Introduction

This paper describes the pilot project “Social Media and Academic Communication” conducted by swissnex China, HEC Lausanne, and University of St. Gallen (HSG). The project aims to explore the feasibility of a platform promoting knowledge about Swiss universities and research to Chinese audiences and to come up with a set of recommendations for academic institutions in Switzerland that wish to leverage an exchange between two academic communities.

As you will discover through the report, such an endeavor is by no means an easy task, but it is our contention that social media in its current form can help to a certain extent. Contrary to assumptions, Chinese social media is extremely dynamic and offers an exciting avenue to reinforce the Sino-Swiss academic relationship.

The report is structured as follows. We present first a survey conducted among the two audiences initially targeted (i.e. Chinese academics/researchers and students). Second, we describe the selection process of the Chinese social media channel and the pilot universities. We then turn to the actual pilot project and its analysis. We conclude with some recommendations addressed to Swiss academic institutions and swissnex China in order to take the pilot project to its next phase.

* We wish to thank the Gebert Rüf Stiftung for its generous support to the project.
Part 1
Survey of Social Media Usage among Chinese Academics and Students

In order to get a clearer picture about the Chinese social media landscape, swissnex China commissioned the Beijing-based consultancy company, All China Marketing Research, to conduct a survey among 120 university students and 24 university professors at universities across China*. The universities were chosen to form a representative sample in terms of geographic diversity and different research areas.

The objective of the survey was two-fold. First was to investigate how Chinese university professors connect to the scientific community via social media. Secondly, to investigate how Chinese students make use of social media to gather information regarding studies abroad.

For university professors, the usage of social media is concentrated around Sina Weibo, Renren and Qzone for domestic social media sites and around Facebook and LinkedIn for foreign social media sites. Most of the interviewees know about social media sites in a very general way. Only about 20% of the professors use social media themselves. Results indicate a significant age gap. Older professors are not accustomed to using the Internet and some of them cannot use a computer. In addition many of the younger professors do not have the spare time to use social media. Among the sample who does utilize social media, the most popular platforms are Sina Weibo (micro-blogging), Renren, and Qzone (social networks) as well as Facebook and LinkedIn.

Academics mainly employ social media sites to communicate their personal status, be informed about news, and socialize**. They mostly communicate their personal viewpoints about a topic relevant to their field or the progress and dynamics of a certain research field. They also search for news and information about their field published by “friends” and to inform themselves about the academic viewpoint of colleagues.

* The sample of institutions comprised Tsinghua University, Renmin University / Beijing; Fudan University / Shanghai; Wuhan University, Sun Yat-sen University / Guangzhou; Harbin Institute of Technology. All institutions belong to the top 39 Chinese universities.

** While coming in a second place communication about research-related information remains marginal.
Only 4.2% of the professors use social media to communicate with partners abroad. The main communication channels used during an international cooperation project are: email (56%), telephone (27%), instant messaging (e.g. QQ, MSN, etc.), Skype, LinkedIn (via groups and for certain topics), and personal talk. LinkedIn is the preferred channel as it is massively used by foreign researchers and is easier to directly link to other researchers. The reasons advanced for not using more social media in communicating with foreign researchers are multiple: it is not clear which channel to chose; the traditional communication channels are satisfying the communication needs; the communication with foreign scholars takes place mostly in an official context where the use of social media is not appropriate; the interactivity degree and efficiency is low when using social media with foreign partners as there are delays in obtaining answers. Furthermore, it is very difficult to connect with decision makers on social media.

In our analysis, a number of additional factors may explain the limited usage of social media among academics. First, there is a fragmentation over different channels and media (e.g. the French Aurore-Science initiative). Second, there is a lack of visibility as to which social media channel(s) will emerge as the most relevant for scientific communication. Given the limited time available to Chinese academics, one cannot reasonably expect them to “invest” in more than a couple social media. Third, there seems to be a mutual difficulty to assess and use social media channels outside of one’s own community*. Last, and perhaps more surprisingly, the academic community tends to be a late adopter of social media when compared to the business community and the broader public.

* One notable exception to this statement is the use of LinkedIn, which is not blocked in China and appears to provide a suitable environment for Chinese academics.
Students use Renren, Sina Weibo, and Douban predominantly to get information about studying abroad. Students are interested in the following information about non-Chinese universities:

- Overall introduction (e.g. ranking, school characteristics and specialties, tuition level, countries the students come from, career prospect)
- Specific information about majors (e.g. ranking, curriculum, dominant and characteristic majors)
- Campus and living environment (e.g. natural scenery and social environment, cultural and learning atmosphere, accommodation condition)
- Scientific research (e.g. key laboratories, faculty, scientific research achievements)
- Admission policies (e.g. requirements, application process, deadlines, previous admission situation, scholarship policy)

Suggestions from teachers and friends, the foreign university’s official website and agencies are other important channels to gather information about foreign universities. College freshman and junior students rely more on teachers and friends while seniors rely more on the official website of the university. Social media is an important channel to obtain information about studying abroad. Senior students show a higher usage rate than freshmen. Social media is also important for the discussion of topics related to studying abroad; the main platforms for this are Renren, Sina Weibo, and Douban.

The survey also revealed some important elements about the knowledge and perception of the Swiss university landscape and Switzerland in general. Among the sample, more than 80% of the students are not familiar with the Swiss higher education system. For various reasons, over 70% of the students do not consider Switzerland as a primary choice. Reputation, language, and financial aspects are among the most cited barriers for not considering studies in Switzerland. If considering studies in Switzerland preferences go to short-term studies such as a summer school or a Master’s degree.

* Preferences regarding social media vary according the age of students (i.e. the younger they are, the more they use Renren).
** There are no distinctive differences between boys and girls.
87% of the interviewed students do not know anything about Switzerland. The remaining 13% have a number of images in mind about Switzerland: the official language of Switzerland is German while the education system is similar to Germany. Swiss universities are famous in the fields of hotel management, bio-pharmaceutics, and environmental sciences.

Regarding the Swiss education system, assumptions are that elementary education is free, the length of master education is 1 year, and the tuition of studying abroad in Switzerland is higher than other countries with fewer scholarships available. For the sample interviewed, famous Swiss universities include the University of Zurich, the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETHZ), the Graduate Institute in Geneva, the University of Basel, and the University of Berne.
Part 2
Selection of the Social Media Channel for the Pilot Project

A number of elements were taken into account in the choice of the social media channel. These included an in-depth analysis of the Chinese social media landscape, the usage of social media by other foreign institutions, swissnex China’s experience with social media, as well as the requirements of the Chinese Internet service providers. After weighing several factors, decision was taken to use Sina Weibo as the main channel of communication.

Launched in August 2009, Weibo.com began as a micro-blogging service that enabled users to follow celebrities and share User Generated Content (UGC) online. Weibo.com has since expanded its user base to include commercial entities, such as small and medium enterprises, Fortune 1000 companies, media firms, and government organizations. In September 2011, Weibo.com upgraded to include social networking features and improved open-platform architecture to host internally developed and third-party applications.

Key functionalities of Weibo.com include the following: micro-blogging, messaging, and social networking services including picture albums, music, event organization, question sessions, and constitution of groups around communities of interest. Weibo.com also offers an open application programming interface (API) platform that allows Weibo users to access a rich collection of applications developed internally and those offered by third-party application developers. To support the open platform environment, Sina Corp. offers a cloud computing service that allows third-party application developers to develop and host applications utilizing SINA’s infrastructure and bandwidth, known as SINA Application Engine (SAE). Applications include games, Kandian (an internally developed social video platform that allows users to share video content from SINA’s own video channel as well as third-party video websites), listening to radio, “light blogging”, space to upload and manage files, and even an online currency.

* See the report “Social Media in China” conducted by the project team in 2012.
User verification and registration play a very important role when using this tool. In order to open a Sina Weibo account that has “credibility” and is listed in the “university” section of the verified accounts (which is “the Hall of Fame” of Weibo), it must be verified. The major difference between verified and non-verified users lies in the fact that verified users are more “credible” than non-verified users and are defined as “elite” in their respective field. Celebrities, which are extremely present on Sina Weibo, are all verified. When applying for verification, one can choose between 28 categories and 486 professions (as of end of January 2013). A verified user has a “V” as part of his account name. Verified members have a special page which is divided into: Hall of Fame (celebrities, industry leaders, etc.), media, brands, government, website, campus, and agency. It is easy for newcomers to find people they might be interested in following. Rankings exist for the most popular accounts.

However, the verification procedure on Sina Weibo changed during the duration of the project. In December 2011, the Chinese government announced regulations forcing each user to have his personal identity verified by submitting his ID number in order to be able to actively use a micro-blogging platform.

The “Campus” section lists all verified university accounts (Chinese and foreign). In order to be verified, the universities have to hand in a letter of application (with official stamp) describing the university and the purpose of the Sina Weibo account.

Sina Weibo is currently the most influential micro-blogging platform in China. It is one of the platforms that offer the most creative potential, but also one that requires great flexibility and permanent monitoring of the functionalities on the side of the account holders. Software, interface, and backend updates occur frequently. Due to its success, it is also heavily monitored and censored by the Chinese government and forced to adjust itself to the ever-changing Internet regulations.

* The procedure differs in terms of account category (e.g. personal, business, academic)
** In order to reach the original goal, the Chinese government has passed a “Decision regarding Strengthening Network Information Protection” which orders the real-name-verification of each user using the services of ISP and internet information providers
*** The regulations came into effect in March 2012. Contrary to its announcement, the Chinese government did not hinder (so far) these non-verified users to take actively part in the micro-blogging platform.
**** See Appendix 1 for the pilot partners’ certificates of authorization.
Other social media channels were excluded for reasons related to the verification process. For instance, Renren was not an option for the Swiss universities as the verification was complicated and lacked transparency. In addition, the ecology surrounding Renren is much less developed and hence less prone to generating visibility. Moreover, Sina Weibo has already generated a certain level of attention for Switzerland through other active Swiss related accounts (e.g. Swiss tourism or the Swiss Embassy in Beijing). Finally, developing a standalone channel such as Aurore-Science is outside the scope of the project. The French platform is designed as a central repository of Sino-French research projects and researchers*.


** A description of Aurore-Science is available in the report “Best Practice Examples of European Institutions” (2012).
Part 3
Selection of the Swiss Universities for the Pilot Project

The selection of partner universities for the pilot project is based on the findings from the landscape analysis as well as the interest displayed by some of the institutions surveyed*.

Interviews conducted in mid-2012 reveal that China will undoubtedly play a role in the international cooperation strategy of most, if not all, institutions. Most foreign universities tend to be interested in bilateral agreements and cooperation with Chinese academic institutions. However, there are different levels of intensity in terms of striking partnerships; the type of partnership also depends on the type of institution under consideration (e.g. looking for industrial partners or academic partners, building research cooperation projects or general agreements). In addition, differences exist within institutions (i.e. between the various faculties as to their interest/implications vis-à-vis China). A number of institutions are also keen on maintaining a balance towards the origin of international students in order to create a truly international learning environment. Concerns and questions are also raised to the management of the institutional brand in Chinese.

In addition, the interviews showed that by mid-2012, there were significant knowledge gaps regarding the Chinese social media landscape and dynamism. In fact, social media in general was starting to gain acceptance by Swiss academic institutions, not the least thanks to the swissnex San Francisco social media initiative**. Not surprisingly, there was no use of Chinese social media at the official level among the interviewed institutions.

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* See the report “Analysis of Selected Swiss Higher Education Institutions and Their Communication Needs Towards Chinese Audiences via Social Media” conducted by the project team (March 2012).
** swissnex San Francisco is currently running a program for Swiss universities called the Digital Campus.
In summary, we found a high level of heterogeneity among the institutions (cantonal universities, federal institutes of technology, and universities of applied sciences) in regards to their “China strategy” and social media strategy. While displaying interest towards integrating Chinese social media in their overall communication strategy, most institutions felt the need to prioritize the use of resources by channeling, first and foremost, towards “traditional” social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) addressing their core targets (students in Switzerland and neighboring European countries). In addition, many institutions expressed the need to carve out an explicit “China strategy” of which Chinese social media would be one element.

3.1 Actual Selection Process

A number of institutions surveyed in 2012 were approached a second time to evaluate its interest to participate in the pilot. The follow-up discussions confirmed a number of points. The interest towards participating in the pilot was highly correlated to the existence (or not) of a well-defined China strategy and priority of the Chinese market. An additional factor rested on the resources (human, financial) that institutions were able or willing to set aside for the project. In other words, while a number of institutions showed a keen interest in Chinese social media project, few were in a position to join the project.

From a project management perspective, a deliberate decision was made to limit the number of partners given the relative novelty of social media among Swiss tertiary institutions and resources available within the project team. A further consideration included the relative immaturity and related volatility of the Chinese social media landscape. For instance, the legal and business environments of service providers like Sina Weibo evolve very rapidly and, at times, unpredictably. Learning to navigate these environments requires time and a certain level of flexibility, which forced the project team to focus on a limited number of institutions.

In the end, three institutions were short-listed and two agreed to participate in the pilot project: the University of St. Gallen (hereafter HSG) and HEC Lausanne (hereafter HEC). Both institutions had been approached during the initial phase of the project and were interested in taking part in a pilot phase.
Part 4
Description of the Pilot

The pilot project took place between September 2012 and February 2013.

4.1 Verification and Registration

A lengthy and cumbersome registration and verification process preceded the first postings. Together with the relevant representatives at HEC and HSG, swissnex China opted for the creation of an individual account for each of the universities participating in the pilot project. For the universities, this meant deciding which entity (e.g. at the department level or at the university level) of the University would be the “holder” of the account – information essential for the verification process.

In order to increase the audience for the universities, a decision was taken to set up a “Campus Switzerland” account in order to play the role of an umbrella and amplifier (e.g. providing more background information about the Swiss university research landscapes). In the process of registering the accounts, it emerged that an account without institutional background is very difficult to register *. Instead, it was decided to use the existing and active swissnex China account on Sina Weibo and Renren to play this amplifier role (e.g. re-posting messages posted by the universities, “@”ing the universities, etc.).

4.2 Workflow

Each university named a person to be the “communicator” between the university and swissnex China; providing content, which the university found interesting for the Chinese audience (text, pictures, and video). On the swissnex China side, a Chinese colleague acted as the “translator” and transformed the provided content into Weibo packages; translating it into Chinese and uploading the content onto the respective Weibo accounts. In addition, the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the universities were checked frequently for additional information.

* Registering “Campus Switzerland” as an academic institution was not possible because we were not able to deliver the documents requested by Sina Weibo.
4.3 Postings

Content was geared at building a positive image by providing relevant information related to the pilot partners. The content can roughly be divided into the following categories:

- General introduction to the institution (e.g. history, mission, etc.)
- Information about courses (e.g. program descriptions, information about Bachelor, Master, and PhD programs) and rankings
- Information about research (e.g. research focus and projects)
- Information about application, admission, scholarships, and tuition
- Announcement of events, special activities, awards, prizes, etc.
- Description of campus life
- Showcasing of alumni

Factbox: Making Sense of Weibo’s Functionalities

**Professor Pigneur’s Lecture on the “Business Canvas Model”**

Organized by swissnex China, the extremely well-attended lecture by Professor Pigneur reached a large audience. Pigneur, the publisher of the Chinese version of “Business Canvas Model” (19,010 followers) and a think-tank (35,000 followers) announced the event on Weibo and had a large amount of re-tweets; the swissnex China Weibo posts were also re-tweeted by users with many followers; the live tweeting from the event by several Weibo users added to the impact; information about the event and a link to the video of the presentation was published by the Weibo account on Youku (1.4 million followers). The video presenting the business model canvas has been viewed more than 136,000 times by end of March 2013.
4.4 Example of Individual Weibo Postings

How do the development and changes in society influence our “work”? From March 15 to 18, at the “Challenge the Best Conference”, teachers and students from St. Gallen University will discuss work models of the future. The program is here: http://t.cn/zY17eVr.

Mathias Thoenig, economics professor at HEC Lausanne, has been awarded a starter grant from the European Research Council (ERC). This grant, worth just over 1 million Euros spread over 60 months, will allow Professor Thoenig and his team to launch a major interdisciplinary research project entitled “The Economics of Grievances and Ethnic Conflicts”. http://t.cn/zjUqxYs
Part 5
Analysis of the Pilot

5.1 Process

As we have experienced in the process of account registering, the rules may change very quickly, and have an impact on the usage of the platform. In both cases, the verification procedure took roughly three weeks. In the future, this could most likely be reduced significantly – provided that all documents are prepared in advance.

Too much time went by between account registration and posting of first content. More efficiency at this step could be achieved by 1) ensuring that a clear and well-articulated China strategy is in place, 2) identifying how Chinese social media can be leveraged to that end, and 3) ensuring specific content has been developed and prepared in advance (e.g. programs, videos, application process, campus life, stories of alumni and enrolled Chinese students, etc.). Only then should the account be registered.

One also needs to take into consideration that interaction between swissnex China and the Swiss universities can be delayed by time difference. Students asking questions about applications will most likely expect a quick answer.

The frequency, timing, and depth of content varied across the categories and, like with social media in Switzerland, there is a need to have a clear plan as to how to occupy the space with the various content categories over time. It is very important to maintain a continuous feed of content; postings were not frequent enough and this is detrimental to communication and building/maintaining presence on Chinese social media.

5.2 Functionalities

The following Sina Weibo functionalities were used during the project: posting of messages, direct messaging, posting of pictures (album), topics (searchable hash tags), and posting of videos (via Youku). Planned chats / live interviews with Swiss experts were not possible due to Sina Weibo regulations (both the interviewing and the interviewed party have to have a verified account on Sina Weibo with more than 5,000 followers).
5.3 Content

Regarding the students target, more systematic and comprehensive information seems to be required about applications. The same comment applies to content about life on campus and university facilities. A suggestion would be to build more on stories and experiences from current Chinese students and alumni.

Content published on Sina Weibo by foreign institutions is, to a very great extent, published in Chinese or in both a foreign language and Chinese; only very few Weibo accounts are purely in a non-Chinese language. But in order to be read, one not only has to use Chinese, but also follow some Weibo habits – such as the usage of visual emoticons, which can be attached to any post. Once embedded in a post, the emoticon spells out the chosen emotion in characters within the text of the post, the use of “Weibo topics” (#...#), and the use of internet slang in order to circumvent censorship.

The special linguistic situation of Switzerland poses an additional challenge in the communication with the Chinese audience: only a minority of Chinese can read German, French, or Italian. A lot of interesting material about the universities does not exist in English, in particular information about general university life, events, and leisure.

Factbox: How Other Foreign Academic Institutions Leverage Weibo

Group Chat with China

In January 2013, Duke University’s Pratt School of Engineering held a group chat on its Sina Weibo page (http://weibo.com/usdukeuniversity) in order to answer questions from prospective Chinese students for its graduate program. In total, there were 150 participants, with 80 questions posted in the short span of an hour. Graduates and current students in the program were also available to answer questions. Questions and comments focused mainly on the application process and the career opportunities for students who graduate from the program. Duke’s presence on Sina Weibo (3001 followers by March 13, 2013) is part of a Chinese social media strategy developed by Duke’s Director of Global Communications, Laura Brinn and managed in partnership with the Social Media Team.*  

* Source: http://spotlight.duke.edu/socialmedia/2013/01/10/duke-is-chinese-chatting-on-sina-weibo/
EM Lyon’s Use of Weibo for the International Education Fair

Among the foreign institutions boasting a sizeable Weibo account, one can find EM Lyon (e.weibo.com/emlyon) with close to 8000 followers as of March 2013. The French Business School has made use of its presence on Weibo to publicize its participation in the International Education Fairs held in Beijing, Wuhan, Xi’an, and Shanghai. In addition, it has opened a space for questions regarding admissions (e.g. GRE scores) with timely provision of answers. While offering cross-links with the Chinese Campus France website, the School surprisingly does not advertise its Weibo account on its Chinese or French websites.

5.4 Followers*

The number of Sina Weibo followers differs between both institutions (respectively 423 and 228 for HSG and HEC as of March 30). This can be attributed in part to the higher and more constant level of implication from one institution as well as to its more important alumni community in China. The level of service offered by swissnex China has been identical to both institutions.

The fact that Switzerland is a non-English speaking country is also partly responsible for the relatively low number of followers both universities have on Sina Weibo as English-speaking countries are the first choice for Chinese students to explore.

* See Appendix 3 for detailed statistics of both accounts.
Part 6
Feedback from the Pilot Project Partners

Both HSG and HEC showed an overall satisfaction with the pilot project and are interested in maintaining a presence in the Chinese social media landscape. Their positive appreciation stems from a number of factors.

First, cooperation with the swissnex China team is rated as good. Having a dedicated person within the swissnex office in Shanghai (SC) allowed a rapid response to the sending of content from the universities. The pro-activity and re-activity of the Shanghai team also contributed to maintaining the supply of content either by looking for information on the partner universities' websites or by posting content from social media pages (e.g. Facebook, Twitter). In certain cases, SC acted as a direct intermediary between the Swiss institutions and Chinese students (e.g. translating questions from 'netizens' into English and posting the received answers on Sina Weibo in Chinese). In other cases, SC acted as an advisor as to what would speak most to a Chinese audience (e.g. the choice of pictures or the type of content to post).

Second, the amount of resources required to maintain the Sina Weibo account during the pilot phase has been limited. Both institutions have devoted an average of 60-90 minutes per week. While most content originated from existing material (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, or other news), both institutions nonetheless developed some specific content for Sina Weibo. For instance, HEC posted the pictures from the Chinese breakfast it organized for the occasion of the Chinese New Year while HSG had one movie translated into Chinese. HSG also re-posted a video from Swiss Tourism showing the city of Saint Gallen. HEC started interviewing Chinese students whereas HSG will ask Chinese students at St. Gallen to write a diary of their studies.

Both institutions have integrated Sina Weibo into their overall communication strategy. They feel that the pilot has provided an interesting learning experience, further convincing them of the need to offer segmented and adapted content to given channels. The international dimension of the project has reinforced this impression.

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* Feedback from the partners was gathered at the end of March 2013 through an interview.
** Given the censorship in China this has required using a Virtual Private Network (VPN).
*** More thoughts could be given to the possibilities of co-branding.
Third, the pilot is perceived as a good way to increase the institutions’ **visibility** in China. For instance, HSG is considering using its Sina Weibo account together with its online marketing campaign in China.

A number of points raised during the final interviews with the two universities deserve close attention. First, both institutions have voiced the necessity to **better understand** “what is going on”. The need is felt at two levels: 1) understand Sina Weibo better in general and 2) understand the conversations on the individual accounts. One institution has asked a Chinese student in Switzerland to “monitor” its Sina Weibo account.

Second, there is a desire to see **better “returns”**. For instance, both institutions would like to see the **number of followers** increase more rapidly.

Third, both institutions are keen to **reach other constituencies** (e.g. Chinese professors, researchers, and alumni) and are interested to explore **other social media channels** (e.g. Renren).

Fourth, and given the level of priority that Chinese social media have in the institutions’ global communication strategy, **more pro-activity** from and **interactivity** with swissnex China is wished for. A sense of **“keep it simple”** is common to both partners in order to avoid over-extension. One institution feels that more structure as well as an overall planning would be beneficial.

During the pilot phase, the burden of the work rested on the swissnex China team. Tasks ranged from simple re-posting and uploading of videos from YouTube to Youku (Chinese version of YouTube) to more complex tasks such as translating content or answering questions. It will be important to define clearly the tasks and responsibilities beyond the pilot phase.

It is interesting to note that very little has changed in the China strategy of both institutions as a result of the participation in the pilot. That said, renewed interest in maintaining a social media presence has been voiced as well as plans to increase the reach across Chinese academic institutions (e.g. in the form of partnerships). There are also ideas to develop **cross-channel synergies**. For instance, this could take the form of postings on the institutions’ Facebook pages so as to create channels between Facebook and Sina Weibo.

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* This doesn’t appear to be a trust issue but rather a way to reduce the information asymmetry.
6.1 Overall Recommendations

• Ensure that a push-pull mechanism is in place whereas Swiss institutions push out content in regular and structured way while swissnex China ensures that timely and appropriate content feeds the individual Sina Weibo accounts

• Foster a team spirit between swissnex China and the Swiss institutions

• Ensure continuous learning regarding the developments of the social media landscape, in particular of the chosen social media channel

6.2 Recommendations to Swiss Academic Institutions

• Have a clear and well-articulated China strategy and see how presence on Chinese social media can serve such strategy; set clear objectives and measures

• Make the Chinese social media communication strategy an integral part of the overall communication strategy

• Weigh carefully the choice between a decentralized (e.g. via swissnex China) and in-house approach

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<th></th>
<th>Decentralized</th>
<th>In-house</th>
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<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
<td>Closer to Chinese market, increased reactivity to new trends</td>
<td>Better understanding of current and future needs of institution</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Disadvantages</strong></td>
<td>Requires streamlined processes to ensure swift answering of questions or crisis management</td>
<td>Distances to Chinese market, lack of understanding of Chinese social media scene **</td>
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Source: Compiled by authors

• Remember that localized and customized content for a Chinese audience requires dedicated resources

• Build a library of material appealing to the targeted Chinese audiences (e.g. dream projects, rankings, lifestyle)

* HEC took a hybrid approach by leveraging his HEC Ambassador in the swissnex China office.

** This can be mitigated by having a Chinese person running the social media initiative from Switzerland.
6.3 Recommendations to swissnex China

- Help address general communication domains of individual institutions:
  » Promotion of individual institutions (e.g. branding, visibility)
  » Cooperation with Chinese institutions (e.g. research, exchange programs)
  » Recruitment of students for various programs (e.g. Master, PhD, executive education)
  » Alumni relationships
  » Switzerland as a place for higher education (research, studying, etc.)

- Build on the **professionalization** of universities’ communication teams as to social media in general; find a common ground between the various institutions and develop a value proposition to **complement** each institution’s existing communication and China strategy; develop individual service offers when needs arise (e.g. featuring specific research initiatives)

- Offer a **training workshop** to institutions considering developing a presence on the Chinese social media scene; the workshop could take place in Switzerland or in China (e.g. in the framework of student fairs or delegation visit); develop a shared understanding of what it means to conduct a conversation with Chinese academic audiences through social media

- **Extend** the offline services proposed to Swiss academic institutions to social media (e.g. institutional brand building, showcasing of research, alumni relationships); communicate around common interests (e.g. branding Switzerland as a place for higher quality education)
• Have a **dedicated** person/team within swissnex China to maintain the Sina Weibo accounts of Swiss academic institutions; appoint a **substitute** to the “account manager” to ensure continuity of service in case of absence; build on common processes to convey messages via dedicated channels.

• Set up a bi-monthly **reporting mechanism** to inform the institutions on the latest developments regarding its Sina Weibo account; the report could either be conveyed in verbal (e.g. via Skype/phone) or written form.

• **Remain up-to-date** on the developments within the chosen social media and more importantly outside of the chosen media (e.g. understand the implications of WeChat for the institutions communication strategy). Whereas Twitter, Facebook, or Google+ is relatively stable social media channels, the situation is very much different in China. Forecasting the usage levels and popularity of Chinese social media in the medium term is extremely hard.

• Explore the feasibility of **developing a standalone solution** specifically targeting Chinese students (e.g. swissuniversities.cn) but going further than a mere translation of the swissuniversity.ch platform.
Appendix 1: Certificates of Authorization

Figure 1: HSG and HEC Certificates of Authorization Required by Sina Weibo
Appendix 2: Topics Posted

Figure 2: Frequency of Topics Used in Postings

Source: Compiled by authors
Appendix 3: Sina Weibo Followers

Figure 3: HSG Sina Weibo Followers (November 2012 – February 2013)

![Graph showing Sina Weibo followers over time]

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<tr>
<td>10/12/12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/12/12</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/01/13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14/01/13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/02/13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/02/13</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by project team
Thanks to new functionalities provided to company accounts at the beginning of 2013, it has been possible to gain a more granular view of the followers of both accounts.

Source: Compiled by project team
Table 2. HEC and HSG Follower Segmentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HEC</th>
<th>HSG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender balance (M-F)</td>
<td>50-50</td>
<td>46-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class age between 18 and 24 years</td>
<td>44.79%</td>
<td>61.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active followers</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive followers</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verified followers</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weibo “experts”</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9.12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: “Experts” are users who are paying in order to enjoy more functionalities and reputation
Source: Compiled by project team
Appendix 4: Screenshots from HEC Postings

Figure 5: HEC Postings

Source: HEC Weibo account

Figure 6: HEC Alumni Video Posting

Source: HEC Weibo account
Appendix 5: Screenshots from HSG Postings

**Figure 7: HSG Interactive Chat**

![HSG Interactive Chat](image)

*Source: HSG Weibo account*

**Figure 8: HSG Cross-branded Video**

![HSG Cross-branded Video](image)

*Source: HSG Weibo account*