

How to use Chinese digital platforms to pursue and increase their
own brand awareness in the Chinese market

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| <p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of this thesis, the research, and its analysis is to assist Finnish SMEs on how to choose the correct Chinese digital platform to promote their business and promote the company's brand. The study conducted the Chinese marketer's operational marketing trends to help support the Finnish marketing decider how to use Chinese digital social media to reach the target audiences and achieve their marketing goals.</p> <p>The study and analysis of the digital platform environment is based on theoretical frameworks from literature that starts at the macro and micro level to look at digital environments trends and conduct a Chinese mainstream digital platform study. To use five of the six factors of the PESTEL method to look at the digital macro and micro-environments relations and present relative points of view. This combined with second-hand data, material references and marketing data helped formulate an answer or perhaps even prove that the hypothetical inbound marketing and traffic conversion is feasible.</p> <p>In this thesis, in addition to mentioning WeChat, the most well-known social platform by Finnish companies also conducts research and analysis on several platforms that are currently the most popular in China. To cooperate with KOLs is the common marketing approach in China. When using Chinese social platforms for corporate brand marketing communications, this approach can increase brand awareness and make the brand more effective and accurate for Chinese audiences.</p> | | |
| Key words : Social media platform, Digital marketing environment, Brand, KOL, PESTEL. | | |

CONTENT

| | |
|---|----|
| 1 INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| 1.1 Background | 4 |
| 1.2 Research objectives..... | 5 |
| 1.3 Research methods | 6 |
| 2 THE LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 9 |
| 2.1 The digital marketing environment..... | 10 |
| 2.1.1 Explanation of the five forces of the PESTEL model | 11 |
| 2.2 digital marketing communication | 12 |
| 2.3 Brand awareness | 14 |
| 2.4 Inbound marketing | 15 |
| 2.5 Search engine marketing..... | 15 |
| 3 MATERIAL DESCRIPTION AND ANALYZES | 15 |
| 3.1 Finnish SME business current environment | 16 |
| 3.2 Main social media platform in Finland..... | 16 |
| 3.3 Current Chinese digital marketing environment..... | 17 |
| 3.3.1 The government's positive attitude towards digital trade..... | 17 |
| 3.3.2 Chinese social media is still a social force | 18 |
| 3.3.3 Legal force | 19 |
| 3.3.4 Cybersecurity law and personal information protection law | 20 |
| 3.3.5 China's current mainstream social media platform marketing trends | 20 |
| 3.3.6 Chinese KOL marketing strategy..... | 21 |
| 3.4 Chinese mainstream platform and data..... | 23 |
| 3.4.1 WeChat | 24 |
| 3.4.2 Douyin (TikTok) | 25 |
| 3.4.3 TouTiao | 28 |
| 3.4.4 Little Red Book | 29 |
| 3.4.5 Sina Weibo..... | 30 |
| 3.5 Digital platform marketing features..... | 31 |
| 4 CONCLUSIONS..... | 37 |
| 4.1 Major finding | 37 |
| 4.2 Future search..... | 39 |
| 5 REFERENCES | 41 |

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the context of the era of big data, leading giant companies use their own advantages in big data and other technological resources to promote their businesses, and to accurately analyze users to improve the economic benefits of products or services. For small and medium-sized enterprises, especially within the manufacturing industry, how to survive in this age of big data is a very important issue. Fortunately, some companies have kept up. In the face of a strong competitive environment, they actively cooperate with digital platforms or connect with the in-depth policy of government digital promotions to carry out the digital transformation of enterprises and find new ways to shape value.

In the current global pandemic, those small and medium-sized enterprises that are already trying to transform or are trying to digitally transform and upgrade, although they are struggling with a unfair disadvantage in the data age, compared to larger enterprises, at least some are surviving. They did not withdraw from the world-wide stage of this era.

China, as the world's second-largest economy after the United States, has seen a good economic recovery after the outbreak of the virus (FDIRESEARCH, 2012). Countries all over the world look for more economic and trade activities with China.

Digital economies, and their deep integration with the real economy, is transforming and upgrading traditional industries and even creating new industries with novel business models. Active cooperation exists between Finland and China to activate these types of businesses within both countries. For instance, through stimulus

funding provided by Business Finland.

1.2 Research objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to provide Finnish SMEs with advice on entering the Chinese market and to understand the trends on Chinese digital social media platforms.

For example, what is the latest information for Chinese cybersecurity law, in terms of the macro environment? How to create more brand and product awareness on Chinese social media platforms and create inbound marketing to services and products (e.g., on a corporate website)? How can such traffic be retained on the corporate webpage? Even if it is a long-term B2B business, showing the brand value in the Chinese market before entering the Chinese market, and what does that mean to the company? Therefore, in terms of the organization within the micro-environment, what are the biggest obstacles for Finnish marketers to enter the Chinese market? Why are there such obstacles? What is the appropriate approach to Chinese and Finnish digital social media marketing? How do Chinese digital marketers choose the right digital marketing platform? What marketing strategies do Chinese marketers use on social media platforms? How does this marketing strategy successfully attract consumers?

In this thesis, it is significant for the small and medium-sized Finnish entrepreneurs to learn about the digital marketing strategies of Chinese marketers. In summary, it is the aim of the research and analysis in this thesis to help Finnish small-medium entrepreneurs choose a suitable digital platform, promote their businesses, build their brand value, and enhance future opportunities and find references for potential operation and development in China.

1.3 Research methods

To analyze the Chinese digital marketing macro-environment, the author used the PESTEL model (Chaffey, Dave, ja Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). PESTEL refers to politics, economics, society, technology, environment, and legal forces, and is a strategic management tool. This tool use these factors to analyze and measure the company marketing environment within the larger picture of the macro-environment. (Vuorinen, 2013).

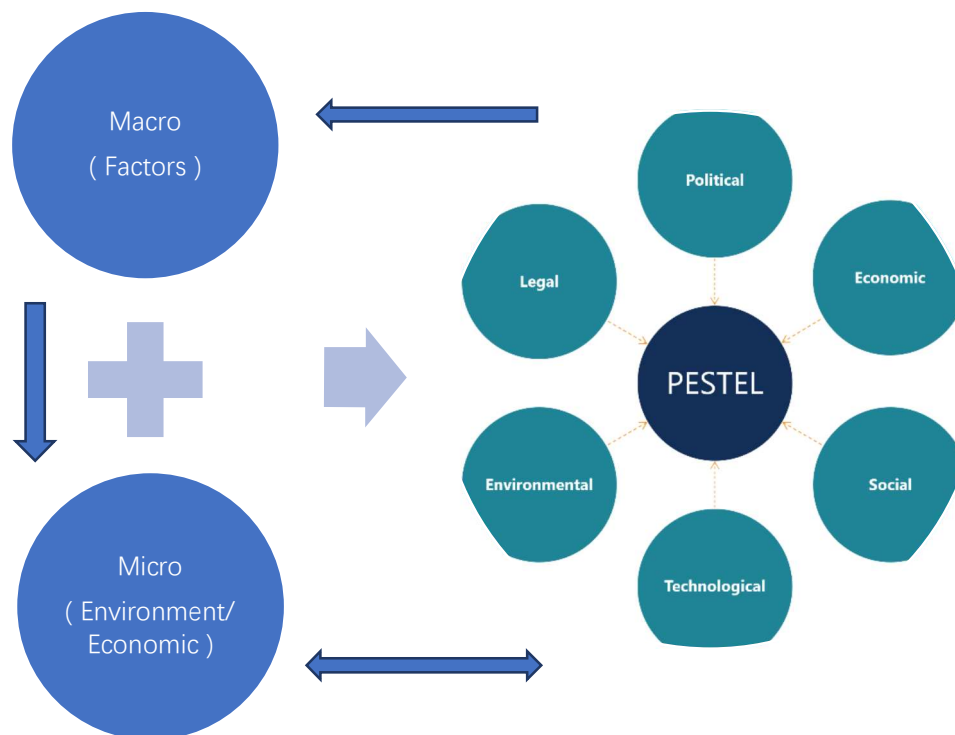


Figure 1: Factor of PESTEL and relationship between the Macro and Micro



Figure 2: Based on the structure of the thesis's themes and keywords, the layout of the macro to the micro

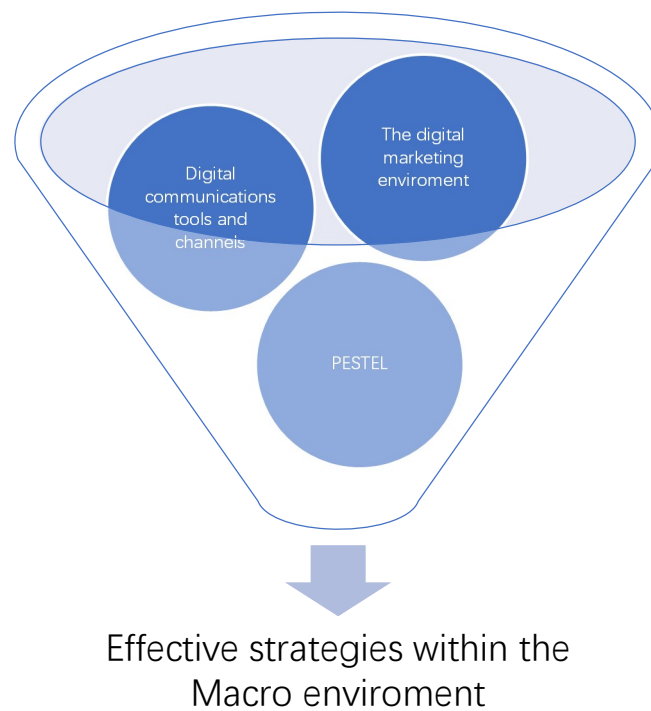


Figure 3: Analysis funnel explained within this thesis

The combination of the concept of the digital macro-environment (Figure 1) (Figure 4), this provides a framework to link and lead to different aspects micro-environment of the digital marketing aspects to analyze China's digital environment (Figure 4). For instance, culture is a specific factor of a country's macro-environment. And within the context of countries such as China and Finland, these cultural factors impact features and actions taken in the micro environments.

Proving the hypothesis of transforming traffic to corporate brand websites and create brand value through Chinese digital platform technology is feasible using these research methods. (Figure 2) (Figure 3) See the section related to (Figure 5) for more details on the research methods used.

To study the differences and characteristics of the data platform tools used by Finnish and Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises in marketing decision-making, the literature, online articles, and industry insight data report readings on the digital marketing environment of both parties were used to support the research topic.

The author used second-hand data on the Internet to support the micro-environment research, from the perspective of marketers, the author explores the current in the digital marketing environment China and Finland.

In the analysis and selection of suitable Chinese digital platforms, the author also used second-hand data such as trends on the number of users on mainstream social platforms, monthly user activity, and users age distribution to show why marketers of Finnish SMEs should consider understanding Chinese mainstream platforms.

Overall, by combining the descriptions collected from the insights of Chinese

marketers and the latest second-hand data analysis, European entrepreneurs can more effectively understand the growth and decline of the Chinese digital market, the current situation, and its future potential when doing market research. This can provide a reference for the direction of a digital marketing operation.

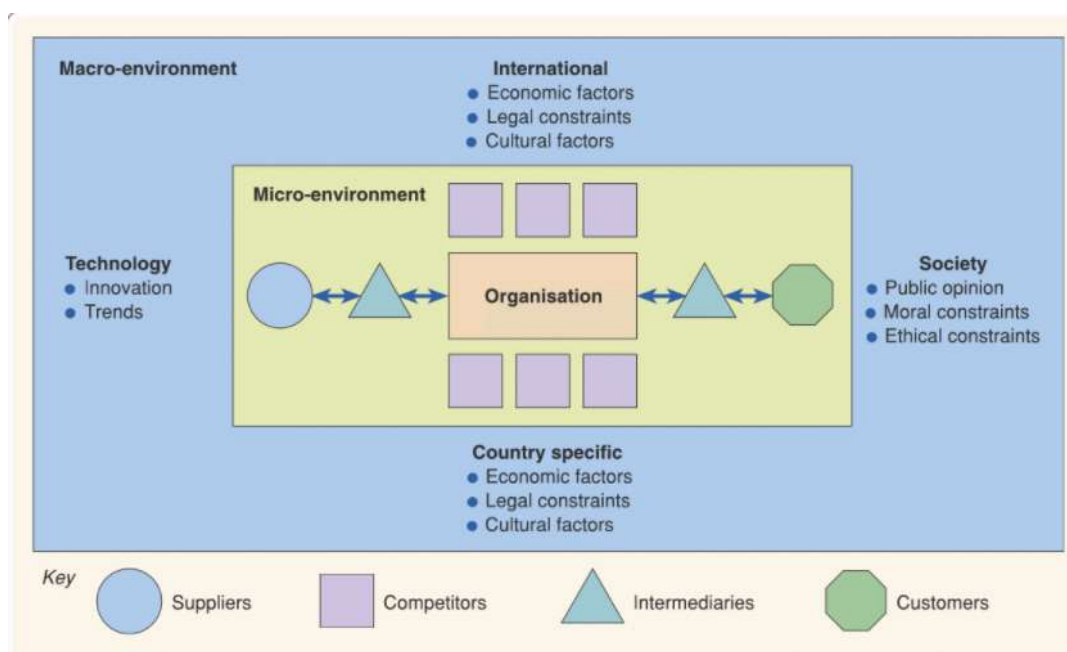


Figure 4: The Digital Marketing Environment (Chaffey, Dave, ja Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, 2019)

2 THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The PESTEL model is an analysis tool to analyze the macro environment. It is known for its use in large environment analyses at companies. It can not only analyze the external environment, but also identify all the forces that impact an organization. (Chaffey, 2015)

The content of this chapter records the literature study in digital marketing from four

perspectives. First, start by understanding the definition of the digital marketing environment, then introduce the definition of digital marketing communication and understand the meaning of digital marketing communication, to explain the definition of the brand and why it is important to manage brand awareness. Finally, to know its relations to digital marketing strategies.

2.1 The digital marketing environment.

For company marketers before designing or exploring a digital marketing strategy, identifying, and understanding the macro and micro-environments have a very important impact on the organization's decision-making and execution. This section introduces the identification of major digital marketing participants and their mutual influence in the macro and micro-environments.

The larger operational context of a company includes a digital marketing environment, and how they participate and create relationships in their target markets. The two major elements are related to the digital marketing environment: Macro-environment
Micro-environment. (Chaffey, 2015).

The digital macro-environment and the economic factor of the PESTEL model, do not explicitly include ecological factors and its influences. Nevertheless, the ecological factor of the digital macro-environment does impact all the organizations in the market. (Chaffey, 2015)

The digital micro-environment refers to the kind interactions, relations and influences between the key players (suppliers, competitors, intermediaries, and customers) in the market. (Chaffey, 2015). The micro-environment directly impacts the business operation of the company. (Summer, 2021)

For company marketers it is very important to understand the macro and microenvironments before designing or exploring a digital marketing strategy, as it has a very important impact on the organization's decision-making and execution.

This can be done by explaining the six major factors of PESTEL business analysis tools. It is necessary to understand and analyze these factors in the macro-environment.

2.1.1 Explanation of the five forces of the PESTEL model

Within this section the PESTEL model is applied to digital marketing platforms, excluding the ecological/environmental factor.

Political force

The political force is related to the government's role in promoting e-commerce. The government's role in e-commerce can be regulation or some other type of restriction. Even political decisions can affect business, for instance human rights issues in relation to the internet and democracy. (Carme COLOMINA, 2021) (Claessens, 2015)

Economic force

The economic force from a classical perspective includes analysis of employment rates, currency interest rates, and market growth and so on. But in this thesis, it is taken from the perspective of how to enter the Chinese digital marketing market, the economic factors related to the influence of digital marketers in emerging markets. Among different economic variables, economic conditions can affect trade opportunities, consumer consumption and business performance, and have a very large impact on marketers and their plans. (Alex N. Ifezue, 2005) (Claessens, 2015)

Social force

The social force refers to the diverse changes in the use of a corporate presence in different digital communities and its cultures. For example, ethical concerns can affect the needs of the company to protect the safety and details of online privacy within services for consumers. (Claessens, 2015) (Prachi Juneja and Management Study Guide Content Team, Referred 2021)

Technological force

Marketers can create and develop new product opportunities and enter the target market through the integration of different digital platform channels. This new method, such as creating a new form of access platform and applications. (Claessens, 2015) (Prachi Juneja and Management Study Guide Content Team, Referred 2021)

Legal force

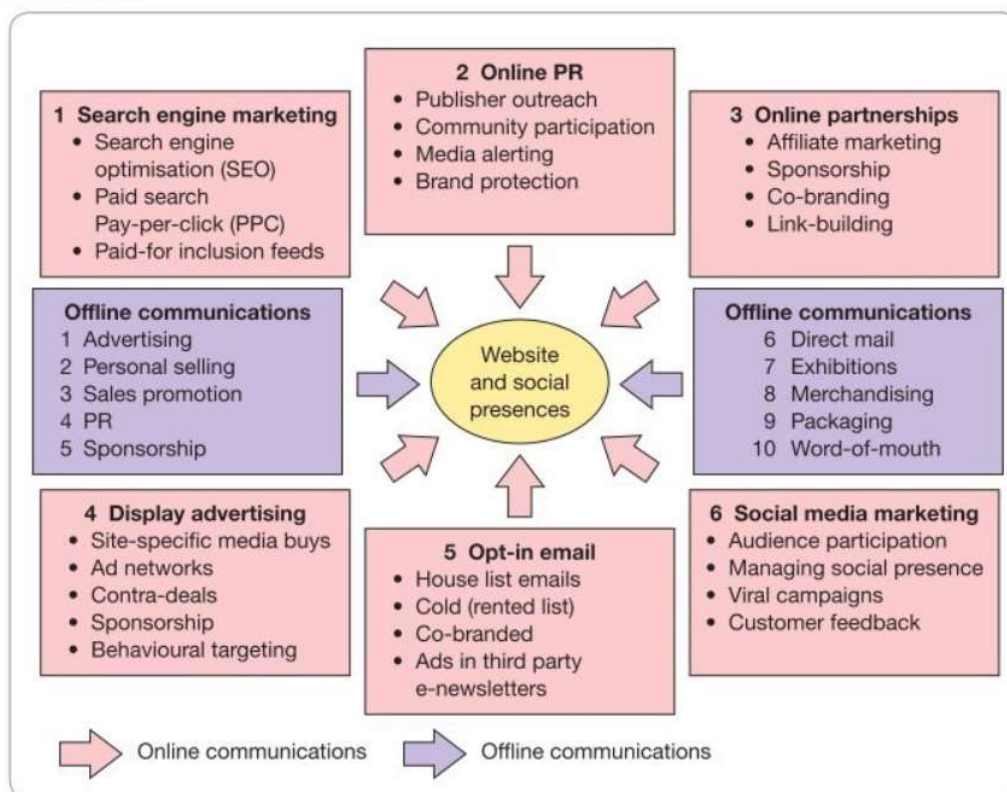
The legal force, include privacy and data protection, legal rules for process sales, taxation, and brand reputation protection laws. Which are especially import for e-commerce businesses or any business storing personal data. (Patel, Referred 19.12.2021) It is worth noting that when an innovative digital technology emerges, the necessary legal frameworks may not be clear or not even exist. This might even lead to marketing activities that are regarded as unethical. Marketers should in such cases proceed with caution, as unethical activities may affect the company's reputation and online consumers may be reduced. (Prachi Juneja and Management Study Guide Content Team, Referred 2021)

2.2 digital marketing communication

Social media marketing proposes to track or improve customer-to-customer interaction and participation through a digital platform. For instance, to encourage positive contact with the company brand. These interactions perhaps happen on the website, social media platform, or other third-party websites. (Chaffey, 2015)

For individual customers or business partners who need to communicate with the company, choosing different digital platform channels provides a role for mutual communication. For instance, the type and style of communication on social platforms is a very important part. When a company is conducting digital marketing communication, it needs to choose a relevant platform, and then encourage customers to participate in communication that helps promote the company's products or services, to achieve the effect of customer conversion and traffic guidance. (Chaffey, 2015).

Interactive communication is also the purpose of social media marketing so that the company can better understand customers and provide support, which is helpful to improve the company's brand awareness.



Source: Chaffey and Smith (2017)

Figure 5: Six categories of digital communication tools or media channels

2.3 Brand awareness

A corporate or product brand is an intangible asset. To build, expand, and develop the brand meaning are important and complex. Managing the brand, its identity, and successfully creating brand value is not easy for marketers. (Naresh K. Malhotra, Brand Meaning Management, 2015)

A unique brand association creates a memory that has a positive impact. (Keller, 1993) Within B2C business model, a good brand can enable and guide customers to make faster purchase decisions. (Davis et al.;Kuhn et al.;& van Riel et al., 2015)

However, for the B2B business model, brand awareness is a long-term journey. Companies not only build up relationships with their customers, but they are also better associated with stakeholders. For instance, suppliers, investors, or the community. (Iglesias et al., 2015) The brand has transferred from being a simple icon that identifies a product, to being a strategic asset and partnerships. (Ming Lim, 2015)

Brand management includes brand awareness, the company employees play an important fundamental role to development of the consumer-brand relationships. (Ind,1998) The more employees understand the brand, the more they share and live these brand values. (Ind, 2015) Sometimes, they can be part-time marketers (Gummesson,1991) or brand champions. (Mahnert and Torres,2007)

Brand managers must understand that brand relevance is a powerful concept. The sensitivity to market responses and innovation values enables help brand managers to become a winner in a difficult market environment. (Aaker, 2011)

2.4 Inbound marketing

Inbound marketing creates value content or experiences for customers that are relevant to them. This is a customized business method for attracting audiences. It won't interrupt the target audiences compared to other business methods that are based on outbound marketing. (Hubspot, 2021). In general, consumers search for information to fulfill their needs through content searches and might find it through social media marketing. To question on how to meet the target audience's needs is the point of inbound marketing. (Chaffey, 2015).

2.5 Search engine marketing

Search engines, such as Google, can be influenced to give higher website ranking through Search Engine Optimization (SEO), or be paid to show advertising (pay-per-click). This combined is called Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and helps the marketers to improve brand awareness using optimal marketing strategies by ensuring consumers can more easily find products. (Chaffey, Dave, ja Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

3 MATERIAL DESCRIPTION AND ANALYZES

This chapter will combine the digital marketing environment that appeared in the second chapter as the basis, analyze the literature and data theory, and separately describe the digital marketing environment in Finland and China.

3.1 Finnish SME business current environment

Finland is a member of the European Union, and various business activities are in a general environment based on EU regulations and standards. In Finland, SMEs are defined as a company that has fewer than 250 employees, and a yearly turnover of not more than 50 million Euro (40 million Euro before 2003). Or the yearly balance sheet valuation does not exceed 43 million Euro (27 million Euro before 2003). (Tilastokeskus, 2021).

3.2 Main social media platform in Finland

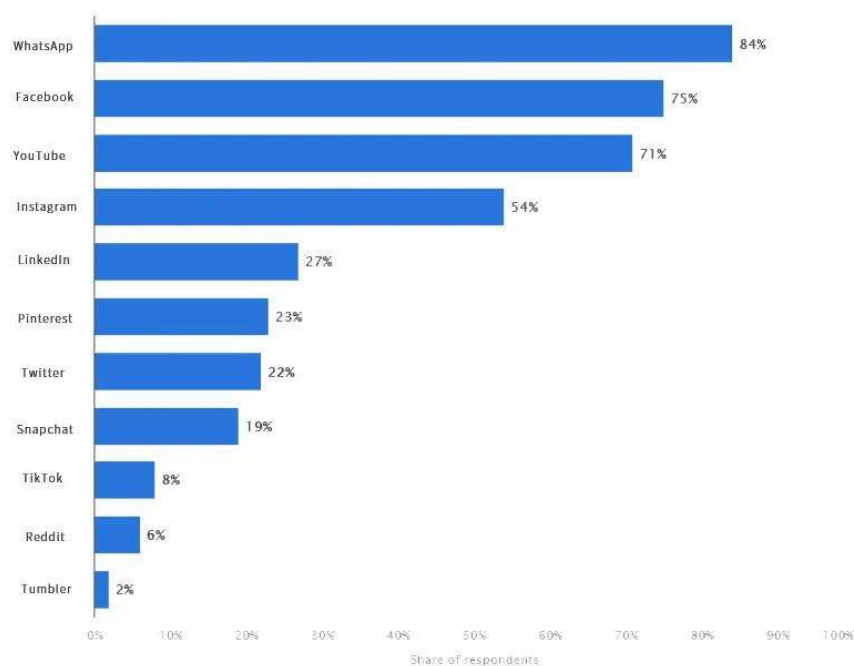


Figure 6: Social media platform usage preferences of Finnish consumers in 2020 (Statista, 2021)

According to the year 2020 of the most used social media in Finland, the top three social media platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube, were each preferred by over 70% of the respondents This shows that western social media platform is

quite America-centric. In 2019, the most common reason (80%) for Finnish people to use Facebook, was driven by the need to keep in contact with friends and family. (Clausnitzer, 2021)

Finland has a high rate of social media usage. As of January 2021, Finland has 4.46 million social media users, an equivalent to 80.4% of the total population. Between 2020 and 2021, the number of social media users in Finland increased by 250,000 (+6.1%). The main social media platform in Finland is WhatsApp, followed by Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, and others.

3.3 Current Chinese digital marketing environment

3.3.1 The government's positive attitude towards digital trade

China, the United States, and the European Union all want to regulate Big Tech in some way or another, each for their own reasons.

The digital economy is an important driving force for economic development. According to the 2020 Chinese Digital Trade Development Report issued by the National Industrial Information Security Development Research Center; we can see that the Chinese government attaches great importance to digital trade to promote economic development. The report pointed out that, at present, Chinese digital trade is entering a new stage of rapid development. According to estimates in 2019, China's digital trade import and export reached 1.4 trillion RMB, which saw a year-on-year increase of 19.0%, and accounting for 25.6% of the overall service trade. (Overseas, 2020)

The scale of the digital economy has been grown rapidly already for a long period of

time, along with China's economic and social development. During the epidemic, it has maintained a three-fold growth rate, and its proportion of GDP has also increased.



Figure 7: The scale of China's digital economy from 2016 to 2020 (Luyao, 2021)
(Green line) Digital economy size in green (Trillion RMB)
(Blue line) Digital economy % of Chinese GDP

3.3.2 Chinese social media is still a social force

At present, in China's digital macro environment, the factors of social power are vividly displayed on China's social media. Imagine the power and effect of traditional paper media on social influence. The dissemination of modern digital technology information has far exceeded people's imagination.

In China, for the release of social media information content, a single platform is not only used by governments and social organizations to release official content, but many companies will also use the platform's comprehensive functional products and services.

Sometimes the platform has different functions for different industries, and the trend of multi-functionality on the same platform is obvious. These functions are used for shopping, humble-bragging, celebrity gossiping, and release the other standard nonpolitical functions. Based on these functions, Chinese social media still have the right to set a social agenda, and sometimes this agenda can force the authorities to adopt a series of behavior. (stuff, 2021)The specific main platform functions will be introduced in following down of this chapter.

3.3.3 Legal force

Data protection is very common in multinational companies. In history, PRC has of lack of international collaboration for data protection. In 2020, the critical data breach leakage incidents not only caused serious losses of data assets to Chinese enterprises but also brought huge social impacts in China. Since there is no comprehensive data protection supervision agency, the coordination of data protection supervision has been reduced in China. However, China's internal data protection is still in a good position among countries in the world. (Bullock, 2016) (Uxsino, 2020)

China has been promoting the development of cloud services. The main domestic data center is an important data center, and its role is to further promote the development of domestic and foreign cloud service markets. (Uxsino, 2020)

The major players of Chinese e-commerce generally adhere to high standards and strictly abide by data protection regulations. Doing so can not only increase core competitiveness, but also leave competitors behind. However, due to the large area of targeting China's different territories, as different regulations in different regions have increased the complexities of compliance. (Uxsino, 2020)

3.3.4 Cybersecurity law and personal information protection law

Cybersecurity risk and personal information protection is a common problem. The protection of data security and information leakage is not only the primary national security responsibility of all countries in the world, but also the purpose of supervision and reduction of criminal behavior. In 2016, Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China is recognized as a basic law. It was implemented in June. 2017. This is the law on the top of pyramid-structured legislation on cybersecurity. (Lawinfochina, 2016) China published the Personal Information Protection Law (Draft) ("PIPL") for public consultation on 21 October 2020. This is the first legal framework to address personal information protection in China. (Yau, 2021) (Bingna Guo, 2021)

For companies doing cross-border business in China, it has been determined that the new Chinese Personal Information Protection Law ("PIPL") will be officially implemented on November 1, 2021. PIPL will work with the "Cyber Security Law" ("CSL") and "Data Security Law" ("DSL") to establish a broader regulatory framework to manage China's network security and data privacy protection. (Bingna Guo, 2021) Its entry into force, when they process or use personal information in China, will have a significant impact on the data compliance practices of domestic and multinational companies.

3.3.5 China's current mainstream social media platform marketing trends

According to the micro of digital marketing environment (Figure 4), the center of the organization needs four key actors to participate and operate in the marketing: Suppliers, Competitors, intermediaries, and customers. In the following sections, the thesis not only elaborates on the current mainstream digital platform tools from the perspective of Chinese marketers but also delves into one of popular Chinese strategic

marketing methods.

When a company enters a new market and uses a lower-cost digital platform to promote its products or services, it must first understand the platforms used by competitors and peers. Similarly, when Finnish companies want to enter the Chinese market, it is necessary to understand China's digital platforms. So, how do Chinese marketers create brand awareness in the Chinese market?

3.3.6 Chinese KOL marketing strategy

KOL refers to Key Opinion Leaders in China and has the same meaning as a social media influencer as western countries. In recent times of China, KOL marketing has been become very popular among Chinese marketers. A KOL marketing strategy refers to the partnership between a brand and one or more KOLs. They use social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book, referred chapter 3.4.4) to publish their product and brand content in cooperation with key opinion leaders.

Key opinion leaders have become major disseminators of product information, and the content they publish, directly affects consumers' purchasing decisions. According to the 2019 China KOL Marketing Strategy White Paper released by iResearch (Iresearchchina, 2019). In such a strategic environment, diversified advertising and targeted users on Chinese social media platforms pose a very big challenge for Finnish marketers.

China's size and diversified local cultural create such obstacles. Furthermore, not every mainstream Chinese social platform has English language support, which is the largest obstacle for Finnish marketers. Mandarin is commonly used for Chinese web search and content browsing. English content is not selected for within local search

algorithms at all. It is therefore recommended to provide content in Mandarin and hire professional translators (Vlasenko, n.d).

Finnish companies planning to enter the China market, need to understand KOL marketing, and how this may be different from social media influencer strategies used in Finland. KOL marketing, or influencer marketing, is a soft-selling word of mouth-based strategy with influencers as the communicator between a brand and its target audience. A KOL differs from western social media influencers in that they are specifically hired to produce certain content, whereas with western social media influencing it is more often about enhancing content these influencers are already producing. (agency, Referred 20.12.2021)

Working with KOLs can be one of the best methods for promoting a new product or service in China. (Lui, N) Finnish companies can cooperate with influencers to increase brand awareness and achieve business growth.

Within the Chinese B2B industry, many Chinese B2B KOLs are authoritative and well-known experts. (Hanni, 2021) It is very common for them to have millions of fans. The most common thing for Chinese companies in KOL marketing is to encourage users to generate content or pay these KOLs to use their promotional materials or share to create posts. The content produced by users usually involves KOLs to create other forms of content to promote the company's brand. (Geysler, 2021)

When the B2B Finnish companies promote their brands in China, they can reach audiences more accurately by cooperation with Chinese professional KOLs. Influential Chinese KOLs can share or forward links to brand content through various Chinese social platforms, such as the Finnish company's own website. This not only plays a role in spreading the company's brand, but also allows Chinese corporate users to get interested in Finnish companies and their products. This kind of conversion

using inbound marketing, is the most effective for Finnish companies to generate sales leads. The Finnish company can track Chinese visitors to their brand website for each KOL to understand interest in their products or services. This can achieve the purpose of continuously improving the business targets and brand awareness of the enterprise. For Chinese people who do not understand Finnish company information at all, by clicking on the number of local websites, the exposure of the company's brand can be increased, and visitors' awareness of the company's brand can be improved.

In the B2C industry in China, influencer marketing is a very mainstream method. (Azoya, 2017) Marketers are using the power of KOLs on various social media platforms in China to achieve various purposes for corporate brand promotion. However, to find the right Chinese KOLs to cooperate with the brand image of your company, you must have a certain understanding of the mainstream Chinese platforms for KOLs to connect and cooperate.

3.4 Chinese mainstream platform and data

The different social media platforms and Apps support people's needs. The functionality of each platform is not only fulfilling the individual needs but also can assist the firm to develop its brand influence, brand awareness, communication with the customer and serve the customer.

Whether in China or Finland, when marketers are engaged in digital marketing, their marketing channels are generally divided into social media marketing, video advertising, and influencer marketing, Email Marketing, Bulk SMS, and display/mobile. For many brands that want to enter the Chinese market, social media is considered an important tool for connecting brands and Chinese consumers. (Eva Li, 2020) Differences in the understanding of Chinese culture when promoting corporate

brands. Digital media marketers at Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises mainly just use social media to communicate with their audiences, but in China, the marketing strategy is mainly based on the strategy of collaboration and cooperation with major KOLs on mainstream platforms to promote or publish advertisements. At present, the most popular format is to use short video formats (e.g., TikTok) of mainstream platforms for output. (Bennehard, 2020)

3.4.1 WeChat

WeChat is an instant messaging software launched by Tencent in China on January 21, 2011. WeChat is a Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media, and mobile payment app by Tencent.

According to Tencent's 2020 report, the monthly active users of WeChat reached 1.2 billion. This figure shows that it is currently the largest social media platform in China. According to related reports, WeChat has almost become the main contact method in China, and its application surpasses traditional telephone and SMS contact methods. Of course, this is due to WeChat's multi-functional application function. For instance, WeChat based payments are very common even in brick-and-mortar shops. Therefore, for anyone who wants to do business in China, downloading WeChat is the gateway to China. (Zhu, 2021) So for marketers, the WeChat is a cross-platform communication tool. It is very effective for directly establishing contact with partners and consumers.

According to the latest data as of 2021, the number of Tencent WeChat active accounts has been steadily increasing. In the second quarter of 2021, WeChat's monthly active users exceeded 1.25 billion, from all age groups. (Thomala, statista, 2021).



Figure 8: Number of monthly active WeChat users from 2nd quarter 2011 to 2nd quarter 2021(in millions) (Thomala, statista, 2021).

3.4.2 Douyin (TikTok)

TikTok Short Video is a social app with short videos that can be viewed on smartphones. It is created and operated by the Chinese company ByteDance. ByteDance released this app in China in the September of 2016. The app began releasing outside of China in September of 2017, where it runs under the name TikTok. Short-form videos are mean users can record 15 seconds to 1-2 minute or longer videos. The app also can upload photos too.

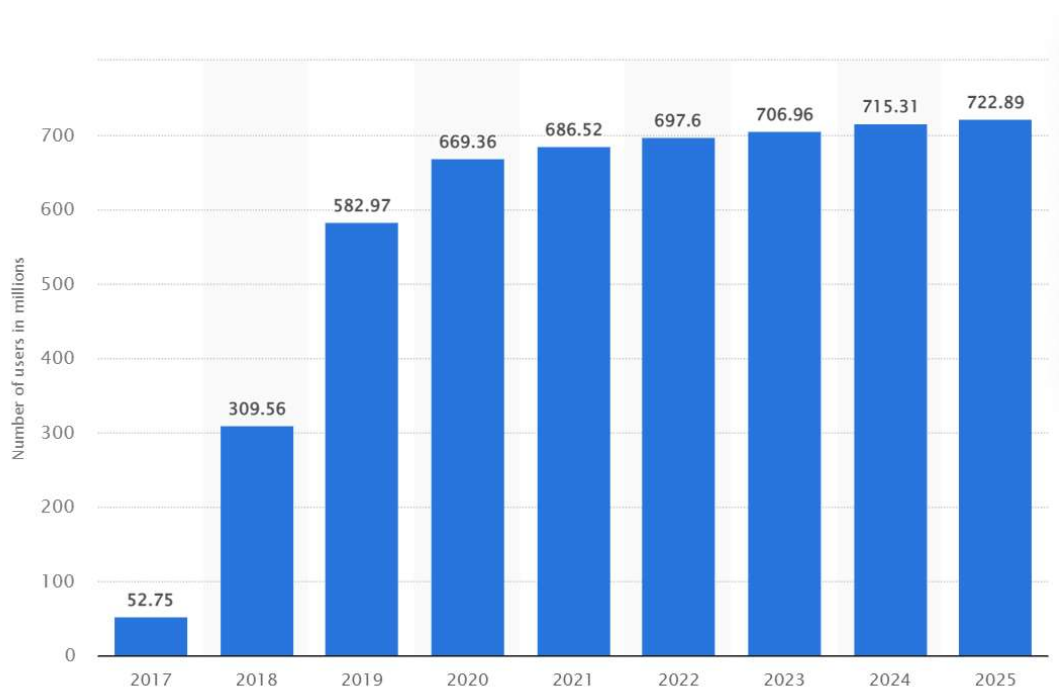


Figure 9: Forecast of the number of TikTok users in China from 2017 to 2025(in millions). (Degenhard, 2021)

According to the latest data of Statista, in 2021, the number of TikTok users in China will be approximately 686.52 million. By 2025, the number of TikTok users in China is expected to increase to 722.89 million. User data is estimated by considering company documents or news materials, secondary research, application downloads, and traffic data. They refer to the average number of monthly active users over a period time, and only count multiple accounts once per person. Including users of sister app Douyin (TikTok) and users of Musical.ly (before it was merged into TikTok in 2018) (Degenhard, statista, 2021)

In Chinese short video industry, Douyin (TikTok) is one of the most popular video platforms in China, alike YouTube. According to QuestMobile, the number of monthly active Douyin (TikTok) users reached 600 million. The average monthly usage time per capita is 1569 minutes or 26,6 hours. Finnish companies that want to

do marketing in the Chinese market, Douyin (TikTok) provides a wide range of opportunities for brands in the market. (daxueconsulting, 2020).

For users of different ages, Douyin (TikTok) also covers almost all age groups. Over 50% of users are Chinese young and middle-aged of all age groups. the age from 25 to 35 years old. The young adults who have just grown up to the main employment group, the age from 19 to 25 years old and from 25 to 30 years old, the total also exceeds 50% of whole groups. This is shows marketing on Douyin (TikTok) enables brands to integrate e-commerce. (daxueconsulting, 2020)

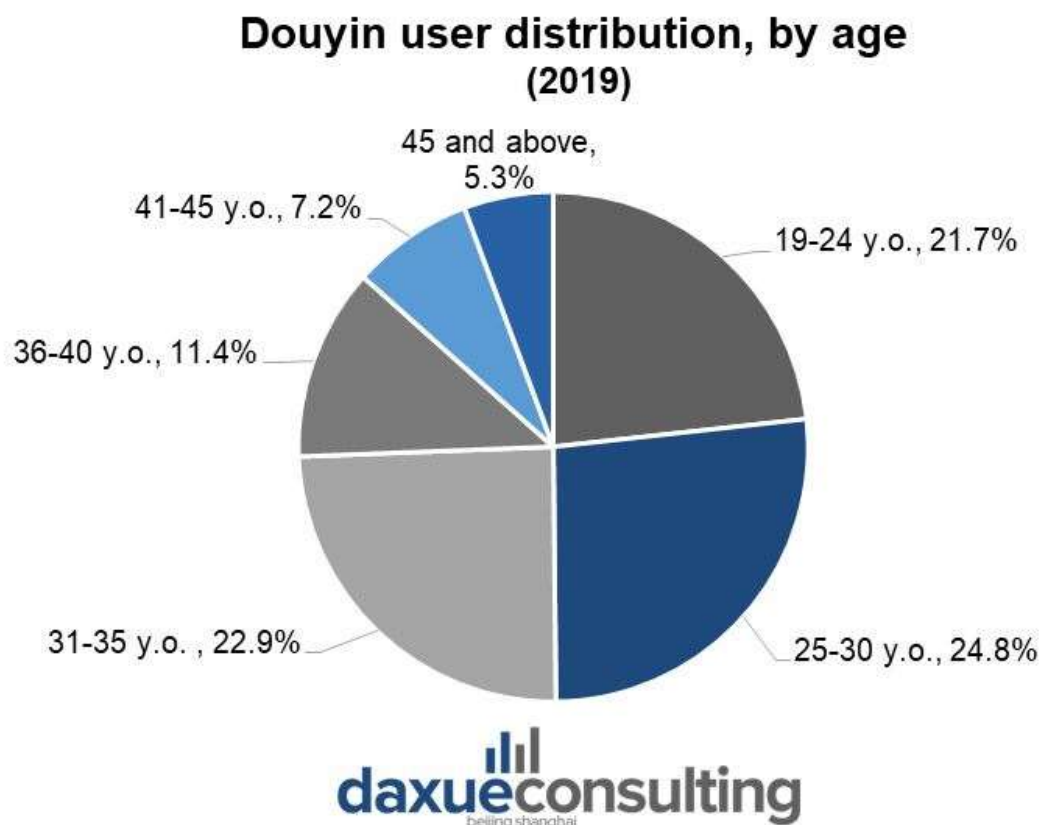


Figure 10: Douyin (TikTok) user distribution, by age (2019) (daxueconsulting, 2020)

3.4.3 TouTiao

TouTiao is a general information and news platform. This platform is another popular product from the ByteDance company in China too. It was released in 2012. As of June 2019, TouTiao's monthly active users are 200 million. According to the data, this number is still growing.

TouTiao has multiple distribution methods including recommendation engine, search engine, following subscription, and content operation.

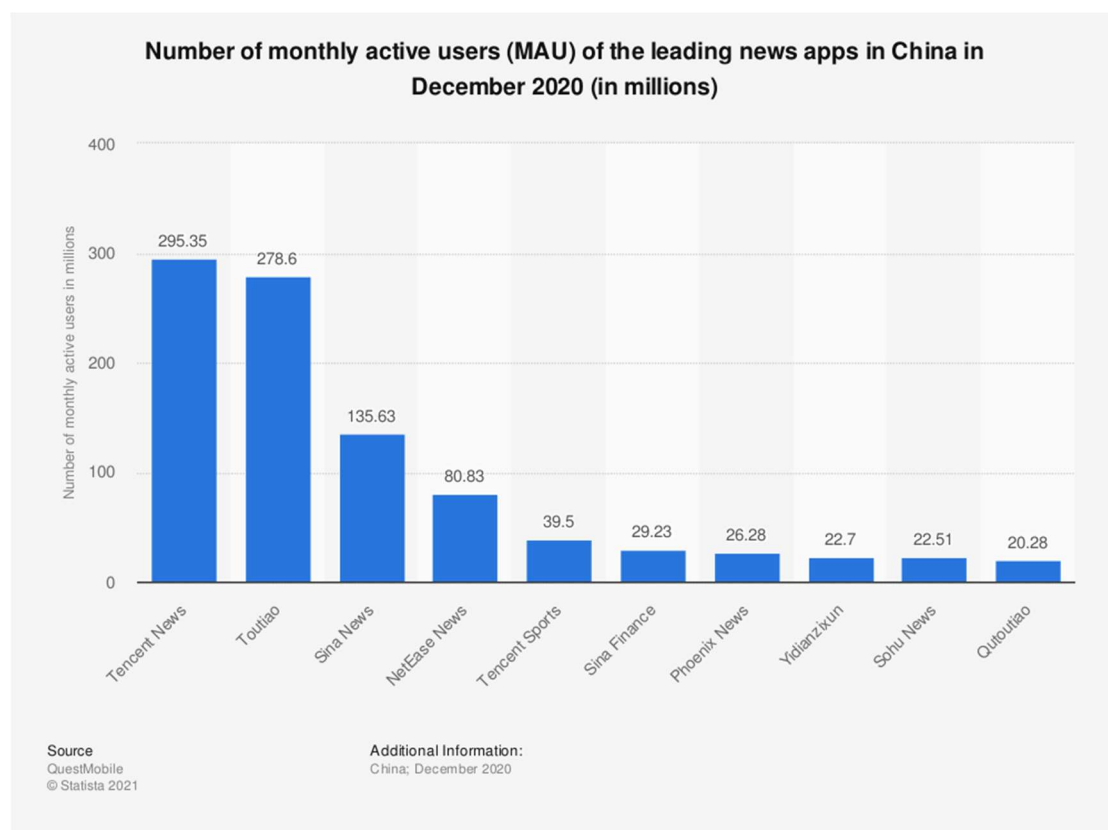


Figure 11: Number of monthly active user (MAU) of the leading news apps in China in December 2020 (in millions) (Smith, 2021)

3.4.4 Little Red Book

Little Red Book (In the Chinese language: Xiaohongshu) is a lifestyle platform and consumption decision-making portal alike Instagram and released in 2013. As of October 2019, the number of monthly active users of Little Red Book has exceeded 100 million, 70% of which are post-90s, and continue to grow rapidly. (Xiaohongshu, n.d)

Little Red book is a cross-border e-commerce platform, the feature of most known for useful content sharing stories, pictures, and videos. Recently, with more than 300 million registered users and a market capitalization of more than \$3 billion, it has officially become a "unicorn company". (marketingtochina.com, 2021)

In China, counterfeit products are still a problem in e-commerce. In the online cross-border beauty industry, the sharing and word-of-mouth of KOLs on the Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) platform are very influential, and this influence has a very large penetration. Sometimes a certain KOLs can directly lead to group buying behavior. It has changed decision-making dramatically. Based on the large number of users of Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) and compared with other platforms, (opp2 W. o., 2021) Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) has surpassed other platforms in building customer trust and reputation for mid-to high-end products and cross-border e-commerce platforms. (melcher, 2020)

On the Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) platform, the proportion of female users greatly exceeds the proportion of male users. This ratio is also obvious in comparison with the gender of users on other social platforms. Refer to Figure 9 data, emergence of this phenomenon, for Finnish corporate marketing decision makers in the consumer beauty industry who want to seek to target the younger generation of women in China, it is undoubtedly very attractive to promote product brands on the Xiaohongshu (Little

Red Book) platform. According to literature references, this platform has more than 100 million users who create videos and picture notes, and nearly 90% are women, most of whom are between 18 and 34 years old. (Wang, campaignasia, 2021)

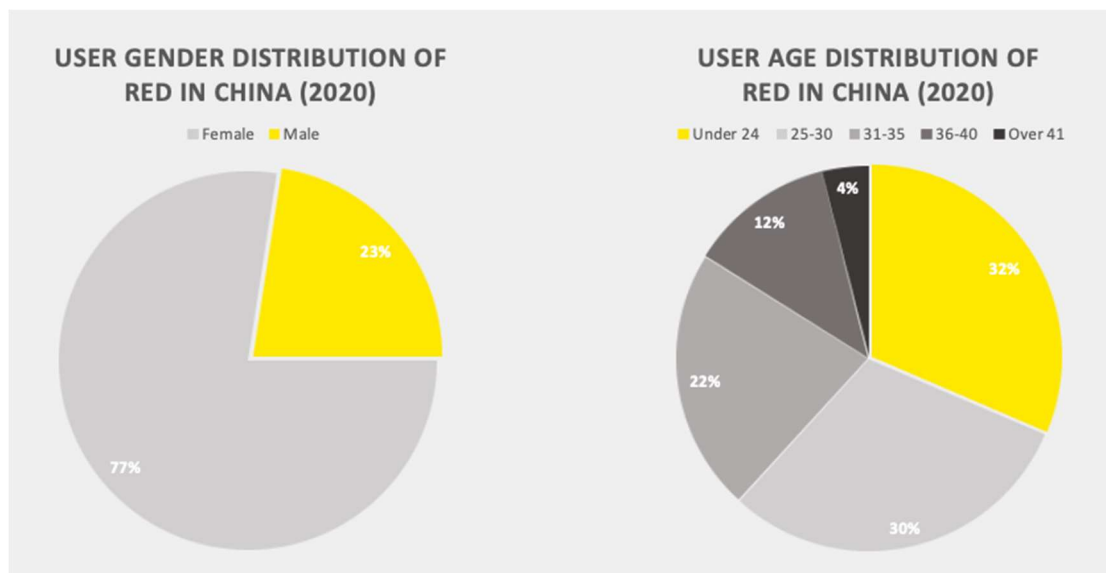


Figure 12: User gender distribution of little red book in China (iresearch, 2020)

3.4.5 Sina Weibo

Sina Weibo is Chinese micro-blogging platform, alike Twitter, established in 2009. Weibo is the second most popular social media in China, with nearly 500 million users. (Asiapacdigital, 2021)

Sina Weibo is one of the few Chinese social media platforms with its own search engine. Like Google search engine marketing, marketers can make posts appear at the top of Sina Weibo search results through paid keyword advertising. If the company has a higher budget, you can consider using this marketing model to achieve higher exposure.

Compared with WeChat, Sina Weibo has more practical channels, including

commenting, music, live broadcasting, and e-commerce. The platform has achieved substantial growth thanks to its multimedia content consumption, and the popularity of short videos. (David, 2020)

As of the second quarter of 2021, the monthly active users of Sina Weibo were approximately 566 million, an increase of 43 million over the same period last year. The Chinese version of Twitter, launched in 2009, has become China's leading Weibo website. Sina Weibo users can also upload pictures, gifs and videos in their posts. (Thomala, statista, 2021)



Figure 13: Number of monthly active users of Sina Weibo from 1st quarter of 2018 to 2nd quarter of 2021(in millions) (Thomala, statista, 2021)

3.5 Digital platform marketing features

After studying the above-mentioned current mainstream social media platforms, it is

not difficult to say that they all have main characteristics when providing services, efficient communication, and precise search. For example, the WeChat platform that replaces traditional communication methods with efficient and timely point-to-point communication. Its leading position advantage is that because it belongs to Alibaba, the Alibaba Group started its business as China's online purchase e-commerce platform Taobao, which is like eBay. Many users in

the early stages of WeChat came from Alibaba Group. So far, whether it is an individual or a company, as a means of contact, online communication, social communication, for marketers, WeChat account as a communication status in the Chinese market is currently still very important.

Sina Weibo can be understood as China's Twitter, this Micro-blogging platform also has an open ecosystem. It means that people do not need necessarily to follow an account to see the content. Usually, content needs to be short or limited to 150-character posts. Sina Weibo offers Fan Tunnel Posts and Searches Result advertising function. It's worth noting that some external links can be restricted, but Alibaba e-commerce platforms are given free rein in terms of promotion. This is because Alibaba owns more than a third of the shares in the Sina Weibo platform (marketingtochina, 2021)

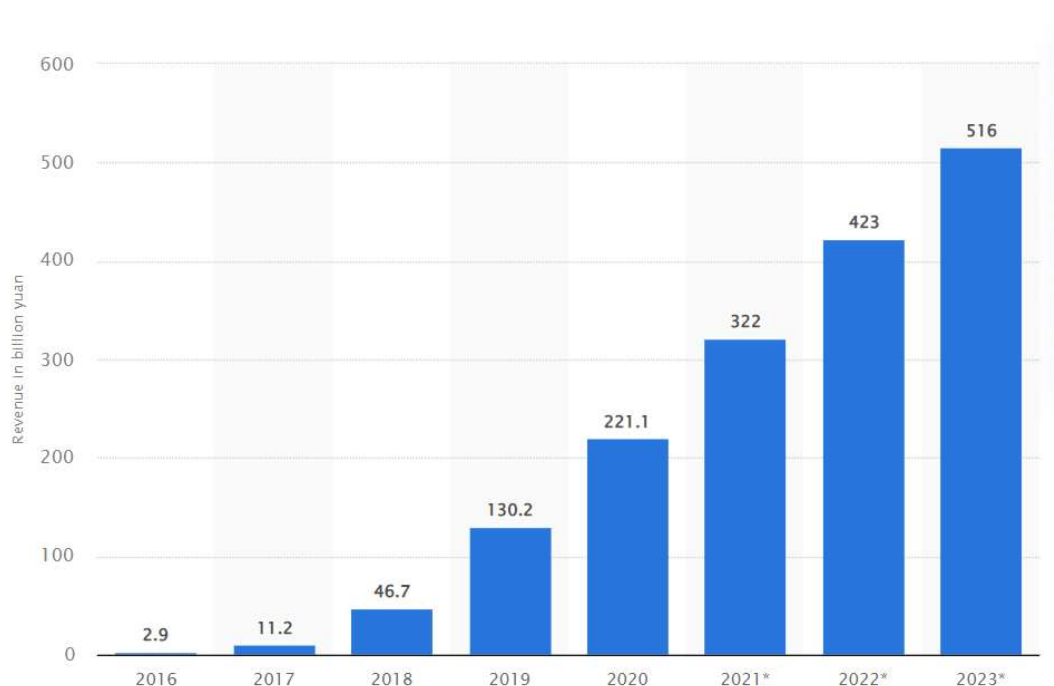


Figure 14: The market size of online short video in China 2016-2023 (RMB in billion) (Thomala, Lai Lin, 2021)

Before the 2019 COVID-19 pandemic, their user base and popularity were already well-known in China. Until today, data from various parties show that because people cannot go out in isolation at home, their user activity and user volume have significantly increased. Especially on the Douyin (TikTok) platform, which is dominated by short videos, the author observed that the information browsing functions of almost all social media platforms appear in the form of short and small videos. (Thomala, Lai Lin, 2021) This phenomenon is a red ocean business strategy, Currently, this strategy exists for the competing of all he industries today. (launch-marketing, 2020) Originally, WeChat had some functions in the form of a text creation platform as a communication tool to connect companies and people, but now it has become a tool in the form of creating video content.

The social sharing mode of the Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) platform (Instagram

equivalent), the accumulated users in the early stage are mainly users sharing and recommending mainly mid-to-high-end brands, which has established a very good user stickiness. There was a demand for many Chinese consumers to let foreign buyers buy duty-free products on their behalf. Under the influence of the new crown virus epidemic, such demand has allowed cross-border e-commerce companies to have more exports to display their products. Because the user stickiness is very good, most of the high-value products are the main source of information for Chinese consumers before making purchase decisions.

Additionally, under the influence of the long-term epidemic, the import and export business of various countries has been severely affected. Global logistics is also affected. For cross-border e-commerce, it is undoubtedly the hardest hit. As a result, under the government's policy advocacy, Chinese marketers have seen a trend of replacing overseas products with the sales of many mid-to-high-end domestic products. On Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book), many sharers of domestic products have appeared, and the needs of users in this part have been greatly satisfied. So that Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) has become a unicorn in the capital market in the past two years. (Wang, campaignasia, 2021)

All in all, the strategy of setting up Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book)'s official account and cooperating with KOLs on Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book)'s platform can not only improve the brand's credibility in the Chinese market, but also increase its visibility, and it can also establish a proven verification compared with other Chinese social platforms. The cost of the official account of Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) is also lower. (asiapadigital, 2021)

From the technical point of view of each digital platform, because ByteDance's core technology is the algorithm mechanism in the background. This technology is also fully applied to Douyin (TikTok) and TouTiao platforms.

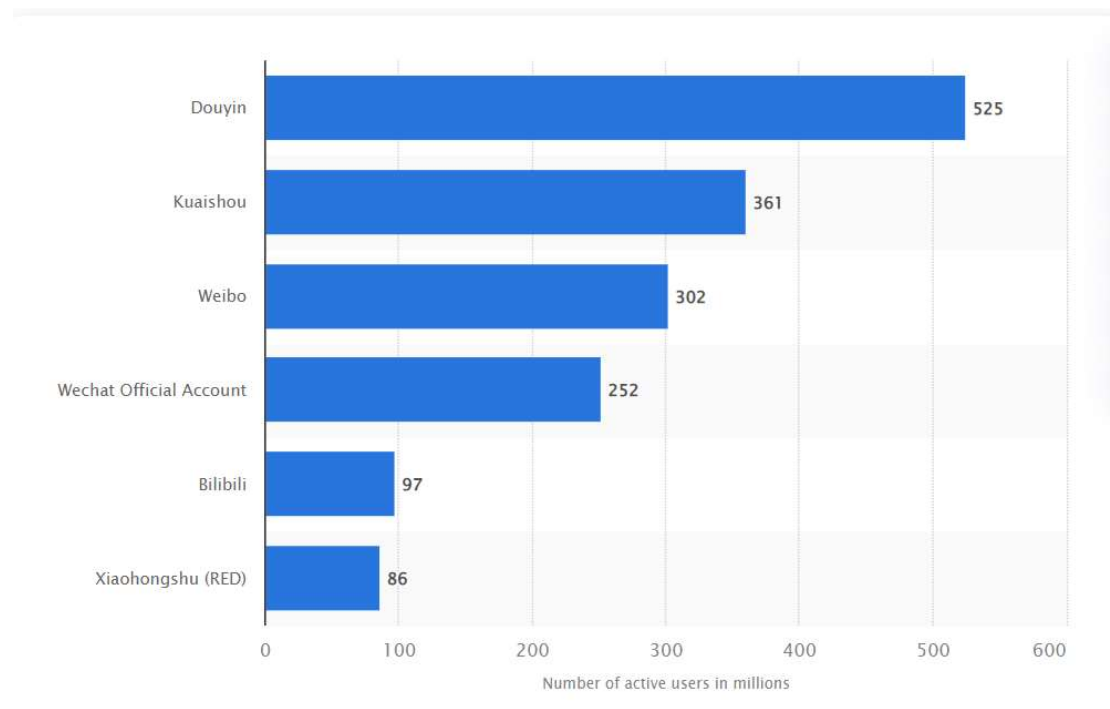


Figure 15: Number of active users attracted by top-tier Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in China as of April 2021, by platform (Thomala, statista, 2021)

For all Douyin (TikTok) users, any video you make, no matter the quality is good or bad, will have a playback volume after it is released, from tens to thousands. This is called call t traffic pool in China, and Douyin (TikTok) will assign a traffic pool to each person working on the work according to the algorithm. After that, Douyin (TikTok) decides whether to push your work to more people based on your performance in this traffic pool, or to stop there. (opp2, 2020) As of April 2021, the top KOLs on Douyin (TikTok) have attracted approximately 525 million active users in China for the digital platform and KOLs aspect. (Thomala, statista, 2021)

Therefore, TouTiao of ByteDance platform also provides personalized news recommendations based on algorithm technology. TouTiao's article recommendation mechanism is a personalized recommendation mechanism to maximize the accuracy of the push and try to ensure that the right articles are recommended to he right people.

Personalized recommendation is not a recommendation by a machine to a user, but a recommendation between users. It seems very simple, but in fact it requires mining and analysis based on massive user behavior data. (Wanqiu, 2021)

Chinese marketers need to establish visibility and trust through search engines when a new brand enter to the Chinese market. For the search engine provided by the Sina Weibo platform, SEO is one of the core advantages of marketing strategy, because people use the search engine not to order adverts, but to look at its own content. (huihui, 2015) According to reference, taking Sina Weibo as an example, on average, more than 50% of page views come from Sina Weibo's search tools. (PARKLU, 2018) Currently, the best social media platforms for search engine optimization in China are Weibo and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book).

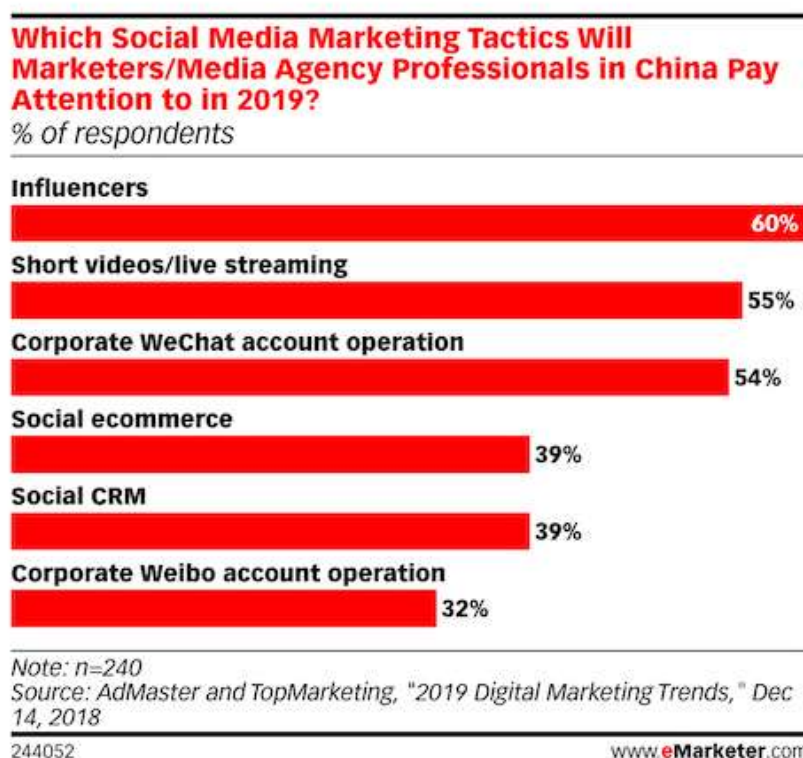


Figure 16: Which social media marketing tactics will marketers/Media agency professionals in China pay attention to in 2019. (D.Garrison, 2019)

All in all, when Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises plan to enter the Chinese market, when marketers want to use Chinese social media for company brand promotion, they should first choose mainstream platforms to reach audiences in the Chinese market, and then choose different platforms according to different audiences. Different mechanisms and attributes and KOL cooperative marketing, precise audience. If when users have high-quality interactions with brands on social media, it will be easier to attract private domain traffic from Chinese audiences and ultimately into deeper connections between marketers and customers. (D.Garrison, 2019) Of course, in the competition among peers, especially compared with the strength of the Finnish companies of large consortia, the cost of improving the brand awareness of the audience in the Chinese market is even lower.

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Major finding

The value of this thesis is that most Finnish SMEs do not have many opportunities to directly contact potential business partners or customers in China. In other words, some of them may have been indirectly learning about Chinese market trends through intermediary companies or various other channels. But for small and medium-sized enterprise marketers, that understanding is not likely enough.

Through a literature-based theoretical framework of the marketing environment, this thesis conducts research and analysis on the digital environment of China and Finland and takes that perspective from the macro into the micro. The purpose is to find valuable information and insights into effective marketing strategy models for

marketers of Finnish SMEs. Finnish SMEs use Chinese social platforms to enter the Chinese market to better enhance their brand awareness.

The research takes on the problem of converting audience traffic to local web pages and using that to increase corporate brand awareness. To achieve this the author took platform marketing and six types of micro-digital communication tools and channels as the theoretical basis (Figure 2). Both inbound and Search engine marketing were taken into the discussion of the feasibility of using social platforms in the micro-environment within China.

Five factors of the six factors in the PESTEL model used in the research process are defined as oriented learning. The author found that these factors are inseparable from the company and organization in the micro-environment. Some forces are even interoperable within marketing operations.

Therefore, to help marketers of Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises to better understand the current digital marketing trends in China. At the micro level, the author studied second-hand data such as the market share of China's mainstream social platforms and the number of users from the perspective of Chinese marketers. According to these data analysis reports, the author found that the characteristics of Finnish social platform users on the platform are quite different from those of Chinese users. Taking the reasons for using the platform as an example, Finns prefer to use the Facebook platform to contact family and friends. The Chinese are more willing to use the WeChat platform, especially as it allows for easy payments both online and in brick-and-mortar stores.

There are many forms of digital marketing operations in China and in the West. After consulting many online articles, most of these reports and insights provided by consulting companies from the perspective of management. According to the various

audiences of different platforms, using KOL and platform cooperation are currently the most popular marketing strategy for Chinese marketers. Therefore, the author found that this marketing strategy is suitable for most business models. (D.Garrison, 2019) One of the most effective ways to promote your product, brand or business in China is to become a KOL "partner". (IOBBI, 2020) By establishing connections with KOLs, brands can access their audiences and networks. This means that their recommendations will generate clicks, increase social media exposure, and motivate people to buy your product or service. (IOBBI, 2020)

When KOLs publish different forms of content on different platforms, they must choose a suitable approach. By discovering the trends and characteristics of current mainstream platforms in China, the trend of publishing in the form of short videos continues to expand.

This thesis found that the views of creating meaningful connections are challenging for Finnish companies that enter the Chinese market to increase brand awareness. Apart from language and common cross-culture barriers, from the perspective of marketers, understanding the development of digital technology will also provide more opportunities in the future.

4.2 Future search

In this thesis, the author does not discuss the cross-cultural perspective on how Finnish SMEs could overcome language barriers to enter the Chinese market. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that this is a major obstacle. But digital platform technology can provide possibilities. The advantage of the digital platform is that through the improvement of technology, people from different countries can communicate and link together. For example, almost all mainstream Chinese digital platforms have the possibility to log in to the English version. But from the

perspective of how to operate the local area and improve brand awareness, all current social platforms in China have restrictions on the functional settings of content. The purpose of doing so is very complicated, and it is closely related to several major factors in the macro-environment. The advice for learners who wish to continue to study Chinese digital platforms in the future is to always pay attention to the macro policy and legal guidance. When making decisions in any marketing operation strategy, more consideration should be given to local marketers' operations, audience analysis, and how to circumvent the risk of digital information security law. Observing the personal information protection law should reduce the risk of complexity in the brand environment of China's marketing communication.

This thesis mentions the background information of the platform's background technology. For marketing strategy makers, improving brand awareness and strengthening more precise marketing operations in the future, optimizing the algorithm mechanism and operational modes of the search platforms are also future directions that are worth studying.

The author recommended that further research studies the social media platform operational rules, algorithmic mechanisms background, and Chinese digital policy and legal guidance.

Overall, future research may help any marketing strategy lead to reduce the customer purchase decision process Payments risk can be reduced so that the final transaction process happens smoothly and successfully.

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