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CREATING A SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING
STRATEGY IN CHINA – CASE STUDY PORTSMOUTH FOOTBALL
CLUB

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The purpose of the thesis is to bring Portsmouth Football Club's social media marketing efforts in China in line with other football clubs in the Premier League, the top footballing division in England. Portsmouth currently operate at a playing level below the top division, but with ambitious owners recently installed, the club plans to play and compete in the top division in England. The club do not currently have any social media efforts directed towards China and to compete financially and enhance their fanbase globally they need to introduce similar and innovative strategies to maximize their potential at that level. The objective of this thesis is to provide Portsmouth Football Club with a social media marketing strategy geared towards China.

The first part of the thesis outlined the project and set the boundaries in which to work in. It provided a background of the case company and set the tone for why and how the project would be implemented.

The second part of the thesis covered the theoretical and empirical parts of this thesis. Theoretical information was gathered from reliable and relevant sources to provide a framework of the most pertinent ideas used in the thesis. The use of literature included books and web-based sources. The theory correlated included aspects such as marketing, related to strategy and communication, and social media, related to marketing, China and the football industry. The market in China and football in China, were analyzed, using secondary sources, such as articles and studies. Empirical information was then recouped to obtain quantitative data from Portsmouth Football Club regarding their objectives, views on China and current strategies. This was gathered by implementing a semi-structured phone interview with a Marketing Manager at the club.

Recommendations on achieving a successful social media marketing strategy in China were set by correlating the literature on Chinese football fans and social media behaviors in football in China, with the interview with the club's Marketing Manager. The interview allowed the author to define successful in relation to Portsmouth's strategy objective and then meet this by offering valid strategic points to succeed in this strategy.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has evolved to become a core part of people's everyday lifestyle, with a wide variety of channels available, allowing different vehicles for consumption. This emergence has changed the way we interact and consume information. With a large proportion of people's daily lives dedicated towards documenting and staying current, this has provided new opportunities for companies to provide information and relate to their customer. In particular, it has influenced marketing and how companies can control their content, and devise a strategy of targeting their target market in their chosen manner. This evolution has led many marketing professionals to describe this as a game-changing technology with a major impact on business. This outlines its critical nature to successfully marketing their product and managing their brand image.

Marketing in football has evolved, as football has become more aligned with business. With many football clubs becoming public traded companies, with the need to satisfy the shareholder. This need, in turn, has led football to enhance current operations and seek continual new sources of revenue, to increase their profitability. This need coupled with the globalization of football has led football leagues and clubs to enhance their outreach, with a more global perspective. Every new fan globally is a potential new source of revenue for the football club. Due to China's large population and burgeoning reputation as a global economic force, it has become a desirable market to penetrate, and create a strong brand image. It is estimated that approximately half of its 1.3 billion population uses the internet.

It is important for companies to view the Chinese market and potential outreach in a differing manner. Social media in China differs drastically from the West, with the need to largely augment marketing strategy to penetrate. Due to governmental controls many of the providers differ from the usual channels utilized in the west; therefore it is essential for football clubs to adapt and provide content through these channels. They must also consider the different cultural aspects of the host country.

2 PURPOSE, OBJECTIVE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Purpose

The author maintains strong proximity to Portsmouth Football Club due to their support for over 20 years. This has afforded them the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of how the company operates and the market it perpetuates. They have also worked and studied in China, which has given them greater insight and understanding of the intended market. The author shows an interest to seek future employment or conduct business, in either the football industry or China, this thesis will act to enhance their learning and expertise in the subject matters.

Portsmouth Football Club is currently undergoing a renaissance with a desire to play and compete at the highest level in England in the coming years. They currently play in League One, with aspirations from the club to go up two divisions to the Premier League. Currently, their marketing efforts do not outreach outside the continent, which includes their Social Media marketing implementation. If they desire to play and compete financially with other clubs in highest English division, the Premier League, it is important they enhance their social media marketing strategy directed towards other continents, such as Asia.

This thesis will allow the author to gain greater experience within social media marketing, applied to a case company, which will enhance their employment prospects in an area they have a desire to work. It will also allow them to demonstrate and enhance their knowledge of the football industry and business in China, both potential areas of future business endeavors.

2.2 Objective

The primary objective is to provide Portsmouth Football Club with a social media marketing strategy, directed towards China.

To reach the desired objective of the thesis, it is critical to complete these tasks:

- Define social media marketing.
- Analyze target market.
- Analyze social media marketing in China.
- Analyze football social media marketing in China.
- Define what the club would like to achieve.
- Create advice on successfully implementing a social media marketing plan in China.

2.3 Limitations

To streamline this project, it is important to set boundaries to facilitate efficiency and productivity in its competitions. Due to the nature of this project, it will relate to social media marketing, whilst only broaching on its relation to marketing communication. Furthermore, it will look to focus on a social media marketing strategy directed solely towards Portsmouth Football Club and not the English football leagues in their entirety. This project will concentrate on the Chinese market and social media mediums relative to this market. Finally, investigation in terms of potential remuneration outlays that may be required in implementing the strategy will be avoided. Full focus will be maintained on the market and strategies therein related to it.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

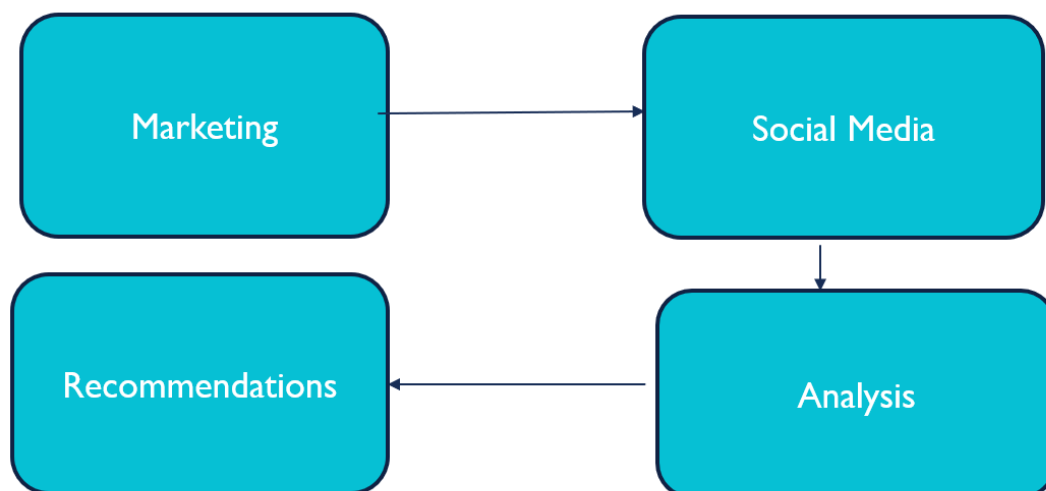


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (Author of the thesis).

The conceptual framework shown in figure 1, offers a valuable guideline into how this project will be completed. The simplistic formulaic pathway it will provide, will aid the success in successfully implementing a successful project. Firstly, the project will look to define basic marketing principles and marketing communication. This will lead into the project and defining social media and social media marketing, relating it to marketing. Thirdly the market will be analyzed, and an interview with Portsmouth Football Club will be undertaken and reviewed. This information will conclude the collective stage of the project and lead into the fourth element where conclusions and recommendations will be made into implementing a successful social media marketing plan for the club, and any aspects regarding the project.

3 CASE COMPANY

Portsmouth Football Club is a professional football club based in the city of Portsmouth, in the South East of England. They are often affectionately known by the nickname "Pompey". (Website of Visit Portsmouth) The football club was formed in 1898

and played its matches at Fratton Park. Portsmouth Football Club has stayed at Fratton Park to this day, although the location has evolved over this time, into a 19,669 capacity spectator stadium. (Website of Portsmouth Football Club) The South Stand is the oldest stand in the stadium still in use, which was erected in the 1920s and designed by Archibald Leitch. This area is home to the dressing rooms, boardroom and offices. It is described on its website as being the heartbeat of the stadium. In the 1930s saw assembly of the North stand, which is still prevalent to this day. In 1997 saw the redevelopment of the Fratton End, known to home the clubs most vociferous and passionate fans. A further decade later a roof was erected to the Milton End. An illustration of Fratton Parks current appearance is shown below in picture 1. The Fratton End is shown to the North of this picture, North Stand to the East, Milton End to the South and South Stand to the West. (Website of Portsmouth Football Club 2018).



Picture 1. Fratton Park (Website of Visit Portsmouth 2018).

Portsmouth Football Club found success in 1927, by achieving promotion to the top footballing division in England, known as the Premier League in modern times. This preceded with them reaching the final of the FA Cup, the prestigious English footballing cup knockout competition, on two separate occasions. They went on to win this competition in 1939, with a 4-1 win over Wolverhampton Wanderers in the final of the competition. The post-war era saw the most successful in their history, finishing

first and winning the division one title twice, the top footballing division in England, in 1949 and 1950. This feat is seen as even more incredible as only five clubs have won this competition in consecutive years since the war. (Website of Visit Portsmouth 2018).

This success was slowly diminished, with the Clubs drop through the lower footballing divisions to division four, which is the equivalent level of the current League Two in England. A resurgence followed afterwards, with the club battling back through the divisions, to make a return to the top division in 1987. (Website of Visit Portsmouth 2018).

Another hiatus to the lower footballing divisions of the English football pyramid ensued thereafter. However, Portsmouth won promotion back to the top footballing division again in 2003, now known in its current format and name as the Premier League. Further success entailed during this period, with them winning the FA Cup knockout competition in 2008, as shown in picture 2. (Website of Visit Portsmouth 2018).



Picture 2. Portsmouth Football Club winning the FA Cup in 2008 (Website of Portsmouth Football Club 2018).

Portsmouth reached the fifth final in their history, of this same competition, in 2010. However, they went on to lose 1-0 to Chelsea. This heralded a dark period for the club, with them finishing low in the league. They were demoted to the lower Championship division amidst an ensuing financial crisis. Poor management of the club had meant the club had accrued some loans, without maximizing the potential revenue with the expansion of the stadium, and greater attendances at matches. The economic, financial crisis during this period led to the banks trying to recoup these loans, which the club could not pay. (Website of The Guardian 2018).

In the following years, the club continued to drop down the divisions, until they reached the lowest professional footballing league division in England, league two, in 2013. In this time the club had gone into administration twice, with a number of creditors chasing unpaid debts. In 2010 the HMRC, the British tax authorities, had issued a winding-up petition over unpaid tax. This was later withdrawn, with the club entering its first administration period thereafter. The club reentered administration in 2012, and with the club in a precarious position, it took a fan-owned share scheme to save the club from possible extinction, bringing the club out of administration in 2013. (Website of The Daily Mail 2018).

The club's resurgence prior to fan ownership was not instantaneous, and it took until 2017 for the club to obtain promotion to league one, by winning the league two title. Another milestone in the club's history, with it becoming only the fifth club to win all the four professional football division titles in England. (Website of Portsmouth Football Club 2018).

In 2017 Michael Eisner, a former Walt Disney executive, headed the American based Tornante syndicate in acquiring Portsmouth Football Club. He came with the intention of reinvigorating the club, with the purpose of reinstating them into the Premier League, the highest footballing division in England. He stated he overlooked investing in current Premier League teams, with preference in building a club up from a lower division, by instilling solid business foundations. (Website of The New York Times 2018).

4 MARKETING

Marketing relates to actions a company will take to make their company or services more appealing to its audience. It looks to provide positive differentiation from alternative competitors, through adding foreseen added value to partaking in a transactional relationship with the organization. Although traditionally attributed organisations need to drive to attain a profit, it can also be attributed to nonprofit making actions whereby the desired result is different. The actions look to make the company more desirable through their marketing actions. Marketing looks to identify their customer needs and understand their competitors, to provide a positive relationship with the consumer. (Blythe 2012, 4.)

Due to the emergence of technology and the expansion of the function of the worldwide web the importance of social media in everyday lives has evolved substantially. This has led to greater utilisation of social media outlets as tools to market communications online to mass audiences. (Thomsett-Scott 2014, 9.)

4.1 Marketing strategy

In order to successfully implement a Marketing campaign it is important to devise a strategy. Marketing strategy relates to the determining the target market and the design of a constructive marketing process. It allows greater efficiency in implementation through planning, which garners greater productivity from the organisation through enhanced understanding, allowing them to more effectively meet their objectives. It also allows for clarification of the marketing process, alleviating potential misunderstanding. In order to create an accomplished marketing strategy, the organisation must foster greater understanding of its target market. They must gauge the relevant segmenting, pricing and communication, to facilitate success. Designing and implementing this strategy is key to the organisation's success in the target market. Marketing communication is important in this process to facilitate exposure and create a consumer relationship. (Lovelock, Wright 2002, 138-139.)

4.1.1 Market segmentation

In order to implement a successful marketing strategy it's important to provide segmentation of the market. Segmentation relates to the identification of groups within the entire market, based on their common needs. It allows the organisation's resources to be more efficiently directed to the intended market, rather than the all consumers in their entirety. There are a number of way segmentation can be applied, in order to reach this objective. Demographic segmentation deals with consumer attributes, such as age, gender, marital status, race, occupation, education, and income. Geographic segmentation relates to segmentation due to geographic profiling of the consumer's location. Psychographic segmentation relates to grouping consumers by their interests. This can be done when there is a lack of demographic attributes to achieve the resulted group, whilst also the psychographic market may cover many different demographics. Another aspect is behavioural, where consumers are grouped based on their buying behaviour, such as adversity to price or loyalty to brands. (Blyhe 2012, 14.)

4.1.2 Branding

Branding is great importance to a marketing strategy and the message the company wishes to project. Many products or services offered by companies are quite similar in their content, so it is important for them to differentiate themselves and add perceived value to the consumer. An example of this is petrol suppliers, will all supplying petrol they must create an identity or appeal that resonates with the consumer, to enhance their appeal. Branding is seen as the process of adding value, through us of brand name, packaging, promotion and position, in consumer thoughts. This is done with the focus to maintain loyalty to their brand through this image, and maintain a continual relationship. Branding is also important to non-profit driven organisations and ventures to enhance their image and operations. (Blythe 2012, 135.) These images are even more important to control online and on social media due to the volatility of how representations are received and how a brand can be perceived in the users eyes.

4.1.3 Positioning

Positioning is another important component to be considered when conducting a marketing strategy. Positioning relates to the need to create a positive image that resonates with the customer. It is important to manipulate the brand to create a positive image with the intended target market. The actions associated to a brand or company are essential in creating a positive image, and wrongly positioning them can adversely affect their reputation. It is important to align the brand in the correct manner, so as to reach the intended consumers effectively, thus enhancing consumer brand loyalty.(Blythe 2012, 14.).

4.2 Marketing Communication

In order to implement a marketing strategy it is important to understand how marketing communications are designed and successfully received by the consumer. Understanding the communication process is particularly important in social media marketing due to how media messages can be received, with potential volatile adverse reaction to inappropriate content.

Marketing communications are the indirect or direct attempts made by companies, in which to notify, convince or remind, about their brand's merits. These means of communication embody the brand and company ethos and look to reinforce consumer relationships. This creates an affinity to their brand or company, through loyalty. (Kotler & Keller 2011, 476).

Marketing communication also relates to non-company generated messages, with consumers creating greater product or brand exposure to other consumers. Greater brand equity and enhanced brand image can be created through association of companies marketing communications, with people, places, brands, and events. This can enhance consumer perception of their product and further align their brand image to the desired effect.(Kotler & Keller 2011, 476).

Due to the technological developments and the advances of smartphone and social media users, the amended marketing communications mix contains eight forms of communication:

- Advertising
 - Sales promotion
 - Events and experiences
 - Public relations and publicity
 - Direct marketing
 - Interactive marketing
 - Word-of-mouth marketing
 - Personal selling
- (Kotler & Keller 2011, 476).

Figure 2 below shows the hierarchy of communication effect. It details the need to forge a process where marketing communication alleviates brand ignorance on the way to growing affiliation and confidence, with the eventual goal of effectuating a consumer purchase. The cycle shows the potential effects of continual marketing communication on the consumer, with greater knowledge turning into a preference for the brand, it demonstrates the importance of effective use of marketing communication and potential rewards. (Blythe 2012, 223-224).

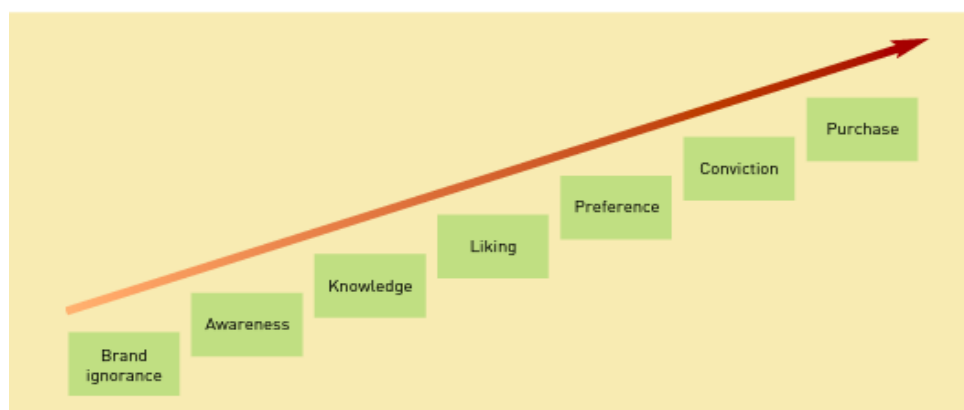


Figure 2. Hierarchy of communication effect (Blythe 2012, 224).

Due to the importance of creating effective marketing communications, it is important to understand how to formulate them. Figure 3 shows the eight-step process to increase the success of marketing communications.



Figure 3. Steps in developing effective communications (Kotler & Keller 2011, 482).

In order to facilitate productive communications, it is important to create a clear understanding of the intended audience. It is then important to outline the intended objectives of implementing the communication, such as create brand awareness or product need. Once these are determined it is important to tailor communications to these needs to optimise the desired objectives. Due to the volatility of how some communication is received it is important to consider details, such as what is the intended message, how to portray this message and who should say it. Messages delivered from people with positive reputations, have a potential to enhance popularity or align ideals. It is then important to select an appropriate means for delivery, with certain methods easier to categorize the desired target market. Also personalised channels allow efforts to be tailored, whereas non-personal are designed to be digested by a large number of consumers. The next step is to establish the intended budget for this communication effort. This budget must be divided appropriately amongst the eight marketing mix modes, to effect the desired result. After implementation it is important to ascertain its success, with companies recommended to survey consumers of their reactions to communication efforts released. This continual feedback over time allows the organisation to produce integrated marketing communications, by

considering the right array of degrees of the marketing mix to expose the consumer to, to enforce the greatest result. (Kotler & Keller 2011 482-495).

5 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. (Kaplan 2015, 197).

Social media relates to the publication and reaction of online content by online users.

This includes:

- Publishing blogs
- Commenting on other users' blogs
- Distributing videos, audio or images on the internet
- Posting content on to a social networking sites
- Creating online articles

(Website of University College London 2018).

Social media has allowed publication of information, such as text or picture updates, detailing insights into user lives to their users. This isn't isolated to sole users but also organizations looking to post content and feature their business within social media platforms. Social media is a two-way process with interaction of these posts, allowing other users to comment or offer reactions, such as hitting the like icon. (Wang 2016, 57).

This ability to engage with people and create reactions is being utilised in business. Social media has become a place where companies compete to engage their audience and create brand awareness. This highlights the importance businesses put on successfully shaping their brand image, with intention of monetizing consumer social media followings. (Brown 2012, 31).

5.1 Social Media in China

Social media surfaced in China in 1994, with the emergence of online communities and forums. This further evolved with introduction of QQ an online instant messaging service in 1999. Blogging became prominent in 2004, and the social network site Renren arrived in 2005, offering a social network platform with chatting facilities. Sina Weibo was introduced in 2009, with microblogging capabilities. (Wang 2016, 25).

The social media in China offers a unique climate, with differing rules and regulations affecting its use. As the internet and exchange of information online has become more widely used in modern societies, China's government have looked to control this exchange of information, with the creation of the "great firewall". This blocks access for its domestic users to many foreign websites and has led to the inactivation of many of the most used social media platforms, used in Western countries. Figure 4 below illustrates the equivalent social media platform used in China, as opposed to the US. This has not starved their need for social media, with a thriving scene. With every social media platform used in the Western world, there is a much-used equivalent in China, offering the same if not more features. This limited access to the wider web provides a challenging environment for companies wishing to connect to the Chinese consumer, with greater connection to indigenous social media needed (Wang 2016, 25).

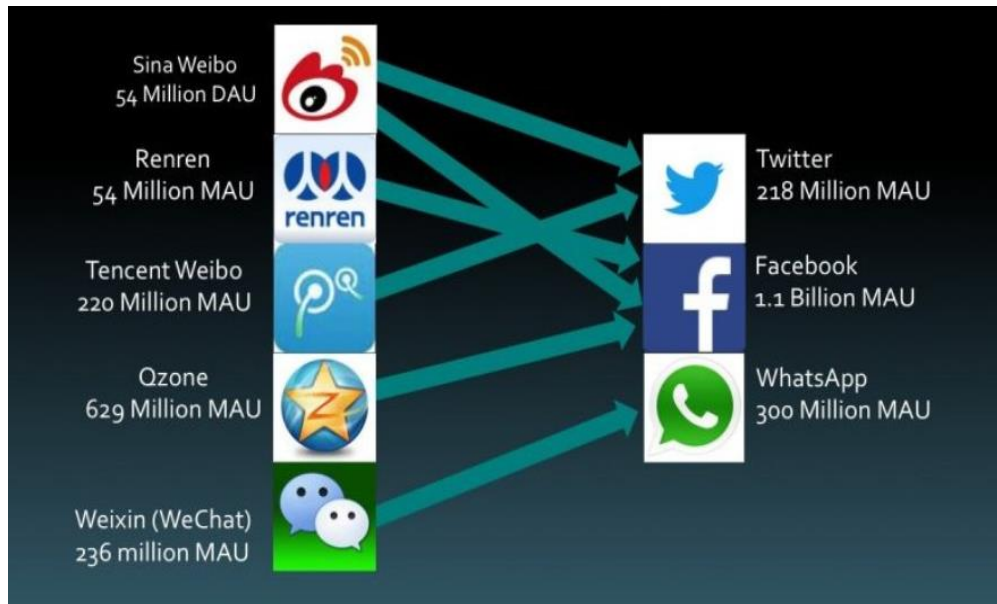


Figure 4. Chinese top 5 social media and US equivalents (Website of Businessinsider 2018).

China has a large number of applications available to the consumer, all offering varying functions, and followings. I will try to supply relevant information from the key social media platforms utilized by companies in successfully marketing their products, in the country. As shown in figure 5 below, detailing the market share of Chinas main social media advertising and marketing platforms by revenue in the quarter of 2017, there are two predominant players, Weibo and Tencent. Tencent controls Wechat, QQ and Tencent Weibo, so this shows we should concentrate more closely on Weibo and their media, when discussing possible platforms to utilise.

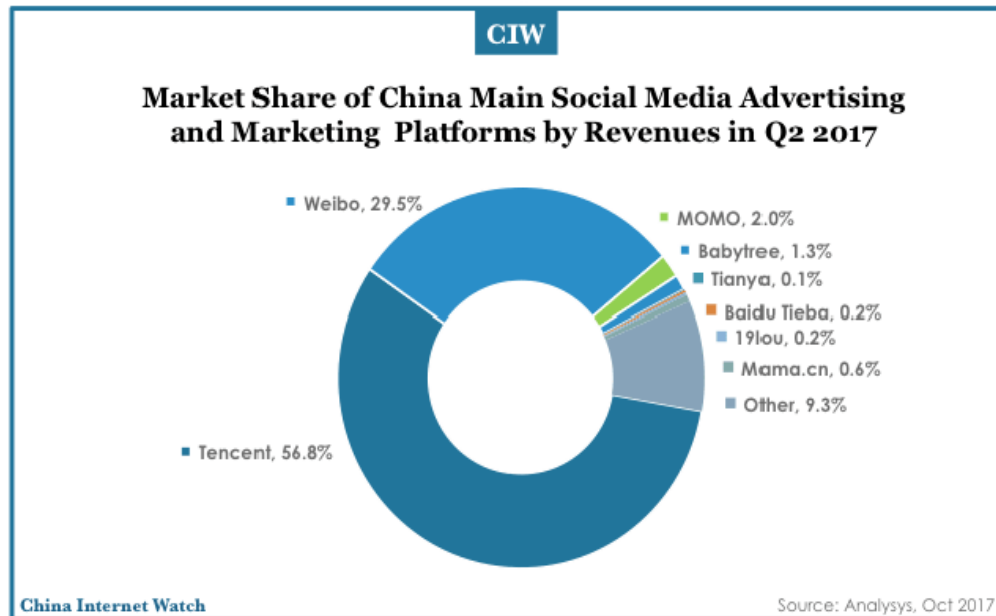


Figure 5. Market share of China's main social media advertising platforms by revenue in quarter 2 2017 (Website of China Internet Watch 2018).

QQ

QQ is an online instant messaging service that is one of the most renowned social media, due it being one of the first in operation. It was created in 1998 by Tencent and was modeled on the popular ICQ, in Western countries. It allows users to chat with friends online and create chat groups. It does not need a phone number for registration, and is popular for being cost effective and efficient. Its popularity has diminished with competition and modern trends, and in 2005 it has since evolved to include Qzone, which offers a social network to post photos and posts, in a similar way to how Facebook is utilised in the Western world. (Mclelland, Haiqing, Goggin 2017, 11).

QQ is beneficial for marketers in that it allows information to be directed towards groups of people, who group together due to similar interests. This allows the marketer to concentrate on a target market more easily for greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness. (Website of Nanjing Marketing Group) QQ offers the opportunity to place banner ads and pop-ups in its application. In qzone it is possible to place banner ads and ads in the users news posts. Due to its popularity with the younger generation it is more suitable to reach younger audiences. (Kaplan 2016, 62-63).

Wechat

Wechat is a multifunctional social media platform, owned by Tencent. It is the most used app in China, with it present in over 90% of smartphones in China. (Kaplan 2016, 63.) It was originally designed as a messaging service, offering message, voice messages and voice calls through its interface. It has since continued to evolve to include ‘moments’, with users sharing posts with information or photographs. These show up on a feed which shows and can be viewed by the users friends. Wechat features continue to grow, and many everyday functions are powered through the app, such as a whole payment platform through its ‘redpacket’ feature, this shows its popularity and reliance in China. (Wang 2016, 37-38).

Wechat has really increased the use of QR codes, allowing users to scan or have their barcode scanned. This has allowed it to be easier to add friends or groups by scanning these codes. This has allowed companies to market their organizations more readily. Allowing consumers to scan codes for their business or its events. It allows the potential for their QR code to be published on all correspondence, marketing materials, packaging and anything else that allows the barcode. This then allows the user to scan this code to gain more information about the company, event or competition. This provides a lot of potential for outreach for companies. (Kaplan 2016, 69-74.) An example of a QR code is shown in below in picture 3, where the code is displayed in the bottom right corner. It shows how Manchester United entice fans to scan and join their Wechat group.



Picture 3. Manchester United Wechat marketing material (Website of Manchester United 2018).

With the introduction of the red envelope and other features allowing the transfer of monetary funds, it has enhanced the potential of monetising Wechat following, with possible links to the businesses official stores or links to marketing partners stores. (Wang 2016, 46.) It also allows the distribution of company information easily when getting subscribers to their group. They can then send out marketing or promotional information, or means to add customer value to the consumer for retention. Wechat is seen as particularly advantageous in its ability to maintain an already present fanbase, whilst also offering easy features to link a company store. However, it is not as advantageous in creating a larger following and generating awareness..(Kaplan 2016, 66-67).

Weibo

Weibo is widely regarded as the equivalent to what Twitter is in the Western world. It is a microblogging site that allows users to post information and photos, allowing others to interact with these posts. It uses ‘#’ to create keywords that are attributed to the post. There are several Weibo platforms from various companies, such as Tencent, but when referring to Weibo most people refer to Sina Weibo, the most used one. Weibo maintains a large base of famous people and organisations, allowing them to connect with their fans, through following their accounts. (Wang 2016, 50.) Weibo is seen as more advantageous towards developing a following than Wechat, allowing interest to be generated through hashtags and publicly available content. (Red Card + - The Apps Issue 2017,6).

It can be identified that a number of steps can be taken to successfully running a Weibo account, which are :

- Design a captivating Weibo page
 - Post engaging content
 - Post videos
 - Monitor post quality
 - Reply to comments
 - Use hashtags to archive posts
 - Make contact with followers individually
 - Sync your post to be displayed on your website
- (Kaplan 2016, 97).

On Weibo targeted advertisement content is concentrated only to the newsfeed. Any promotion of product or brand come via posts showing in the users feeds. The marketing is more of the content and generating interest and attraction into following their Weibo page. Another aspect is the use of Key Opinion Leaders, or KOLs, they are widely recognised members of Weibo, with large follower numbers who can be used to promote a product or page to generate interest. (Kaplan 2016, 104-105).

Youku

Youku is described by many as the Youtube of China. It allows users to submit their video content or view others. It differs in that it also has similarities of that of Netflix or Amazon, in that it is home to a lot of original TV shows. It differs from youtube in that much of youtube's content is shorter videos, youku has a lot more videos of longer content. Youku is similar to youtube in that it has a lot of vloggers or influencers, called "youkuers", who look to create video content with the intention of generating personal revenue, through sponsorships or featured advertising links attached to their content. (Website of BBC 2018).

Youku also generates a lot of revenue through advertising through their application. Advertisers pay to feature their products or branding, with much of the video content show on the application. But in 2017 there has seen a decline in this sort of advertising, with many companies showing greater interest in shorter video content on Sina Weibo. "Chinese viewers still spend a tremendous amount of time, more than anyone else in the world, viewing online videos," said Danielle Bailey, head of Asia Pacific research at digital agency L2. "But live streaming is dominating, as well as short Vine-like videos where people and brands can produce content." (Website of The Financial Times 2018).

Sports Apps

As years have advanced and mobile applications have started to be developed, there has seen a wide range of available Apps. This has led to changes into how news content is digested, with a larger number of available sports and football specific news applications becoming ever popular. (Red Card + - The Apps Issue 2017, 3). This allows the opportunity for clubs to direct their marketing efforts channeled directly towards sports or football fans, through banners and created content through these platforms.

5.2 Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing can be defined as a “promotional activity whereby a business targets customers or prospects through social media sites in an effort to increase sales, strengthen brand loyalty, or achieve other business goals”. (Wilson 2010,17.)

Social media marketing is the application of marketing strategies that make use of the social media sites created on the internet. (Mei, 2013 24.) These social media sites are like websites that have an interactive interface that makes people from all parts of the world able to see what other people post. (Saravanakumar, Suganthalakshmi 2013, 4444.) These social media sites have various capabilities that can allow the goods or services on sale to be posted either through text, photographs or videos. The clients can interact with the seller by asking questions that may help them make a decisive action on whether they are going to purchase the advertised products or they may require some modifications or customizations for them to make the purchase. Available statistics indicate that there is a growing number of people who are making their purchase decisions based on what they see or come across through their social media accounts.(Chen 2016, 94).

One of the main benefits of social media marketing is that it has the power of reaching the people who are spread in most parts of the world, meaning that the geographical boundaries will not hinder a product from being made visible to the target clients. (Mei 2013, 28.) This refers to this phenomenon as viral marketing, as he likens the spread

of messages on social media platforms to that of a virus replicating in the body of a patient. While the use of print and electronic media platforms for advertising purposes may make one's products be confined to a specific geographical region, social media marketing breaks this barrier. People who may be as far away as another continent are likely to see what is being advertised and decide on whether they will go for it or not.

Another advantage associated with reaching many people spread in different parts of the world is that the charges for reaching all these people are very low. It means that one will not have to spend a lot of money for advertising purposes as the only requirement that one has to meet is that he must have data bundles that will connect him to the internet. In so doing, he will be able to post what he wants and then reach as many people as much as possible at the click of a button on their phone. The fact that one will be interacting with a broad audience of customers means that there is an aspect of brand visibility taking place across a virtual world that knows no physical boundary. (Mei 2013, 30). With this increased brand visibility, it is possible for the said product penetrating the international market with greater ease. The result will be that there are higher chances of increased sales of the said product taking place, and this is what a firms want.

Another advantage of social media marketing is that it is cost-effective compared to other forms of marketing (Mei, 2013 page 33). What one needs is a social media account that is opened freely on almost all social media sites. Once the social media account has been opened, one is now ready to start interacting with his clients either synchronously or asynchronously. It is possible for the seller to see how many people may have seen his post so that he can make a follow-up on them later since some social media sites indicate the name of the person who may have seen the said advert or promotion. In so doing, there is a possibility of the seller making contact with the interested buyers of her products and establish some form of rapport that may lead to increased sales of the said products. The only cost that one is likely to incur while interacting with his supposed clients are the data bundle charges in places where the internet connectivity is not free. Even in areas where they pay for the data bundles, the costs are still very low compared to other forms of marketing strategies that one may incur if he uses another medium to carry out his marketing strategies.

Social media marketing is also likely to lead to more inbound traffic to one's business. (Mei 2013, 34). The reason is that there is a vast client base that the social media marketing reaches that may be out of reach of the average loyal clients that a firm may be depending on. The inbound traffic will come due to search engine optimization aspect that takes place on social media. With Search Engine Optimization, search results for a related product are likely to include the product that one may have advertised. The result is that there is increased brand awareness either as substitutes, complementary products or even as an alternative product. What this implies is that there are higher chances of one's product getting more attention even from people who may not be aware of it, resulting in increased sales in the future.

Greater customer satisfaction is another benefit that is likely to be derived from social media marketing. The reason is that it is possible for the seller to have a one on one interaction with his clients, which may lead to either customized products or some modifications being done on the said product so that clients get the satisfaction that they want. (Mei 2013, 33.) The fact that there is a cheap chat option that leads to interaction between the sellers and the buyers makes it possible for there to be some level of trust being developed between these two parties. The seller knows that he must keep his side of the bargain while the buyers also know that they must also keep their side of the deal. If any party absconds on its part of the agreement, it is possible to retrieve the social media chats and display them to the whole world for them to see who may not have carried out his duty in an expected manner. To avoid such an ugly situation, the seller will ensure that they act cleanly so that they attract more customers in the future.

One of the issues that may be witnessed in China when it comes to social media marketing is the high censorships that are placed on the internet, specifically the social media sites. (Lorentzen, 2014, 403.) Countries like China have high censorships that have led to blocking of some social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. It means that a person who wants to penetrate the Chinese market has to use the Chinese social media platforms like Weibo, Tencent, and Taobao. Some of these Chinese social media sites are not known outside China, making it impossible for their users to access markets outside China. The Chinese people are also cautious about what they post on social media, meaning that they may not be free while using it for their marketing

activities. (Lorentzen 2014, 404.) The Chinese have to scrutinize anything that they post so that they do not come into collisions with the law enforcers. Even adverts must be censored so that the authorities are sure that there is nothing seditious about them or even something that talks negatively about the government

Another problem with such social media sites from China is that they may be using the Chinese language in their interaction process and this may limit the number of people who visit them as they may not understand the Chinese language. (Lorentzen 2014, 404.) What this implies is that their audience is limited to their fellow Chinese only since many people cannot read or even understand the Chinese language. In so doing, there is a possibility that they will have very few people who may understand what is being posted.

Another problem of social media marketing in China is that some social media sites have developed an algorithm that they use to block content to the viewers. The reason is that these social media sites feel that with the many Chinese social media visitors per day, there are high chances of junk matters being posted on their walls. If one's firm is unlucky and this algorithm classifies it as junk, then it will never be seen as it gets blocked automatically. The result would be little or no returns on investments that are done on the social media sites.

Choosing which audience to speak to is a problem of social media marketing. The reason is that social media have a global reach meaning that a firm needs to choose between crafting a message meant for the local target market and having a global a message for the global audience. The challenge will come where it is not possible to have a message that is likely to resonate well with all cultures of the world at the same time. The fact that the Chinese language is only spoken by the Chinese themselves, it means that reaching a global audience by use of Chinese social media sites like WeChat, Weibo and Taobao will be a big challenge, since the worldwide audience does not speak the Chinese language. (Ng 2015, 45).

Another problem will arise when people from specific regions feel that they are being offended by adverts from a certain firm and decide to block such a firm or people related to that firm. It will mean that it becomes impossible to convince everyone on

social media that one has the best products that may meet their varied needs exquisitely. In short, the problem of cultural difference is likely to be a stumbling block that will make it impossible for a firm to have a standard message that can be accepted across the different cultures of the world.

Maintaining brand reputations through social media sites is also a challenge since many people interpret different messages differently. A light joke from a firm to its clients may appear offensive to other people, and this may lead to adverse rankings on the side of the said firm. It is not possible to have all the people reasoning, in the same way, implying that satisfying everybody on social media sites is likely to be a daunting task. What should also be seen is that some people are likely to concentrate on a single mistake on a social media post and leave out any other suitable message that the post is likely to portray. An example here can be shown by the fact that some inexperienced editors may post a message with typing errors and this may put off some clients. In China, where there is high internet censorship, it means that firms must be sure that they are posting something that may not be offensive to the government lest it is pulled down, or even punitive measures like being blacklisted are taken on the said firm. (Ng 2015, 67.) It means that before any message or advert is posted on social media, it is advisable that many employees of the firm must go through it to ensure that it is okay. All this is a workforce that needs pay at the end of the month. Gaffes on social media cannot be taken lightly by clients, and this may be costly in the long run. Brand loyalty is likely to be diminished by this fact, leading to reduced revenues instead of increased revenues.

One strategy that can be used to carry out social media marketing in China is to ensure that social media usage does not contravene government policies on responsible social media usage (Lorentzen 2014, 410). It means that firms must be in strict control of what they post, so that they avoid any collisions with the government (Ng 2013, 67). By working within the confines of the law and the censorship regulations of the Chinese government on social media usage, firms will have no big deal when it comes to being in collision with the law enforcers. (Lorentzen 2014, 411). Such a firm will have its social media marketing going on unperturbed.

The second strategy is the identification of customer demographics that will tell the firm who views their ads and makes it possible to view the profiles of such people. (Ozuem 2016, 78). Most social media sites have a dashboard that shows the number of people visiting a given page, their profiles and this hastens the possibility of sending strong signals to the concerned firms on what they should do. Since most social media users are adults, it is good to interact with them after checking the information on the dashboard so that one can have a deep understanding of his clients. It will be seen that this strategy will work well in ensuring that one knows what is expected of him so that he can come up with products that are likely to meet the varied needs of her clients.

Creating social media marketing goals is another strategy that can be used to ensure that one reaps maximum benefits from social media marketing. Since the goal of social media marketing is to increase the returns on investment, it will be good if one sets a target about the number of people that he would like to view his ads. (Moriuchi 2016, 134). A look at the social media usage in China shows that most of the account owners on social media are adults, meaning that they may be having a stable income. It, therefore, implies that with this adult audience, one should come up with ways of ensuring that they see what one posts and also buys them. One such strategy will be by being members of several groups or pages where even other firms are using social media marketing. In so doing, one is likely to know how best to improve his brand presence and other small issues that are related to social media marketing. Realistic goals will include having a given number of people viewing the ads posted on social media and a steady rise in the number of sales being made. (Moriuchi 2016, 140).

Since the Chinese people speak almost the same language, it is good that the strategy of using a language that can be understood by all Chinese people be adopted in social media marketing in China. The reason is that there are possibilities of creating rapport with the people who know that you are using their language compared to those who do not understand what you are posting on social media. That feeling of being recognized is likely to drive the sales of given entities due to the right choice of language that resonates well with a majority of the audience.

Developing engaging content will be another strategy that can be used in social media marketing. (Moriuchi 2016, 150). With engaging content, it means that one has to

come up with content that asks people for their views on any given issue. In so doing, the target clients are likely to air their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and this will lead the firm to know what is necessary to ensure that the name of the firm is not spoilt.

The process of social media marketing is illustrated below, in figure 6. It demonstrates a four-step process. Firstly its necessary to identify the intended goals, as it allows the organisation the ability to create a clear vision for a successful project. Social media marketing is regarded as reactive, but goals are defined due to the need to build a successful strategy over time. Once goals are set, it is necessary to ascertain the most efficient channels to meet the set goals. After defining the most effective channels and degrees of usage the organisation implement its social media campaign. It is important to stay current and anticipate consumer needs and trends before the consumer knows they need them. This increases engagement and interest. Once your social media marketing material is in circulation it is important to analyse in order to gain greater understanding of meeting the consumers needs, so as to not lose their interest. Most social media platforms offer analytics tools to allow the organisation the opportunity to gain greater understanding of how their efforts are received and the reactions garnered. (Dodson 2016, 153-188).



Figure 6. Social media marketing process (Dodson 2016, 154).

5.3 Social Media and Football

The emergence of social media into modern life has revolutionized how companies treat their consumer relationship. In the football industry this is no different, with it seen as an important tool to their business success.

The globalization of football and its worldwide consumption, due to tv rights being sold into a magnitude of countries, had led to European clubs maintaining worldwide fanbases. China, U.S, India, and Indonesia make up 45 percent of the world population, so there is potential scope for fan recoupment and retention. Social media has emerged as an important tool to allow European clubs to engage with all their fans worldwide, allowing them to feel more valued and a close affinity to their club. Before social media it was hard to provide fans in further geographic locations with this feeling of proximity to their team. Social media now allows them to tailor specific content to countries and regions and with the aim of retaining their loyalty and support. Social media allows these worldwide users to engage with content produced by the club, and interact with other supporters, enhancing their fan experience, whilst still geographically being far apart from the club's location. (Website of The Financial Times 2018).

Creating a larger fan base and following on social media platforms, has allowed them to gain greater appeal with potential sponsorship companies. They now have greater channels to enhance these sponsorship advertising campaigns and larger worldwide audiences to offer, with companies able to utilize their presence to tailor marketing to geo-specific countries or locations. Retaining social media accounts allows the football clubs to retain the information of a large proportion of their fantasies and their behavioral patterns, which allows them to understand their fans needs and wants. This further allows them to direct the sale of their official merchandise worldwide in the most conducive manner, whilst also offering the potential for sponsor companies to reach a large consumer audience with a prior understanding of their target market behaviors. (Website of The Financial Times 2018).

6 MARKET

To devise a successful marketing strategy, it is essential to gain an understanding of the market and consumer behaviors. We must look at China and in particular the football fans in China and understand how this can be related to a successful social media strategy,

6.1 China

China boasts the largest population in the world. As demonstrated in the graph below the population has steadily increased yearly and is estimated to be at just over 1.4 billion. This accounts for 18.5% of the world population. (Website of Worldometers 2018).

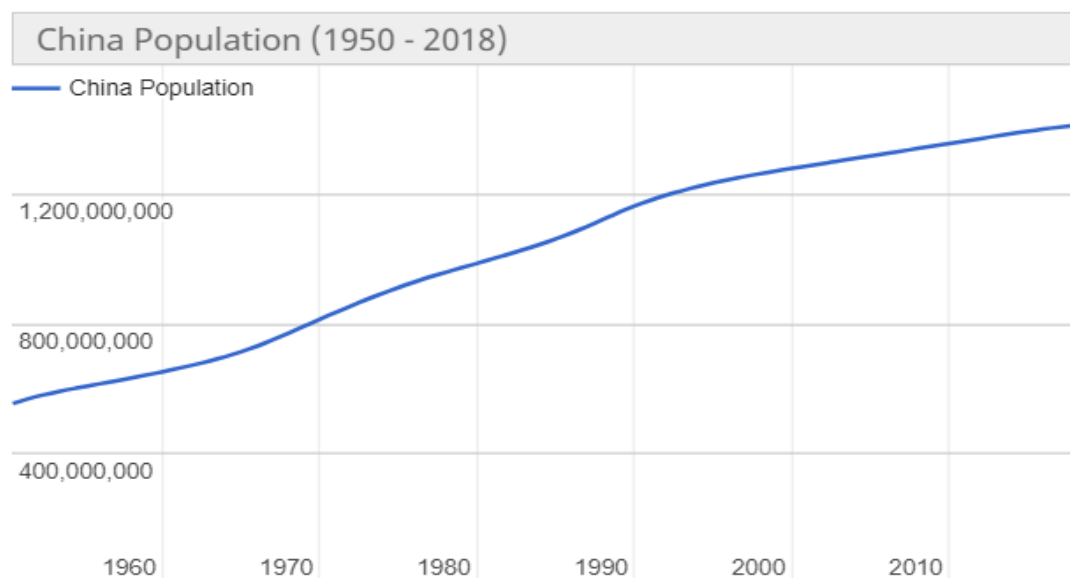


Figure 7. China's world population from 1950 to 2018. (Website of Worldometers 2018).

China has emerged as a global superpower. It is ranked only second to the United States in terms of GDP. This is demonstrated in the chart below from the World Bank's International Comparison Program, which shows it maintains 14.9% of the overall Worldwide GDP. This study went on to predict that China would soon become

the world's biggest economy. The research found China's GDP at 87 percent of the U.S, and have more than doubled in the period 2005-2011 in comparison. These statistics support China's economic growth and predicted continual future growth. This is demonstrated in figure 8 below, showing the worldwide share of GDP by country. (Website of CNBC 2018).

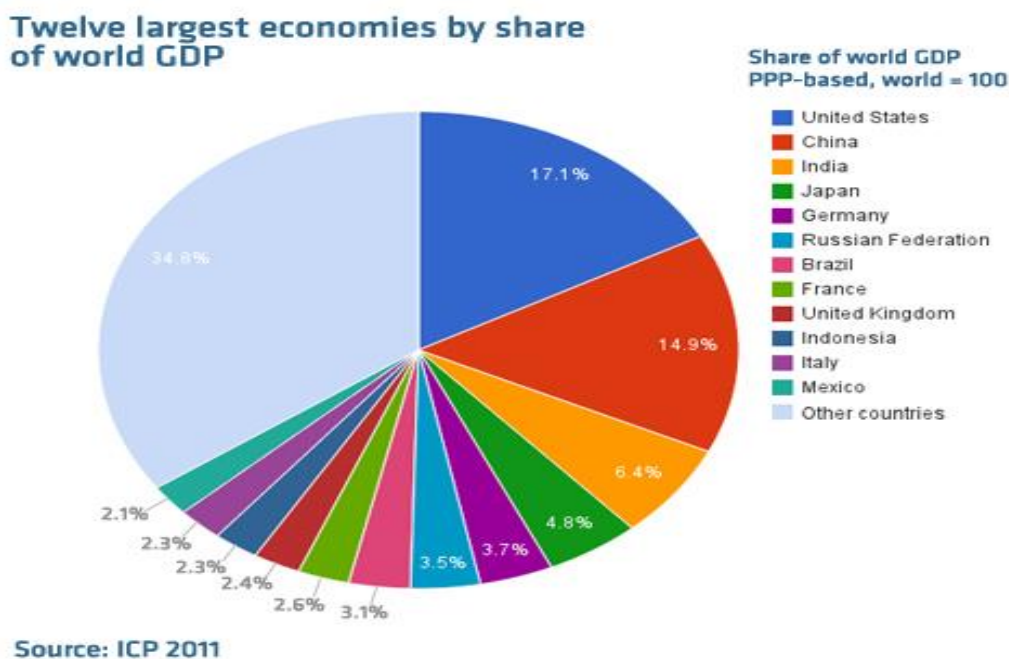


Figure 8. Largest economies GDP percentage (Website of CNBC 2018).

China shows a vast inequality of wealth distribution, with large disparity from more affluent and underdeveloped regions. This is demonstrated when comparing Shanghai to the poorest province Gansu, with it boasting five times the wealth. This is not uncommon in China, as shown in the figure 9 below, showing China's GDP per region in dollars. This supports the notion that there are more affluent areas of China, with disposable income, in contradiction to more poverty-ravaged areas. This shows the big difference of market dependent on geographical region and available incomes. (Website of The Economist 2018).



Figure 9. Regional GDP in Dollars in China (Website of The Economist 2018).

Due to China's economic emergence, we have seen a sharp increase in the disposable income available to the Chinese consumer. This is demonstrated in the figure 10 below, which demonstrates the per capita disposable income per household from 1990 to 2016. Due to the contrasting geographic standards of living, it is important to separate rural and industrial China, with the graph showing a yearly increase for both groups.

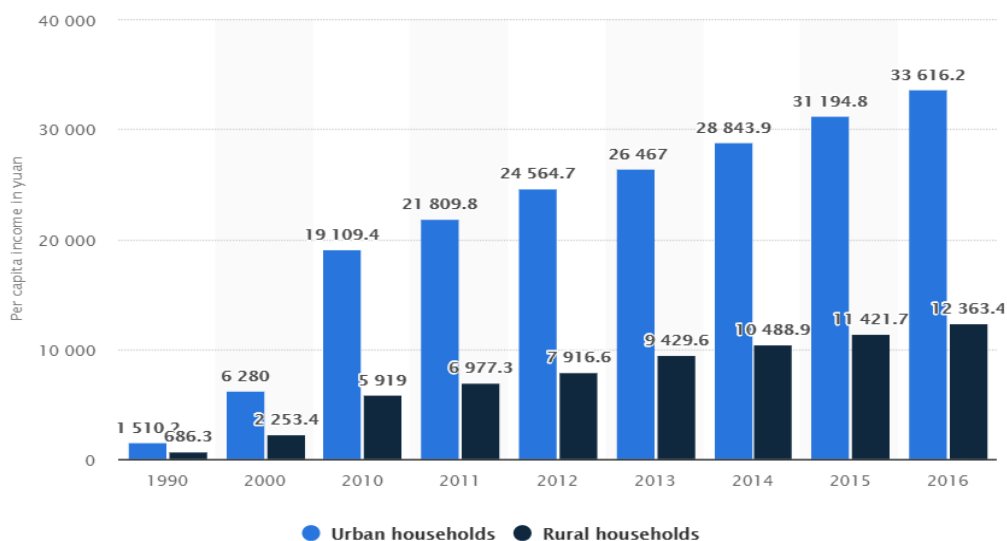


Figure 10. Average annual disposable income per capita (Website of Statista 2018).

A study by The Economist Intelligence Unit has anticipated that mainland China's middle class could exceed more than a third of the population by 2030. This is presented in the chart below, which outlines the social classes categorized by disposable income in 2015 and that of 2030. It reports that around 35% of the population will appropriate annual disposable income exceeding \$10,000, up from about 10% reported in 2016. This is forecasted to see consumer spending to match the European Union. This study also predicted that there would be no change to the distribution of wealth between rural and industrial China. Analyst Dan Wang envisages the potential for an even greater margin between the groups, with greater opportunity for the wealthy to use their wealth to become richer. (Website of South China Morning Post 2018).

The importance of digital content to China is even more apparent when you consider the vast number of people with access to the internet. It is estimated that approximately over half of its 1.4 billion population uses the internet, which is the largest number of any country worldwide. (Delisle, Goldstein, Yang 2016, 1.) A study from Statista detailing the number of smartphone users in the top 15 countries worldwide in 2017, shown in figure 11, shows they also maintain the worlds largest usage of smartphones. The graph shows they have over double the users of India in 2nd place, maintaining over 700,000 to Indias 300,000. In 2015 CIA World Factbook estimated there are also 1.305 billion mobile phones in the country, further demonstrating the huge amount of consumers available to be reached by online content. (China and Football... 2016, 5).

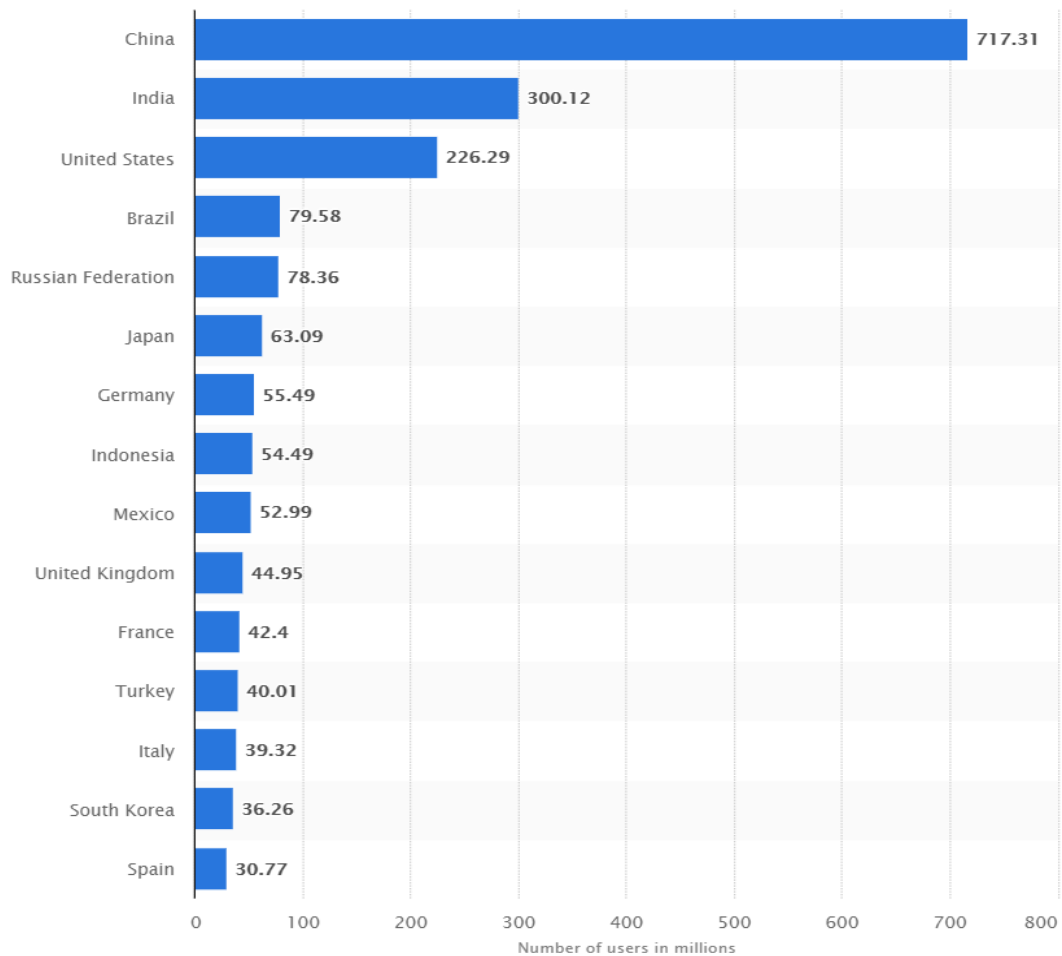


Figure 11. Number of smartphone users in millions by country (Website of Statista 2018).

6.2 Football in China

Due to China's global economic standing and its 1.4 billion population the sports industry teams, federations, leagues, and sponsors are looking to the country's growth potential. European teams have noticed the opportunity to attract a large proportion of new fans, thus unlocking revenue opportunities within China. (China and Football... 2016, 4) The president of prestigious Barcelona football club, Josep Bartomeu, when discussing China said "Asia is probably the most important and most fast-growing area of the world" and identified it as key to European clubs in growing future revenue. (Website of The Financial Times 2018).

Many historians attribute China as the origin of football in its format seen today. The first forms of a game similar to modern-day football have been traced back to "cuju" or "kickball" around 900D. (Website of BBC 2018). Fast forward to the modern era and football in Europe has evolved to have longstanding professional leagues. China first introduced a professional football league in 1990. Attendances and investment were poor, it was largely seen as an advertisement arm for state enterprises. In 2000 the widespread disgust of endemic corruption led many sponsors to withdraw. The league was rebranded and the "Chinese Super League" was introduced in 2004. (Website of The China Story) The Chinese professional league continued to operate with lower levels of quality and failed to fully catch the imagination of the Chinese public. This left the Chinese football fan to seek their enjoyment elsewhere. This led the European leagues quick to exploit this, by selling their media rights for matches and increasing branding through tours to China.(Zhang, Pitts 2018, 18.) The East Asian countries embraced football, and were met with less resistance as with other forms of western globalization.(Manzenreiter 2004,254).

This changed however, in 2015, with Chinas economic emergence, and eventually president, Xi Jinping, identified it as core in China's metamorphosis into a global superpower. He identified his desire to create China as a "soccer powerhouse" by implementing a 50-point plan, and this began the start of major investment. (Website of The Guardian 2018). A fund of US\$813 billion has been put aside to be invested in the sports industry by 2025. He invested heavily in restructuring the national football team organization, whilst also paying attention to constructing more pitches and youth programs. His bold moves encouraged Chinese clubs to spend big on acquiring expensive big name players and invest in co-operation with European clubs. With government encouragement, many Chinese have invested in buying or sponsoring European clubs, with more Chinese advertising on shirts and in stadiums. English Premier League teams Newcastle United and West Bromwich Albion are shown in picture 4 below, wearing shirts with Chinese company advertising. (Website of The New York Times 2018). In 2016 the Chinese Football Association launched its optimistic plan for China to become a 'world football superpower' by 2050. They looked to do this by increasing participation through increased training centres and pitches, with a football pitch to every 10,000 people by 2030. They also set achievement targets for the men's and women's national teams. A number of giant

Chinese companies, such as Wanda Group, Alibaba Group, and property Kaisa Group, have joined together to accumulate a billion dollar fund to assist with constructing these facilities. (China and Football... 2016, 12). These investments have acted to build interest in the game both domestically and introduce more people to the game.



Picture 4. Premier League clubs with Chinese shirt sponsors (Website of The Mirror 2018).

Football is an emerging interest in China, with basketball still the country's most popular sport. A study by Nielsen sports recorded that 40% of the urban population aged between 16-59 followed the sport. Basketball's prominence is due to greater exposure in China, with the U.S NBA basketball league selling viewing rights since the 1990s. Football interest has been growing steadily over the last three years, and they maintain 31% following from the same age group. This demonstrates the emerging interest of football in China and its potential as a sport. (China and Football... 2016, 6).

6.3 Chinese Fans

In order to successfully create a social media marketing strategy, it is important to understand the fans, and their mentality. Chinese Sporting fans are coveted commodity, with new sports consistently entering the market and vying for their attention. An

example of this is recently the UFC mixed martial arts and American NHL ice hockey league have seen the potential scope for fan base and entered the mix. This battle for fan devotion in European football is particularly intense, with all the clubs from the highest European leagues, such as the Premier League, actively focused on the Chinese market. However, they are met with the realisation that the Chinese sports landscape differs drastically from their usual experience. The Chinese fans are unique to anywhere else worldwide, maintaining differing goals, motivations and behaviours. It is seen that gaining understanding of the Chinese fans, with all its complexities, offers one of the greatest dividends for a sports organization. Engagement is key and a lack of understanding of how China operates can affect their operation adversely. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 2)

One aspect to consider is how fans are motivated. In Western countries often fan allegiance is something that is attributed to them. It may be through their geographic allegiance to one area, such as their nearest club, or it may be a family tradition to follow a certain club. The thought process of selecting a team to support is not there, as it is often a simple process. This differs in China, where the Chinese fan lacks this affinity to a European team due to their geographic proximity and the domestic essence of the club. This dearth of football culture and attached affinity has afforded them the opportunity to choose any club they wish, which makes them available to acquire to a clubs fan base. A table below demonstrates a study by mailman group into what motivates Chinese football fans to follow a team. It is unsurprising that many of the most successful football clubs are the most supported in China. But contrary to this point there are many other big factors that influence Chinese fans thought process. The study indicates a greater affinity to players, with 76% of fans stating they follow their favourite players over clubs. This shows the importance of player image when attracting allegiance to the club as a whole, and greater attention should be shown to marketing including their star players. Another aspect that ranks higher than the clubs success is the manner in which they play. Sometimes this can influence brand image with the consumer, and with the Chinese fan more open to choice it is far more prominent than in Western decision making when supporting a club. An example of this would be Arsenal who are known for their attractive playing style, they should focus their marketing on their style. Where a team like Chelsea may focus more on their marketing efforts on their individual star players or victories. Another aspect to

consider is that 28.8% of Chinese football fans attributed player looks as an important factor when choosing a team to follow. This can be seen with Borussia Dortmund's large support, in relation to a large following of Mario Gotze and Marco Reus by female Chinese fans. Player appearance is another aspect that can be exploited and fans may be receptive to using suitable players in marketing efforts. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 3)

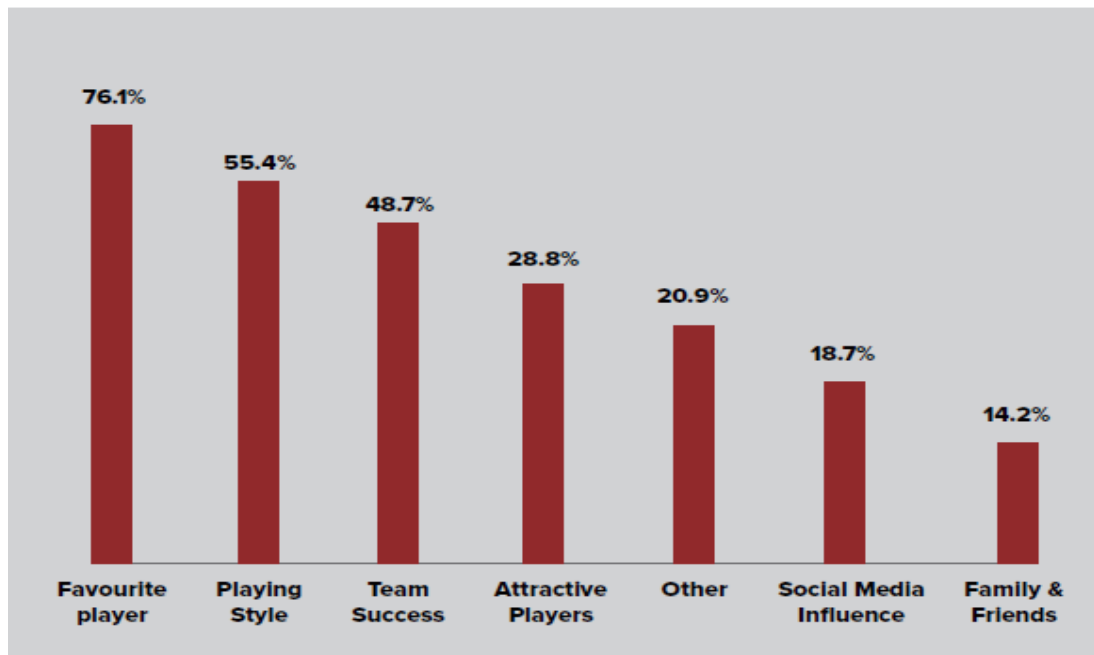


Figure 12. What motivates Chinese fans to follow a team? (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 3).

Another aspect to consider is the current patterns relating to the age of Chinese football fans. A general pattern can be identified and much of this is attributable to European football history over the years. The success of the German national football team and their football leagues efforts to create an online following in China have created quite a following amongst younger fan, for German football clubs. Also, recent sporting success from the Spanish clubs Real Madrid and Barcelona, coupled with both clubs each holding one of the generations greatest players, has also attracted a large number of younger fans. The English Premier League hold s a slightly older demographic, due to the sporting success of the English Premier League in the late 2000's and early 2010's. Italian clubs again maintain an older fanbase due to the Italian league being the first to be broadcast in China in the 1980s, and more focus on producing content

aimed at their established fans rather than attracting newer millennials. This reinforces the notion that sporting success is relative to creating a positive brand image in China. However, the success of the German Bundesliga teams gathering a following shows it is also productive to create intelligent online strategies. The Spanish League also supports the fact that star players are also conducive to creating a following for the club, with Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi, both synonymous with their clubs. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 4).

Fan loyalty in China is also different in China. Most supporters in Western countries choose to solely support their team, with this loyalty affixed solely to their club. Mailman's fan study in 2018 concluded that 71.6% of Chinese fans supported a second team. They may often selectively choose to choose a secondary team in a different competitive league, based on their success, in conjunction with their initial team. Many of the top supported clubs in this study are the most successful sporting teams in Europe. However, Borussia Dortmund has managed to build a fanbase through their brand image and commitment to the Chinese market. It emphasizes the importance of a club's online marketing strategy. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 4).

It is important understand where the Chinese fans absorb their football news from. Traditionally the national Chinese broadcaster CCTV has monopolised the international and domestic sporting broadcast market, with 20 dedicated channels. However, in recent years a new breed of broadcaster has emerged to compete offering sports live streaming and news, such as QQ, Wechat, and Sina Weibo. A study by Nielsen China analyzing what devices people use to access online sports information, shows that now mobile phone nearly has parity with the laptop, with 577 million of the 653 million active social media users accessing information via their phone. Picture 5 details the study results shown below. (China and Football... 2016, 9).



Picture 5. What device people in China use to get online sports information? (China and Football... 2016, 9).

Another big difference when compared to the Western use of social media, is that Western fans have a greater reliance on accumulating news from more established news outlets. The use of Twitter is more attributed to breaking news stories rather than a social media platform. In many aspects Chinese are more dependent on social media platforms in this fact, and may be considered to be slightly more developed. A study by Mailman in 2017, looked into where fans access their online football news from. 70.7% percent accessed their information from their clubs official Wechat and Weibo accounts, this can be attributed to the perceived reliability of the sources. This content is also mobile based through these apps, which supports modern day life. These platforms also allow interaction with the clubs and other fans, which more long-established alternatives do not offer. This shows the Chinese fan is more interested in authentic content, tailored to their everyday apps and how they usually consume their information. Another point of reference is the Key Opinion Leaders(KOLs), which are also referred to for their expertise and ability to break rumours before official account. This is correlates with Chinese interest in gossip and being first to know information. Football specific apps are popular amongst fans, with 51.8% of fans using them for footballing news. Apps such as Dongquidi and Silke have seen steady growth, and mailman predicts their prominence will continue to grow. They are advantageous and appealing to China's prominent online market, the millennial, due to the community format and being mobile based content. They offer continual news and analysis couples with community features. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 5)

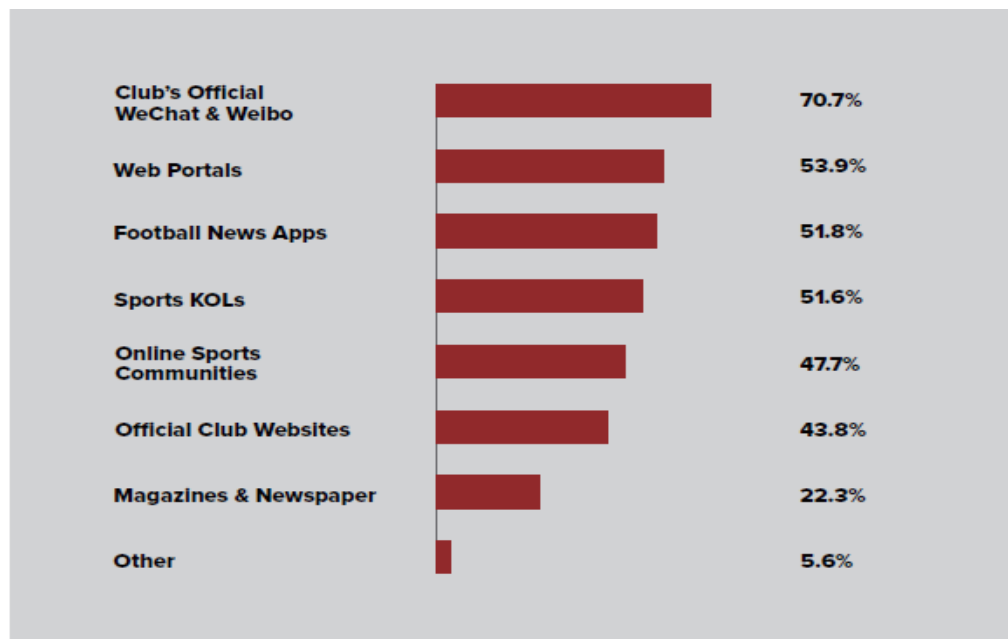


Figure 13. Where fans access online news? (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 5).

When trying to appeal to the Chinese fans, it is important to understand what content they enjoy to consume. Video content has become an important tool to use and engage the football fan. Most football content produced in the Western social media is directed towards giving the fan greater insight behind the scenes of the club operations or giving the fans greater accessibility to the players. This differs for the Chinese fan who have a greater palate to see players' dedication or skill levels, as opposed to amusing content. The Chinese fan has a greater preference towards this type of content, although this study identified slight preferences towards this type of content, there were still strong inclinations towards the same content seen in Western video content. The Chinese fan has a far greater interest in noble qualities. An example of this form of engagement could be seen by Nike resulting in a spike in sales, as a result of releasing video content on Weibo, promoting sportsmanship. (Website of CNBC 2018). Overall, the study identified that a well-rounded strategy covering all forms of content. One area that was clearly open to utilization was that the report recorded that 74% of Chinese fans had a preference for videos showing training sessions. This clearly shows an area open to align to an active strategy. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 6).

Mailmans report identified 92% of fans watch the games at home, due to time difference most games are broadcast after 10 pm or later, This shows the time sensitive of content produced for Chinese fan, with a large time difference encompassing Europe and China. Another aspect to be considered when streaming games live is that is is accessible by mobile, as it is the primary form of viewing games. The pertinent sponsorship partners differ a lot form the West too, with alcohol and gambling firms usually utilized, in China is more prime for home merchandising and food delivery services. Currently, Manchester United matches viewed through the Super Sports app contain an advertisement for their sponsor Milly, a mattress company. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 6).

The report also identified that 66% of Chinese fans are single. Many of these fans are coined by the phrase 'single dog,' which articulates their dedicated romantic relationship with football. They have such a strong attachment to football and the team they follow. They see the need to demonstrate their dedication and passion for their team. With such a large population of individuals with such strong views and similar views, it allows for the opportunity for potential alignment and cooperation with dating apps. The Italian club Napoli recently announced a partnership with Tinder. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 6)

Merchandising in China can be challenging, with a reputation for a vast counterfeit market. However, the study conducted by Mailman with Chinese fans, did not concur with this notion that they prefer cheaper counterfeit fan merchandise. The study found that 73.7% purchased from the club's official online store, 58.4% purchased items from the club's official sponsors online store, 53.2% bought from the clubs official Tmall or JD.com store and 52.1% bought from the kit sponsors high-street store. This leans to their previously stated devotion and passion for the team they support. The study advises that creating a presence in China, supports a need for providing an official e-commerce channel, considering Chinese impressions. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 7)

Often a social media presence or strategies leads to cooperation. It is important to understand how fans view these cooperation's, so it does not adversely affect a club's social media brand reputation. In reference to Mailman's study on Chinese fans, they

refer to differing attitudes as opposed to Western fans, towards sponsors. The study concluded that 65% of Chinese fans retained the intention to purchase official sponsor brands. 58% consider these brands to be very prestigious due to these partnerships. This reinforces the value of positive cooperation. Due to the strength these cooperation's influence the Chinese fan, it alludes to how lucrative sponsoring a team can be, especially for brands looking to establish a presence in China and Chinese brands in Europe. The study concluded that under a third of Chinese fans saw a sponsor as a sign of quality. However they still saw that this association created desirability. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 8)

Mailman's study further augmented their belief that the Chinese fan is heavily influenced by marketing practices. In their study, they discuss the power of key opinion leaders, or KOLs, on the Chinese consumer. Key opinion leaders are experts in their field and connect with their audience by offering advice and opinions for the layman. The study identifies their ability to have a vivid impact on the consumer, and ability to empower activation. Mailman identifies this influence to continue to develop in the future and is a further opportunity to engage the Chinese fan. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 8)

In China, piracy is prevalent, with many Chinese fans unwilling to pay to watch matches. (Website of Financial Times) The Chinese sporting industry is still in its inception, but Mailman's study into fan behaviour, identified a transformation in their attitudes towards paid content. It recorded that 54% were willing to pay to watch games, with 46% seeking free games. This is a major stride forward and shows potential for further opportunities for future sporting in the region, with fans becoming ever more dedicated and passionate in their support. This maturation of the market is aligned to a growing appreciation for the product quality and cost of the broadcasting rights. They also see a potential decline in unofficial streams, due to the major European leagues enforcing piracy measures. This sway in attitude could lead to further softening in attitudes towards purchasing sports content. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 8)

6.4 European Club Fan Engagement

European clubs are not just competing through their sporting merits but are also consistently challenging to enhance their online presence and fan base. In previous times language has provided a stumbling block, with traditional European language websites and social media providing a barrier to engaging a fan relationship. This was also greatly more problematic, with a restrictive governmental policy on access to Western websites. Vincent Chan, account manager for Mailman, a distinguished Chinese based sporting, and consulting group commented, “Without Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, fans are really frustrated that they cannot directly interact with the players.” (Website of The Guardian 2018).

In response to these difficulties, European clubs have counteracted this with the launch of Mandarin websites and content exclusively for its Chinese audience. Football executives say clubs can generate greater interest through Chinese orientated content, on the most widely used Chinese media platforms. (Website of Financial Times) This English Premier League club Liverpool, where the first European club to launch an official presence in 2011, with a further 30 now active on Weibo, the Chinese microblogging site. (Website of The Guardian 2018).

Vincent Chan further commented it takes time for clubs to turn their presence into a profit. “But as long as they stick to the Chinese market it is only a matter of time,” he said. Further stating “There has been some sponsorship from Chinese companies to foreign clubs such as Huawei, Wahaha, and Wanda,” These cooperations can be mutually beneficial when aligned to the correct company, helping to raise their profile and enhance their brand in China. (Website of The Guardian 2018). Wolfsburg a traditionally smaller level German football club, has attracted a double the number of followers on its Chinese Weibo account than its German Twitter account. This is partially attributed due to its connection to Volkswagen, and Volkswagen prestige within China. It offers hope to positive alignment strategies, to create positive exposure and connection to well-recognized companies. (Website of Financial Times 2018).

In order to delve deeper into how European Clubs control their social media presence, it is important to identify a leading authority in analysing such behaviours. Mailman is a well-respected authority on the Chinese football market, that has been providing in-depth industry analytics since 2011. They created an annual report, called Redcard, which aimed to analyse and educate the Chinese football market, which provided awards adjudged by industry experts. This report is held in the highest esteem in the industry and feels it is a good reference point to report important behavioral patterns and insight.

Mailmans 2018 annual Chinese digital football awards, Redcard, provided insight into the social media growth of European football clubs in 2017. It identified that largely the most followers gained, was towards the most established clubs. With 6 million followers gained in 2017, over 50% of this figure were allocated to the top 5 followed clubs in China. It also recognised that only 12 teams managed to enhance their following by over 100,000 in this period. This proves how difficult it is to rapidly create a presence in the region, with largely most growth going to clubs with well-established presences in former years. The awards go on to comment that if this trend is to change, perhaps a change of tact is needed by the clubs. They identify the emergence of dedicated sporting apps, such as Donggiudi, the most active football app with 2.7 million users, as such an opportunity. Sporting apps have risen to prominence in 2017, offering more specific dedicated content, which offers the advantage for clubs to direct their efforts towards their core fans, and allows them to target the opportunity of expanding their fanbase in a more segmented football-centric environment. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 2).

The awards also concluded that there had been a 50% increase in new European clubs on Weibo, with Wechat only showing a 10% increase. They attribute this too European clubs inability to convert their targets on Wechat, preferring Weibo towards their fan engagement strategies. It recognises that 60% of sports fans on Weibo, are interested in football. The report identifies a need for the clubs to covert their followers into a solid fanbase, with membership programs suggested to monetize their following. The English football club, Arsenal, has developed a membership program on their Mandarin website, but the report anticipated greater utilisation of Wechat in this

manner in the future. This provides a good way of generating greater revenue into providing content to satisfy your clubs solid fanbase. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 6).

Mailmans report also noticed a greater proportion of smaller less renowned clubs establishing themselves online. This marks a greater opportunity for all clubs to find their niche, to engage a create a fanbase in China. The online presence of European clubs in China rose from 55 to 76 in 2017. It noted that whilst China has a propensity for industries biggest achieving clubs and players, 65% of China's football fans lived in tier three cities. Much of the concerted efforts show by the bigger European clubs, was directed towards the larger Chinese cities, with tours and marketing aimed towards these. This provides a good opportunity for other clubs to gain favour in other regions less attended by the bigger European clubs, by directing geo-specific marketing. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 6).

There are a number of specific area clubs look to use to increase their social media following, which are :-

Video streaming

The need to continue to innovate and generate follower interest, has led many clubs to follow the continued demand from the Chinese consumer for video content. The production of video clubs that can be tailored by the club, are very useful to portray a marketing image of the club, or generate interest. Fu Si, the business manager, for Douyu Live streaming, commented "There's lots of crossover between the audience of live streaming events and ordinary sports fans. Additionally, the interaction, the culture of the barrage in China, the well-integrated social functions and the convenience of live streaming content to generate into short-form videos all fit the online social behavior of millennials. This is very different from the interaction and participation of traditional TV media, live streaming is easier to attract the peripheral sports fans to participate in the production of content, it can also increase the audience's stickiness by producing experiential content." Due to its importance in social media and in particular China, in successful social media strategies, Mailmans Redcard 2018 awards dedicated an award to the best live stream content for 2017.

They also advised clubs on how to successfully produce live content, and potential future trends in the area. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 11).

Mailmans 2018 report alluded to a number of considerations when creating video streaming content. The first factor it advised clubs to gauge was due to the difference in time zone; content was more suitable to be published at early evenings during midweek and late evening at the weekend. Secondly, the clubs should make considerations of the differences the Chinese market maintains and offer authentic content, that offers unique value. Another aspect it recommends is the video streams should be created exclusively towards the Chinese consumer, with use of a Mandarin-speaking host an enhancement. Lastly, it advises that this content can be published outside the usual live stream platforms, gaining greater outreach through paid media services on Sina Weibo or a well-considered KOL strategy. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 11).

With a large proportion of Chinese fans supporting players, and ultimately choosing a team to follow and support based on the team they play for, it identifies the use of the most popular players in their marketing efforts as the clearest way to engage and create a fan base on social media. It recognises that their strong celebrity status allows them to act as ambassadors for the clubs image, also create a greater desirability for the team. This allows the clubs appeal to align more to the consumer market. The Chinese consumer most relates to players regarded as a "role model" in how their character is perceived, with their character attributes seen to be aspirational to their followers. Another aspect to consider is the use of different players to reach different demographics, such as gender or age. (Website of China Policy Institute) An example of this is German club, Borussia Dortmund, using Marco Reus and Mario Gotze in their social media, to exploit a following from the Chinese female fans. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 3).

Mailmans report predicts that live streaming will continue to remain current in 2018, with greater regulation expected. This can only enhance the clarity of a clubs message by using this method, with a lot of the unnecessary content taken away, to allow the consumer more direct access to content, without a lot of other things posted it may become lost in. The integration of sponsors used in live content is expected to become

more utilised, with the Spanish club Real Madrid, using this in cooperation with Adidas in 2017, to much success, gaining over 500,00 views. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 11).

Mailman attributed German team Borussia Dortmund as the standout performers in 2017, with them winning an award for best live streaming towards the Chinese market. They're most recognised video content was a mini-series of 8 episodes, featuring players and giving insight into training and matches. They increased popularity by aligning content with their tour of China. Mailman's report also gave recognition to Spanish club Deportivo Alaves, who utilised their match with the popular Barcelona, by creating 90 minutes prematch stream presented by a Chinese host, taking in the stadium atmosphere and providing a stadium tour. They had 10,000 followers in China before this content, but managed to amass 1.5 million views, demonstrating their creative ability to reach new users. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 11). Many other clubs have creatively created video content looking to appeal to the Chinese market, in 2017. Many clubs, such as English Tottenham Hotspur and Italian Napoli, have provided behind the scenes content, allowing greater access, which has proved popular. A good demonstration of creative engagement was English club Manchester City supporting a Chinese football oriented reality show. Allowing them to outreach and provide greater exposure to more fans. (Website of The Financial Times 2018).

Online Campaigns

Football clubs recognise the growing need to recognise online users are not passive users, and look to actively engage their fans. They recognise the need to acknowledge their appreciation for their fans support, to create brand loyalty. They need to be creative and current, to maintain their audience's interest. It is important they actively look to create fresh content that will mould their brand image to the desired effect. In China they appreciate content that is aligned with their values and considers them as a unique consumer audience, therefore content tailored to the Chinese market is essential. Prof. Dr. Schmidt, Director of the Center for Sports and Management at WHU said "Professional soccer clubs and leagues who want to reach out to the Chinese soccer fan require digital adeptness that can cope with the pace of digital innovation in China." (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 14).

Mailmans 2018 red card report differentiated between long-term and short-term engagement strategies. They recognised that shorter-term strategies tended to be more results driven, with longer-term looking to build a closer fan relationship over a period of time. Many clubs demonstrated shorter-term strategies in 2017, an example of which being creating interest through giveaways of official merchandise, which looked to increase immediate follower and view levels of their Chinese social media accounts. Mailman recognised clubs going to extra lengths to satisfy their followers effectively benefitted the most, building up a solid reputation and creating longer-term loyalty. Clubs that prioritised the creating and sharing of fan stories, where able to demonstrate their fan value the most. Both Manchester United and Juventus, large superpowers in the European game, used hashtagged social media campaigns, encouraging engagement from their fans and rewarding these results. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 14).

Mailmans 2018 red card awarded the German Bundesliga with the best online campaign. The 'Bundesliga Dream' campaign allowed Chinese fans of the German league, asking fans their dream experience, with the view of fulfilling them for two lucky winners. It was enhanced by Chinese specific content from the clubs and players. This demonstrated good engagement and empathy for its Chinese fans, and ultimately amassed 15 million views. Mailman also recognised Manchester City as a runner-up. They demonstrated their Chinese customer value, by creating special live video content at half-time at their match, for Chinese new year. This again demonstrated specific content for its audience, allowing it to be aligned with its Chinese fans beliefs. Manchester United, the club with Mailmans Redcard award for the most supported club, demonstrated the same ethos, by creating the selfie creator allowing their fans to share their fan pictures in their social media. Another strategy used was to create content with one of the most followed online celebrities in China, which was one of the most watched posts of 2017. This demonstrates good collaborative work to enhance outreach and exposure of their brand, whilst aligning themselves to an already popular figure, thus enhancing their brand. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 14).

Sponsors

Sponsorship and cooperations are a key aspect in the football business, with a vast amount of revenue generated and its ability to shape a clubs desired brand image. Important selection is important as certain products may generate revenue, but adversely affect the image of a football club, with its fans. It is important to select and align with companies and brands, that resonate their brand and enhance their image with their fanbase. Sponsors pay a huge part in the Chinese market with the Chinese buyer behavior heavily influenced by their cooperation with the clubs. (Red Card + - The Fans Issue 2017, 8). This is equally true with cooperations of already well-established brands within China, aligning with football clubs to further enhance their brands, such as with Volkswagen and Wolfsburg football club. (Website of The Financial Times) They also produced a campaign with Xiamen Airlines, with a prize draw offering winners the chance to attend a game courtesy fo the airline. The club asked fans to follow their Wechat account, and then answer a series of questions to enter. The use of online campaigns using already established brands is an important method is creating greater exposure of the clubs brand and enhancing potential following.

Tour interaction

With many European football teams looking to further their standing in China through tours, playing in a number of cities. This is a trend that continues to increase and this allows them to create greater awareness and create greater proximity to the Chinese fan, which coupled with an online strategy is identified as a key component in maximizing their potential. It allows their whole Chiese following throughout China, to get greater affinity to them. Mailmans Redcard report identified a need for the clubs Chinese social media teams to be present 24 hours a day during the tour, to maximize the opportunity. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 15).

Mailman awarded the German club FC Bayern with the award for best tour campaign. They produced a lot of content on all their Chinese social media channels, whilst also providing content from a number of regions The created original content, such as square dancing in front of the Oriental TV tower in Shanghai. The German club

Schalke were also noted in the report, for their success, by creating interest through the quantity of live stream content while on tour and also creating content displaying them in the community, such as schools. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 15).

Technology

With China in the forefront of technological innovation, it is important to embrace new technology to appeal to the consumer. Clubs must stay current and look to innovate to compete for fan attention. With clubs focussed on providing content that brings its fan closer to the club, they have begun to utilise the use of 360 degree and virtual reality content. FC Bayern produced 360-degree views of the stadium, providing virtual reality glasses to their Chinese fans. Manchester United have created a selfie-creator which allows fans to take virtual photos with the favourite players and Juventus introduced a virtual reality app. This shows clubs keeping up with technological advances, while also offering new appealing content. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 12).

Esports

Esports the competitive video game sporting community has gained traction over the previous years. The industry is estimated to be worth over \$1.5 billion by 2020, and this offers a good opportunity for outreach and potential recoup of new fans. With the size and popularity of this community, this marks an opportunity for the football clubs to escalate their social media following. There is potential for alignment to esports leagues or teams to generate exposure, and currently, Olympic Lyonnais are the only football club exploiting this, but this expected to change in the future. (Red Card 2018..... 2018, 2).

7 METHODOLOGY

7.1 Research Design

Research design looks to provide a guideline for the researcher to implement their research process efficiently. It details all the efforts, techniques and procedures garnered within the research process. There are three types of research design that can be utilized, which are exploratory, descriptive and casual. (Silver, Stevens, Wrenn, & Luodon 2013, 70).

Exploratory research seeks to obtain information the researcher lacks familiarity on. Descriptive research differs in that seeks to explain incident, individuals or events. Casual research relates to the relationship between certain variables, attributed to a certain incident which is identifiable through descriptive study methods. (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill 2007, 133-134).

In this thesis the author used exploratory research to define the concepts and reach the objective of creating a successful social media marketing strategy for Portsmouth Football Club in China.

7.2 Research Method

It is important to differentiate between qualitative and quantitative data collection, as both methods provide different benefits. Qualitative data collection relates to data that is not accumulated to gather numerical statistical data, such as an interview. It allows the person collecting the data to seek broader responses to questions. This is useful when a more open and expansive answer is more useful as a result to gain greater insight. Quantitative data collection relates to data that can be quantified, such as a questionnaire. It allows a person to collect a larger sample of data to be recorded numerically. This is more useful when data needs to be used comparatively between the respondent's sample base. (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill 2007, 145).

This project will aim to provide a social media marketing strategy for the case company. Due to the nature of this project, it is important to provide valid supplementary information to support recommendations generated. Data is required to gain a greater perspective into the Chinese market and Chinese fan behavior, to aid creating the marketing strategy successfully. However, it is unnecessary to administer quantitative research through methods such as questionnaire, due to the strength of sources ascertained through large reports conducted by credible organizations. Due to the size of their organization and studies, their resources allow them to conduct and obtain data beyond the author's resources. However, it is necessary to obtain qualitative data by means of interview, to provide supporting information from the case company, regarding their needs and competencies with Chinese social media and the market. Shaun Whitmarsh, a marketing manager at Portsmouth Football Club, will partake in this interview to provide the relevant supplementary information required.

Interviews take the form of a discussion between two or more people, with the intent to recoup valuable and reliable information to aid your research objective. Where defined goals are set out in your research an interview may aid in enlightening the subject. Interviews can take three forms, which are structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews relate to question set up in a formulaic manner, which the intent to receive a standard basic response that can be easily recorded, such as a questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews also look to have set up predetermined questions, but they are tailored to each respondent, with some questions omitted as per need. Unstructured interviews are more informal by nature, they do not contain predefined questions, but look at topic areas, where the respondent is given more freedom to respond based on these topics. This allows a large quantity of information to be received about a topic area. (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill 2007, 310-313). In this thesis the author utilized a semi-structured interview to receive qualitative data from Portsmouth Football Club, with greater need to define specific question topic areas, with the intention to gain expansive responses to these areas. A phone interview was conducted at the convenience of the interviewee, with the author asking a set of predetermined questions.

7.3 Validity and Reliability

Reliability relates to consistency of result gained. It's important to consider if the same study was completed multiple times, would the same consistent result be achieved. To maintain reliability to it is important to conduct research in a manner that can maintain these levels of consistency. Validity concerns the credibility of our conclusions, inferences, and propositions. It is relative to measuring the intended level and its result it is reaching this. (Adams, Khan, 2007, 236-237).

To maintain validity and reliability in this thesis, a number of steps must be adhered to, to allow the most useful form of recommendations to be generated. This will be maintained by using the most recently published materials from the most credible sources. The author will also look to maintain impartiality during this thesis, to avoid applied bias to the overall findings. To the highest degree, all materials must be reported without bias and interviews conducted in an environment that is conducive to natural unbiased opinion. For the empirical part, the interviews partaken to complete this thesis, will be conducted with senior staff at the case company, to allow greater reliability of information. Questions will be designed carefully and responsibly to allow for the most valid and reliable responses.

7.4 Data Collection and Analysis

There are two methods of data collection, which are primary and secondary. Primary relates to the collection of data that is new and obtained in its first instance at the time of use. (Adams, Khan 2007 107). Secondary data is the accumulation of data via already existing sources. It relates to it being reused from another source and its primary location. (Adams, Khan 2007, 117).

To provide a varied degree of sources, this thesis will look to use both secondary and primary sources. A large number of secondary sources of literature, such as books, reports and online news articles will be taken from credible sources. As regards primary data an interview will be conducted with Shaun Whitmarsh, a marketing manager at Portsmouth Football Club.

8 INTERVIEW

I conducted an interview with Shaun Whitmarsh, a marketing manager of Portsmouth Football Club. This was implemented to gather greater insight into the current social media action of the club and to define how the club perceived a successful marketing strategy. The information gained would allow the social media marketing strategy to be tailored more specifically towards their needs.

The interview was conducted by phone, on the 20th April 2018, in their internal working environment, this was chosen to provide convenience for the interviewee, and to afford them the condition of being in an environment synonymous to the topic. The interview was designed with a number of open-ended questions relevant to information desired, to ascertain more expansive responses. The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and the questions were grouped into three sections and will be reported detailing findings of each group of questions below.

Current Strategy

The interview discovered Portsmouth Football Club currently utilize four social media channels, which are Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. They usually use these social media platforms to upload various forms of media, such as text updates, pictures and videos. They allow Portsmouth to provide useful and engaging content. It is used to update club information, such as business developments, merchandise releases and ticket information. It also allows them to offer engaging content that will be desirable to the fans, such as videos, articles and pictures. These can be used to allow the fan greater insight into the team and gain greater affinity for the players and club. The club does this by publishing player interview articles, player interview videos, videos of training, videos of matches, pictures of matches and content from the junior sides. This provides an overall strategy to maintain interest in the club and brand, to maintain fan loyalty. They also look to use match days as an important way to attract fan utilization of their channels, by providing game updates live.

They identify that their current desired outcome from their social media platforms is to provide their fans with useful information and give them greater insight into the

club's operations. They hope to maintain the fans interest and build on their relationship positively.

The benefits from a social media presence were recognized as its ability to maintain a large proportion of its fanbase in these platforms. By creating these followings, they recognized it allowed them to reach their fans globally in a more efficient and cost-efficient manner. They also noticed it allowed them to align their platforms with their merchandising, ticketing and sponsorship efforts. This demonstrates their ability to monetize these followings gained.

When questioned about how they actively seek to increase their followings they explained they did not aggressively look to enhance their followings. Due to the nature of their product and brand most of their following was accumulated through supporters, and it was hard to increase followers without increasing support. Their current playing level doesn't currently leave them enough opportunity to fully enhance their efforts, due to the highly competitive industry they maintain. It is easier for them to promote and enhance their followings with a more successful football team. However, they did recognize the use of publishing their social media platforms links on all club generated materials to raise awareness amongst fans.

China

The interview recognized that Portsmouth don't currently have any supporters groups in China. It also recognized that they don't have any special social media strategies in place to reach Chinese football fans. They currently use their western social media platforms to universally interact with all their fans worldwide.

Shaun Whitmarsh explained that he had vague knowledge of Weibo, as he had heard of it used by a few Premier League clubs, the top league in England, but he did not acknowledge any other forms of Chinese social media. He also explained that the club had never used any forms of Chinese social media, which shows their inexperience in this area.

When questioned how they would like their brand to be represented in China, he wanted them to be a good wholesome ethical family brand. He wanted their passion and dedication to come through. He mentioned their passionate fanbase as an embodiment of the symbol of the club.

When questioned how social media content would differ for the Chinese market, he noticed the importance to create content in the Chinese language, whilst also maintaining culturally trending topics with their social media users. He also noticed the importance to create content that stood out from their competitors, due to the competitive nature of the market. He also mentioned the need to use innovative strategies, such as new technologies, due to their interest in the region.

Strategy Objective

When questioned about Portsmouth Football clubs future objective, he stated they would like to regain their status in the English top football division. He stated the chairman had the vision for the club to grow economically through this rise, and to maintain a similar financial standing as their rivals in the top division.

He recognized a social media marketing strategy to China would help reach this objective, by allowing them to be financially competitive with clubs of the same level, by maintaining similar strategies. It would allow them to enhance their exposure, to increase their global fanbase, which in turn would lead to greater merchandising and sponsorship revenue possibilities.

He identified a successful social media strategy in China, as a campaign that would enhance their presence in the country. They would like to attract a fan base and build an operating base in the region, with a view to further optimizing their efforts over time. Fundamentally the creation of relevant social media platforms and a way to attract a solid base of local fans.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

The author will look to provide Portsmouth Football Club the supplementary information to meet the objective of providing a successful social media strategy towards the Chinese market.

Target Market

Firstly, it's critical that Portsmouth Football Club identify and understand their target market. To for Portsmouth to successfully implement a social media marketing strategy they will need to tailor their marketing communication to reach Chinese football fans. They offer a unique culture and values that will make it critical to understand their behavior, to garner success. It is important to design marketing communications to meet their needs.

Following a favorite European football club is heavily influenced by other factors than just the sporting success of the team, and their decisions are more influenced by the club their favorite players play for or the style of play of the club. Even factors such as player looks can influence decisions, which is very different from European motivation to following a team on social media. This leaves them open to different marketing strategies and influences. It is also identified that Chinese fans are very dedicated fans, once they select their team they follow them and their endorsements vehemently.

The Chinese football fan age group spans over all ages, but they are all connected to football via online media, with online social media a big part of their society and associated with their behaviors. More of their actions are linked towards this technology and the majority proportion actively own a smartphone and utilize it for online social media.

Strategy Objective

It is important to recognize Portsmouth Football Clubs overall objective in implementing this social media marketing strategy. The interview allowed us to ascertain that they have a desire to create a sustainable social media presence on Chinese social media, thus providing a platform to further enhance and develop their future reputation and presence. This presence they wish to develop could be further utilized in the future in generating extra revenue to the club, through using the accrued followings to maximize merchandising and sponsorship relationships. This would allow them to maintain a competitive financial position amongst the other clubs in the top English division, which is where they intend to operate in the future.

Current Strategy

Portsmouth Football Clubs current strategy looks to utilize traditional Western social media channels, such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram. They use these media to reach all their fans worldwide, with the same content intended to be consumed by them all. They do not use any aggressive tactics to increase their following, allowing the Football Club to market itself. They advertise all forms of their social media on their materials and paraphernalia. They do not have any Chinese supporter groups offline or online, which they have a relationship with. It is also identified that they currently lack knowledge or experience in the Chinese social media arena.

Social Media

To implement the social media marketing strategy successfully it is critical to select the correct channels to reach the clubs desired market. Due to the restrictive nature of the social media landscape in China, it is important to select channels not banned within the country, to reach the market more widely. Portsmouth currently maintain traditional Western social media accounts for all their needs, which would not optimize the probability of success for this campaign. Therefore, this strategy aims to select the most relevant media to the country. As the club are looking to create a presence the most important forms of media should be selected to provide a base to expand on once their brand image has increased to the relevant size.

Firstly, a presence on Wechat would be beneficial due to its status within China, it is the most prominent and most used form of social media, installed on 90% of smartphones in China. It is more greatly utilized in maintaining a fanbase rather than providing potential outreach for new followers. However, the growing success of the club in creating brand awareness in the region, will demand a place where fans can congregate to receive club information, interact with the club and interact with other fans in the country. It will allow the club to create a community and database of fans, where they can monitor and manage them more closely. This is what most European clubs creating a presence in China use to further their business, and to maintain credibility it is important to create a presence on this platform with the intention to draw a fanbase to this platform.

Secondly Weibo is another big player in the region that provides a good opportunity to develop a following. Most European clubs prefer this platform, as it allows content to be more widely consumed by the whole platform, rather than a closed group. This gives greater potential for outreach and opportunity to increase a following with creative content, that maintains an interest to the users. It allows clubs to get their required marketing communication to a larger audience. It is the second most used form of social media in China and provides the chance to meet larger demographic groups.

Marketing Strategies

To fully meet the objective of the club, the strategy must consider how they wish to portray their brand as a passionate, dedicated club with family values. All marketing communication must adhere to these values and look to maximize this message and its potential to the fans in China. The strategy must consider all content published does not sway away from these principles to provide a clear uniform brand image to the Chinese social media users. This brand image tallies particularly well with the Chinese media users due to their propensity to admire noble qualities.

Studies by Mailman group conclude that all content must be specific to the country using Mandarin language, providing culturally sensitive and relevant content and tailored towards the local media users. Portsmouth Football Club agree a strategy of this nature must provide engaging content that is regionally specific.

Due to the objective of the strategy and the need to develop a new following for the club in the country, marketing strategies are best focused towards Weibo. Content-based on Wechat will be based on following satisfaction and retention, whereas on Weibo the club is recommended to utilize to create a wider message, with scope to maximizing interest amongst the social media community.

To attract users to Portsmouth Football Club's Weibo account, they must create engaging content, that creates user reaction. The greater the interest created the higher the buzz towards the club and all their social media channels. Due to the nature of the objective, shorter-term motivated campaigns should be garnered, to spike interest in their account. The want to peak user interest with the intention of inducing their following. Content should be exciting and interesting, to create this quick buzz amongst the users. AN example of these would be viral marketing campaigning, which would be particularly useful for the club, in creating content that is much discussed online, creating exposure, and drawing newer followers to their account.

It is important to consider the content published. Overall it is recommended the club post a mixture of content, such as text, photos and videos. Using a full spectrum allows the club page to provide information appealing to a wider number of the media users. Mailman Group's 2018 Redcard study alluded to a great demand from fans for video content, particularly of team training sessions. This is an area where the club could create interest. It has also been noted that trends have seen greater demand for shorter video content, and the club should post content of a more shorter nature. Another area that has proved popular is by providing content providing insights into the club, with player interview features or stadium tours, overseen by a Chinese host. Portsmouth should look to provide features with a Chinese host, creating greater availability of the Portsmouth playing squad to the Chinese fans. The use of the club's star players in posts in a practice particularly recommended, due to the Chinese fans displaying a

greater affinity to popular players rather than clubs. The players images can attract greater traffic and followers to their social media.

Mailman's 2017 fans study noticed the emergence of technology used in the football social marketing field. European clubs have utilized things such as VR and 360-degree views, to create current and innovative content. Posting VR and 360-degree content will generate a greater exposure to the club's media. The clubs are recommended to use similar strategies such as interactive stadium tours or a selfie creator where fans can take pictures with their favorite players, without their physical presence.

To generate greater interest in the clubs Wechat page the club should maintain their QR codes on all forms of media and materials. In China the QR code is scanned to join the Wechat groups and their code will appear on everything produced by organization in China, online and offline. It can be displayed on all packaging, posts, articles and even in bigger forms, such as billboards. It is the most important way the club will be able to expand their Wechat followers.

The next way to increase their following and interest in their accounts in the use of strategic cooperation's. The club should use KOLs and Chinese celebrities to help promote their page or posts with their large followers. This will create a surge of interest and allow the club to immerse their brand image with popular identities. This can also be translated to companies and forging relationships with sponsors or creating collaborative content with companies popular in China, will also help boost interest and following to their media platforms. Lastly there is potential to collaborate and create content with esports organizations. This gaming culture is big in China, and there has seen a trend towards European clubs utilizing this in China.

Measure Results

Once the strategy has been implemented the club should look to measure the results. They need to gather how their posts and contents were absorbed by the media users. They need to see what gains the most positive and desired results and use this information to hone their efforts in attracting a greater following. The cycle goes again, and

they create new content with this experience used to perfect their message for their audience. Many of the social media platforms provide analytics to assist in doing this.

10 CONCLUSION

In conclusion to this thesis it is important to reflect on the objective, and in this case the author looked to devise a successful social media marketing strategy in China for Portsmouth Football Club. To ascertain how a successful social media marketing strategy would be defined in this case, it was critical to gather information from the club on their overall objective to achieving this success. The author successfully utilized an interview with a marketing manager at the club to gather the relevant supplementary information to clearly set out the definition of the objective of the thesis. They wanted to create a social media presence and raise awareness in China. The author successfully managed to devise a strategy to these terms, by gathering supporting literature to base it upon.

10.1 Project Tasks

To meet the overall objective of the thesis the author set out to create a number of project tasks to meet. These tasks were set up to outline and better facilitate the efficient creation of the thesis. It is important to ascertain whether these tasks were met and whether these jeopardized the completion of the thesis. The author set out six project tasks and each of these were successfully met, which aided the completion of the thesis. Literature was used to gather the relevant supporting information, with the use of an interview used to meet the requirement of acknowledging the clubs need for conducting this project. Overall the collection of this information was uncomplicated due to the availability of sources.

10.2 Limitations

In the beginning of the thesis a number of boundaries were setup to facilitate the efficient completion of the thesis. These conditions successfully streamlined the project onto aspects more focused towards the topic intention. It allowed the author to avoid the potential remuneration of implementing such a strategy, this information would be hard to define within the limitations of the resources of the project. A greater relation to the financial nature of this operation may further enhance its use to the football club. The focus on Chinese social media and market allowed the project to be more streamlined and efficient in its formation.

10.3 Validity and Reliability

The author also set out to define measures taken to maintain validity and reliability. Reliability and validity was maintained in sourcing material from reliable and relevant sources. This aided the overall objective and desired result of the thesis project. The author acted impartially in reporting the information and conducting the interview. This also added to the reliability of the outcome. The author set out to implement an interview with a marketing manager at the case company. The interview was conducted without bias and in a professional manner. However, as it was a telephone interview it did not allow the author to gain a full essence from the interviewee of their full intention, through body language cues. To further enhance the project, it may have been recommended to conduct the interview face-to-face, but the information gathered was still useful and valid in setting out the defined objective of the thesis. It did not affect the overall success of creating a successful social media marketing strategy.

10.4 Personal competence

This thesis allowed the author to gain further knowledge in social media marketing applied to the football industry and the Chinese market. It allowed the author to apply and further their knowledge and competencies applied to a case company and real business scenario. This knowledge gained will provide a platform for knowledge in

this field, acting as base to provide potential employment and educational possibilities related to this project.

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APPENDIX 1: Case Company Interview

Current Strategy

What social media channels do Portsmouth Football Club currently use?

What do you post on your social media channels?

What are the desired results from posting on social media?

What are the benefits from having a social media presence for Portsmouth Football Club?

How do you look to increase your following on your social media channels?

China

Do you have any supporters groups in China?

How do you look to reach Chinese football fans?

Do you know any Chinese social media platforms?

How would you like your brand to be represented in China?

How would social media content differ for the Chinese market?

Strategy Objective

What is the future objective of Portsmouth Football Club?

How would a social media strategy in China help this?

What would a successful social media strategy in China achieve for the club?