Social Media in Chinese Tourism Industry

-The Use of Weibo by Tourist Sites in China

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Abstract:

The wide spread of social media usage has become an important social phenomenon in recent years. In the tourism industry, the use of social media has shaped the way people travel tremendously. It provides both opportunities and challenges to tourist sites that adopt or intend to adopt social media to their marketing strategies. This report determines in which way tourist sites can use social media, more specifically Weibo (Chinese microblog), as a marketing tool for promotion in China. By using the research methods of content analysis and email interview, the top ten most influential accounts of 5A scenic areas on Weibo are studied. Moreover, this report briefly outlines China's unique condition of social media and at the same time, explores and evaluates the social media strategies that are used by those top ten tourist site.

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Abbreviations:

CNNIC: China Internet Network Information Center

CNTA: China National Tourism Administration

DMO: Destination Marketing Organizations

LOC: Location

MAU: Monthly Active Users

MII: Ministry of information industry

UGC: User Generated Content

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Chapter 1 Introduction:

1.1 Background:

Following the rapid development of technology and easy access to internet, social media with its attributes of participative, interactive, open and transparent, has changed the communication style for billons of people around the world. In China alone, by December 2015, there are approximately 649 million internet users, including 249 million micro-blog users. The numbers of users of popular social media such as Weibo (microblog in Chinese), WeChat[1] have increased considerably in China since 2009. (CNNIC, 2015; Zhou & Wang, 2014)

Social media also has a growing impact on the tourism industry and changes the way tourists travel. More and more tourists, in particularly young people, take advantage of social media for their travel decision-making. They use social platforms to find tourist destination, design travel plans, share their experience and even directly communicate with the tourist sites administrators. (Yang & Wang, 2015) On the other hand, based on the huge amount of users, many organizations and business managements have seen the potential marketing capacity of social media and start to develop their own social media strategies (Zhou & Wang, 2014). Many tourists' sites and destination organizations are no exception from this trend. They start to use social media as helpful interactive platform to connect with their visitors/ followers like all others.

Moreover, Chinese social media are different than its counterparts in other countries. There is strong governmental surveillance on social media platforms and only very few foreign participants in the Chinese market. There would be substantial restrictions in the long run, most of the worldwide popular social media platforms, such as: Facebook, Twitter and Google are banned in China. (Kristensen, 2013) Together with the language barriers, social media in Chinese context is remaining unfamiliar to western world. Consequently, the studies related to Chinese social media is relatively little compared to westerns'. Therefore, this report is trying to explore the usages of popular social media as marketing tool in China, especially for tourists' sites, their social media strategies in promoting healthy image and maintaining positive relationship with tourists/followers. Sina Weibo, as one of most popular social media platforms in China is selected for data collection basis, its top ten most influential accounts of 5A scenic areas are chosen to be study subjects in this report. These ten accounts are listed in an official report of the tourist industry development from

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[1] WeChat is a free messaging & calling app that allows you to easily connect with family & friends across countries. It's the all-in-one communications app for free text (SMS/MMS), voice & video calls, moments, photo sharing, and games.

Weibo Data Center by May 2015 (2015). A detailed introduction of Sina Weibo and the Top-ten list will be in the following paragraph.

1.1.1 Sina Weibo:

Sina Weibo, which will be referred as "Weibo" from now on, is a major social media platform in China. Launched in 2010, Weibo is known as Chinese hybrids version of Twitter and Facebook with highest user loyalty and usage in China. It is also the main source for news, entertainment and other social media. (Yang & Wang, 2015) According to Weibo's official report, by the end of September 2014, it had 167 million MAU (Monthly Active Users). (Weibo, 2015) Its users vary from ordinary people to celebrities, individuals to groups or organizations, business use to charities.

Its popularity is due to several reasons. First, without restriction of time and location, it provides easy access to a platform that everyone can express themselves freely by posting a feed up to 140 Chinese characters, or upload nine pictures, one videos and long content. Second, people can use Weibo as a media to interact with each other and connect with the world by "like", "comment" or "repost" other people's posts. It is also possible to send a private message or start a conversation directly on Weibo. In some cases, users can be part of the decision making by answer the post when host is seeking public opinion. Third, Sina Weibo's verification system ensures the authenticity of the user's identity. Under this checking system, an individual account will have an orange sign "V" and organizations and enterprises will have sign "V" in blue color tagged beside their account names once their identities are verified. All ten accounts that will be studies in this report are having this blue "V" sign. Moreover, users cannot change their account name casually, as system will require verifying the detail information each time they change. Hence, the identities of celebrities and organizations are trustworthy. It gives opportunities for individual to directly interact with celebrities, government organizations and companies, which are difficult to achieve through traditional communication channels. (Business overview.2016)

Recently, there is a tendency that Weibo is on the decline. According to one research by the British daily morning newspaper *The Telegraph*, with heavily monitored by Chinese authorities, independent research suggests that the number of posts on Weibo has dropped by up to 70% in 2014. (Rushton, 2014) Some might doubt the importance of Weibo and think that any more related researches on it might not be necessary. But from the stand of this report, although Weibo is in its mature stage and the growth of its user base is slowing, there are still potentials. An influential

Weibo account can still have broadcasting power that is greater than local newspapers. One person can easily reach millions of people by Weibo's platform, it is particularly important in China where its government fears physical assembly and collective action. In some sense, Weibo's fall is just a proof of its influence. Because the growth of its power threatens the government's authority, results in authorities' attempts to keep it in check, which leads to decreasing in the numbers of posts and users. As author Emily Parker said: "*Social media fads come and go, Web sites rise and fall, words are written and deleted. But that discovery is impossible to erase.*" (Parker, 2014) Therefore, this report found Weibo is still interesting topic to study on.

1.1.2 Top ten most influential accounts of 5A scenic areas:

Table 1: Top 10 most influential accounts of 5A scenic areas on Weibo May 2015 [2]

名次 Rank	代号 Code	微博名称 Weibo Account	省份 Province	活跃度 Active Level	传播力 Broadcasting power	覆盖度 Coverage rate	影响力 Influential power
1	LOC 1	故宫博物院 The Palace Museum (the forbidden city)	北京 Beijing	181	46	311	538
2	LOC 2	黄山 Mount Huangshan	安徽 Anhui	101	21	318	440
3	LOC 3	绍兴市沈园景区 Shen Garden in Shaoxing	浙江 Zhejiang	289	14	124	428
4	LOC 4	横店影视城娱乐频道 Hengdian World Studios	浙江 Zhejiang	112	23	271	405
5	LOC 5	崂山风景区官方微博 Laoshan Scenic Area offical Weibo	山东 Shandong	119	10	250	379
6	LOC 6	广州长隆欢乐世界 Guangzhou Chimelong Paradise	广东 Guangdong	100	9	265	373
7	LOC 7	长隆野生动物世界 Chimelong Xiangjiang Safari Park	广东 Guangdong	101	14	243	358
8	LOC 8	博爱青天河风景区 Boai Qingtian River Scenic Area	河南 Henan	64	8	283	355
9	LOC 9	山西皇城相府景区 Huangcheng Prime Minister's Mansion	山西 Shanxi	102	9	238	349
10	LOC 10	乌镇旅游 Wuzhen Water Town	浙江 Zhejiang	100	15	228	343

Table 1 shows the list of top ten most influential Weibo accounts of 5A scenic area in China for the month of May in 2015 (p13, Sina and Weibo Data Center, 2015). 5A or AAAAA scenic areas are

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[2] Translated from Page 13, Travel Weibo Development Report May 2015 by Sina and Weibo Data Center (see appendix 4)

the highest ranking in the standardized quality rating system for all scenic areas in China; they are considered as the iconic natural and cultural attractions. This quality rating system is range from 5A (AAAAA) to 1A (A), which is similar to the five-star ranking system in hotel industry. It is overseen by the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and the assessment of the sites is executed by the National Tourism Scenic Area Quality Assessment Commission. The evaluation is based on 12 criteria, which including tourism resources, conservation, infrastructure, management operation, safety, the level of visitor interest and satisfaction and so on. (Shepherd & Yu, 2012)

The top ten accounts sorted by rank are: the palace museum (Forbidden City), Mount Huangshan, Shen Garden in Shaoxing, Hengdian world studios, Laoshan Scenic Area official Weibo, Guangzhou Chimelong Paradise, Chimlong Xiangjiang Safari Park, Boai Qingtian River Scenic Area, Huangcheng Prime Minister's Mansion and Wuzhen Water town. As those tourist sites by themselves are not the study objects in this report, they will be referred to by codes as LOC 1 to LOC 10 respectively throughout this paper, in order to avoid further confusion.

Moreover, the data collected for this report was from the month of May in 2015. There are several reasons and assumptions for this particular choice of month. First, this is the newest data published by Weibo Data Center at the time of this research started (October 2015). Second, among these ten accounts, except one (LOC 8) is established in 2012, all other accounts are established in 2010 and 2011, therefore it can be assumed that after several years operating experience on Weibo, they are sophisticated users and have accumulated certain amount of followers. Third, there are many small holidays and special days in May, for examples: the Labor Day vacation (1st of May), the Mother's day (10th of May), the Chinese Tourist Day (19th of May). In addition, many big events followed up in the beginning of June, such as: The Children's Day (1st of June), National Higher Education Entrance Examination (高考，take place at 7th and 8th of June every year). Above events are mentioned frequently in posts and account operators are much more active in taking part of the discussion that are related to these events. Fourth, there is good climate in most places in China in May, more outdoor activities are preferred, and people are more willing to travel during this period. Therefore it is expected that there are extra promoting activities of these Weibo accounts in May month. More analysis of this list will be in Chapter 4.

1.2 Research question:

Social media has recently become a part of tourist sites' promotion. Weibo is one of the most popular social media platforms in China, and is used by many Chinese tourist sites. Different tourist sites have different social media strategies behind them. The aim of this paper is to find and demonstrate what these different strategies are and why they are different. Moreover, this paper is trying to determine the best strategy under different circumstance for tourist sites. Based on the information above and the purpose of this thesis, the following research question is proposed:

What are the different social media strategies used by tourist sites on Weibo and how to choose a suitable strategy for a specific tourist site?

Sub-questions:
- Why do tourist sites adopt Weibo as part of their social media strategies?
- What are the advantages of social media compare to other media?
- What are the different social media strategies?
- What are the characteristics of Chinese social media?
- How can tourist sites utilize Weibo properly for promoting themselves?
- What elements contribute to high level of micro-blog activities?
- What are the best practice examples from the use of social media by those tourist sites?
- How to choose the suitable strategy for different tourist sites?

1.3 Research design:

The structure of this thesis is organized into 6 chapters, which is demonstrated in Figure 1 below. The first chapter is the introduction: it introduces the background knowledge of this report to readers and presents the problem statement. The second chapter shows the methodology that is used to design, conduct and analyze of this report. The theoretical background is in the third chapter, it provides the theoretical basis for conducting this research. It includes the current literatures that related to topics such as: tourism and social media, Chinese social media and ROI in social media. In the fourth chapter, the finding and analysis will be presented, which also contains the discussion

of the findings through deeper analysis rooted in the theory of this subject. The fifth chapter is conclusion and followed with the last chapter of limitation and further research.

Figure 1 Research structure of this report:

Introduction

Methodology

Theoretical background

Finding and analysis

Conclusion

Limitation and further research
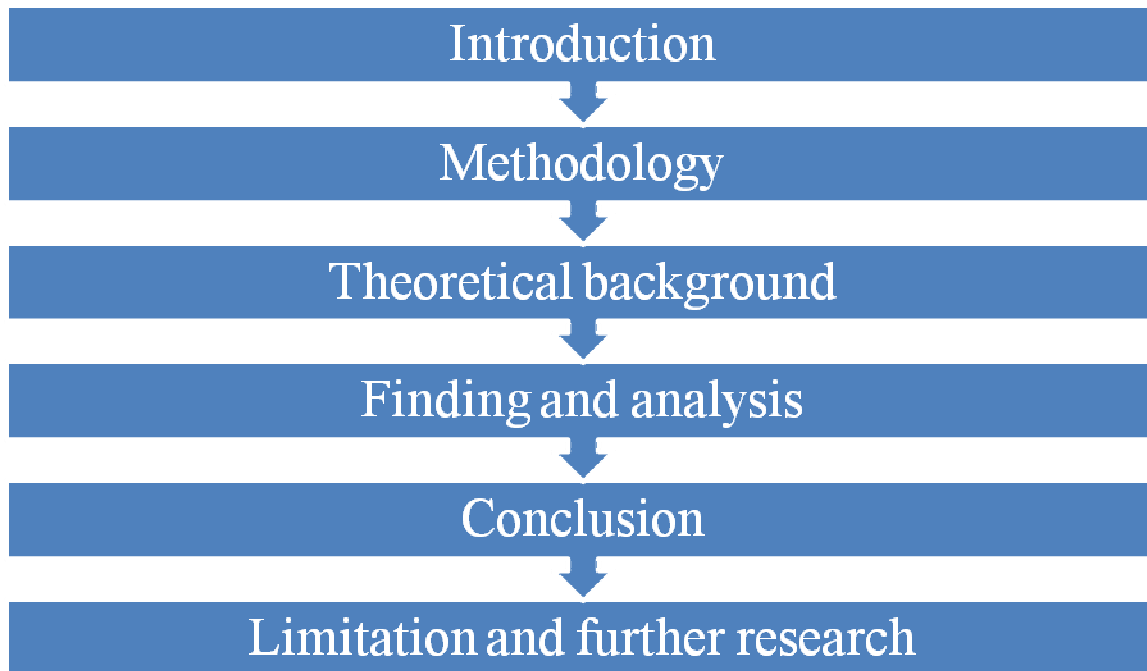
Chapter 2 Methodology:

The following chapter outlines the research methods used in this study. Following Bryman: "*A research method is simply a technique for collecting data*" (Bryman, 2004), it is certainly not easy to decide which methods are appropriate for any research. Silverman (2005) points out that the choice of method should not be predetermined and it largely relies on what the research is trying to find out. For the needs of this research, both quantitative and qualitative methods are adopted, where the aforementioned is used as primary method and the latter as supplementary. By using both quantitative and qualitative methods, this research seeks to gain a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the use of social media among these ten 5A tourist sites. This chapter will end up with discussion of the quality of this report.

2.1 Quantitative content analysis:

Quantitative research methods, " *In very board terms, it was described as entailing the collection of numerical data and as exhibiting a view of the relationship between theory and research as deductive, a predilection for a natural science approach, and as having an objectivist conception of social reality*" (p62, Bryman, 2004). This approach is mostly used in nature science, and social science researchers are commonly skeptical to this method. Yet in this project, the study object is the top ten most influential tourist sites' accounts on Weibo. In order to analyze their behaviors and activities pattern in certain period of time requires a large amount of data from their Weibo platform. Therefore, the quantitative method, more specifically content analysis, becomes the primary method of this study.

Bryman defines quantitative content analysis as "*an approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner" (P183, Bryman, 2004)*. There are two qualities that need to be stressed according to him: "objectivity" and "being systematic". These two terms require that the whole process of analysis is done in a consistent and transparent manner, therefore the results can be replicated and not suffer from researcher's personal bias. However, when using the method of quantitative content analysis, it is hard to determine the answers to "why" questions and it becomes controversial when it is used to find out latent meaning and themes. (Bryman, 2004)

Some of the purposes of using content analysis in this study can be found in Weber's paper. These purposes are including: identify the intentions and other characteristics of the communicator; describe attitudinal and behavioral responses to communications; describe trends in communication content and so on (Weber, 1990). In order to explore the activities of top ten influential 5A scenic areas on Weibo and later analyze their social media strategies based on these data, a large amount of related data have to be collected from their Weibo platform. This data can be categorized into two subjects. They are entitled as basic information of these ten accounts and their accounts' activities and strategies on Weibo. Each data set has many small specific subsets. The process for collection of these data will be explained later in chapter 2.3. This process is very important, as mentioned in the beginning of this paragraph. With the data that are collected for quantitative content analysis, this report is able to outline the activity patterns, identify the intentions and the trends in the content posted from these ten accounts. In the end this is used to conclude their social media strategies.

2.2 E-mail interviewing:

In contrast to method of quantitative research, qualitative research methods are much more related with words than numbers. It has an inductive view of the relationship and research, and "*it stresses on the understanding of social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants",* and believe that *"social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals, rather than phenomena 'out there' and separate from those involved in its construction*" (p266, Bryman, 2004). Some researchers believe that qualitative methods can provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than quantitative data, therefore it is more favorable in social science research even such methods requires theoretical sophistication and methodological rigour. Nevertheless, according to Silverman, no method is intrinsically better than another, regardless if they are quantitative or qualitative (Silverman, 2005).

As mentioned above, using only quantitative research makes difficult to answer "why" questions, therefore in this study, the multi-strategy research is used, which means that both quantitative and qualitative will be used to fill in the gaps. In this case, the qualitative research method is supplementary, which can help to get the information that is not accessible by content analysis. Such information including: the reason for choosing to use Weibo's platform, whether there are social media strategies and what the strategies are, the accounts' operators' opinion and purposes of using Weibo, their long-term goals and so on. Hence, all information that would be needed later,

are narrowed down to 15 interview questions (see table 9). By using the function of private messaging on Weibo, the interview questions were sent out to each of these ten accounts. This kind of interview is called an online asynchronous interview. In this way, this report is able to get direct contact with Weibo accounts' manager and have their insight views on the making of their strategies and activities planning.

With the easy access to the internet, much of the research which was difficult to conduct in the past is now easier to carry out. Meho (2006) categorizes three methods of internet-based qualitative research: *online synchronous interview, online asynchronous interview* and *virtual focus group.* In this report, online, asynchronous, in-depth (or less-structured) interviewing via E-mail (in this case the "private message" function on Weibo is employed. Compared to telephone or face-to-face interview, E-mail interviewing has several advantages. First, the cost is relatively low for execution and transcription. Second, it saves time when carrying out the interview and scheduling the appointment, and once the interview questions are defined, they can be sent to multiple interviewees at once. Third, it allows access to individuals who are hard or impossible to reach by conventional way, such as individuals who are geographically far away; who are not good at expressing themselves orally as they do in writing or people who prefer online interaction over face-to-face interviews. Fourth, it allows interviewee to take part in interview in a familiar environment with less stress on deadlines. In this way, interviewees are more relaxed and feel free to express their opinion, which leads to rich and high quality data.

There are also some obstacles to E-mail interviewing, for examples: this method can be hard for people who are not familiar with new technologies, such as old people or people have no access to the internet; it takes uncertain time to collect data; and may have low response rate, as many E-mails are deleted before they are read. And missing visual and nonverbal cues due to absence of facial expressions or body languages or the tones of voices of both parties can lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding. To overcome this problem, Meho (2006) suggests that interview questions should be more self-explanatory than face-to-face or telephone interviews and certain linguistic methods can be borrowed, such as acronyms, abbreviations or emoticons, as well as underlining and capitalization for emphasis important texts for substitute of nonverbal cues. Acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of E-mail interviewing, "*the quality of responses gained through online research is much the same as responses produced by more traditional method*" (P51,Denscombe, 2003) and many studies found that participants of E-mail interviewing

are more focused on the questions and can provide more reflectively dense thoughts than conventional interviewees. (Meho, 2006) The further execution of the interviews will be shortly mentioned in Chapter 2.3.

2.3 Data collection:

The process of data collection is essential in the research, as it provides the foundation for analysis and potential answers to the research question. Especially, this report is largely relying on the quantitative data from Weibo's platform; the collection of data becomes even more crucial. However, other kinds of data also play indispensable role to strengthen the knowledge and get new insights. Following texts shows process of collection of two different types of data, namely secondary and primary data.

2.3.1 Collection of secondary data

Secondary data include both raw data and published summaries. These data can be both quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (non-numeric) data and contains three main subgroups: document based, survey based and those compiled from multiple sources. Using secondary data in research can help researchers saving considerable time and cost. Recently, with the widespread internet usage, researchers are increasingly making use of web-based materials generated by online communities as document secondary data. (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016) and major part of data in this report obtained through the internet.

A solid amount of academic literature was searched and reviewed at the first stage of this thesis. These materials are including: books and academic articles on different topics, such as theory, methodology, social media, Chinese social media environment and similar projects. Mostly of these data are easy to access through CBS' library. There are also many other different articles, news and statistical databases reviewed, these sources are from web pages, journals, and Weibo's official data center. Major part of secondary data in this report is document based and some others from Weibo's official reports; they are used as theoretical preparation for collection of primary data and analysis.

2.3.2 Collection of primary data

Primary data is new data that is collected or created for particular research. In this report, primary data consists of two parts: quantitative content analysis and online asynchronous interview. The

process of collecting these data will be described in following paragraph and all of this data is obtained through Sina Weibo's platform.

- Quantitative content analysis

The data for content analysis in this report refers to the activities of top ten most influential 5A scenic areas' Weibo accounts in the month of May 2015. These Weibo accounts are considered as frontrunner in using social media compared to their other counterparts in China. By collecting basic information of their accounts, their posts' content and other activities, it is possible to conduct content analysis to determine their strategies of promotion and maintain healthy relationship with followers/ visitors. Almost all of them have large amount of followers on their Weibo and post frequently, in other word, they are very active to engage and interact with their fans. Moreover, most of these accounts have established their profiles early and their identities are officially verified by Sina Weibo. This indicates that they are more sophisticated and trustworthy than average users. There were some challenges as there was a large amount of data to be recorded, sorted and calculated. Microsoft Office Excel is used here to process the collected data for content analysis.

Data collected for content analysis in this report is focusing on types and content of posts and followers' engagement, to examine which kinds of posts are popular and people's reaction on them. Hays et al. (2012) introduced three measurements to analyze data from micro-blog: *post frequency*, *interaction* and *content*. It provides the theoretical knowledge and academic basis to people that want to study the subject of micro-blog. By sorting the data into these three categories, it is easier to analyze and make more sense, considering the goal of this report. Therefore content analysis of this report will follow these three main themes and collect related information accordingly.

Post frequency can be easily determined. On the home page of every Weibo user, the total numbers of posts and followers are clearly showed. Numbers of posts divide by a time period would be the post frequency in a given period. To check the level of interaction between the Weibo user and its followers, the easiest way is to see the number of replies to specific posts; it is also one important measurement to measure the impact of social media as marketing tool. A common interactive post normally contains a question or request which ask for some kind of response directly and these interaction activities can be tracked under each post. According to Weibo's functions, every user can "repost", "comment" or "like" a post, and all these activities are open to public and everyone

can see the numbers of "repost", "like" and their comments for each post unless the account operator block those functions.

The content of the posts can be a wide variety of words, videos, audios or pictures. In one of Yang and Wang's researches, they categorized the contents of posts into four types:

Professional generated content: Destination-related information including local culture, food, events, news, etc.

User-generated Content: reposts of followers' posts that are related to the destinations (e.g., travel diaries, travel blogs, or itineraries of tourists)

Game-related notifications: the notification regarding games designed to generate more fans or increase destination or product awareness by encouraging reposts to win prizes. This type of post is mostly published and reposted by the DMO for more exposure and spread of the messages.

Greeting: contents that is unrelated to the destination or tourism industry such as "good morning" or jokes. (p12, Table5, Yang & Wang, 2015)

Moreover, Yang and Wang (2015) also mentioned that professionally generated content is the most frequently used type in Weibo for DMO, followed with game-related notification messages, user-generated and casual greetings respectively. In this report, even though the research object is not DMO, but rather more specific tourist spots, their content on Weibo likewise fall into to these four categories.

All data collected according to above mentioned topics is categorized into eight tables and two figures. These tables includes: basic Weibo statistic, total number of posts and average number of daily post, source of posts and their proportions, formats of content and their proportions, distribution of types of content and their proportion, numbers of interactive posts and its proportions in total posts and degree of followers' interaction. The two figures are frequency of daily postings by the tourist sites and post numbers of different types of contents. The process of preparing this data is time consuming, but it gives better guideline to check which posts are most frequent submitted, which content are most popular (more interactive) and which types of information are frequently used for tourist spots accounts on Weibo, which are very useful for outlining their strategy of social media usage as a marketing tool.

- Interview:

Although content analysis provides large amount of useful information, it is difficult to determine how social media platform can be utilized effectively as marketing tool from the managers' point of view. Therefore, E-mail interviews are designed to these ten accounts' administrator. Thanks to the convenience of the Weibo, it is possible to send interview questions (see table 9) to the administrator of Weibo account directly and have dialog through private messages. Because the majority of Weibo's users are Chinese, the interview questions will be translated to Chinese before they are sent to the account administrators. (See Appendix 2) The questions mainly concern why and how certain social media strategies are selected and employed. In this way, their motivation and method of using social media strategies can be explained. More important, their expectation and whether they are satisfied with the outcome of their social media usage can be answered. The answers are expected to be in Chinese, which requires time to translate into English later on.

With proper information gained from content analysis and E-mail interviews of these ten Weibo accounts, this report focuses on determining the purposes and goals of famous tourist sites' social media strategies. Moreover, it is expected to obtain a holistic overview and understanding of the successful use of social media among these tourist sites.

2.4 Quality of research:

It is difficult to check the quality of finding and analysis from the author's point of view, what can be done is to try to reduce the possibility of getting misguided answers during the process of research. There are two most prominent criteria for evaluating the quality of research in the natural science and quantitative research in the social science. These are reliability and validity (Saunders et al., 2016). As a matter of fact that this report largely depends on quantitative methods, therefore these two criteria are especially important. Moreover, there are lots of discussion on whether qualitative research should adopt the same quality standards as quantitative research, some scholars in social research just accept the same measurements as in quantitative research; others developed parallel version of "*reliability, internal and external validity*", namely as "*dependability, credibility and transferability*" for qualitative study separately. (Bryman, 2004; Saunders et al., 2016) In this report, qualitative E-mail interview is regarded as supplementary, and most data analysis rely on quantitative method. Therefore it is natural for this report to adopt the same standard as in quantitative study.

2.4.1Reliability:

"*Reliability refers replication and consistency* (p202, Saunders et al., 2016) *."* If a researcher can get the same findings when he/she replicates a former research, then that research is considered as reliable.

Hence, to test the reliability of this report is to determine if someone replicates the same research, the data and results would come out the same. It can be checked from several aspects, according to Saunders et al., researchers need to overcome four pitfalls that related to reliability in the search. They are *participant error, participant bias, researcher error and researcher bias* (p203, Saunders et al., 2016). Therefore, it is logical to examine the reliability of this report in this order.

The first common threat to reliability is *participant error*. It includes any negative factor that affects a participant's performance. In this study the participants are account administrators, and most data that collected for content analysis is statistical numbers, which has no close relationship with the participants. They do not have direct access to modify statistics such as the number of followers and reposting for their accounts. On the other hand, the way of using "private message" to send interview questions might influences the interviewees' performance. As mentioned before, the interviews carried out for this report suffer from the disadvantages of Email interviewing, such as: low response rate, interviewees' answers might be prepared which are not entirely the truth; there could be misunderstandings and so on. But with the restriction of access to the interviewees, Email interviewing is a great alternative, and it is believed that its advantages are much more than disadvantages in this report.

The second threat is *participant bias*. It includes any factor that leads to un-trusted responses. One research shows that organizations are normally not very comfortable with followers/consumers expressing their opinions, criticisms and ideas on social media channels (Saunders et al., 2016). It could also be the case for these ten accounts, many comments and posts that are unfavorable might be deleted from their platform and therefore cannot be collected during the research of this report. Moreover, it is not a secret that it is possible to increase the number of followers or get good review/comments by paying fees through certain dishonorable channels. (Such as hire a "water army"[3] or directly buying services from Taobao.com[4]) But it is not the biggest concern of this

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[3] The detail explanation of "Water army" will be in Chapter 3.3

[4] Taobao.com is a Chinese website for online shopping, it is similar to eBay or Amazon.com

report. Because after reading every post and comment several times during the content analysis, it is believed that most of those accounts were all putting big efforts to maintain their platform running nicely, the evidences can be seen in quality and quantity of all the posts, which requires large amount of time and energy. And even if such forged activities exist, it is assumed to be very limited and not influence the result in great extent. Concerning the interview, there might be participant bias, as it is difficult to confirm the identities of the interviewee. They might not give the precise answers to our questions and might not represent the view from management of the social media strategy. Moreover, there is also possibility that interviewees would only give the answer that is positive for their reputation. But in general, every interview faces more or less the same issues related to the subjective view of the interviewees, as every individual has their own thought and motivation. Hence it should not be the big issue in this report.

The third threat is *researcher error*. It includes any negative factor that affects a researcher's interpretation. From the researcher's point of view, it is hard to measure such factors. However, the biggest barrier during this research is the language. As all the quantitative data and interview are conducted in Chinese and afterwards translated to English. Deviation might emerge during the process.

The last threat is *researcher bias*. It includes any factor that leads to bias in the researcher's recording of responses. Every researcher as individual has own mindset and therefore perceives information differently. It is very hard to avoid personal bias during the research. In this report, the data from the content analysis are more objective as it is mostly just statistical figures. There might be doubts as to which types of content a given post belongs to, for instance, the author of this report sometimes found it difficult to categorize one particular post as a causal greeting or user generated content. But this kind of situation is very rare and can be ignored. To the interview, everyone has their own understanding of the interview question and answers, and analyze it differently, particularly when there is translation involved. But as we mentioned many times, interview is only a small proportion of this research, so *researcher bias* should not affect the reliability of the whole research in a great extent. And author of this report is aware of the challenges of reliability, and will try the best to minimize the influences of these four pitfalls.

2.4.2 Validity

"*Validity refers to the appropriateness of the measurements used, accuracy of the analysis of the results and generalisability of the finding.*" (p202, Saunders et al., 2016) More specifically, Hernon and Schwartz introduce the concept of validity into external validity and internal validity. External validity is to determine if the research finding are generalisable to the population. Internal validity is to check if the instrument accurately measures what it is supposed to measure, whether the research has the right or best practices of the findings and whether other factors, variables or conditions have been taking into consideration and acknowledged (Hernon & Schwartz, 2009). Therefore the main problem filed that related to validity in this report can be determined by answering few questions: can the finding of this research be generalisable to the population (External validity)? Are all the measurements accurately measured like they are supposed to? Is the process of conducting this research is the best practice? Is any other situation or variables are useful to this research (Internal validity)?

First of all, the study objects of this research are the top 10 most influential accounts of 5A scenic areas on Weibo for May 2015. Can the finding that related to them in this report be generalized to other populations? Or more specifically, can their successful social media strategy be borrowed to other similar accounts? The answer is: not to the whole population of users on Weibo, but it most likely works for those account that have similar background. By similar background, is meant that it applies to tourist sites that are well-known in China and who are experienced with Weibo. As other organizations or companies might have different purposes and goals of using Weibo, they might not get the result they wished for in following these ten accounts' strategies. But it can still give great inspiration to other originations if they have needs to develop their own strategy. Moreover, same accounts might have different strategies at different times, for example: some of these tourist sites have very limited visitors in the winter, their performances might change during this period, but it is hard to determine in this report, as this report is only analyzing the data from one month.

In order to answer the research question, a large amount of data is collected for content analysis to outline their social media strategy. The data are divided into two major parts: basic information and their activities and strategies. The second part is divided into post frequency, post content and interactivity according to Hays et. al,. (2012) These themes are examined by many small measurements, such as: number of daily posts, number of total posts, types of content, formats of content and many other more. All these numbers are readily available, and give traces of activities

and preference of these ten accounts on Weibo platform. It largely contributes to describe the way these ten accounts are using their Weibo platform. Certainly, there can be improvement in the interview section, where more responses are desirable and more detailed and depth in answers is beneficial. But once more, with the condition so far, it is the best it can be.

From the point of author, no research will ever be perfectly reliable and valid. Each research has its own weakness and suffers from some problems. Therefore the primary aim for any research is to maximize both reliability and validity. Silverman (2005) gives some suggestions that can help to enhance the quality of the research: give an honest account of the conduct of the research; discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the research; provide full descriptions of what was done related to choices of methods, data collection and analysis; and be open to what is motivation and obstacles when conducting of the research.

In this report, all the data from Weibo are publicly available and the interviews are well documented. It is assumed that if someone else intends to replicate this research, it will give the same or close results of content analysis, but to the interviews, the interpretation might be different according to individual's perceptions. The finding might not be generalized to a large population but to a certain setting. At the same time, all the measurements are considered as accurate. However, even E-mail interviewing seems to have many disadvantages; the gain is still bigger than loss and bear in mind that it is just small part of this research. Therefore it is believed that this research is fair in reliability and validity.

Chapter 3: Theoretical background:

In this chapter, the relevant literatures and studies are reviewed and arranged into three sections: social media and tourism, ROI in social media and social media in China.

3.1 Social media and tourism:

Social media is frequently mentioned nowadays. It is defined as ''*a category of media focusing on participation and peer-to-peer communication between individuals with sites providing the capability to develop user-generated content (UGC) and exchange messages and comments between different users*'' (p718, Chaffey, 2011) The emergence of the "web 2.0" technology further accelerates the development of social media. O'reilly concludes core competences of "web 2.0" including "*harnessing collective intelligence, leveraging the long tail through custom self-service, light weight user interfaces, development models, and business model (p37, O'Reilly, 2007)."* By using social media, many companies and organizations have gained considerable success. Consequently, more and more managers prefer including social media as part of integrated marketing communication policies.

Chaffey (2011) cites in his book, that social media can be divided into six categories: *social networking,* Facebook and Linked In is good examples; *social knowledge,* such as Yahoo! Answers and Wikipedia; *social news*, Twitter is a good example for this category; *social streaming*, where people can share pictures, photos and so on, Youtube is the best-known in this category; *social sharing*, which are mainly social bookmarking sites; and *company user generated content and community*, which is the social space that's supported by the company, and allow customers to write reviews, ratings or even blogging to improve customer relationship management. (p485, Chaffey, 2011)

Furthermore, Chaffey (2011) clarifies that compared to traditional media like TV, post and radio, new digital media such as website and mobile commerce has significant advantages. These advantages are simplified as the ''6 I's'' by McDonald and Wilson (1999) (p415, Chaffey, 2011): 1. *Interactivity*: This is the most important characteristic of social media, which creates two way communications between company and customer. It helps the company to change their traditional push marketing communication technique to more effective pull marketing communication.

2. *Intelligence*: Internet provides the platform for companies to carry out marketing research and gather customer information at a very low cost. From these data, companies can easily analyze and use them to implement new marketing strategies.

3. *Individualization*: Unlike traditional media where the same message is send to the whole population, new digital media enables companies to send tailored information to audiences according to their personal preferences.

4. *Integration:* Different methods can be used to integrate between the company and the consumers, such as E-mail, phone, mail and website.

5. *Industry restructuring:* The status of disintermediation, reintermediation and countermediation should be considered restructuring in the first place based on the feature of e-marketing.

6. *Independence of location:* Companies are not restricted to certain locations; digital media paves a way for companies to go global.

With above mentioned advantages, social media platforms are slowly diffusing across every aspect of people's daily life. In the tourism industry, the use of social media is transforming the way of people travel completely. More and more tourists use social media to share their tourism experiences, formulate travel plan and even develop business. It is observed that more Chinese tourists than ever, which big proportion of it is younger generation have used the internet and social media platforms for travel decision-making. (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2012; Munar & Ooi, 2012; Yang & Wang, 2015)

Munar et.al also wrote in their paper that, the interactive communication platforms' popularity changes the virtual landscape of tourism. These platforms allow users to create, publish and comment on digitized content anywhere in the world. They share images of travel on Flick, upload videos on YouTube, describe their stories on Travelblog, write reviews on TripAdvisor and update their tourism experience on Facebook. By this way, social media enables new kinds of tourism interaction, which improve and extend the physical travel experience in various ways. (Munar, Gyimóthy, & Cai, 2013) Statistics shows that travel review websites are most influential element in the travel planning process, 69% of travelers will check travel review websites before they make decision, 57% of people use online travel agencies, 56% use travel provider sites and 43% of people ask advices from their friends and relatives before they travel. (Minazzi, 2015) All these evidences prove that social media become more and more popular among the travelers.

Following the changes of consumers' preferences, tourism organizations take actions to include social media in their marketing strategy, in order to communicate with consumers and enhance company's reputation. Different social media channels can serve for different purposes. One research shows that micro-blog websites are suitable for serving marketing objectives as awareness for established brands; at the same time, social networking websites are better in branding and interactive campaigns. (Yang & Wang, 2015)

During the process of adoption of social media into their marketing strategy, hospitality and tourism marketers found out that the importance of developing unique social media strategies cannot be stressed enough. This is due to several reasons. First, many products offered in hospitality and tourism are intangible, which are impossible to evaluate before consumption, hence word-of-mouth plays important role here. Second, many of the tourism products are considered with high risk, the introduction or advices from reference group can contribute to the decision-making process. Third, there is intensely competition within the tourism industry, and social media strategy might become one important competitive advantage for early adopter. Moreover, it suggests that tourism marketers should take the lead of use of social media rather being driven by competitors. It is better to learn how to control, not being controlled by this new powerful digital force. (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008)

In the light of all interests in social media within tourism industry, there has been an increase in researches and literatures that deal with this phenomenon over recent years. More specifically, there are numbers of academic researches mainly on the impact of social media from travelers and companies' perspectives. (Minazzi, 2015) Beside this fact, most researches within this field have studied this phenomenon from the travelers' perspective, (Munar et al., 2013) there are limited literatures that are written from companies/organizations' side.

Fewer studies in tourism sector from companies/organizations show a slow process in adoption of social media by travel operators. But there are important implications for companies/organizations to accept social media as part of marketing strategies, and acknowledges its ability and potential, as "*social media play a key role for promotion activities, product distribution, communication, management, and research. Even if until now practitioners have valued social media especially for promotion and communication rather than as independent distribution channels, the future trend for social media marketing could move from the current brand marketing to conversions and sales.*" (p16, Minazzi, 2015) Therefore this study attempts to fill up this gap by exploring the social media

strategies from the suppliers' side, and at the same time learn experience from these ten tourist sites' accounts and other relevant literatures. Following section will be literature reviews for some important researches within this field that are related to this report.

In one research by Yang and Wang (2015) on social media marketing strategies used by ten overseas destination marketing organizations (DMO) in China, they conclude that micro-blogs were most popular social media channels among the ten DMOs. The research considered micro-blogs, social networking websites and mobile social applications. These ten DMOs use different marketing strategies: some of them adopt many different social media platforms at the same time and are active on all of them. Some focus on only one particular channel and are more active on the chosen channel. Some choose to use China's most popular social channels, but are less active. The rest of them lack presence on any social media channels. This study further introduces the social media landscape in china; emphasizes the importance of choosing the right social media for specific purposes; recommends that social media marketing should focus on building connection and relationship with followers; and in the end it suggests that success of social media marketing depends on sustained effort.

Hays et al. (2012) have studied the use of social media as a marketing tool for national organizations. This research demonstrates widespread of usage of social media among top international tourism destinations. Facebook and Twitter are chosen due to their popularity worldwide. Study concludes that social media strategies of top DMOs vary considerable, and the uses of social media for those DMOs are largely experimental. Moreover, evidences shows that the majority of these DMOs are not using social media platforms to their full effectiveness when it is used to interact and engage with consumers; social media is still not fully recognized and respected as a marketing tool, its position is often underestimated. In the end, this research suggests that DMOs should take the advantages of social media, and be more innovative and creative to differentiate from traditional marketing strategies.

Hvass and Munar (2012) published a paper on one exploratory study of the use of Facebook and Twitter among airline companies. Their conclusion is that the companies' usages of social platforms are highly diverse and exploratory in nature. They lack social media strategies and tend to use these two platforms for advertisements rather than interaction channels. It raises several issues, such as the content they posted on the social platforms is too conservative and formal, the degree of activities among these companies are varies, customer segmentation is too narrow.

Hay (2010) investigated the use of Twitter as a tourism marketing tool among DMOs, hotels and the consumers. He finds out that as the new social media platform, the use of Twitter is still evolving. Both tourists and organizations are still in the initial stage to understand its full potential. Twitter provides an inexpensive method for organizing competition and multi-agency input for tourism strategies; it also provides a platform to interact with young generation that might be hard to reach by other channels. But its use seems to be limited to some hotel chains, luxurious and boutique hotels, as they are still skeptical on this new technology, their attitudes seems to be to wait and see what happens.

These researches are used as guidance to the study of this report, which provide knowledge of social media, research methods, theoretical backgrounds and other relevant literatures. Almost all the literatures above on researches of use of social media in tourism mentioned the lack of efficient social media strategies, and their activities are mostly experimental. Different tourism suppliers use it for different purposes and with different methods. All the researches are relatively new, as the major social media platforms have only been established in recent years. As Zeng and Gerritsen(2014) concluded, even there are increasing numbers of researches on this topic that are conducted with broader and deeper interests, but academic studies related to it are still in its infancy stage. However, if social media is used as a marketing tool in a proper way, it can engage customers with loyalty, electronic word-of mouth and further resulted in sales and revenues. (Minazzi, 2015) Moreover, it has to be mentioned that information changes dramatically on the internet, some of the literatures are maybe already outdated when this report is delivered. Many tourist operators might already have more suitable or compensative strategies during years after scholars have written their reports, therefore the results that published in these reports might not be fully accurate later on. However, lack of relevant studies from suppliers' perspective and interests in this field motivates the creation of this report.

3.2 ROI in social media:

Return on Investment (ROI) in social media has long been a controversial topic in the business world. Currently, the discussion of this topic became even more popular with the increasing spread of social media use and budget cuts. These discussions and debates on ROI in social media can be divided into two mainstreams.

One mainstream argues that there is no point to measure ROI, because social media is not about money, sales or profit margins, it is about people. (Fisher, 2009) Others add that compared to traditional marketing channels, social media are relatively new. Many marketers ignore the potential of the social media; they would only focus on the short-term results instead of long-term payoff. Under this circumstance, Hoffman and Fodor argue that, there are three long term objectives of social media: *brand awareness*, every time when users visit companies' social media applications, the brand are highly exposed; *brand engagement*, consumers can be engaged with brand through social media in broad channels (for example: Youtube, Facebook, Twitter); *word of mouth*, once users are aware and engaged with the brand, they are ready to communicate with other people online or off-line. (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010) All these can be achieved in very low-cost and in relatively short time, and mostly have positive feedback. And among these three objectives, use of *world of mouth* marketing on social media often ranks as the most influential source of pre-purchase information and can affect consumer behavior significantly. (Son, 2011; Zhou & Wang, 2014)

Another mainstream outlines that in a tightening economy, even the ROI in social media is very hard to measure, businessmen still need to know if they are getting return on their investment, to see if it is worth for their input or further investment. (Fisher, 2009) This is particularly important if there is certain level of risk involved. As social media is a medium between the account operators and followers, (social media platforms are not necessarily neutral and some wish to influence the users' opinions in a certain way) both positive and negative comments can be posted to its users. It means that marketers who invest in social media marketing can deliver messages to their audiences with reduced cost, but there is risk that these messages might turn out negatively. Hence it is vital to measure the ROI and then adjust social media strategy accordingly. From this point of view, there are two purposes for measuring ROI. First, it is to improve their imperfect social media strategy and tactical decisions for more revenues. Second, it is to better demonstrate and communicate to the managements and its staffs the effectiveness of certain marketing action. (Powell, Groves, & Dimos, 2011)

To support their idea on importance of measuring the ROI in social media, Powell et. al (p220-232, 2011) proposes eight-step process to measure social marketing strategy and ROI. These eight steps are described below:

The first step: *develop strategy and set goals*. The marketing strategy is guidance for corporations to know where to go and how to get there. The social marketing strategy can function better if the

goals are set in advanced. These goals should reflect both the overall corporate goals and social marketing goals. In additional, it is also important to take care of the information from social media, do market research and evaluate the objectives.

The second step: *identifying target audiences.* Target audiences can be divided to three parts: influencers, individuals and consumers. Influencers are people who are positively inclined towards the brand and amplify messages to others in a persuasive way. Individuals are every single person who joins in the online community. They might become influencer, consumers or neither of the two after joining the community. Consumers purchase products or service, and hopefully become loyal to the brand and recommend it to others. By identifying and targeting these three audiences and make specific strategies for each of them can have best outcomes with least effort. At the same time, defining the brand image and identify competitors can be also take into consideration.

The third step: *developing the campaign message and monitoring conversation content.* Content is the most important element in social marketing. Therefore it is important to listen, monitor and segment the conversations on the social media and then develop and design corporation's own message content.

The forth step: *executing social marketing campaign tactics.* After the proper campaign content and target audiences are defined, the campaign has to be carried out tactically. It can be done by choosing carefully the options of strategies between integrated or stand-alone, production or experimental, sustainable or short term.

The fifth step: *defining, monitoring and evaluating interim and success metrics; choosing the analytical methodology.* If one company has no experience of social media campaign, they can refer to similar brands and campaigns executed in the past to help them go through the fifth step of measuring ROI in social media.

The sixth step: *monitoring and managing the execution of social marketing campaigns.* As social media provide platforms for two ways interactive communications, a social media campaign might not take places exactly as planned. Marketers should monitor a campaign carefully. They can take actions such as tracking short-term, interim metrics, tracking plan versus actual, responding to negative comments and engaging in the online community.

The seventh step: *measuring and tracking actual costs, calculating ROI.* Comparing to traditional marketing, social marketing campaign has relatively low costs, but it does not mean the cost is nothing. Actually, the most costly investment in social marketing campaign is people. This cost must be measured and evaluated in order to calculate the ROI for any social media marketing activities accurately.

The eighth step: *reviewing success or failure and iterating.* After having checked the other seven steps by the end of the campaign, the results need to be analyzed and studied in order to share the knowledge and experience of success or failure across the whole organization. This ensures better practice for next time.

This eight steps process helps marketers to understand what are needed to develop a measurement and method to calculate ROI in social media, and then afterwards improve their current strategy for better outcomes. It provides some instructions for social media marketing campaign, especially for companies that do not have experience; and helps marketers to stay ahead of the competition and design suitable strategy.

Both of these two mainstreams of thinking on ROI in social media have certain amount of followers depending on different types of companies and degree of their investment in social media. The second approach is accepted widely by those result-oriented companies that are largely relying on e-marketing. This report prefers the first approach more, as the majority of the ten tourist sites that are introduced in this report, their intentions of operating Weibo accounts are not based on increasing the sales or profit; at the same time, they seldom have campaigns. The evidence can be found in their posts and interviews. Therefore the former approach is more suitable in this case, but there is also some points are very useful in the second approach, particularly the eight steps process that introduced above are powerful tool to evaluate the social media activities. Therefore both of the approaches can benefit to this report in different degree.

Furthermore, when there is so much discussion on ROI, it is important to mention social strategy as well. Because good strategy can give better return of invest with lower cost. Mergel (2010) concludes three social media strategies that are often used in the public sector. The first strategy is "push strategy", which is additional to traditional internet-based methods. Here social media is used as an extra input and communication channel to the existing internet presence. The administrator mostly uses social media to send out the message to its audiences. This is one-way communication.

The second strategy is "pull strategy", which purpose is to bring back their audiences from social media platform to an organization's website for news and other information's aggregation. By some degree of interaction, this strategy is actively involving its audiences, for the results such as: few comments or retweets. The third strategy is "networking strategy", which is the least observable strategy among all. The use of this strategy is concerning highly interactive activities between the social media platforms' operator and its audiences. Social media platforms here are not only used to send out messages or news, but also used as a place where actual problems are discussed and knowledge are shared. Despite these three strategies described by Mergel, are mainly in use by the public sector, many other sectors can also adopt them. In this report, the top-ten tourist sites' social media strategies can be all categorized into these three and will be discussed later in this report.

There are countless different social media platforms and a large number of users. The rapid exchange of information and low access requirements result in huge business opportunities for companies and organization, but at the same time, it also creates enormous challenges. Being able to measure the ROI in social media and use social media successfully as a marketing tool become vital. Therefore, this report is trying to conclude few experiences from some successful examples and inspires those managers of social media platforms. There are some advices from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) about being attractive on social media: *be active, be interesting, be humble, be unprofessional* (avoid overly-professional content offerings) and *be honest.* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

3.3 Social media in China:

In recent years, Chinese media has caught more and more attention from outside world, even many of it is criticism and skepticisms. This particularly happened in 2008, when several significant events took places: a riot in Tibet in March, a destructive earthquake in Sichuang province in May and the Olympic Games hosted in Beijing in August. Chinese Media that is controlled by the Communist Party has played important roles to shape the perceptions to these events from both Chinese and worldwide aspects. From then on, the rest of the world gradually realized that the Chinese media is too big and important to be ignored. It is not only because China has the world's largest media audiences, but also because China's spectacular growth of economy and modernization, it become a major player in world trade and finance. On all of these occasions, there have been supports and aids from Chinese modern mass communication.(Scotton & Hachten, 2010)

Social media compared to other traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio and televisions is relatively new. In Professor Scotton and Hachten's (2010) textbook on Chinese new media, they have briefly introduced the state of social media in China. In nowadays, Chinese joined the digital revolution and become familiar with computers, internet, cell phones and social media. The modernized and westernized China is trapped in an authoritarian political system that is having difficulties to control it. Massive content that is posted and exchanged by e-mail, websites and blogs threatens the existing political order. But from another point of view, these changes in media are positive to a new revolution. It is an irresistible force to push the political and social institutions towards changes and openness. The Chinese government tries to take in charge of all media, including all the social media platforms, but it is almost impossible. Those users of blogs, of whom the majority are young people, are especially interested in challenging authorities by going around the great firewall of China.

Politics and pornography are the two most sensitive topics on the internet that the Chinese authority is targeting. According to the ministry of information industry (MII) of China, they need only "*healthy, civilized news and information beneficial to the nation.*" (p29, Scotton & Hachten, 2010) The ministry together with some other national agencies has a determination system to keep unwanted topic off the internet. And approximately 30,000 to 50,000 monitors are working on searching for "unhealthy information", such as pornography and some topic related to democracy or freedom and so on. The decline in blogger's interests in politically sensitive topics might due to the tightening of the laws concern internet uses. But still blogs especially micro-blogs has great potentials for business, as there are 50 million blog users that are either creating or reading blogs at one time.

Furthermore, CNNIC reports that, demographically, 60% of internet users in China are aged less than 25 and 80% of these young users live in the cities. (CNNIC, 2015) With the better education and access to large amount of information, most of the urban Chinese are proud of new China and strongly disagree with criticisms from abroad. Compared to Americans' distrust view of their government as a threatening agency, Chinese prefer to respect government as a wise parent. Similar to other countries, most social media content are entertainment. Young people spent most of their time on music, sports, lifestyle information and social interaction; at the same time, only spent limited time to follow political, economic and social issues. (Scotton & Hachten, 2010)

Professor Scotton and Hachten both have had long interests in China and even have working experiences that are closely related to Chinese media for a certain period of time. In their book they gave a comprehensive and detailed background description of Chinese media, but their opinions are still based on a western point of view. Furthermore the focus on social media is only a small part of this book. Because of this, the author of this report thinks that it is important to hear other voices on Chinese social media and particularly an insight view from within China. Therefore additional literatures are reviewed and discussed below.

In Zheng's (2013) study of e-governance on Chinese microblogs, he introduces three unique findings that are absent in other countries. The first is a centralized review process. Information that will be posted on government's microblogs, especially for controversial topics, will undergo various levels for approval. The process is similar to traditional content reviews from lower-level workers to high-level leaders. Many leaders still put tight control over these micro-blogs posts, which normally results in low or slow responses rate and the followers usually un-trust or feel distanced towards such governments' micro-blogs. This process is time consuming and reflects China's "top-down" and centralized administrative system.

The second unique finding is the phenomena of the internet "water army". The term "water army" refers to ghostwriters that get paid to post comments with certain commercial or political intentions. These comments have a hidden purpose, which is usually manipulate and mislead public opinion to the benefits for certain interest groups. This is a problem particularly when the government is trying to determine the public opinion; it is difficult for them to hear the true voices from the intended audience. The existence of "water armies" might due to specific social and economical environment in China, where it is easy and cheap for interest groups to hire people to upload content that mislead or conceal true public opinions for their own gain.

The third finding is international influences. During last few years, it is very popular to use social media in government around the world. In some countries, it is common to use social media channels for political elections and communication. This international trend has influenced different agencies of Chinese government to adopt social media, especially microblogs to interact with public, but normally with poor maintenance.

Even Zheng's research is on e-governance, and his findings are not all suitable for the purpose of this thesis, for example: the centralized review process is much weaker among tourist sites, as there

would be much less sensitive topics in such accounts. They have much less political influences and more commercialized. But the power of "water armies" and "international influences" cannot be ignored. Tourist sites might hire a "water army" for the purpose of promotion or sales. Even though international influences are limited, they produce a much stronger pressure on the tourism industry. This can be easily seen in the cut-throat competition in the top-ten lists from Weibo in this thesis.

Zhou and Wang (2014) conclude three challenges as managers of social media platforms in modern China. The first challenge is management of the negative information. If one person, especially an influential user on social media, posts a negative tour experience, it could harm the tourist site's image badly. It is important to deal with this kind of noise carefully and keep a good image. The second challenge is reliability of the information. In an open platform where everyone can freely express their opinions, keeping true and accurate information can become hard. The last challenge is that there is still certain amount of disadvantageous groups in China, such as people with low income or poor education. It is either hard for them to afford access to social media, or gaining access is hard due to lack of connectivity. Thus, social media as "the new media" still cannot entirely replace the traditional media in short run. It is the opinion of the author of this report that these three challenges are not only valid in China, but due to the large population they might become more apparent in China.

After all, social media marketing strategy refers to information dissemination through interactions between individuals and organizations by using social platforms in order to achieve business goal. As each individual has his/her own perception, and social media is very much an outcome of the technology, media and its users, hence it is very important to have tailored marketing strategy according to different target group for the best result. (Yang & Wang, 2015) Especially in China, the government's censorship plays a leading role in the development of social media, why they are different from social media platforms in the western world. It is particularly vital to have a social media strategy that fit in the local Chinese political, social, economic and cultural contexts.

The differences between Chinese and western social media does not have a significant impacts on this report. The purpose of this report is not to do a comparative study between social media in China and western countries. Moreover, most literatures on social media in China are concerning e-governance, it is easy to understand that the political interests are still leading elements in this field. All in all, this section is trying to give an overview of condition in Chinese social media to those

that are not familiar with it. From the author's point of view, social media in China has considerable influential power because of its large user base and openness compared to other traditional media.

Chapter 4: Findings and analysis:

In this chapter, the methods of content analysis and E-mail interviewing are employed in order to analyze the top ten influential accounts' behaviors on Weibo. The different research methods give both objective and subjective view. The findings and results will be described separately in the following sections and end up with a discussion.

4.1 Content Analysis:

The content analysis in this part is based on table 1 of the top ten most influential accounts of 5A scenic areas on Weibo for the month of May 2015. A brief introduction of this table is already presented in Chapter 1. A more comprehensive analysis of the findings in this table will be discussed in the sections below.

4.1.1 Basic information:

All of the ten accounts in this top-ten list are well established tourist sites in China, physically as well as on Weibo. Among these ten sites, LOC1, LOC3, LOC9 and LOC 10 are historical and cultural relics; LOC 2, LOC 5 and LOC 8 are natural scenic area; LOC 4, LOC 6 and LOC 7 are amusement or theme parks. Three of them are from Zhenjiang Province, two of them are from Guangdong Province, and the rest are from five different places in Beijing, Anhui province, Shandong province, Henan province and Shanxi province.

Sina and Weibo Data Center collects data from different areas and publishes official reports regularly. Statistic shows that the above ten accounts of tourist sites had the most influential power in the month of May 2015. This means that compared to their counterparts in the same industry, they have a considerable amount of followers, who they can influence in greater extend. The degree of influential power is measured by three indicators: active level, broadcasting power and coverage rate, they are included in the table 1 as well. Active level is related to the numbers of high quality blogs that account operator posted, reposted or commented upon. Broadcasting power is depending on numbers of posts that have been reposted, commented on and liked by followers; it is a measurement of popularity of blogs posted by account operators. The last indicator is coverage rate, and it is the active level of the followers of that account.

The detailed calculation method of numbers of these three indicators are described in Weibo's official Website (Help.weibo.com,2016) as *"very complicated and accurate"*. As these methods are

not directly relevant to this report, they will not be discussed in greater detail. However, the number of influential power is easily derived from the three indicators, as shown in the formular below:

Number of active level + number of broadcasting rate + number of coverage rate

= number of influential power

The higher grades they get, the more influential power they have and it applies to all three indicators. The highest score of influential power stays in the top of this list. As described by Weibo data center, influential power is an important measurement to determine the quality of accounts' information, the speed and breadth of information dissemination. (P8, Sina and Weibo Data Center, 2015) It is a dynamic number that is calculated by daily basis. Weibo Data Center also suggests that in order to increase the number of influential power, account operators can post interesting posts, comment other's posts and join in the discussion of hot topic with a higher frequency.

According to Table 1, the average number of active level is 126.9, the average number of broadcasting power is 16.9 and average cover rate is 253.1. These three averages results in an average number of influential power of 396.9. The influential power of LOC 1 (538) is far ahead of LOC 2 (440) with the difference of 98 points, the differences between LOC 2 and 3, 3 and 4, 4 and 5 etc. is much smaller and varies from 3 to 26. Each account in the top three has one highest score in three elements. LOC 1 has top grade (46) in broadcasting power and considerable high score in other two areas; LOC 2 has top grade in coverage rate; and LOC 3 is highest (289) in active level but lowest in coverage rate. Generally speaking, it is important that account operator is equally active in all three areas, but being good at one of the indicators can be also an alternative if one wants to stay in higher position of this list.

Table 2 Basic Weibo statistics for top 10 most influential accounts of 5A scenic area (Data collected by 03.11.2015)[5]

Place	Weibo account	Followers	Following	Member since	Total No. Of posts	No. Of posts May 2015
LOC 1	The Palace Museum (Forbidden City)	1.6 million	197	5 March 2010	5337	78
LOC 2	mount Huangshan	3.72 million	707	7 April 2011	9953	71
LOC 3	Shen Garden in Shaoxing	9536	457	12 August 2011	20325	502
LOC 4	Hengdian world studios	0.28 million	1776	29 November 2010	11266	95
LOC 5	Laoshan Scenic Area official Weibo	0.97 million	1109	27 June 2011	10678	463
LOC 6	Guangzhou Chimelong Paradise	0.39 million	315	3 August 2010	11409	139
LOC 7	Chimelong Xiangjiang Safari Park	0.17 million	1389	15 March 2010	13419	133
LOC 8	Boai Qingtian River Scenic Area	1.03 million	489	7 March 2012	2268	67
LOC 9	Huangcheng Prime Minister's Mansion	0.24 million	596	25 April 2011	5487	448
LOC 10	Wuzhen Water town	0.09 million	1813	20 March 2010	8568	149

As shown in table 2, basic information of these ten accounts is revealed. This information includes numbers of followers and following, time of account establishment, total numbers of posts and numbers of posts in May 2015.

Among these ten accounts, LOC 1 is the oldest participant. It started operating its profile already on 5th, March 2010. By contrast, LOC 8 is the youngest one, it signed up for a Weibo account in 2012. The dates for which these accounts were established are somehow clustered. Five of them registered in 2010, four registered in 2011 and only one did in 2012. Thus, most of them are early adopters of Weibo, as Weibo itself was launched in 2010. However, it is hard to find correlation between the establishment dates and the numbers of followers. As by common sense, many people might surmise that accounts that have been registered for longer time would have a larger number of followers. This is not what happened here. For example, the account who has the most followers is LOC 2. This account has 3.72 million followers, which is more than double the followers than LOC 1 in the second place, who has 1.6 million followers. LOC 2 established its profile in April 2011 and it is in the sixth place in the timeline. LOC 8, who is youngest one among the ten, has 1.03 million followers, which puts it in the third place regarding the quantity followers. Worth to mention here is LOC 3; it has unusually low number (9536) of followers compared to other nine accounts (it might be a mistake by Weibo Data Center, but this study will follow this list). LOC 3 is also the one has the most posts; it posted 20,325 in total, almost 7000 more than LOC 7 which is in the second place of posts' quantity. Only in May, it has posted 502 posts, which is 7 times more than first (78 posts) and second (71 posts) places in this list. LOC 1 and LOC 2 who stay in the top of this list have posted considerable low posts in total on May. Only three of them posted more than

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[5]Data collected from www.weibo.com. See appendix 1

400 posts in that month, the other two are LOC 5 (463 posts) and LOC 9(448), other seven accounts have each posted average 105 posts on May. Therefore, the number of posts is no guarantee of popularity of a given account, quality or other criterions of the posts might play a more important role here. It reminds other accounts who want to be popular on Weibo, this strategy of sending a large amount of posts by daily basis might not help them. Instead they should focus on the quality of the content and post with a plan and purpose.

In summary, all these ten accounts are early adopter of Weibo and considered as successful, at least in the month of May 2015: first of all, they are in the list of Top 10 most influential accounts of 5A scenic area on Weibo; secondly, they have big amount of followers (except LOC 3); lastly, they are very active in their blog, but in different ways. Thus, this study is focusing on their various way of being popular on Weibo and it will be explored in the following sections.

4.1.2 Accounts' activities and strategies on Weibo:

This section focuses on the activities of the chosen accounts on Weibo. According to Hays et. al.(Hays et al., 2012), users' activities on micro-blogs can be divided into three main themes: post frequency, content and interaction. These concepts are useful for the purpose of this report, thus, the data collected from Weibo will be analyzed according to these categories. In the end, this study will try to determine the social media strategies of the chosen accounts.

- *4.1.2A Post frequency:*

Post frequency contains total number of posts, average number of daily posts and repeated posts. This data is listed in table 3. According to this table, LOC 3 has the biggest amount of posts with total number of 502, which equals almost a quarter of the total posts (2145) by all ten accounts. At the same time, LOC 3 is also in the first place of average daily post with number of 16.19. In contrast, LOC 8 has the lowest number (67) posts, which is only 3.1 % of the total number of posts. This gives an average of only 2.16 posts per day.

According to the quantity of the posts, these ten accounts can be divided into three groups. First, 66% of total posts (2145) are posted by LOC 3, LOC 5 and LOC 9. Each of them has posted more than 400 posts in May. In average, they have posted around 15 daily posts. Second, three accounts posted more than 100 posts each, they are LOC 6 (139), LOC 7 (133) and LOC 10 (149) which equal to around 4.5 posts every day. The last group is consists of LOC 1, LOC 2, LOC 4 and LOC 8,

each of them has posted less than 100 posts in May, which means they posted only about 2.5 daily post. In Figure 2, the exact and average numbers of daily post by each account is visualized as a graph.

In addition, the numbers of repeated post[6] are also included in Table 3. Here it shows that LOC 2 has no repeated posted. LOC 6 has the most repeated posts (33), which is 23.7% of its total posts in May. Most of these posts are related to its promotion activities, such as "repost this message and get free tickets", discount message and recruitment information. LOC 7[7] seems to have same strategy as LOC 6, properly because they are both owned by the same corporation. The remaining accounts' numbers of repeated posts varies from 2 to 31, the content of these posts are different. For example, LOC 1 has 11 repeated posts (14.1% of total posts), these posts contain mostly messages about exhibitions and lectures. LOC 8 has 4 repeated posts (6% of total posts) which are announcements related to weather report.

Table 3 Total number of posts and average number of daily posts in May 2015 (Data collected by 03.11.2015)

Place	Total No. Of posts May 2015	Average No. Of Daily posts May 2015	Distribution of posts by site	Repeated post	
				No. Of posts	% of total posts
LOC 1	78	2.51	3.6%	11	14.1%
LOC 2	71	2.29	3.3%	0	0%
LOC 3	502	16.19	23.4%	6	1.2%
LOC 4	95	3.06	4.4%	2	2.1%
LOC 5	463	14.93	21.6%	27	5.8%
LOC 6	139	4.48	6.5%	33	23.7%
LOC 7	133	4.29	6.2%	31	23.3%
LOC 8	67	2.16	3.1%	4	6.0%
LOC 9	448	14.45	20.9%	2	0.4%
LOC 10	149	4.80	6.9%	7	4.7%
In total	2145	6.91	100%	123	5.7%

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[6] Repeated posts are different from reposted posts. It is similar in content to existing posts, but not a copy of the original post.
[7] LOC 6 and LOC 7 are both belong to Guangzhou Chimelong Group Co., Ltd

Figure 2 Frequency of daily post by 10 tourist site during May 2015 (Data collected by 10.11.2015)
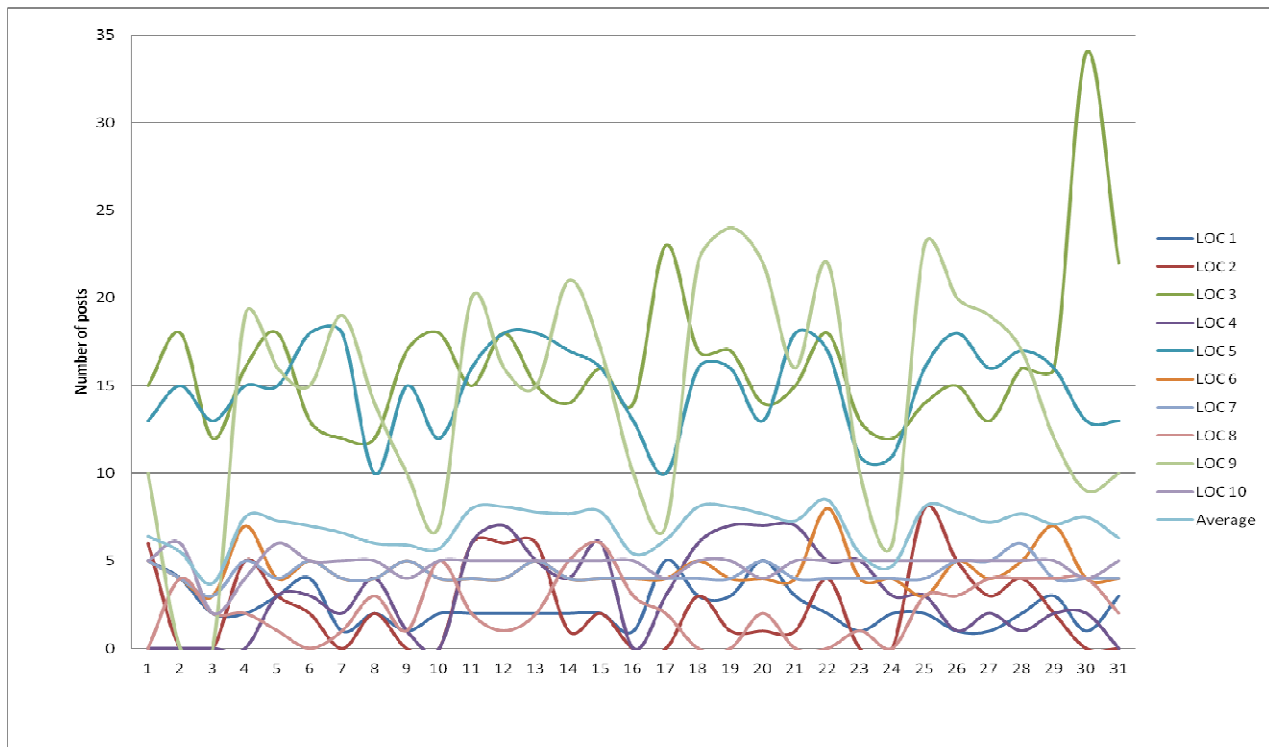
In figure 2, the precise number of posts posted by the ten tourist sites, are plotted day by day. Moreover, the average number of daily post is added as well.

It is clear that LOC 3, LOC 5 and LOC 9 are far beyond the average curve. LOC 9's curve fluctuate the most, ranging from 0 to 23. LOC 6, 7, 10 display more systematic strategies, as they keep posting 4 to 5 posts in average every day. The average curve shows six peak points. These six points are corresponding to six dates with more than 8 posts in average each. These dates are 11th (8 posts), 12th (8.1 posts), 18th (8.1 posts), 19th (8.1 posts), 22nd (8.5 posts) and 25th (8.1 posts) on May. As mentioned before, there are several holidays and special days in May. It was expected that before or during these days, there would be extra activities on Weibo, but this is not the case here. Except for the 19th of May (Chinese Tourist Day), where there can be seen more activities, the rest of days does not correlate directly to these holidays. But few interesting phenomena are found here. First, during the Labor Day's 3 days vacation on 1st of May and following days, some of the accounts, for example: LOC 2, LOC 4, LOC 9 has no activities at all, they didn't post any content during that period. The explanation can be that these account operators are also on vacation or there is too much work to do in the tourist site that they didn't have time to manage their Weibo accounts. Second, five out of the six dates with more than 8 posts in average are Mondays and Tuesdays. The

remaining Monday (4th of May) and Tuesday (5th of May) had respectively 7.5 and 7.3 posts, which are also high posts rates. This trend could be explained by the tourist sites having fewer visitors on Mondays and Tuesdays, thus the account operators have more time to maintain their Weibo accounts. However, this does not mean that they are not active at all during these vacations and special days. In fact, these special days are mentioned many times in their posts and they did have some kind of reward posts for these, for instance LOC 6's free tickets for mother's day or discount for children in the end of May for preparation of 1st of June (The children's Day). These activities are just not concentrated in certain period, like few days before those special days. They spread over the whole month of May, and most of the promotion activities for Labor Day (1st of May), which is considered a relevantly big vacation with three public off days, is to be believed carried out in the end of April. Therefore, it seems a little bit quiet on May.

To sum up, there is no general pattern on how often they posts every day. The frequency of posting is depending on different accounts' unique conditions and strategies. It does seem that most account operators favors Mondays and Tuesdays in general.

- *4.1.2B Post content:*

In order to analyze the post content, this section represents data in three tables and one figure. Information on sources, formats and types of post content are included in these tables and figures.

Table 4 lists the source of posts and its proportions on Weibo in the month of May 2015. There are two main sources of posts: original or repost. An original post is the post that was initially created by an account operator and submitted to his/her own Weibo's platform. Reposted post, as mentioned before, are different from repeated posts, as reposted post are the posts that are "borrowed" from others or from previous posts. The repeated posts are those posts that contain the same or similar information in one's account's platform and appear more than once. Most of the posts that were sent by these ten accounts are original, that is 66.6% of the total posts in average. LOC 1 has the highest percentage of original post (83.3%) and LOC 6 has the lowest (44.6%) among the ten accounts. More specifically, LOC 1, LOC 2 and LOC 5 have quite high rates in originality, and each of them has more than 80% of original posts in total amount. LOC 4, LOC 8 and LOC 9 are in the middle range which has around 70% original posts. LOC 3, LOC 6, LOC 7 and LOC 10 have the least original rate, which are below average from 44% to 60% accordingly.

Table 4 Source of posts and their proportions on Weibo by May 2015 (Data collected by 05.11.2015)

Place	Total posts	Original post		Repost post	
		No. Of posts	% of total posts	No. Of posts	% of total posts
LOC 1	78	65	83.3%	13	16.7%
LOC 2	71	58	81.7%	13	18.3%
LOC 3	502	264	52.6%	238	47.4%
LOC 4	95	64	67.4%	31	32.6%
LOC 5	463	379	81.9%	84	18.1%
LOC 6	139	62	44.6%	77	55.4%
LOC 7	133	63	47.4%	70	52.6%
LOC 8	67	51	76.1%	16	23.9%
LOC 9	448	333	74.3%	115	25.7%
LOC 10	149	90	60.4%	59	39.6%
Total	2145	1429	66.6%	716	33.4%

Another important element of post content is its format; the detailed statistics are shown in table 5 below. On Weibo, account operators can choose to submit content in four different kinds of formats. These formats are: pure texts, pictures, videos and audio. It is possible to use multiple formats at once, for instance account operator can write a text and upload picture and videos, therefore some of numbers in the table are overlapping. Moreover, the audio format was very rarely used during the whole month of May. Only one post by LOC 8 used the audio format, therefore it is not included in this table.

As it shows, the most popular format is pictures. The average rate of using the pictures format is 92%; LOC 1 and LOC 6 are even using pictures in every single post. The least popular format is audio. The other two formats are not used commonly as well, which results in low average rate of 4.4% and 4.2%. More importantly, LOC 1 and LOC 2 largely employ pictures in their posts (almost 100%); at the same time, they hardly used any of the other three formats. Only a single pure text post was submitted by LOC 2.

Table 5 Formats of content and their proportions on Weibo by May 2015 (Data collected by 05.11.2015)

Place	Total posts	Pure Texts		Pictures		Videos	
		No. Of posts	% of total posts	No. Of posts	% of total posts	No. Of posts	% of total posts
LOC 1	78	0	0%	78	100%	0	0%
LOC 2	71	1	1.4%	70	98.6%	0	0%
LOC 3	502	53	10.6%	447	89.6%	3	0.6%
LOC 4	95	8	8.4%	79	83.2%	15	15.8%
LOC 5	463	0	0%	452	97.6%	10	2.2%
LOC 6	139	0	0%	139	100%	4	2.9%
LOC 7	133	1	0.75%	131	98.5%	3	2.3%
LOC 8	67	10	14.9%	55	82.1%	2	3.0%
LOC 9	448	18	4.0%	383	85.5%	51	11.4%
LOC 10	149	3	2.0%	146	98.0%	2	1.3%
Total	**2145**	**94**	**4.4%**	**1980**	**92.3%**	**90**	**4.2%**

Last but not least, according to Yang and Wang (2015), the content of posts is categorized into professional generated content, user generated content, game related notifications and casual greetings. By elaborative observation, all 2145 posts are put into these four categories. Figure 3 presents post numbers of different types of contents, and the numerical details are in Table 6.

Figure 3 Post numbers of different types of contents (Data collected by 05.11.2015)
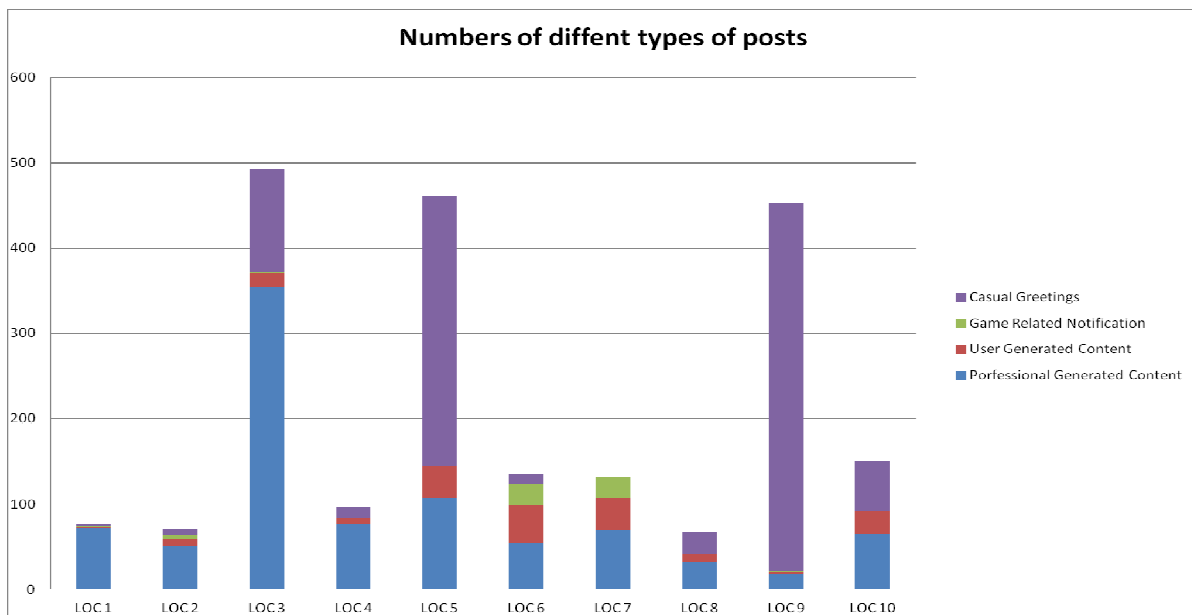
This figure shows that, in most of the cases, professional generated content takes the largest proportion of total numbers of posts, for example, LOC 1 has 92.3% professional generated content, LOC 4 has 81.1% and LOC 2 has 71.8%. But there are also exceptions, as LOC 5 and LOC 9 have most of their posts in categorize of casual greeting, which result in 68.3% and 96.2% in total number of posts. The second mostly published content is casual greeting. LOC 5 and LOC 9

contributed a lot to this category. In general, except for LOC 7 who has not posted any casual greetings, all of the other nine accounts are more or less using this type well. Especially LOC 3, LOC5 and LOC 9 used this type on daily basis. They are sending greeting like "good morning" "good night" every day just to ensure their appearances on Weibo.

The third used content is user generated. This kind of content are normally benefitting for enhancing the interactivity between the account operators and followers. Generally, account operator will repost followers' posts, and most of these posts are related to their experience of visiting the physical tourist sites. Therefore by submitting posts of user generated content and commenting on these posts, the account operators begin to engage in conversations with followers. This is a big advantage of the Weibo platform. In this class, LOC 6 has the highest percentage of user generated content (30.9%) and LOC 9 has the lowest percentage of 0.4%. The reasons for low percentage of user generated content can be explained in two ways. First, the account operator is not interested in reposting followers' posts. This can be the case for LOC 1, the Forbidden City in Beijing. As a renowned tourist site, LOC 1 has numerous visitors every day, but the content of its Weibo account is mostly related to its collections, galleries and history. There is only few repostings of followers posts, thus the willingness to interact with their followers is not clear. Second, there are not so many posts sent by followers, which are directly related to this tourist site's account. This can be the case for LOC 3, who does not have many followers compared to the other nine accounts. The account operator has shown willingness to connect with its followers by reposting a few of the followers' posts, but due to the limited number of posts submit by followers, the percentage of user generated content is still low.

The last type is game related notifications. LOC 6 and LOC 7 are the two accounts that use this type the most (18%). As mentioned before, they both belong to the same corporation, so they likely share similar Weibo strategies. Even the content of their game related notifications are very similar. Generally speaking, the usage of this type of posts is relatively low. Except for LOC 2 who has 6 posts, all the other accounts are having only a single or none posts in this category.

Table 6 Distribution of types of content and their proportion on Weibo by May 2015 (Data collected by 05.11.2015)

Place	Total	Professional Generated Content		User Generated Content		Game Related Notifications		Casual Greetings	
		No. Of posts	% of total posts	No. Of posts	% of total posts	No. Of posts	% of total posts	No. Of posts	% of total posts
LOC 1	78	72	92,3%	1	1,3%	1	1,3%	3	3,8%
LOC 2	71	51	71,8%	7	9,9%	6	8,5%	7	9,9%
LOC 3	502	355	70,7%	16	3,2%	1	0,2%	120	23,9%
LOC 4	95	77	81,1%	6	6,3%	1	1,1%	12	12,6%
LOC 5	463	107	23,1%	37	8,0%	1	0,2%	316	68,3%
LOC 6	139	55	39,6%	43	30,9%	26	18,7%	11	7,9%
LOC 7	133	69	51,9%	38	28,6%	25	18,8%	0	0,0%
LOC 8	67	32	47,8%	9	13,4%	0	0,0%	26	38,8%
LOC 9	448	18	4,0%	2	0,4%	1	0,2%	431	96,2%
LOC 10	149	65	43,6%	26	17,4%	1	0,7%	58	38,9%
Total	2145	901	42,0%	185	8,6%	63	2,9%	984	45,9%

In order to determine the ten accounts' different strategies based on their posts' specific content. This study analyzed a total of 2145 posts. A summary of this analysis follows below.

LOC 1, LOC 3, LOC 9 and LOC 10 are all historical and cultural relics. LOC 1 (the Forbidden City) is a well-known tourist site and museum. It has various priceless collection and stories. Its Weibo platform is used to present its profound cultural background. Most its posts are introduction of its collections, exhibitions and stories of architectures in the palace. Furthermore it posts content about the Chinese traditional lunar calendar on a daily basis and provides information related to the current date.

LOC 3 (Shen Garden in Shaoxing) has the most posts (502) among the ten accounts. The content of its posts are varied. Firstly, it has various numbers of posts that are reposted from other relevant Weibo accounts, for instance, the local tourist administration or other tourist sites in the same city. It helps to update the news and events locally. As LOC 3 is a very small tourist site, it uses its posts to promote local culture, historical stories, poems and even geographical knowledge. Secondly, it posts daily trends such as the weather reports and live information in the garden. Last but not least part of its posts is causal greeting, like "good morning" "good night" daily posts or some random thoughts and mottos all fall in this category. These three parts sums up to an average of 16 posts per day.

LOC 9 (Huangcheng Prime Minister's Mansion) displays a similar strategy to LOC 3, as both have a high percentage of reposted posts. The difference is that most of these posts are casual greeting. These reposted casual greeting messages including recipes, jokes, life tips, interesting videos, pictures of pets and daily "good morning"/"good night" greetings. LOC 9 is also the one account that has the least professional generated posts.

LOC 10 (Wuzhen Water town) is not only a tourist site, but also an old town which has around 12,000 inhabitants. There are much more than just sightseeing, visitors can easily stay there for few days or even months to experience the local life. Thus, its Weibo account is much more than a tour guide or information desk. Its posts are mainly introducing local food, culture, travel information, every day weather report and what is going on in the town. Additionally, it also uses the strategy as daily sign in "good morning" "good night" messages.

LOC 2, LOC 5 and LOC 8 are natural scenic area with mountains. LOC 2's (mount Huangshan) posts contain large amount of photos and detailed descriptions of its scenery. Its posts are reposted many times, and are very popular among its followers. LOC 5's (Laoshan Scenic Area official Weibo) post strategy is similar to LOC 9, it also has lots of posts and most of them are causal greeting. These causal greeting posts including weather reports, daily update of the sites, general life knowledge, recipes, jokes, nice photos and travel information. "Good morning" "good night" messages are a must for them, and there are some user-generated posts from visitors as well. LOC 8 (Boai Qingtian River Scenic Area) has the least posts (67) among all ten accounts. Its strategy is close to LOC 2, the content consists of photos and description of its scenery, the daily weather reports and updates as professional generated messages; "good morning" message, life advices or nice pictures as casual greeting; and some user generated reposts.

The last group of accounts is LOC 4, LOC 6 and LOC 7, and they are amusement or theme parks. LOC 4 (Hengdian world studios) is a big film studio, every day there are certain amount of films and TV series produced, and it is also opened to public as tourist site. Its Weibo platform is mostly like a notice board, it publishes the daily schedules of time and places of different film crew, actors/ actress's daily activities.

As mentioned before, LOC 6 (Guangzhou Chimelong Paradise) and LOC 7 (Chimelong Xiangjiang Safari Park) likely share the same strategy due to both parks being owned by the same corporation. They both have a similar amount of posts, one has 139 posts and another has 133. LOC 6 is an amusement park and LOC 7 is a Safari Park. Both of these accounts are good at following their own followers and both have a high percentage of user generated posts. They are actively communicating with their visitors and followers. Both accounts have a certain amount of game related posts, these posts includes information on discounts, due to the Children's day, Mother's day, and recruitment announcements. The biggest difference between them is their professional

generated posts. As an amusement park, LOC 6 is more focused on introducing its recreational facilities and various activities and events, while LOC 7 creates most posts on their animals' daily lives and relevant events.

- *4.1.2C Interaction with followers:*

The last theme of activities on Weibo is interaction. It can be determined from two aspects. First, from account operator's aspect, it can be determined by checking the amount of interactive posts being posted. These numbers can be seen in Table 7. Second, from followers' aspect, the participation of followers is indicator of their interaction. The exact numbers of received "reposted" "commented" and "liked" are shown in Table 8.

According to Hays et.al.(p223, 2012), interactive post is "a *post that directly asked a question or requested some form of response*". By this definition, the numbers of interactive posts and its proportions are listed in Table 7. According to Table 7, LOC 1 and LOC 3 have 0 interactive posts. LOC 9 has 30 interactive posts (6.7%), which made it in the first place of having this kind of posts.

Furthermore, by analyzing of these interactive posts, the results showed that they have different strategies on choice of topics. Follow their strategies, these ten accounts can be divide into 3 groups. First group is LOC 2 and LOC 4 (group 1). These two accounts have very little interactive posts, which are only 3 and 1 accordingly. But they both display a strong intention for getting feedback from their followers when they submitted interactive posts. In general, most of this kind of posts is game related notifications. For example, LOC 2 submitted a post saying: repost this message and have a chance to win a camera" (posted at 8:53 of 15th of May). This resulted in 28,098 reposts and 985 comments. Another example is that LOC 4 set up a poll for "annual little prince", (posted at 10:36 of 8th of May) the purpose of this poll is to elect the most popular young actor in 2015, and it got 15,668 votes in total. It proved that the followers' reactions to this kind of inactive post are very active, as their topics are of considerable interest them.

The second group includes LOC 6 (7 posts), LOC 7 (7 posts) and LOC 10 (5 posts). They only have few interactive posts and these posts are mostly professional generated. The account operators do display some intention for responses, but not as strong as group 1. For instance LOC 6 posted several photos of its recreational facilities and asked "which one do you want to challenge?" (Posted at 16:03 of 23rd of May); LOC 7 posted some photos of animals from their park and asked

"can you guess what kind of cute animal it is?" (Posted by 10:20 of 22nd of May); LOC 10 posted some photos of local views and asked: "what is the water town in your eyes?" (Posted at 10: 30 of 27th May). They got some responses in return, but not as many as group 1.

LOC 5, LOC 8 and LOC 9 are belongs to the last group. Except for LOC 8, the other two accounts have quite a lot of interactive posts compare to the rest of the accounts. Their posts are mostly in the category of causal greeting and their intention for feedback is the weakest among these 3 groups. Their interactive posts are typically including different kinds of pictures which are not related to its tourist site at all, and ask questions such as:" which movie touches your heart?" "Where is your most wanted destination?" or "there are several toys in the pictures below, how much do you still remember?" Normally, these kinds of questions will receive very little or even no responses. The data in table 8 proved these points.

Table 7 Numbers of interactive posts and its proportions in total posts (Data collected by 10.11.2015)

Place	Total No. Of posts May 2015	Interactive posts	
		No. Of posts	% in total posts
LOC 1	78	0	0,0%
LOC 2	71	3	4,2%
LOC 3	502	0	0,0%
LOC 4	95	1	1,1%
LOC 5	463	16	3,5%
LOC 6	139	7	5,0%
LOC 7	133	7	5,3%
LOC 8	67	2	3,0%
LOC 9	448	30	6,7%
LOC 10	149	5	3,4%
Average	**214,5**	**7,1**	**3,2%**

There are three indicators that can be used to measure the involvement of the followers, they are the numbers of received "repost", "comments" and "likes", and it's captured in table 8. These numbers can easily be extracted on Weibo, as every post is accompanied by panes containing counters for "reposts", "comments" and "likes". Moreover, all comments are open to the public, and only the account owner has the right to delete the comments as wished.

As shown in table 8, LOC 2 received the highest number of repost with an average 515 repost per post. This can be linked to the single interactive post that has more than 28,000 reposts as mentioned previously. LOC 5 has the lowest rate in reposting, which is 1.9 reposts per post. The average number of each post has 90 reposts, but only LOC 1, LOC 2, LOC 4 are above the average, especially LOC 1 and LOC 2 are far ahead. The other seven accounts are far below the average, ranging from 1.9 to 10.9 reposts per post. There are big gap between LOC 1, LOC 2 and the rest of the accounts. In the measurement of received comments, LOC 1 is in the first place with average 48.4 per post; in contrast, LOC 9 has 0.8 per post in the bottom. The average of total comments received is 15.1. This is not as a big gap as the other items. In this case, LOC 1, LOC 2 and LOC 4 have highest number of comments and are above average. LOC 5, LOC 8 and LOC 9 are in the bottom in this measurement. In the measurement of received "likes", LOC 1 has the highest amount (254.5 per post in average) and LOC 3 has the lowest amount (0.3 per post in average). There is a considerable difference between these two accounts, even when compared to the average number of all (45.4 per day). LOC 1 and LOC 4 are far above the average and LOC 3 and LOC 5 (1.5 per post) are far below.

Overall, there is a high degree of variation of the numbers for these three measurements among the ten accounts. There seems to be no correlation between these numbers and the accounts ranking by influential power. There are many elements that influence this, such as the number of total posts, the time of posting, the post frequency and the content of the posts.

Table 8 Degree of followers' interaction on Weibo (Data collected by 10.11.2015)

Place	"Reposted" by followers		"Commented" by followers		"liked" by followers	
	No. Of reposts	Average per.post	No. Of comments	Average per.post	No. Of likes	Average per.post
LOC 1	19344	248,0	3778	48,4	19848	254,5
LOC 2	36587	515,3	2476	34,9	959	13,5
LOC 3	5463	10,9	4968	9,9	158	0,3
LOC 4	8639	90,9	3350	35,3	12573	132,3
LOC 5	874	1,9	854	1,8	682	1,5
LOC 6	873	6,3	977	7,0	748	5,4
LOC 7	952	7,2	1701	12,8	2346	17,6
LOC 8	229	3,4	93	1,4	392	5,9
LOC 9	2857	6,4	347	0,8	2517	5,6
LOC 10	1644	11,0	693	4,7	2745	18,4
Average	**7746,2**	**90,1**	**1923,7**	**15,7**	**4296,8**	**45,5**

4.1.3 Summary:

The content analysis in this part is based on the list of top 10 most influential accounts of 5A scenic area on Weibo (May 2015). A great deal of data is collected from Weibo's platform, and it includes these ten accounts' basic information, post frequency, post content and their interactivity. The information is narrowed down into tables and figures in order to conclude these ten Weibo account's activities and strategies.

In summary, LOC 1 is ranking highest when it comes to influential power. It is also the first account that established a profile on Weibo, but the quantities of followers has no direct relationship to the lifetime of account. Many accounts have much more followers even though they are relatively new. Among these accounts, LOC 5 posted most with 502 on May and LOC 8 posted least with 67 in total. Post frequency is another important element, as the average number of daily post among these ten is close to 7. LOC 3 is most frequent poster, submitting an average of 16 posts per day. In contrast, LOC 8 posted the least with 2 posts per day. There is not certain pattern of posting frequency. LOC 6, LOC 7 and LOC 10 are most systematic about number of posting, they post 4 to 5 posts every day; while LOC 9 is the most unpredictable, the number of daily post varies from 0 to 23. Figure 2 shows a clear trend of a higher post frequency on Mondays and Tuesdays, in general all of the accounts are more active with an average of more than 8 posts per day. There are no evidences of strong extra promotional activities before or during holidays and special days, but these are often mentioned in posting during the whole month.

There are two sources of posts, original and reposted. LOC 1 has the highest originality and LOC 6 has highest repost rate. Pictures are most preferred format and audios are the least. And there are four types of post content: professional generated, user generated content, game related notification and casual greeting. Most accounts chose to post professional generated content primarily. Only LOC 5 and LOC 9 have the largest proportion of causal greeting content. Game related notification is least used type of content. These ten accounts' strategies on specific post content varies.

From different characteristics of the ten accounts that is summarized above, this study further divide them into three categories: expert type, staff type and friend type. (Easy to see in figure 3) LOC 1, LOC 2 and LOC 4 represent the type of "expert". They are acting as an expert and have great knowledge related to their profession. They don't send post often and their posts are brief and concise. Large amount of their posts are professional related, the other three kinds of content are only taking limited proportion. Instead engaging in discussions, they are more interested in pushing

information to their followers. They are not particularly interesting in interacting with followers, but have great number of followers, who are somehow willing to interact with them. The evidences are showed in Table 8, their received numbers of "repost", "comment" and "likes" are in the lead.

The second type is "staff" type, most of accounts fall into this category. It's including LOC 3, LOC 6, LOC 7, LOC 8 and LOC 10. These accounts act like workers who are doing a job and most of their posts are sent within working hour. Professional generated content are still the most frequently posted type, but the other three kinds of content are also used. In particular user generated content are posted, which shows their willingness to interact with followers and follow their activities.

LOC 5 and LOC 9 represent the third type of "friend". This type of account is very friendly and "talkative". They post huge amount of posts, most of them are causal greeting and only very few professional generated content. It has the least characteristics of public organization, and instead it is more like a relaxed individual that post anything at anytime.

All in all, after the content analysis, there are some experiences that can be learnt from these accounts. First, for those accounts of historic and cultural relics, it is popular to send posts which are related to its cultural background, stories and history. Second, for natural scenic area, the preferred way would be post photos of its beautiful scenery and introduce geographic knowledge and interesting stories that took place within this area. Third and last, for theme parks it would be attractive to post content that relates to local news, ongoing events and daily updates. Moreover, the account operators can increase the number of interactive posts, in order to receive more feedback from followers. For this purpose, the most effective type is game related interactive posts.

Furthermore, one research on tweets found that 92% of retweets (similar function as "repost" on Weibo) and replies (similar function as "comment" on Weibo) take place within one hour of the time the original tweet is posted. Therefore, the post frequency and timing become crucial. (Hays et al., 2012) In this study, there is no general pattern on how often these ten accounts post every day, the frequency of posting is according to their unique conditions and strategies. But in average each of them submits 6 posts every day, which is already a high frequency. Even if there isn't any important information, they will leave a daily message, such as "good morning" and "good night". This helps them keeping their appearance up. More importantly, the number of posts is not necessary guarantee of popularity, there are many other elements can influence this such as: the time of posting, the type of posts and the content of the posts.

4.2 Interview analysis:

Table 9: Interview Questions:

1. When did you decide to develop a social media strategy?
2. Why did you decide to use Sina Weibo?
3. Do you have any other social media tools besides Sina Weibo?
4. Do you have a dedicated marketing department or employees for developing a social media strategy? And if so, how many employees are involved?
5. How many people are tasked with updates, posts and interaction on Weibo?
6. How much of your marketing budget is allocated to your presence on social medai?
7. Do you think it is more valuable to use social media to promote than conventional marketing methods?
8. Is it hard to develop a specific social media strategy?
9. Do you think your social media strategy is a success? How do you measure it? What is your biggest success or failure?
10. Have you made major adjustments in your strategy since the beginning?
11. What is your goal in the future?
12. What makes you different than other tourist sites' Weibo accounts?
13. Who is your target group in social media?
14. What kind of posts do you update most? And which kinds do you think are most effective? (Contest, ask a question, request photos, advertising?)
15. Do you have any secret strategy to gain followers in Weibo?

By taking advantage of the openness and interactivity in social media, it is possible to communicate directly with operator of Weibo's accounts. In this research, the account operators' opinions and motivations on their social media strategies are also considered as one important part of the study objective. Therefore, 15 interview questions are prepared and send out to these top 10 accounts as private messages on Weibo. (See table 9[8]) These questions are designed to give an inside view from the social media strategy makers[9] perspective, in order to supplement the blank area that content analysis cannot provide. Although the nature and method of interview lead to the interviewee's subjective opinion, biased responses or uncertain validity, it is expected to be overcome by quantitative content analysis. Moreover, these interview questions are made to determine the differences between the expected outcome of these strategies and the actual outcome.

The interview questions were sent two times in Chinese language, as in the first time, nearly no one replied. In the end, two accounts operators replied, they are LOC 5 Laoshan Scenic Area official Weibo and LOC 9 Huangcheng Prime Minister's Mansion. (See appendix 3[10]) The other eight accounts gave no responses at all. Because of this kind of interview shares similar features to the E-mail interview which mentioned before, for example: missing face to face contact and uncertain response time, the low response rate was taking into consideration in advance. The reasons for the low response rate could be that the account operators have too many messages and it is difficult to

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[8] The original interview questions that have been sent out are in Chinese (see appendix 2)

[9] The strategy makers are assumed to be the account operators.

[10] The original interview records are in Chinese, the texts used here are directly translated from Chinese.

distinguish important information from spam. Other reasons could be that the accounts' operator has no interests in answering the questions or simply don't know the answer.

Between these two accounts who replied, even LOC 9 responded, he/she refused the interview politely by saying: "*I don't know how to answer most of the questions, as I am not the boss, there are something that I have no rights to tell you, but I have concluded in one sentence: respect and take the advantage of the (market)/social media marketing (here even the original text is "market", but in this context, it make more sense to understand as "social media marketing"). The procedure is not important and there are no methods can be utilized repeatedly.*" (Screenshot 1, p1, appendix 3) His/her answer indicates that their social media strategy is uncertain or at least, not implement from top to down clearly. It might be a specific case or even an example of some of the accounts that don't really have purpose or strategies for their Weibo's platform. They are just following the mainstream and doing what others have done. According to Hays et. al's (Hays et al., 2012) research on the use of social media by national tourism organizations, only few tourism organizations have started to study social media and develop strategies for their own benefit. Even the adoption of social media is still in an un-matured stage. They also point out that those tourism organizations which do not adopt social media, will lose their competitive advantages over time.

From this this research's point of view, based on the interview and the results from content analysis, the success of LOC 9 cannot be easily concluded as either coincidence or hard work. Some good experiences can be learnt from LOC 9, even though the operator cannot provide concrete answers. First of all, they have put quite a lot of effort in their Weibo platform, including frequent posting (approximately 15 posts every day) and frequent interaction with followers through interactive posts (6.7% of total posts are interactive). All these activities ensure a high appearances of its account and have contributed to its popularity among the followers even though there was not so much promotion during that period. Hence, it can be assumed that they might not have designed their social strategy from the beginning, but developed it along the way. Moreover, it is worth to mention that the development of any Weibo platform is a dynamic process, where it is important to adjust the strategy to align with the needs of the audiences. LOC 9 followed this pattern and as the expressed it themselves: "*respect and take the advantage of the (market)/social media marketing*", (Screenshot 1, p1, appendix 3) resulted in a place in the top 10 list.

LOC 5 is more devoted to this interview. The operator of this account gave more concrete and detailed answers. Even it is mentioned in the answers that he/she is lacking professional knowledge of social media strategy, that he/she can only provide brief introduction rather than answering the questions one by one. Those answers are still valued as quite comprehensive. In the interview, the operator introduced that although this account has been registered for a long period (account created at 27th of June 2011); he/she took over the role of operator of this account from spring 2014. The purpose of opening this account on Weibo is to provide a platform to introduce the beautiful sceneries of Laoshan Mountain and other related tourist information to public. The choice of Weibo is due to the flexible and convenience of its posting method: 140 Chinese characters are enough to present clearly one event or information; at the same time, it is also possible to upload pictures, audios and videos. Due to the fact that Sina Weibo has a large amount of users, it can spread information in a wide audience. This became the first priority when they picked up a social media platform. Beside Sina Weibo, WeChat is one of their other social media channels. At present, there are two people in charge of maintenance of their Weibo platform, but the division of tasks is unspecific. This platform is open all year around. This year, there were not so many activities that can be directly links to sales, only a little on admission. The most used formats of content are pictures, as Laoshan Mountain is known for its beautiful sceneries and rich in tourist resources. The most frequently published content is travel guidance to visitors. In the account operator's opinion, compared to other accounts, they are not just trying to run their account for any direct benefit, but instead to serve their visitors through this platform. The numbers of the followers are not the most important consideration. Content with practical information is the second most predominant posting, providing first-hand guidance to visitors. This account has no specific target group and its followers have a wide range of ages. As the answer to their social media strategy, the operator pointed out that they don't have any specific strategy. He/she did confirm the importance of social media as an easy channel to spread messages and receive feedback with no delay. It is also a convenient way to make useful information available to a large base of audience. In short, it is much more effective than other traditional forms of media. (Screenshot 2-6, appendix 3)

Neither of these two interviews can be considered as 'traditional interview', where each question is answered one by one accordingly. At the same time, neither of them has described their social media strategy clearly. But both of them acknowledge the advantages of social media as being "flexible", "convenient" and "cost efficient". Even LOC 5 mentioned in interview that there is no intended target group, statistics from Weibo shows that their followers mostly belongs to the

younger generations. According to CNNIC's report of 2015 (p32, 2015), more than 80% of the internet users are under 40 years old. It is due to several reasons, for instance: young generations are quicker to accept new technologies and have more opportunities to access the internet.

The interviews show that these two tourist sites has specific employees in charge of their social media channels, whether they are working for an independent department of social media marketing or belong to another departments (f.x: marketing or sales departments) is uncertain. It can be assumed that all other eight or at least most of them have professional administrators to manage their Weibo account and possibly other social media platforms.

To the questions of the purposes of establishing a Weibo account, there are three main points. LOC 5 describes as "*to introduce the beautiful sceneries of Laoshan Mountain and other related tourist information to public*". This opinion represents one of most important purpose within these ten Weibo accounts and possible many other similar types of accounts on Weibo. It is confirmed by content analysis that most of the posts have no direct link to sales, and most of these ten accounts did not show much of directly intention of promotion to attract more visitors, but to get close contact with followers or potential visitors. Here Weibo become bridge between the tourist sites and the followers\visitor, account operators use this platform often to hear visitors' suggestion and answer their questions. Another purpose can be that account operators use this platform to advocating their value and culture, f.x LOC 1, LOC 2 and LOC 3, frequently post content to introduce cultures background, and local history instead of just putting up some practical guide information. Promotion related to sales can be the last and least purpose of these ten accounts, for instance, LOC 6 and LOC 7 have more information on their campaign compared to other accounts. Even LOC 3, LOC 5 and LOC 9 do not have so much content directly related to their tourist site (mostly content are casual greetings), but post large amount of posts with all kinds of information on a daily basis to keep their appearance high. This is one way of promoting themselves, by reminding their followers not to forget about them. It is worth noting that the types of tourist sites can influence the purposes of having Weibo accounts. For instance, many of these accounts represent well-known tourist sites in reality, such as LOC 1 the Forbidden City, LOC 2 mount Huangshan. Considering the facilities and capacities of these well-known tourist sites, they are often overloaded with visitors, especially in the holiday seasons. Therefore their purpose for maintaining Weibo account would be different than those less-known or newly established tourist sites, such as: LOC 6 and LOC 7, who are more eager to gaining more visitors. Instead of gaining

more visitors, well established tourist sites seems more interested in providing a better travel experiences and keep a good public image. The evidences for this statement are also discussed in the content analysis as well.

Some might argue that interview in this study are suffering from low response rate and it might not represent the conditions for other accounts. It has to be admitted that the credibility maybe affected in certain degree under this circumstance, and this issue was also discussed in methodology part. The author of this report was aware of this situation in advanced and tried best maximizing the reliability and validity of these interviews. Here are some arguments from the standpoint of this report. First of all, this report is not based on a comparative study, where different strategies are analyzed and compared; therefore the number of interviews does not really affect the quality of this study. Secondly, the quality of the interview is more important than the quantity. In this case, LOC 5 gave very detailed and specific answers. Even these answers cannot represent all the other similar accounts, but at least many of them. Thirdly, the analysis of interviews is not independent but supplementary to the content analysis. Based on data from quantitative content analysis, the interviews are carried out to determine the gap between the accounts' intentions and reality. Therefore even only two accounts took part in this interview; it still provides some insight to account operators, which is considered valuable to this research.

4.3 Discussion:

Sina Data center collects data related to its users and publishes top-lists and reports regularly. The importance of this kind of lists and statistics on Weibo can be seen from two perspectives. From the perspective of Sina Corp., who is the manager and monitor of Weibo, mastering the information of their users and what is happening on Weibo is a must. Sina Weibo's business model depends on this information, as this model is based on six sources of income: "*interactive, precision ads; instant search; paid content; e-commerce; social games and a wireless value-added service.*" (Rapoza, 2011) These six sources require a huge user base for the social media platform. Publishing the top-lists and other statistics is one way to increase the competitiveness between its users, which in turn leads to more attention to its platform. The more activity from the users, the higher the economical return for Sina Corp. Under this circumstance, the top-lists become one tool for Sina Corp. to keep their users active.

From the users perspective Weibo has great influential power over its large user base. If one account achieves a ranking on the top 10 list, it is much more visible than competing accounts and therefore more likely to gain more followers. In other words, it is easier to increase the numbers of followers, making the platform a more efficient tool for activities of promotion. Therefore, the top-lists and statistics are very useful for both Sina Corp. and its users.

Nine out of ten of these accounts were early adopter of Weibo platform. They have been using Weibo since 2010 and 2011 and have large amount of followers. Even though Weibo's official websites states that the degree of accounts' influential power does not rely entirely on the numbers of followers, the data from the content analysis suggests that the number of followers is still the most important indicator among all others. The quality of post also plays an important role, for instance, LOC 1 and LOC 2 have high quality in their posted content, which results in a large amount of repost. This helped them to stay at the top of the list. The post frequency seems less important based on the numbers from LOC 3, LOC 5 and LOC 9, who posted the most without ranking at the top of the top-10 list. It is worth mentioning that even though this study shows that the number of posts is no guarantee of popularity, it has to be noticed that this study only focuses on the data from a single month. It is not fair to entirely deny the importance of post amounts. It is possible that the high amount of posts is a new strategy that has not yet resulted in an increased number of followers. However this is hard to determine in this study and seems highly unlikely to the author. This possibility can be disregarded.

LOC 5, LOC 9 took part in the interview and these two accounts are the two with most frequent posting and therefore the most "talkative" in the content analysis. Both content analysis and interviews confirmed that there are not so many posts that are directly linked to sales. Instead they put more efforts on interacting with their followers/visitors, to provide better travel experience and retain their good image. Hay et.al.(2012) cites that many destination marketing organizations do not take social media as a replacement for existing technologies, but rather an additional tool to be used coordinated with old strategies. Besides, Weibo has its advantages of low costs and easy access. When using Weibo as a marketing tool to promote a tourist site, it might be hard to see short-term economical results, but one would expect pay off in the long-term by enhancing the *brand awareness*, *brand engagement* and *word of mouth*. (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010)

Not every Weibo account has a clear strategy, at least not the two in the interviews. This demonstrates that they did not plan to have concrete strategy from the very beginning, but might just have established a Weibo account because everybody else did so. But during the process of running of their accounts, unique strategies become clearer without the awareness of operators. With the analysis of content and interviews, this research is able to outline and conclude the strategies for the ten chosen Weibo accounts. Some of the accounts are very good at editing their post content, for example: LOC 1, LOC 2. Some of them are very good at posting frequently, for example: LOC 3, LOC 5 and 9. Others are good at utilizing their Weibo accounts to interact with their followers and at the same time promote events, for example: LOC 6 and LOC 7. These three types of Weibo accounts are categorized as "expert" "staff" and "friend" in the earlier section of content analysis.

These three types of Weibo accounts corresponds to Mergel's (2010) description of three social media strategies that often used in the public sector. The account type of "expert" is referring to the "push strategy", where the social media is mostly used for sending out messages to its audience. In most cases this is a one-way channel of communication. The second account type of "staff" compares to the "pull strategy", where the purpose of using social media for this type of accounts is to inform its audiences about the updates and activities in the tourist site. There is some degree of interaction between the operators and its audiences, which results in a certain amount of "comments" or "likes". The last type of "friends" is relates to the "networking strategy". Accounts that fall in this type are highly interactive to engage with their audiences and there might be conversations and discussions through the platform.

The two account operators that replied to the interviews, both fall within the friend type of accounts. The input from their replies is that it is important to acknowledge the importance of social media as a marketing tool, and then develop a suitable and flexible social media marketing strategy later on in practice.

There are also some unique findings of these ten account's use of social media compared to other empirical researches. In Yang and Wang's study (2015), they conclude that professional generated content is most frequently used on Weibo among DMOs, followed with game-related notification messages, user-generated and casual greetings. In contrast, this report shows that among these top 10 Chinese tourist sites, most accounts chose to post professional generated content primarily, and only LOC5 and LOC 9 have the largest proportion of causal greeting content. The second most used

content type is casual greetings, followed by user generated content. Game related notification is the least used type of content according to this report. Both of the researches show that professional generated content is favored and user-generated content is in the third place. The ranking of the casual greeting and game-related notification types have been swapped, when comparing this study with (Yang & Wang, 2015).

This has some implications: First, casual greeting in the second place shows that most of the ten tourist sites are very "friendly". As these causal greeting includes various information that is not directly link to the tourist sites itself, it has no significant meaning for promotion except for keeping a high appearance on Weibo. Second, the game-related notification in the last place indicates that tourist sites are less interested in attracting more followers. Normally this kind of content offers the followers a chance to win some kind of reward for reposing the original post. Using this kind of contest to promote certain activities has proven to be a very efficient way to spread a message and get more people to learn about the account. This results in enhancement of the accounts' popularity in short time. It can be assumed that in comparison to those DMOs in Yang and Wang's study, these ten tourist sites are less competitive in gaining new followers but more willing to engage with their followers.

Furthermore, there is no strong evidences that prove the impact of uniqueness of Chinese social media on Weibo in this study. Due to the nature of these ten accounts, they are much less sensitive in politics. Therefore, the centralized review process and international influences are weak here. In contrast the phenomena of a "water army" might play a role. This phenomenon is common on the Chinese internet, but is hard to evaluate in this study. The operators of these accounts have to face three challenges as any other accounts in China: to manage the negative information, to control the reliability of the information and to reach more followers in disadvantageous groups.

Chapter 5 Conclusion:

Social media with its advantages of openness, interactive, easy access and cost-efficient, have changed people' daily lives dramatically. In the tourism industry, it has changes the way people travel and plays important role especially in travel decision-making. Under this circumstance, more and more suppliers in this industry see the potential of social media and start to include it into their marketing strategy. This exploratory study determines the activities and performances of top ten most influential accounts of 5A scenic areas on Weibo in the month of May 2015 in China, to outline and evaluate their strategies of using popular social media as marketing tool for promotion.

As the result, it shows that these ten accounts use Weibo in varies ways. Several findings can be derived from the content analysis and E-mail interview. First, although the interviews show that there was no specific social media strategy from the beginning (or at least those strategies are unclear), this study has managed to categorize the ten accounts into the three types: "expert", "staff", and "friend", based on the data collected by content analysis. The three types correspond to the "push strategy", "pull strategy", "networking strategy" accordingly. Second, pictures are most frequent used posting format and video is the least. The most used content is professional generated, followed with causal greeting, user generated and game related notification last. This indicates that the ten accounts are less aggressive in attracting more followers but very "friendly" to engage their followers. However, the total numbers of causal greeting are heavily influenced by the three very "friendly" accounts: LOC 3, 5 and 9. The two later also stand out by not having a majority of professional generated content. Third, both interviews and content analysis demonstrate that majority of the posts have no direct connection with sales. The content of these posts are mostly related to travel guidance and practical information, which lead to a better tour experience for visitors and an enhanced image of the tourist sites. It proved that tourist sites use social media as powerful tool for improvement of *brand awareness*, *brand engagement*, *word of mouth* rather than short-term economical return. Forth, the specific condition of censorship in Chinese context does not have significant influences to the activities of these ten accounts on Weibo. However the influence can still be expected, as Weibo itself is a platform that was created under the circumstance that other worldwide social media such as facebook and twitter are blocked in China. As a matter of fact, Weibo is and will continue to be monitored by the Chinese government. The users have to be careful what to say on Weibo and currently Weibo's user base is in decline.

Furthermore, this study also has some recommendations. The first recommendation is that different tourist sites should choose strategies that are suitable for their conditions and needs. For example, for historic and cultural relics, it is popular to send posts which are related to cultural background and stories; for natural scenic area, it is recommended to post photos of scene and geographic knowledge; for theme park, it is better to send information relate to local news, ongoing events and daily updated. Second, it is recommended to increase the number of interactive posts if an account wants to get more feedback and followers. It is particularly important for those newly open accounts that need to hear the public opinion in order to design their strategies according to their own needs. Third, it emphasizes the importance of post timing, as most replies, comments and likes from followers are updated within one hour after operators submitted its post (Hays et.al. 2012). It is smart to select good time to post important information, and avoid posting for instance at midnight or early morning.

As many empirical researches mentions, the adoption of social media for marketing purpose is still in its initial stage. To have a successful social media strategy requires sustained effort, and it should focus on building connections and relationship with followers rather than pursue short term profit. It is important to acknowledge the importance of social media as a marketing tool, and then develop a suitable and flexible social media marketing strategy in practice. Moreover, it is difficult to measure the Return of Investment of social media strategy, but accounts who manage to have successful social strategy will gain competitive advantage. In the end, Powell et.al., (2011)'s eight steps process to measure social marketing strategy described in Chapter 3, can be borrowed regularly to evaluate the current strategies. This can help companies/organizations improve their strategies for a better outcome according to their needs.

Chapter 6 Limitation and further research:

Due to the restriction of time and resources, the sizes of the data collected is limited. A larger sample size in a longer time frame would be beneficial to the content analysis, for instance: the same lists in September month or even from last year could be included. In addition, higher interview response rates were expected. Language is another barrier in this research. As most materials are in Chinese, it takes time to translate and the accuracy of the content might be affected. This barrier also decides that most users of Weibo platform are Chinese speaking and has fewer users abroad. Moreover, almost all of the ten accounts represent fairly well-known tourist sites in China, hence it has less implication for newly established tourist sites. It is assumed that such would be more focused on introducing and promoting of their sites. This report can serve as an inspiration and guide to renowned tourist sites who would be interested in creating a Weibo account. The great wall and summer palace in Beijing are two examples that might benefit from adopting social media.

Although the purpose of this research is to explore the use of social media among the tourist sites, any other kinds of organizations and companies can be studied as independent subject. As the different characteristics of the organizations, the results would vary significantly. Furthermore, the comparative study of using social media as marketing tool between Western and Chinese context could be also interesting! Such research can be conducted by observing one tourist site's different behavior in different social media, for example: VisitCopenhagen[11](the official convention, event and tourism organization of Copenhagen) has accounts on both Facebook and Chinese Weibo, the target group is very different on these two platforms due to the language. The purpose and activity pattern can also be very different, which is worth to further elaborate on.

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[11] Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=visitcopenhagen

Weibo: http://weibo.com/visitcopenhagen?is_all=1

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Appendix:

Appendix 1: Top 10's Homepages on Weibo (data collected by 02.11.2015)
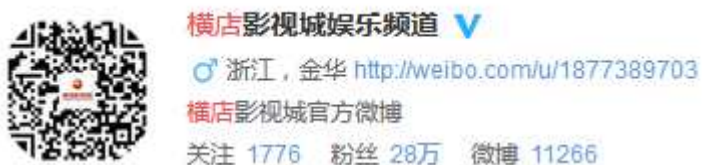
1. http://weibo.com/gugongweb?from=myfollow_all

2. http://weibo.com/huangshan?from=myfollow_all

3. http://weibo.com/shenyuanjingqu?from=myfollow_all

4. http://weibo.com/u/1877389703?from=myfollow_all

5. http://weibo.com/53296616?from=myfollow_all

6. http://weibo.com/chparadise?from=myfollow_all

7. http://www.weibo.com/xjzoo?stat_date=201505#feedtop

长隆野生动物世界 V
♂ 广东 http://weibo.com/xjzoo
长隆野生动物世界
关注 1389   粉丝 17万   微博 13419

8. http://www.weibo.com/p/1001062650958143/home?from=page_100106&mod=TAB#place 河南青天河

河南青天河 V
♂ 河南 http://weibo.com/qthjq
河南青天河风景名胜区管理局官方微博
关注 489   粉丝 103万   微博 2268

9. http://weibo.com/hcxfjq?from=myfollow_all

山西皇城相府景区 V
♂ 山西，晋城 http://weibo.com/hcxfjq
山西皇城相府景区官方微博
关注 596   粉丝 24万   微博 5487

10. http://weibo.com/chinawuzhen?from=myfollow_all

乌镇旅游 V
♂ 浙江，嘉兴 http://weibo.com/chinawuzhen
乌镇旅游官方围脖
关注 1813   粉丝 9万   微博 8568

Appendix 2: Interview questions (English & Chinese)

1. When did you decide to develop a social media strategy?

2. Why do you decide to use Sina Weibo?

3. Do you have any other social media tools than Sina Weibo?

4. Do you have specific marketing department or employees for developing social media strategy? And if you do, how many employees are involved?

5. How many people are in charge of updates, posts and interaction on Weibo?

6. How much it takes of using social media in total of marketing budgets?

7. Do you think it is valuable to use social media to promote than conventional marketing methods?

8. Is it hard to develop a specific social media strategy?

9. Do you think your social media strategy is success? How do you measure it? What is your biggest success or failure?

10. Have you adjusted a lot in your strategy compare to the start?

11. What is your goal in the future?

12. What makes you different than other tourist sites' Weibo accounts?

13. Who is your target group in social media?

14. What kind of posts do you update most? And which kinds do you think are most effective? (Contest, ask a question, request photos, advertising?)

15. Do you have any secret strategy to gain followers in Weibo?

1. 请问你们什么时候决定利用微博发展社交媒体行销策略的？
2. 为什么选择微博呢？
3. 除了新浪微博，你们还有其它的社交媒体平台吗？
4. 请问你们有特定的部门或者工作人员专门负责策划发展社交媒体的行销策略吗？如果有的话，有多少呢？
5. 请问有多少工作人员在微博上负责更新，发布消息和跟粉丝互动呢？
6. 在整个市场营销发展的预算中，社会化媒体的发展占了多少比重呢？
7. 您觉得利用微博或者其它社交媒体来宣传，比普通的行销方式好吗？
8. 制定特定的社交媒体行销策略困难吗？
9. 请问您觉得你们的社交媒体策略成功吗？你们是怎么衡量的呢？您觉得你们最大的成功或者失败是什么呢？
10. 跟刚刚开始比较，你们现在的策略改变大吗？
11. 你们未来计划的目标是什么？
12. 和其他的旅游景点的微博帐户比较，你们有什么不同呢？
13. 你们的目标群是谁呢？
14. 什么样的内容你们跟新的最多呢？哪种你们觉得是最有效的？（小竞赛，发布问题，征求照片还是广告？）
15. 你们对获得这么多的粉丝有什么秘诀吗？

Appendix 3: Interview records (Chinese):

1. **Interview record with Huangcheng Prime Minister's Mansion (LOC 9):**
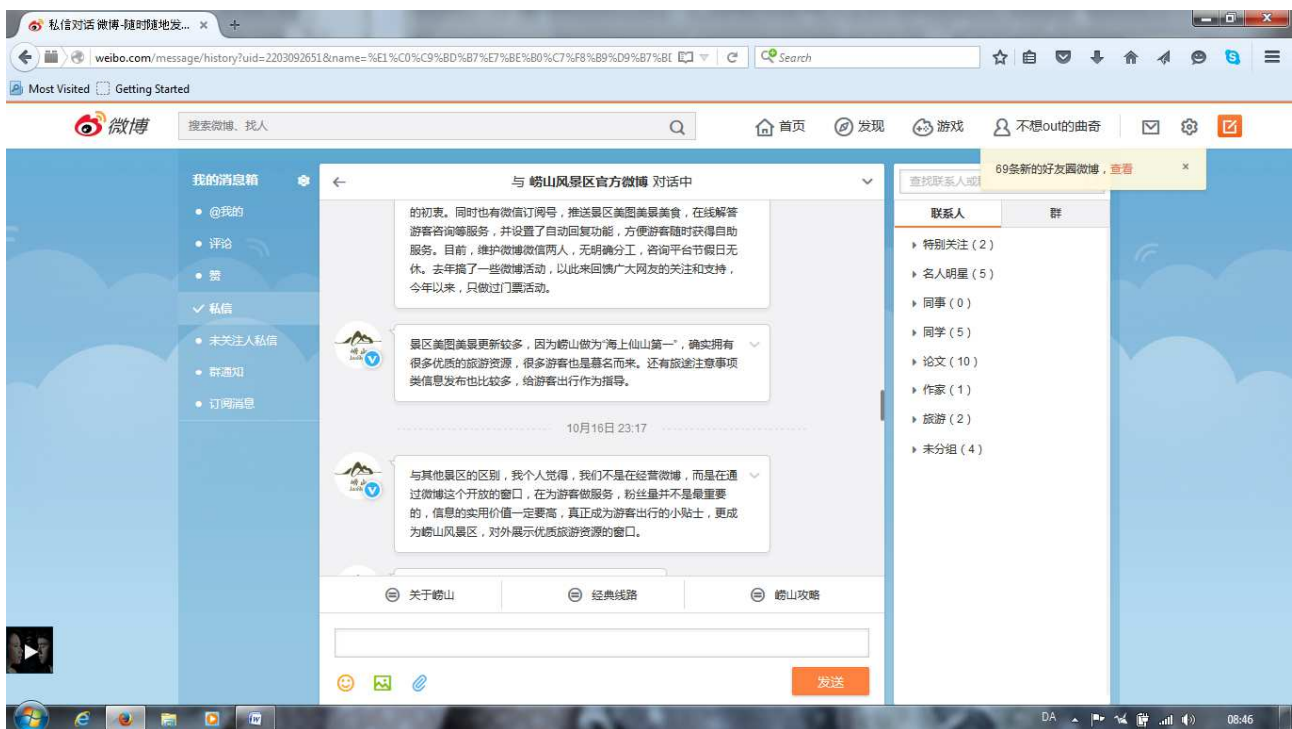
Screenshot 1:

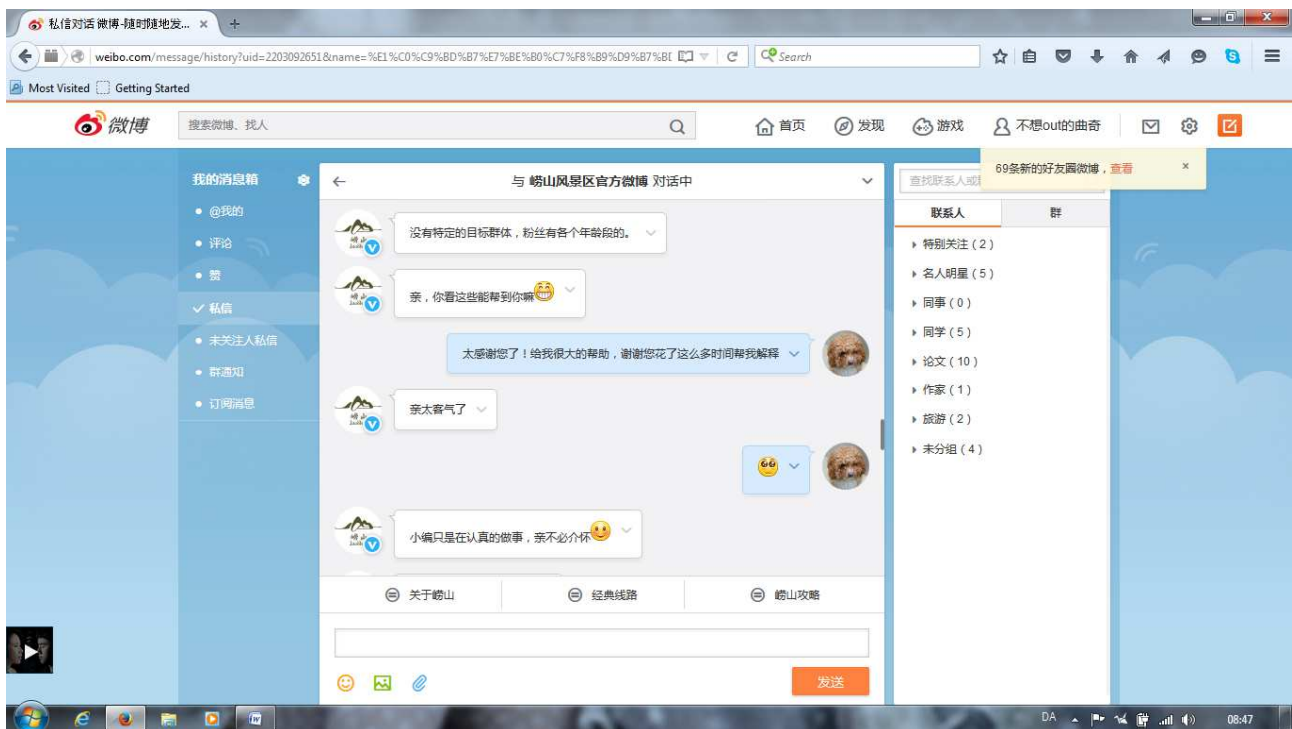2. **Interview record with Laoshan Scenic Area official Weibo (LOC 5):**
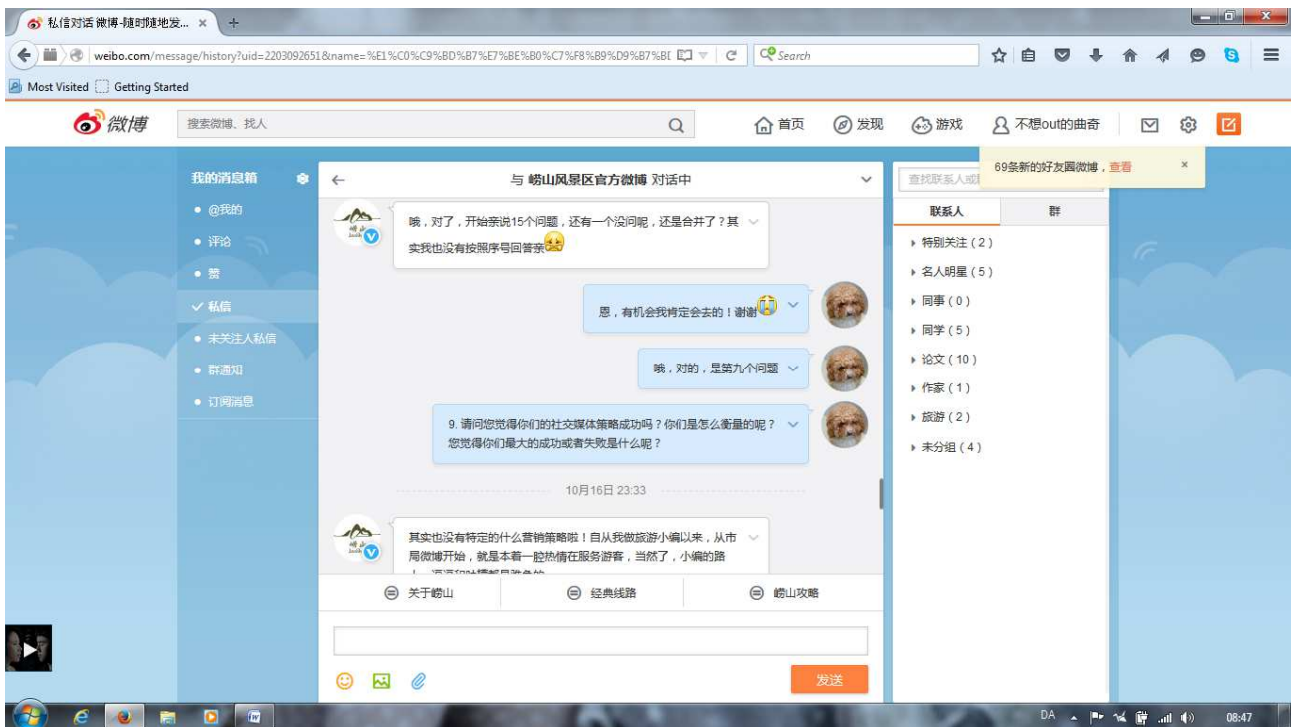
Screenshot 2:

Screenshot 3:

Screenshot 4:

Screenshot 5:

Screenshot 6:

Appendix 4: Top 10 most influential accounts of 5A scenic areas on Weibo May 2015 (original in Chinese)

There is an error in the material below. The entry at the eighth place refers to a tourism location in France, which is an obvious mistake. From column four, I have determined that the correct location is "Boai Qingtian River Scenic Area" in the Henan Province. I have used the correct location in this thesis.

5A级景区旅游账号排行榜 — 新浪微博数据中心 (Sina & Weibo Data Center)

全国5A景区影响力排行榜

名次	微博名称	省份	认证说明	活跃度	传播力	覆盖度	影响力
1	故宫博物院	北京	故宫博物院官方微博	181	46	311	538
2	黄山	安徽	中国黄山风景区官方微博	101	21	318	440
3	绍兴市沈园景区	浙江	绍兴市鲁迅故里·沈园景区	289	14	124	428
4	横店影视城娱乐频道	浙江	金华市东阳横店影视城景区	112	23	271	405
5	崂山风景区官方微博	山东	青岛崂山风景区官方微博	119	10	250	379
6	广州长隆欢乐世界	广东	广州长隆欢乐世界	100	9	265	373
7	长隆野生动物世界	广东	长隆野生动物世界	101	14	243	358
8	湖光山色法国安纳西	河南	焦作云台山—神农山—博爱青天河风景名胜区	64	8	283	355
9	山西皇城相府景区	山西	山西皇城相府景区官方微博	102	9	238	349
10	乌镇旅游	浙江	乌镇旅游官方围脖	100	15	228	344

5A景区排行榜如上。表中，排名前三的账号分别为，故宫博物院、黄山和沈园风景区；在所有账号中，浙江省共占三个席位，分别为：沈园景区、横店影视城和乌镇；广东占两个席位，分别为长隆欢乐世界和长隆野生动物园；其余席位分别分布于山东（崂山）、河南（青天河）、山西（皇城相府景区）。

数据来源：新浪微博数据中心