapers use digital marketing in their online papers. Also direct marketing can be seen as digital, if the receiver has possibilities to react to it through digital channels (email, sms-message, internet site etc.). (Karjaluo 2010, 14)

Digital marketing has advantages over the traditional marketing. Digital marketing is faster to execute, easier to measure, usually less expensive and more easily focused on certain interest group. The costs are lower compared to

traditional marketing because when using digital channels to distribute the marketing material, there is no need for printing and delivering said material to receivers. Also digital marketing allows larger and more focus interest group to be targeted for marketing. Internet has also made reaching this interest group easier compared to traditional print media and letters. (Merisavo, Vesanen, Raulas & Virtanen 2006, 43–46)

Digital marketing also provides better interaction between marketers and the receivers (companies-customers). Digitalization has provided customers new ways to give feedback on the products/services and therefore enabled the companies to adjust their products/services/marketing according to that feedback to get better results (Salmenkivi & Nyman 2007, 66–67). Customers also benefit from digitalization because it allows them to search and find necessary information when it is needed. So companies should keep in mind what customers need/expect from the digital services/sources and how do they use said services (Merisavo et.al. 2006, 45). Marketer should also keep in mind how customers search for said information, in other words what keywords they use when compiling search through search engine. This is especially important, if the customer does not know the name of the company/product/service. (Salmenkivi & Nyman 2007, 69–70)

## **Social Media Marketing**

“The idea of advertisement based marketing is that if potential customers spend more and more time in social media, marketing should also be focused there to make contact to the potential customers” (Juslén 2009, 306).

Here social media marketing shall be further introduced. As social media has grown exponentially in the past decade and more and more people are afflicted by social media, it is of course important for companies and marketers to take advantage of this new marketing channel that has emerged. But amongst all the hype of social media marketing it is important to remember, as Evans (2012) mentions, that social media is only one way to market and you should not forget about all the other channels. So Evans defines social media marketing as a way to influence the crowd via social media and its applications/platforms. Evans also highlights that social media is not a tool to control your customers but to interact with them. (Evans, 2012, 41–44)

Karjaluoto (2010) defines social media marketing as a part of digital marketing communications (DMC). According to Karjaluoto, DMC consists of the communication and interaction between company/brand and its customers, where the means of communication include digital channels (internet, e-mail, mobile phones and digital television). So DMC is even wider concept than internet marketing (as person can receive digital marketing without ever using internet) and social media marketing is just a part of internet marketing. Social media marketing is very easily personalized for certain customer groups and is more personal than marketing in ‘traditional’ mass-media. And other thing that distinguishes digital- and social media marketing from traditional marketing is

that it is highly interactive as receiver is able to comment and communicate with the sender (marketer/company) about the messages. Especially social media marketing is a good way to take care of the customer relationships. (Karjaluoto, 2010, 13–14; 127–129). Kaplan and Haenlein take more precise approach and define social media marketing as marketing activities that take place in social media, by which they mean collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For the purpose of this thesis I define social media marketing as Kaplan and Haenlein defined it. So in this thesis social media marketing means the marketing activities that companies have in the social media (collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds).

Social media marketers pursue goals directed on increasing the awareness of product or service, showing its particular features and benefits, generating sales and opportunities, connected with key decision makers, demonstrating knowledge and expertise within the industry sector, launching new products, providing customer support, giving recommendations, etc. Generally speaking, B2B companies, as well as B2C companies, are trying to gain three main benefits: competitive differentiation, market share growth and brand expansion. According to 2014 Social Media Marketing Industry Report 97 % of B2B marketers are using social media for marketing purposes (Stelzner, 2014).

Numerous studies highlight the importance and complexity of how consumers share information on social media. Kwok & Yu (2013) examined what types of social media messages work best for restaurants, more exactly what types of messages gained the most clicks of “Like” and comments on Facebook. According to this study, Facebook users may feel more attracted to more straightforward messages that contain photos and status updates, rather than those that require clicking on a link or require the time to view a video. Conversational messages receive more attention from Facebook users than sales and marketing messages. The key is to interact with Facebook users as friends rather than as marketing targets.

### **2.3.2 Media Richness Theory**

Media richness theory by Daft & Lengel (1986) depicts the ability of information channels to represent the information send via said channels. This theory has two assumptions. The first assumption of this theory is that organizations process information to reduce uncertainty and equivocality. Uncertainty in this concept means the difference between the amount of information required to perform the task and the amount of information already possessed, in other words lack of information. Equivocality in this concept means the ambiguity of the task, caused by conflicting interpretations about the situation caused by overflow of information which might even be conflicting. This causes problems to achieve one shared view of the information given. High equivocality leads to the situation where the individual does not know what questions he/she

should ask and when uncertainty is high the said individual/group knows the needed questions, but lacks the needed information. So when amount/quality of information increases, uncertainty and equivocality usually decrease. They came up with a framework to illustrate the relations of high/low equivocality and uncertainty (FIGURE 1). (Daft & Lengel, 1986)

EQUIVOCALITY	High	1. High Equivocality, Low Uncertainty  Occasional ambiguous, unclear events, managers define questions, develop common grammar, gather opinions.	2. High Equivocality, High Uncertainty  Many ambiguous, unclear events, managers define questions, also seek answers, gather objective data and exchange opinions.
	Low	3. Low Equivocality, Low Uncertainty  Clear, well-defined situation, managers need few answers, gather routine objective data.	4. Low Equivocality, High Uncertainty  Many, well-defined problems, managers ask many questions, seek explicit answers, gather new, quantitative data.
		Low	High

FIGURE 1 Hypothesized Framework of Equivocality and uncertainty on Information Requirements (Daft & Lengell, 1986, p. 557).

The second assumption of the media richness theory is that commonly used media works better for certain tasks than others. This theory was first introduced to depict communication in organizations. Daft and Lengel point out that for example messages that contain high equivocality are preferred to be told face-to-face and messages with low equivocality are shared through written media. In other words the more equivocal the task/message/situation is, richer media should be used and in contrast simpler tasks/messages/situations need less rich media to transit the information. In other words media richness theory claims that expressive and therefore rich ways of communication through different mediums are usually more efficient for finding solutions to equivocal situations than mediums that lack the richness. For example conversations over phone lack the social clues like facial expressions and other body language. So according to media richness theory it would be more efficient to use for example videoconference than phone conversation, where visual communication is possible to some limit, for transmitting messages that may contain some equivocality or uncertainty. (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987)

Daft and Lengel state in their media richness theory that media varies in information richness (media richness). This varying is based on the mediums ability to facilitate shared meaning for the information within given time interval. The communication channels that are richer enable users to communicate and share information more quickly and to better understand ambiguous or equivocal messages. Therefore richer media would lead to better performance on equivocal tasks according to Daft and Lengel. In contrast, leaner media

should be better for low equivocality tasks because rich media could provide too much information and make it difficult to gain the shared meaning. (Daft & Lengel, 1986)

Daft, Lengel and Trevino present a media richness hierarchy in their article from 1987 (FIGURE 2). Media richness hierarchy determines the richness of different media through four criteria:

1. **Feedback:** If feedback is instant then it allows questions to be asked and corrections to be made.
2. **Multiple cues:** Many cues may be part of the message (body gestures, voice inflection, physical presence etc.)
3. **Language variety:** Range of meaning that can be transmitted with language. Numbers give more precise meaning, but 'natural language' can be used to depict wider image.
4. **Personal focus:** Message will be better received and understood if it is infused with personal feelings/emotions. This allows messages to be tailored to the needs and current situation of the receiver

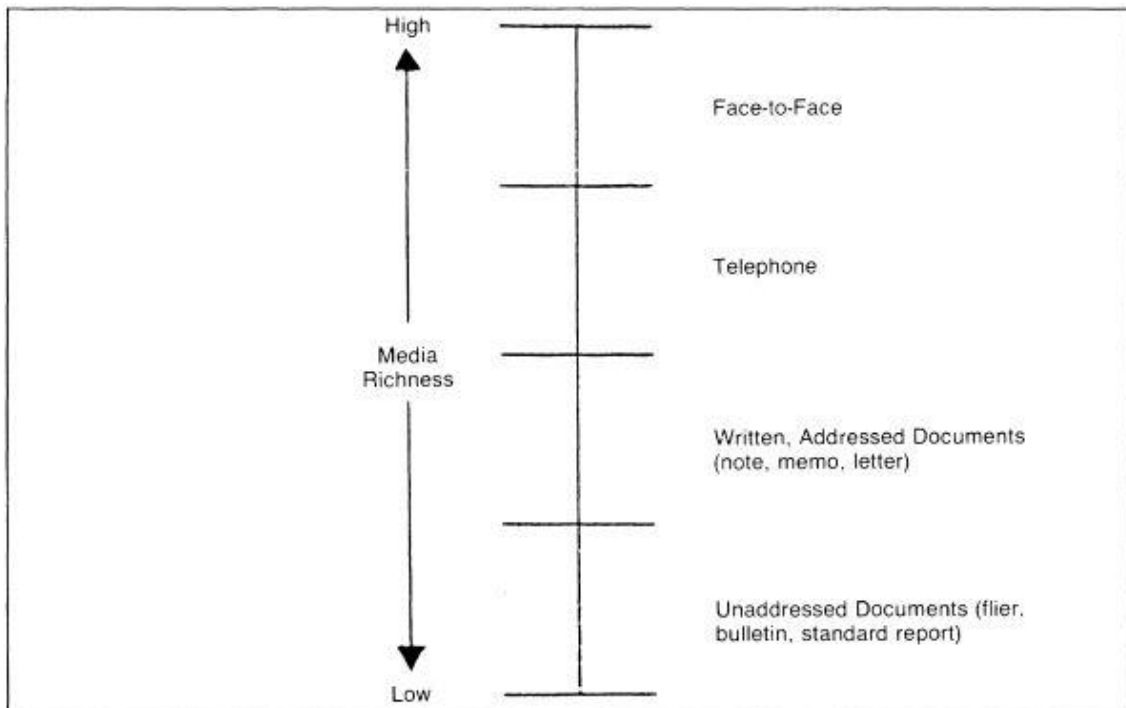


FIGURE 2 Hierarchy of Media Richness (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987, p. 358).

As seen from FIGURE 2 face-to-face communication is the richest form of communication and unaddressed documents are the least rich forms of communication. And as the criteria show, the more social presence the communication channel or media requires, the richer it is. Also the sender of the message should keep in mind that different situations need different kind of media. But not always it is possible to choose the right media, so it is important to know

the restrictions of different communication channels to avoid misunderstandings. (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987)

Media richness theory has been criticized in many occasions especially because it was made before the emerging of the 'new media': email, internet, social media etc. and therefore is not taking them into account in richness hierarchy and as means of communication (see El-Shinnawy & Markus, 1997; Dennis, Fuller & Valacich, 2008). Still media richness theory is widely used as a basis for studying communication channels and the new media, and so it will be used in this thesis as well and the criticism about it will be taken into account during the research and conclusions.

### **2.3.3 Socialgraphics & Social Feedback Loop Frameworks**

For the purpose of this thesis two frameworks about marketing in social media were chosen. These frameworks help to understand how the customers act in social media. The socialgraphics framework gives tools to assess customers and how to best reach them. The social feedback loop then shows how the customer's activities in social media affect the purchase funnel. The brand management framework gives some idea on how to use brands effectively in social media and otherwise.

Owyang and Li have come up with the socialgraphics framework. This framework says that when marketing in social media, marketers should instead of focusing on their customers demographic, geographic or psychographic profiles, they should also develop a social strategy which they call socialgraphics. By this they mean that marketers and managers should ask these questions: which websites are my customers on? What are my customers' social behaviors online? What social information or people do my customers rely on? What is my customers' social influence and who trusts them? How do my customers use social technologies in the context of my products? (Owyang & Li, 2010)

By answering these questions the marketer/manager can then separate their customers to different stages of engagement. These stages are: curating, producing, commenting, sharing and watching. After the customers are separated in these groups by their activity in social media, the marketer can then produce group specific content to facilitate their social interactions. (Owyang & Li, 2010)

Owyang and Li provided next some guidelines to comprehend with these different groups or layers. They said that it is important to understand the customers' social behavior. Watchers tend to only consume content (visit social networking sites, read blogs, watch videos etc.), they do this to get information that could help them in their decision making process. To engage watchers marketer should first understand what they are currently consuming and then provide them with relevant information to help their decision making. Those customers that fall in the sharing category share their information to peers through social media (photos, videos, tweets, articles etc.). To engage the shar-

ing group marketer should simplify sharing by allowing Facebook, Twitter etc. connection features. (Owyang & Li, 2010)

The last three groups are seen by Owyang and Li to be placed at the top of the engagement pyramid. The commenting group wants to respond to the content that other have shared by commenting/rating it. So they actively participate, support and contribute ideas and opinions. To engage commenters, company should develop community policy or make sure that every webpage has commenting features. It is also important to foster an open, friendly environment and to make sure that spammers and trolls are discouraged. The next group is the producing consumers. They create and publish their own content via blogs, websites, podcasts etc. to express their own identity and to be heard and recognized. To engage them company should provide public recognition for the most helpful community members and to create sponsored discussions (like Intel Insiders, Microsoft MVP etc.). (Owyang & Li, 2010)

The last group is the curating consumers. They moderate the communities and are heavily involved in them. They might have invested in the product and want to help its success or just give back to the community and be recognized. To engage curators properly company should rely on them and see them as trusted advisors or non-paid partners even. Company could also identify these influencers and recognize them in public, to bolster their own identity and status in the community. (Owyang & Li, 2010)

Owyang and Li provided good information and tools to engage customers in open dialogue about the goods the company is providing. Next will be presented the social feedback framework by Dave Evans (2012), which shows why it is important to get your customers engaged in social conversation about the products/services provided.

Dave Evans introduces the social feedback loop framework in his book 'Social Media Marketing: An Hour a Day' (2012). He states that one of the most valuable aspects of social media in marketing perspective is to build and manage a feedback loop. The feedback loop gives important information about where and how one should influence social conversations. So in a nutshell the social feedback loop means that current customers are feeding back their experiences after the purchase through social media into the purchase funnel and that information and experiences will then be used by potential customers when making decisions about purchase. Here the purchase funnel is defined to be the process of decision making when purchasing goods. The three stages in the funnel are awareness, consideration and purchase. Evans then points out that the social feedback loop is an open model where the experiences of current customers benefit the next wave of shoppers. So in this light he sees the feedback loop connecting post-purchase experiences to the beginning of the purchase funnel to be a key element in using social media for marketing purposes. (Evans, 2012, 39-41)

Evans explains that after a purchase the customer uses the product, forms opinions, and talks about it. Some of the experience after purchase will be posted online and this will loop back to other customers' decision making processes.



This social feedback cycle is driven mostly by word-of-mouth. Evans then reminds that as social media is nowadays common and widely used by consumers, which lead to the fact, that also marketers should be using it to stay on top of the trend. He has made a 'new' purchase funnel which also covers the post-purchase phase and the feedback loop. Evans reminds that in traditional marketing the focus has mostly been on making customers aware of the products and getting them to buy it. But the actual consideration part of the purchase funnel has been somewhat hard to influence. He then points out that the feedback loop does exactly that (see FIGURE 3). (Evans, 2012, 41–45). Whitley (2014) points out the importance of word-of-mouth by stating that 92% of consumers believe recommendations from their friends, family or other peers over all form of advertising. Also she continues that 64% of marketers see word-of-mouth to be the most effective way of marketing (Whitley, 2014). Whitley's findings clearly support the social feedback loop framework from Evans, which states that current customers will impact the purchase decisions of future customers.

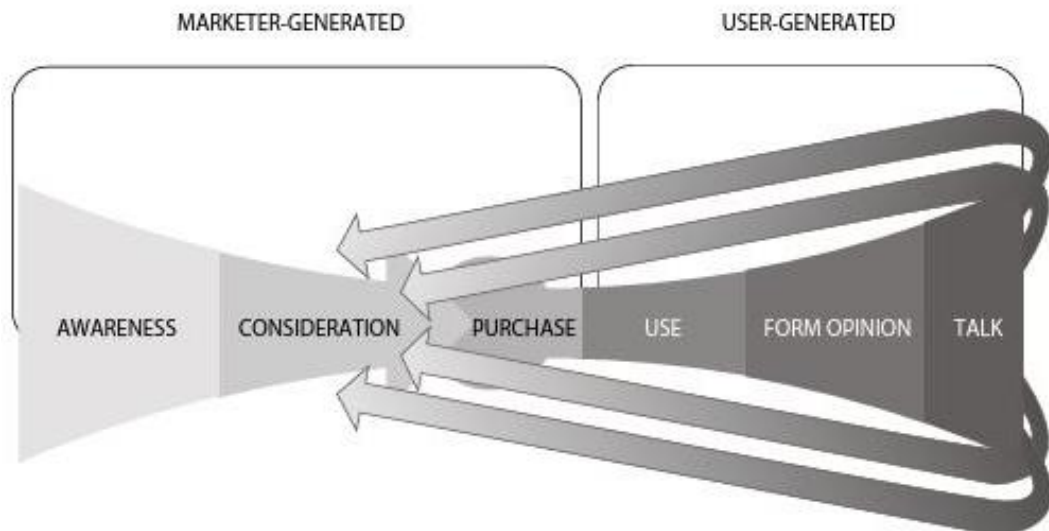


FIGURE 3 The Social Feedback Loop (Evans, 2012, p. 44)

### Summary

These two frameworks provided by Owyang & Li (2010) and Evans (2012) show that marketers should shift their focus from the pre-purchase decision making to post-purchase and word-of-mouth. The marketer should study the different levels of engagement of their customers and by using that information adopt different strategies to serve their needs best and to encourage the social media activity. The direction of these conversations that take place in social media should also be monitored and if needed the company should influence the direction of these conversations. However these frameworks only present vague tools to segmenting and engaging these consumer groups and how to influence the conversations to the right direction.

### 3 SOCIAL MEDIA IN CHINA

This chapter and sub-chapters will focus on the social media that is used in China, as well as the internet censorship that Chinese Government is utilizing. Main focus in the social media will be in the most popular social media services of China: Sina Weibo and WeChat. Some additional services shall be mentioned briefly.

#### 3.1 Chinese Internet Censorship

China is well known for its strict censorship over different media. The traditional media is all controlled by governmental organizations and therefore information from those channels is censored to fit the needs of the government. Nowadays when social media is constantly growing and is used to spread freedom of speech even to regions where it has been nonexistent previously, it is interesting how well Chinese government has managed to get social media in China so well under control. Since Facebook, Twitter and most of the 'western' social media channels were banned in China in 2009 after Tiananmen anniversary had sprung riots in northwest China's Xingjian region, which were facilitated through Social media. (Epstein, 2011)

China began heavy censorship and surveillance operations in 2003, when Ministry of Public Security launched the Golden Shield Project (金盾工程). In common language and media this project is often referred as the Great Firewall of China (防火长城). The main focus of Great Firewall is political censorship, which is built into all layers of internet infrastructure in China. The Great Firewall mostly affects 'inappropriate' movement of information between global internet and Chinese internet (Human Rights Watch, 2006). According to Zhang (2006) the content which should be censored is defined in the law titled 'Decisions on Protecting Internet Security'. Key points for censoring content in that law are:

- Any information that goes against the basic principles set down in the Constitution
- Information that endangers national security, divulges state secrets, subverts the government, or undermines national unification
- Information that is detrimental to the honor and interests of the state
- Information that disseminates rumors, disturbs social order, or undermines social stability
- Other generally 'harmful' and criminal information that is prohibited by the law or administrative regulations

So according to Zhang all content that is politically, ideologically or religiously in contradiction to the governments views should be seen as 'evil' content that has to be filtered so that common people will not be affected by that content. This was the main driving force for building the Great Firewall of China. Zhang also points out that China has made its censorship-policy as transparent as possible and it is well known what kind of content they are censoring and why. (Zhang, 2006)

The Great Firewall and internet censorship are technically overseen by the Ministry of Information Industry and the policies on what content should be censored are controlled by the State Council Information Office and the Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Department (Harwit & Clark, 2001). These governmental institutions then work closely with the state-licensed Internet Access Providers (IAP), which are responsible for providing (or banning) access to internet users to websites hosted outside of China. IAP's also provide services to the Internet Service Providers (ISP), which then sell internet access to customers. This state-controlled network of internet providers allows the effective filtering of content that is allowed to pass through the routers of common people, as network administrators (ISP's) are able to filter the dataflow through the devices. (OpenNet Initiative, 2012)

As mentioned before the internet censorship begins in the router level of Chinese internet infrastructure. In 2005 there were already thousands of URL's and keywords which either allow or restrict access of dataflow between ISP's and internet servers around the globe. This hardware-based censorship is reinforced by software dedicated to filter the inappropriate political/religious content. Similar software is used worldwide for example by companies to restrict access to certain websites (usually pornographic) from organizations network. This filtering causes error message to appear when user tries to access blocked website. (OpenNet Initiative, 2005). Second step in filtering the content is to prevent ISP's from hosting politically inappropriate content. Most of the ISP's are private businesses some even with foreign investments. Those companies are held liable for the content they provide, so if any breach of the regulations is spotted, the ISP will be held liable and be sanctioned. (Harwit & Clark, 2001)

Thirdly Chinese government targets the Internet Content Providers (ICPs), which are organizations or individuals providing public content on the internet

such as news, entertainment, commercial material etc. Also organizations and individuals providing platforms for people to communicate and share content with one another (blogs, photo/video-sharing sites, chatrooms and other forms of social media) are targeted by government and they must monitor the content and prohibit inappropriate use and sharing of content. These organizations and individuals need to register for a license to operate such services and will be held liable for all content appearing on their websites/services. (OpenNet Initiative, 2006). Displaying of any politically objectionable content may result in sanctions to the company's management and employees forced by the Ministry of Information Industry, the State Council Information Office and the Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Department. Usually insufficient control leads to company's license to be revoked. (Human Rights Watch, 2006)

Because of these actions blogging sites, search engines and other social media have vast lists of keywords that are marked automatically and filtered out of the content manually by administrators. Search engines also automatically filter out results that have politically objectionable content. These websites are completely filtered out from the search results, so users' don't even know that they exist. Sites that have not applied these rules have been banned from Chinese internet, like Wordpress.com and Blogger.com. Blog-hosting companies are not given a 'block list' straightly from the government, but they should figure it out by themselves by following the guidelines provided by the governmental bodies (MacKinnon, 2008). According to Bei (2014) one such list created and used by 29 large websites and ICPs contains 18 categories meant to target unwanted content directly in blogging and social media. Any content landing in these categories shall be removed by the administrators. These categories are:

- Information that is in violation of the basic principles of the Constitution.
- Information that endangers state security, divulges state secrets, subverts state power or undermines national unity.
- Information that harms the national reputation and interest.
- Information that instigates ethnic hatred and discrimination, and undermines ethnic unity.
- Information that instigates regional discrimination and regional hatred.
- Information that undermines national policies on religion and promotes "evil" and superstition.
- Rumors that disrupt social order or undermine social stability.
- Vulgarity and pornography, information about gambling, murder or terrorism, or crime abetting.
- Insults, defamation, or information that harms other people's legitimate rights and interests.
- Threatening violence against others.

- Minor's privacy information without written consent from their legal guardians.
- Abusive language bad for social order and customs.
- Infringement of intellectual property rights.
- Disseminating advertisements or other marketing information.
- Using languages other than commonly used languages.
- Information unrelated to the original posts.
- Information that is unreadable or is written in a combination of characters and marks to circumvent censorship.
- Other information whose dissemination is prohibited by laws and regulations. (Bei, 2014)

The speed of the removal of inappropriate content varies as from Bokee (one of the largest blog hosting sites in China) this kind of political/religiously objectionable content was removed within 24h to one week. From Sina Weibo this inappropriate content will be removed within hours by the sites administrators. Some other services also automatically prohibit the publishing of content that has blocked keywords within it or by just censoring those keywords and leaving rest of the content intact. (MacKinnon, 2008)

For example Yahoo!, Microsoft and Google, all which operate in China, have taken their own measures to follow the rules set by Chinese Government. Microsoft has been censoring some keywords from blogs hosted in their servers in China; also search engines provided by Microsoft follow the guidelines provided by Chinese Government when used in China. Google has also provided a censored version of its search engine in China (Google.cn). Google stated that users can always rely on the google.com to get uncensored search results, but access to google.com has been blocked by ISP's. Also Skype has admitted to building censorship functions into Skypes Chinese chat client for filtering content. (Zhang, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2006)

There are of course methods for the technologically adept users to circumvent the Great Firewall by using proxy servers or other similar circumventing technologies like TOR (the onion routing) which mask the true destination of the internet user. But altogether even when not foolproof the Great Firewall has been successful enough to keep the 'public opinions' in line with the governments' interests. And many multinational companies operating in China have been playing significant role in filtering out the inappropriate content that Chinese government does not want people to know about. (Human Rights Watch, 2006)

### **3.2 Popular Chinese Social Media Platforms**

Most of the 'western' social media services sites and platforms are not available for usage in China due to the censorship laws. But there are still social media

services that are used by Chinese people. Most of them have restrictions so 'western' people cannot use them as easily as Chinese. Here the two most popular social media services of China: Sina Weibo and WeChat shall be introduced. The information for this chapter was mostly gathered through interviews of Chinese researchers and students of our University and then backed up with literature review of scientific articles as well as some business articles. Total of 6 individuals were interviewed for this part. Five of them were researchers in the University of Jyväskylä and one was exchange student (see chapter 5.2). Also some statistics and information were checked from other sources (see references).

### 3.2.1 Sina Weibo

Sina Weibo (新浪微博) (<http://www.weibo.com/>) was launched by SINA Corporation in 2009 and is currently one of the largest Chinese social media sites with 167 million monthly active users (September 2014) and total of well over 500 million users which is well over 30% of internet users in China (CIW Team, 2014; Yu et.al 2011). Nowadays China's largest e-commerce company Alibaba owns 32% of Sina Weibo (Fannery, 2014). Sina Weibo is a microblogging site (weibo literally means microblog in Chinese) with similar traits to Twitter and Facebook. One could even say that Sina Weibo is a hybrid of these two popular social media sites. Users tend to refer Sina Weibo with only Weibo (microblog), which may cause some confusion, as there are also other microblogging sites (although not as popular) including Tencent Weibo, Sohu Weibo and NetEase Weibo. Sina Weibo had 56,5% of China's microblogging market (active users) and 86,6% (browsing time) compared to competitors like Tencent Weibo in 2011 (Resonance Team, 2011). Still there are some indications that all microblogging services have been losing interest among users lately. This has led to the users of Sina Weibo starting to become more inactive, maybe moving to some another services. This is shown as decreasing monthly active users. This might still be only passing phenomenon, but future will tell (Bei, 2014).

Sina Weibo is currently available for simplified and traditional Chinese characters. There are also versions for Hong Kong and Taiwan. The Chinese version that is currently available is restricted for Chinese users only, so one needs citizenship to use it. Users need to verify their identity with Chinese cell-phone number or with a valid Chinese citizen identification number. The main features of Sina Weibo are Twitter-like. Registered users may post messages limited to 140 characters on their profile (see example in FIGURE 4), which are then visible to all registered users, or to certain user group, if privacy settings of the post have been altered by the user. While Twitter tweets may only contain text and links, Sina Weibo allows messages to contain pictures and smileys or links to other sites or profiles (Yu et.al, 2011). Users can follow other users and their posts and get notifications when something new happens with the followed user/content. Users can mention other users similarly to twitter with '@UserName', and add hashtags to their posts with '#HashName#'. Reposting

works also similarly to twitters retweeting feature. Users can also put some users or posts on their favorite list, which can be used to categorize the content the user is following.

Users own profile page (FIGURE 4) consists of information about the user and the information of the possible verification/identification (see below). This information such as the user's name, short description about the user and recent activity is displayed. User profiles have Facebook-like features like the wall, where the posts of the said user are displayed in chronological order. There are also features for filtering content according to the release date. There are also statistics about the user's followers and who the user is following currently and how many posts the user has made so far. Under each post there are comments displayed and information about how many times the post has been liked, shared and reposted. So information displayed in the users profile page is more similar to Facebooks user profiles than Twitters. (Yu et.al, 2011)



FIGURE 4 Profile page of the user “This is Finland” (verified account of the department of communication and culture of the Finland’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs)

Sina Weibo allows users to attach image, music or video files in every post which is somewhat similar to Facebooks status update. Users can also comment on every post made by other registered users and the comments are shown below the original post as list, not retweeted to followers as in Twitter (Yu et.al, 2011). Unregistered users may only browse posts made by verified user ac-



counts (see below). Unverified accounts/posts and comments are not visible to visitors so to fully read all posts one must register to the service. Sina Weibo also has similar searching functions to Facebook, which helps users to find the users/information they are looking for easily. It is also available as mobile application for Android, Blackberry OS, iOS, Symbian S60, Windows Mobile and Windows Phone.

Sina Weibo has similar identification policy as Twitter to verify the accounts of famous users and organizations. When the account is verified, the username gets a colorful 'V' as sign of verification. For people the 'V' is orange and for organizations blue, as seen below in image captured from Finnair's Sina Weibo site (FIGURE 5). Addition to the 'V' the account will get a graph and declaration that this account is verified one. There are different kinds of verification available for personal accounts, college/university accounts, organizations and official accounts (e.g. governmental departments). Sina Weibo is the most used social media channel for Chinese celebrities and famous persons in China. The most famous verified ones have hundreds of millions of followers. Also organizations use Sina Weibo for advertising and for customer service purposes.



FIGURE 5 Screenshot from Finnair's Sina Weibo page demonstrating the blue verification symbol 'V'

Sina Weibo has grown its user base exponentially, but is starting to slow. Reason for that is that Sina Weibo is currently only available for Chinese users, there is still potential to grow within China, but one reason for slowing of the growth are the same firewalls that keep Facebook and Twitter out of China's internet, keep Sina Weibo and similar Chinese services in. Founders of Facebook and Sina Weibo, Mr. Zuckerberg and Mr. Chao, met briefly last year and were talking about the possibilities to enter new markets; Facebook back to China and Sina Weibo to the rest of the global internet. But at the current time being Mr. Chao stated that Sina Weibo's focus is still in China's internet. (Epstein, 2011; Bei, 2014)



### 3.2.2 WeChat

WeChat (微信) (<http://www.WeChat.com/en/>) is a mobile application similar to WhatsApp. While WhatsApp is more focused on instant messaging, WeChat has more social media features. In 2014, WeChat had 468 million active users from which 70 million were outside of China (Statista.com, 2014). WeChat is available for Android, iPhone, Blackberry, Windows Phone and Symbian phones. Registration can be done through Facebook account or valid phone number. WeChat provides also a web-based client for messaging, but it needs a QR-code to be scanned with the actual application before one can use the web-client.

WeChat provides instant messaging, voice messaging, broadcasting (one-to-many), and sharing of photographs, videos (application allows to capture video and pictures straight from the application itself when user wipes down from the top), audio and location. WeChat allows users to share contacts via Bluetooth and it also provides interesting features to connect randomly with other users, if they are open to that option (see FIGURE 6). One way to do this is to shake your phone and it will connect you to anyone shaking their device simultaneously (no need to be close to each other).

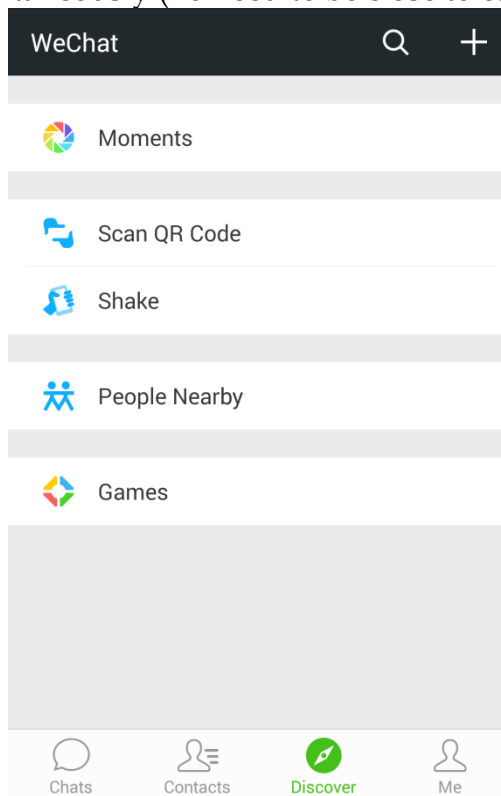


FIGURE 6 Features to find new contacts/content

WeChat provides options for organizations to set up 'official accounts' for their business in WeChat. It is used for example by small producers of vegetables for promoting their products and even selling them directly from WeChat, as it provides option for shopping through the application (needs special ac-

count to use the shopping feature on one's profile). WeChat has however still quite poor search features, so finding new contacts is not always easy, if you don't know their full WeChat username. This provides that organizations need to make their WeChat presence known to users some other way. After the users have found the organization, the sending and receiving messages through WeChat is easy and provides real-time customer service through the application.

As mentioned before, WeChat allows users to broadcast messages to be visible for all their current contacts. This is still not a public message as it is visible to ones contacts only. WeChat displays user's contacts in a list, where user can choose which users receive the message or if it is visible to all contacts (see FIGURE 7). This feature is a great way to share special moments and pictures with group of friends, similar to Facebook posts. These posts can be viewed by the users in chronological order and it is currently not possible to arrange them in other way (e.g. by sender or alphabetical order) which makes it difficult to find particular messages amongst all of them, as there is no search function for that. One way to find ones favorite content is to mark it as favorite. Then user can access his/her favorite contents through his/her own profile page (see FIGURE 8).

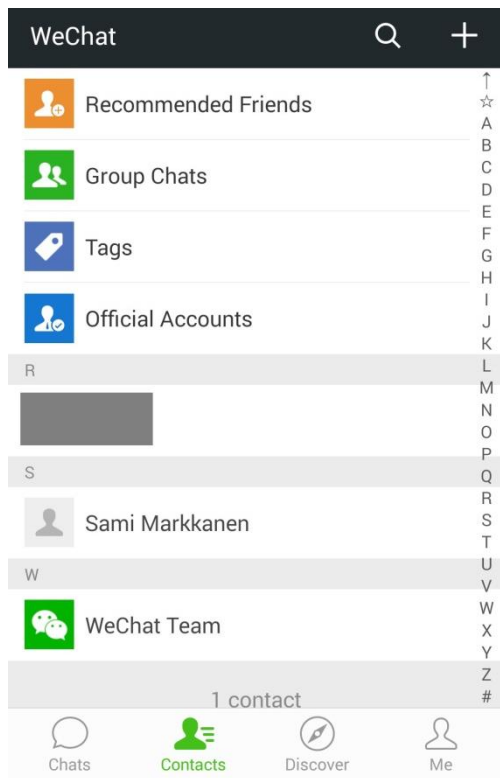


FIGURE 7 Contact list from WeChat

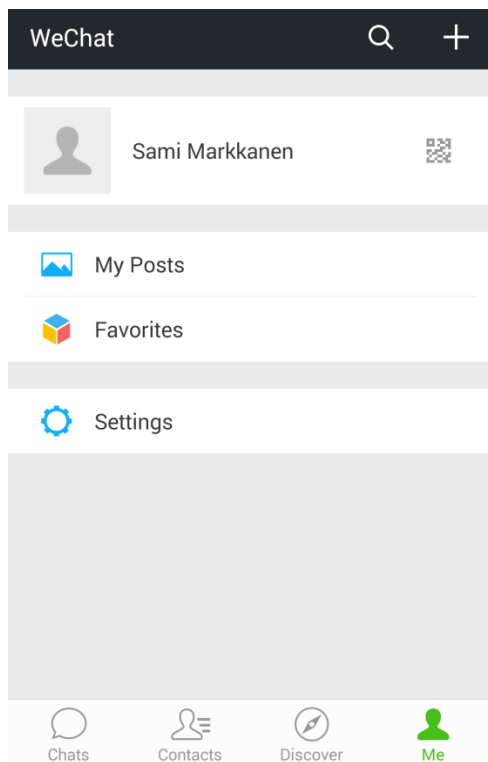


FIGURE 8 Profile page from WeChat

### 3.2.3 Other

There are of course many other social media channels used in China, but Sina Weibo and WeChat are the most popular ones. Second most popular ones are RenRen, which is quite similar to western Facebook although its user base is diminishing as people are moving to use Sina Weibo instead, and QQ that is a microblogging service with similar features to Sina Weibo and Twitter. Currently the most potent competitor for Sina Weibo is QQ, which is property of Tencent, which is one of the largest social networking companies in China. (Epstein, 2011)

Tencent's QQ has over 100 million users, but they are far less active than users of Sina Weibo or WeChat. Tencent has also 'lobbied' celebrities to use their service besides and instead of Sina Weibo, which has large user base of celebrities. But this has not been as effective as hoped, since said celebrities are more active in Sina Weibo and most likely respond to their fans through Sina Weibo. Still the competitors of Sina Weibo use vast budgets to gain more users and to try and challenge Sina Weibo for the post of most popular microblogging/ social media site. (Epstein, 2011)

## 4 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

### 4.1 What is Culture?

Culture has been studied for long time and there have been attempts to determine what culture is (as early as 45 BC when Cicero wrote about '*cultura animi*', which can be translated to cultivation of soul). Yet there is still no single explanation for 'culture' as those explanations vary depending on different fields of study. For example anthropologists use widely the definition made by Edward Tylor (1871). Tylor defined that 'culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor, 1871). This view has been used largely in the field of anthropology and sociology. Later there have been more definitions like Lytle et.al (1999), who define culture as pattern of beliefs and values that assists us in interpreting our past and future behaviors. Some other researchers say that culture is almost impossible to define, because it is constantly evolving (Avison & Myers, 1995; Groeschl & Doherty, 2000).

In this thesis the definition and cultural dimensions provided by Hofstede will be used as the basis. One of the most popular views on culture (in organizational viewpoint, not anthropologist) nowadays is Hofstede's (1980) definition for culture. Hofstede states that culture is an expression of 'mental programming' that exists in all of us. Mental programming then is shown by individual's behavior, words and actions. Those living in close relation to one another have then similar mental programming, which causes them to act and behave in certain way, which can be seen as culture. Hofstede presented four cultural dimensions based on his studies, which can be used to illustrate differences between different cultures. Later he has added two more dimensions as more studies were conducted. The original dimensions are: Power Distance Index, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity and Uncertainty Avoidance Index. The later added dimensions are: Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Normative Orientation and Indulgence versus Re-

straint (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Hofstede, 2011). These dimensions shall be further introduced in the next chapter. Hofstede is still one of the most popular researchers in the field of culture, although his work has been criticized lately (see for example Myers & Tan, 2002 and Fougère & Moulettes 2007). There are also other tools to assess cultural differences, but Hofstede's dimensions are most well-known and widely used (Myers & Tan, 2002) and thus they will be used in this thesis as well to assess the cultural differences between Finland and China, although it is important to remember that they must not be taken as strict fact but more as a guideline, because as Avison & Myers (1997) say, every person is individual so it is impossible to make accurate assumptions about everyone with any of these cultural models.

Still it is necessary to take a quick look to other research, arguments and opinions made in this area. Fougère and Moulettes (2007), Jones and Alony (2007) as well as Myers and Tan (2002) stated that concept of 'national culture' that is used by Hofstede, is too narrow and simplistic. The main reason for this argument is that 'national culture' is bound to the territories of different states rather than actual cultural groups of people. Myers and Tan point out that these cultural groups may span across national borders and inside countries there are multiple groups of people with different sub-cultures, for example in China where are more than 1.5 billion people, and even Chinese language has so many variations that people in different areas won't necessarily understand each other. Myers and Tan suggest that researchers should leave the concept of 'national culture' behind and try to recognize the more dynamic side of the culture. (Myers & Tan, 2002; Fougère & Moulettes 2007; Jones & Alony, 2007)

Myers and Tan also point out that Hofstede did not conduct any research himself with cultural differences in mind, as he was not studying culture but rather findings from other research results (collected by IBM with worldwide employee attitude surveys.) were explained by cultural differences. They also point out that as the surveys were made by IBM only inside their own organization and subsidiaries (in 40 different countries), the organizational culture must have had impact on the results. There are also several problems with the term 'national culture'. One pointed out by Myers and Tan is that nation-states are relatively new phenomenon and culture has been around for thousands of years. This is one reason why culture is not tied with nation-states. Also the nation-states are still changing as new nation-states are formed when old ones break up producing number of new states (e.g. the Soviet Union). The culture within nation-states is also affected by immigrants (Myers & Tan, 2002). Hofstede also undermines the history of nations, especially the colonial and neocolonial ones, and points that inequalities should only be blamed on the people's 'collective programming of the mind' (Fougère & Moulettes 2007). Many nation-states also contain many different cultures and as pointed out earlier, people in same nation-state might not even have same language, race or culture (Myers & Tan 2002). Groeschl & Doherty add that globalization has allowed people to move more freely after work which has increased the mixing of cultures within nation-states. (Groeschl & Doherty, 2000)

According to Myers and Tan (2002), increasing number of researchers and studies has pointed out that the relationship between 'national culture' and work related cultural values is extremely complex and not explained by Hofstede's current model. It has been shown that in collectivistic countries people may have more individualistic relationship with their workplace than Hofstede's model shows. Some other findings are that economic growth is not well explained by Hofstede's dimensions as well as the problems of explaining the actions of individuals with these dimensions. All these researchers have argued that culture might be more complicated than Hofstede's studies (as well as countless others) have assumed (Groeschl & Doherty, 2000; Myers & Tan, 2002; Fougère & Moulettes 2007). Still Hofstede's dimensions of national culture are a good basis for understanding the influence of national culture on organizations, but they are not as well suited to understanding social activities (Harvey, 1997). All the researchers agree that more research is needed to get a fully valid and acceptable model for cultural analysis (Harvey, 1997; Groeschl & Doherty, 2000; Myers & Tan, 2002; Fougère & Moulettes 2007; Jones & Alony, 2007). But in the meantime, Hofstede's model serves as a basis for assessing new cultures, when kept in mind that the model should be used as a guideline to know the 'stereotypical' differences between nationalities (Jones & Alony, 2007).

## 4.2 Cultural Differences

As mentioned in previous chapter Hofstede has presented six dimensions to assess cultural differences between nations. In this chapter a closer look shall be taken to these dimensions.

First dimension, the *power distance index*, is defined by Hofstede as "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally". This means that in societies with high power distance, the individuals accept hierarchies where everyone has place and don't need justification for that given place. Correspondingly individuals from low power distance cultures tend to expect more democratic positions and equality. Mentors and executives have more consulting role than just telling what to do without questioning. These differences are further illustrated in FIGURE 9. (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Hofstede, 2011)

<b>Small Power Distance</b>	<b>Large Power Distance</b>
Use of power should be legitimate and is subject to criteria of good and evil	Power is a basic fact of society antedating good or evil: its legitimacy is irrelevant
Parents treat children as equals	Parents teach children obedience
Older people are neither respected nor feared	Older people are both respected and feared
Student-centered education	Teacher-centered education
Hierarchy means inequality of roles, established for convenience	Hierarchy means existential inequality
Subordinates expect to be consulted	Subordinates expect to be told what to do
Pluralist governments based on majority vote and changed peacefully	Autocratic governments based on co-optation and changed by revolution
Corruption rare; scandals end political careers	Corruption frequent; scandals are covered up
Income distribution in society rather even	Income distribution in society very uneven
Religions stressing equality of believers	Religions with a hierarchy of priests

FIGURE 9 Differences between small- and large- power distance societies (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9)

Second dimension, *individualism vs. collectivism*, according to Hofstede is defined as “the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups”. In individualistic cultures individuals are expected to take care and look after themselves and their own families. In collectivistic cultures individuals are integrated into larger groups from the very beginning, starting from their family and relatives. This group then protects and takes care of the individual and in exchange gets his/her loyalty. For example individuals from collectivist cultures are not likely to show strong individual opinions and they don't necessarily want to be raised above the group, which is opposite to individualistic cultures. These differences are further illustrated in FIGURE 10. (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Hofstede, 2011)

<b>Individualism</b>	<b>Collectivism</b>
Everyone is supposed to take care of him- or herself and his or her immediate family only	People are born into extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty
"I" – consciousness	"We" –consciousness
Right of privacy	Stress on belonging
Speaking one's mind is healthy	Harmony should always be maintained
Others classified as individuals	Others classified as in-group or out-group
Personal opinion expected: one person one vote	Opinions and votes predetermined by in-group
Transgression of norms leads to guilt feelings	Transgression of norms leads to shame feelings
Languages in which the word "I" is indispensable	Languages in which the word "I" is avoided
Purpose of education is learning how to learn	Purpose of education is learning how to do
Task prevails over relationship	Relationship prevails over task

FIGURE 10 Differences between individualist and collectivist society (Hofstede, 2011, p. 11)



Third dimension in the Hofstede model is *masculinity vs. femininity*. In this context masculinity and femininity are not individual characteristics, but a societal factor. According to Hofstede this dimension “refers to the distribution of values between the genders”. When culture is seen as masculine, the values such as competitiveness, assertiveness, materialism and ambition for power are highly praised in the culture. Correspondingly when culture is feminine, values like relationships, modesty and caring are more visible. Also in masculine countries gender roles are visible and there are clear accepted roles for each gender. Feminine cultures tend to have higher equality between genders. These differences are further illustrated in FIGURE 11. (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Hofstede, 2011)

<b>Femininity</b>	<b>Masculinity</b>
Minimum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders	Maximum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders
Men and women should be modest and caring	Men should be and women may be assertive and ambitious
Balance between family and work	Work prevails over family
Sympathy for the weak	Admiration for the strong
Both fathers and mothers deal with facts and feelings	Fathers deal with facts, mothers with feelings
Both boys and girls may cry but neither should fight	Girls cry, boys don't; boys should fight back, girls shouldn't fight
Mothers decide on number of children	Fathers decide on family size
Many women in elected political positions	Few women in elected political positions
Religion focuses on fellow human beings	Religion focuses on God or gods
Matter-of-fact attitudes about sexuality; sex is a way of relating	Moralistic attitudes about sexuality; sex is a way of performing

FIGURE 11 Differences between feminine and masculine societies (Hofstede, 2011, p. 12)

*Uncertainty avoidance index* is the fourth dimension in Hofstede's model. According to Hofstede, this dimension “deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity”. It indicates how people in certain culture deal with unstructured or uncertain situations and do they feel uncomfortable or comfortable in those situations. Individuals from high uncertainty avoidance culture try to minimize the possibility of such situations by relying on traditions, strict planning, rules and behavioral codes. Individuals from low uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to be more pragmatic and more tolerant to change. Therefore need for strict rules and guidelines is lower and changes of plans is acceptable, if not expected. These differences are further illustrated in FIGURE 12. (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Hofstede, 2011)



<b>Weak Uncertainty Avoidance</b>	<b>Strong Uncertainty Avoidance</b>
The uncertainty inherent in life is accepted and each day is taken as it comes	The uncertainty inherent in life is felt as a continuous threat that must be fought
Ease, lower stress, self-control, low anxiety	Higher stress, emotionality, anxiety, neuroticism
Higher scores on subjective health and well-being	Lower scores on subjective health and well-being
Tolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is curious	Intolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is dangerous
Comfortable with ambiguity and chaos	Need for clarity and structure
Teachers may say 'I don't know'	Teachers supposed to have all the answers
Changing jobs no problem	Staying in jobs even if disliked
Dislike of rules - written or unwritten	Emotional need for rules – even if not obeyed
In politics, citizens feel and are seen as competent towards authorities	In politics, citizens feel and are seen as incompetent towards authorities
In religion, philosophy and science: relativism and empiricism	In religion, philosophy and science: belief in ultimate truths and grand theories

FIGURE 12 Differences between weak- and strong- uncertainty avoidance societies (Hofstede, 2011, p. 10)

Fifth dimension added to the Hofstede's original four is *long term orientation vs .short term orientation* and it describes society's time horizon. Long-term oriented societies are more future oriented and appraise values such as perseverance, thrift, and having a sense of shame. In short term oriented societies values such as fulfilling social obligations, respect for tradition, protecting one's 'face', and personal steadiness and stability are praised highly. These differences are further illustrated in FIGURE 13. According to Hofstede (2011) this dimension is strongly correlating with current economic growth. (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, 2011)

<b>Short-Term Orientation</b>	<b>Long-Term Orientation</b>
Most important events in life occurred in the past or take place now	Most important events in life will occur in the future
Personal steadiness and stability: a good person is always the same	A good person adapts to the circumstances
There are universal guidelines about what is good and evil	What is good and evil depends upon the circumstances
Traditions are sacrosanct	Traditions are adaptable to changed circumstances
Family life guided by imperatives	Family life guided by shared tasks
Supposed to be proud of one's country	Trying to learn from other countries
Service to others is an important goal	Thrift and perseverance are important goals
Social spending and consumption	Large savings quote, funds available for investment
Students attribute success and failure to luck	Students attribute success to effort and failure to lack of effort
Slow or no economic growth of poor countries	Fast economic growth of countries up till a level of prosperity

FIGURE 13 Differences between short- and long-term oriented society (Hofstede, 2011, p. 15)

The newest (added 2010) and last dimension in Hofstede's model is *indulgence vs. restraint*. According to Hofstede, indulgent societies allow individuals to have relatively free gratification of basic and natural human needs related to enjoying life and having fun. In more restraint societies the gratification of needs is highly controlled and is usually regulated with strict norms. The differences between indulgent and restrained societies are further illustrated in FIGURE 14. (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, 2011)

<b>Indulgence</b>	<b>Restrained</b>
Higher percentage of people declaring themselves very happy	Fewer very happy people
A perception of personal life control	A perception of helplessness: what happens to me is not my own doing
Freedom of speech seen as important	Freedom of speech is not a primary concern
Higher importance of leisure	Lower importance of leisure
More likely to remember positive emotions	Less likely to remember positive emotions
In countries with educated populations, higher birthrates	In countries with educated populations, lower birthrates
More people actively involved in sports	Fewer people actively involved in sports
In countries with enough food, higher percentages of obese people	In countries with enough food, fewer obese people
In wealthy countries, lenient sexual norms	In wealthy countries, stricter sexual norms
Maintaining order in the nation is not given a high priority	Higher number of police officers per 100,000 population

FIGURE 14 Differences between indulgent and restrained societies (Hofstede, 2011, p. 16)

Henderson (1994) presented a modified dimensional model with cultural aspect in it, which was mainly focused on pedagogical learning. That model was modified from Reeves (1992) interactive learning systems (ILS) model. Still it is useful tool for assessing learning in social media, which is important part of this thesis, as companies that use social media want their (potential) customers to learn something from that interaction. The model contains 14 pedagogic dimensions of interactive learning, which are represented on a continuum with a range of values between two extremes. (Reeves, 1992; Henderson 1994)

Henderson added a cultural contextually dimension to Reeves' model, forming an axis to each dimension. This model can be seen in FIGURE 15. Henderson argued that the dimensions and their continuums cannot, exist outside of culture, thus needing the cultural axis on each dimension. This is justifiable as all the dimensions and continuums are social constructs and have meaning because of the academic traditions in which they are situated. Therefore the meaning of each continuum changes when moving from one culture to another. This is further illustrated when different cultural ideologies and pedagogical traditions are considered. The cultural contextually dimensions range from 'not incorporated' to 'actioned'. 'Not incorporated' includes social, cultural, economic and historical perspectives of the culture as well as contributions of minorities to the nations 'main' culture. 'Actioned' contains obvious, relevant, and cul-

turally appropriate aspects in ways that promote effective mediating processes and learning outcomes. (Henderson, 1994)

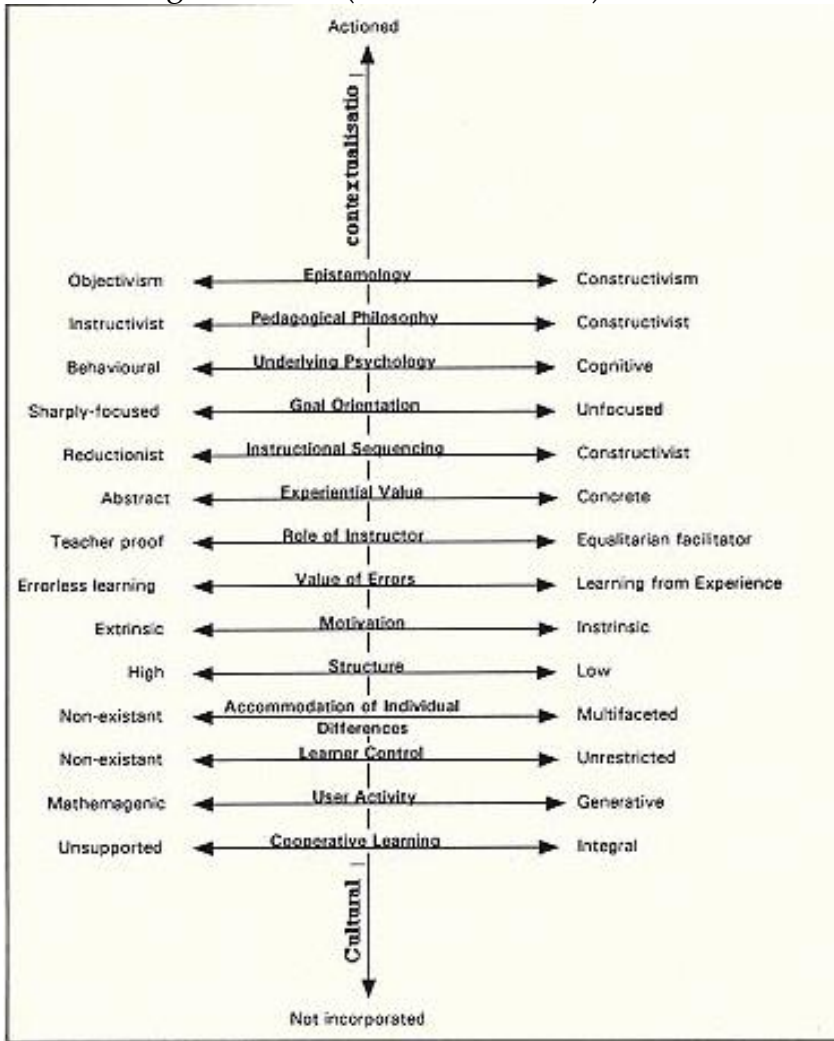


FIGURE 15 The culturally contextualized pedagogic model of instructional design in ILS (Henderson, 1994)

### 4.3 Cultural Differences Between Finland and China

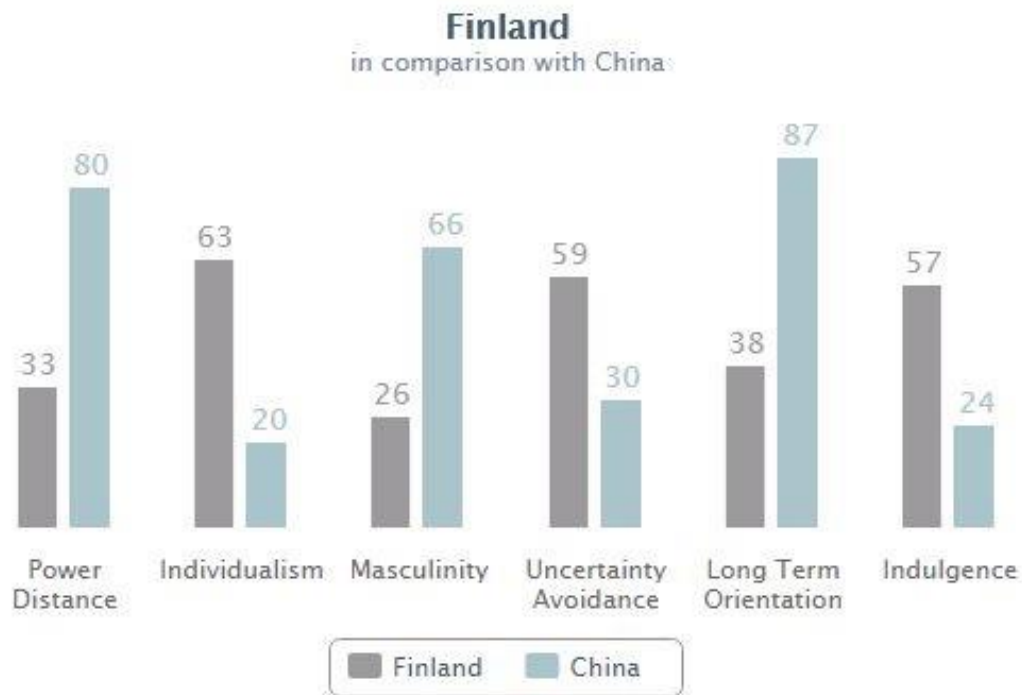


FIGURE 16 Finland and China compared with Hofstede's dimensions (The Hofstede Centre)

In this chapter a closer look shall be taken on the cultural differences between Finland and China. FIGURE 16 illustrates these differences on the Hofstede's dimensions.

First let's take a look at the power distance. Finland scores low on power distance when China scores high. In Finland being independent is appreciated and hierarchy is used for convenience only. Everyone has equal rights, leaders are accessible, easily approached and they are expected to be more coaching. Employees expect to be consulted and power is decentralized, meaning that managers rely on their team members knowledge and experience. Attitudes towards managers are informal and 'on first name basis, allowing direct communication and participation. In China inequality among individuals is accepted and superiors may abuse their subordinates because of that. Managers don't ask employees for advice and employees should not question made by the management. (The Hofstede Centre, n.d.)

As seen in the FIGURE 16, Finland is an individual society scoring high on that dimension, whereas China scores low, meaning that China is highly collectivistic society. Finland being individual, as explained in previous chapter, means that there is a high preference for a loose social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families. Offence on individual causes guilt and a loss of self-esteem. Hiring and promoting employees are supposed to be based on merits only and management is



seen as the management of individuals. In China, which is collectivist society, individuals act to fulfill the interests and needs of the group they belong into and not for themselves. Hiring and promotions are affected by group ties and closer in-groups are getting better positions and treatment. Relationships with in-groups are warm and caring, but even hostile to out-groups. Personal relationships are highly praised. (The Hofstede Centre, n.d.)

FIGURE 16 illustrates that Finland is a feminine society scoring low on this dimension, while China can be seen as masculine society with higher score. In Finland people value equality, solidarity and quality of life. Conflicts are usually resolved by negotiation and compromise. Free time and flexibility are highly favored and personal status is not shown. In comparison, Chinese people are success oriented and driven. Leisure time is sacrificed for succession in work. Students care very much on their test scores, because it is the main criteria for success and therefore status. (The Hofstede Centre, n.d.)

Finland has higher uncertainty avoidance, which means that there is a need for rules, time is money, people tend to work hard, precision and punctuality are expected and security is an important element in individual motivation. China then again scores low on this dimensions, following laws and rules may be flexible and usually changed to suit the actual situation and Chinese are comfortable with uncertain situations and with ambiguity. Truth is still appreciated in close social circles. (The Hofstede Centre, n.d.)

Finland as a society is short-term oriented according to Hofstede's dimensions, meaning people want to establish the absolute truth, thinking is normative, traditions are respected and focus is on achieving quick results. China scores very high and can therefore be seen as long-term oriented. With pragmatic orientation, truth is believed to be dependent on the situation, context and time. Traditions are adapted to suit new conditions. There is a strong urge to save and invest, and perseverance in achieving results. (The Hofstede Centre, n.d.)

Finland scores relatively high on indulgence, which means that Finnish society is open for enjoying life and having fun and individuals tend to be optimistic. Leisure time is also highly appreciated, money is used by individuals as they please and individuals may also act as they wish. In comparison, China is fairly restricted society meaning individuals are keen to pessimism and cynicism. Also leisure time is not that much emphasized and society has strict control on the gratifications of individuals' desires. Individuals' actions are restricted by social norms and they feel that indulging themselves would be wrong.

As seen in this chapter, Finland and China are two very different societies on cultural levels. Although it must be kept in mind that Hofstede's model does not give the 'absolute truth' or fact and must thus be used more as a guideline when approaching new culture.

## 4.4 Culture and Social Media

As found out in previous chapter, there are many differences between Finnish and Chinese culture. These differences should also be taken into account in social media communications. There have been studies about how cultural differences are shown in the use and users of social media. Gao et.al (2012) and Yu et.al (2011) focused on the differences between Twitter and Sina Weibo users, while Mandl (2009) focused on the blog user's differences between China and Germany.

Gao et.al (2012) focused their study on the differences in user actions in Sina Weibo and Twitter by analyzing over 40 million individual microblogging activities (Twitter content mostly from US). Sina Weibo is currently the largest Chinese microblogging service and largest social media platform. Sina Weibo is highly similar to Twitter as both share same functionalities and limit the posts to 140 characters. Still Sina Weibo has more features than Twitter, making it a kind of hybrid of Twitter and Facebook (see chapter 3.2.1). Gao et.al focused their study on five different dimensions of microblog usage: access behavior, syntactic content analysis, semantic content analysis, sentiment analysis, and temporal behavior. (Gao et.al, 2012)

Access behavior focuses on the access methods used by the users to access the microblogging service. Both Sina Weibo and Twitter are accessible via different client applications for mobile and desktop use. Users of both platforms prefer to use the official web interface. Still Chinese users tend to use mobile application more frequently in comparison to 'western' users of Twitter and they post more microblog content as byproduct of their other social media use. According to Gao et.al this might be explained by the difference in power distance (see chapter 4.2), as it seems that Sina Weibo users are less afraid of disclosing information about them compared to Twitter users. Given the high power distance of the Chinese culture, they assumed that Chinese users do not attribute much impact to their individual activities and so the impact of disclosing information is lesser (Gao et.al, 2012). This is further proved by Mandl (2009), who found out that less than 40% of German bloggers revealed their age compared to 71% of Chinese bloggers. Mandl also found out that Chinese blogs are mainly maintained by individual users, whereas in Germany around 20% were organized by groups or organizations. According to Mandl this shows the difference in power distance, as in China where power distance is high only top executives of companies can speak for the company publicly whereas in Germany these organization blogs are maintained by lower level employees. (Mandl, 2009)

As both Sina Weibo and Twitter limit the posts to 140 characters, the syntactic content analysis focused on the use of hashtags and URL's. As Gao et.al (2012) found out, the use of hashtags is significantly lower in Sina Weibo compared to Twitter and they conclude that hashtags are as much that approved in Sina Weibo than in Twitter. The use of URL's and hashtags is more frequent

when posting messages from desktop applications compared to mobile applications on both platforms. Also Twitter users ask twice more questions compared to Sina Weibo users. The more intense use of hashtags by the Twitter users may be related to lower power distance and higher degree of individualism (see chapter 4.2). By using hashtags the users can ensure that their messages appear in public discussions and Twitter users are more eager to make their posts go public and take part in public discussion. According to Gao et.al this can be explained by the lower power distance of the Twitter users (who as mentioned were mostly American in this study) and higher individualism as they want to make difference with their posts and be seen in public discussion. (Gao et.al, 2012). Mandl (2009) also pointed out that Chinese bloggers were less eager to express themselves by tagging, which shows the lack of individualism. Still Chinese bloggers showed better coping with uncertainty, as their online articles and blog posts were less structured compared to German ones. Chinese blogs also contained more visual elements when in comparison to German ones. (Mandl, 2009)

Gao et.al also looked more closely to the topics and concepts of the messages in Sina Weibo and Twitter. This semantic content analysis showed that in Sina Weibo users are more reluctant to talk about organizations such as political parties and other governmental institutions and is more focused on locations and persons. This finding according to Gao et.al is explained by the high long-term orientation (see chapter 4.2) in China, which in this case is shown as employee's low commitment to organizations. In Twitter there were no visible topics or subjects that would have been collectively avoided by the users. Their study also showed that semantic concepts are less occurred when users use mobile applications when compared to desktop applications. Twitter users are also more likely to mention locations when the message is produced as by-product of some other activities. (Gao et.al, 2012). Yu et.al (2011) also found out in their research that posts in Sina Weibo contain more jokes, images, videos and significantly large amount of them are reposts. This shows that trends in Sina Weibo are caused by the reposting same media content repeatedly while in Twitter trends are usually caused by sources of media. (Yu et.al, 2011)

As microblogs allow users to freely discuss about topics that concern them, Gao et.al conducted Sentiment analysis to find the differences on users revealing sentiment in Twitter and Sina Weibo. Research revealed that there are significantly more positive posts on both platforms compared to negative ones. Also Sina Weibo users are notably more likely to post positive messages than Twitter users, which is according to Gao et.al (2012) and Mandl (2009) explained by the long-term orientation as people tend to be more positive in high long-term orientation nations (see chapter 4.2) (Gao et.al, 2012; Mandl 2009). The main difference is though that in Sina Weibo, positive messages are mostly about people and locations and negative ones concern organizations. In Twitter this is quite the opposite, as organizations get more likely positive messages than people and locations. According to Gao et.al and Mandl this difference about posting positive/negative messages about people is explained by collec-

tivism/individualism (see chapter 4.2). As China is highly collectivistic country, people are more loyal and positive towards each other compared to Twitter users, which in this study were from highly individual culture. (Gao et.al, 2012; Mandl 2009)

There are still some differences about posts made during weekend and weekdays, as shown by temporal behavior analysis. Sina Weibo users are more active during weekends while Twitter users are more active during weekdays. The interests of users also shift during weekends as Sina Weibo users were more interested in topics about people and organizations while Twitter users focused more on topics about locations during weekends. The lifespan of interests is significantly shorter in Sina Weibo compared to Twitter and topics about locations get longest interest from users and shortest interest lifespan goes to topics about organizations. While this might seem to be in contradiction to long-term orientation, Gao et.al point out that one aspect of highly long-term oriented cultures is to adapt rather quickly to changes. So by adapting quickly to new emerging topics and leaving the old ones behind, Sina Weibo (Chinese) users show long-term orientation. (Gao et.al 2012)

It is also notable to take into account that Chinese social media users are fairly active when comparing to 'western' social media users and have numerous social media accounts. Also mobile usage is increasing rapidly in china, as more people gain access to mobile devices suitable for social media use. Chinese people are somewhat skeptical towards authorities and formal institutions and thus the 'opinion leaders' in social networks are highly appreciated and their messages heard. This shows the importance of peer-to-peer recommendations and user-reviews in China. The competition for consumers is also fierce in China and many companies have employees whose main responsibility is to praise the company's products and services in social media, as well as share negative news and information about competitors. For companies it is thus crucial to identify the real source of negative comments/posts and take counter-measures accordingly. (Chiu et.al, 2012)



## 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the research methods shall be introduced. Also the data collection and data analysis conducted for this thesis shall be described in the following pages.

### 5.1 Research Method

Qualitative research was used in this thesis. Qualitative research is good choice for the thesis as there is already vast amount of information about cultural differences and social media usage. In this thesis the aim is to find out how Finnish companies are currently utilizing social media in China and how they keep the cultural differences in mind. Kananen (2010, 41-42) has mentioned that when aim of a research is to get profound information about some particular issue, then qualitative research is a good solution. (Kananen 2010, 41-42).

In qualitative research the issue being researched is intended to be explained with words and sentences in understandable form. The aim is to describe real life as comprehensively as possible. Unlike in quantitative research, in qualitative research there are no numerical data used but it relies more on personal interactions like interviews. (Kananen 2010, 41-42; Hirsijärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 2009, 161-162)

In the previous literature review part of this thesis, scientific publications (articles, books, seminar papers etc.) were read and knowledge collected from them and introduced in this thesis. This literature was searched mostly from Google Scholar and databases provided in Nelli-portal. Main search phrases used were: 'Chinese social media', 'Cultural differences', 'digital marketing (in China)' etc. These articles are mostly published in scientific publications, which make them valid information. Information about Chinese social media was collected from these scientific publications as well as asking from our departments Chinese researchers and students. The main sources of information in cultural differences shall be taken from Hofstede's work and backed up with some arti-

cles that bring other viewpoints to cultural differences. For social media there are numerous interesting and valid publications and various different opinions and viewpoints.

Research method in the empirical research section of the thesis is exploratory (Shields & Rangarajan, 2013, 109–110), where Chinese social media shall first be familiarized and afterwards interviews will be conducted with Finnish companies that are currently operating in China to get their experiences about Chinese social media and how are they currently utilizing it.

## 5.2 Data Collection

The data about the most popular Chinese social media channels was collected via face-to-face interviews with Chinese researchers and students working in the University of Jyväskylä. Total of five researchers and one exchange student were interviewed. Two of them were female and the rest men. Age was distributed between 25–40 years. They were asked about the most used social media channels nowadays in China and if companies use these platforms as well (see interview structure from APPENDIX 3). The results from these interviews are represented in chapter 3.2.

The information about the use of social media by Finnish companies in China was gathered by theme-interviews conducted via email. After the first round the data was analyzed and according to the findings more information was gathered with further questions. In these email-questionnaires and interviews key personnel (marketing and PR managers) for the companies' social media usage were interviewed via email due to time difference and tight schedules of the interviewees. The companies to be contacted were chosen by exploring the Chinese social media to find out which Finnish companies have presence in these sites. Total of 20 companies were contacted and eight interviews were gathered from them, including six different companies, all of which are operating globally in several different locations and in different fields (see TABLE 1 in page 52). From these eight interviewees three were Finnish and the rest Chinese. Seven were females and one male.

Originally this thesis was to be about companies that are working in the field of educational technology or other educational fields. But as it turned out after contacting these companies, they did not use Chinese social media at the time of this thesis, thus the scope had to be changed to accept all the companies that did use social media in China.

From two of these interviewed companies two persons were interviewed and from the rest four companies only one per company. From the companies that were contacted but are not featured in this thesis five told that they did not have any social media activities in China currently and the rest were not interested in participating the interviews or did not give any answer to the contacting attempts.

After the first round of interviews there was a need for second round, as there were few occurring themes in the answers. The interview structure for Round 1 can be found in APPENDIX 1 and structure for Round 2 from APPENDIX 2. In Round 2 the questions for each individual interviewee were selected so that if they had already answered some questions on the first round, they were not asked those again.

### **5.3 Data Analysis**

The data collected with the interviews was analyzed by organizing the answers into themes and categories that reflect the research problem and previous researches about this subject. Hirsjärvi and Hurmes (2001) have mentioned that data analysis in interviews should start during the interviews. This was done in this thesis when similarities and differences from the answers of different interviewees were looked at during and after the data collection phase. After all the data from a round was gathered the answers were then organized into groups around different themes (see APPENDIX 4 for Round 1 and APPENDIX 5 for Round 2). After Round 1 the focus was centered into the most occurring themes and this was used to create the focus and questions for Round 2.

After the Round 2 the analysis itself was conducted by comparing different answers and searching for similarities and differences to point out the major factors in social media usage of Finnish companies in China as well as culturally affected differences compared to the usage of Finnish social media. The answers organized in these themes were lastly compared to the existing theory and previous researches to see if it was in line with them or if there were any major differences.

## 6 RESULTS

In this chapter a closer look to the social media usage of Finnish companies operating in China shall be taken. The information presented in this chapter was collected via interviews. The following table (1) introduces the companies that took part in this research.

TABLE 1 Companies which participated to interviews

<b>Company</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>No. of employees</b>	<b>How long has used SoMe in China</b>	<b>No. of interviewees'</b>
Company 1	Airlines	c. 5500	From 2014, possibly earlier	1
Company 2	Basic resources, engineering	c. 5000	May 2014	2
Company 3	Services, Pulp and Energy, Paper and Automation	c. 10,500	August 2014	2
Company 4	Stainless steel	c. 12,600	September 2014	1
Company 5	Industrial machinery	c. 10,700	From 2014, possibly earlier	1
Company 6	Indoor climate products, services and solutions, indoor environment management.	c. 1200	April 2015	1

## 6.1 Round 1: Company's Social Media Usage in China

### 6.1.1 Activity, Content, Channels etc.

All the companies that were interviewed are quite active in the Chinese social media. Most of them create and publish content in social media every working day or at least two or three times a week. The content includes varying marketing materials (articles, news, product info, videos etc.), communication with stakeholder groups and customer service. Also three of them mentioned that they are targeting potential employees through social media in China. This is greatly illustrated by two of the answers regarding the activity and content of the social media usage:

"Typically we do the updates twice/three times per week, which includes Valmet updates (important orders, new technology/products, coming events), recruitment info, industry update." Company 3: Interviewee 1 & 2.

"We do marketing, communications as well as customer service on Chinese social media channels. The main aim is to earn more and more brand awareness, increase our sales via social channels of course and all the time serving our customer the best we can. Social media is one of our "always-on" channels in China which means that we are active all the time - almost every day in various ways." Company 1: Interviewee 1.

The main social media platforms used by these companies were Sina Weibo and WeChat. At the moment of these interviews five out of six interviewees told that their company was using Sina Weibo. Furthermore three were using WeChat and two were planning to start using WeChat. There were also two interviewees that used Youku for sharing videos.

All the interviewees told that their company is using social media for contacting customers (existing and potential) and employees. Four of them also mentioned that social media is used for contacting media. Two mentioned that one target group is potential employees. Most of them had also started the social media usage recently (during the past two years). They were quite happy about the results and told that they have gained a nice amount of active followers.

"We have 900+ followers on Weibo and 1200+ followers on WeChat right now." Company 5: Interviewee 1.

"People have shared their memories when traveled with us and they've also shared our content to their friends better than we were expecting. Our brand is known more widely in Chinese market already, thanks to our activities on social media channels." Company 1: Interviewee 1.

All interviewees told that the contents/tweets their company is sharing are shared by the readers and followers. Still two of them said that share rate is

slow and one reason behind it might be the industry those companies are working in, as speculated in the answer from company 4: interviewee 1:

“However, as we are a B2B material company, our contents are not as interesting as B2C articles. So the share rate is still low.” Company 4: Interviewee 1.

When asked about co-operation between the social media/marketing departments inside the company (all of them are operating in multiple countries), five out of six told that they have good co-operation between countries. Four of them mentioned that all activities are managed by headquarters and then local offices manage the social media accordingly. Two of them also mentioned that the marketing departments in different locations also share knowledge and success stories and other content with each other.

“So **yes** we do have a lot of cooperation. Like said, we have our own local sales offices, local digital agencies as well as our local PR agency. All of the stakeholders are doing close cooperation when it comes to our social media actions. Then we have our central HQ who is looking after to whole market and its channels, and who for example is the main responsible for our content calendar tool and its updates.” Company 1: Interviewee 1.

“We have almost all the social media platform managing by our headquarters, we communicate frequently on the contents that we shared or any success story we achieved.” Company 2: Interviewee 2.

### **6.1.2 Experiences about Chinese Social Media Users**

According to the interviewees Chinese social media users are extremely active but still demanding at the same time. They will actively share branded content to their friends and relatives, even more actively than ‘western’ social media users, if they find the information interesting. This activity also shapes the social media usage of companies, as they have to follow social media users to the platform they are currently using, as Chinese social media users tend to want all the services and information from one channel.

“People are more willing to share branded contents to their friends and relatives than they are in Western social media sites for example. Also, they want to get all the services in one channel - they don't want to use native apps, brand websites and other travel sites separately - they are expecting to get all the info, services, offers etc., all in one place.” Company 1: Interviewee 1.

Chinese social media users are also active during certain days and time of days, so by analyzing this companies can determine the best time to share their content to the network of followers, so that the message will have the best possible spread. And also the attractiveness of the message is emphasized by all the interviewees throughout the interview data.

“We have analyzed the good time of one day for posts and also create our contents related to the hot topic, it usually comes to a better result.” Company 2: Interviewee 2.

But interestingly only two out of five companies has received actual feedback from the customers through social media, although all of them say that Chinese social media users are very active. The feedback received has been mainly positive. This has been seen by the interviewees as a major difference compared to the ‘western’ social media users, as Chinese social media user’s don’t seem to use social media site as a place for criticism.

“Yes, a lot and mainly only positive feedback. That's the one difference when comparing to Western social sites and its users: social site is not the place for criticisms, at least not as those sometimes are in Western markets.” Company 1: Interviewee 1.

Half of the interviewees had some experience in using social media for similar purposes also in other countries than China. The main reason behind the lack of this experience for some interviewees was the language barrier. But the rest who had used social media outside of China told that the content is usually country specific and that the main difference is the user behavior as illustrated throughout this chapter.

“NO, we only have run this in China due to language difference, no experience with other countries.” Company 3: Interviewee 1 & 2.

“The most significant differences are in user's behavior” Company 1: Interviewee 1.

### 6.1.3 Challenges

All the participants in the interviews told that the number one challenge in Chinese social media for a company nowadays is how to create attractive and interesting content, so that the users and followers will read and share it forward. This is very difficult for example companies working on the B2B material business. Another challenge related to the attractiveness of the content is to find the best Key Opinion Leaders who are popular, followed and trustworthy among the common users. They might greatly benefit companies if they find the messages interesting and ‘shareworthy’.

“Also, the internet is quite popular nowadays, more challenge for the contents creation, how to create the more interesting contents to attract or keep our potential target?” Company 1: Interviewee 1.

“You have to generate very interesting contents to attract readers. With the information booming, people become selective.” Company 2: Interviewee 2.

“Other challenge is to find Key Opinion Leaders that works the best for us when we want to promote our marketing messages on Chinese social sites.” Company 4: Interviewee 1.

There are also challenges related to the attractiveness of the content, like how to create active participation, attract more followers and grow your fan base with limited resources in constantly growing mass of companies marketing in Chinese social media. Lack of resources also leads to challenge of answering customer inquiries in timely manner through social media, as put by Interview 7.

“Virus marketing for B2B niche market; how to grow the size of fans with limited resource; how to create active participation in discussion; and serve our customer inquiry online in a timely manner without disclosing confidential information.” Company 5: Interviewee 1.

#### **6.1.4 Summary**

All of the interviewees told that the main challenges and differences compared to western social media is that Chinese social media users demand more interesting content, but if their need for interesting content is met, they are more active and more likely to share the branded messages to their own circles. Next step is to focus more on these factors and set a second round of interviews to focus more deeply on how the companies are creating interesting content to their followers in social media and how are they activating said followers.

## **6.2 How Companies Can Activate Their Followers in Social Media?**

### **6.2.1 Consumer Activity in Social Media**

Heinonen (2011) has given a good framework (see FIGURE 17) for companies to follow, when the aim is to activate and motivate their followers in social media. In this framework the user motives are represented on the right hand side (entertainment, social connection and information seeking) and user input on the bottom (consumption, participation and production). Heinonen suggests that the role of user-generated content is reducing the influence of traditional marketing. This idea is also backed up by Evans (2012) and Whitley (2014) as word-of-mouth is nowadays a key factor when consumers are looking for information about products and services. This had led to the need for companies to interact with their customer through social media more than just traditional marketing communication. Participating in the customers social media activities and activating followers in social media can give companies insight on the impact the user generated content is having on their brand and create good interactions with former, current and potential customers (Heinonen, 2011; Evans, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).



Companies should offer different information that is available to anyone in order to attract users. This information can be shared through different channels, but it is a good idea to lead the customer to the company's social media page, where the provided information is explained and a possibility to discuss and comment the said information is available to users. This, according to Heinonen (2011) and Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), leads to more active users and creates company-consumer interactions as well as consumer-consumer interactions. The occurring discussion can then provide more insights to the company about the consumer's interests and needs. (Heinonen, 2011; Evans, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

Good ways to attract more followers in social media and making the users more active is to make sure that the information is interesting to them. This can be achieved by linking the company with current (positive) happenings/events and providing real-time information about those events. Heinonen (2011) points out that creating discussions about different daily topics is one of them most effective way to increase user activity and create interest. Key factor here is to allow users to post questions and share experiences on company's social media page. For example one possible way is to encourage users to share tips on how the products can be used in various different ways or how to use it effectively and initiate discussion about these between the users. Also the use of key opinion leaders, who are interesting and popular users, with vast amount of active followers, can increase the company's visibility and interest in the said company. One example of this kind of activity is to give popular bloggers products to be tested and reviewed, after which they post their review on their personal blogs/social media profiles. (Wang et.al, 2013; Heinonen, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

One good motivation for social media users is entertainment. Heinonen (2011) introduces few possible ways to increase the entertainment factor of companies' social media sites. For example companies can increase user activity by providing games and other interactive content related to their products and services. This content should be free and easy to use as well as entertaining, to appeal different users effectively. Another way is to demystify the company image. Heinonen as well as Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) see that important part to get closer to users in social media is to demystify the company's image and to act "unprofessionally" in social media. This can include employees sharing knowledge and funny stories. Also consumer experiences and (funny) stories can increase the entertainment value of the content. (Heinonen, 2011; Evans 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

The hardest part in this framework according to Heinonen is to get users to actively produce content on their own. Users are eager to consume content and participate, but to get participating user to produce content for the company is challenging. Yet this can be very effective in ways of giving new insight about markets, consumer behaviors and needs and therefore reduce some workload from research and development. Good way to get users to produce is to link it with their entertainment motives. For example companies can create

contests to create new ideas, offerings or improvements to existing products/services. If there are prizes involved for the best ideas it can of course increase the participation and interest of users. (Heinonen, 2011)

<b>Consumer motivation</b>	<b>Entertainment</b>	Creating games and online content	Creating creative tools for users' daily practices Enabling different UGC sections based on entertainment practices	Connecting users in real-time games
	<b>Social connection</b>	Enabling interaction between users Creating chat functions and online communities	Supporting interactions Demystifying company's image online	Facilitating new social connections Learning from and adapting to discussions
	<b>Information</b>	Providing product information and free downloads Linking company/offering to current happenings Consumer advocates	Creating real-time reviews and tests of products Clarifying the link between company/offering and customer lives	Providing tools facilitating daily practices Inviting customers in the development of new offerings
		<b>Consumption</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>Production</b>
		<b>Consumer input</b>		

FIGURE 17 Framework by Heinonen for companies to effectively participate in their customers social media activities and to activate them (Heinonen, 2011, p. 362).

## 6.2.2 Round 2: Activating Followers

The companies that gave answers to the Round 2 of the interviews had all except one created specific strategies on how to create interesting content to their customers. They were also all aware of what is interesting to their followers and of course they produced content accordingly. The content strategies are all created in co-operations between the marketing departments in headquarters and the local operators who produce the actual posts in social media. Therefore the message is in line with the companies' public image and brand and the information is relevant to the followers and culturally appropriate.

"Our content strategy is a mix of core brand, functional brand, lifestyle content and travel content in general. After briefed this to our local partners they are responsible for creating the actual content, I'll taking care of that our social content is linked to our over-all marketing strategy & plans " Company 1: interviewee 1

In the case of these companies the interesting topics to the customers are related to new products, local reference cases/news, recruitment info and special offers. And these topics are the most used by the companies. They have also

noted that the followers are most active during the day of release of new content and the peak time is in the afternoon when there is break time at working days. Also the activity is best right before weekend.

"Between 3-6 pm and mostly just before weekend (Thu, Fri). And yes, we do schedule our messages accordingly and measuring always when's the best time to publish"  
Company 1: interviewee 1

"The releasing day, is the most active day. The peak time slot always during the break time at working days" Company 3: interviewee 1 & 2

When it comes to the motivating features that can be used to increase the consumer participation and activity in social media (like games, contests, special offers etc.) most of the companies had used some of them in some form. The ones focusing more on B2C markets used them more than B2B companies, because the focus group is different as put by Company 3: interviewee 1. The reactions to these activities have been positive as they activate followers' more than basic posts. Company 1: interviewee 1. Still only one company told that they are using #hashtags in Sina Weibo. One company also is sharing free downloadable content on the site, but according to them has not received many feedbacks about that content.

"No. Valmet is a technology company, different from the consumer goods company, our customer/followers typically are middle-aged, and very technical professionals" Company 3: interviewee 1

"We have yes, all of them. Games and contest are mostly campaign related. Those are working very well, engagement rates are higher than what basic postings have" Company 1: interviewee 1

At the moment companies did not encourage customers to interact with each other via conversation in social media. Reason behind this is that WeChat, which is the most used by these companies, does not offer commenting function on posts. In Sina Weibo however this function exists and if a conversation occurs the companies react to those and participate, but do not initiate it themselves directly, although some are encouraging people to share their opinions and reviews and sometimes even sharing received feedback in social media.

"we always encourage people to share their opinions and reviews with us and with their friends on social media. Some-times we do share them too but not always"  
Company 1: interviewee 1

All the companies are directing customers to their social media via other marketing/communication channels many by using QR-codes in printed material. They also see this as a vital part of operations as people are using social media more actively all the time. This is also great way to get people to know about the companies' social media sites.

“Our email signatures, newsletter and other materials that we are publishing includes QR-code for WeChat” Company 4: interviewee 1

“We printed our Valmet WeChat QR on every printing material, to get more leads” Company 3: interviewees 1 & 2

“We do, all our channels are cross-linked. Users are checking our social sites quite a lot when received email for example. They know we're there to discuss if they have some questions etc.” Company 1: interviewee 1

Also the use of key opinion leaders is one of the strategies for these companies to share their posts to larger audience. They are making co-operation deals with these popular users or earning their attention by being active and interesting, which includes sharing content that these key opinion leaders find attractive.

“We can earn their attention or we can make cooperation deals with them.” Company 1: interviewee 1

“Some reporters retweet our information.” Company 4: interviewee 1

All in all the companies that took part in this research are using social media effectively and know how to activate their followers by creating interesting content as well as using other measures. Only one company admitted that they did not have a clear strategy yet, as they had just started using Chinese social media few months prior and were just getting introduced to the opportunities that it can give as put by the interviewee when asked about what kind of strategies they have in this matter:

“So far practically none. We need to improve in this. Of course we are trying to make our subjects interesting and get more followers and reach our customers and get them to contact us” Company 6: Interviewee 1

When asked how social media usage differs in China compared to Finland the answer was that in China companies have to be much more active and produce more interesting content, as seen already in the answers from Round 1. But then again people are more willing to share when asked to and also share their personal information and content more easily than ‘western’ users. Also the infrastructure itself gives challenges as internet connections are at some places very poor, which was mentioned as a challenge by one company.

“When asking people to share, that works well in Asia in general but not in Western markets. Asian people are more willing to share their photos, opinions etc on social sites” Company 1: interviewee 1

“Only challenges I see at the moment are related to poor internet connections and China blogging all the international social media channels.” Company 6: Interviewee 1

## 7 DISCUSSION

The Finnish companies that are operating in China are keeping the cultural differences in mind while using social media and this is mostly achieved by using local people to create content and participate in the planning of social media activities. Most of these companies also said that they have gained good results from their social media usage, so it would be good idea for those companies that not yet have utilized Chinese social media to start using these channels for communication.

Hofstede (2011) mentions that because China is high power distance country, only people with high status can speak behalf of the company publicly. As most of the content created to the social media is created by someone else than the CEO or PR managers in the cases of these companies this definition is somewhat questionable at least in this perspective. Then again these messages are quite anonymous as social media users' can't see that who from the company is sending them via company's social media account. Gao et.al (2012) found out in their research that Chinese social media users are eager to share content to their social media circles and this was also found out in this research to be true, as most of the interviewees told that people are active to share information to their own circles. There were also mentions about users being active in social media campaigns, although it was not specified which kind of campaigns those were. Also the need for key opinion leaders means that users in Chinese social media like to follow the opinions of someone they find trustworthy rather than sharing own ideas, which is also in line with Gao's findings.

Gao et.al (2012) say that as Chinese social media users are more active compared to 'western' users and also demand more interesting content. In this thesis the results are similar as companies need to create new and interesting content almost daily to appease their followers. Also it is important to answer the comments of the Chinese social media users in timely manner so that they feel that they have been noticed. Otherwise they might abandon the company (similar as found out by Chiu et. all, 2012). Hofstede (2011) and Gao et.al (2012) also suggest that because of the restraint society, consumers are not keen to publicly criticize organizations. This is also in line with the findings of this the-

sis as most of the interviewees said that they had not received any negative feedback through the social media.

Heinonen (2012) and Haenlein & Kaplan (2010) told that it is important to know what interesting content to ones followers is in order to be attractive in social media. Most of the companies had clear strategies on how to create interesting content and that included them being aware of what was interesting. This also varied between the companies, as they were from different fields, but there were few that all shared: recruitment information and information about new (local) services/products. The companies have also kept this in mind when creating content. Gao et.al (2012) mentioned that Chinese users are rapidly changing their interest, but in the light of this research this might not be completely true, as the key interests are shared by all companies no matter the field and for prolonged time. One interesting finding was that the Chinese social media users tend to be most active during Thursday and Friday in the afternoon, which goes against Gao's findings that they should be most active during weekends. This might of course be due to the small amount of data in this thesis compared to the vast amount of data in Gao's research.

Evans 2012, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010 and Heinonen 2011 all suggest that motivational features such as games and contests are a good way to increase the user activity in social media. This is also true in Chinese social media, as companies that used these features mentioned that they gained more activity with these motivational features than their usual content. Same goes with the key opinion leaders which are seen by the companies as a good way to distribute their content to large number of followers. The key opinion leaders are either made deals with or their attention is earned some other way. Gao et.al (2012) found out that hashtags are not as popular in China than in western social media. This is explained by Hofstede (2011) to be part of the collectivism of Chinese culture, as people don't want to stand out from the group. Only one company said to be using hashtags in Sina Weibo, although almost all had Sina Weibo accounts. As a conclusion this shows that the hashtags are not as popular in China.

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) and Wang (2013) argue that to increase ones followers in social media and to activate them, a good way is to direct ones consumers to social media sites from other marketing channels. This has been done by the interviewed companies with the use of QR-codes in all their printed materials as well as links in the emails etc. This has proven to be effective way to gain more followers in social media and this supports the findings of Wang and Kaplan & Haenlein.

When it comes to encouraging communication between the followers, which importance was emphasized by Heinonen (2011) and Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), there is one obstacle. WeChat, which is currently gaining popularity among users according to the interviewees, has no comment -function at the moment. This has restricted the opportunities to create communication between the followers. But Sina Weibo in the other hand has this function and it is used to encourage users to post their opinions and reviews on the companies sites by

few of the companies interviewed. Companies also actively participate in conversations in their own social media sites, which is in line with Evans (2012), Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) and Heinonen (2011), who all told that it is important to actively participate in conversations on company's own social media site and other communication channels. Still as found out by Hofstede (2011) and Gao et.al (2012) Chinese social media users are not keen to publicly criticize the companies, as most of the companies had received hardly any feedback at all from the social media and no negative feedback.

Gao et.al (2012) found out in their research that Chinese social media user are much more demanding about the content than 'western' social media users. This was also seen by the main differences when comparing Chinese and Finnish social media usage as Chinese users want more interesting content and companies must be more active in Chinese social media to retain their followers. Then again Chinese users are more willing to share their personal opinions and information with their social media circles and even share branded content, if they find it interesting when asked by the company. This is also in line with Gao's findings and differs from the 'western' users. Also the fact that Chinese users are not too keen to give public feedback, which was seen in this research, is in line with Gao's and Hofstede's (2011) findings from their research.

After the analysis of the collected data by comparing it to the former research, few guidelines were conducted for the companies to keep in mind when starting or improving their social media usage in China. These guidelines are presented next to conclude the discussion part of this thesis:

For Chinese social media use:

1. Because Chinese social media users demand more activity and interesting content than western users, companies have to be more active and interesting in Chinese social media
2. Ask people to share their opinions in your social media site, as Chinese people are more willing to share content when asked compared to 'western' users
3. Don't be surprised if you don't get negative feedback through social media, as Chinese social media users are not keen to criticize companies publicly due to the more restraint society
4. Key opinion leaders are a good way to get more visibility for your content especially in China, where people like to follow and listen to persons with higher 'status' and fame
5. Direct consumers to your social media site with other marketing material (like television advertisement, newspaper advertisement, banners, flyers, business cards, emails etc.), as search functions are still quite limited in Chinese social media and it would otherwise be hard for them to find you
6. Choose your platform according to your need and where your followers are. (for example WeChat is gaining popularity, but does

not allow commenting on posts, so if your goal is to create interaction between users use Sina Weibo)

7. Follow the restrictions and rules for social media usage by the governmental officials to avoid getting censored in social media and face other penalties.
8. Don't expect too much from the infrastructure, as for example internet speeds are still quite limited in China and restricted mostly to Chinese domains

Good for Chinese and western social media:

1. Know what your followers think is interesting content and act accordingly, because that is the key to be interesting
2. Motivating features (such as games, contents and special offers) are great way to increase the activity of followers
3. When/if receiving feedback through social media, be sure to answer it in timely manner, otherwise you might lose your followers



## 8 SUMMARY AND LIMITATIONS

### 8.1 Summary

As found out in this thesis, cultural differences play an important role when companies or individuals are using social media. Although culture is not an unambiguous concept, there is lots of research conducted about culture and cultural differences (see chapter 4). These can be used as guidelines for planning business activities and preparing to meet other cultures. These cultural differences was coped by the interviewed companies by using local people to create content and manage the social media accounts in China.

Social media has many forms and different types of social media are usable for different kind of activities. Social media offers a great channel for companies to contact stakeholders, are they customers, employees, media, government officials, partners etc. as it offers fast and relatively affordable way to share information and content to large groups or to target smaller groups. So as media richness theory shows us, it is very rich form of medium. It also offers a channel for customer service as communication can take place in real time. That is why it is interesting that many (five out of 20) of the companies contacted were not currently using social media in China at all, although they might have plans for that later on as some of the companies interviewed had only been using the Chinese social media for less than a year.

Chinese social media differs from the 'western' social media as it is more restricted as for example Facebook and Twitter are completely banned at the time of this thesis. The content is also heavily monitored by the government officials and censored, if need be. Still Chinese social media users are very active and China has offered them their own social media sites and platforms. Most popular of these nowadays are Sina Weibo and WeChat, which is currently the most popular service and is taking users from Weibo. Finnish companies have found these social media services and noticed the trend that users are shifting from Weibo to WeChat, so it seems that the ones using social media in China are aware of the current trends there.

Companies are also aware that the Chinese social media users demand companies to be active and interesting, which is taken into account in the strategies of social media usage of the companies well. For example they are aware what kind of information is currently attractive to their followers and when is the best time to publish new posts and contests to increase the activity in social media. They are also very good at directing people to their social media accounts and all the marketing seems to be linked.

This thesis has given a small-scale insight to the social media usage of Finnish companies in China and insight about cultural differences and social media. Hopefully this proves useful for companies and individuals who are interested in using social media in China or just figuring out the cultural differences between these two countries.

## 8.2 Limitations and Future Research

The main limitation of this thesis is the small amount of interviews that was gathered and so the coverage of Finnish companies working in China was marginal. Therefore there is a room for a large scale research to fully determine the stage of social media usage of Finnish companies in China. That research could also generate better and more thorough insight to the cultural differences affecting the usage and therefore better guidelines for companies to use when starting or improving the social media usage in China.

Also it would be good to actually look through the social media sites of the companies and observe the social media usage that way. In this thesis that could not be accomplished mainly due to the language barrier and the lack of access to Chinese social media, as Sina Weibo is restricted to Chinese people and organizations working in China only. So it would be better to do this kind of research in co-operation with local people so that the language and restrictions wouldn't affect the outcome of the research so much.

As mentioned earlier one limitation of this thesis is that the writer does not speak Chinese, so many articles that were in Chinese could not have been used for this thesis. Also the actual social media sites of the companies are in Chinese, so it was not possible to analyze the content directly from the sites.

One limitation for the interview results was that the interview data was collected via email, which leaves room for misunderstandings as email does not allow actually seeing or hearing if the other understands the question/answer correctly and is not an interactive way to collect data and communicate, as media richness theory explains (see chapter 2.3.2).

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW STRUCTURE - ROUND 1

1. How has your corporation used social media in china? (for what purposes & how active use etc.)
2. What are the main social media services you are currently using? What kind of content are you sharing through them?
3. Who are you aiming to appeal to through social media? Have you succeeded?
4. How the target groups have reacted to the content you have shared through social media?
5. What kind of experiences you have about the Chinese social media users?
6. Have you received any feedback from the users through social media?
7. Have you accomplished the goals set for your social media use? If not what could be the reason?
8. What kind of difficulties/problems there have been while using social media in China?
9. Is there any kind of co-operation between offices in different countries in your organization (for social media use)?
10. Do you have experience of using social media for similar purposes in some other country than China? How did it differ?



## APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW STRUCTURE - ROUND 2

1. What kind of tools/strategy you have for creating interesting content?
2. What is interesting content to your followers?
3. What kind of content you most usually share?
4. When are your followers most active? (certain time of day/week?) Do you schedule your messages accordingly?
5. Do you use any motivating features for your followers in social media? (games, contests, special offers etc.). If yes how have the users reacted?
6. Do you use #hashtags (if you are using Weibo)?
7. Do you encourage conversation between the followers? If yes how have the users reacted?
8. Do you direct people to your social media site from other marketing channels (email, printed etc.)? If yes how have the users reacted?
9. Do you provide product/service information on your social media site?
10. Are you sharing any free downloadable content (brochures, whitepapers, applications etc.)? If yes how have the users reacted?
11. Are you encouraging customers to participate in conversations and to share their reviews/opinions in your social media site? Do you share feedback received from other sources in social media?
12. Are you actively taking part in conversations in your own social media site? What about other sites?
13. Are you using Key Opinion Leaders (popular users with vast amount of followers) to distribute your contents? How are you getting their attention?
14. How the usage of social media in China differs to the usage in Finland (on user & company level)?
15. What social media strategies work in China but not in Finland/western social media?

### **APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW STRUCTURE - CHINESE SOCIAL MEDIA**

1. What are the most popular Social Media sites/platforms in China?
2. What are the main functionalities of those sites/platforms? (Building communities, sharing content, organizing events etc.)
3. What kind of content do people share in those platforms?
4. Are they only for consumers or are there local/global businesses also present?
5. If businesses are present, what kind of interaction do they have with consumers? (What is their main purpose for being in some?)

## APPENDIX 4: ANALYSING INTERVIEW DATA - ROUND 1

How has your corporation used social media in china?:

- Typically we do the updates **twice/three** times per week, which includes **Valmet updates**(important orders,new technology/products, coming events), **recruitment info, industry update**.
- we do **marketing, communications as well as customer service** on Chinese social media channels. The main aim is to earn more and more brand awareness, increase our sales via social channels of course and all the time serving our customer the best we can. Social media is one of our "always-on" channels in China which means that **we are active all the time - almost every day** in various ways.
- **share videos and other corporate messages** locally and in Chinese
- we have kept **daily** contents maintenance and initiated several campaigns. We used this platform to **communicate** with our potential customers, colleagues, media about our latest news, **promoting** Outotec high technology, and **building our brand** on the internet.
- We publish articles **once a week** on WeChat and **2-3 times per week** for weibo.
- It's our major digital marketing channel to enhance brand coverage. We have at least one feed **every working day**.

What are the main social media services you are currently using?:

- In use
  - WeChat (3), (Sina)Weibo (5), Youku (2)
- Planning to start
  - WeChat (2)

Who are you aiming to appeal to through social media? Have you succeeded?

- customers/ own employees/ industry media are the most active followers.
- Young aspirational Chinese people
- Customers, potential customers, employees and potential employees as well as authorities
- potential customers, colleagues, media
- to customers and employees
- Customers, employees, partners, potential employees, media and industry insiders.
- We have the followers around 700 now. Our recruitment messages are the most popular ones, which can be forwarded most widely, and get

over double readers, that means when we push the message to 500 followers, we can get over 1000 readers.

- It helps to certain level
- We have 900+ followers on Weibo and 1200+ followers on WeChat right now.

How the target groups have reacted to the content you have shared through social media?

- Typically they will read the full story and **share the content with his/her social circle**, if he/she interest
- People have shared their memories when traveled with us and they've also **shared our content to their friends better than we were expecting**. Our brand is known more widely in Chinese market already, thanks to our activities on social media channels.
- We could record the page view for each message, it always **comes to a good result as long as the contents are attractive**, but the **content is seldom shared** or commented.
- Some of our employees **retweet our stories to their friend circles**.
- However, as we are a B2B material company, **our contents are not as interesting as B2C articles. So the share rate is still low**.
- They will **share the feeds within their network and comment**. When there is an online campaign, we also have an active participation rate.

*What kind of experiences you have about the Chinese social media users?*

- **WeChat user group is** so widely now, and **active** as said above, company must use the tool for marketing purpose.
- **People are more willing to share branded contents** to their friends and relatives **than they are in Western social media sites** for example. Also, **they want to get all the services in one channel** - they don't want to use native apps, brand websites and other travel sites separately - they are expecting to get all the info, services, offers etc., all in one place.
- We have analyzed the good time of one day for posts and also create our **contents related to the hot topic, it usually comes to a better result**.
- **China social media users are quite active** and become more and more intelligent. **You have to share contents that they really feel interested**. Otherwise, it is difficult to ask them to retweet.
- **They are active and interesting**. They see the subject matters from different angel. For our employees, the social media communication builds up their employee identity.

Have you received any feedback from the users through social media?

- some of them send questions to back-stage management platform, but I only got feedback from offline
- **Yes, a lot and mainly only positive feedback**. That's the one difference when comparing to Western social sites and its users: **social site is not**

**the place for criticisms**, at least not as those sometimes are in Western markets.

- Not too much.
- Almost no.
- Yes, comments to our products and service updates, business inquiries, etc.

Have you accomplished the goals set for your social media use? If not what could be the reason?

- **the followers no.** increased stably but slowly. We assume one of the reason may come to the industry, **we're in traditional industry with stable circles**, however we will put **more efforts on content to attract readers to follow us**.
- **Pretty much yes** but like said there's still room for improvements. We still would like to increase our sales which is not an easy task, as Chinese are still more willing to travel in groups and book their trips via travel sites
- **Yes**, we have quite a lot of followers, and also good feedback for Baidu search
- **Not really**. We are still in the phase of getting better understand of our customers and building our own infrastructures and contents.
- **Yes**, we are on track for our annual social media plan.

What kind of difficulties/problems there have been while using social media in China?

- the **challenge is how your content attract readers** in such a mass information platform
- No problems but some challenges: we still need to measure carefully to see **what are the contents people are engaging the most**. Other challenge is to find **Key Opinion Leaders** that works the best for us when we want to promote our marketing messages on Chinese social sites.
- Nowadays, Weibo is not a most used tools in China, most of our customers are using WeChat now, however, **WeChat is quite much a closed circles, however it couldn't be searched by search engine on the internet**. Sometimes, it's **difficult to evaluate which platform we should focus on**. Also, the internet is quite popular nowadays, more **challenge for the contents creation, how to create the more interesting contents to attract or keep our potential target?**
- **You have to generate very interesting contents** to attract readers. With the information booming, people become selective.
- Virus marketing for B2B niche market; how to grow the size of fans with limited resource; **how to create active participation in discussion**; and serve our customer inquiry online in a timely manner without disclosing confidential information.

Is there any kind of co-operation between offices in different countries in your organization (for social media use)?

- **NO**, this is run only for China market. Finland use twitter, linkedin , facebook etc. but which have been blocked in China.
- So **yes** we do have a lot of cooperation. Like said, we have our own local sales offices, local digital agencies as well as our local PR agency. All of the stakeholders are doing close cooperation when it comes to our social media actions. Then we have our central HQ who is looking after to whole market and its channels, and who for example is the main responsible for our content calendar tool and its updates.
- **Yes**. Basically the use of social media headed from HQ in Finland due to the reason that we are a stock listed company here and we try keep our messages consistent in all market areas and for all audiences. Besides China all other social media accounts are global and with some exceptions posts are in English, which is the corporate language. We have monthly telcos where all local social media editors are present. In that we try to get an overview of the upcoming posts in different channels and brainstorm and share ideas for future activities. We have editors from Marketing Communications and Human Resources. Between telcos we of course share ideas by emails / chats.
- We have editorial meetings for content creation and sharing.
- **Yes**, we have **almost all the social media platform managing by our headquarters**, we communicate frequently on the contents that we shared or any success story we achieved.
- **Yes**, we work with corporate marketing team in the head office and other regional offices to share news stories.

Do you have experience of using social media for similar purposes in some other country than China? How did it differ?

- **NO**, we only have run this in China due to language difference, no experience with other countries.
- Yes, in many markets. **The most significant differences are in user's behavior**
- We have global accounts for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. Due to language issues it is much easier to manage those accounts. Due to language barrier we are in the end quite blindfolded about our presence in Chinese social media. We use social media monitoring for our global accounts. I am not aware if something similar is in use in China
- **Not for me.**
- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube as well to serve the global branding. We have more country specific information for Chinese social media platforms and provide more frequent updates.

## APPENDIX 5: ANALYSING INTERVIEW DATA - ROUND 2

Interview question	Previous research	Findings in this thesis
What kind of tools/strategy you have for creating interesting content?	Tools presented by Heinonen (2012)	Most of them had strategies related to their core functions and brand to create interesting content. They had also analyzed what kind of content is best to their followers
What is interesting content to your followers?	The first step of being interesting is to listen to your customers. Find out what they would like to hear; what they would like to talk about; what they might find interesting, enjoyable, and valuable. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010) Interests of Chinese social media users change rapidly (Gao et.al 2012)	All the companies were aware of the content most interesting to their followers...
What kind of content you most usually share?		... and shared mostly content related to that
When are your followers most active? (certain time of day/week?) Do you schedule your messages accordingly?	Chinese social media users are most active during weekends (Gao et.al, 2012)	They were most active right before weekend and when new content was posted
Do you use any motivating features for your followers in social media? (games, contests, special offers etc.). If yes how have the users reacted?	These are useful to create motivation for users to participate and follow you in social media (Evans 2012, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, Heinonen 2011)	Most of the companies used some form of motivating features (games, contents and special offerings)
Do you use #hashtags (if you are using Weibo)?	Hashtags are not popular in Chinese social media (Gato et.al, 2012) -> people don't want to stand out from a group (Hofstede, 2011)	Only one company used hashtags in Sina Weibo
Do you encourage conversation between the followers? If yes how have the users reacted?	It is important to offer tools for user-to-user communication in social media (Heinonen 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010)	WeChat does not have comment -function. In Sina Weibo they do encourage users to share their opinions, but do not encourage conversation

		further
Do you direct people to your social media site from other marketing channels (email, printed etc.)? If yes how have the users reacted?	Using different contact channels can be a worthwhile and profitable strategy (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Wang 2013)	All companies were directing people to social media from other marketing channels
Do you provide product/service information on your social media site?	It is good to act "unprofessionally" and more as a user than corporation (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, Evans 2012) Facts must be correct (Hofstede, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein 2010)	Product and service information was on the top of the topics in social media use for these companies, and it seemed to be the most interesting to users as well
Are you sharing any free downloadable content (brochures, whitepapers, applications etc.)?	Giving something useful to users is a good way to get people to notice you in social media (Heinonen 2011, Evans 2012)	One company was, but had not received feedback on how effective it had been
Are you encouraging customers to participate in conversations and to share their reviews/opinions in your social media site? Do you share feedback received from other sources in social media?	As freedom of speech is limited in China, individuals are not keen to criticize organizations publicly (Hofstede 2011; Gao et. al. 2012;) It is important to get customers to participate and open up the conversation (Heinonen, 2011, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Wang 2013)	In Sina Weibo they do encourage users to share their reviews and opinions and one company seldom shares feedback received from other channels.  WeChat does not have commenting function to allow this
Are you actively taking part in conversations in your own social media site? What about other sites?	It is important to be active (Evans 2012, Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, Heinonen 2011) WOM is important factor in building brand and marketing, so it is good to try and steer the conversation in the right direction discreetly. (Evans, 2012, WHitler 2014)	In company's own social media accounts yes, but not elsewhere
Are you using Key Opinion Leaders (popular users with vast amount of followers) to distribute your contents? How are you getting their attention?	the use of key opinion leaders, who are interesting and popular users, with vast amount of active followers, can increase the company's visibility and interest in the said compa-	Key Opinion leaders are being used and they provide good way to share posts to large number of followers. Their attention is either earned or got with co-operation deals



	ny. (Heinonen, 2011; Evans, 2012)	
How the usage of social media in China differs to the usage in Finland (on user & company level)?	Chinese users need more interesting content and are not willing to give public feedback to organizations in social media (Gao et.al 2012)	Chinese users are more active and demand more interesting content. They are not keen to give publicly feedback, at least negative feedback
What social media strategies work in China but not in Finland/western social media?	Chinese users are more eager to share content. Hashtags may not be popular for users (Gao et. al, 2012)	When asking people to share, that works well in Asia in general but not in Western markets. Asian people are more willing to share their photos, opinions etc. on social sites. Hashtags were used by only one company