

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS THROUGH WEIBO: HOW MULTINATIONAL PUBLIC
RELATIONS AGENCIES ARE USING MICROBLOGGING IN CHINA

By

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To my beloved family and dear friends, for their unwavering support

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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With the precondition of globalization for success in business, and its requirement that businesses function freely and comfortably in a wide-ranging international context, one kind of multinational corporation (MNC) that has bloomed quickly is the multinational public relations agency. Social media is a use of the Internet that permits multiple individuals to communicate as quickly as possible. Corporations are increasingly using social media as a useful online communication platform. Similarly, to operate successfully in China, it is essential to investigate digital communications and online public relations. In China, the leading microblogging site is Sina Weibo, also called, simply, Weibo. To get in touch with potential customers, and in particular, to communicate with them online, there presents two potential multifold, strategic and theoretical frameworks: one, international public relations and two, online relationship cultivation strategies. The latter involves two-way communication; engagement through social media; interactivity; and dialogic communication. These provide the foundation for research of the present work. Thus, the goal of this thesis is to determine how multinational public relations agencies are using the interactivity of the Internet and the potential of Weibo to engage in dialogue with their stakeholders. To achieve this goal,

two steps are developed based on the global 250 agency ranking (2012) of multinational public relations agencies. Examining the Weibo pages of these agencies' and the message they send, permitted us to analyze how these agencies connect with potential consumers. We found that although they have activities on their Weibo, they do not fully utilize the potential of Weibo as a dialogical communication tool to cultivate stakeholder relationships online. They especially need to further advocate, stimulate and promote by interacting with other Weibo users and by responding to questions and comments. Messages on their Weibo accounts are found to be mainly one-way communications in the style of traditional public relations messages. Nonetheless by incorporating their contacts with Weibo functions, we found they have done much toward engaging their stakeholders online.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

With the popularity and continuing innovation of the Internet, we are stepping into the age of “Web 2.0.” Social media is becoming an inevitable tool in communication. Social media is one of the most popular communication categories worldwide. In today’s online context and as a global phenomenon, the necessity and importance of studying social media cannot be overstated (Radwanick, Lipsman, & Aquino, 2011). By December 2011, there were about 1.2 million social networking users, which accounted for 82 percent of the online population worldwide (Radwanick et al., 2011). In that same December 2011, about 20 percent of users’ total online time was spent on various social networking sites. This compares to March 2007, when only about 6 percent of users’ total online time was spent on social networking sites (Radwanick et al., 2011). Facebook is a web site and social networking service launched in February 2004 (Vorvoreanu, 2009) that permits users to post material and read the material posted by others. Twitter is a web site and social networking service launched in March 2006, that permits users to post text messages of up to 140 characters (“tweets”) and to read such messages posted by others (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012). Microblogging refers to the practice of posting short messages on the Internet (“the web”) such as posted on Twitter, with frequent updates, usually on mobile devices, particularly using cell phones (Farhi, 2009). Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites among all social media, but since Twitter has

become a hosting site in 2006, “microblogging” has become the dominant mode of online communication (Shepherd, 2009). For some time, in many countries around the world, Facebook was the only leading social media platform. This is no longer true. In Japan, for example, there are 10 percent more Twitter users than Facebook users, and this percentage has been steadily increasing (Radwanick et al., 2011). Worldwide, by April 2009, Twitter had attracted a total of over 17 million users. This was 83 percent more than the previous month (Farhi, 2009). Thus, microblogging has emerged as a big player and disruptive new force in social media.

The emergence, in recent years, of management’s use of the Internet to communicate, definitely and undeniably has changed the way organizations and their stakeholders interact. This is especially true in the case of social media where a majority of the content is provided by individual users (Assis-Dorr, Palacios-Marques, & Merigo, 2012). As a result, though interaction was seen taking place through social media, the type of engagement differed, especially in the aspect of socialization, because the format of online publication contents differed in terms of inter-personal relationships and its creativity (Assis-Dorr et al., 2012). Social media “provides platforms for online users to connect, share, and build relationships with others online, [and has] forever altered the lives of individuals, communities and societies all over the world” (Radwanick et al., 2011, p. 2). As indicated by public relations scholars (Assis-Dorr et al., 2012), the Internet was a potential tool of interactivity, dialogue, and two-way communication, because it promotes interactions among

users. Also, social media offer a unique opportunity to develop and maintain relationships with the public by engaging members of the public in online dialogues (Wright, 1998, 2001), which is a key element in achieving successful public relations (J. Grunig, 1992).

Although social media's popularity is a global cultural phenomenon, because of significant differences between various governments, infrastructure, and cultural practices around the world, the use of social media as a communication tool is growing differently in every country (Radwanick et al., 2011). In China, the year 2005 is remarkable in the development of social media, because of the establishment of two popular social media sites—Renren.com® which is a “copycat” of Facebook (Rond, 2009), and Sina™ Blog which is a dominant blog site in China now (Chinanet.org.cn). Since then, the use of social media by the Chinese has grown. Social media has become a hotspot (Chen, 2010). With the growth and prevalence of these popular websites in China, instead of being regarded merely as a fad or “buzz word,” social media gradually have come to be regarded as a significant communication platform (Chen, 2010). In 2009, in China, among total Internet users, 92 percent of the net citizens or “netizens” using the Internet used social media. By comparison, in 2009, in America, 76 percent of American netizens using the Internet, used social media. Thus, in China, there was a 16 percent greater use of social media than there was in America (Oshiro, 2009). That is obvious evidence that the Chinese are more open to sharing information and connecting with others online (as

cited in Oshiro, 2009). So far, there are countless social media platforms in China, according to CIC (China's leading social business intelligence provider). In 2012, social media in China could be divided into the following four categories: one, core networks with relatively mature functions; two, valued-added networks which are developed on the base of core networks and other online platforms; three, functional networks which are offering basic support for netizens and also other platforms; and four, niche networks with independent functions for particular groups and certain models. Specifically, core networks are including Micro-Blog, for example, Weibo®.com and Fanfou®; other social networking sites such as Renren.com®; instant message application, for example, QQ® and Trademessenger®; video sharing includes Tudou.com® and Youku.com®; photo sharing like Yupoo.com®; blogs as Sina™ Blog; forum such as Tianya.com® and Maopu.com®, and others (as seen in Appendix A). Among these social media sites, Sina Weibo with more than 10 billion unique visitors is ranking in the eighth among all social media websites, and the first in the microblogging category (Radwanick, et al., 2011).

Indeed, Twitter, the short message service of microblogging application (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012), has popularized the “micro-blog” to the point that it is used worldwide. So the first question more precisely, is what exactly microblogging? According to Shepherd (2009), a feature of microblogging is simplicity. Microblogging is known as “a kind of hybrid between blogging and social networking, where users post [messages] of 140 characters or less that respond to

the site's orienting question of what [users are doing]" (Shepherd, 2009, p. 150). The emergence of Twitter is the main reason for the emergence of microblogging as one of the most popular forms of social media (Assis-Dorr et al., 2012). The use of Twitter as a social-networking medium increased by about 59 percent in 2011 with the result that by December 2011, Twitter users constituted 10 percent of the world's Internet population (Radwanick et al., 2011). So far, Twitter has acted, not only as an interpersonal communication tool among acquaintances, but as a "central means of communication during events of worldwide and national significance" (Radwanick et al., 2011).

Social Media in China

In China, Twitter (or microblogging) has been prevalent since 2009, that is, for only about three years. In the United States, Twitter has been in use for more than six years. Since the ban of Twitter and Facebook by the Government of China in 2008, several other microblogging sites have sprung up in China. In June 2012, the China National Network Information Centre (CNNIC) declared that microblogging users in China increased from 13.8 percent (in December 2010) to 50.9 percent (in 2012) among all the Internet users (China Internet Network Information Center, 2012). In the past two years, by June 2012, the number of microblogging users dramatically jumped from 63.11 million to 273.65 million with a growth rate of 208.9 percent, which was an increase of 9.5 percent compared with the end of 2011 (CNNIC 2012). This clearly indicates that microblogging was the online application

with the fastest growth and drawing the most interest and attention. Among all kinds of microblogging sites, “Weibo” invented by Sina Corporation, “a leading online media company and mobile value-added service (MVAS) provider for China and for global Chinese communities” (Sina, n.d.), was the most popular one since launching in August 2009. In just a few years, Weibo became an Internet phenomenon in China. By the end of December 2010, it reached 50 million users (Gady & Yang, 2011). In fact, a “200-million mark” was reached as early as August 2011 while they were expecting it to happen only towards the end of that year (Fletcher, 2011). And “... for now, [Sina]’s microblog service is the undisputed champion” (Barboza, 2011, ¶ 20). In reality, Sina Corp. declared that in June 2012 that, there were about 368 million accounts on the Weibo site, and the average amount of online active users was 36.5 million in each day recently (Gao & Chen, 2012). “[Sina Weibo] was responsible for 87 percent of the time spent on micro-blogging” services in China (Fan, 2011, ¶ 2). This number is increasing rapidly, so it is imperative that researchers, especially in China, should be aware of the likelihood that Sina Weibo will affect the Chinese use of communicating on the Internet. As does Twitter, the Weibo site makes it easy for individual users to keep themselves up-to-date with information by providing content through external sources such as “SMS, webs, mobile webs, instant message, and other third party API projects” (Nada, 2009). In addition, Weibo provides instant news and information and gives its users ideas about what is going on by sharing contents with others and offering links from other

sources. Consequently, Sina Weibo is potentially becoming a popular platform for corporations to communicate with the public.

According to CNNIC, the Internet provides one of the major avenues of engaging the public by providing a platform for online dialogue and doing customer services. Some 52.1% of Chinese corporations are using the Internet to communicate with their public including offering services to customers, promoting products, doing product surveys and so on (China Internet Network Information Center, 2011). Edelman Public Relations Worldwide has indicated that the Internet has turned into a public relations area and has become an ideal approach to practice public relations, because public relations agencies need this effective medium to reach and interact with their stakeholders (Assis-Dorr, et al., 2012). For example, many corporations mainly are using email as a communication tool. Although it is cost-effective and easy to use, it is still not a good way to reach the public successfully, because this one-way communication is inefficient at obtaining feedback (CNNIC 2011). By comparison, use of social media enables public relations agencies to have constant accessibility with their stakeholders with more online dialogues and personalized conversation, including in circumstances in which previously, traditional media could not reach them easily (Assis-Dorr et al., 2012).

The same situation has emerged with the use of microblogging, since the blooming of Sina Weibo in China. Instead of relying solely on creating their own websites, portal sites, blogs and forums as instruments, corporations have begun to

take substantial advantage of microblogging and other social media sites as a medium of public relations, to communicate with the public, directly and immediately. Among the 485 million Internet users in China, the enormous base of Weibo users, comprise the youth “who spend long periods engaged in social networking, online games and electronic commerce” (Barboza, 2011, ¶ 3). Ma Yuan, an analyst with the investment bank, Bocom International Holdings in Beijing, describes Sina Weibo as “the next killer application on the Internet and mobile phones” (as cited in Fan, 2011, p. 34). In fact, more and more corporations, including most multinational organizations, are engaged in doing public relations with Sina Weibo. Celebrities in particular, are engaged in endorsing brands through Weibo. “My clients are saying, ‘everybody [is] on Weibo, so what do we do?’ ” says Peony Wu, the chief digital officer at Ogilvy & Mather China. “[S]o many big companies are now testing the waters” (as cited in Barboza, 2011, ¶ 23).

Beside its popularity, there are other reasons that Weibo should be paid attention to in the public relations sector. As Sina Weibo grows with a powerful effect on public disclosure, it has become one of the largest platforms in the world for sharing news, information, and real-time data. Once upon a time, traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, televisions and radios were major tools for public relations practitioners to reach their clients and limited audiences (Croft, 2008). At the same time, news and information on these media had to be controlled tightly if they were to score high in likeability and in terms of attracting attention

from stakeholders, so public relations practitioners were always viewed as “gatekeepers” (Croft, 2008). However, the development of social media with the function of information disclosure has weakened this role of public relations in the presence of a free Internet. According to McKinsey Quarterly’s global survey in 2009, “Web 2.0 delivers benefits by multiplying the opportunities for collaboration and by allowing knowledge to spread more effectively. ... Just as promising are new organizational forms that may spring up as a result of widespread Web 2.0 adoption” (Bughin, Chui, & Miller, 2009, pp. 11/17). In addition, Weibo users still could receive information on others who are not followed by sharing with these users the identity of those who are followed (Xifra & Grau, 2010). As a result, companies are flocking to create campaigns aimed at using microblogging.

Furthermore, Sina Weibo’s development is a testament to the prosperity of the microblogging age in China, which means a new innovation in Chinese social media has already taken place. In most developed countries, public relations professionals regard Twitter as one of the most efficient Internet-based communication platforms, because of its capability to access a wide range of stakeholders at the same time (Lovejoy et al., 2012). As relationships are the foundation of online communication tools, it is necessary for public relations agencies to focus on the social media’s emergence (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Due to the limited number of words in each message, microblogging accelerates the speed of publicizing information and exchanging communications,

by reducing the communication to “easily digestible information pieces,” even more rapidly than any other social media sites (Lovejoy et al., 2012). As a result, public relations firms have promoted these sites as relationship-building tools. To some extent, comparing to Twitter, Facebook, and other social media in the United States, Weibo is sort of a new baby in China since it is only three years old. Is it an opportunity, or is it a challenge, for public relations firms in China, to engage stakeholders on Weibo? If it is an opportunity, how could it contribute to managing stakeholder relationships? Or if it is a challenge, how should public relations agencies overcome that challenge? It is time to study Weibo as an online communication tool. This thesis will do so, first, by researching and investigating how multinational public relations agencies engage their stakeholders through Sina Weibo.

Multinational Public Relations Agencies in China

With the globalization of business, both corporations and public relations agencies are looking to offer their services to expand in international markets. The major mission of public relations agencies online is to manage the “communications between an organization and the public in order to promote favorable relationships and portray a desired image” (“Study reveals,” 2010). According to Vorvoreanu (2009), setting-up mutually beneficial and standing relationships between corporations and the public whenever and however they are able to do so online, is the main purpose of a public relations practitioner (Vorvoreanu, 2009). Practically,

many multinational public relations agencies, such as the Ogilvy & Mather Group in Shanghai, have realized the importance of retaining “open and regular” online dialogues with the public and their key stakeholders through Weibo (“Study reveals,” 2012). For example, Debby Cheung, the president of the Ogilvy & Mather Group/Shanghai, regards Weibo as a double-edged sword (“Study reveals,” 2012). On one side, it heavily impacts the operations of corporations and their brands through rapid integration from all kinds of online platforms and then aggrandizement of information on Weibo (“Study reveals,” 2012). On the other side, in this case, corporations need to clarify and control their risk to engage their stakeholders and manage relationships with them online (“Study reveals,” 2012).

Because of the reform and opening-up that has taken place since 1978, public relations was able to be introduced as a significant profession to the Chinese, by organizing public relations departments and personnel in multinational corporations (MNCs) based upon their overseas parent companies’ management model (He, 2002). The concept of public relations was brought into Taiwan and Hong Kong first, and through a series of early, well-known public relations activities in the hotel and restaurant industry, it was accepted in such main cities of mainland of China, as Beijing and Guangdong (He & Xie, 2009). Around the 1980s, in view of the emergence of the Chinese market, multinational public relations agencies began extending their overseas markets to China. In 1984, the first public relations agency to establish offices in China, was Hill & Knowlton (China International Public

Relations Association, 1998). Next, in August, Burson-Marsteller, founded a joint venture with the China Press Development, named the Chinese Global Public Relations (CIPRA, 1998). During this early phase, these multinational public relations agencies substantially influenced the Chinese public relations industry (He, 2002). Subsequently, in the 1990s, more and more multinational agencies entered China, including among others, Edelman, Ogilvy and Fleishma-Hillard, either by establishing their own offices or by entering into joint ventures with Chinese corporations (He & Xie, 2009). Along with achieving the expanding of their businesses into the Chinese market, these multinational public relations agencies influenced China's public relations industry far more than they were expecting (He & Xie, 2009). Their entrance into the Chinese market was aimed at strengthening their strategic development, because an opened China had become such a potential market for them to improve an integrated global network (He, 2002). Meanwhile, they gained new clients both in China and internationally, based on maintaining their original client base and helping these clients to practice public relations in the Chinese market (He, 2002). A result of successful public relations activities by reputational multinational agencies, has led China's public relations industry into a more specialized, professional and competitive way (He & Xie, 2009). In fact, not only have foreign agencies moved their footprint into China, but many Chinese public relations firms have been extending their markets internationally, outside of China, as well (He & Xie, 2009).

To understand the use of Weibo by multinational public relations agencies, several questions should be answered. What kinds of messages do these multinational public relations agencies send on their Weibo pages? Do they effectively deliver information to their stakeholders? How do they use Weibo to practice public relations? How does the public react to the messages they place on Weibo pages? How do they use Weibo's features to practice public relations on Sina Weibo? How can these agencies use public relations to improve their interactivities on Sina Weibo? What does the public think about their public relations issues on Weibo? What factors make these public relations strategies more effective with the public?

Purpose of the thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how multinational public relations agencies are using Sina Weibo as a dialogic communication tool to engage their stakeholders and to build and maintain relationships with them. Once having completed that investigation, it will be feasible to discuss whether or not it is a good choice to use Weibo as a platform to communicate with the public in China. This thesis mainly focuses on how multinational public relations agencies use their Weibo accounts. particularly in China, so four aspects are studied: a) what are the features of their Weibo pages; b) what activities are taking place on the Weibo pages of multinational public relations agencies; c) how do these multinational public relations agencies use Weibo to engage their stakeholders; and d) how do Weibo's features

facilitate the relationship cultivation process between multinational public relations agencies and the public. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how public relations agencies, in the future, can use microblogging to mobilize stakeholders in today's China, in this thesis, the viewpoints of both the agencies and the public will be incorporated.

We look at the top global 250 multinational public relation agencies, based on the 2012 *Holmes Report*, and from that group, choose those with their own offices in China who have Sina Weibo accounts. The latter public relations agencies' Weibo pages in China are observed and analyzed using a content analysis. This thesis' primary purpose is to observe and analyze the Weibo pages of these public relations agencies, in particular the messages and comments on their Weibo's pages in China.

This thesis will study how these agencies make an effort to get in touch with the public and what are the voices of the public online. To effect this analysis, the foundations of research will be to employ several multifold strategic and theoretical frameworks, including first, international public relations, and second, online relationship cultivation strategies (two-way communication, engagement through social media, interactivity, and dialogic communication).

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Public Relations in Multinational Companies (MNCs) and International Public Relations

Although MNCs have been gaining multiple advantages, such as market expansion, business diversification and vertical integration, they still face some challenges and disadvantages including greater interdependence, risk and complexity, which exist during the process of globalization (Molleda, Connolly-Ahern, & Quinn, 2005). These challenges would differ in each organization due to distinctive operating models, histories, and global footprints (Dewhurst, Harris, & Heywood, 2012). As a result, there does not exist, a master model. Individual MNCs face a variety of challenges in different degrees (Dewhurst et al., June 2012). Nowadays, the manner MNCs are doing business is being scrutinized both internationally and domestically, and they have been “seen either as heroes or villains” because of the growth of markets (Molleda et al., 2005). Operations in more than one country could even lead to potential conflicts between MNCs. The characteristics of the local public of each nation must be taken into consideration on a global context (Choi & Cameron, 2005). For example, a crisis could be moved to host countries and affect subsidiaries’ operations, in spite of the fact that it originally occurred in the home countries, and vice versa (Molleda, 2011). This difficulty arises because MNCs are required to consider stakeholders’ needs and expectations, both in home and in host countries overseas (Molleda, 2011), because of the increasingly growth of

“international transactions, transportation and communication, especially information technology” (Molleda & Connolly-Ahern, 2002, p. 4). In addition, interest groups in one country not only focus on what is happening in the country in which they live, but they also pay high attention to MNCs’ behaviors all over the world (Berg & Holtbrugge, 2001, cited in Molleda et al., 2005).

According to G.A. Steiner and J. F. Steiner (2003), the seven most important factors that would influence the operation of a business, are economy; technology; government; legislation; culture; nature; and the organizations themselves. It is true that MNCs are facing global and varied sets of characteristics of the public in an international context, and the globalization of the world economy is creating further social entities including politics, education, culture and communication (Lee, 2005). So as the globalization of markets proceeds, there is a “need for adaptation...[by] both domestic and transnational business organizations to capture and adjust to environmentally changing conditions” (Molleda & Moremo, 2008, p. 137). Due to the need to operate businesses in multiple nations and situations, such as the need to abide by local regulations and services for different customer groups, MNCs are more easily influenced by international activities than are local corporations (Wankel, 2009). MNCs are required to spend greater time and resources than do single-national companies, to perceive the cultures and contexts of the home countries, to see the need to switch roles between the global and the local, and to achieve a high quality of strategic relationships. Doing so permits MNCs to (“[understand] the

cultures and the contexts of the countries in which they conduct business, their reputations in the same, the shifting interpenetrations of the global and the local, and the quality of their strategic relationships”) (Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004). What is worse is that the effects of their efforts to maintain such issues are uncertain (Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004). All in all, there is an urgent need for the presence of international public relations activities, when MNCs cope with this complicated environment, in meeting the requirements of the progress of globalization (Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004).

Simply speaking, a multinational corporation is “a business with ‘parentage’ in one nation that exercises a high degree of control over [individual ... subsidiaries] in a number of other nations throughout the world” (Burson, 1972). Instead of affecting only a single nation, as the central producers and distributors in the process of globalization, MNCs have an indoctrinal “mass impact” (Pal & Dutta, 2008). Consequently, in order to alter international images and identities for MNCs with global policies, the use of public relations has emerged as the central player in such exercises (Held & McGrew, 2000). In MNCs’ perspective, they are not only requested to be a balance between globalization and localization macroscopically (Molleda & Meremo, 2008), but they also must make efforts on operations, designs, and specific functions microscopically (Molleda & Suarez, 2005). From a public relations perspective, changes caused by the progress of globalization have resulted in providing both opportunities and challenges for public relations practitioners and

scholars. Thus, a need to communicate globally with the public when MNCs are carrying out their multinational businesses increases dramatically (Lee, 2005). For example, most of the employees in the host countries of foreign affiliates including administrators and other staff members are natives (Burson, 1972). MNCs provide markets to those countries in which their manufacturing factories operate (Burson, 1972), selling their products and offering services to local and overseas customers, dealing with issues with governments with local and global policies, facing media relations on an international scale, and so on (Lee, 2005). Furthermore, “[if] public relation is at the core of management, any variable affecting business would affect the practice of public relations as well” (Molleda & Suarez, 2005, p. 22). Therefore, along with globalization, public relations definitely became a necessary management strategy in helping MNCs to communicate with local and global stakeholders, as well as helping them to reach mutual comprehension and accommodation (Hiebert, 2005).

Unfortunately, public relations, like any other organizational function, is carried out in the stressful environment of having to meet the expectations of both the public and organizations (Molleda & Moreno, 2008). There is a demand to record the common and specific features of practicing public relations in each unique country because in the global public relations community, there is a high recognition of the need to contribute further and persistent efforts to support the public relations profession and its particular operations in multinational settings in terms of its growth (Molleda & Moreno, 2008). These studies about exercising public relations in a

particular environment are called “contextualized research” (Taylor, 2001). At the same time, public relations scholars and practitioners pay more and more attention to “transferring knowledge, experiences, and best practices” to different regions worldwide (Molleda, 2008).

The evolution and practices of public relations are influenced by the environment in every country. To reach an efficient local response when it is needed, it is very important that public relations counselors possess a clear understanding of what are the kinds of environments organizations and clients are finding themselves (Molleda & Suarez, 2005). According to Sharpe and Pritchard (2004), the evolution is due to social stress that organizations face. That is, the global acceptance of democratic principles, increasing global interdependence and the advancement of communication technologies are three major factors pushing forward the development of international public relations (Sharpe & Pritchard, 2004). These are based on the five environmental variables (i.e. the political-economic system, culture, the extent of activism, the level of development, and the media system) (Vercic, L. Grunig, and J. Grunig (1996). Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) have summarized them into three factors which could impact the practices of the general principles, including the infrastructure, the societal culture, and the media environment in each country. As changing of the environment has been confirmed, there will be an increase in the “ability to predict which strategies and techniques are better suited to a particular organizational environment” (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003, p. 73).

The principles of practicing public relations for businesses in multinational circumstances are innovating, because MNCs play a totally different role nowadays based on the modification of their basic philosophy (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2001). Efficient public relations include communicating across boundaries, based on an assumption of running business in a united context (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2001). As a result, the primary task of public relations practitioners is to establish an integrated image for MNCs as nonpolitical institutions, and then to help them to create peaceful business environmental conditions (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2001). According to Botan (1992), two out of the four models for public relations management in MNCs of Kinzar and Bohn (1985) are more common. The first model is the ethnocentric approach, theorizing that people will react and communicate in similar ways because human beings share the same functions (Botan, 1992). Thus, "it is possible that a public relations professional trained and experienced in only one culture will have a nearly automatic approach to public relations activities" in other countries (Lilman, 1980, p.11). That is, the public relations activities in foreign affiliates can be, and are, almost directly commanded by their headquarters in the home countries of the MNCs (Botan, 1992). The second model, is the polycentric method, which is somehow more flexible, and gives practitioners a high degree of autonomy when practicing public relations activities in oversea subsidiaries (Botan, 1992). Ideally, the best way to approach the multinational public relations is to "strike a balance between these two poles" (Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004, p. 214). That's because on one hand, the

ethnocentric model has limitations, as the local public – the public in the faraway country, cannot be responded to quickly or in a suitable manner, because of the long distance between the local public and the MCN's headquarters in the home country and because of the cultural differences between the home country and the particular or distinct or different cultural norms of the audiences of the public in the faraway local country (Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004). On the other hand, the polycentric model also has its limitations. Though local communications are more efficient in this model, they lack the global level in adjustment, so that they could cause public relations conflicts macroscopically (Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004).

In addition, on the basis of the four models of public relations by Grunig and Hunt (1984), which consist of one, press agency/publicity; two public information; three, two-way asymmetrical; and four, two-way symmetrical; actions, international public relations are fast improving to help practitioners to efficiently and effectively conduct public relations activities in different regions worldwide (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriamesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995). Further, a complete understanding of the formation of communication and relationship-building based on cultural similarities and differences is needed when MNCs are communicating with those members of their public who possess different cultural and national backgrounds (Banks, 1995). As an example, a MNC overseas affiliate may decide to practice public relations activities at a “subsidiary level” locally, but a confirmation at the global level is still needed before implementing any communication strategies (Bardhan & Patwardhan, 2004).

With the massive growth of globalization, a demand for qualified public relations practitioners is expanding (Sung, 2003). Thus, multinational public relations agencies will continue to play a key role in helping MNCs to practice public relations professionally as globalization progresses.

The Need of a Multinational Public Relations Agency

There are various reasons that organizations require the assistance of multinational public relations agencies in their global businesses. Mainly, it is because the expertise and experience of public relations agencies (Sung, 2003) help organizations to “[establish] and [maintain] mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994, p. 1). Organizations gain an enormous advantage by conducting their public relations by hiring professional multinational public relations agencies. First, public relations professionals in agencies analyze problems not only with a new perspective and fresh insights, but also provide experienced, skillful and expert services in problem-solving (Sung, 2003). Second, in large agencies with overseas subsidiaries, organizations, especially the MNCs, could use global networks and resources for local and international public relations programs (Sung, 2003). Third, organization can link themselves to agencies with a high reputation in professionalism and ethics (Sung, 2003) and through hiring them, can gain the support of opinion leaders, the media, and other communities. To adapt the need of their clients to be globalized, as other industries have done, most major public

relations agencies become MNCs themselves by establishing global networks and resources, opening foreign affiliates and branches, as well as acquisitions (Lee, 2011). Specifically, public relations agencies always act as further gatekeepers in assisting MNCs to publicize their products and maintain stakeholder relationships in other countries where they have set up manufactures and sales offices (Jeong, 2008).

Public relations practitioners and agencies are facing multiple challenges and opportunities due to tremendous social changes including globalization, information revolutions, multi channels communications and technology innovations (Jeong, 2008). It is not an overstatement to state that like other MNCs, MNCs in the public relations industry have entered the globalized battle and become a part of the global community (Sung, 2003). In fact, most agencies have realized this need to be a part of the global community, and as a result, the major agencies are becoming larger, while the smaller ones gradually have almost disappeared (Deutsch, 1990). Indeed, a vast majority of multinational public relations agencies have opened their subsidiaries in places where once there were few businesses (Deutsch, 1990). Multinational public relations agencies have no choice other than raising international presences, because in order to meet their demands maximally, clients would give up an agency for another unhesitatingly once they could find a better one (Jeong, 2008). In addition, the global path is not only an alternative to survive, but also represents investments with high risks along with high profits (Deutsch, 1990). The globalization

broadly expands markets for agencies by bringing new clients through both local organizations and MNC's affiliates in host countries, and active international operations all over the world (Sung, 2003). In reality, "Asian companies have grown far more attuned to public relations, opening a tasty market for agencies hungry to expand" (Deutsch, 1990, ¶ 7). There is a small amount of research that investigates how multinational public relations agencies developed in Asian (Jeong, 2008; Sriamesh, 2002; Sriamesh, Kim & Takasaki, 1999), but the subject has barely been touched in China. So in this thesis, the research objectives are to study multinational public relations agencies which have opened their own offices in China, and the theme is to observe how they develop their stakeholder relationships in the Chinese market.

Meanwhile, Bovet (1994) points out several approaches to establish a global team depending on the increasing growth of international clients, such as networking, training, online global database, email, regular reports, and annual meetings. The points that most sincerely concern clients are the efficiency of the global network of multinational public relations agencies (McKenna, 2006), while technology makes the global communications easier to control by professionals (Deutsch, 1990). Consequently, a dramatic development of techniques, such as satellite, optical fiber, and internet, has occurred to accelerate the efficiency of global communication (Lee, 2005). In the age of digital communication, there is a need to understand the influences of technology and follow its developing trend (Anonymous, 2011). In the

first several years, multinational public relations agencies engaged social media depending on their willingness as “a successful labor of love,” but “now it is time to lead the conversation towards facilitating the understanding on how crucial social media is to the relevance and growth of companies” (Anonymous, 2011, ¶ 9). Even more, a majority of MNCs have planned to enlarge their scales of social media to facilitate their communication processes (Anonymous, 2011). For example, social media helped them to reach young audiences by creating strong and meaningful online dialogues, said Waldo Galan, Managing Director of Ford International Business Development Caribbean & Central America Region (Anonymous, 2011), and the young generation aged 10 to 19, and 20 to 29 are two of the most active groups to use the Internet in China (CNNIC, 2012). In fact, many multinational public relations agencies have depended on the Internet very much. These include the “O’ Village,” which is the online platform of Ogilvy& Mather Public Relations Agency, which was developed to help “users quickly search by topics, such as expertise and geography, to find a starting point for research or advice” (McKenna, 2006, ¶ 4).

Relationship Cultivation and Stakeholder Reach by Social Media

Presently, social media is widely merged with the industry, which professionals have clearly realized changes how public relations is practiced in the communication field (Croft, 2007; Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008; Nacht, 2008). For all of its public relations potential, many professionals and scholars are leaving little doubt that social media serve as a tool for building organizational-public

relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Social media allows organizations to gain timely feedbacks of their information and involvement in online conversations and thus social media brings them the opportunity to build relationships with their public (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012). As social media becomes a core channel in disseminating information dramatically, according to Gillin (2008), more than half of social media participants recognized the importance of using social media as a tool in their communication activities, and among them about one third regard it as a core strategy. For example, Stephen Noble, digital director at Hill and Knowlton, said that “any agency that thinks their bread and butter is media releases will end up living on bread and butter,” which points out the necessity of using new technologic tools in reaching audiences (Livesley, 2007). On the practitioners’ side, based on a survey conducted by PRSA in 2007, communication technologies make their work easier by accelerating information circulation to reach a larger audience (Eyrich et al., 2008). Meanwhile, in addition to offering platforms for public relations practitioners to reach the public and engage them into dialogues, social media has added an approach to enrich media relations (Eyrich et al., 2008). Specifically, practitioners changed the way they exercise public relations (Pavlik, 2007) in terms of “the way they develop and deliver messages, and the structure, culture, and management style of corporations and organizations themselves” (“Size matter,” 2011). On the other side of clients’ perspective, about four-fifths of the clients of public relations agencies believe that it is extremely important to understand social media strategy, and

seventy percent of clients have already gotten involved into social media themselves (Porto, 2009). For instance, among the top 500 organizations of 2012, 365 organizations which stand for 71 industries have owned Twitter accounts and posted messages there in the recent 30 days. This indicates that “there has been a surge forward in the adoption and use of social media and new communications tools among this year’s Fortune 500” (Barnes, Lescault, & Andonian, 2012).

Social media are used as communication tools by organizations in facilitating their missions, programs and improving relationships between them and their stakeholders (“Size Matter”, 2011). Public relations professionals have recognized a gap between “the goals that practitioners have for organizational Web sites and what those traditional sites are capable of delivering in terms of building relationships between an organization and its stakeholders” (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007, p. 227). However, social media tools would help them to build stakeholder relationships by involving them into online conversations (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007) based on five dialogic principles that are used to build organization-public relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998). For instance, Waters (2009) has showed nonprofit organizations not only streamline their function in management by using social media, but also interact with their stakeholders, including volunteers, donors and so on. In accordance with Kent and Taylor (1998). communication strategies, which are disclosures using all kinds of websites and interactivity, are good for relationship cultivation between organizations and their key stakeholders. Nevertheless, although social media has

obviously changed our views and influences of media, and more and more organizations are involved in various communication techniques, there is still a need to do further research to discover more efficient ways to take advantages of social media tools (Gillin, 2008).

Studies have indicated that organizations with usages of social media's dialogic functions were only in a one-way communication in disseminating messages to the public and did not grasp opportunities to engage with key stakeholders in two-way communication (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009; Rybako & Seltzer, 2010; Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). Therefore, this thesis will examine whether or not multinational public relations agencies regard Weibo as a useful online tool to get in touch with their stakeholders. Do they fully use Weibo as an online platform to reach their stakeholders? Companies can develop and sustain relationships with the public by accessing online media, because the Internet is a potential communication tool for engagement, interactivity, dialogue and two-way communication (Etter et al., 2011). In the following sections, four components consisting of engagement, interactivity, two-way communication and dialogic communication will be discussed to see how organizations cultivate stakeholder relationships with social media (in this case, to examine how multinational public relations agencies build stakeholder relationships through the Chinese microblogging—Weibo).

Engagement

Organizations are required to engage their stakeholders in their public relations activities no matter whether or not they are willing to do so (Business for Social Responsibility, 2003). Generally speaking, stakeholders should be taken into consideration, or at least recognized (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2001). However, it is not required that organizations mobilize stakeholders in each decision-making process, or meet needs from every stakeholder (WBCSD, 2001). Even more, sometimes there may be some variances between companies and their stakeholder groups, so that the two parties are always on the way to “agree to disagree” (Burchell & Cook, 2008). As a result, it is suggested that corporations not only keep a watchful eye on their stakeholders, but also on their relationships with them (Freeman, 1984, Freeman & Gilbert, 1987). As defined by Freeman (1984), stakeholders are “any group and individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p.46). Normally, the most common groups who could be regarded as stakeholders to an organization are stockholders, workers, consumers, suppliers, creditors, competitors, government agencies, professional groups and the local community (Freeman, 1984). These groups are impacted by organizations, and vice versa. In the case of multinational public relations agencies in China, their stakeholders are obviously different from that of organizations. Generally speaking, there are stockholders, public relations practitioners, other employees (for example

managers and so on), clients (both individuals and organizations), headquarters and other oversea affiliates, local and global competitors, local and home country government agencies, local and global media, as well as local and home country communities. Then, stakeholder engagement is “a way of gathering important inputs and ideas, anticipating and managing conflicts, improving decision-making, building consensus amongst different views, strengthening relationships, and enhancing corporate reputation” (BSR, 2003).

Several studies have gradually come to find that two goals, including “information-sharing and dialogue/relationship-building,” are being sought in using social media as a stakeholder engagement tool (Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Hackler & Saxton, 2007; Kang & Norton, 2004; Kent et al., 2003; La Porte, Demchak, & de Jong, 2002; McAllister-Spooner & Taylor, 2007; Nah, 2009; Park & Reber, 2008; Waters, 2007). Social media is successful in creating relations. Then, it encourages the public to learn more information thus leading to a continuous relationship (Smitko, 2012). Moreover, the wide use of new media has increasingly improved the quality of the communication and the effectiveness of engaging clients as well as other stakeholders (e.g., Waters, 2007). For example, if a user has rated a YouTube video click or made a comment on it after watching it, there exists a greater possibility of the user presenting it to his or her friends and choosing to vote on it (Paine & Kowalski, 2008). In the same way, messages in such microblogging websites as Weibo, can be treated as “nodes” in social networking relationships, and the

information in the comments and replies that connect specific persons (that is the use of @ mentions) are “ties” among these “nodes” (Smitko, 2012).

It is possible to improve the level of engagement only after understanding the real nature of a relationship (Paine & Kowalski, 2008). To engage and mobilize stakeholders involves more than simply being on social media (Vorvoreanu, 2009). According to Higgins and Scholer (2009), engagement is “a state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed, or engrossed in something” (p. 7). In the case of social media, engagement indicates a status of involving in a dialogue, or just hanging out ever more (Paine & Kowalski, 2008). As suggested by Scoble (2006, as cited in Paine & Kowalski, 2008), the idea of engagement is designed to measure a user’s interaction, relying on the authority of Internet-based social media channels (Paine & Kowalski, 2008, p. 554). Accordingly, in this thesis, the definition of engagement is taken from analysts of Forrester Research (as cited in Paine & Kowalski, 2008). According to the analysis of Forrester Research, there are four components mirroring the levels of images of the public over time. These are involvement, interaction, intimacy, and influence, defined as follows:

INVOLVEMENT. It Includes web analytics like site traffic, page views, time spent, etc. This essentially is the component that measures if a person is present.

INTERACTION. This component addresses the more robust actions people take, such as buying a product, requesting a catalog, signing up for an email, posting a comment on a blog, uploading a photo or video, etc. These metrics come from e-commerce or social media platforms.

INTIMACY. The sentiment or affinity that a person exhibits in the things they say or the actions they take, such as the meaning behind a blog post or comment, a product review, etc.

INFLUENCE. Addresses the likelihood that a person will recommend your product or service to someone else (As cited in Paine & Kowalski, 2008, p. 3).

According to diverse factors, these engagement indices consist of “links, track backs, comments and the frequency sentiment [as well as] tonality of comments” (Paine & Kowalski, 2008, p. 554).

Obviously, to build a relationship with these stakeholders of agencies both locally and globally through engagement, social media are required as one of the most important two-way communication tools in the relationship cultivation. Although the sophistication in the use of social media is higher and higher, many organizations are still doing only one-way communication on web pages and use microblogging only to send out information rather than achieve a successful engagement of stakeholders and interactivity (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Two-way communication, which will be discussed in the next section, is the need common to both organizations and the public in relationship-building by online communication (Jo & Kim, 2003).

Two-way Communication

J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) have proposed four models of public relations including the press agency, the public information, two-way asymmetrical communication and two-way symmetrical communication. The first two, as one-way models, are not mentioned in this thesis because they were not developed by research or strategic planning (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The other two involve two-

way communication models of public relations, which are discussed as important communication models in this thesis. However, both two-way communications are not the same, because asymmetrical communication focuses on persuasion while symmetrical communication focuses on feedback (East, 1996 a). On one hand, the two-way asymmetrical communication model develops messages to persuade the public to behave by serving the interests of the organization (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). On the other hand, the two-way symmetrical communication model is an ideal way to practice the public relation function, which is one “serving as an organizational function that attempts to balance the interests of organizations with those of their public” (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, p. 46).

The two-way symmetrical model is regarded as the “best” two-way communication model of public relations to build long-term relationships between organizations and their key public (Leichty & Springston, 1993). In this model, a mutual understanding and respect in the communication process is based on the information exchange (Leichty & Springston, 1993). As a result, after the two-way symmetrical communication, there will be mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and the public by achieving a mutual understanding. This also leads to the objective of public relations – to build a mutually beneficial relationship (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992). Of course, a precondition should be promised, which is that participants are sharing information openly and freely in a successful two-way symmetrical model (Zoller, 2004). Furthermore, public relations practitioners are

faithful to both their employers and the public of these organizations (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). Therefore, this model has generated better long-term relationships for organizations--whether businesses or agencies-- and the public than other models (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). "The two-way symmetrical model of public relations suggests that communication, including mediated communication, is indeed effective at achieving symmetrical goals and objectives" (Dozier & Ehling, 1992, p. 182). In fact, based on improving understanding with the public and balancing interests between organizations and the public, the two-way symmetrical model attempts to manage conflicts by appropriate communication (East, 1996).

Only in an interactive, dialogic and new media setting, can the two-way symmetrical communication provide a theoretical framework to study public relations (Naudé, Fronement, & Atwood, 2004). The Internet is used to cope with several gaps existing in one-way traditional communication between the public relations professional and the public, such as the symmetry gap which refers to the lacking roles of speakers (Naudé et al., 2004). However, the social media based on the Internet could narrow or even close this symmetrical gap by offering the public opportunities to speak out and respond (Schickinger, 1998). Specifically, the relevant theoretical elements of interactivity as the nature of the Internet and two-way symmetry can facilitate a dialogue between organizations and the public (Naudé et al., 2004). In a two-way symmetrical model, public relations is practiced to create

two-way dialogues with the public by providing a voice and providing that all parties can be heard (Leichty & Springston, 1993). Communication with the public is understood and practiced as consisting of dialogues from individuals to individuals (Cabezuelo-Lorenzo & Ruiz-Carreras, 2010). The two-way symmetrical communication model of public relations has provided a public space for formulating dialogues (J. Grunig, 1997), while that space for dialogues has offered the public opportunities to “[improve] mutual understanding, [manage] conflict and [allow] for the negotiation of what is ‘right’” (Zoller, 2004, p. 214). Therefore, the two-way symmetrical communication is a “true dialogue” in which parties attempt to achieve a compromise on different ideas, attitudes, and behaviors (J. Grunig, 1990, p. 21). In the age of the Internet, social media websites create a structure for the two-way symmetrical communication model to interact and have feedback during a conversation (Cabezuelo-Lorenzo & Ruiz-Carreras, 2010). For instance, depending on the virtual conversation from many to many, there are bidirectional interactions between users, information senders and receivers on social media such as microblogging (Cabezuelo-Lorenzo & Ruiz-Carreras, 2010).

In this thesis, along with applying the two-way symmetrical model of public relations, the nature of interactivity provided by the Internet and the existing dialogues in the process of online communication are stressed in the following sections.

Interactivity

Interactivity as a key characteristic of the Internet to distinguish the new media from traditional media has strengthened the mutual relationship and co-operation between the organization and the public (Jo & Kim, 2003). It is always a critical concept in the online communication setting, because it is defined based on the features of the Internet (McMillan, Hoy, Kim & McMahan, 2008). Three kinds of definitions are proposed by communication scholars (Ahren, Stromer-Galley, & Neuman, 2000; Cook, 1994; Guedj, et al., 1980; Haeckel, 1998; McMillan, 2000, 2002; Pavlik, 1996; Rice, 1984; Steuer, 1992; Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 1992): “interaction between senders and receivers, humans and machine, and messages and its users” (Jo & Kim, 2003, p. 201). Although there are many different definitions with several disagreements, one common characteristic is that it mirrors mutual relational interactions between the message provider and the recipient in the Internet-based setting (Jo & Kim, 2003).

According to McMillan and Hwang (2002), the definitions of interactivity are based on three features of the communication: (a) the characteristics of the communication setting make it an interactive process; (b) the user utilizes the interactive feature; and (c) perceptions--the interactivity of the communication setting is based on user' perceptions. In this thesis, the interactivity of Weibo depends on the features of the Weibo pages. General characteristics and specific characteristics of the Websites are sought in some studies that focus on features (McMillan &

Hwang, 2002). Scholars have assumed that both communicators (multinational public relations agencies in this case) and their audiences were in search of mutual and two-way communication when they examined the interactivity of websites (Ha & James, 1998). As a result, definitions focusing on features are stressing “exchange” and “mutuality” (Ha & James, 1998). As a microblogging site similar to Twitter, Weibo provides various approaches to interactivity for users relying on its features (Danah, Golder, & Lotan, 2010; Honeycutt & Herring, 2009), and has the interface’s capacity of having a conversation or of exchanging information (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003). At first, users are following others in whom they are interested and getting new postings (Etter et al., 2011). Also, users can interact with each other directly and indirectly through the Weibo (Etter et al., 2011). To communicate with other users directly, one can make comments on others’ messages, mention others with the @ sign, and forward others’ messages with comments. If a user gets a comment from others, thereupon, a reply to this comment can be posted, and then an ongoing conversation takes place, resulting in an “extended exchange” (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009, p. 1). In addition, indirect communication may occur on the Weibo pages such as when a user forwards a message from another user without any comment, “likes” it and stores it as well (Song, 2010). Given the functional interactivity of the medium Weibo, the goal of this thesis is to investigate either multinational public relations agencies’ use of Weibo to interact with stakeholders, or the use of Weibo merely as a medium to provide

information without any interaction. The interactivity helps organizations engage their stakeholders into communicating and cultivating relationships between them (Ha & James, 1998). Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to continue to examine how these agencies use Weibo to engage their stakeholders and whether they use it to interact in dialogic communication with stakeholders to achieve relational outcomes.

In addition, we examine the theory that “strategic communication using the Internet can benefit from a consideration of dialogic communication” (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Therefore, in the following section, dialogue-relevant concepts are going to be reviewed and we will discuss dialogic communication as an important online relationship-building and maintenance tool (Kent, 2008; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002).

Dialogic Communication

Dialogic communication theory stems from a number of subjects including philosophy, rhetoric, psychology, and relational communication (Kent, 2008; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; McAllister-Spooner, 2008; Theunissen & Noordin, 2010). It is used as an honest and ethical approach to lead scholars and professionals to establish and sustain efficient relationships between organizations and their stakeholders (McAllister-Spooner, 2008). For example, Martin Buber in a philosophic perspective, states that “[the] parties [in a dialogue] must view communicating with each other as the goal of a relationship,” but communication, on the other hand, is not a means to an end (Kent & Taylor, 1998). In public relations, “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 325) is considered a

dialogue, and parties who are involved need effort to give and take in an honest, open, and ethical relationship (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009).

Among the four models of public relations, the two-way symmetrical models are the most desirable models applied to the dialogic communication (J. Gurnig, 1992; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). According to Kent and Taylor (1998), the two-way symmetrical model is regarded as “a procedural means” for organizations to interact with the public in communication (p. 323). On the other hand, dialogues are viewed as products, for they are linked to types of communications (Kent & Taylor, 1998). While dialogue is the base of relationships, social media as an online dialogic medium makes it possible for public relations to carry out the management function of building organization-stakeholder relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Organizations are required to focus on forming better frameworks of communications and identifying the value of building relationships with stakeholders in the age of instantaneous communication through the Internet, websites, social media and so on, globally (Kent, 2008). As a result, Internet applications’ communicative features provide a multitudinous environment and opportunities to organizations to strike up dialogues with their key public (Kent & Taylor, 1998). They also have “proposed dialogue as a theoretical framework to guide the creation and maintenance of relationships between organizations and the public” (Vorvoreanu, 2009). On the basis of previous studies (Buber, 1982; Johannesen, 1990), interpersonal dialogic communication exists by interpersonal relationships including

the face-to-face way among actors who are involved in dialogues (Kent & Taylor, 1998). However in today's digital age, does this style of communication still fit in? Actually, under circumstances of face-to-face dialogues, personal prejudices are leading opinions because they deal with "identities" and "impressions" (Kent & Taylor, 1998). There are two related reasons. First, physical characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and attractiveness constrain the identity, as well as the common knowledge of social backgrounds; and second, different attributes often contribute to unexpected identities (Mehdizadeh, 2010). However, online environments, which exist in a typical identity, make it possible for "individuals to engage in a controlled setting" (Mehdizadeh, 2010). As a two-way symmetrical communication (J. Gruing & Hunt, 1984), online dialogic communication combines together openness, immediacy, interaction, and engagement and becomes an indispensable strategy to fill the gap of interpersonal dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998). On the other hand, the public reach of corporations via online dialogic communication not only focuses on relationships which already exist, but also on the creation of potential relationships as related to their key stakeholders (Kent & Taylor, 1998). As a result, the social media offers a great opportunity for organizations to practice public relations, because their stakeholders, and especially their customers, are more likely to interact honestly and immediately with "direct feedback" (Ovatt, 1995).

According to Kent and Taylor (1998), the successful incorporating of dialogic communication on the Internet is guided by five principles, which were improved by

Taylor, Kent and White (2001), Kent and Taylor (2003) and others (McAllister & Taylor 2007; Samsup & Jung, 2005; Seltzer & Mitrook 2007) regard the Internet as potential platform for organization-public relationship creation and maintenance (Bekhit, 2009). These principles, explained by Bekhit (2009) are based on the above:

(1) Ease of interface, which suggests that sites should be arranged intuitively and should be easy to navigate, dynamic enough to encourage all potential public to explore them, information-rich enough to meet the needs of a very diverse public, and interactive enough to allow users to pursue further informational issues and dialogic relationships; (2) usefulness of information, which suggests that organizations provide useful information of general value to all public in a logical hierarchical structure; (3) rule of conservation of visitors, which suggests that links should not lead users away from the organization's site to other sites; (4) generation of return visits, which explores ways to create the foundation for long-lasting relationships. Websites also should include elements that make return visits desirable, and (5) a dialogic feedback loop should exist that allows the public to question organizations and offers them the opportunity to respond to questions and problems. (Bekhit, 2009, p. 57)

According to Taylor et al. (2001), these five principles are divided into two categories:

(a) a technical and design cluster, which may be considered as a prerequisite for dialogue, including the principles of ease of interface, usefulness of information, and rule of conservation of visitors, and (b) a dialogic cluster consisting of the generation of return visits and a dialogic feedback loop.

Research Questions

In sum, with the precondition of globalization in businesses, and requirements in this process in terms of the varied international context, multinational public relations agencies have bloomed quickly as one kind of MNCs. As a result, the development

of international public relations is required not only by globalizing in MNCs including multinational public relations agencies, but also by a need for environmental diversification in various local levels and in the international level. Among these factors impacting the practices of international public relations, social media as an advancement of communication technologies have rapidly innovated. In accordance with the four models of public relations, especially the two-way symmetry, and unique environment in every single country, multinational public relations agencies exercise public relations with different strategies in particular nations. In China, social media are no longer merely a buzzword. With the popularity of using social media, especially the leading microblogging site-Weibo, digital communication and online public relations are essential to investigate, while more and more organizations are regarding social media as a useful online communication platform. Meanwhile, multinational public relations agencies have increasingly registered their Weibo accounts to communicate with their stakeholders in China. Generally, public relations is viewed as a discipline of relationship management which focuses “its effort upon developing long-term behavioral [and mutually beneficial] relationships between organizations and their key public ... [to determine] the value of those organization-public relationships” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom 2000, p. 1). In the management of the organization-public relations, a legitimate conversation is needed to assist in understanding how dialogical communication contributes to relationship cultivation with stakeholders (Waters & Journal, 2011). Meanwhile, the two-way symmetry

involves legitimate dialogues occurring between organizations and their stakeholders with a common demand of mutual understanding (Waters & Journal, 2011). As a useful tool for organizations to engage stakeholders, microblogging such as Weibo is offering a chance to establish and sustain a favorable relationship with the public by the interactivity for fostering dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998). So the goal of this thesis is to determine how multinational public relations agencies are using the interactivity of the Internet and the potential of Weibo to engage in dialogue with their stakeholders. Given the discussion of this literature and relevance to social media sites, research questions were created:

RQ1. What is the level of engagement on Weibo pages of multinational public relations agencies with their stakeholders?

RQ2. To what extent are multinational public relations agencies following two-way communication in practicing public relations on Weibo?

RQ3. What level of interactivity did their Weibo pages reach depending on Weibo's features?

RQ4. How high is the public relations related contents in messages dismissed on Weibo pages of multinational public relations agencies to interact with other Weibo users?

RQ5. What is the tone of comments from other users on messages presented on multinational public relations agencies' Weibo pages?

RQ6. Are multinational public relations agencies fully utilizing the potential of Weibo as a dialogical communication tool?

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

To determine how multinational public relations agencies are using Weibo, and whether its features were actively being used, a content analysis of these agencies' Weibo pages and messages they sent would be conducted. The study's unit of analysis was the Weibo page of multinational public relations agencies, including the posted messages and users' comments and actions. First of all, a presentation of Sina Weibo and its features was needed in this section to complete this thesis. The following explains Weibo and its features in detail, and seeks to understand whether these features help or hinder multinational public relations agencies in practising public relations in the Chinese market.

Sina Weibo

In order for MNCs to effectively utilize Sina Weibo to reach their stakeholders, it is crucial to make sense of Weibo's features and take full advantages of these features in building relationship with the public. Apparently, if there is any feature leading to failure of efficient communication, multinational public relations agencies should notice that and avoid making mistakes related to such a feature. For example, Weibo presents an easy interface as a microblogging site, so corporations can make use of this feature to conveniently access the public. On one side, Sina Weibo offers similar functions of engaging stakeholders into communication for public relations agencies. In addition, one of reasons that Sina Weibo became a furor and seemed to be out of control especially among the youth is its celebrity endorsement tactic. That

is, first users who launched this microblog platform were the most active bloggers online. These included film stars, famous singers, real estate tycoons, popular athletes, prevalent writers, as well as some authority organizations. This characteristic makes Weibo have much more impact in spreading information, as because of their celebrity, these famous people's messages will be shared thousands of times (Barboza, 2011). Furthermore, like Twitter, Sina Weibo adds "V" tags beside account names for these celebrities and well-known organizations that had been verified through legal and valid processes. On the other hand, Sina Weibo, which has been complemented by some Chinese components, is a hybrid by combining features of both Twitter and Facebook, and also added by several "local elements" (Barboza, 2011) For example, despite the limit of 140 words on Weibo, information can show much more in Chinese. That is, a Chinese idiom, which consists of four or more Chinese words and is rooted in classical allusions, always can stand for more than a sentence, even more than a paragraph. Sina Weibo has added more features on its profiles, and made it more and more similar to the style of Facebook. Other than the limitation of 140 characters, users are allowed to add images, videos, audios and emoticons directly with their messages. The Weibo version is more social than Twitter. For example, comments can be posted not only under the same message and showed as threaded, but they can also be displayed at the beginning of messages when they are forwarded. Apart from such applications as microgroups, mini polls as well some game apps, which were similar to those on

Facebook, also have been made available on Sina Weibo. As mentioned before, it is an improved version of Twitter rather than just a clone of Twitter. However, there is little research about Weibo and how public relations firms reach their stakeholders by using this online communication tool. What is worse, many English publications have fuzzy reports about Sina Weibo (Waters et al., 2009; Hille, 2011). The general perception among English publications is that Weibo was under heavy pressure by the government of China in its first years of its development, but it has now accepted by the government after several efforts to reform. Recently, a Chinese official was seen on the Weibo site wearing luxury watches, which he obviously could not have afforded on only his regular income. This issue attracted a lot of attention from Weibo users and the Chinese government. After verification of his corruption, he was dismissed from his post and punished. Hence, Weibo is worth investigating as a thriving online communication platform.

Sina Weibo has become a mania in China three years ago and it is obvious that it is time to explore it academically. Unfortunately, there are several news reports about Weibo and the Sina Corporation such as in the New York Times (Barboza, 2011; Wines, 2012; Wines & Lafraniere, 2011), the Business Daily Upgrade, and other publications, but few academic research has taken place to investigate Weibo as an online communication tool in engaging stakeholders for corporations. In addition, it was first defined as a Chinese microblog to express information since it was in style similar to Twitter, but it became more and more similar to Facebook

recently by launching games, apps and other applications on its site (Hu, 2011).

Accordingly, by integrating both of their merits, Sina Weibo has become one of the most potentially promising platforms for public disclosures and message dissemination of messages (Hu, 2011).

Table3-1. 社交网站的功能排行 [Function Ratings of Social Networking Sites (SNS)]

SNS Function	Transmission	Communication	Mediated Function	Sociability	Extendibility
Email	★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★
Blog	★★★	★★	★★★★	★	★★
Instant Messaging	★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★★
BBS	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★
Facebook	★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Twitter	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★

Song, A. (2010, January 1). 微博的三大特点和盈利模式 [Three features and profit mode of Weibo]. Retrieved from http://www.netkey.com.cn/service/wangzhanjianshe_display-2055.htm

According to Song (2010, as shown in Table 3-1), it is necessary to rank six kinds of social media sites including email, instant messaging, BBS, blog, Facebook and Twitter in transmission, communication, mediated function, sociability and extendibility. These five functions are rated from one to five successively by stars. One star stands for very weak, two stars stand for weak, three stars stand for general, four stars stand for strong, and five stars stand for very strong. As shown in Table 3-1, comparing Email, Blog, Instant Messaging and BBS, the two most functional social media platforms in terms of the five functions are Twitter and Facebook. Specifically, Twitter acts best in transmission, mediated function and extendibility with ratings of five, four and five stars respectively, while Twitter's

function, communication, is somehow weak. Facebook's functions of communication, sociability and extendibility are best among these social networking sites, but Facebook is very weak in transmission and mediated function. BBS is very weak in its extendibility, while BBS's other functions are not weak. Instant Messaging is very strong in communicating with others and is strong in its extendibility, but Instant Messaging is not so strong by the other criteria. Email is very mediocre, and Email is the weakest overall, because no other function is strong.

In combining Facebook with Twitter, the most two functional social media sites, Sina Weibo definitely integrates the merits of all of them (as shown in Table 3-2). Hence, because all of its five functions work strongly as an online communication method, Sina Weibo becomes the outstanding one among all of these social networking platforms (i.e. Email, Instant Messaging, BBS, Blog, Facebook, Twitter, and Sina Weibo). Weibo is very strong in transmitting information, communicating with other netizens, as well as in its sociability and extendibility. It is also a strong site as a medium by bringing all sorts of news from various media (Song, 2010).

Table 3-2. Function Ratings of Facebook, Twitter and Sina Weibo

SNS Function	Transmission	Communication	Mediated Function	Sociality	Extendibility
Facebook	★	★★★★★	★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Twitter	★★★★★	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Sina Weibo	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

With the goal of examining how multinational public relations agencies communicate with their stakeholders, especially users on Weibo, this thesis is going to analyze Weibo's features at first. Then it will analyze its feasibility as an online

communication platform to practice public relations. It will also examine whether its features benefit the organizations' public relations activities or fail them. In general, features of Sina Weibo are summarized into two aspects: messages' content and dissemination (Song, 2010). First, content features:

Brevity in style: Unlike other Social Networking Sites (SNSs), microblogging is low-cost, easy to access, and an efficient way to convey points when sharing information, as it has a 140-word limitation on message size (Rosson & Zhao, 2009). What is more, a message is sent interactively and immediately by its simple style in online communication (Rosson & Zhao, 2009). In addition, "most of the discussion on Weibo, is carried in short messages distributed to groups of 'followers' [and] is of light fare like gossip" (Fletcher, 2011). That means on one side, that it is easy to convey points in short sentences when communicating online; however, on the other side, information provided by Weibo might be useless (Fletcher, 2011).

Huge updating information flow: Primarily, the enormous amount of Sina Weibo users creates innumerable relevant messages every minute, even every second (Yan, 2011). Corporations should be aware of how to utilize a communication strategy in this huge flow of updating information (Shepherd, 2009). For instance, on November 11th, 2011, users posted an average of 3500 messages per second on Sina Weibo (Yan, 2011). Indeed, the highest day on record saw 5996 messages posted per second (Yan, 2011, ¶ 3).

Initiative exposure of information: The direction of information flow on Weibo is set as information-dominating instead of people-based, which means messages are always emerging *initiatively* rather than passively as in traditional media (Song, 2010). In other words, users live in a micro setting are being offered information automatically when they are scanning the Weibo profiles, and it is one of the most attractive elements of Weibo (Rosson & Zhao, 2009). For example, customers could view product information by searching corporations' web pages--if they are willing to access them; if not, they will never get there. However, if corporations post product information directly on Weibo as a short message, it might present to their Weibo followers whether or not they desire to see it (Shepherd, 2009).

Actually, it is much more important to study whether there any features of Sina Weibo as an online information-spreading platform, that contribute to building relationship and that deal with dialogic communication between organizations and the public (Hu, 2011). The reason this is crucial is that this type of efficient means of communication makes a major contribution in enabling MNCs to keep in touch with the public based on online dialogic communication (Shepherd, 2009). So the second aspect of features is about dissemination of messages:

Expression in breadth and depth: Because of the enormous number of users, the scale in the ability to express messages on Weibo is one of the broadest and deepest ones in the social media field. Microblogging is like a micro-society in its breadth (Rosson & Zhao, 2009), as a result of the features permitting forwarding and

commenting freely on anyone's messages; once sent, one cannot imagine where a message is going. "Sina also allows users to more effectively repost or comment on and share other people's posts, creating bigger microblog communities" (Barboza, 2011, ¶ 22). In terms of depth of users, various kinds of users on Sina Weibo include singers, movie stars, corporations, media, and even government officers (Hu, 2011). Consequently, a simple message may resonate in many levels of society and may cause an unexpected impact.

Speedy disclosure of facts: Speedy disclosure of facts results from the way of expressing messages, the huge amount of users as well as the benefit of the high speed of the Internet. Also, as Rosson and Zhao (2009) argue, "real-time information" is more useful than out of date comments, and will be regarded as a "quick and interesting source of news" (Rosson & Zhao, 2009, p. 246-247). Thus, speedy disclosure is one particular dimension of online communication and dialogues. Fortunately, Sina Weibo—that hybrid of Facebook and Twitter—is one of the fastest online platforms in information disclosure.

Extensions of celebrity reflection: Since the beginning of Sina Weibo, celebrities, who are defined as public figures with frequent activities, have played an essential role on Weibo. To a certain degree, it becomes a golden rule for companies to invite celebrities to "promote their products" (Barboza, 2009, ¶ 23). Meanwhile, once that would take place, Weibo would be used to zoom in on their influence among other users, such as their fans and the media. From a corporation's

perspective, this feature offers an outstanding way to promote their products and services from the endorsement of active users, usually celebrities with Weibo accounts (Barboza, 2009). In fact, “as microblogs have a powerful effect ... advertisers start to create campaigns aimed at microblog users, [and many Chinese organizations] are scrambling to develop and promote their own microblog services” (Barboza, 2009, ¶ 8).

High media realization: “As more and more newspapers turned to social media to reach readers in new ways,” there developed a need to be involved in this trend (Greer & Yan, 2010, p. 6), especially as Sina Weibo is extremely efficient at conveying information. In addition, Sina Weibo, as an improvement of Twitter, offers substantial assistance, by upgrading the disclosure of information in real-time. Speedy disclosure of information is only one of many benefits of Sina Weibo’s unique blend of features to newspapers (Farhi, 2009).

Rather than isolating from others, all features of Weibo are interrelated, so that one feature may be affected by any other. Do multinational public relations agencies benefit from Weibo’s multiple features when they are doing public relations and building mutually beneficial organization-public relationships on Sina Weibo? An analysis of content follows.

Method

As a systematic, objective, and quantitative method (Kim & Kuljis, 2010), which stems from mass communication research since the 1950s (Berelson, 1952), content

analysis is extremely valuable in research, with distinct features in languages and communications (Harwood & Garry, 2003; Mariampolski 2001; Tesch 1990). In this thesis, content analysis was used to see what is happening, but not to explain why these phenomena exist. So it aims to investigate how multinational public relations agencies utilize the most popular Chinese microblogging -- Sina Weibo -- as a dialogical communication tool to engage their stakeholders in China. Before conducting the content analysis, a preliminary research was conducted to perceive some general information about multinational agencies and their Weibo accounts. To this purpose, two steps have been developed based on the global 250 agency ranking (2012) of multinational public relations agencies. First, a research about Weibo pages of multinational public relations has been conducted. Second, messages on their Weibo pages have been selected to be studied.

Population and Sample

The thesis selects these multinational public relations agencies, based on the global 250 agency ranking in 2012 from the *Holmes Report* (2012) with offices in China (both mainland and Taiwan Island). Multinational corporations, including multinational public relations agencies, in addition to having their headquarters all over the world, have a number of affiliates (Wankel, 2009). MNCs operate their businesses worldwide in different ways, which includes opening their own offices overseas, seeking business partners in other countries where they have clients, and so on, depending on their business type (Lu, 2009). Based on the setting of research

questions, this thesis is presented in two parts: Weibo accounts selection and messages selection. An overview of 250 ranked global public relations agencies found that there were 42 agencies with their own offices in China. (The result of preliminary analysis on multinational public relations agencies with offices in China is available in Appendix B). In addition, cities which were chosen to open offices are Beijing, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Suzhou, and Taiwan. However, not each of these has a Weibo account. After a numerical review, 22 of these agencies were found to have registered accounts on Weibo. This indicates that so far, 52.4 percent of the multinational public relations agencies in China are using Weibo. These agencies with Weibo accounts opened their Weibo accounts at different times, and there was a substantial difference in the number of messages in their Weibo accounts. For example, the MSL Group established its Weibo account in June of 2009, and had 716 messages so far. APCO Worldwide opened its accounts in August, 2011 and as of November 6th, 2012, had only 11 messages. In total, as of November 6, 2012, there were 8690 messages on multinational public relations agencies' Weibo profiles. As of January 10th, 2013, there were 9567 messages on multinational public relations agencies' Weibo profiles.

Therefore, this thesis has analyzed all 22 multinational public relations agencies found to have registered accounts on Weibo. Mass communication researchers frequently use nonprobability sampling, so in this thesis, the latest 10 messages in each Weibo page of the 22 multinational public relations agencies were selected to

be studied. In every message, comments and other relevant material were also taken into consideration.

Coding Sheet Construction

To apply the content analysis to the multinational public relations agencies' Weibo accounts, coding indices used in this thesis were adapted from previous research (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012; Paine & Kowalski, 2008; Smitko, 2011; Waters et al., 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011). After combining and selecting their coding categories, all related information about messages on their Weibo sites has been analyzed by added it into the coding sheet (as shown in Appendix C). In general, there are four sections in the coding sheet according to the research questions and previous studies. First of all, each message was coded by its posting date and the agency that sent it. In the following of the first section, the messages were also analyzed in terms of languages types, and element presences. For example, the presence of picture type, video type, audio type and/or URL attachments was to be checked to see if corporations are using these strategies to engage stakeholders, and to see how interactive they are on microblogging sites with online publics (Men & Tsai, 2012; Waters et al., 2009). Also, the presence of the functions of mention and hashtag are also included in the coding sheet to measure corporate engagement (Lovejoy et al., 2012; Smitko, 2011). In this thesis, these elements in messages and the functions on Weibo pages were coded to investigate engagement of multinational public relations agencies. Secondary, in order to

measure interactivity and the features of two-way communication in terms of comments with messages from agencies' Weibo pages, several coding schemes from the literature on new media are combined to capture microblogging's features (Men & Tsai, 2012; Waters et al., 2009; Waters & Jamal, 2011). That is, message were shared, commented or liked, and the tone in these comments was needed to be checked in this case. Besides, mention others in comments and the conversations happened of the sample messages have been coded, because this is a new communication tool that could lead to interactions and conversations (Smitko, 2012). Then in the next section, a series of public relations related contents were taken into consideration when building the coding sheet. Since multinational corporations are facing different stakeholders in home and globally, different information were needed to be taken into consideration when they operate (Etter, Plotkowiak, & Stanoevska-Slabeva, 2011). What is more, the usefulness of information and messages is varied commonly (Etter, Plotkowiak, & Stanoevska-Slabeva, 2011). At last, the final section consists of three indices of tones of other Weibo users who made comments and feedback on messages in the sample. In fact, all indices are mixed, because some indices could indicate more than one feature.

Data Gathering and Analysis

In the first step of this research process, information (by the day of January, 10th, 2013) about multinational public relations agencies' Weibo pages is provided (as seen in Appendix B). By January 10th, 2013, there were a total of 182,644

messages on their Weibo pages. Although there was an average 435 messages on each Weibo page, some agencies were not as active as others. For example, the Weibo page with the most messages was Storymaker (a German agency) with 1235 messages, while the Brunswick Group did not send any message yet but had seven followers. The average number of followers was 8320 per Weibo page, and Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide, with 106197 followers, had the most number of followers. With this number, the Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide firm had 58 percent of the total amount of followers among the 22 firms studied. Between November 6th, 2012 and January 10th, 2013, there was a 31 percent increase in messages and a 10 percent growth in followers per Weibo page. To analyze the friending practices of these multinational public relations agencies, the researchers set up a Weibo account that followed all 22 sampled agencies. The researchers' Weibo account was followed by only one of these 22 agencies. In their Weibo pages, some agencies offer a brief introduction, links to other sites, and/or contact information. Nine Weibo accounts were active in 10 days, that is, nine Weibo accounts had sent messages in the previous 10 days, and 13 accounts were active in the recent month.

In the second step, a content analysis was conducted using the coding sheet that was built for this step. The code scheme is the primary step in the process of content analysis, and it is a guideline to enable researchers to classify all the data they have gathered into the different categories they have previously set up, so that

they may accurately collect the data (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). This approach not only reduces the complexity of the procedure of analyzing the content, but also systematically and rationally increases the inter-coder reliability (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Inter-coder reliability is a measurement that is used to determine whether the research results will be consistent when different coders do the same content analysis. In this thesis, two coders were trained to code information about Weibo accounts and messages. Each coder has taken responsibility for 70 percent of the sample, so that there was a 20 percent overlapping of data, to ensure inter-coder reliability in the process of the analysis. The reliability was calculated by the Holsti (1969) formula, which identifies the reliability of nominal data. In a pilot study using 10 percent of our data, the intercoder reliability coefficient was found to be 0.95, which is above the minimum reliability coefficient of 0.9 when using Holsti's formula (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

The first research question would be answered by checking the language used in a message, and such elements as picture, video, audio, URL, and @ sign usage in a message according to the four components designed to reveal the level of engagement and the nature of the relationship (involvement, interaction, intimacy, and influence) (Paine & Kowalski, 2008) (see section Engagement, above). In addition, the general information collected in the first step of the research has revealed the engagement level of these Weibo pages. To answer the second research question, the extent of following the two-way communication in practicing

public relations on Weibo, other users' reactions has been recorded and analyzed, including the number of users who liked a message, shared a message with or without a comment, made a comment directly and mentioned others in a comment. To answer the third research question, the reactions mentioned above could also indicate the level of interactivity. In addition whether or not a message has an @ sign and the percentage of effective conversations included in a message also need to be checked. There is also a need to quantify how many times a conversation between two same users goes back and forth. To answer the fourth research question, what is the level of the public relations-related content in each message on their Weibo pages, one would check a message's content relevance in the light of whether it was related to public relations business with clients, or whether it pertained to the multinational public relations agency who sent the message, or to the headquarters and/or other oversea affiliates, or whether it involved another multinational public relations agency or agencies in China rather than the agency who sent a message, or whether it pertained to Chinese communities, news released by media, to government regulation or to other matter. In addition, the tones of comments from other users have been investigated to answer the fifth research question. Every comment has the potential to reveal its speaker's attitudes. Is it presented positively, negatively, or neutrally? Finally, the last question to be answered would be an overall evaluation. The research results in step one and in most indices based on the five features of dialogical communication have considered in answering this research

question. The five features of dialogical communication are divided into two clusters (Taylor et al., 2001). In the technical and design cluster of multinational public relations' Weibo pages, the principle of ease of interface has already been decided by the features of Weibo, so this would not be researched but analyzed directly in this thesis. The remaining others and the other cluster of features, the dialogical cluster, were considered in the study through both step one and step two. In this thesis, most indices could indicate multiple dimensions, so that they are not sorted by categories but mixed.

In this thesis, to check the relevance between all nominal variables, the SPSS® 20.0 for Windows was used to analyze data by following frequencies and descriptive statistical operations. Both observed and expected frequencies will be compared to determine whether the change in frequency is actually significant.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

In the step one of the research, 22 Weibo pages of multinational public relations agencies were observed during the period between November 6th, 2012 and January 10th, 2013. In step two, a content analysis of 210 messages sent by 21 out of 22 multinational public relations agencies by Weibo accounts has been conducted. All messages collected were sent before Jan. 10th, 2013. In order to answer the research questions in this thesis, frequencies and descriptive statistics of the indices in the coding sheet were run.

RQ1: The level of engagement on Weibo pages of multinational public relations agencies

The first research question determined the level of multinational public relations agencies' engagement with their stakeholders on Weibo pages by sending messages with varied elements and mention functions. As shown in Table 4-1, a majority of messages (74.8 %, N = 157) were sent only in simplified Chinese since it is the official language of the Chinese market. Another 19.5 percent (N =41) of the messages included both Chinese and English in them, and a final 5.2 percent (N =11) among these messages were sent in English. In the case of the three agencies with messages on their Weibo pages whose headquarters are in countries whose languages include neither English nor Chinese (MSL Group, Dentsu Public Relations and Storymaker), there is a percentage of 0.5 (N = 1) that the message included other languages. In regard to elements in messages, the inclusion of a picture was

the most common attachment to messages, with 76.2 percent (N =160) of the messages including a picture as an attachment. At least one URL was attached to 39.00 percent (N =82) of the messages while only 3.30 (N =7) percent of the messages contained a video. No message included an audio as an attachment. In addition, to engage other users in legitimate conversations on Weibo, multinational public relations agencies had to address others specifically. The results indicate that 38.6 percent (N =81) of the messages mentioned at least one other user or at least included a “@” sign, and 28.1 percent (N =59) of messages included the hashtag (“#”) symbol which refers to words that appeared in the discussion forums.

Table 4-1. Descriptive Statistics 1

Indices	Percentage Allocation
Language of a message	
Only in Chinese	74.8 (N =157 / 210)
Only in English	5.2 (N =11 / 210)
Both in Chinese and English	19.5 (N =41 / 210)
Include others	0.5 (N =1 / 210)
Message element (M = 29.63, SD = 35.72)	
Picture attachment	76.2 (N =160 / 210)
Video attachment	3.3 (N =7 / 210)
Audio attachment	0 (N =0 / 210)
URL attachment	39.0 (N =82 / 210)
Weibo Function	
Mention other user (with an @ sign)	38.6 (N =81 / 210)
Hashtag (with a # sign)	28.1 (N =59 / 210)

RQ2 & RQ3: two-way communication and interactivity in practicing public relations on Weibo

To answer the second question, how multinational public relations agencies followed the use of two-way communications in practicing public relations on their Weibo, frequencies were run on the two-way communication model of public

relations. Few users liked messages (4.3 percent, $N = 9$) which were sent by multinational public relations agencies on Weibo. In addition, among 210 messages, the ratio of messages that were shared without comment, shared with comment, and received direct comments by other users were 47.6 ($N = 100$), 53.8 ($N = 113$) and 43.8 ($N = 92$) respectively (as shown in the Table 4-2). In other words, among 2834 Weibo user interactions (like a message, share a message without a comment, share a message with comments, or make comments directly), only 18 users (0.6 percent) on Weibo had liked messages of these multinational public relations agencies in the sample, with a mean of 0.09 and a standard deviation of 0.56. In 1,150, or 40.6 percent of users who shared messages with no comment, the average was 5.48, with a high standard deviation of 24.88. Of the 1,274, or 45.0 percent of users who shared messages with some comments, the mean was 6.07 with a standard deviation of 20.25. At the same time, 13.8 percent ($N = 392$) of the users made direct comments about messages ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 4.99$). A frequent way to communicate with other users on Weibo is by including the “@” sign followed by the user’s account names in the comments. In our results, 267 out of 1,666 comments, equaling 16.0 percent, mentioned at least one other user (with “@” signs).

In addition to the above indices to measure the level of interactivity in utilizing Weibo to exercise public relations (RQ3), the researchers found that 8.2 percent ($N = 136$) had been responded to by the sender agency, and the number of responses in a conversation between the same two users went back and forth in a range from 0 to

4 in these comments. Further, 68.6 percent (N = 144) of the messages were sent originally by agencies themselves, while the remaining 31.4 percent (N = 66) were forwarded from others.

Table 4-2. Descriptive Statistics 2

Indices	Percentage Allocation	Mean	SD
Average number of messages that liked by other users	4.3 % (N = 9 / 210)	0.09	0.56
Average number of messages that shared without comments by other users	47.6 % (N = 100 / 210)	5.48	24.88
Average number of messages that shared with comments by other users	53.8 % (N = 113 / 210)	6.07	20.25
Average number of messages that only made comments without sharing them by other users	43.8% (N = 92 / 210)	1.87	4.99

Table 4-3. Descriptive Statistics 3

Indices	Percentage Allocation
Origin of a message	
The agency original sent	68.6 (N =144)
Forward from others	31.4 (N =66)
User interactions about messages	
Users who liked a message	0.6 % (N =18 / 2843)
Users who shared a message without comments	40.6 % (N =1150 / 2843)
Users who shared a message with comments	45.0 % (N =1274 / 2843)
Users who only made comments without sharing a messages	13.8 % (N =392 / 2843)
Users mentioned others in a comment (made a comment with an @ sign other than the original author of a message)	16.0 % (N =267 / 2843)
Effective conversations included in messages (comments that are responded to by the message sender)	8.2 % (N =136 / 2843)

RQ4: public relations related contents in messages dismissed on their Weibo pages

Agency Weibo accounts appeared to serve all users and to promote open communications, providing valuable information to each of them. However, to each group of stakeholders, the usefulness of messages differed from stakeholder to stakeholder. To investigate the fourth research question, public relations-related content by agency, the average lies at 18.15 percent, with a standard deviation of 18.05. Specifically, the most frequently-seen relevant content in messages was content about internal multinational public relations agencies, with a percentage of 56.7 (N = 119). The percentage of the next most often found relevant content in messages was 31.4 (N = 66), which means that there were 66 messages relevant to communities in China. As shown in the Table 4-2, 15.2 percent (N = 32) of the messages were related to public relations business with clients; 13.3 percent (N = 28) of the messages were relevant to news releases by media; 12.4 percent (N = 26) of the messages mentioned information about the headquarters and/or other oversea affiliates of the multinational public relations agencies that sent the messages; 4.8 percent (N = 10) messages referred to other multinational public relations agencies in China rather than the agency that sent the message; and no message was relevant to any information related to government regulations. In addition, 24 out of 210 of the messages sent, equaling 11.4 percent were relevant to other information rather than the items listed above.

Table 4-4. Descriptive Statistics 4

Indices	Percentage Allocation
Relevance of message content (M = 18.15, SD = 18.05)	
Relevant to public relations business with a client	15.2 % (N =32 / 210)
Relevant to an internal multinational public relations agency who sent the message	56.7 % (N =119 / 210)
Relevant to the headquarters and/or other overseas affiliates of a multinational public relations agency who sent the message	12.4 % (N =26 / 210)
Relevant to other multinational public relations agencies in China rather than the agency who sent a message	4.8 % (N =10 / 210)
Relevant to news release by media	13.3 % (N =28 / 210)
Relevant to government regulation	0 % (N =0 / 210)
Relevant to communities in China	31.4 % (N =66 / 210)
Relevant to others	11.4 % (N =24 / 210)

RQ5: the tone of other users' comments about messages presented on their Weibo pages

Table 4-5. Descriptive Statistics 5

Indices	Percentage Allocation
Attitudes indicated in messages	
Positive comments only	55.2 % (N =920 / 1666)
Negative comments only	3.8 % (N =63 / 1666)
Comments with mixed and neutral attitudes	40.9 % (N =681 / 1666)

Table 4-6. Descriptive Statistics 6

Indices	Percentage Allocation	Mean	SD
Amount of messages with positive comments only	49.0% (N = 103 / 210)	4.38	14.08
Amount of messages with negative comments only	11.9% (N = 25 / 210)	0.30	1.07
Amount of messages with mixed and/or neutral comments	49.0% (N = 103 / 210)	3.24	11.97

In regard to the different influences of stakeholders' attitudes on different messages (RQ5), in the sample of 210 messages, 1,666 comments were found. Of these comments, 55.2 percent (N = 920) were found to be positive, 3.8 percent (N =

63) were found to be negative, and 40.9 percent (N = 681) of them displayed no attitude. The three means of these are 4.38, 0.30 and 3.24, with the three having high standard deviations of 14.08, 1.07 and 11.97 respectively (As shown in Table 4-6). In other words, there were 49.0 percent (N = 103) among all 210 messages have been made by positive comments only. Also messages with negative comments only in the sample account for 11.9 percent (N = 25). Amongst 210 sample messages, there were also 103 messages, corresponding to 49.0 percentages, with mixed and/or neutral comments.

RQ6: the usage of Weibo pages as a dialogical communication tool

Table 4-7. Descriptive Statistics 7

Indices	Percentage Allocation
Weibo pages with activities	77.3 % (N = 17 / 22)
Average increase of messages	30.6 % (N = 8 / 22)
Average increase of followers	9.8 % (N = 2 / 22)
Weibo pages with internal links	68.2 % (N = 15 / 22)
Weibo pages with introduction	54.5 % (N = 12 / 22)
Weibo pages with contact information	41.9 % (N = 9 / 22)
Email occupation	13.6 % (N = 3 / 22)
Phone NO. occupation	18.2 % (N = 4 / 22)
Address occupation	9.1 % (N = 2 / 22)

Indices about different elements and two Weibo function usages in messages, as well as user interactions and contact information were designed to answer the final research question as a comprehensive one. The research results based on the second cluster of dialogic communication features, the dialogic cluster, were addressed.

Additionally, during the research period, 77.3 percent (N = 17) of the multinational public relations agencies with corporate Weibo accounts have sent one,

or more than one, message. Amongst them, four had Weibo accounts with no activity on them, and one agency (Cohn & Wolfe) had a negative growth of two percent. The average of message percentage increase was 30.6 percent. However, as indicated by the high standard deviation of 70.9, the results showed a high variance, ranging from – two percent up to 294 percent (as seen in Appendix B).

While sending too many messages may clutter followers' Weibo feeds, an organization that sends too few messages or even no messages would have a risk of being neglected among other messages. At the same time, the numbers of followers on their Weibo had changed from 52 percent down to 0 ($M = 9.8$, $SD = 13.5$). Shine Communications had the highest percentage increase in both messages and followers on its Weibo pages. In addition, 68.2 percent ($N = 15$) of Weibo pages include at least one internal link to other sites with an average at 1.82 links on per Weibo page, and the standard deviation is 1.89. What is more, the one with the most links (Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide) attached seven on its agency Weibo pages at the time of coding. Leaving agency contact information (email address, phone number, or address) on their Weibo pages could increase the opportunity to interact with others offline, and a brief introduction could improve others' knowledge about the agencies to involve stakeholders. As for contact information, 59.1 percent ($N = 13$) of multinational public relations agencies did not provide any contact information, while the percentages of agencies that offered one, two or three ways to contact them, among email, phone number, and address were

13.6 percent (N = 3), 18.2 percent (N = 4), and 9.1 percent (N = 2) respectively. In addition, over half (54.5 %, N = 12) of multinational public relations agencies' Weibo pages included an introduction about the agencies themselves.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

As the Internet continues to evolve and mature, it is vital that public relations scholars examine the usages of social media again and again for applications and theoretical insights. As indicated, microblogging is more flexible than first appears and it “is ushering in a new era of possibilities for organizations to communicate with and engage their core stakeholders and the general public” than could be expected at first glance (Lovejoy et al., 2012). This thesis aimed to understand public relations on social media and, particularly, to investigate how multinational public relations agencies integrate microblogging to cultivate relationships with online stakeholders in China. The content of communication created by 22 multinational public relations agencies was checked from an organizational perspective. By analyzing the content of these agencies’ Weibo pages and the messages they sent, this study found that multinational public relations agencies have not used the majority of the Weibo resources available to them in their microblogging presences. As same as found in previous studies (e.g. Park & Reber, 2008; Waters & Jamal, 2011; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Men & Tsai, 2012), the results in this thesis suggest that agencies could take greater advantage of the resources of Weibo to build online relationships.

In the Chinese market, these multinational public relations agencies sprang out as an emerging industry at the end of twentieth century. Now, microblogging is a new phenomenon for any corporation in relationship-building. Agencies are learning how to engage the public online through active dynamics on Weibo, though there are

few handbooks to guide them on how to use it. In most messages on Weibo, simplified Chinese as the official language was selected to send information, so that their information could be better understood by other users, and then could promote an efficient engagement among them. There is a variety of ways including enrich a message with different elements to connect to other users, create engagement and develop relationships that could build social capital (Smitko, 2012). Elements such as pictures were used to make an effort to develop the relationship by getting the users involved in agency internal activities and social networking attendance. Mentioning other users by “@” symbol would increase involvement with online publics and chance of dialogs between the agencies and the users (Lovejoy et al., 2012). The use of hashtags in these messages is likely a sign that they are more likely than others in the sample to be searched on Weibo with Weibo’s search engine optimization (Lovejoy et al., 2012). In this thesis, these 22 multinational public relations agencies might continue to connect with others by using the “@” symbol when communicating with current and potential stakeholders that follow them on Weibo, and they might follow this by including the hashtag (“#”) symbol, to involve them into discussions. It might be not convincing that real interactions could happen in 140 characters or less, but in fact, microblogging has indeed become a potential tool for stakeholder engagement if public relations practitioners can use this resource at an adequate level.

In this thesis, the researchers have found that multinational public relations agencies were using Weibo pages to send out information and messages, instead of communicating with other Weibo users or connecting with others through interactions. Although some agencies in the sample are using Weibo to start several conversations through the use of messages, most are merely treating it as another channel to send out information such as is performed in traditional media, rather than a two-way communication platform. Although public relations scholars have addressed the importance of valid communications between organizations and the public through facilitating social media strategies (Li & Bernoff, 2008; Solis & Breakenridge, 2009; Lovejoy et al., 2012), only a few multinational public relations agencies were found to have incorporated social media in conversations and two-way communications according to the research findings. In reality, microblogging is a new social media outlet with enormous ability to build relationships that public relations practitioners have barely begun to explore or appreciate (Lovejoy et al., 2012). Messages on Weibo pages of multinational public relations agencies in the sample were mainly one-way information channels according to the means and standard deviations of each interaction occurred in messages. So in the researchers' opinions, though Weibo was seen to be used by multinational public relations agencies as a tool to communicate with stakeholders, as shown in this study, Weibo's features were not used in a sufficiently broad and full a manner to effect two-way communications in China.

As a practical matter, these multinational public relations agencies face unique challenges in communicating interactively online with a public that comprises an enormous number of individuals (Etter, Plotkowiak, & Stanoevska-Slabeva, 2011). In this thesis, Weibo as one of microblogging sites, offers an opportunity for them to disseminate information to any individual users, to mention particular users, and to reply more directly to questions and comments. As a result, compared to the traditional websites which only reach narrow audience groups, Weibo represents a new way to interact with stakeholders. Despite the growing attention that is being devoted to interact with online public, the actual results evaluating the application of this relatively new communication channel were somehow disappointing, in that few of the potential interactions were taking place on this social media site (Coupland, 2005). The sending of messages on multinational public relations agencies' Weibo pages demonstrated a willingness to share information, but the communication was not active to the point of answering questions or responding to comments from other Weibo users. These facts indicate that agencies are not effectively using their Weibo accounts to get feedback and to cultivate mutual understanding between themselves and the public. Other organizations will be better rewarded by their online presence efforts, if they solicit feedback and comments, respond to them, and attempt to get the users involved in both online and offline interactions (Waters & Jamal, 2011). Thus, to satisfy their online stakeholders, multinational public relations agencies might pay more attention to the amount of interactivity they promote and incorporate

in their Weibo pages. For example, they could reply with more valid comments, answer typical questions and mention other users in responses more frequently to advance the interactivity level.

The types of public relations-related information sent by multinational public relations agencies on their Weibo reveal their focus on stakeholder groups. This thesis found that multinational public relations agencies were primarily sending messages about internal multinational public relations agencies, and then mentioned information about related communities in China. Therefore, the employees were the stakeholders with whom the agencies were the most concerned according to the messages studied on the agencies' Weibo pages. As they are facing pressures not only from the Chinese market, but also from the world, because of the globalization process, agencies must learn to give attention to stakeholders, not only in China, but also all over the world. In fact, these multinational public agencies did not give sufficient attention to messages related to other public relations content, such as information related to public relations business with clients, news released by media, by their headquarters and/or other oversea affiliates, by competitor multinational public relations agencies in China, and by government regulations.

To determine whether or not multinational public relations agencies did a good job on Weibo pages in cultivating relationships in China, the number of comments with positive attitude from users who made comments about messages they sent is one of the most direct indices. However, negative comments may cause not only a

direct negative influence, but this can be amplified because negative comments catch the attention of other users. The results led to the conclusion that a majority of users with comments about messages in the sample communicated their attitudes to agencies. Nonetheless, in fact the number of users who had interacted with the sample messages on Weibo was only 2,834, which was a far smaller number than some single messages sent by some other Weibo users. For example, a Weibo account that was used to broadcast headline news once had a message with 5,798 interactive users. Therefore, multinational public relations agencies should promote more communication strategies to enhance the interactivity on their Weibo pages.

As the financial benefits in social media engagement have not been proven yet (Waters & Jamal, 2011), one reason these multinational public relations agencies were not using all the potential interaction elements in the Weibo usage shown in the research might be that they lack the time and resources to put in managing their Weibo accounts, or might not even be adept in enhancing the interactivity of the process. This may be another reason for the lack of interaction on agencies' Weibo pages. As previous studies shown, despite public relations practitioners and scholars having realized the necessity to engage in the social media phenomenon, they do not believe that social media is the cure-all for organizational communication efforts (Waters & Jamal, 2011).

While the interactivity and engagement capabilities of Internet-based microblogging have been more widely accepted, relatively, its dialogical features in

the light of relationship cultivation are not so well-known or applied. If agencies want to engage other users in dialogue, multinational public relations agencies should better motivate the public to engage with them online by continuously keeping a watchful eye on the dynamics of their Weibo pages. What is more, these dialogic features could be equated with constant interactions and conversations offered, as found as the basis of any long-term, mutual relationships (Taylor et al., 2001). In conclusion, how effectively multinational public relations agencies utilize their Weibo pages with an understanding of the dialogic capacity of the microblogging to develop two-way communication, is the key to permitting them to decide the extent to which they wish to develop mutually beneficial relationships with other Weibo users. While sending too many messages may clutter followers' Weibo feeds, an organization that sends too few messages or even no messages would have a risk of being neglected among other messages. As indicated by the findings, the vast majority of agencies have upgraded their Weibo pages in the duration of coding. In this thesis about multinational public relations which need to cultivate relationship with online stakeholders, the most useful information category should be public relations-related contents, and the results show that few messages were not connected to public relations practices. Also, all links that the agencies provided on their Weibo page were internal links of their own which promises to keep all users into agencies' sites, which is the rule of conversations of visitors in incorporating dialogic communications on social media (Kent & Taylor, 1998). As for the agencies that did include elements

including pictures, URL address, and videos in the sample messages, these multinational public relations agencies would attract more users to pay more attentions to their message-sending on their Weibo pages. However, although Weibo is designed to provide corporate users a chance to get feedback from the public and respond them, they did not regard Weibo as a dialogical loop as it is supposed to be, for these agencies did not catch this brilliant opportunity to get others' feedback and respond to them actively.

As long as multinational public relations agencies know the ways their stakeholders use social media sites in the Chinese market, microblogging will be an effective way to reach these groups effectively. Specifically, with the growth of Weibo in every sector such as business, education and so on, more and more audiences in a broader diversity in spite of their age, culture and social socio-economic status will be on this popular microblogging site (Waters et al., 2009). As a result, these multinational public relations agencies in the Chinese market, as the primary executants in public relations practices, need to facilitate more with Weibo in cultivating relationships with online stakeholders and meeting the increasing expectations and demands of their stakeholders. The findings indicated that although agencies have activities on their Weibo, they did not fully utilize the potential of Weibo as a dialogical communication tool to cultivate stakeholder relationships online, and especially need to further increase interacting with other Weibo users and to further respond to questions and comments. Messages on their Weibo

accounts are mainly related to public relations, but these are a type of one-way communication rather than two-way communication in disseminating information. However, they have done much about engagement in reaching their stakeholders online by incorporating with Weibo functions.

This study does have limitations that need to be acknowledged. Though the findings indicated that multinational public relations agencies need to do more to enhance their applications with Weibo in cultivating relationships with their online stakeholders, it should be pointed out that only 22 agencies were examined. Also, among these agencies, most of them are American-based multinational corporations, so it may be found that the study results were influenced by this cultural factor, and agencies in other countries may use microblogging sites differently in China. In addition, this research only considered Sina Weibo, but there exist also other popular microblogging sites, such as Tencent Weibo, Sohu Weibo, Fanfo.com, and so on. Another limitation in this study is that it could not measure the number of private messages sent between agencies and the public online. There is a possibility that conversations took place in the private messages section that researchers could not see in the public sector. As a result, while the results indicated that multinational public relations agencies may not frequently be interactive with other Weibo users, this conclusion may be untrue. Possibly, the private messages section may be a preferred way for agencies to build relationships and interact with their online stakeholders. Another important limitation to this research is that the effectiveness of

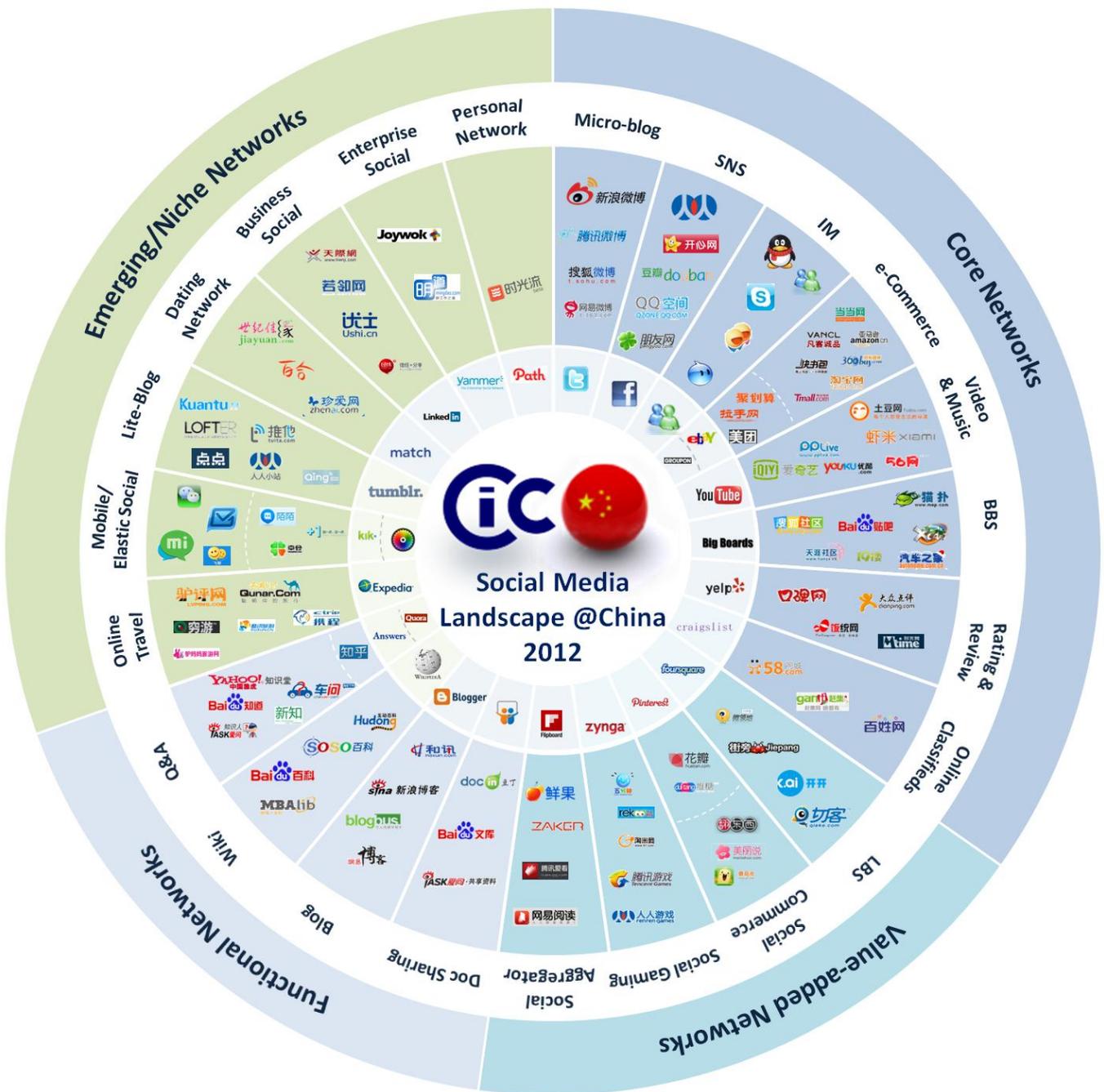
the Sina Weibo as a platform to develop relationships still remains to be proven.

Public relations scholars have examined relationship cultivation on traditional Web sites and blogs, but little research has been done on new social media sites. When it comes to microblogging in China, there is very little published material discussing this new phenomenon. Therefore, the indices measured in this study were formed based on publications studying traditional websites and several other kinds of social media sites, such as social networking sites, rather than on a new theoretical framework but they were based on a study of media strategies discussed in previous studies.

These limitations do not undermine the importance of the research, but introduce varied new research ideas for public relations and organizational communication scholars. Although this research might offer insights into how Weibo can better assist relationship-improvement efforts, more research must be conducted to analyze how other dimensions of Weibo can assist these efforts. As Weibo continues to be one of the most popular social media applications in China, understanding how it can most effectively be used by public relations practitioners is valuable for academic and professional purposes. However, studies are still needed to determine the results of developing microblogging sites. In this thesis, a test about other users' attitudes among those who made comments were examined, and the results indicated they were interested in replying to Weibo messages from multinational public relations agencies. However, it would be interesting to know

whether there is a relation between the levels of incorporating Weibo as a relationship-building tool and the reactions of other Weibo users about information dissemination. Also, as an agency-orientated research, it would be helpful to conduct surveys or interviews with public relations practitioners to find out whether multinational public relations agencies felt they could be used to engage in dialogue and foster online relationships, or whether they felt that the internet-based platform was the most helpful avenue in cultivating two-way communications and relationships with online stakeholders through Weibo in China.

APPENDIX A
CIC 2012 CHINA SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE



Social Media Infographics (2013). CIC China Social Media Landscape 2013.
Retrieved from
http://www.ciccorporate.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=74&Itemid=184&lang=en

**APPENDIX B
MULTINATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCIES IN CHINA**

Table B-1.

Rank 2012	Agency Name	Office Amount in China	Message Quantity1	Follower Quantity1	Message Quantity2	Follower Quantity2	Last Activity	Message Quantity Changed	Message Increase %	Follower Quantity Changed	Follower Increase %	Internal Links	Contact Information	Intro
1	Edelman	5	697	2105	741	2280	1/10/2013	44	6%	175	8%	1	0	1
2	Weber Shandwich	5	399	18583	415	18860	12/7/2012	16	4%	277	1%	4	Email Phone NO.	1
3	Fleishman - Hillard	5	16	565	25	609	1/6/2013	9	56%	44	8%	0	Email Phone NO. Address	1
4	MSL Group	4	718	2949	727	3057	12/25/2012	9	1%	108	4%	1	0	1
5	Burson -Marsteller	4	690	16184	749	16596	1/9/2013	59	9%	412	3%	4	Phone NO. Address	1
6	Hill+Knowlton Strategies	5	459	2573	459	2744	10/17/2012	0	0%	171	7%	1	0	1
7	Ketchum	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8	Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide	5	919	103634	970	106197	1/10/2013	51	6%	2563	2%	7	0	1
9	EuroRSCG Worldwide	5	42	1368	42	1371	2/22/2012	0	0%	3	0%	3	0	0
10	FTI Consulting	4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	Brunswick Group	3	0	7	0	7	N/A	0	0%	0	0%	0	0	0
12	Cohn&Wolfe		1093	3405	1071	3489	1/9/2013	-22	-2%	84	2%	2	Phone NO. Address	1
13	GolinHarris	5	448	470	562	531	1/10/2013	114	25%	61	13%	0	0	0

Table B-1. Continued

14	Grayling	2	41	313	50	336	1/9/2013	9	22%	23	7%	1	Phone NO. Address	0
15	Media Consulta International	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
16	APCO Worldwide	3	11	234	31	322	12/24/2012	20	182%	88	38%	2	Email	1
17	Waggener Edstrom Worldwide	3	323	930	457	974	1/10/2013	134	41%	44	5%	2	0	0
18	Porter Novelli	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
19	Ruder Finn	4	26	900	26	1191	9/10/2012	0	0%	291	32%	0	0	0
21	Chandler Chicco Companies	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
22	RLM Finsbury4	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
23	KREAB Gavin Anderson	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
26	PRAP Japan	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
27	Text 100	2	423	882	427	896	12/13/2012	4	1%	14	2%	3	0	1
28	BlueFocus Consulting Group	3	49	10929	54	11361	11/14/2012	5	10%	432	4%	0	0	0
34	Citigate Dewe Rogerson	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
37	Dentsu Public Relations	1	981	8563	1157	9732	1/5/2013	176	18%	1169	14%	4	Email Phone NO. Address	1
38	College Group	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
40	LEWIS PR	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table B-1. Continued

48	Bite Communications	3	13	80	13	84	10/25/2011	0	0%	4	5%	1	0	0
49	Hotwire	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
52	Llorente & Cuenca	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
55	Oliver Schott Kommunikation	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
59	Strategic Public Relations Group	5	37	167	37	178	9/5/2012	0	0%	11	7%	0	0	0
61	M: Communications	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
127	Nelson Bostock Group	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
129	The Hoffman Agency	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
139	Kirchhoff Consult	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
170	Shine Communications	1	81	54	319	82	12/22/2012	238	294%	28	52%	0	0	0
184	Akkanto	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
232	Storymaker	1	1224	1725	1235	1747	1/3/2013	11	1%	22	1%	4	0	1
246	Ewing Group	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	110	8690	176620	9567	182644	N/A	877	10%	6024	3%	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Average	2.62	395	8028	435	8302			31%	274	10%			

*Messages and followers quantities tagged with 1 were collected by November 6th, 2012, and messages and followers quantities tagged with 1 were collected by November 6th, 2012.

APPENDIX C
CODING SHEET

Column record	Variable name	Variable label	Value labels
1	DATE	Date of a message sent	MM/DD/YYYY
2	SOURCE	Source of a message	1 = Edelman 2 = Weber Shandwich 3 = Fleishman-Hillard 4 = MSL Group 5 = Burson-Marsteller 6 = Hill+Knowlton Strategies 7 = Ogilvy Public Relations Worldwide 8 = EuroRSCG Worldwide 9 = Brunswick Group 10 = Cohn&Wolfe 11 = GolinHarris 12 = Grayling 13 = APCO Worldwide 14 = Waggener Edstrom Worldwide 15 = Ruder Finn 16 = Text 100 17 = BlueFocus Consulting Group 18 = Dentsu Public Relations 19 = Bite Communications 20 = Strategic Public Relations Group 21 = Shine Communications 22 = Storymaker
3	LANGUAGE	Language of a message	1 = Only in Chinese 2 = Only in English 3 = Both in Chinese and English 4 = Only in others 5 = Include others

4	RELEVANCE1	Relevant to public relations business with a client	0 = No 1 = Yes
5	RELEVANCE2	Relevant to an internal multinational public relations agency who sent the message	0 = No 1 = Yes
6	RELEVANCE3	Relevant to the headquarters and/or other oversea affiliates of a multinational public relations agency who sent the message	0 = No 1 = Yes
7	RELEVANCE4	Relevant to other multinational public relations agencies in China rather than the agency who sent a message	0 = No 1 = Yes
8	RELEVANCE5	Relevant to news release by media	0 = No 1 = Yes
9	RELEVANCE6	Relevant to government regulation	0 = No 1 = Yes
10	RELEVANCE7	Relevant to communities in China	0 = No 1 = Yes
11	RELEVANCE8	Relevant to others	0 = No 1 = Yes
12	MESSAGE1	Picture attachment	0 = No 1 = Yes
13	MESSAGE2	Video attachment	0 = No 1 = Yes
14	MESSAGE3	Audio attachment	0 = No 1 = Yes
15	MESSAGE4	URL attachment	0 = No 1 = Yes
16	MENTION	Mention other user (with an @ sign)	0 = No 1 = Yes

17	HASHTAG	Hashtag (with a # sign)	0 = No 1 = Yes
18	ORIGIN	Origin of a message	1 = The agency original sent 2 = Forward from others
19-21	USERS1	Amount of users who liked a message	000-999
22-24	USERS2	Amount of users who shared a message without comments	000-999
25-27	USERS3	Amount of users who shared a message with comments	000-999
28-30	USERS4	Amount of users who only made comments without sharing a messages	000-999
31-33	USERS5	Amount of users mentioned others in a comment (made a comment with an @ sign other than the original author of a message)	000-999
34-35	FREQUENCY	Number of responses in a conversation between the same two users goes back and forth	00-99
36-37	CONVERSATION	Percentage of effective conversations included in a message (comments that are responded to by the message sender)	00-99

38-40	ATTITUDE1	Amount of positive comments	000-999
41-43	ATTITUDE2	Amount of negative comments	000-999
44-46	ATTITUDE3	Amount of comments with mixed and/or neutral attitudes	000-999

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