

Research on Attraction of International Students: Case Study of College of International Education – Zhejiang Gongshang University, Hangzhou

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ABSTRACT

Enrollment of international students has become an important factor for ranking of educational institutions. This has made attraction of potential students as contemporary area of research in which different independent variables are considered. This study is the novel idea which was deprived of attention of researchers in past as less notice was given to the impact of social media usage on attraction of potential international students in universities. China is escalating its educational capacity for international students in recent eons. The present report is the outcome of a case study of a college for international students of Chinese university. Our case study is interesting as quantitative analysis contains the basics of the empirical, analytical scientific approach which is seldom found in interviews and other case studies. Based on descriptive analysis and results of 20 interviews, we have presented our findings and recommendations which are very much useful for concerned quarters and vibrant for implementation. The findings show the need of evolving working strategies by universities for unanimous use of social media for attraction of international students and the ultimate improvement of university ranking. Significance of survey interviews is elaborated through percentage of common major responses of 3 sets of interview questions. The study sheds light on the dire need of policy formulation for adopting, switching or abandoning a Social Media or Enterprise Social Network for official purpose.

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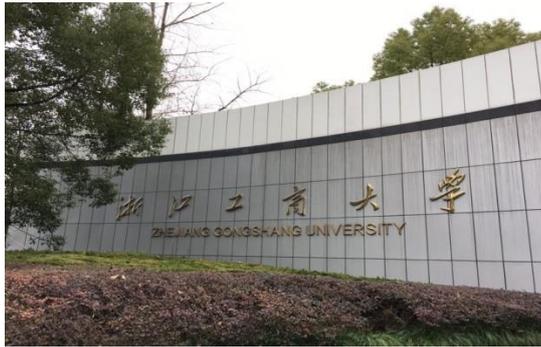


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Increasing trend of internet has enthused research to examine the use of social media for the promotion of pedagogical programs and to register potential applicants. The way of marketer's communication can make easy conversation to intimate the brands of mass media through the use of mass customization. Use of social media is quite common in this era. Social media can be termed as the service or a tool used through Internet for facilitation of interaction and communication. This has become imperative for business enterprises to comprehend that what is the daily utilization of social media and how to integrate and utilize the social media marketing potential. Acceleration in the usage of social media by the university education market is observed for sharing of information and to process the recruitment. The students obtain information use social networking sites such as Facebook and

LinkedIn. Web-pages are also seen as the greatest source of information for admission needs (Calitz & Cullen, 2012).

One of the emerging universities of Asia in the education of Business Administration is Zhejiang Gongshang University (ZJGSU) which is located in Hangzhou, China. ZJGSU is among the top universities in the fields of economics, management, law, literature, history, philosophy, engineering, science and arts. Now, ZJGSU has academic exchanges and joint scientific research and educational programs with other partner universities as well. ZJGSU has signed intercollegiate cooperation agreements with more than 100 universities and research institutes in more than 50 countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. The university has several departments, colleges and schools serving various purposes. The College of International Education (CIE) in ZJGSU is responsible for recruiting students, managing, and caring for the livelihood of foreign students. The College of International Education (CIE) broadly uses two kinds of advertising to attract new students: 1. Old media such as print media. 2. New media such as web pages, Facebook, WeChat (Social Media), etc



Figure 1

Social Media (SM) is a form of electronic communication for social networking and micro-blogging through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content such as videos, audios, pictures, texts and PowerPoints. Many organizations are starting to implement social media to promote collaboration amongst their employees, for internal and external use to connect individuals who share similar business interests or activities and to coordinate the business activities. This social media use for organizations is Enterprise Social Networking (ESN).

To increase the work performance, intra-organization, social media has got importance in companies after wide acceptance of social media by the public. Intra-organizational social media has been divided for two main purposes; social and work-related (Sun & Shang, 2014).

Innovative technology begins primarily on the basis of price costs and putting products into the hands of consumers, rather than the individual features that it contains. With nearly all innovations, these ideas and products and services come about when things either are not yet available, or are constrained in their usefulness or accessibility. Frugal Information System (IS) Innovations therefore are both cost effective and fill a role in a culture or society that it does not currently fill.



Figure 4

China is a breeding ground for tech startups and services alike as they begin to transform their economy from manufacturing to sustainable internal consumption of services. With these technology advances, few power

players have dominated the marketplace, such as WeChat and Alipay. With these two common everyday players, it becomes more difficult for other APP's to find market share in their specific areas.

One such success story has come from a company called Weqia, which was able to successfully target and incorporate itself within the needs of the segment it meant to incorporate within China. Their idea was changing the way people integrated with their mobile phones by incorporating portable and secure social media platforms to be accessed by these devices, as the everyday use of computers has taken a drastic hit since the adoption of the smart phones. By focusing their efforts on the SME (small and medium enterprises) sector, they have seen steady and encouraging growth numbers have risen since their debut in 2014. Other giants, such as WeChat, struggle to be practically used in the business setting, as most users adopt this platform for their own personal uses.

With the newest abilities of being able to use software platforms (PowerPoint, Word, Excel) on smartphone devices, this technology becomes even more necessary in the future applications. While the company leadership has worried about the rise of the tech giants adopting such technology and grabbing marketplace, Weqia has upped their game with the introduction of new popular add-ins, such as the check-in part of their features. By remaining focused on frugal Information Systems (IS) innovation, Weqia and similar technologies still have niche market positives, even among big power players (Sun, Cao, Tan, & Shang, 2016).

Continuance intention of Chinese users towards online social networks has been explored during recent past years. Results of research of (Sun, Liu, Peng, Dong, & Barnes, 2014) indicated that antecedents like usage satisfaction, effort expectancy, tie strength, perceived enjoyment, shared norms and trust explain the continuation intention of users toward social networks. Social networks have grown hugely during last decade and eventually they achieved basic introduction in daily lives for practice of millions of users to become indispensable. As regarded as important information sharing tool, enterprises have also become cognizant of the importance and need of collaborative tools. This concept of Enterprise Social Network (ESN) is supposed to serve its purpose to facilitate inter-organizational collaborations (Zribi et al., 2015).

2. Scope and Objective of Study

This is a case study from the College of International Education of Zhejiang Gongshang University, located in Zhejiang, Hangzhou, China. This study covers the investigation about the effectiveness of Social Media or Enterprise Social Network for attraction of international students. The main objectives of study include:

- a. To ascertain whether any social media or ESN is currently being used by CIE?
- b. To determine how SM or ESN is being used for attraction of international students, if so?
- c. To find out how this usage of SM or ESN may be made more effective to attract international students?

3. Assumptions

- A1: CIE is using only WeChat as the social media tool for communication with students.
- A2: There is no pre-interaction by CIE with prospective international students or education forums before the formal admission application.

We had two assumptions in lieu of a formal hypothesis due to the categorical difference between two intensifications. For developing hypothesis, theoretical analysis is needed to use a deductive approach of research. On the other hand, general literature is available on usage of social media and its marketing reasons, even to recruit international students in different disciplines by universities. But for this case, there is no written, published literature about the use of social media by CIE of ZJGSU. Hence, we formed two assumptions on the basis of our observation, which still has practical implications which proved after the interviews.

4. Practical Implication

World ranking and country rankings are important indicators for all universities today. The number of international students desiring to get admission is one of the factors contributing towards the ranking of any university. Due to extensive usage, the role of SM or ESN is very important to attract new students. This

research will find out that how optimally SM or ESN can be used to achieve the objective of attracting new international students.



Figure 5

5. Method: Selection of Interview Questions

For the present case study, face to face interview technique was used and the instrument was formed with the sole aim to take care of precious time of CIE staff, but also to not miss any important question, found relevant to our study. Interview is the strong tool to understand respondents and very useful data collection method in qualitative research (Jong & Jung, 2015).

In the current case study, Interview questions were prepended with the flexibility of clarifying questions. Hence, our study interviews were semi-structured in nature. There were three major sets of questions. The first set was information about the respondent, which was not compulsory. If any respondent wanted to conceal his or her identity, it was assured that information will be kept confidential and the rest they choose to share the information that can be captured. The second set was of general information, but quite relevant to our survey. It had further two parts. The first part was formed in relevance to the concerned officer only and the second part was for all the interviewees. The final set was specifically about the usage of SM or ESN. Although most of the questions were of both types, closed-ended and open-ended, but questions mainly lead to free answers by the respondents. Likert or Semantic scale has not been used for these questions because we were not supposed to perform more than descriptive analysis on receiving data. Interview questions are attached as Appendix-I. For interviews, formal way was used and prior appointments were registered with interviewees. All interviews were conducted as planned.



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6. Population, Sample and Interviewees

This is the case study of College of International Education of Zhejiang Gongshang University, Hangzhou, China. Among the population of international student offices of higher education institutions, we selected CIE of ZJGSU because it was expected that pupil diversity of ZJGSU is high. We used cluster sampling method for data collection, as we interviewed two employees from each office of CIE.

7. Analysis, Results and Findings

Interview questions were interesting for respondents and took individual time. Few respondents of senior level admired the questions as things brought into the notice, which can be considered by them for future use. Most of the questions were replied, completely by the interviewees, but for the few questions only a few respondents preferred not to reply due to their position limitations. Analysis shows that response rate was 100% for 96% questions. Codes were assigned to the demographic information and to the items measured on a Likert Scale for data feeding and analysis. This case study was primarily a qualitative research. However, descriptive statistics were still used in MS Excel to analyze the collected data for better comprehension and for an overview of top management. For the most important analysis regarding the usage of SM or ESN and for its practical implications, a comprehensive analysis was made to come up with the findings. Having the majority of female respondents, the overview of gender, frequency is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Gender

Gender Code	Gender Type	Type Frequency	Frequency Distribution
1	Male	4	20%
2	Female	16	80%

As an important research inquisitive, we needed to know which age slab, most of the users of SM or ESN fall in. Hence, age analysis was also necessary in our study. The result shows 60% of respondents fall in age between 21 to 30 years. Detailed analysis of age distribution can be

seen from Table 2. A Pie Chart is also provided as Figure 6 to have a quick look.

Table 2: Age

Age Code	Age	Slab Frequency	Frequency Distribution
1	Below 21	4	20%
2	Between 21-30	12	60%
3	Between 31-40	4	20%
4	Above 40	0	0%

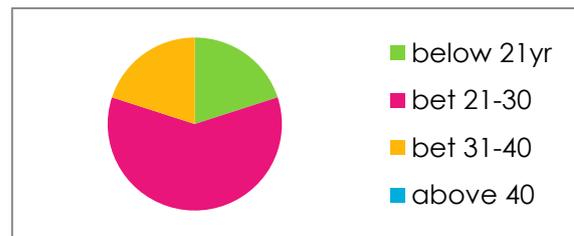


Figure 2

After capturing demographic information, interview questions were asked commencing from the question number 5 of our instrument. We have summarized the questions 5-12 and presented the summary of responses in Table 3:

Table 3 –Enrollment Information

Question no	Question Summary	Summary of Responses
5	How they are recruiting students	College Websites, Student Fairs
6	Vision	Expand the influence of China and To gain international recognition of the university
7	Intl. Students	1600
8	Total students	
9	Avg. intl. students per year	750
10	Most countries represented	Africa and Kazakhstan
11	Targets	More than every year
12	Retention rate	
13	Preference	No



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Summary of responses to the questions on Methods and use of social media is given in Table 4.

Table 4: Social Media

Question no	Question Summary	Response Rate	Summary of Responses
14	Methods	80%	Posters, WeChat, Word of mouth, QQ, TV ads
15	Use of social media	100%	95% use 5% Abandoned

The above table shows 100% response rate to the important question on use of social media. Analysis of responses reveals that 5% employees have abandoned social media.

Table 5 is for Question summary, response rate and summary of responses for question number 16 (16.1-16.9) and 17.

Table 5: Social Media Details

Question no	Question Summary	Response Rate	Summary of Responses
16.1	Media Name	100%	Single or Multiple with 90% WeChat
16.2	Factors of using	100%	Many factors with leading factor as convenience with 40% response
16.3	Media usage for successful candidates	100%	80% yes, but after email
16.4	For prospective applicants	80%	63% yes
16.5	Useful in attracting	100% out of Yes in 16.4	60% Normal
16.6	Effective	100% out of Yes in 16.5	100% Effective at Likert Scale
16.7	Efficient	100% out of Yes in 16.6	100% Efficient at Likert Scale
16.8			
16.9	Other factors	75% out of 8	80% Convenient
17	What functions	70%	Group Circles

The above summary depicts dependency of responses and their analysis on the basis of previous questions.

Four important questions have been asked in the heading of question number 18 (18.1-18.4). Table 6 is about these important questions and responses.

Table 6: Perception

Question no	Question Summary	Response Rate	Summary of Responses
18.1	Other benefits	70%	Different replies
18.2	Satisfaction	80%	63% very much
18.3	Additional feature	80%	Different replies like personal emotions
18.4	Plan to switch	80%	100% yes

Table 7 below is about the questions and response summary pertaining to the users who abandoned the use of social media. Since, only 1 user abandoned it; hence, no separate column for response rate is mentioned in said table.

Table 7: Social Media Abandoner

Question no	Question Summary	Summary of Responses
20.1	Factors to abandon	Biased information
20.2	Smooth functions now?	Yes
20.3	Plan to experience new media	Yes
20.4	Reuse of media	Yes
20.5	Recommendations for users	Honesty

It can be noticed that there is no table for sub-questions of question number 19. This is because our question 15 was about the usage of social media and in reply to this question, no respondent replied that he or she did not use any social media. This describes that in CIE, the majority of employees uses social media. Only a single respondent replied that she has abandoned the use of social media. This determinant described the habit of CIE employees for using social media.



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Table 8 describes that how much useful social media is perceived “useful” in CIE for attracting potential students. A bar chart gives an overview of responses taken on the Likert scale using effective interview technique.

Table 8: Usefulness of Social Media

Scale	Standard	Frequency	Distribution
1	Very poor	0	0
2	Poor	0	0
3	Normal	12	60%
4	Very useful	3	20%
5	Extremely useful	3	20%

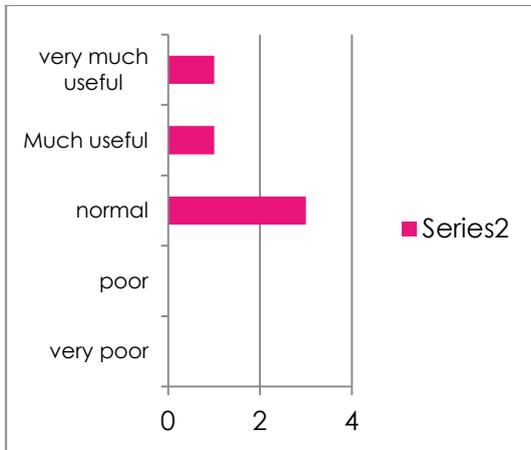


Figure 3

Similarly, efficiency, various factors and opinion of respondents have been briefed in table 5 which gives the idea about usage practices of social media in CIE to attract potential students. Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5 shows different pictures of ZJGSU and CIE. Figure 7 shows the level of usefulness of Social Media. In the responses to questions for which answers were quantified on a 5 point Likert scale, the mean value was not less than 4.1 and standard deviation did not exceed the figure of 0.49. This shows the reliability and consistency of data.

8. Implications and Conclusion

Social Media has become prompt way of exchanging the thoughts, messages, views, files, images and videos not only for personal use but also for work-related activities. Analysis of the present case shows that WeChat is the commonly used social media by CIE. Many respondents expressed their views about the reasons and factors influencing them for usage of WeChat, which are commonly centered with the convenience. Respondents told how they use this social media to have correspondence with the successful candidates for admission who are going to become their students from different countries. This reflects that potential students are also significantly using WeChat in Africa and Kazakhstan, and the reason behind is, CIE staff carries out pre-departure orientation of successful candidates through this Media followed by official emails. Data analysis also shows that 63% of respondents who use this media are quite satisfied with it. Our Chat group chats are very common for information sharing with the new students after attracting internationally. We had two assumptions about the usage of social media by CIE for attraction of international potential students. The result of 20 interviews shows that email and QQ are also being used together with WeChat for communication with the students. Hence, our A1 is rejected. The analysis further shows that SM or ESN is being used for pre-interaction with the potential students to guide them and attract them for new intakes. Thus, A2 is accepted.

Rejection of A1 and acceptance of A2 reveals that CIE is taking reasonable benefit of WeChat for smooth operations. But there is a need to consider about the competitive strategies for adopting and using a contented ESN to attract potential international students and contribute in improving the world ranking of ZJGSU. Data analysis is too simple, but very much important for recommendations.

9. Recommendations

ZJGSU is a well ranked university of China in the discipline of Business studies, Human Resource Management. Having 27,900 students in 2017, its average yearly intake of international students is 750. Currently 1600 international students are enrolled in ZJGSU. On the basis of our survey, its analysis and the findings, we recommend the following:

- a. WeChat, although is an effective media of communication, but there are a large number of international potential students who do not use it in their countries. Because earlier analysis shows that major market of SM in competition of WhatsApp captures WeChat. Hence, CIE may consider usage of WhatsApp equally with WeChat. On the other hand, WhatsApp cannot be used without Virtual Private Network (VPN) in China, hence; the issue can be handled at the appropriate level. It is expected that additions of commonly used SM in the world will open a new horizon for more attraction of potential students internationally.
- b. In order to increase the usage of WeChat for attraction of potential international students, college website and admission page may be updated regularly. This is critical to mention that WeChat ID or QR code of concerned staff or volunteers may be displayed on relevant web pages.
- c. All the policies and procedures at university and college level of ZJGSU and CIE are well-established and truly implemented. This is the manifestation of concrete efforts of policy formulators and enforcers for regularity. All the stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, staff and students deserve appreciation for this achievement. At the same time, there is need of devising the policy for missing links regarding usage of social media. Hence, a policy for using SM may be devised by the department. Reasons to abandon or switching to other SM may be noticed and remedies be evolved for symmetry of the work regarding usage of SM or ESN. Services of researchers may be hired in this specialized field.

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