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Potential lessons from Chinese businesses and platforms for online networking and marketing: An exploratory study

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Highlights

- Existing literature does not cover the most recent Chinese digital marketing approaches.
- This study explores western businesses' attitudes towards learning from an emerging market.
- For greater e-commerce success in the future, live-streaming, short videos, customer reviews, and private traffic management are recommended focus areas.
- Developing online media collaborations will help businesses with their international trade.

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the potential for improving New Zealand small-and-medium sized enterprises' (SMEs) digital marketing strategies by learning the different approaches from their Chinese counterparts. Digital marketing is an important topic, especially after the pandemic of the last two years, as online shopping has gained further ground. On the other hand, original digital marketing practices in a dynamic and large market such as China still has not received enough attention within academic literature. Therefore, this study is seeking to answer the following two research questions: 1) How are SMEs in China adopting digital marketing strategies and platforms? 2) Can local SMEs learn from Chinese SMEs' adoption of digital marketing for SMEs in New Zealand? Survey and semi-structured interviews were conducted with Chinese participants to gain insights of digital marketing applications by Chinese SMEs. After acquiring data from Chinese participants and building the framework of online marketing strategies and platforms in China based on data analysis, semi-structured interview questions were designed and conducted with New Zealand experts. Findings from this study reveals that Chinese SMEs increase their online customer traffic through three main sources: e-commerce platform, social media, and private traffic, which is a controllable traffic pool of loyal customers or the brands' social media followers. In addition, digital marketing technologies from China have the potential of being transferred to New Zealand. However, the process can be long-term, due to cultural and attitude barriers. This study also suggests a tentative model examining the likelihood of transferring (LOT) based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

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1. Introduction

Digital online marketing has transformed the relationships between retailers and customers, and provided more opportunities for small-and-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to reach a broader audience. Research indicates that small business can benefit from digital marketing by increasing by 26% revenue and saving 22% on costs on average (SNC, 2018). Digitalization has transformed consumer behaviour by providing interactive channels and accessible product information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The purpose of this study is to explore how and in what ways Chinese SMEs are using digital marketing strategies to increase their business competence and the possibilities of New Zealand and other western SMEs to learn from Chinese digital marketing experience and to improve their digital capability. Existing literature on digital marketing strategies in Chinese companies does not include the most recent applications, and business owners' attitudes towards learning from non-western countries (e.g., China) and their platforms have not been explored widely.

There are two research questions, with new findings for each one:

- How are SMEs in China adopting digital marketing strategies and platforms?
- Can New Zealand SMEs learn from Chinese SMEs' adoption of digital marketing?

Section 4 presents the findings from the Chinese SMEs, to answer the first question. According to Chinese participants, Taobao, social media and private traffic are the main source for their online store traffic. The online shopping platforms in China have actively developed their own algorithms and acted as effective search engines for customers to find appropriate products, e.g., on Taobao. Section 5 reveals findings from New Zealand marketing experts familiar with American and European platforms, aiming to answer the second question. The local participants were presented the results from Chinese surveys and interviews, and asked about opinions about the possibilities of applying similar strategies and platforms.

2. Related literature

Previous literature has illustrated benefits for SMEs to adopt online marketing strategies from various perspectives. [Mokhtar et al. \(2014\)](#) suggested that decision-makers of SMEs follow the Market Orientation (MO) strategy to address consumers' needs. In particular, products and services should be created to meet specific customer demands. The abilities to identify, react, and involve in new market trends will help SMEs to establish long-term competence and success ([Al-Qirim, 2007](#)). The importance of social media in managing customer relations continues to grow since the disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic ([Obembe et al., 2021](#)).

Small businesses can benefit from the application of e-commerce technology and information technology systems by opportunities they provide ([Paraskevas & Buhalis, 2002](#)). In particular for New Zealand SMEs, which are facing a relatively narrow market due to geographical distance and small population. Currently, China is a major export destination for many New Zealand businesses, and it is crucial to understand Chinese social networks and consumer habits ([Ren & Gao, 2020](#)).

The Chinese context is unique due to political and cultural differences, which also pose challenges for foreign brands. [Tate et al. \(2016\)](#) suggest that brands seeking to enter Chinese market should conceptualize their social media relationships as online friendship, so that customers could relate to their social network content. However, the data they gained for developing this research was from participants from previous generations, and their ideas and understandings are different from the current Generation Z, who are a major shopping force in Chinese market.

Understanding knowledge transfer is important for companies that want to distinguish themselves in the market ([Demers, 2007](#)). Knowledge has become a firm's most fundamental resources. The success of an organization depends not only on the products but also the flows of knowledge ([Ai & Tan, 2018](#)). For a company, transferring knowledge will lead to an advantage over its competitors and facilitate internal strategy implementation ([Murray & Peyrefitte, 2007](#)). [De-Graft et al. \(2018\)](#) argued that the ability to transfer technology skills still account for a considerable part of competitive heterogeneity, and transferring tacit knowledge is essential for companies to expand overseas ([Murray & Peyrefitte, 2007](#)). Furthermore, due to the fact that knowledge transfer process may enable members to gain more integrated information, make sound decisions, and prompt innovations ([Chen & McQueen, 2010](#)), decision makers should pay attention to opportunities for transferring knowledge.

Effective cross-cultural knowledge transfer is greatly built on learning, which is the process that translates context-specific experience to general knowledge and then back to context-specific knowledge (Kayes et al., 2005). In addition, Kayes et al. (2005) concluded that the factors for successful cross-cultural knowledge transfer include:

- A person or group to lead the process;
- A systematic cycle of learning;
- Ability to comprehend the potential limits

Appreciation for different cultures, building connections in the host culture, observation, coping with ambiguity, translating complicated opinions, taking action and management of others are important competencies (Kayes et al., 2005). In summary, when suitable circumstances and motivation exist, it is possible to learn business and technical practices from other cultures.

The digital marketing adoption by SMEs has been well-researched from different perspectives. For example, researchers have studied how SMEs can apply online marketing strategies to increase sales (Diehr & Wilhelm, 2017; Karimi & Naghibi, 2015), and the possibilities of SMEs' use of internet technology systems are also explored (Vassileva, 2017). In particular, O'Donnell (2014) identified marketing planning, resources management, customer retention, customer acquisition, customer understanding, competitor understanding, products promotion, and delivery management are the key determinants for marketing activities of SMEs.

Small businesses are at different maturity stages in terms of digital marketing application, and some SMEs are better at managing and making use of consumer data. Businesses that are performing relationship marketing strategies are better equipped with CRM systems, while some business owners or marketing managers from SMEs are not familiar with this term (Harrigan et al., 2012).

Marketing activities by SMEs can be limited by various constraints. Marketing function is not as mature in SMEs as in large organizations (Turow, 2008), and the owners of SMEs are always the decision maker, whose marketing knowledge and skills impact online marketing strategies and results. Usually, the marketing strategies by SMEs are unstructured, informal, and adopted in a bottom-up method. Furthermore, limited resources such as marketing professionals, finances and structured planning activities may hinder small companies' marketing strategies (Boyles, 2011).

Studies hold similar opinion about the importance of entrepreneurs' managerial ability as well as business motivation, which are the key determinants for the success of a SME. However, most SME owners tend to favour marketing activities that generate immediate or short-term results, some researchers believe that this is caused by their limited resources (Gamble & Gilmore, 2013), while this is a problem to be understood and investigated more specifically. Eggers et al. (2012) argued that the intention for growth also affects business owners' expectation for marketing strategies. For companies with low growth intention, they tend to focus more on the current customers' demand rather than acquiring new customers, while for companies with entrepreneurial intention, products and processes

innovation are their priority (Eggers et al., 2012). O'Donnell (2014) stated that the marketing function grows with a firm's lifecycle stage, and it becomes more established when the firm moves through. In addition, for small businesses seeking to enter global market, owners should improve their managerial competence in order to boost their international performance. Brands should acquire social media knowledge and competence to engage with targeted consumers (Tate et al., 2016). The more positive engagement with customers, the more likely a brand is to gain loyal customers. This way, the business may be able to not only convey standard functional information, but also create emotional value, in terms of customer loyalty and personal appeal (Kato, 2021).

3. Methods and data collection

Qualitative research can help researchers gain an in-depth view of emerging events or phenomenon (Brooks et al., 2012). Using a qualitative method is appropriate as the topic of digital marketing is a constantly developing phenomenon. Two previous examples are O'Donnell (2014) where the researcher adopted a qualitative method to explain what marketing techniques SMEs use to promote their products and services, and Mokhtar et al. (2014) where they studied the relationship between SMEs' performance and marketing orientation qualitatively. For this paper's contemporary topic, the gaps in prior research and frameworks suggested an exploratory and qualitative direction.

As this study intends to examine both how the digital marketing applications are used by Chinese SMEs as well as the attitudes of New Zealand marketing experts towards these digital marketing techniques, this study contains two sample groups.

The sample from China was targeted according to the following criteria: 1) Being an SME with less than 20 employees, 2) Having online presence and using online marketing strategies, at a level that can provide interesting information, and 3) Having a level of homogeneity and similarity, to ensure effective comparisons and contrast across these businesses.

Based on these criteria, it was decided to include Chinese SMEs with online shops from Taobao.com. Taobao was the only e-commerce platform discussed in this study in consideration of its large market share, innovative aspects and integration of social networks. The researchers succeeded in getting a positive response from a sample of business owners and marketing/operation managers with an average three years of experience in using digital marketing to drive sales. Purposeful sampling is an efficient method for small sample size data collection, and it ensures that participants can provide relevant and effective information to help fulfil the researchers' objectives (Kornhaber et al., 2014; Robinson, 2014). Moreover, participants with expertise in their field and broad opinions can provide favourable data to support research findings (Michelle et al., 2014). Participants selected with the purposeful sampling method can contribute to the researcher's understanding of in-depth personal experience (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). In this research study, the key informant approach was adopted. A senior manager or business owner was selected from each SME as the key informant to gather data (Daghfous et al., 2013).

For the second sample, it was important that the participants could evaluate the data that was collected from the Chinese SMEs. Some of these concepts, platforms, and marketing terms from can be difficult or

unfamiliar for ordinary New Zealand SME owners. Therefore, New Zealand marketing experts were included as participants, who have expertise and marketing knowledge to be able to understand unfamiliar marketing concepts and relate them to the application of New Zealand market. The New Zealand marketing experts were recruited by seeking the advice of peer digital marketing experts. For qualitative and descriptive research, snowball sampling is helpful when the number of respondents is limited, and trust is required to initiate conversations (Noy, 2008). In this research, a small number of experts was contacted with a research introduction and requirements, and they provided more contacts by sending introduction emails.

The New Zealand sample was limited to the following criteria: 1) Experienced with digital marketing and social media, and 2) Experienced in conducting digital marketing campaigns for SMEs with less than 20 employees. New Zealand marketing experts were thus recruited, each with at least five years of working experience in the marketing industry.

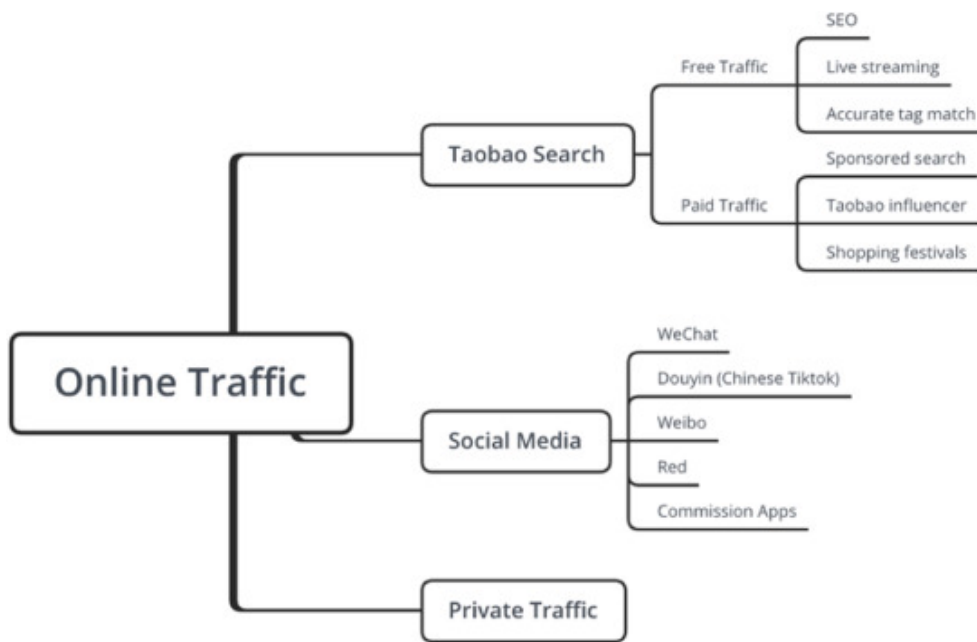
The Chinese participants were informed of their rights and given the research consent form prior to the data collection process. The Chinese participants acknowledged their willingness to participate by sending emails or officially agreed on WeChat, a mainstream social network used in China.

The process of collection primary data from Chinese participants started by speaking with participants over the phone. The data collection instrument was a combination of an online survey and semi-structured interview. The online survey had 33 questions in order to gain an understanding of the participants' backgrounds and the digital marketing platforms they use. The survey was written in both English and Chinese. The researchers used Tencent Wenjuan, a survey system that supports Chinese language. The raw data and field notes were saved in Microsoft Excel, and further transferred to NVivo 12 for data organization. The goal has been to find themes and patterns, and identify and critique the trends, as well as the major topics and possibly conflicting perspectives.

The collection of primary data from the New Zealand sample started the research consent forms were signed prior to each interview. Participants were assured complete confidentiality and privacy, and the notes from each interview and the summary of the findings were shared with them. This also ensures results credibility and respondent validation, by returning the interview notes back to participants to check for accuracy. A semi-structured interview was used. Followed by example of digital marketing cases from China, the interviewees were invited to discuss them. Open-ended questions were used to encourage discussion and with the purpose of getting a detailed picture of the participants' ideas and thoughts.

4. Findings from Chinese SMEs

This section presents findings from surveys and interviews with Chinese companies. The purpose of this section is to highlight repeated themes across twelve case studies, find out their attitudes towards digital marketing, application of digital marketing strategies and platforms, investigate digital marketing barriers and explore trends of digital marketing adoption in China. Fig. 1 is a brief summary of the strategies covered; these are discussed in detail individually.



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Fig. 1. Chinese SMEs' online traffic sources.

All twelve cases agreed that digital marketing benefit them in terms of improving sales and revenue. They believed that digital marketing helped them to reach a larger group of audience, reduce marketing cost, gain measurable results of marketing campaigns, and better retain loyal customers.

However, there are some negative attitudes towards digital marketing, such as increasing competition and cost for acquiring new customers, the falsification of data from sponsored cooperation with internet celebrities, and information overload.

Chinese participants all agreed that increasing traffic is the first step and the most important procedure in driving sales, which is the ultimate goal of digital marketing. The major traffic source for Chinese SMEs is Taobao. When shopping online, Chinese consumers are distinctive from western consumers who use search engines to find products, instead, Chinese consumers would use e-commerce platforms to find products. The online shopping platform in China have actively developed their own algorithms and acted as effective search engines for customers to find appropriate products. Therefore, the term “searching” discussed in this section is not on searching engines, but on Taobao, a mainstream marketplace platform in China. The algorithms of Taobao allow sellers to gain free customer traffic by search engine optimization (SEO), live streaming and accurate tag match.

4.1. Free traffic strategies

4.1.1. Free traffic: search engine optimization (SEO)

Search engine optimization (SEO) is defined as the process of making a website show near the top of lists (Erdemir, 2015). There has not yet an official definition of SEO on Taobao, but SEO methods on Taobao

have similarities to that on search engines like Google. For example, both Taobao and Google present searching results based on users' location, demographics and preferences (Google, 2020). There are some common techniques used by Chinese SMEs for optimizing search rankings for their products. First, Taobao offers free user behaviour data analysis software to shop owners, so they can understand what keywords customers are searching and adjust their product title accordingly. The second strategy is to optimize the content/picture/video. Attractive pictures and videos are major reasons for customers to visit the detail page of a product, and the key factors to improve conversion rate. When customers are presented with a list of products, they are more likely to go into details of the ones with attractive photos and videos.

The tendency of customers' purchases to be influenced by previous customer reviews is already known. As stated by the participants of this study, Chinese customers constantly read reviews from others before placing an online order, and they trust comments from other buyers as opposed to just the product details from shops.

Participant 8: "There are still many new customers that can be tapped on the Taobao platform, but now in this industry products are becoming similar and customers are relying more on reviews, so you need to have some strategies before running marketing campaigns. When customers click the link but realize the product is not what they want, they will leave your page. If they want this product, they will read reviews from other customers and the product details before making the final decision. In this process, the most important factors will be your item's pictures and title."

Finally, it is important to optimize store performance and ranking. To a large extent, companies from China rate their shopping experiences, and monitor their store data on a daily base. According to the Taobao algorithm, a shop's performance scores are based on its click-through rate, save rate, add to shopping cart rate, re-purchase rate, customer feedback, and conversion rate.

4.1.2. Free traffic: live streaming on Taobao

Chinese SMEs made use of Taobao live streaming as a free method to attract new customers and increase store exposure. Additionally, they believed that the real-time communication with customers can increase their conversion rate, since they can answer customers' questions and present products themselves.

Chinese small business owners were aware of the physiological effects created by live streaming. They not only introduced their products during live streaming, but also provided coupons and lucky draws to encourage customers purchasing. According to Gong, Ye, Liu, et al. (2020), live streaming can encourage customer impulsive buying behaviour by real-time and interactive conversation as well as inviting atmosphere. In addition, interaction during live streaming can increase consumer trust and loyalty.

4.1.3. Free traffic: persona tags match

Data was one of the words that frequently appeared during interviews. Taobao empowers its sellers with enhanced database for generating tags of consumers. A functional marketing campaign not only targets right audience, but also achieves satisfying results by promoting products or services. In addition, a

successful promotion helps customers to discover their demands for products or services, which they would otherwise not realize.

4.2. Paid traffic strategies

4.2.1. Paid traffic: sponsored advertisement

Sellers on Taobao can bid for business traffic based on specific spots and target crowds. On Taobao, the two most used paid advertisements are called Express Train and Drillings. Express train's pricing method is based on cost per click (CPC), and sellers will not be charged if there is no click, while Drillings charge sellers based on cost per mille (CPM).

4.2.2. Paid traffic: Taobao Influencer (Taoke)

The idea of Taoke (Taobao influencer) started in 2007 as the Alibaba Group founded Alimama (https://www.alibabagroup.com/en/news/press_pdf/p071120.pdf ↗), a marketing technology and big data platform. Taoke is now a popular term when small businesses looking to find some sponsored promotion by influencers. Sellers on Taobao can find Taoke on an open social platform and negotiate commission percentage based on a Taoke's previous performance. Taoke create content such as videos and photos with shopping links, which may appear on the front page of Taobao or Weitao, a built-in social channel of Taobao for sellers or influencers to interact with customers.

4.2.3. Paid traffic: shopping festivals

Shopping festivals on Taobao are shopping events when customers are offered lucrative prices, and sellers take advantage shopping festivals to increase sales and brand exposure. Major shopping festivals on Taobao include New Year, International Women's Day, 18th June, Double 11 and Double 12. Promotional activities have been proved to engage with customers and drive online store performance, despite that they reduce customers' actual payment amount and intensify strategic customer behaviour (Zhang et al., 2020).

4.3. Social media traffic

The Chinese participants considered social media as a significant tool to boost sales. Among the twelve cases, all of them used WeChat to engage with customers, six used Red, five used Douyin, five used Weitao and two used Weibo. According to the interviews, WeChat is an effective channel to engage with loyal customers and boost re-purchase rate, Douyin is helpful in terms of acquiring new customers, while Red is a platform for both customer acquisition and customer retention. However, participants have both positive and negative perspectives towards the application of social media. Influencer marketing is another popular technique used by SMEs in China. Despite that SMEs have little tendency to adopt social media (Durkin et al., 2013; Nakara et al., 2012), small businesses in China showed confidence in social media's capability of improving sales.

4.4. Private traffic

This is a term appearing in recent years, it refers to the marketing method of extracting traffic from search engines or online marketplace to private pools. Since small businesses have low budgets to manage marketing campaigns, they have been focusing on building their own traffic pools to retain loyal customers and increase repurchase rate. WeChat is the most used social network and messaging APP in China. On WeChat, retailers can reach their customers by creating groups and sharing product-related contents such as photos, videos, and links on Moments. The mini-program function on WeChat also enabled small retailers to create their own mini-APPS, in which they can build online shops.

In addition to WeChat, Chinese SMEs took advantage of Taobao's social functions. Retailers on Taobao can post micro-blogs with links on Weitao, a built-in social channel on Taobao. Moreover, retailers can also create customers groups, where they can share coupons, red pocket, new-arrivals, and all kinds of promotion events. Companies also used social media such as Weibo, Red and Douyin to engage with their followers. Compared to Weibo and Douyin, users on Red are younger and with a higher purchase desire.

4.5. Short videos

Fragmented and stimulating information is preferred by most internet users. Characteristics like short time, high entertainment, convenient production and sharing have made short videos the naturally popular media for marketers. Moreover, as Douyin has been aggressively attracting users, small businesses in China have seen great opportunities in getting traffic by generating short videos.

4.6. Live streaming

Chinese customers are accepting live streaming as a way to get personal shopping experience and great discounts. Although participants had complaints and concerns for live streaming data, they still showed optimistic attitudes towards the future of live streaming marketing. Live streaming can also be used as a method to supplement product detail pages. For example, when presenter introducing a product, the video can be recorded and added to the product detail page on Taobao, and customers can watch the recorded live streaming video for specific introduction. Participants who expressed live streaming as a future digital marketing direction focused either on live streaming themselves, or on cooperating with celebrities for live streaming.

Participant 9: "Later, I will focus on Taobao live broadcasts. I have to say that they are very effective. Shops that obtain the right to emerge can easily sell tens of thousands of live broadcasts for an hour or two. This has become a hit for many merchants. We will also cooperate with KOLs on platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, and Red to sell through live-streaming."

4.7. Summary

Effective management of private traffic can help brands, especially small businesses to retain customers. Since companies agreed that acquiring new customers is getting more difficult and expensive, they have become more aware of the importance of customer retention through private traffic management.

Compared to large organizations, SMEs are facing unique challenges. The major difficulties SMEs encountered when managing digital marketing campaigns include: lack of marketing budget, lack of

professionals to produce social media content, and the trust while working with online influencers.

The budget is the first thing that decision-makers in SMEs consider before conducting paid marketing campaigns. From the interview results, limited budget was one of the major obstacles for online shop growth. Chinese participants also found some solutions. Since it is becoming more and more expensive to acquire new customers and gain online traffic, SMEs with limited budget are seeking other options such as optimizing searching results and creating engaging content to boost store traffic.

For SMEs, the right choice of marketing strategies is also more important. Some participants claimed that they need to gain more marketing knowledge and expertise. Good online store management can attract customer with low cost, while wrong marketing decisions can waste money. Despite the insufficient digital marketing knowledge, some businesses owners said they learned how to manage their online store from Taobao University, which is a platform founded by Alibaba Group providing lectures on building a digital business (Gilchrist, 2018).

While SMEs are trying to attract customers on social media by using entertaining content, they may lack the ability to produce engaging photos, articles, and videos. A digital marketing content strategy relies on creating consistent, relevant and valuable content for customers. If they can overcome this challenge and produce content quickly, it can lead to customer engagement and stimulate sales.

Chinese SMEs considered cooperating with key opinion leaders (KOL) is an effective method to boost sales, since KOLs are able to influence a great number of followers. However, some participants expressed their concern about trust. When companies pay for online celebrities to promote products on live streaming, they need to pay endorsement fees and commissions. Sometimes these may be too high when it is uncertain whether many orders will result from cooperating with a KOL.

When asked about new digital marketing trends, the Chinese participants expressed strong passion for live streaming, creating short videos, and managing private traffic. Interesting marketing content such as videos are believed by retailers to better catch audiences' attention.

5. Findings from New Zealand marketing experts

All participants mentioned that they had been aware of Alibaba. Some participant had personal experience in using Ali Express, and a smaller number had used WeChat as well as WeChat Pay. These marketing professionals had a preliminary understanding of Chinese digital marketing applications and platforms. Participants mainly gain new digital marketing knowledge from the US instead of China, which is often seen as a politically and culturally different country.

Compared to Chinese customers, who search products on e-commerce platforms, New Zealand consumers use Google as the major platforms when they search for items. When talking about Search engine optimization (SEO), New Zealand marketing experts focused more on the optimization of keywords rather than optimizing product details, customer reviews or store performance, which are key points from the interviews with Chinese SMEs. All marketing experts agreed that Google is the most similar website to Taobao searching. Marketing experts believed that SEO on Taobao was similar to SEO on Google, and

tend to use similar SEO techniques to benefit from Google traffic. However, the experts also expressed some scepticism towards local SMEs' effective management of keywords optimization to increase website visits. They also expressed other thoughts around improving local SME's digital marketing strategies. Compared to Chinese SMEs, local SMEs currently apply simpler approaches for processing the pictures, videos and descriptions on online stores. Although customer reviews are considered to be important for improving the conversion rate in e-commerce, local SMEs seem to receive limited benefits from customer reviews. The algorithms for ranking and search results are not widely considered by local businesses. Although local SMEs have not started to focus on writing their own product details or encouraging more customer reviews, the experts interviewed believed that doing these would improve online businesses. The following sections will mention specific strategies and tools that were found useful.

5.1. Free traffic: live streaming

All marketing experts considered live streaming can be an effective tool for New Zealand SMEs, since live streaming provides customers a better direct-viewing experience and allows customers interact with streamers. Barriers for local SMEs use live streaming included the market size of New Zealand, SME owners' perception and budget.

5.2. Free traffic: persona tags match

All New Zealand participants reported that Google Analytics can be used to analyze consumer demographics and find accurate users based on the tags match, while three participants mentioned the exact way of operating. However, local SMEs did not make the full use of it due to sophistication. Taking advantage of these algorithms could be difficult for local SMEs. Despite that Google searching and Google analytics are strong tools for online businesses, local SMEs lacked the understanding or professionals to make use of them.

5.3. Paid traffic

Sponsored search is very similar to Google Adwords. According to the interview participants, local SMEs were aware of Google Adwords or other sponsored searching tools, but their limited budget could be a constraint. They also reported that influencer marketing had been used by retailers less systematically; as no New Zealand e-commerce platform had similar influencers or commission systems.

Boxing Day or Black Friday are opportunities for New Zealand retailers to promote, however, compared to Chinese SMEs, who are using each festival to drive sales, the local businesses only focus on certain holidays.

5.4. Social media traffic

Since social media tools used in China have unique aspects, the interview participants were first given a brief review of Chinese social media applications, and then asked about similar social networks used by local SMEs, and how these similar networks can be used in ways similar to Chinese small businesses.

Overall, among all the social media presented to the interviewees, only Douyin has a very close Western equivalent as TikTok, which is still less sophisticated in terms of business functionality. WeChat, Weibo and Commission apps have similar Western counterparts, while Red has no comparable platform. In addition to content marketing, SMEs are also suggested to encourage UGC (Mussol et al., 2017). Chinese small business managed their UGC mainly on Taobao customer reviews and Red, which are major places customers visit when they look for reviews. Social media such as Weibo and WeChat were also used by Chinese SMEs for creating a word-of-mouth effect.

Wechat: Facebook was reported as the most equivalent social media to WeChat. WeChat's messaging and moments features are like Facebook messaging and Facebook wall. Facebook business page and messenger were the main functions most by New Zealand SMEs to engage with customers.

Problems associated with using Facebook including the information privacy issue and excessive advertising, which prevented users from using Facebook. WeChat has more features for businesses that are not well developed on Facebook, e.g., WeChat Mini-Apps, marketplace, and payment.

Douyin: TikTok has already been popular among New Zealand young people. On Douyin, retailers can add their product link to a video, or sell directly on live streaming, but these functions are not yet available on TikTok. New Zealand marketing experts considered the influencer marketing on TikTok to be effective. In addition, participants believed that the product link and live streaming sell would be powerful if these functions were available.

Participant A: "I think TikTok appeals to the probably slightly younger user base. But its engagement is a lot higher than any other social media platform. My niece is using TikTok, and if there was the ability for the influencers she follows to sell products, she would probably buy them."

Weibo: The New Zealand equivalent social platform of Weibo is Twitter; however, SMEs in New Zealand do not use Twitter as a platform for promoting businesses. In addition, customers do not use Twitter as much compared to Facebook or Instagram.

Red: Although Red has proved its success in Chinese market, there has not been a similar sized platform for customer reviews. New Zealand marketing experts mentioned similar platforms like Yelp, Facebook Reviews, Google Reviews and customer.co.nz, but these platforms are not comparable to Red in terms of size and functions.

Commission APPs: Participants believed the Chinese Commission APPs used similar marketing strategy as affiliate marketing, from which customers could earn commission by promoting products to their friends. Similar platforms mentioned by experts include: Amazon, Ali Express, Grab One, Shopify.

However, experts have varied opinions on its effectiveness.

5.5. Private traffic

According to the experts, New Zealand SMEs have already adopted email marketing, Facebook Page and Instagram official account for customer engagement, as a form of private traffic management, but since

“private traffic management” is not yet a specified field in marketing, New Zealand small business only applied fundamental techniques of private traffic management.

Perceived barriers included different mindset and regulation. Chinese SMEs usually provide red pocket or coupon as incentives for customers to join social media groups or follow accounts, which would not be effective in other countries, since customers have different mindsets. Furthermore, New Zealand has strict regulations on sending text messages or emails to customers. Without consumers’ explicit permission, business may not send advertisement by email or by text messages.

5.6. Possibilities of using Chinese platforms/strategies to sell within New Zealand

All participants agreed that New Zealand SMEs could use some of Chinese digital marketing strategies to sell in New Zealand. However, the availability of technology, platforms and professionals were considered to be the major barriers. In particular, video, live streaming, and targeted group marketing were believed to be the most effective methods for New Zealand SMEs sell in New Zealand.

Participant A: “I think there are a lot of cues that we could take from, you know, from you sort of mentioned about, I think China is surging in terms of technology, and things like COVID-19 have accelerated and moved us to a cashless society. There's still more that we could do.”

5.7. Possibilities of using Chinese platforms/strategies by local SMEs to sell to China

Business looking to sell into Chinese market definitely need to use the local strategies and platforms. However, for New Zealand companies, who are faced language and cultural barriers, they need to use reliable intermediate that are familiar with Chinese market.

5.8. Summary and barriers for local companies to learn Chinese strategies and platforms

Major barriers perceived by New Zealand marketing experts involved language and culture, which are fundamentally different from New Zealand. Other factors included attitudes and technology adoption. Culture was considered to be the major barrier for marketing knowledge transfer from China. Chinese consumers have distinctive shopping habits compared to New Zealand customers, and sellers need to adjust their marketing strategies correspondingly. Participants reported the difficulty they have when trying to acquire information about Chinese online marketing since they did not know Chinese and had to rely on websites written in the West instead of Chinese marketers.

Participant D: “... but there are a couple of barriers, like the use of technology, integration, and attitudes. Everything you just talked about, like live shopping, video, and payment, starting to really prioritize in terms of the business owner themselves coming to terms with the new technology. But also, it takes them a while to adopt new technology, but the short-video, absolutely.”

6. Discussion of findings from Chinese companies

According to [Fan \(2019\)](#), Chinese SMEs hold positive attitudes towards applying digital marketing strategies and platforms. According to the findings here, they seem to be constantly working to enhance

their online capabilities. Chinese SMEs themselves have the potential for developing a strong understanding and measurement of marketing activities because of global competition, cheaper technology infrastructure, and information visibility (Chong et al., 2011).

Searching, social media and private pools are three major sources for Chinese small business to gain customer traffic. Chinese consumers rely on e-commerce marketplace rather than search engines when they make online purchases, and e-commerce platform like Taobao has developed sophisticated algorithms to satisfy customers searching demand and present searching results based on personal interests. Accordingly, retailers on Taobao studied its algorithms and optimized their online stores to stand out from their competitors. Small businesses had to make use of their limited budget; hence they turned to free traffic and applied every resource to increase their related knowledge. This result indicates that Chinese SMEs are actively enhancing their online marketing techniques in a systematic way, and it contradicts the claim made by Gilmore et al. (2004), who considered SMEs' marketing strategies were informal and reactive. In the following pages, each sub-section discusses one of the six important themes.

6.1. Free traffic

To optimize search results on Taobao, Chinese SMEs study Taobao algorithms and follow each update. Past literature exploring Taobao algorithms focuses on technological aspects rather than applications from business's perspectives. In addition, sellers' responses for negative reviews may influence consumer shopping behaviour (Liu et al., 2020).

Live streaming was considered as one of the most effective digital marketing tools by Chinese SMEs. Shop owners can either hire a model or present products themselves. This study confirms the findings from Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2018) that live streaming method is beneficial regarding building trust and maintain customer loyalty. Moreover, this result contributes to the literature by providing new perspectives of live streaming adoption and usage, such as gaining accurate online customers, increasing sales as well as conversion rate, and supplementing product details page.

Data was one of the major tools used by Chinese SMEs to increase business performance. This finding disagrees with the results from Mohamed and Weber (2020), who claimed that SMEs had low awareness of data benefits and inadequate knowledge of big data power. Reasons for Chinese SMEs' enthusiasm for using big data can be several. First, the fierce competition in e-commerce industry has been driving SMEs to operate their online shops with more data-driven techniques. Taobao sellers have free access to Taobao University, which provide techniques and information to boost online performance. Finally, the whole society is passionate about information technology, and Alibaba Group is using big data and AI to create enormous business miracles, which drives SMEs to follow Alibaba's rules and stay updated with the innovative application of information technology.

6.2. Paid traffic

Like Google AdWords, Taobao provides both pay-per-click (CPC) (which is called Express Train) and pay-per-mille (CPM) (named Drill) advertisements. The results showed that sellers with more experience tend to use paid advertisements, while the new sellers were more careful and conservative when it comes

to paid traffic. Participant 5 thought highly of shop attributes digitalization, which could help to Taobao searching accuracy. This result is in line with findings from [Richards and Li \(2018\)](#), who believed sponsored searching advertisement on Taobao would become more sophisticated and monetized in terms of customer search.

Cooperating with influencers has been proved to be effective method to increase SMEs' competences ([Rizomyliotis et al., 2018](#)). In 2020, influencer marketing is considered to represent a \$10 billion USD industry ([Haenlein et al., 2020](#)). In this study, Chinese SMEs cooperated with Taobao influencers mainly in two ways: live-streaming and Taobao blog posts. Compared to western countries, retailers in China adopt some unique strategies and distinctive platforms when it comes to influencer marketing. In addition, Taobao's social media aspects have been overlooked by researchers. Therefore, findings of Taobao influencer marketing could not be related to past literature.

The fact that Chinese SMEs took advantage from shopping festivals on Taobao aligns with the literature regarding marketing plan's importance to the success of small business ([Parry et al., 2012](#)). Chinese SMEs on Taobao are benefiting in terms of saving in their operational budget. On large e-commerce platforms, SMEs can follow planned marketing activities and they do not need to make promotion rules or set up online systems to support promotion. The most famous shopping festival in China is called Double 11, which is well studied. [Yang et al. \(2018\)](#) found out that consumers' purchase intention may be influenced by the shopping atmosphere, and [Zhao et al. \(2019\)](#) confirmed that Chinese Millennial is the mainstream shopping power for the Double 11 shopping festival.

6.3. Social media traffic

Chinese companies reported that the most used social media were WeChat, Douyin, Weibo, Red and some commission APPs. In China, the social media are distinctive from western countries, where Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are dominating. In recent years, TikTok by Byte Dance is receiving increasing popularity among younger populations. However, TikTok has less features for business compared to Douyin, which allows users to add shopping links to videos and in live streaming.

Chinese social media platforms' linkage with e-commerce platforms has made it easy for retailers to boost sales. For example, social media such as Douyin and Weibo are linked to Taobao, while WeChat and Red has their own e-commerce platform and Taobao links are not accessible on them. The reason for these social platforms' linkage to different online marketplace is investment relationships. As a social commerce platform, Red features in UGC and cross-border commerce ([Yan et al., 2017](#)), and it is unique in China as no comparable or even similar platform is available in New Zealand. Red is based on shopping experience sharing within community and decentralized UGC model ([Yan et al., 2017](#)). Chinese SMEs made use of Red by creating content themselves or cooperating with KOLs to acquire new customers, and they believe that new customers were easily attracted by positive reviews from others.

The fact that Chinese SMEs were using social platforms and customers interactions to boost sales can be related to social commerce, which is a concept from [Web 2.0](#), and e word-of-mouth (eWOM) becomes significant for online business ([Huang & Benyoucef, 2013](#)). All mentioned social networks in this study are built with functions for users to share, purchase, and write customer reviews. In addition, since WeChat

Pay and Alipay are dominating Chinese online and mobile payment sector, consumers enjoy a more convenient online shopping experience.

6.4. Private traffic

As a new term emerged from digital marketing field, research examining the topic of private traffic have not been found. Private traffic has become one of the most discussed marketing techniques in China. Chinese marketers are exploring cost-effective methods such as private traffic as a response to the competitive e-commerce market as increasingly expensive customer acquisition cost. As [Majid \(2020\)](#) stated, customer acquisition can become a major cost for companies, while customer retention may help bring profitable and long-lasting relationships with customers.

Chinese customers showed relatively accepting attitudes towards joining brands' private traffic pools. One of the reasons for customers' supportive attitudes is that digital marketing is becoming more common and accepted in China, and from consumers' perspectives, private traffic operations allow them to get updated news and promotions from brands they like.

6.5. Difficulties encountered by Chinese SMEs in adopting digital marketing strategies

This study identified four key challenges for SMEs to apply digital marketing strategies: marketing budget, social media content, digital marketing expertise, and false data when cooperating with KOLs. Budget and financial resources have been well discussed in literature as the biggest challenge for SMEs' development ([Hyz, 2019](#); [Li & Hendrichske, 2014](#)).

Due to the limited size of SMEs, small business owners usually act in multiple roles, and they tend to be less specialized in creating engaging digital content that requires creating consistent, relevant, and valuable content for customers. Chinese participants aimed at producing marketing content that encourage customer engagement and stimulate their shopping behaviour, but they did not show satisfaction with the content they created. This finding aligns with the statement of [Pulizzi and Barrett \(2009\)](#), who believed that content marketing is a technique to attract and engage with targeted audiences with the potential buying or communicating behaviors. Compared to self-generated content, Chinese small business showed more proficiency in user-generated content (UGC) management, mainly through Taobao customer reviews and Red, which are major places customers visit when they look for reviews. Social media such as Weibo and WeChat were also considered by Chinese SMEs for creating word-of-mouth effect.

The fact that Chinese SMEs have concern on data authenticity is unique. There have not yet been any research findings reporting false data as one of challenges in SMEs' application of digital marketing. Falsifying data has become one of the major problems associated with influencer marketing. The participants in this study repeatedly mentioned that they had suffered from fake data from cooperating with KOLs during live streaming and sponsored advertisements.

6.6. Practical implications: learning from Chinese digital marketing trends

Chinese companies considered short-video marketing, live streaming and private traffic as promising methods for boosting online performance. The development of mobile payment, e-commerce platforms and social media platforms are fundamentals for digital marketing innovation.

Short videos provide a more direct visual experience for consumers. Online customers are attracted by stimulating information, and engaging short videos can present products and provide in more details. This can also be beneficial as an alternative to having to translate into another language.

Through live streaming, customers can have a more straightforward visual experience by the demonstration of how products are made and used, ask question and get answers in real time, and participate in live activities such as lucky draws and coupon promotions. This is in line with [Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut \(2018\)](#) who emphasized trust in sellers and trust in products, and stated that live streaming would enhance both types of trust. Live streaming can create an immersive environment and stimulate social presence. The two-way communication during live streaming can influence purchasing behaviour ([Li et al., 2018](#)). E-commerce and social media platforms in China are developing live streaming platforms and provide support such as extra exposure and lower rates. Taobao Live and Douyin Live were two most mentioned platforms for live streaming, since they have the most online customers and smooth shopping experiences. Taobao live can also support physical retail shops ([Chou, 2020](#)) and western businesses can partner with retail outlets to introduce their products in the Chinese market.

7. Discussion of findings from New Zealand experts

Aiming to answer the second research question, this section summarises and discusses findings from New Zealand participants. This section first presents interpretation of New Zealand digital marketing experts' previous knowledge of digital development in China, followed by a discussion of New Zealand marketing experts' perceptions of each digital marketing strategy and platform used by Chinese SMEs. Barriers for New Zealand SMEs seeking to learn digital marketing applications from China and potential will also be discussed. In the end, the likelihood of transferring (LOT) model will be suggested, which is an extension of the technology acceptance model developed by [Davis et al. \(1989\)](#).

Despite that New Zealand marketing experts mentioned some Chinese platforms such as Alibaba, WeChat and TikTok, they have very limited knowledge about the Chinese SMEs' digital marketing application and Chinese consumers' shopping behaviour. The fact that innovation happened in China is not widely spreading reflects the cultural and language difference' negative impact on knowledge transfer. This finding agrees with the statement of [Tan and Gartland \(2014\)](#). In addition, the fact that New Zealand participants felt that China was “gated” reflects political system's influence on attitudes towards digital development in China. In the following pages, this section presents discussions along the six important themes.

7.1. Free traffic

In New Zealand, there is no comparable e-commerce platform to Taobao, which integrates social media function, online shopping, Google Analytics, and Google AdWords. From the perspectives of gaining online customer, Google was discussed during interviews in order to correlate with Taobao. Strategies including search engine optimization (SEO), persona tags match and sponsored search were used by New Zealand SMEs on Google, while Taobao influencer marketing was considered similar to influencer marketing strategy adopted on Instagram or Facebook. Google and Taobao have different focuses on algorithms in terms of searching. Searching results from Taobao and Google are both personalized, based on users' location, previous searching activities, meaning of query, webpages' quality, relevance, as well as usability (Google, 2020b). Accurate understanding of consumers allows retailers to advertise online with better results. Taobao have similar information and big data application for its online sellers to benefit from accurate targeted customers and achieve better outcomes. However, Taobao has through information of its users.

To make the most of organic searching results and paid advertisements from Google or Taobao, SMEs should be equipped with knowledge and expertise. However, New Zealand SMEs have a poor understanding of the power of big data compared to Chinese SMEs.

There has not been a platform for live-streaming that supports online shopping links in New Zealand. The marketing experts thought live streaming was an innovative and effective way to communicate with customer, but their concerns for live streaming results included New Zealand's small market size, SMEs' willingness and abilities to present products by live streaming. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have announced the launch of live streaming shopping function in 2020, which enable retailers in U.S. to sell through live streaming (Potuck, 2020). In addition to live shopping, Facebook and Instagram are also adding the Checkout feature to make customers' shopping experience more seamless and easier (Potuck, 2020). Live streaming is not a new method in western countries. Facebook live and Instagram live launched in 2016, many marketers are still hesitant about using them (Whitney, 2021). With the integration of shopping and checkout, businesses can make better use of live streaming to promote sales.

Persona tags match was reported as a technique that was underused by New Zealand SMEs due to the lack of understanding and capability. Holmlund et al. (2020) stated that customer actions such as visiting an item page, adding products to shopping cart, and making payment were analysed and presented on Google Analytics dashboard, which would combine a user's history and features to generate a probability vector. Personalized search and recommendation system that is based on past purchasing history, demographics and preferences have been used by major e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, eBay and Taobao (Le & Liaw, 2017). However, Amazon, eBay and Taobao that feature in big data analytics capabilities are not mainstream e-commerce platforms in New Zealand, and common platforms used by New Zealand SMEs such as Shopify and TradeMe were considered as less sophisticated in terms of data analytics.

7.2. Paid traffic

New Zealand experts considered sponsored search marketing and influencer marketing as mature digital marketing strategies in New Zealand. These two strategies have also been broadly discussed by past

literature. Paid search marketing has become a dominant form of online marketing, and the article by [Laffey \(2007\)](#) has illustrated the mechanics of paid search marketing operation thoroughly. Marketing experts from New Zealand compared Taobao sponsored search to Google Adwords campaigns. They also expressed that SMEs may have limited budget to spend on Google Adwords, and they response-marketing first like social media instead of branding. This finding is in consistent with results from [Santra \(2018\)](#), who found out that the budgetary issue is a key constraint for SMEs' digital marketing success.

New Zealand SMEs prefer influencer marketing when they aim to reach younger customers. This finding also supports with the study by [Lind \(2018\)](#), who found out that Generation Z and the Millennials are more easily influenced by micro-influencers.

Shopping festivals are considered less of an e-commerce phenomenon in New Zealand. Although New Zealand SMEs offer promotions on Boxing Day or Black Friday, they do not have a system for coupons and discount due to the lack of suitable platform. Shopping festivals are considered to be able to drive shopping intention due to the atmosphere promotion strategies. Findings from [Chen and Li \(2020\)](#) confirmed this concept.

7.3. Social media

This finding is in line with previous studies. Facebook still plays a crucial role in social media marketing ([Karimi & Naghibi, 2015](#)). As [Tlapana and Dike \(2020\)](#) claimed, Facebook is more popular for online marketing and customer engagement compared to Instagram and Twitter.

Facebook vs. WeChat: SMEs may benefit from Facebook features such as Facebook page, instant messaging with customers and advertisements. This finding is in line with the study by [Moghavvemi \(2015\)](#), who recognized Facebook usage as a positive factor influencing SMEs' business performance. In addition, Facebook could reduce marketing and customer service cost, improve consumer engagement as well as promote products information ([Moghavvemi, 2015](#)).

TikTok vs. Douyin: New Zealand marketing experts noticed the surpassing popularity of TikTok, but their opinions on TikTok's usefulness to help SMEs grow business were divergent. Researchers noticed TikTok's value in digital marketing and e-commerce since 2018. Despite that TikTok is facing a more complicated environment than Douyin, it is actively developing features that are convenient for business, such as cooperating with one of the major e-commerce platforms Shopify and adding live streaming features ([Haenlein et al., 2020](#)).

Weibo vs. Twitter: According to the interviews, none of New Zealand experts thought Twitter was an effective social network for digital marketing activities, despite being very popular around 2012. Until recently, some researchers from other western countries still considered Twitter an efficient platform for relationships with customers ([Cripps et al., 2020](#)). However, Twitter does not seem to be a major platform for shopping promotion information by New Zealand customers any more.

Red: no comparable platform in New Zealand: There has not yet been a comparable platform to Red, and platforms with similar features include Google, Facebook and Instagram. Red is a platform that

focuses on social commerce and community shopping experience sharing (Yan et al., 2017). Since online products information provided by most New Zealand sellers were already considered as insufficient, a platform with customer reviews could supplement. New Zealand companies need to adapt to satisfying customers' online shopping experience by encouraging customers to leave reviews, as it would increase conversion rate as well as loyalty. This result agrees with findings from Daud et al. (2016), who revealed that positive customer reviews enhance loyalty and satisfaction.

Commission APPs vs. Affiliate Marketing: Similar to the model of commission APPs in China, affiliate marketing strategy in New Zealand allows an affiliate to earn a percentage of the sale when a visitor makes purchases from the link provided by the affiliate (Amarasekara & Mathrani, 2016). According to New Zealand experts, affiliate marketing approach was underused by small businesses due to limited size, people's mindset and perceived frauds. Fraud and limited budget could be major barriers to the adoption of affiliate marketing (Amarasekara & Mathrani, 2016). In addition, SMEs's limited budget and marketing knowledge may affect their effective adoption of affiliate marketing; as Castagna et al. (2020) also pointed out, affiliate marketing was one of the tools SMEs neglected.

7.4. Private traffic

Email marketing was considered to be the strategy similar to private traffic management, and it has been effectively used by New Zealand SMEs. Compared to Chinese SMEs, New Zealand SMEs engage with their loyal customers with less direct tools. Other social media such as Facebook groups and Instagram were not fully explored. On the other hands, Chinese SMEs' management of private traffic is based on Chinese social media platforms and Chinese consumer habits, which are distinctive from the ones in New Zealand. New Zealand consumers' preference and acceptance level of business communication should be studied before drawing conclusion.

7.5. Barriers for New Zealand companies seeking to learn from China

The fact that New Zealand marketing experts have so little knowledge of digital marketing innovation in China poses the major challenge for knowledge transfer. New Zealand participants mainly follow U.S. media to get updates on marketing trends, and they were not sure where to learn Chinese market even when they have clients looking to enter Chinese market. This is mainly due to the distinctive cultures between China and New Zealand. Findings of this study reflect the statement of Disterer (2001), cultural traditions may discourage knowledge sharing. Different languages pose difficulties for externalizing tacit knowledge since languages also affect individuals' mentalities.

The lack of understanding in digital marketing was reported to be the major factor affecting SMEs' adoption of online marketing strategies. This result aligns with the statement of Tlapana and Dike (2020), who concluded that insufficient understanding would hinder small businesses' effective application of marketing tools. Insufficient understanding of the logical linkages between marketing actions and outcomes, inputs and outputs, and causes and effects caused by organizational distance may increase difficulty in knowledge transfer (Simonin, 1999). Other barriers that hinder knowledge being transferred

from China to New Zealand included cultural difference, language barriers, attitudes and availability of technology.

7.6. Practical implications: how companies can engage in knowledge transfer

Profitability is one of the arguments for encouraging technology transfer. According to [Villani et al. \(2017\)](#), organizations can promote technology transfer by reducing cognitive, organizational, and social distance. These can be facilitated through online platforms and media. The review of past literature indicated that possible means of transferring marketing knowledge include:

- Building business collaborations
- Hiring global managers as intermediaries
- Involving marketing agencies and educational organizations' engagement

There is great potential in Chinese digital marketing venues to help New Zealand SMEs boost their profitability. The e-commerce technology and marketing strategies from China need to be understood by those facilitating the knowledge transfer before they inform and train others.

[Kayes et al. \(2005\)](#) suggested a three-phrase approach for the learning processes in cross-cultural knowledge transfer. When that approach is applied to the findings of this paper, New Zealand marketing managers seeking to develop cross-cultural skills can first identify competencies, increase their understanding of cultural features, and finally adopt new practices in genuine ways.

8. Synthesis

8.1. Comparison of practices

Previous authors such as [Ilavarasan et al. \(2018\)](#) recommended to study homegrown platforms from emerging economies such China and [India](#), from business and technical perspectives. In bringing together the two previous findings sections, we observed the differences listed in [Table 1](#) below, followed by the Likelihood of Transferring Model in [Table 2](#).

Table 1. Comparison of applications used.

	WeChat (China)	Facebook/Instagram (New Zealand)
Messaging	Yes	Yes
Content posts	Yes	Yes
Mini-programs	Yes	No
Payment	Yes	Yes (No for Instagram)
	Douyin (China)	TikTok (New Zealand)
Add product links	Yes	No
Live stream sell	Yes	No

	WeChat (China)	Facebook/Instagram (New Zealand)
Influencer platform	Yes	No
	Weibo (China)	Twitter (New Zealand)
Link to e-commerce	Yes	No
Sponsored ads	Yes	Yes

Table 2. Likeliness of transferring (LOT) model application.

Digital Marketing Techniques/Platforms used by Chinese SMEs			Similar Platform(s) in NZ	(-) How NZ existing platforms/strategies are similar to Chinese ones (S)	(-) Degree of Usage by New Zealand SMEs (DOA)	(+) Perceived Usefulness (U)	(+) Perceived Ease of Use (EOU)	Likelihood of Transferrii (LOT)
Search Traffic	Free	SEO	Google	5	2	5	3	1
		Live streaming	NA	0	0	4	3	7
		Accurate tag match	Google	5	1	5	3	2
	Paid traffic	Sponsored search	GoogleAds	4	1	4	4	3
		Taobao influencer	Influencer marketing	3	2	3	3	1
		Shopping festivals	Black Friday, Boxing Day	3	2	4	4	3
Social Media	WeChat		WhatsAPP	2	4	4	4	2
			Facebook					
	Douyin		TikTok	2	1	4	3	4
	Weibo		Twitter	3	0	0	5	2
	Red		Facebook/Ins	2	1	4	5	6
Private Traffic	Commission APPs		Affilia marketing	1	1	3	2	3
			Facebook, email, whatsapp	2	3	5	4	4

This comparison is purely functional and not a criticism of mainstream western applications. For instance, the popular western counterparts can work strongly to serve other needs of the consumers and citizens, e.g., pure entertainment, professional networks, activism and news. Current social media applications used by many New Zealand and western marketing professionals are not integrated closely with shopping platforms sites, which are handled separately by e.g., eBay and TradeMe. Therefore, these marketers may be accustomed to using social media more as intermediary applications with indirect impact. As a result, they may develop limited experience if they only stick to TikTok and Instagram, which

are more popular among younger consumers; whereas their Chinese counterparts have had a greater chance to practice direct interactions and selling to their target groups. It is often the case that western consumers have learned to effectively navigate different links and applications; however, a slight technical advantage in user-friendliness and usability can lead to benefits.

Even if marketers do not use the same applications in the local market, they can still learn from the recently developed proactive Chinese marketing practices. In cases of exporting, understanding the features of both Western and Chinese applications is indispensable for marketers. The next section proposes a framework to help more closely evaluate which media applications and marketing techniques the knowledge transfer could begin with.

8.2. Overall theoretical contribution and framework: a likelihood of transfer (LOT) model

Participants thought that digital marketing strategies used by Chinese SMEs were effective. They were also uncertain whether New Zealand SMEs could adopt them. This study recommends a tentative Likelihood of Transfer (LOT) framework with four variables that may affect possibility of technology transfer, inspired by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), as per [Davis et al. \(1989\)](#). This extends the TAM model by adding two variables to describe the availability of existing platforms or strategies: similarity (S) and degree of application (DOA):

Similarity (S): the degree to which an existing platform/strategy is similar to the introduced platform/strategy.

Degree of Usage (DOU): the degree to which a platform/strategy has already been adopted.

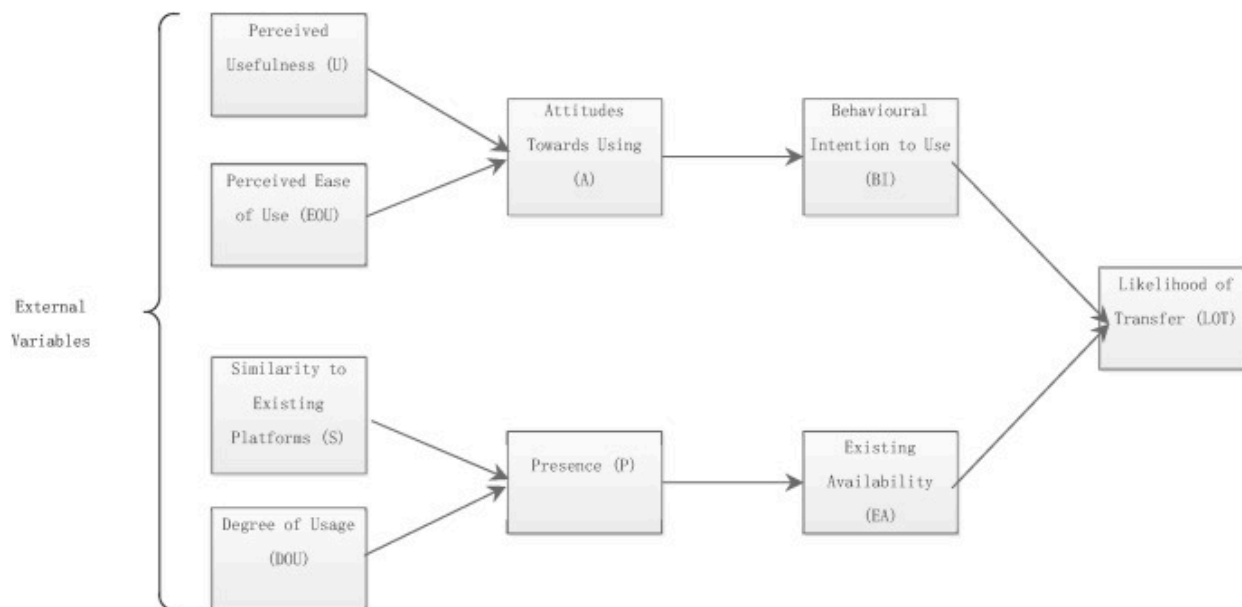
Perceived Usefulness (U) and Perceived Ease of Use (EOU): According to [Davis et al. \(1989\)](#), U and EOU are external variables that positively determines people's attitudes towards behaviour intention (BI). EOU was defined as the “degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort within an organizational context”, while U refers to how much a person believes that using a particular system can enhance their job performance.

Finally, Likelihood of Transferring (LOT) is the likelihood of a technology or strategy can be transferred. In this model, U, EOU, S, DOU were all external variables that affect final results of LOT. Perceived usefulness (U) and perceived ease of use (EOU) may affect people's intention to use, and they determine users' attitudes which further affect behavioural intention to adopt new technology ([Davis et al., 1989](#)). U and EOU were considered as joint determinants that positively affect the degree of technology acceptance ([Davis et al., 1989](#)). Similarity (S) and degree of Usage (DOU) reflect the degree of presence of existing platforms and strategies, which are determinants of existing availability that has a negative impact on the likelihood of transfer (LOT).

$$\text{LOT} = \text{EOU} + \text{U} - \text{DOU} - \text{S}$$

Each variable was given score ranging from 0 to 5, describing the degree of similarity/degree of application/usefulness/easiness of use is. As a result, LOT ranges from 10, and the higher the score, the

more likely a platform/strategy can be transferred. Fig. 2 below is a representation.



[Download: Download high-res image \(215KB\)](#)

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Fig. 2. Likeliness of transferring model (LOT).

Based on the LOT model and interview content, the variables of each platform and strategy used by Chinese SMEs were assigned a value ranging from 0 to 5, and each LOT score was shown in the table below.

This model suggests the potential of each platform or strategy used by Chinese SMEs to be transferred to New Zealand, and the results help to expand on the qualitative findings.

The mostly likely transferred platforms/strategies included: live streaming (7), Red (6), Douyin (4) and private traffic management (4), while the least likely transferred techniques were SEO (1) and Taobao Influencer (1). The LOT model delineates the likelihood of transferring each digital marketing technology/strategy, and it indicates that live streaming and customer review platforms such as ‘Red’ and short videos on TikTok are considered the digital marketing platforms/strategies that have most potential of being transferred from China to New Zealand. The limitations of the LOT model may include that each score was measured subjectively, and the model is still developing, and needs to be tested further in the future with quantitative approaches and instruments.

9. Conclusion

The findings from Chinese companies were organized according to repeated themes across case studies, and were later presented to New Zealand experts for comments and professional opinions on the potential of application by local SMEs.

Previous research such as [Falasca and Piven \(2020\)](#) had shown that email marketing, marketing automation and video content were crucial for SMEs in New Zealand. This study recommends that live-

streaming, short video, customer reviews, and private traffic management are the skills which should be acquired by New Zealand marketing practitioners in the future.

From a macro perspective, Chinese and New Zealand SMEs are using comparable digital marketing techniques. To engage with customers, Chinese SMEs use e-commerce searching function and social media to attract new customers, and actively manage their private traffic to maintain loyal customers and increase their re-purchase rate. New Zealand small business also draw online traffic from search engines as well as social media and retain customer loyalty by affiliate marketing and email marketing. Chinese small business show a more innovative trend using AI, big data, and advanced platforms such as live streaming marketplace and business oriented social networks.

The suggested Likelihood of Transferring (LOT) in this study indicates that live streaming, customer review platforms like Red, and brief videos on TikTok are considered the digital marketing platforms/strategies with the most potential of being transferred from China to New Zealand. Perceived challenges of cross-cultural knowledge transfer are a lack of understanding in digital marketing, cultural difference, language barriers, attitudes, and availability of technology.

Possible means of facilitating marketing knowledge transfer across borders are: building business collaborations, hiring bilingual marketing specialists as intermediaries, and collaboration between marketing agencies and educational institutions. These strategies also lead to some possible directions for future research on social media marketing. For example, building social media collaborations is important for online businesses that market to other countries. Studying and evaluating these collaborations in the future would extend the findings of this present study and help develop the Likelihood of Transferring model further. This study was limited to New Zealand local businesses; therefore, it would be useful to carry out similar research in other western countries to further validate the findings. Finally, as social media is constantly growing and changing across the globe, higher education institutions should encourage and help their students to become more aware of alternative and diverse digital strategies.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Emre Erturk: Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Lingjun Zhang: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft.

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