

Analysis of the Overseas Online Communication Capacity of Chinese Universities and Development Strategies

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Abstract:

Against the backdrop of intensifying global competition and deepening exchange in higher education, enhancing overseas online communication capacity has become a crucial issue for Chinese universities seeking to advance internationalized education and build global brand images. Key factors determining the effectiveness of their overseas online presence include the degree of leadership emphasis, the establishment of specialized external communication posts with appropriate staffing, the effective operation of diverse overseas social media platforms, and sustained collaboration with international mainstream media. However, some universities still face challenges such as a shortage of qualified personnel, weak content innovation, and a lack of distinctive management strategies on overseas social platforms. In response, this paper proposes a series of measures: improving the “grand external communication” system and mechanism, deepening university–media cooperation, building integrated overseas media platforms, and strengthening cross-cultural communication capacity. These strategies offer feasible insights and operational references for Chinese universities to enhance their overseas online communication capacity and international influence in the new era.

Keywords:

Overseas
Online communication capacity
Strategies

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1. Introduction

With the continuous advancement of the “Belt and Road” Initiative and the ongoing progress in the “Double First-Class” construction, the role of Chinese universities in the international academic arena and the global higher education system has become increasingly significant.

As global demand for higher education continues to rise, interactions among universities worldwide have intensified in international discourse, making it vital for Chinese universities to establish a uniquely Chinese “University discourse system” through international media and social platforms^[1,2].

Universities, as key platforms for academic and cultural export, can significantly boost the global spread and recognition of Chinese culture if they can project a stronger “Chinese voice” across social and media networks worldwide. Objectively, however, the influence of Chinese universities in global public opinion and overseas online communication still needs substantial enhancement. On one hand, overseas audiences have only limited recognition of the educational philosophy, research strength, and social contributions of Chinese universities^[3,4]. On the other hand, with the rapid growth of global new media and social platforms, finding ways to effectively leverage digital channels to convey universities’ academic achievements, campus culture, and Chinese narratives to the international community remains a considerable challenge.

Overseas communication by universities not only demonstrates institutional images and academic progress but also constitutes a critical aspect of China’s cultural soft power development in the field of education. Some universities with strong external communication capabilities have already begun actively using new media technologies and strategies to engage in cross-cultural, cross-platform international promotion, seeking to interact with global audiences on mainstream social platforms such as Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Nevertheless, most existing discussions on university internationalization still focus on areas such as joint educational programs and international student enrollment, with comparatively less systematic research on overseas online communication capacity. Moreover, some universities continue to confront persistent issues in overseas online communication, including a shortage of specialized personnel, insufficient localized content, inadequate multilingual operation, and less-than-fully-developed top-level planning for external communication^[5].

2. Current channels and operations of overseas communication by Chinese universities

2.1. Insufficient integration of social media platforms

Given the extensive influence and user base of overseas

social media, particularly Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube, many universities are gradually recognizing the importance of establishing official accounts on these platforms. Many leading institutions have obtained account verifications and carry out routine operations on several of these sites. Nonetheless, inadequate integration and interoperability among different social media platforms weaken the consistency and coverage of online communication.

2.2. Limited alignment between content quality and audience needs

In terms of overseas communication, some universities still rely on English-language institutional websites, promotional brochures, or short videos as the foundational means for international users, including overseas students, foreign faculty, and academic bodies, to learn about the institution. Yet, many universities neglect the need for multilingual coverage, rendering the information inaccessible to a wider international audience. Some universities exhibit low activity levels on overseas social media, with limited annual posting frequency, follower engagement, and quality of interactions. In addition, some content fails to reflect the interests and needs of overseas users, leading to suboptimal communication outcomes.

2.3. Inadequate resource investment

Many universities primarily depend on a few fixed social platforms without effectively utilizing additional channels such as international news websites or academic platforms. Insufficient budgets for international communication further constrain the availability of professional teams and technical support, undermining the professionalism and efficacy of external communication.

3. Strategies and approaches to enhance overseas online communication capacity in Chinese universities

3.1. Improve systems and mechanisms to establish a “Grand external communication” framework

3.1.1. Reinforce top-level design and coordination

Universities should emphasize the strategic importance of overseas communication by incorporating it into mid-

to long-term development plans and annual priorities. Concurrently, institutions should establish or expand external communication offices aligned with the scale of their international ambitions (setting up an overseas communication center under the Publicity Department) to ensure clear functions and responsibilities ^[6].

3.1.2. Establish departmental collaboration and resource-sharing

External communication often involves multiple departments (Publicity, International Cooperation, Research, and individual colleges). Without unified coordination, information silos or resource misallocation may arise. Universities can form leadership teams dedicated to external communication, hold regular joint meetings, and achieve unified planning, data sharing, and scheduling of communication initiatives ^[7]. A data-driven management platform can also be developed to monitor media coverage, overseas social media engagement metrics, and other indicators, thus providing scientific evidence for strategy adjustments.

3.2. Deepen university–media collaboration to produce high-quality external communication projects

3.2.1. Strengthen topic planning and narrate university stories effectively

Successful external communication hinges on the ability to present warm, in-depth, and readable content. Effective themes might include campus anniversaries, major research breakthroughs, international collaboration agreements, high-profile lectures, or outstanding alumni stories. By employing narrative techniques, contextual presentation, and digital visualization, such reports can be made more appealing and shareable ^[8,9].

3.2.2. Develop specialized cultural products and activities

Many universities focus on leveraging campus cultural elements to enhance external communication, such as creating cultural derivatives for external promotion. Through integrated online-offline activities like university history exhibitions, cultural festivals, or innovation and entrepreneurship competitions, universities can attract coverage by international media and participation by

faculty, students, and alumni, thereby boosting global visibility ^[10]

3.3. Diversify the use of new media platforms and strengthen integrated overseas media presence

3.3.1. Build a comprehensive overseas social media matrix for unified planning and multi-platform distribution

Considering the user base and communication potential of the five major global social platforms (Facebook, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube), universities can strategically establish their presence on each platform in accordance with audience demographics and content attributes, maintaining consistent branding and visual design. Facebook emphasizes community interaction with alumni, faculty, students, and international partners, often featuring in-depth posts and external links. X is ideal for rapid dissemination of international academic events, major announcements, and topical commentary, with strategic use of hashtags boosting exposure. Instagram leverages high-quality images and short videos to present an appealing “visual aesthetic” of campus scenery, student life, and research achievements, drawing in younger international audiences. YouTube has an exceptional impact on video content in global outreach. Content may include recruitment videos, research documentary features, collections of renowned lectures, and other thematic varieties. LinkedIn focuses on promoting the university’s disciplinary strengths, recruitment information, and industry partnership opportunities to align with professional and career-focused audiences.

3.3.2. Advance localized operations and follower engagement

Establishing an account alone does not guarantee meaningful influence in global discourse, success depends on localized content and consistent operations ^[11]. It is recommended to staff professionals who are familiar with overseas cultural contexts, proficient in foreign languages, and skilled in new media management. During content creation, attention should be paid to language style and cultural nuances, avoiding “Chinese English” which can hamper comprehension. Strategies to improve follower engagement might include designing interactive

topic campaigns, holding Q&A sessions, and targeted promotions, thus cultivating loyal fanbases and gradually expanding reach ^[12].

3.3.3. Collaborate with international mainstream media and industry platforms

This collaboration can build deeper partnerships demand planned, strategic efforts to cultivate strong overseas media relationships. For major events or high-impact research findings, institutions should proactively seek partnerships such as mainstream media, or global university ranking agencies and professional societies ^[13].

3.4. Strengthen workforce development to enhance cross-cultural communication and media management skills

3.4.1. Establish an overseas communication center or office

The creation of a dedicated “Overseas Communication Center or Office” is critical to advancing overseas online communication. Such an office can coordinate English-language news writing, promotional materials (brochures), the upkeep of the English version of the university website, new media account operations, and international alumni relations, ensuring systematic planning and implementation rather than disconnected efforts across different departments.

3.4.2. Enhance personnel training and multi-skilled competence

Personnel tasked with overseas communication require a solid understanding of international media landscapes and regulations, strong cross-cultural communication skills, and keen insight into global public opinion. Universities should provide regular high-level training programs, support international exchange and learning, and promote knowledge sharing with professionals from international

media outlets to continually upgrade the expertise of external communication teams ^[14].

3.4.3. Refine professional titles and performance evaluation systems

External communication roles integrate journalistic, branding, and cross-cultural management responsibilities, rather than being purely administrative or supplementary. Universities may explore incorporating “overseas communication proficiency” into promotion criteria, encouraging external communication staff to publish high-level articles in international journals or media outlets, participate in international conferences, and lead cross-cultural projects. By introducing more flexible evaluation metrics, these universities can motivate staff to be proactive and creative ^[15].

4. Conclusion

Given the intense competition and rapidly evolving public opinion landscape in international higher education, Chinese universities must confront the difficulties and challenges in overseas online communication to achieve broader global influence and a more active voice on the world stage. Moving forward, Chinese universities should bolster top-level planning, integrate internal resources, expand international publicity channels, and continually explore global communication strategies and cross-cultural engagement techniques. Only by adhering to a grand external communication perspective, emphasizing professional talent development and coordinated platform operations can universities build more internationally compelling images and contribute significantly to advancing the internationalization of China’s higher education system and strengthening the nation’s cultural soft power.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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