The Patterns of Using Social Media
By The ‘New’ Chinese Tourists

Bachelor Thesis for Obtaining the Degree
Bachelor of Business Administration in
Tourism and Hospitality Management

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Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor’s Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

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Abstract

The enormous increase of Chinese outbound tourists traveling overseas has drawn much attention in the tourism industry. Instead of traditional Chinese tourist groups, a rising number of tourists prefer to travel differently. Furthermore, it has become common to use social media in relation to traveling to collect information and knowledge. Yet the form of social media in China is completely different from the one in western countries. This research attempts to show patterns of social media usage by the ‘new’ Chinese tourists when traveling aboard. For the international tourism industry, it is imperative to understand the social media usage patterns, which are not based on the Western environment, culture, or values. This paper employs both structured interviews and a survey to present comprehensive results, which conclude that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists would use some different social media platforms more actively before and after their trips as opposed to during their trips. In particular, the ‘new’ Chinese tourists will behave as ‘Reader’ before the trips and ‘Opinionated Users’ after the trips, and they would certainly appreciate more authentic information written by ‘Travel Experts’ or articles posted on ‘Travel Forums’. The objective of this paper is to offer the opportunity for Western destinations and international tourism service organizations to target the ‘new’ Chinese tourists more explicitly and to conduct more effective online marketing.
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List of Abbreviations

CITM – Chinese International Travel Monitor
CNTA – Chinese National Tourism Administration
ETC – European Travel Commission
eWOM – Electronic Word-of-mouth
NCT – New Chinese Tourists
UGC – User Generated Content
UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organization
1. Introduction

The continuous increase of Chinese outbound tourists traveling abroad has recently drawn considerable attention in the international tourism industry (EYGM, 2013). According to predictions for the Chinese outbound travel market by the UNWTO (2008), the overall number of Chinese tourists traveling abroad will pass 100 million by 2020. Furthermore, the China Tourism Academy (2014) annual report contains forecasts stating that the amount of Chinese tourists will reach 26.4 million in the first three months in 2014, which shows a dramatic increase of 17 per cent compared to the same period in 2013. According to official data from the Chinese National Tourism Administration (CNTA) annual report (2012), compared to other popular destinations, Europe is in the leading position in attracting Chinese tourists. During the past few years, the number of Chinese tourists traveling to Europe has been steadily increasing. More specifically, the continent has received over 3 million trips from Chinese travellers in 2011 (ETC & UNWTO, 2013). Hence, capturing the rising Chinese market is one of the critical and indispensable business strategies for the international tourism industry. As Li, Harrill, Uysal, Burnett, & Zhan (2010) note “the potential Chinese outbound tourism market is too large to be ignored” (p. 258).

It has been stated that the common type of traditional Chinese tourists likes to restrain themselves with fully controlled policies (Edensor, 2000). They rather prefer to travel in tour groups with rules and disciplined performances. Such attitudes influence the way tourists experience their trips (Fugmann & Aceves, 2013). However, according to a trend report prepared by TUI AG and Z_punkt GmbH (2012), a generation of ‘new’ Chinese tourists has emerged due to several megatrends in China. A group of people, who would like to discover new things, to seek and discuss new experiences with their friends, is expected to become the major Chinese travel market (Sparks & Pan, 2009).

Given the great success of Web 2.0, social media has become one of the imperative sources for searching and sharing information online for travelers before their journeys abroad (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). In China, social media outlets differ substantially from the ones in Western countries in Europe and North America, given the fact that accessing major global social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, etc. is fairly impossible (Chiu, Lin, & Silverman, 2012). At the same time, China has the world’s largest and most active social media market with approximately 300 million people that use social media, ranging from blogs to microblogs, from social networking sites to online communities (Chiu, Ip, &
Silverman, 2012). In addition, the TUI AG and Zpunkt GmbH’s report (2012) shows that many Chinese consumers are now making use of social media platforms for planning their travels overseas. According to a survey by Hotels.com L.P. (2012), most of the independent travelers would prefer searching travel-related information and planning their trips merely online. Moreover, “young, savvy Chinese travelers take Internet access for granted” (Trivett & Staff, 2013), as sharing travel experiences is becoming more and more trendy among independent Chinese travelers (Hotels.com. L.P., 2014).

Thus, we can assume that for ‘new’ Chinese tourists, it would be imperative to use social media platforms not only for pre-trips, but also for all stages of traveling. Nevertheless, most studies focus on social media patterns for tourists coming from Western countries. Therefore, this paper will aim at filling this gap by researching patterns of social media usage by the ‘new’ Chinese travelers during different stages in their leisure trips to Europe. Specifically, the objectives of this paper include: to get a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and related concepts by reviewing existing current literature; to generate relevant hypotheses; to apply the methods of qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey to collect information and data for testing the generated hypotheses; to discuss the findings in their context; and finally, to identify the limitations of the current study.

The main research of this study is to discover some patterns of social media usage by the ‘new’ Chinese tourists while they are traveling overseas. The patterns would include the activeness in different traveling stages to indicate the active period/periods of time for the ‘new’ Chinese tourists to use social media, usage of different kinds of Chinese social media platforms, preference of different types of travel-related social media profiles and sites, and certain behaviors based on the different types of established Chinese social media users.

It is expected that the findings of this paper will help the tourism industry to have a better understanding of how the ‘new’ Chinese tourists use social media in relation to traveling to Europe. The insights on how the ‘new’ Chinese tourists behave on social media platforms can assist international hotels, travel agencies and tour operators in targeting the ‘new’ Chinese tourists more explicitly and performing more effective online marketing.
2. Literature Review

2.1. The Rising ‘New’ Chinese Tourists

2.1.1 General Characteristics of the ‘New’ Chinese Tourists

Only four per cent of China’s urban population has traveled abroad, which means that the Chinese outbound travel market still has great potential for growth (Credit Lyonnais Securities Asia, 2005). Furthermore, in 2012, resulting from the enormous economic development, the percentage of the urban population in China has increased by more than 60 per cent (ETC & UNWTO, 2013). Currently, Europe is still one of the most popular regions for Chinese travellers (Lauder & Clinique, 2013). While group traveling is still the most popular pattern to travel overseas, the number of Chinese tourists who choose to enjoy self-organized travel experiences is a fast growing trend (Gao, 2013).

The concept “second wave of Chinese outbound tourism” has been discussed by Arlt (2013), who refers to those travelers from China that would like to discover more about the world and make connections internationally. The number of this type of tourists, especially the type of self-organized travelers, has begun to rise because of the quickening pace of development of the Chinese economy (Arlt, 2013). Xiang (2013) describes this group of tourists with self-organizing travel intentions as independent travellers, as they would like to travel in a small group or even preferably alone, without any help from the tourism intermediaries or travel agencies. Trivett and Staff (2013) highlights that they would like to plan extensively to fulfill their eagerness for unique travel experiences, and some of the ‘new’ Chinese travelers manage their traveling plans for a fairly long time in order to discover some uncommon destinations or unique and authentic activities to express their personal interests, to show their differences in relation to others, and to praise themselves as the ‘first’ to experience certain places or activities among their friends.

In the ITB World Travel Trends Report (2013), Valeria Croce, head of research at the European Travel Commission describes the ‘New Chinese Travellers’, as those who want to escape from the stereotype of old-fashioned group tours, but are more interested in individual experiences. In other words, despite being price-sensitive, these up-and-coming travelers are “urban, wealthy, young, better educated, and more importantly, technologically skilled in social media and Internet usage” (IPK International & Messe Berlin GmbH., 2013, p.16). It has been discovered in Xiang’s research (2013) that 74 per cent of
current Chinese independent tourists are within the age group between 25 and 44 years old, with better education compared to the general population in China, since approximately 83 per cent of them have at least an undergraduate degree. Skift report (2013) also states that besides being young and more educated, the ‘new’ Chinese tourists are rich and demanding consumers. Firstly, many ‘new’ tourists earn over 60,000 RMB. Secondly, due to the “one child policy”, the younger generation grows up in a ‘spoiled’ environment, so that they would like to seek top luxury services and advanced quality (Trivett & Staff, 2013).

Moreover, Trivett and Staff (2013) mention that they tend to stay in one destination for longer periods while learning more about the local culture, getting to know local people, enjoying local food and relaxing in a different environment. At the same time, expenditure of the Chinese tourists abroad has been increasing, and some of them go overseas only for luxury shopping (Trivett & Staff, 2013). According to Arlt (2013) the New Chinese tourists (NCTs) are those who are able to speak some English or some other foreign languages instead of only being able to speak Mandarin, and many of them even have the prior experience of studying abroad. As a result, they have become more sophisticated and connected travelers, as they are brave enough to deal with the problems that they would encounter in a foreign country (Trivett & Staff, 2013).

“Internet plays a main role for the ‘new’ tourists to gather information” (Trivett & Staff, 2013). Nowadays Internet, especially social networks and social media, have become necessities for the ‘new’ Chinese tourists, because they would like to get suggestions from friends and read travel blogs as a guide during the phase of planning their own trips (Trivett & Staff, 2013). According to the Chinese International Travel Monitor (CITM) report by Hotel.com. L.P. (2012), Chinese travellers are becoming younger, more confident and highly active online, as they acclimate to Western cultures and traditions. A great number of Chinese Internet users indicate a high-speed transfer to online research of travel-related information, and even book over the Internet (Hotel.com. L.P., 2012). In addition, the time they would spend on searching tourism information could vary from a few days up to even a few months, even though they have already chosen the destination and bought the major products (Xiang, 2013). Furthermore, according to Xiang (2013), in order to reduce the anxiety in an unfamiliar country overseas, Chinese travelers are usually quite active on collecting and spreading information by using social media to understand the destination better, so that they can feel more confident about controlling the whole trip.
2.1.2 Four Archetypes of the ‘New’ Chinese Tourists

Based on the annual report from ETC and UNWTO (2012) and the trend report from TUI AG and Z_punkt GmbH (2012), we can generally assume that there are four archetypes of the ‘new’ Chinese tourists.

The Adventurer. This archetype refers to a growing group of members with a free-spirited, open-minded and brave heart that seek adventures (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). They love sharing their experiences with their friends as frequently as possible via electronic channels, such as social media platforms, in order to obtain ‘Mian Zi’ (prestige), particularly in the younger generation, they are strongly hoping to gain respect from their circle of friends by extreme and unique experiences, for example, driving fast vehicles with no speed limit on motorways or dancing overnight in a fashionable club in Europe (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). However, there are also ‘Sunset Travelers’, a term referred to the ‘aged adventurers’, who are interested in gaining knowledge and would like to travel to acquire life experience instead of prestige or status (ETC & UNWTO, 2012). There is a new trend that indicates that this sub group is starting to be active on the Internet as well (ETC & UNWTO, 2012).

The Connoisseur. The connoisseur type prefers to enrich their knowledge and acquire deeper insights instead of simply seeing the destination (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). For example, in order to enrich their expertise in a field they are interested in, such as good wines, classical music, delicious food or art, they probably would attend exclusive wine tours or one-day museum tours, etc. to obtain authentic experiences and perceptions in Europe (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). They always intend to return to the places that they find interesting and attractive for more qualitative and deeper experiences in order to become knowledgeable about the place and its culture (ETC & UNWTO, 2012). Moreover, the ETC and UNWTO report (2012) also states that this sub group certainly would like to share their experience with their friends, and more importantly, the output they post online is usually aesthetic in nature.

The ‘Wenyi’ Youth. The Chinese word ‘Wenyi’ means literature and art. This group represents a whole new generation of globalized and free will Chinese youth, who prefer to be ‘travelers’ instead of the classic Chinese ‘tourists’ (ETC & UNWTO, 2012). Because this group of travelers sometimes has budget and time restrictions, they might prefer to visit unpopular but interesting sights, attend interesting festivals, join adventurous road trips and
exciting sports events, as well as choose special and cheaper accommodation like hostels or even engage in ‘couch surfing’ (ETC & UNWTO, 2012). The report of TUI AG and Z_punkt GmbH (2012), names this sub group young ‘dreamers’, who can be influenced by their personal idols from films, music or sports, so when they are traveling, they are chasing their spiritual fulfillment and self-realization by escaping from everyday life (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). For example, this group includes the romantic honeymooners who just want to “live their dreams” (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). In addition, the ETC and UNWTO report (2012) highlights that Internet access is a necessity for them, as not only social media platforms are their imperative tools to plan their trips, but also social networking is indispensable for posting and sharing their experiences.

The Seeker of Relaxation. Members of this group are longing for nature, fresh air and the great outdoors (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). In particular, it includes members of the middle and upper-middle class who are seeking to get away from horrible environmental pollution and a stressful lifestyle in an urban area (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). As an example, the TUI AG and Z_punkt GmbH report (2012) states, they would choose to attend the Paris fashion week, enjoy aromatherapy in an expensive Swiss spa or a luxurious beach holiday on an island in Greece. The report by ETC and UNWTO (2012) calls some of the young generation in this type ‘hedonists’, who are using their parents’ wealth to enjoy their lives with expensive taste and style. In addition, this archetype also participates actively on social networks to share or even show off the good times they are having (ETC & UNWTO, 2012).

2.1.3 The Megatrends that Generate the ‘New’ Chinese Tourists
The trend report conducted by TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH (2012) notes that there are several megatrends that generate the ‘new’ Chinese tourists. These are shortly described below.

Globalization. China has opened its doors for foreign business and investment to boost the economy for more than 30 years (Wu, 2001). Therefore, Arlt (2013) states that the rapid economic growth and booming trend of globalization is greatly influencing and changing the local society in China. As a consequence, there are increased possibilities for more Chinese people to be able to afford traveling around the whole world (Arlt, 2013). It is expected that hundreds of millions of Chinese households are going to achieve the global level of ‘middle class’ in the coming years because of the upswing in the economy in China (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012).
Urbanization. Urban planning and development have always been a concern in the development process in China, its urbanization has transformed dramatically due to changing policies and economics (Vol & Britain, 1998). The report by TUI AG and Z_punkt GmbH (2012) mentions that the Chinese government is currently encouraging and promoting inhabitants moving from rural areas to urban areas. The proportion of urbanization is forecasted as approximately 55 per cent by 2020 (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). Moreover, due to rapid urbanization in China, there will be an increasing number of Chinese tourists, who are not only from the leading cities of Beijing and Shanghai, but also from second tier cities, traveling internationally (ETC & UNWTO, 2012).

Individualization reaches a new stage. The tourism industry enjoys an optimistic influence from the increasing personal development and rising desire of freedom in China (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). Traveling has become a symbol and a status for Chinese people able to develop their individual lives (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012). As a result, more Chinese tourists would prefer self-organized travel as they prefer to arrange their trips by themselves in order to get more involved (Arlt, 2013).

New consumption patterns. The TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH (2012) report points out that in China, people no longer want to achieve only the tangible needs such as expensive goods, but also to obtain intangible needs by fulfilling their desire of gaining prestige, including spending more of their income on travel experiences. Arlt (2013) highlights that gaining personal prestige and developing self-esteem are the primary driving forces for Chinese outbound travelers.

Digital Culture. “The growth in Internet usage in China over the last decade is staggering” (ETC & UNWTO, 2012, p. 35). In addition, mobile media is getting more popular and useful for the Chinese due to its convenience and capability (Chiu, Lin & Silverman, 2012). In the end of 2013, China had 618 million Internet users with 500 million mobile devices (Hotel.com. L.P., 2014). According to the TUI AG and Z_punkt GmbH report (2012), currently, 65 per cent of Chinese households use Internet services to obtain information and provide information for others. This percentage is consistently rising, which makes China the biggest online nation (TUI AG & Z_punkt GmbH, 2012).

In conclusion, as it can be seen, numerous studies claim that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists are greatly booming, and additionally, they tend to use social media platforms to obtain travel-related information, to review the quality of travel destination, products, service, etc., as
well as to share their experience with other people. As Arlt (2013) suggests, in order to open up the gate for the new Chinese market, marketing through social media is essential.

2.2. Social media

2.2.1 The General Concept of Social Media

“Social media, as one of the most powerful online networking tools, has been integrated into social and economic life in the real world” (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, p. 27). It allows users to reach to the information they need and broadcast the information they would like to share. Wells (2011) notes that these actions broadly influence people in many aspects. Moreover, social media tools, which provide for social networking allow direct interaction and communication with other users that are already in the user’s contact list or even with the people a user wishes to be friends with (Wells, 2011).

There are two major concepts that should be defined: Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that first used in 2004, Web 2.0 is a platform that allows participation and collaboration among users, instead of individual creation and publication of content in the World Wide Web. In other words, the birth of the Web 2.0 was the prerequisite of development of social media. Nezakati et al. (2015) also mention that social media exists on the Web 2.0, which consists of a set of online applications.

User Generated Content (UGC) can be characterized by three requirements for such content: “1) it is publicly available over the Internet, 2) it reflects a certain amount of creative effort and 3) it is created outside of professional routines and practices” (Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). Therefore, UGC on social media platforms allows users to generate their own content to communicate with other participants (Drews & Schemer, 2010). Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent (2007) enumerate the different types of UGC – text, photos and images, music and audio, video and film, and user-created content posted on products and other interest areas. On some level, information on UGC would be seen as recommended by friends, family members and other people with “like-minded souls” (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Thus, we could generally describe social media as a sum of applications based on Internet, built on the foundations of Web 2.0 in the aspect of ideology and technology, that allows users to create and exchange generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).
Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre (2011) state that social media is the application of the web and mobile technologies that aims at getting users to be involved in interactive platforms and communities by sharing User Generated Content with others, co-creating and modifying and even discussing opinions and experiences. It includes different actions for consumers, for example, to “post”, “tag”, “dig”, or “blog” etc. on the Internet with the intention of educating each other about travel-related knowledge such as travel-related merchandise, services, and relevant brands and issues (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). Mangold and Faulds (2009) list some types of social media in Western countries. This list includes different platforms, such as blogs, wikis, online communities, social networking sites and so on (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), where one can attend common activities, give ‘likes’, ‘tag’, and also access files posted on media sites like YouTube and Flickr (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) state that social networking sites, wikis, consumer review sites, content community sites, Internet forums and even location-based social media are all included in the area of social media. Moreover, mobile web-based technologies and all other information and communication technologies have helped social interaction via words, pictures, videos and audios (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

Social media platforms allow individuals to interact and communicate about their personal interests (Nezakati et al., 2015). Thus, Goldenberg, Libai, and Muller (2001) note that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is generated by information diffusion on social media platforms. Moreover, eWOM on social media is incredibly powerful in affecting consumer attitudes towards products and services (Herr, Karde, & Kim, 1991; Podnar & Javernik, 2012). “It can be a source of negative influence from dissatisfied customers” (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, p. 33). Therefore, if not managed properly, social media can yield not only positive benefits but also negative effects (Hede & Kellett, 2012; Thevenot, 2007).

According to Kim, Lim, and Brymer (2015), “social media is a phenomenon that is evolving into an important part of all businesses’ marketing and client base development strategies” (p.165). Therefore, understanding online social media in the tourism industry and being aware of the importance of social media for travelers to obtain travel information are crucial in order to create strategic tourism-marketing practices (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, & O’Leary, 2006).
2.2.2 Social Media in Tourism and Hospitality Industry

“Social media has revolutionized the way businesses interact with customers” (Kim et al., 2015, p. 165). It offers not only social communication, but also an ambience, which is established with contributions and interactions by all online participants (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Today, travelers are able to decide on traveling to destinations via social media platforms, as traveler’s attitudes towards social media in the information-intensive tourism industry, have changed the way travelers think and make decisions (Nezakati et al., 2015).

To this end, Fotis, Buhalis, and Rossides (2011) argue that social media platforms are very important tools to customers in the behaviors of searching for travel-related information and making decisions for traveling. The fact that an increasing number of visitors utilize travel websites to plan and book their holidays can easily explain the importance of social media in the tourism and hospitality industry (Lu, 2012; Milano, Baggio, & Piattelli, 2011).

Buhalis and Law (2008) also mention that social media allows communication not only among travelers, but also tourism providers, a phenomenon that has significantly impacted the tourism industry and tourism distribution. It has become extremely popular and important for travelers to use online resources for traveling, because the shared information could be simply applied as hints and tips for other people, for example, online review comments and personal stories on travel blogs based on individual traveling journeys (Gretzel, 2006; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). Social media is also able to assist travelers in managing travel in different ways, for instance, in addition to searching for information and organizing trips, users can share travel stories and experiences via blogs, Twitter, and other kinds of online social networks, Flickr or YouTube or any other website for media sharing, even social bookmarking websites, in addition to various other ways (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). Furthermore, Schroeder and Pennington-Gray (2014) note that social media usage has an impact on all stages of traveling, including pre-trip, during the trip and post-trip. Especially younger travelers tend to be most active on their social media accounts when they are on a trip (Schroeder & Pennington-Gray, 2014).

Regarding hotel business, Anderson (2012) highlights that social media has been playing an essential and imperative role in influencing customers’ satisfaction and service process improvement. Furthermore, social media can affect purchase behavior of the guests and performance of the hotels (Anderson, 2012). Hotels are able to interact with their customers via social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to share relevant
information, and inform their customers of their in order to improve the reputation of the brand (McCarthy, Stock, & Verma, 2010)

Importantly, social media platforms, especially travel blogs and UGC travel websites, generate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which enables travelers to gain insights from each other through online communication (Zehrer, Crotts, & Magnini, 2011). For example, online reviews are also one of the most popular forms of generating eWOM, so customers are informed by others about products and services, which influence their own purchase decisions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012; Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Pan, MacLaurin, and Crotts (2007) also highlight that the tourism industry is going to be increasingly influenced by eWOM in the future due to social media.

It is obvious that social media offers the tourism and hospitality industry the chance to comprehend and obtain a better understanding of the demands, desires and interests of consumers (Nezakati et al., 2015). Certainly, the industry is also facing challenges in cooperating with social media, to develop distinct strategies for blending social media into business processes (Gonzalo, 2012).

### 2.3. Social Media Patterns in China

#### 2.3.1 Overview

China had 513 million Internet users in December 2011, which indicates Internet usage has been developing much faster compared to the rest of the world (Chiu, Lin, & Silverman, 2012). However, Chiu, Lin, and Silverman (2012) also declare that local Chinese websites still hold a dominant position within the country due to Internet restrictions, whereas accessing Facebook and Twitter, and some other social media, is still prohibited in China. It has been brought up by Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) that “different countries and businesses have different realities regarding the social media used for tourism management” (p. 33).

Chiu, Lin, and Silverman (2012) note that the use of social media began in 1994 in China, firstly with online forums and communities. After almost ten years, user review websites such as Dianping (in Chinese means “to comment”) emerged, followed by Blogging later in 2004, then social-networking sites with chatting functions such as Renren, and SinaWeibo in 2009 with multimedia ‘microblogging’. Nowadays, Chinese social media websites are even seen as a tool of obtaining information in the first place by Internet users (Chiu, Ip, & Silverman, 2012). Moreover, it has become the primary platform for Chinese Internet users
to collect information and knowledge and to make friends with other like-minded individuals (Jin, 2009). Furthermore, as Chiu, Lin and Silverman (2012) argue, even though China’s social media field is very “local and fragmented”, Chinese social media users are much more active than those in other countries. Interestingly, more than 80 per cent of them have accounts on multiple social media platforms, which have their own features and areas of focus to attract different types of users (Chiu, Lin, & Silverman, 2012).

In addition, Chiu, Ip and Silverman (2012) mentions that the competition in using social media to attract consumers in China is extremely intense, consequently, a lot of companies constantly hire so-called “artificial writers” to spread positive messages and information to increase exposure, as well as to improve their online reputation; at the same time, they are used to assault competitors with negative reviews. Therefore, international companies should have rival social media strategies to gain more Chinese consumers, such as an authentic and user-friendly content and approach, as well as sustained social media efforts (Chiu, Ip, & Silverman, 2012).

In order for Chinese social media users to follow certain accounts and users, the posts of the authors have to be influential (Yu, Asur, & Huberman, 2011). Yu, Asur, & Huberman (2011) explains that instead of official accounts (verified accounts), which represent well-known public figures or organizations, the accounts that provide trendy and useful information have more attention and followers.

2.3.2 Social Media Platforms in China

Recently, during an online event – IFITT Hangout on Social Media in China -- one of the invited speakers, Deana Gao, founder and CEO of China Gravy, noted that apart from differences in search engines, social media in China follows a completely different landscape from Western countries (Gao, 2014). One reason that social media is so important in China is that Chinese people prefer social media more than traditional media, as they trust transparent information provided by their friends more than commercials (Gao, 2014). She also highlighted that, nowadays, Sina Weibo, WeChat, and QQ, etc., are the most popular platforms among Chinese social media users. Hence, five of the most important and popular Chinese social media platforms are described below.

*Sina Weibo*. The literal translation of Weibo in Mandarin is ‘microblogging’, which is a combination of the services of Facebook and Twitter (Chiu, Lin, & Silverman, 2012). *Sina Weibo* was first launched in August 2009 by the largest Chinese web portal – Sina
Corporation (Yu et al., 2011). It also has been explained by Yu et al. (2011) that similar to Twitter, Sina Weibo enables users to post messages of up to 140 characters. There are also other functions and features such as messaging other users, embedding multimedia (images and videos), as well as tagging other users and hash tagging trending keywords, in addition to the following functions: ‘like’; ‘comment’; ‘follow’; ‘retweet’; ‘share’; and ‘collect’ (Yu et al., 2011).

WeChat. WeChat is a mobile application that belongs to Tencent Company, which is a new and powerful mobile communication tool that supports voice, video messages, text messages, images and group chats (WeChat.com., n.d.). Additionally, you can find new friends who are nearby (WeChat.com., n.d.). By the year 2014, it had 396 million monthly active users, which makes it the most powerful and popular mobile messaging application in China (Lim, 2014).

QQ Tencent. QQ is also developed by Tencent, and has now become the largest online chat community in China and the whole world (Tencent, n.d.). It has been stated on their official website, that thanks to their enormous user base, it offers a great platform to provide opportunities for users to meet new people. It includes online communication functions such as text messaging, video, voice chat and many more (Tencent, n.d.).

Renren. Ren is translated as “people” in Mandarin Chinese. Chiu, Lin, and Silverman (2012) indicate that the name itself suggests that people communicate with each other. Chinese refer to Renren as a Chinese version of Facebook, not only as it has extremely similar features and functions as Facebook, but also because it started as a social networking site exclusively for students, while now it is open to a bigger audience (Chiu, Lin, & Silverman, 2012).

Qiongyou. Qiongyou is an online travel forum that has been developed exclusively for the purpose of traveling, and it allows travelers to share their experience, upload their travel strategies and stories in order to help others, and provides travel-related assistance (Qyer.com., n.d.). Additionally, it also offers promotions for hotels, flights, transportation, etc. (Qyer.com., n.d.)
2.3.3 Types of Chinese Social Media Users

Chiu, Lin, & Silverman (2012) introduced four types of Chinese social media users: social enthusiasts, resenders, readers and opinionated users:

Social enthusiasts are users who spend a great amount of their time on maintaining online networks, therefore, they post updates on social media about their personal lives every single day. Interestingly, they care about the number of friends they have, as they believe that having a large circle of friends is very important. These users are open to advertisements and would like to see commercials on social media platforms, as they would most likely choose to use social media sites to get to know new products and services. They use social media to share reviews of products and services and to inform their friends about them.

Resenders are the type of users that see social-media as a platform to promote themselves. They would like to drive as much traffic as they can to their blogs or any other accounts to generate as many followers as they can. Thus, to obtain the goal, they are usually keen on commenting, forwarding and reposting content from other sources.

Readers are a group of social media users who spend significant time on different platforms, however, they generally only read what others are posting without participating. Typically, they follow a number of users (mostly verified) and read their content when they want, but seldom comment or write anything. Additionally, they rarely post their own content on social media. Other users, like some popular bloggers, could easily influence them on products and services.

Opinionated users are the kind of social media users that devote most of their time to different platforms in order to upload content instead of simply reading. Since they like expressing their own opinions and stories, social media platforms are an important place for them to do so. They speak out about their good and bad experiences with a product or brand after their personal experience.

To conclude, the approach of one-size-fits-all to market on social media in China would not be sufficient. Instead, it’s important to recognize different patterns of consumer behavior for each segment as they apply to different target tourists in order to deploy appropriate strategies (Chiu, Lin, & Silverman, 2012).
3. Hypotheses

Based on the literature review that has been discussed above, several hypotheses have been formulated:

i. Once the ‘new’ Chinese tourists have already decided to travel to a destination or several destinations in Europe, they would be more active on social media before and after the trip rather than during the trip;

ii. During all stages of traveling, the ‘new’ Chinese tourists will use more than just one type of social media platform;

iii. Among all travel-related social media sites, profiles and accounts, the ‘new’ Chinese tourists think it is more useful to follow ‘Travel Experts’ accounts and use ‘Travel Forums’ rather than official accounts;

iv. Moreover, the ‘new’ Chinese tourists will mostly behave either as the so-called “Reader” type on social media before the trip, but tend to be more like ‘Opinionated Users’ during and after the trip;

4. Methodology

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is applied in order to obtain sufficient data and information to generate valuable findings. Structured interviews, a qualitative research method, were chosen to get some comprehensive ideas from the travel experts and were then followed by a quantitative method – a web survey.

4.1. Qualitative Method - Interview

An interview with structured questions was created. It targeted travel experts in a popular travel forum – Qiongyou. Nine interviewees, who can be described as ‘new’ Chinese tourists and who are very active on different social media accounts such as different travel forums, Weibo, Wechat, and others, agreed to participate in the interview. The respondents were interviewed over a period from 15th November 2014 to 22nd January 2015.

The interviews were conducted in the Chinese language. Due to geographical distance, four of the interviews were conducted by Skype video-chat, three -via emails, and the remaining two -via WeChat. For Skype video-chat interviews, each lasted for a maximum of 30 minutes. A sound recorder tool was utilized, thus, permission was granted from each interviewee before being recorded for the interview. Therefore, all conversations were recorded,
translated and transcribed. For email interviews, the interviewees received the questions in a *Microsoft Word* document. They could write their answers directly below. For *WeChat* interviews, interviewees were asked by voice messages and they could choose to respond in written or verbal form. All results were saved and transcribed, and are available upon request.

The interview consisted of nine questions, which explore aspects of the hypotheses stated above. First, the interviewees were asked for personal information, such as age, residence, and profession. Afterwards, they were asked to describe their image and impressions of Europe, followed by their individual experience while traveling in Europe. Then the interviewees were asked to share the circumstances of their travel, style and activities in Europe. In the next question, the interviewees were asked about social media and their style of social media usage. The purpose of the above questions was to ensure that the interviewees could be generally identified as the ‘new’ Chinese tourists, which were discussed in Section 2.1 of the literature review. The following two questions inquired about the social media usage during different stages of traveling, the most active periods, and the accounts they use most frequently. Then, the interviewees were asked to list the travel-related profiles that they follow and their favorite personal preferences. Lastly, all interviewees were asked to describe their activities on social media accounts throughout different traveling stages. The exact wording of the questions (both in Chinese and English) is presented in Appendix 1. All of the results of the interviews are analyzed and discussed in the following sections of this research.

### 4.2. Quantitative Method - Survey

Based on the results and findings from the literature review and the conducted interviews, a survey with ten questions was disseminated to Chinese social media users in virtual communities and other popular social media platforms, such as *WeChat* and *Sino Weibo*. The survey ran from 23rd January 2015 to 25th of February 2015. 150 responses were received. However, given the Internet server restrictions in China, where the target group is placed, only 62 responses could have been analyzed. After collecting all the data, SPSS was used to calculate and generate the results.

In the questionnaire, personal information was collected such as age, gender, education, social media usage, social media usage in relation to traveling, and preference of activities in Europe. These questions were included in order to test whether the respondents can be
characterized as ‘new’ Chinese tourists, discussed in Section 2.1. Moreover, the questions also inquired about whether the respondents have traveled to Europe.

The items of the questionnaire were presented to the respondents in Mandarin Chinese. The exact structure of the questionnaire and the translation of the questions into English are presented in Appendix 2.

The assumptions of normality of all paired-sample variables were tested by histograms in a frequency distribution test. The assumption of normality for all variables was violated, therefore, non-parametric tests were appropriate.

An overview of all variables is listed in Table 1, where the numbers of questions refer to the number indicated in Appendix 2.

Table 1: List of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Question in the Questionnaire</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usual social media activeness</td>
<td>6c</td>
<td>Scale: (1 – Very active; 5 – Inactive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activeness before the trip</td>
<td>7d</td>
<td>Scale: (1 – Very active; 5 – Inactive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activeness during the trip</td>
<td>7d</td>
<td>Scale: (1 – Very active; 5 – Inactive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activeness after the trip</td>
<td>7d</td>
<td>Scale: (1 – Very active; 5 – Inactive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of social media accounts</td>
<td>9a</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accounts before the trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of social media accounts</td>
<td>9a</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accounts during the trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of social media accounts</td>
<td>9a</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accounts after the trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Accounts</td>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Scale: (1 – Very Useful; 5 – Useless)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Experts</td>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Scale: (1 – Very Useful; 5 – Useless)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Forums</td>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Scale: (1 – Very Useful; 5 – Useless)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloggers</td>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Scale: (1 – Very Useful; 5 – Useless)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wechat Friends’ Moment</td>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Scale: (1 – Very Useful; 5 – Useless)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Matched activities before the trip | 9b | Number of activities 1 (reading & checking), 2 (liking), 3 (collecting), 9 (forwarding) > number of activities 4 (commenting), 5 (interacting), 6 (asking questions), 7 (posting), 8 (sharing), 10 (others) |

| Matched activities during the trip | 9b | Number of activities 1, 2, 3, 9 < number of activities 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 |

| Matched activities after the trip | 9b | Number of activities 1, 2, 3, 9 < number of activities 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 |

| Usage of international social media accounts | 10a | 0 - no, 1 - yes |

For testing Hypothesis I, four variables were used – ‘usual social media activeness’, ‘activeness before the trip’, ‘activeness during the trip’, and ‘activeness after the trip’. Friedman’s ANOVA was applied to test the difference between the four selected groups.

In order to test Hypothesis II, frequencies and percentages of ‘number of social media accounts before the trip’, ‘number of social media accounts during the trip’, and ‘number of social media accounts after the trip’ were compared.

Friedman’s ANOVA was also used to test Hypothesis III by exploring the differences between ‘Official Accounts’, ‘Travel Experts’, ‘Travel Forums’, ‘Bloggers’, and ‘Wechat Friends’ Moment’.

In order to test Hypothesis IV, firstly, the ten main activities were divided into two groups to distinguish between the social media user types of ‘Readers’ and ‘Opinionated Users’.
Activities of reading and checking, liking, collecting and forwarding refer to ‘Readers’, activity of commenting, interacting, asking questions, posting, sharing and others refer to ‘Opinionated Users’. Then, a frequency test was run to examine whether the percentages of ‘matched activities before the trip’, ‘matched activities during the trip’, and ‘matched activities after the trip’ are supporting the hypothesis.

5. Results

5.1. Findings of the Interviews
For a clear understanding of the interview, the results are organized in 5 subsections: (1) interviewee description and travel experience in Europe, (2) social media usage, (3) hypothesis I (4) hypothesis III, and (5) hypothesis IV.

5.1.1 Interviewee Description
The interviewees gave an overview of themselves regarding age, residence, and profession. Seven out of nine interviewees were between the age of 21 and 35; the other two were slightly older at 39 and 49. Eight interviewees were residing in China, one interviewee was working in Singapore. Their professions varied from student to writer and sales person, from the media industry to the tourism industry, which shows great diversity.

Eight out of nine interviewees have either lived in Europe for a while or traveled in Europe several times. All of the interviewees had a good impression of Europe, as some of them considered Europe to be very clean and relaxing. Moreover, some think it is historical, arty and romantic as well. Five out of nine interviewees would prefer to travel to Europe for relaxing themselves and enjoying the art, new culture and different lifestyle in Europe. Interviewee 3, 7 & 8 would prefer to get to experience what locals offer to see the real traditions and insights. However, Interviewee 5 pointed out the purpose of travel was mainly work, and Interviewee 9 highlighted that the activities depended on where s/he went, since different destinations have their own attractions. Moreover, Interviewee 1 stated that magnificent pictures of other people online would attract attention to her/is travel desire. In addition, Interviewee 4 specially mentioned that s/he would prefer to travel slowly to get to know the destination as much and as deeply as possible, and plan the trips by her/imself instead of using the services of a travel agency. Interviewee 8 also said that s/he would prefer to plan the trips carefully by her/imself.
Therefore, it can be concluded that compared with traditional Chinese tourists, the interviewees have shown the characteristics of being the ‘new’ Chinese tourists.

5.1.2 Social Media Usage

Regarding the definition and understanding of social media, Interviewee 1 indicated that social media is a platform, which allows different people in different places to share information at the same time or at even different times while Interviewee 3 considered social media a big platform where people interact with each other to get more information in a fast way. Interviewee 9 also added that social media is a popular platform and intermediary for the public to use and participate equally in. Other interviewees gave quite similar ideas. Clearly, it has been made clear that getting information, sharing and interacting are the main ideas of how the interviewees comprehend social media.

Next, all interviewees mentioned that they are using different social media platforms. Each interviewee mentioned Wechat, eight interviewees referred to Weibo. Besides, QQ, Renren, Blog, Qiongyou Forum and other online travel communities have been noted as well. Interviewee 1 was even one of the moderators on Qiongyou Forum, which makes her/him usually very active and interactive with other users.

Particularly, interviewee 4 revealed that s/he has 25,000 fans on Weibo and 400 friends on personal Wechat account. Moreover, she has two official business accounts on Wechat, which have 1,000 and 10,000 respectively. Interviewee 1 also spoke of the number of the fans on her/his Weibo accounts, which are around 1,000. S/he also mentioned that there are a lot more fans on her/his QQ account. Consequently, this pointed out the high engagement of some social media users.

To conclude, all interviewees are regular users of social media, which also fits into the ‘new’ Chinese tourists group.

5.1.3 Hypothesis I

Hypothesis I states that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists would be more active on social media before and after the trip rather than during the trip. The answers of interviewees considering this statement varied from each other.

Two out of nine interviewees stated that they are active both before and after a trip. Interviewee 4 highlighted that s/he would be more active on social media during both these
two stages instead of during the trip. S/he also emphasized that s/he would be consistently active on social media after deciding to go overseas, and after the trip, s/he would update almost every single day. In addition, Interviewee 1 said that s/he is more active both before and after the trip as well, searching for information before the trips, sharing experiences and answer questions for other travelers after the trips, as s/he considers writing down the experiences is an accomplishment of a journey for her mind.

Interviewees 3 and 7 are more active before the trip, because both of them would like to use social media to check as much information as they can in order to fully prepare themselves for their journeys overseas. Besides, Interviewee 9 is only more active after the trips.

Nevertheless, Interviewees 5 and 8 are more active before and during the trips. For instance, Interviewee 8 mentioned that s/he would like to share her/his experience live on social media, especially on Wechat. Additionally, Interviewees 2 and 6 stated that, they would be more active during and after the trips.

Consequently, attention has been drawn to the fact that more interviewees are more active on social media platforms before or after the trip than during the trip. However, four out of nine interviewees said they would be more active during the trip, but together with the option of either before the trips or after the trips.

5.1.4 Hypothesis III

When asked for the preferable travel-related profiles, as indicated by Hypothesis III, interviewees have differing opinions. The hypothesis suggests that ‘Travel Experts’ and ‘Travel Forum’ are the most popular travel-related profiles among all. Four out of nine of the interviewees mentioned these two travel-related profiles as their most preferable ones. Particularly, Interviewees 1, 3, 4 and 8 highlighted one Qiongyou ‘Travel Forum’, Interviewee 4 preferred to read travel notes of the ‘Travel Experts’ in particular, and Interviewee 3 said that there are so many ‘Travel Experts’ online, it is very difficult to choose, and very hard to know whether you have chosen the right one. As a result, s/he would go for the accounts have the most reviews and comments.

The other five interviewees have different preferences regarding following travel-related profiles. Interviewees 6 & 7 rely on official accounts for checking information, while interviewees 2 & 5 don’t rely on any travel-related profiles. But Interviewee 5 listed two
international online travel agencies, Agoda and Qunar, to check for good deals. Interviewee 9 would prefer to search in some places where the information is more integrated. However, she emphasized that if someone has posted something valuable on social media regarding her/his destinations, s/he might ask the writer directly.

In summary, almost half of the interviewees are fond of ‘Travel Forum’ and ‘Travel Expert’ for getting knowledge of the trips.

5.1.5 Hypothesis IV

The ‘new’ Chinese tourists will behave differently on social media during different travel stages. According to the literature review Section 2.3.4, the different types of users have different behaviors across social media platforms. We assume that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists behave as ‘Readers’ on social media before their trips, but are ‘Opinionated Users’ during and after the trip.

Interviewee 7 claimed that s/he is a person who reads more than participates in general on social media. But during the trip, sometimes s/he also would like to share some special stories s/he experiences and findings that s/he has discovered while traveling.

Interviewee 1 noted that before the trip, s/he is only engaged in reading and checking information without interaction, which fits into the category of ‘Readers’. However, during the trip, s/he has no interaction and activity either. But after the trip, writing down the experience and posting her/his own articles are essential activities for her/him. Besides, s/he also highlighted that s/he would prefer to be more active on travel-related platforms and forums, as people share similar values and lifestyles there. Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 6 have similar actions with only reading before and sharing experiences after traveling. However, Interviewee 3 highlighted that s/he would post pictures in her/his own friends’ circle on social media after the trips, especially on Wechat, nevertheless, without any interaction with the public.

Interviewee 4 also has similar patterns of usage. Before the trip, s/he prefers to visit forums like Tianya and Qiongyou, to read articles and raiders those other travelers have posted in order to make her/his own travel plans. Moreover, s/he considered that the information on these forums are really detailed, so there is no need to ask questions, participate or interact with others, because all the problems can be solved by simply reading. During the trip, she would only sometimes get on Weibo and Wechat to share his/her live experience. After the
trip, s/he is usually very active, for instance, writing travel notes, sharing travel raiders and answering questions to help other travelers. Similarly, Interviewee 9 considered doing traveling ‘homework’ as to plan the trips before the trip is very important. Additionally, s/he stated that if there were some questions that can’t be solved, s/he would prefer to ask the travel experts or her/his friends directly, which was mentioned by interviewee 3 as well. During the trip, s/he would share only sometimes some experiences with friends on social media. Her/his most active stage would be after the trip, as s/he always writes down the travel notes and shares them on social media, which can be helpful to answer questions.

Interviewee 2 said besides checking some useful information on social media platforms, s/he would just post and inform friends about the trips, which Interviewee 5 is also fond of doing. However, Interviewee 2 would upload pictures to share her/his real experience with friends during and after the trips, while Interviewee 5 prefers to share information exclusively during the trip.

In conclusion, all of the interviewees who answered this section have claimed that they are ‘Readers’ before the trips in comparison to, five interviewees who consider themselves to be ‘Opinionated Users’ after the trips. In addition, most of them are participating and interacting on social media actively during the trip, however, not as much as after their trips, so we can’t simply conclude which type of social media user they are during the trip.

In summary, all interviewees are regular users of social media, and more than half of the interviewees are more active on social media platforms before or after the trip rather than during the trip, which supports Hypothesis I. Secondly, almost half of the interviewees are fond of ‘Travel Forum’ and ‘Travel Expert’ for acquiring knowledge about the trips, that is consistent with Hypothesis III. Last but not least, same as Hypothesis IV states, all the interviewees are more like so-called ‘Readers’ before the trips, but only five interviewees are consider themselves to be ‘Opinionated Users’ after the trips.

5.2. Quantitative Method - Survey

5.2.1 Respondents Descriptions

According to the results, we can clearly see that almost 80 per cent of the respondents are younger than 35 years old. Moreover, more than half of the respondents are women, and 84 per cent of them hold academic degrees higher than an undergraduate degree. Among the respondents, 40 per cent have been to Europe before. It supports the definition of the ‘new’
Chinese tourists, as they are supposed to be young and more educated. Even though not all of them have been to Europe, the data can be biased as only 62 out of 200 responses can be analyzed, due to restrictive Internet protocols in China.

Figure 1: Number of Preferred Activities in Europe

According to Figure 1, it is clear that there are more respondents who would like to do more than one activity in Europe: 27 per cent of them would like to do four types of activities followed by 21 per cent respondents who prefer to do three kinds of activities. Moreover, there almost 5 per cent respondents would like to do more than six activities.
In relation to the use of social media, the percentage of those using social media is 100 per cent. Furthermore, 95 per cent of the respondents are using social media for the purpose of traveling. Additionally, almost 60 per cent of them think it is useful to plan their trips by utilizing social media platforms while 30 per cent consider using social media to be very useful for planning trips (see Figure 2). Only less than 2 per cent answered that it is a little useful and none of the respondents think that using social media in relation to traveling is completely useless.
Speaking of the use of different Chinese social media platforms, more than 60 per cent of the respondents have more than three Chinese social media accounts while almost 5 per cent have more than five accounts (see Figure 3). Only 18 per cent have one social media account. Additionally, no respondent has no Chinese social media account whereas almost 2 per cent of them have more than six accounts.

In conclusion, most of the respondents are young and well educated and prefer to be more active in traveling. Moreover they are active on Chinese social media platforms.

5.2.3 Hypothesis I

We can conclude that the activeness changes in different stages, as there is a significant result (p< 0.05). We also can see from the ranks results that activeness of using social media before the trip (m= 2.18) is the most active stage among the respondents (the smaller the number is, the more active the usage is), followed by activeness after the trip (m= 2.47), which supports the hypothesis that states that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists are using social media more actively before the trips and after the trips, compared to daily usage (m=2.66) and the traveling stage during the trips (m=2.68) (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables of Activeness On Social Media</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How active usually</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activeness of using social media before the trip</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activeness of using social media during the trip</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activeness of using social media after the trip</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.4 Hypothesis II

Based on Figure 4, 5, & 6, it is safe to say that before the trips, 22 per cent of the respondents are using one social media account while the rest are active on at least two platforms. At the same time, more than 33 per cent are using all listed social media platforms, which are Sino Weibo, Wechat, RenRen, QQ, Qiongyou, Tianya, Zhihu and Blogs. During the trip more than 4 per cent of the respondents do not use social media at all while more than 35 per cent are active on only one platform. During the trip, 60 per cent of them utilize two or more social media accounts. The same applies to the stage after the trip in which more than 60 per cent of the respondents actively use two or more social media accounts.
accounts. Thus, the results are sufficient in proving the Hypothesis II, which holds that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists are using different social media accounts in different traveling stages.

Figure 4: Numbers of the Active Social Media Platforms Before the Trip

Figure 5: Numbers of the Active Social Media Platforms During the Trip
5.2.5 Hypothesis III

It is very obvious that from Table 3 below, there are differences between the five travel-related profiles, due to the fact that the result is significant (p < 0.05). In particular, we can see that ‘Travel Expert’ has the smallest rank (m = 2.50), which is the most preferable by the respondents, followed by ‘Travel Forum’ (m = 2.77), which places second. Hence, the results conclude that ‘Travel Expert’ and ‘Travel Forum’ are the preferred profiles, which affirms Hypothesis III.

Table 3: Ranks of Usefulness of Different Travel-Related Social Media Sites, Platforms, & Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables of Usefulness of Different Travel-related Profiles</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The usefulness of official accounts</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The usefulness of travel experts</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The usefulness of travel forums</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The usefulness of bloggers</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The usefulness of WeChat moments</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.6 Hypothesis IV

There are differences in behaviors during different traveling stages. To remind the subgroups of the activities: Activities 1 (reading & checking), 2 (liking), 3 (collecting), 9 (forwarding) refer to ‘Readers’, activity 4 (commenting), 5 (interacting), 6 (asking questions), 7 (posting), 8 (sharing), 10 (others) refer to ‘Opinionated Users’. It is clear that before the trips, there are more respondents (75 per cent) who behave as ‘Readers’. More than 70 per cent of the respondents are ‘Opinionated Users’ during and after the trips. Therefore, it is evident that Hypothesis IV has been adequately proved, in other words, the ‘new’ Chinese tourists will mostly behave as ‘Readers’ on social media before the trip, but tend to be ‘Opinionated Users’ during and after the trip.

6. Discussion & Limitation

6.1. Discussion and Implications

As indicated previously, we researched and examined how the ‘new’ Chinese tourists use social media in relation to travel by utilizing interviews and surveys through which we found some meaningful results.

First, it is important to acknowledge that the increasing ‘new’ Chinese tourists are fond of making use of social media in relation to traveling. Besides the results we have collected from interviews that show that every interviewee is a regular user on social media, the majority of the respondents from the survey consider social media a useful online platform for traveling as well. Furthermore, even though there are differences on rates of activity in different traveling stages among interviewees, the stages before and after the trip are noted more frequently. Likewise, the survey’s significant result demonstrates that use of social media varies from the three stages of traveling - during the trip the respondents are slightly less active compared to before and after the trips. This can refer to Xiang’s (2013) statement that Chinese tourists would like to feel comfortable and confident during their trips and therefore consider it essential to collect as much information as they can. Based on section 2.1.2, all archetypes of the ‘new’ Chinese tourists – the adventurer, the connoisseur, the ‘Wenyi’ youth and the seeker of relaxation - indicate the utilization of social media after the trips for sharing experiences. This finding confirms that thoroughly preparing marketing strategies for providing travel-related information for the Chinese market on social media is very important, because not only Western travelers, but also travelers from China are using...
social media as a critical tool in searching travel-related information, which definitely affects their decision-making behavior (Fotis, Buhalís & Rossides, 2011). Furthermore, as mentioned on Section 2.2.1, Pan, MacLaurin, and Crotts (2007) emphasize that the tourism industry is going to be increasingly influenced by eWOM due to social media, which denotes the importance of managing Chinese social media platforms in order to properly deal with Chinese tourists’ reviews of their trips.

Secondly, it has been proven that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists are using more than just one social media platform. Interestingly, the results confirm the findings of Gao (2014) that lists Sina Weibo, Wechat, and QQ, etc., as the most popular platforms among Chinese social media users. Some interviewees have mentioned that these are the social media platforms that they use the most actively. This indicates that managing and developing different accounts on different Chinese social media platforms would assist in expanding exposure with the aim of attracting the Chinese market. In addition, as there are many social media platforms, acknowledging popular existing social media tools in the market would be important at the beginning in order to establish proper plans for exploiting the most suitable ones. Furthermore, sustained social media efforts are definitely required (Chiu, Ip, & Silverman, 2012), which suggests international tourism organizations should develop continuous and long-term social media schemes to maintain stability and balance among different platforms.

Thirdly, there are different travel-related sites, platforms and accounts on social media. Yet ‘Travel Experts’ and ‘Travel Forums’ seem to be the most preferable instead of the traditional official accounts. This finding is consistent with Yu, Asur, & Huberman’s (2011) suggestion that providing trendy and useful information would definitely gain more attention and followers in the Chinese online market as an official account is no longer persuasive enough. Moreover, Chiu, Ip and Silverman (2012) also reveal that in order to increase exposure and spread a positive image, hiring writers to improve the quality of content on social media is also one of the strategies. Hence, this indicates that in order to win more Chinese consumers, authentic and user-friendly content would be the key on social media (Chiu, Ip, & Silverman, 2012).

According to Chiu, Lin and Silverman (2012)’s four imperative segmentations of Chinese social media users, the ‘new’ Chinese tourists will mostly be ‘Readers’ before the trip, but tend to be ‘Opinionated Users’ during and after the trip. Based on the input of the
interviews, the most preferable action is to acquire valuable information from social media platforms in order to better plan journeys. The survey provided similar results, as the greater part of respondents generally only read and check what others are posting without participation. Furthermore, more than half of the interviewees are considered ‘Opinionated Users’ after the trips, and more than 70 per cent of the respondents from the survey are ‘Opinionated Users’ during and after the trips due to the fact that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists like sharing traveling experiences after the trips, which externalizes their good and bad experiences. Moreover, some interviewees even pointed out that they would like to help other travelers and answer their questions, which also has been explained by the theory of Chiu, Lin and Silverman (2012) on ‘Opinionated Users’. Therefore, the findings point out that it is not only indispensable to manage different social media platforms, but it is also important to understand the behavior of each user segment.

6.2. Limitation

Given its exploratory nature, the findings of this paper have some limitations. First, the interviewees for this study were invited on one popular ‘Travel Forum’. It would be more representative to have more opinions from other social media users on other popular platforms so that the input would be more robust. Second, the data from the survey can be biased as only 62 out of 200 responses can be counted, due to restrictive Internet protocols in China. The online survey tool could not be accessed by all the potential respondents, which can have an effect on the results of the survey. Moreover, it is obvious that there is a lack of international academic literature regarding Chinese social media. Future studies may extend the research by including discussion of more Chinese articles to give more comprehensive insights. Moreover, future researchers could consider differentiating social media users in different geographic areas in China, as it will allow for additional comparisons and analysis beyond the context used in this paper. Furthermore, a goal of future research could also be the development of more practical strategies in order to guide the international tourism industry and its online tourism marketers to attract the ‘new’ Chinese tourists on social media platforms in China.

7. Conclusion

Research finding of this paper has discovered some information regarding the patterns of using social media by the ‘new’ Chinese tourists when traveling abroad. It is advisable that
due to the different Internet use patterns and the current restrictions in China, different online marketing strategies need to be taken into account when expanding the tourism market in China. After analysis the results of several interviews and survey data, the present research has ascertained several findings, including that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists would use more than one social media platform for traveling, and they are more active before the trip in order to gain travel-related information, as well as to share their experience with others after the trip. Regarding obtaining information, they would prefer more authentic information instead of enriched content from official verified profiles. In addition, it is useful to know that the ‘new’ Chinese tourists tend not to behave interactively on social media before the trip, but are inclined to express their experiences and feelings during and after the trip. These findings have raised theoretical suggestions for Western tourism companies to develop applicable social media plans for the growing ‘new’ Chinese tourists in the Chinese context. Future studies can consider compiling more Chinese language literature reviews and utilizing research methods in the Chinese online environment to develop more precise findings.

8. Bibliography


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9. Appendices

9.1. Appendix 1. Interview Questions

1. Name, Age, City and Profession (姓名，年龄，居住地和职业)

2. What is the image of Europe in your mind? (Could be cities’ impression)（在你心里，欧洲是个怎样的形象？或者你对欧洲某些城市有什么特别的印象？）

3. Have you traveled to Europe before? If yes, how many times and which destinations specifically? And how long have you stayed in those destinations?（你去欧洲旅行过吗？如果去过，去过几次？去过哪些地方？分别待了多久？）

4. What were the purposes/occasions for you to travel to Europe? Which types of travel would you prefer? What type of activities you engage in while travelling?（去欧洲旅行时有什么特别的目的或理由吗？你比较倾向于哪一种旅行方式？通常你会参加什么样的旅行活动？）

5. Do you use social media? How would you define social media? Which social media platforms/outlets do you use actively and regularly? Why? Do you have a lot of followers?（你使用社交网络吗？你心里是怎么定义社交网络的？你正在使用哪些社交网络平台？哪些平台网页的帐号你使用的比较活跃？你会被许多人关注或者你有很多联系人和好友吗？）

6. Do you use social media in relation to travelling? For choosing a destination/pre-trip/during trip/post-trip? Which one or which ones of them do you focus more?（对于旅行－选择旅行地／查询旅行地信息／旅行过程当中／旅行结束后，你会使用社交
网络吗？哪一个或哪些阶段你会更注重使用社交网络？）

7. Which accounts or what kinds of accounts do you prefer when searching for travel-related information? (Official ones? Travel DaRen? Or?) （当你想要查询有关于旅行的信息时，通常你会选择什么样的账号去查询？比如，旅游达人，官方授权账号等等？）

8. When and where are you the most active on social media in relation to a long-distance trip (stages)? How long before the trip will you start being very active? And how long after the trip will you still be active? And what about during the trip? （当你决定要出国旅行，通常在什么时候你会在社交网络上非常活跃？比如，出行前？出行中或者出行后？你都会活跃在哪些社交网络上？在决定了要出国旅行了之后就会一直很活跃吗？会活跃多久？旅行结束后又会特别活跃多久？）

9. Could you explain in details of your usual activities on social media before the trip, during the trip and after the trip? For example, before the trip, do you prefer to leave comments and participate and share things with other users? Or just look through the information? （请具体的讲一下你在旅行前／旅行中／旅行后的社交网络活动。比如，在出行前，你更倾向于评论参与和分享吗？或者只是单纯的阅读浏览信息？相似的，出行中和出行后呢？）


1. Age
   o 18-25 1
   o 26-35 2
   o 35-45 3
   o 45 above 4

2. Gender
   o Female 1
   o Male 2
3. Education
   o High School  1
   o Diploma      2
   o Bachelor     3
   o Master       4
   o MBA          5
   o PhD          6

4. Profession: __________________________

5.
   a. Have you traveled to Europe before?
      o Yes
      o No
   b. If yes, where and how long have you been to?
      __________________________________________________________
   c. When would be your next plan to travel to Europe?
      __________________________________________________________
   d. Choose the activities you usually do / would like to do during the trip in Europe:
      o Sports       1
      o Relaxing     2
      o Shopping     3
      o Sighting     4
      o Cuisine Tasting 5
      o Depends on what the destination is special for 6
      o Others: ____________________________ 7

6.
   a. Do you use social media?
      o Yes
      o No
   b. Which social media accounts are you using at the moment?
      o Weibo         1
      o Wechat        2
      o Ren Ren       3
      o QQ           4
      o Qiongyou     5
      o Tianya       6
      o Zhihu        7
      o Blog: ____________________________ 8
   c. How active are you usually on social media?
      Very active  Active  Sometimes  Not very active  Not active at all
      1           2         3           4               5
7.
   a. Do you use social media in relation to traveling?
      - Yes
      - No
   b. Do you agree on having a fully prepared and planned trip?
      Strongly agree  Agree  Neutral  Disagree  Strongly disagree
      1  2  3  4  5
   c. How useful do you think to plan your trip by utilizing social media?
      Very useful  Useful  Little useful  Useless
      1  2  3  4
   d. Please choose the activeness of using social media in following stages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very active</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Less active</th>
<th>Inactive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Before the trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. During the trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. After the trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.
   a. The importance on different types of information in relation to traveling from 1-5: 1 is very important, 5 is very unimportant.

   1 Pictures       1  2  3  4  5
   2 Articles       1  2  3  4  5
   4 Raiders        1  2  3  4  5
   (Travel Strategies)
   3 Travel notes   1  2  3  4  5
   5 Q & A          1  2  3  4  5
   b. The usefulness on different types of social media accounts in relation to gathering information from 1-5: 1 is very useful, 5 is very useless.

   a Official accounts  1  2  3  4  5
9.  
   a. Please choose 3 most active usage of platform/platforms in relation to traveling:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Before the trip</th>
<th>During the trip</th>
<th>After the trip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wechat 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weibo 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ren Ren 3</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>QQ 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Qiongyou 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tianya 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zhihu 7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Blogs 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

b. Please choose the your activities on social media in certain traveling stage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Before the trip</th>
<th>During the trip</th>
<th>After the trip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading&amp;Cheking 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collecting 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commenting 4</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interacting 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking Questions 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forwarding 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.
a. Do you use international social media regarding traveling abroad?
   o Yes
   o No
b. If yes, please name them:
   ________________________________________________________