Social Media in China

Best Practice Examples of European Institutions

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A growing number of non-Chinese academic, scientific and cultural institutions are active on the Chinese Internet, on Chinese social networks and micro blogging platforms.

A closer look has been taken at a number of the above-mentioned institutions and discussions have been conducted with the responsible persons, in order to understand the motivations of the institutions, their main goals, methods, difficulties and future scenarios. We chose European institutions as their situation is more similar to the Swiss ones, as they face the same problem in competing with US institutions (for Chinese students, for example, the first address to go to study are US universities).

These institutions are addressing the Chinese public via different means: 1) proprietary platforms, 2) social networking platforms (e.g., http://www.douban.com) and micro blogging systems (mostly via the most popular Chinese micro blogging platform http://www.weibo.com).

The goal is essentially the same: information about the country, promotion of academia, research targeted at Chinese students and academics, facilitating cooperation projects, language learning, socializing, etc.
1. Aurore-Sciences: Bilingual Platform for French and Chinese Scientists

www.aurore-sciences.org

Aurore is an initiative of the scientific service of the Consulate General of France in Shanghai, developed in cooperation with the French university cooperation service (service de coopération universitaire), Campus France, the Académie des Sciences, and the Institut Français. Its main mission is to monitor the scientific and technological development in the circonscription of Shanghai (Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui), follow the sino-french scientific cooperation; reinforce the attractiveness of France in the scientific community in China.

Start page of Aurore-Sciences, showing the different modules of the website
Furthermore, it receives a courtesy support by the Ministry of Education of China, which recommends this platform and activity to the Chinese scientists but is not actively contributing to the platform.

Aurore-Sciences is a bilingual (Chinese / French) proprietary platform, which enables an information exchange between Chinese and French scientists. It is an interactive database as well as a portal for research and for sino-french cooperation in the field of tertiary education. It aims at facilitating the exchange and collaborations on the level of institutions, laboratories and individual researchers. It makes it easy for researchers to initiate a contact, to establish user groups centered on a common research topic and facilitates the information exchange within groups of researchers. The database has been started as an internal tool for use of tracking addresses, meetings, protocols and also divided (upon external requests by French scientists) into a public and non public part by the Consulate of France.

The content of the website is available in French and Chinese, with some content available in French and English only. By February 2012, the platform includes the personal pages of 800 scientists and 650 institutions approximately, divided into 14 thematic subcategories.

**The Aurore-Sciences platform offers the following information:**

- News from the French / Chinese campus, news from the French Embassy in Beijing, scientific articles by members (which can be subscribed by RSS feeds), biographies of scientists (after approval by Consulate of France), explanation of the Chinese and French university system (including organigrams of all the universities registered on the platform)

**The Aurore-Sciences platform has the following functionalities:**

- Pages for institutions
- Topic-centered user groups
- Messaging and comment function (which history can be displayed)
- Sophisticated search and filtering system (by research areas, simple + advanced search). The platform incorporates the French university registration tool.
Personal pages for individual researchers

Institutional affiliation
In order to be more user-friendly, the plan is to adapt the design of the platform, to improve the filtering system and to integrate the website with social media platforms via links. The expectation of this improvement is a higher traffic/visit to/on the web site.

**Workflow of the Aurore-Sciences platform**

The Consulate General of France in Shanghai has created a list of Chinese universities, starting with the most important 200 ones, from which a new user registering can be chosen when creating his/her own page, in order to avoid double entries or misspellings. The participating scientists can create their own page, and update the content themselves. Before the account goes online, it will be approved by the staff of the French Consulate in Shanghai.

Scientists can create groups based on their research interest (including functionalities i.e. emailing, instant messaging, sharing documents etc.)

For the maintenance of the website, the Consulate of France in Shanghai dedicates 4-6 internal people as well as 2 people from the Academy of Sciences. Furthermore they receive the support from a freelancer who is working online. The software was developed by a French company in Shanghai.

The success of the Aurore-Sciences platform lies in the fact that it addresses a very concrete problem (managing the information flow within an institution) and its open, collaborative and interactive structure allowing a simple and direct interaction between users.
2 British Council

Accounts from the British Council on the Chinese Social Media as on Sina Weibo (http://t.sina.com.cn/bcchina), Tencent Weibo (http://t.qq.com/britishcouncil), Douban (http://site.douban.com/britishcouncil), Kaixin (http://www.kaixin001.com/britishcouncil) exist since 2009. The British Council was one of the first foreign institutions to join major SNS and microblogging platforms in China. The British Council's strategy is divided into a local strategy and a worldwide one; in China, it maintains corporate accounts (British Council Beijing, Shanghai), local project accounts as well as international project accounts (for special projects like Zero Carbon Center, Green Idea).

**British Council on Sina Weibo:** Each site gives a short introduction on the institution (left column), the postings (middle column), tags, projects, affiliated persons, fans and groups on the right.

**The Content**

50% of the created content is about event and promotion and 50% is dedicated to the direct user interaction and long term engagement with the users. Furthermore special campaigns (e.g. the visit...
of the Prime Minister to China, the Royal Wedding etc) has been maintained and published. The content is tailored for different platforms, the messages are formulated so that readers can easily react, incorporate texts and pictures. Postings contain project specific content but also general content which is related to the UK as a whole, but has no direct link to the work of the British Council in China. In addition, a special content section is related to the study of the English language, to English language exams and programs, students exchange. British Council is adopting one of the strategies which are essential for success on Chinese (micro blogging) platforms: to reach out to celebrities who drive traffic to an account.

Live tweeting from events has proved to be a very important part of the work, which implies a thorough briefing of project managers before the event.

**The Workflow**

The British Council project managers are responsible for their accounts. During the monthly planning session, including members of different project teams, it is decided which content and mixture, related to the activity/topic, should be taken. This allows the teams to come up with interesting mixture of content and awareness for the end-user. All the work related to social media is done in-house.

**Social Media Evaluation Strategy**

The evaluation is based on an internal model which British Council is currently developing. On a quantitative level, it considers the number of users, of postings, re-postings, mentions and comments. British Council also tries to assess the impact of social media usage via their impact on traditional media, like print media or TV.
3 Goethe Institute Beijing / Shanghai

The Goethe Institute is not present on Chinese social media, due to a lack of human resources.

Their promotional work is done via classic bilingual websites:
http://www.goethe.de/ins/cn/pek/deindex.htm?wt_sc=peking;
http://www.goethe.de/ins/cn/sha/deindex.htm
4 Instituto Cervantes

The Spanish “Instituto Cervantes” in Beijing as well as in Shanghai have been observed: Instituto Cervantes in Beijing [http://pekin.cervantes.es/cn/default.shtm] has a Sina Weibo account [http://www.weibo.com/u/1865445673] which is used mainly for announcing events and posting language related content. Furthermore, it is present on Youku (the Chinese Youtube) [http://u.youku.com/user_show/id_UmZzA1OTYyNzl0.html] as well as Douban [http://site.douban.com/cervantesbj/].

**Instituto Cervantes on Sina Weibo**

In Shanghai, the Spanish Instituto Cervantes is present as the Biblioteca Miguel de Cervantes [http://biblioteca-shanghai.cervantes.es/cn/default.htm] and is active on Sina Weibo [http://weibo.com/biblicervantessh], on Douban [http://site.douban.com/bibliocervsh/], with literature and film related content, mainly, on Youku [http://u.youku.com/%E4%B8%BA%E6%B5%B7%E5%A1%9E%E4%B8%87%E6%8F%90%E6%96%AF], as well as on a photo sharing site [http://photo.163.com]. The Spanish Instituto Cervantes is rethinking its social media strategy for China, planning to hire a Chinese journalist in order to maintain the different accounts and to create a more vivid presence on the Chinese Internet.
5 Robert Bosch Stiftung

The German Robert Bosch Stiftung ([http://www.bosch-stiftung.de/content/language1/html/index.asp](http://www.bosch-stiftung.de/content/language1/html/index.asp)) is one of the major German foundations associated with a private company and has managed the philanthropic request of the company founder Robert Bosch for more than 40 years, promoting educational, cultural and dialogue programs.

Robert Bosch Stiftung on Sina Weibo

The Robert Bosch Stiftung is present on Sina Weibo since the beginning of 2012 ([http://weibo.com/robertboschstiftung](http://weibo.com/robertboschstiftung)). A Chinese doctoral student who studied in Germany and is now based in Beijing maintains the account. The content on Sina Weibo is centered around the program „Magnet China“ ([http://www.magnet-china.de](http://www.magnet-china.de)) – a dialog series on the occasion of the Year of Chinese Culture in 2012. The start of these activities was gathering questions from the Chinese audience for a TV discussion between Helmut Schmidt, a Chinese scholar and a German journalist.
6 Heinrich Böll Stiftung

The German Heinrich Böll Stiftung ([http://www.boell.de](http://www.boell.de)) is one of six political foundations in Germany. It is associated with the German Green Party, but is legally independent and works in the spirit of intellectual openness.

Its office in Beijing ([http://www.boell-china.org](http://www.boell-china.org)) works in cooperation with the Chinese Association for NGO Cooperation (CANGO), carrying out projects to strengthen civil society development in China and internationally. It also works with other civil society organisations, governmental departments and academic institutions to provide positive motivations for development and reform in China and for a better understanding between China and Germany.

For political reasons, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung cannot use social media in China, due to the fact that their topics as democracy, development of a civil society, reform etc. are very sensitive in China. Dialogues or comments on those topics can risk the entire activity for the organization in China.

7. Conclusion

Taking into consideration of all above listed and discussed examples of European institutions, which are active or partially engaged on social media in China, in order to be successful on Chinese Social Media, the following aspects are crucial:

- Development of a clear overall strategy which defines the platform/s platform to use: Given the fact that Chinese users are using more than one social media platform to organize their social life, it seems to make sense to chose more than one platform and to be clear of how to enhance them mutually.
- Allocation of enough human resources to maintain the account[s]
- Definition of a clear workflow and a communication strategy
- Tailor of content to the habits and needs of the Chinese users (content must be heavily localized): not only text, but also picture, video etc. A European strategy simply transferred to China is problematic. One must also be conscious about the language issue: content must be in Chinese, in order to reach the right target audience (i.e. students, mass public, etc.).
- Share of content across platforms
- Establishment of a network
- Self-censorship: Western institutions using Chinese social media must be aware of the fact that the Chinese Internet is censored. Micro blogging platforms are under special scrutiny of the censors. The institutions have to be aware of certain restrictions.