Social Media Marketing Strategies in Commercial Movies

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Masters in Arts Management

Research Project

May 2016

Social Media Marketing Strategies in Commercial Movies Approved Dr. John Fenn Arts and Administration Program University of Oregon Date

Acknowledgements

I cannot express enough thanks to all the people who helped me to accomplish this research. Without the support of my classmates, the faculty members of the Arts and Administration program, this research could not have been completed. I offer my sincere appreciation for all of you.

Especially, I want to thank my research advisor Dr. John Fenn. You always gave me correct direction and useful suggestions when I was overwhelmed with the research. I also need to thank my cohort for always supporting me.

Finally, thanks to my dearest parents and good friends; you have my deepest gratitude.

Your encouragement when I faced rough times gave me much power to overcome these challenges. I give you my heartfelt thanks. Love you all.

Abstract

In recent years, with the rapid development of the Internet, more and more movies are promoted via social media platforms. The purpose of this research is to explore differences in social media marketing strategies between the United States and China, and to provide recommendations about using social media to the film industry. Furthermore, I provide detailed information, such as the background of social media, and different movie marketing strategies.

Through inventory data collection and an analysis method, I collected information about the usage of media platforms and employed case study methodology to focus on two specific movies: the *Fast & Furious 7* (America) and *Lost in Hong Kong* (China). After analyzing data collected from the inventory and case study, I offer a summary of the different social media marketing strategies between these two countries and give some related recommendations to the Chinese and American movie industries.

KEY WORDS

Social Media, Marketing, Movie, Strategy, Comparison

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The advent of Web 2.0 technologies has created many new ways to communicate, which has also changed movie-marketing channels compared to what was used in the past; As Litman and Ahn identify "the current strategy is especially well-suited to the peculiarities of contemporary film markets where initial exhibition is the first stage in a chain of market windows for any given film, with strong effects on the film's subsequent performance throughout the chain," (Litman & Ahn, 1998, p. 98). Social media is an important part to our lives. Eighty-two per cent of the world's Internet users use social media platforms, representing the largest portion of individuals' Internet usage (comScore, 2011). Therefore, in the age of social media, how can film companies target specific audiences? How can they use social media platforms to release new films? How can they increase a film's popularity through social media? How can they make a systematic marketing plan to promote film by using media strategies? These questions are addressed in this research.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Visual Schematic



Figure 2: Research Methodology Schematic



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social media is one of the most significant aspects of an organization's marketing plan.

Using social media marketing strategies can help the film industry attract more potential customers in the future. The information in social media comes from third-party sources, and the message can spread from user to user quickly (Social Media Marketing, 2015).

"Entertainment is part of our American diplomacy," US President Barack Obama told a crowd in 2012 at a DreamWorks Animation facility. In fact, the top 500 grossing films of all time are Hollywood productions (Jazeera, 2014). Hollywood plays an important role both in culture and in the economy. Although China has made some progress in the film industry, it still has a lot to learn from the US film industry.

This research used inventory and case study methodology to compare two countries' film marketing situations. Through data analyses the differences between the American and Chinese social media marketing were identified.

Marketing strategies in social media for the film industry is a broad topic therefore it is crucial to have a basic knowledge of social media, film marketing, and the box office, if we want to have a better understanding of the movie field. Making full use of social media can attract attention and push movie-goers to share the movie they like by word-of-mouth. To be successful a film not only needs to be of high quality production, its marketing also needs be good. From targeting audiences to using unique marketing strategies, from script preparation stage to finish shooting, good markers should consider all of the processes to have effective marketing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The virtual Internet environment is composed of a group of users who communicate via blogs, websites, comments, etc. Building trust in a given community is the goal of social networking (Safko, 2010). Social media plays an important role in people's lives. In 2014, the global box office made \$37.5 billion; out of this, America had a 27% segment of the market earning 10.4 billion U.S. dollars, while China had \$4.8 billion that accounted for 13% of the market (Statista, 2014). Hollywood movies have strong capital and market share not only because of the success of its films, but also because of its marketing success. In the age of social media, film distribution firms can target audiences by finding out audiences' interests via different platforms such as Facebook, blogs and news. In the movie field, both America and China use social media to promote film productions, however because of different developmental levels and different national situations, their marketing strategies also vary. Therefore, researching the movies marketing in these two countries is significant.

However, there is little research that focuses on identifying the differences and analyzing what Chinese movie marketing can learn from Hollywood. In order to address this gap, I decided to conduct a research project on the differences between American and Chinese movie social media marketing strategies. The purpose of this research study was to find what kinds of new social media marketing strategies are used for movie marketing, to analyze the benefits and challenges of using each of these strategies according to the American and Chinese different national conditions, and to come up with some suggestions for Chinese movie marketing.

METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM

In this study, I used a mixed methods approach. A literature review, inventory research and case study were my methodologies for this research. In the proposal method section, it is helpful to introduce basic definitions (Creswell, 2014). Firstly in the literature review I introduced the development of social media, identifying the kinds of marketing strategies used for films, and showed how social media is used in film marketing. After I built up the framework of social media and marketing, an inventory was the next step, followed by the specific case studies. O'Leary (2010) emphasizes the need to determine a methodological design, as it is the best way to address the research question. Inventory and case study were the main cornerstones of this study. The research questions are as follows:

MAIN QUESTION

How do commercial movies do social media marketing?

SUB-QUESTIONS

- What kinds of social media marketing approaches are usually used?
- How do *Fast & Furious 7* and *Lost in Hong Kong* compare?
- What are the benefits and challenges of using these strategies?
- In the Chinese context how can we use the experience of Hollywood social media marketing strategies?

DELIMITATIONS & LIMITATIONS

This study is limited to a case study and I focus on two countries, America and China, and on two film companies only: Universal Pictures and Beijing Enlight Media Co. Ltd. There are three

reasons for choosing *Fast & Furious 7* and *Lost in Hong Kong* for my case study: Firstly they each represent one of the most influential movies in American and China respectively in 2015.

Secondly, both of their producing companies are high profile. Thirdly, my research time was limited and I did not have enough time to research all of the movie marketing. Therefore I chose two of the most representative movies for my case study research.

Furthermore, the scale of this research is limited. It only includes commercial movies, and a case study that compares two film companies in two different countries to represent the main trends in social media marketing strategies. This research cannot represent the whole field of the film industry. Due to the different cultural policies of the two countries included in this study, my research has limitations in thoroughly grasping film-marketing strategies. Moreover, because of security issues, I could not find all the media documents and their detailed budgets.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

My study can be divided into two parts: One is social media; another is film marketing. For the Beijing Enlight Media Co. Ltd, which is one of my case study companies, this study can provide a specific comparison to show what else they can do for their future film social media marketing. For the Chinese film industry, I also come up with three recommendations. Moreover, although this study is for the movie field, social media is now ubiquitous with its quick broadcasting and low cost. This research will also benefit other similar organizations such as advertising companies and media companies.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to understand how commercial movie companies use social media as a marketing tool, this study included companies from two countries. Mixed methods research was used for building this study. It consists of two inventories and two case studies. Firstly I started with inventory research. "Inventories are instruments that attempt to 'take stock' of one or more aspects of an individual's behavior rather than to measure in the usual sense," (James, 1997). I used an inventory to build worksheets, which include two categories of context of usage of film marketing strategy; one American, another is Chinese. I chose ten movies for the inventory research, and included detailed information such as release time, box office, and various strategies marketers used. Fast & Furious 7 (America) and Lost in Hong Kong (China) are also two of the cases included in my inventory research. During the inventory creation process, I narrowed down the scope of the study, collected and analyzed specific marketing strategies through online searching and the literature view, and then conducted a comparison. After finishing the inventory research, I proceeded to conduct a case study to identify more detailed information about these two films.

"The case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances, (Robert, 1995, p. xi)." In the case study methodology, I clarified the reason why these two films were chosen as research cases, introduced background information such as the directors, and the box office, and made clear the timeline for using each strategy. I expected to discover differences and similarities between American and Chinese movie promotion strategies, and to find out the benefits and challenges of

each social media instrument. I also tried to explain whether it would be useful to use

Hollywood's social media marketing approaches in China, and to give some recommendations

and suggestions for the Chinese movie industry.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

There were two steps in the data collection stage. The first was gathering all the information about film marketing strategies using inventory research. The second was utilizing a case study approach to compare the social media marketing strategies of *Fast & Furious 7* (America) and *Lost in Hong Kong* (China).

As Creswell (2014) explains, data collection needs researchers to engage in prolonged observation, be sensitive to identify their influence or consequence, and to reduce their disruption of the physical setting.

The first step was to target twenty films as inventory objects. I identified the contexts in which marketing was used, mainly focusing on the social media platforms they used, such as Facebook (United States) and Sina Weibo (China). The second part was the case study, which involved two films. I identified what kinds of social media marketing strategies they used through visiting official websites and online databases. My case study research questions were: Why did I choose these two films? What kinds of marketing strategies for each film were used for marketing? What were the influences of using these marketing strategies, such as at the box office? What were the differences in strategies used between these two different countries? Data resources came from a review of the literature and online searching. The collection process

started with the background of the films the marketing strategies used, and then followed with the social media employed. I used the data collected to analyze, compare and identify the different media channels used between America and China, as well as the benefits and challenges of each media strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

My research begins with an overview of social media, then focuses on the commercial online marketing of movies. These social media platforms produce online film marketing, which has changed the traditional promotion strategies. Therefore, knowing the concept and context of social media is the first step to understanding my research.

As a pivotal online communication platform, social media attracts more and more people to research it. According to Tuten (2008), "social media enables members to produce, publish, control, critique, rank, and interact with online content" (p.20). Thinking of social media as an umbrella, it gathers social-networking sites, virtual worlds, social news and book marketing sites, wikis, and forums and opinion sites (Tuten, 2008). Because of its two-way communication, social media has the function of changing strangers to consumers (Kabani, 2012). With Web 2.0, social media developed as a storm. According to Andrew's Social Media Usage 2005-2015 report, 76% Internet users used at least one social networking site in 2015, compared with only 10% in 2005. From the information provided by Statista in January of 2016, Facebook is the first social network that has 1 billion registered accounts. The top ten social media platforms are Facebook,

WhatsApp, QQ, Facebook Messenger, QZone, WeChat, Tumblr, Instagram, and Twitter (Statista, 2016). Some platforms such as Facebook mainly focus on status sharing between friends and family. Some platforms like Tumblr are microblogs to record daily journals. Others like QQ belong to a local context, a domestic social tool. The United States has the majority of social media users, with more than 100 million users. As time goes on, social media has already become one of the most important approaches for consumers to conduct their information searches and to make purchasing decisions (Lempert, 2006).

ABOUT FILM MARKETING

Marketing promotion needs (1) customers to understand value proposition, (2) uniqueness of the outstanding brand (3) knowing what customers are thinking, and finally (4) communication of brand messages to the prospective target audience (Tuten, 2008). This is the same purpose as film marketing, which is to target and encourage audiences to buy film products. Durie (1993) stresses, "the goal of film marketing is to maximize the audience for a film and, by extension, its earning potential" (p.13). There are many ways for film promotion, which I classify into two categories. One is traditional marketing, such as print advertising, launch events, and posters; another is social marketing. In my research, social media marketing is the key point. Kabani explains that, "if online marketing is the act of leveraging the Internet in general to get your message across, social media marketing is the act of leveraging specialsocial media platforms to promote a product or a service to increase sales" (2012, p. 3). According to Tuten (2008), there are seven lessons that should be considered when doing social media marketing: "(1) set appropriate objectives, (2) embrace engagement, (3) make it relevant, (4)

staff it, (5) integrate multiple social-media outlets, (6) build on the social centricity inherent in the communities, and (7) invest the time" (p. 28). Using social networks, blogs, news sites, and other platforms to broadcast a value concept is the main purpose of social media marketing.

THE PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION

There were two steps in the data collection stage. The first was collecting successful and meaningful film information from the film marketing history, which I separated into Chinese films and American films. The second stage was utilizing a case study to compare the social media marketing strategies of *Lost in Hong Kong* (China) and *Fast & Furious 7* (America).

To begin with the first step, I did inventory research on the most influential ways of marketing commercial films. Through a review of the literature and online databases, I identified thirty commercial movies, and listed these thirty movies' most useful ways of marketing. After that, I selected twenty movies as my inventory target: the top ten Chinese influential movies and the top ten American (see Appendices 1 & 2). There were three standards applied in choosing these twenty movies. The first was the timing of the social marketing year and the historical influence in the film marketing history. Except for the first film in each inventory, the following movies were made in the past fifteen years. The Chinese top ten movies were from 2002 to 2015, because Chinese film marketing began in 2002. For America, the social media marketing year began in 1999. The second standard was that the box office revenue of the top ten Chinese movies had to have exceeded RMB 300 million (\$45 million). Each of the top ten American movies' box offices revenues was more than \$245 million. The third standard for each movie was that it had to have at least one aspect of a good marketing strategy. These three conditions had

to exist at the same time; if not, even if the film's box office revenue was high or it had an innovative marketing approach, it did not belong in the top ten. After choosing these twenty movies, I summarized eleven common ways of marketing films as a judgment standard to complete my inventory research. In terms of *Lost in Hong Kong* and *Fast & Furious 7*, these two films were both in the list of the top ten. In compiling the inventory, I also collected necessary data for my case study.

DATA & INFORMATION FROM THE INVENTORY

During the data collection process, I collected eleven commonly used ways of marketing films.

Out of these eleven approaches, nine belonged to or could be used through social media: viral music, posters, trailers, blogs, topic speculation, video marketing, cooperation with ticketing websites or official websites, Sina Weibo or Facebook accounts, and film derivatives. Although there are similar approaches to movie marketing all over the world, some differences still exist between China and America, because of the different social contexts and users' habits. As far as Chinese movie marketing is concerned, the most popular and useful social media platform is Sina Weibo, not Facebook, because we cannot use Facebook in mainland China. In addition, in China, audiences like to use third party ticketing websites to order film tickets, because they have many discounts. That means purchasers can save much money compared with buying at the movie theatre. Furthermore, for American movies, establishing an official website is essential, while Chinese movies seldom use this marketing strategy. Of course, many of the same marketing methods are used and nearly every film promotion strategy is used, such as launch events, posters, and trailers. However, according to the different sizes of film production and

when they are released, not every film marketing strategy uses all of the approaches listed in the inventory. From the two inventories, it can be seen that American movie marketing mainly uses ten ways to do promotion, and online marketing makes up 61%. Chinese movies mainly use nine ways, and online marketing accounts for 50%.

It is obvious to see from the two inventories that there is a difference between the distinct movie processes between America and China. "The Blair Witch Project is thought to be the first widely released movie marketed primarily by the Internet," which means that film social media marketing began in 1999 in the United States (Wikipedia). In contrast, the film Hero, which was released in 2002, marks the era of social media marketing coming to China. Furthermore, The Blair Witch Project box office revenue grossed over \$248 million with a \$20,000 production budget, while Hero's worldwide box office revenue was \$177,394,432 with a \$30 million production budget. It is obvious that most American movies made full use of a limited budget to create as high a box office revenue as possible by using social media marketing methods, predating China's strategies. However, with professional marketing gradually maturing and social media playing an important role, Chinese movie marketing is developing quickly and has become the main force in the film industry. According to the box office report of 2015, by the end of December 3rd, there were six billion dollars total in China's film industry, which increased by 47.4%, compared with 2014. Included in the total box office revenue, there was a 59.2% income created by domestic films (meihua.info, 2015). In the top ten box office hits in 2015, there were six domestic films and four imported films.

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTERS

Through compiling the inventory, I found that no matter what the type of movie, what scale of budget, or when the movie was produced, they have one common marketing strategy: all of the films have posters. With social online marketing widely used, movie posters are not only used in theatre lobbies, and more of them are posted via social media platforms to stimulate customer discussion. In 1999, The Blair Witch Project posted many posters on the official website, and used different styles to indicate how the film was doing. Nowadays, some films are released all over the world; therefore one movie usually has many different versions of posters depending on the domestic and international markets. The Golden Era was released in October of 2014 in China. This movie, according to different cultures and every country's aesthetics, used differently styled posters to present the movie's theme. The publisher put every version of the poster that had obviously national characteristics online, and its creativity attracted many views. In addition to basing the poster used on the different regions where it will be available, they are adapted also according to the time period of a movie's release, especially in the social media era. The film Lost in Hong Kong used social media posters, which attracted much attention on Sina Weibo, and finally made a great contribution to the box office revenue. They made 30 versions of countdown posters. Everyday they put one GIF poster on their official weibo, which reminded audiences how many days were left until the movie's release. The movie *Tiny Time* series used posters about different actors' demo roles in the movie, because this kind of poster could attract as many groups of fans as possible.

VIRAL MUSIC

Viral music marketing has become a necessary part of movie marketing. A high quality song can not only convey emotion, but also can push up box office revenue. Nowadays, viral music is also becoming one of the most important movie marketing strategies. Before movies are online, marketers expose the viral music first. Good theme music can attract more people to keep a watchful eye on the movie. The themes for many commercial movies' are especially famous and influential. "Let It Go" was the theme song of Frozen in 2013, and now it has become one of the most recorded of all the Disney songs. According to the Disney blog, "'Let It Go' reached the top five on the billboard Hot 100 chart, and won both the Academy Award for Best Original Song in 2014 and the Grammy Award for Best Song Written for Visual Media in 2015." IFPI reported that 10.9 million copies of this song were sold in 2014, and it became one of the fifth best-selling songs in 2015. Obviously, the popularity of this song made people have a deeper impression to Frozen, and not only successfully pushed the global box office revenue, but also its copies revenue contributed hugely to Walt Disney. Different from America's Hollywood, which has a huge budget, "Little Apple" was the theme music of an independent Chinese film called Old Boy: The Way of The Dragon. Due to little investment and no famous actors, the film was hard to market. However, based on the theme music, this only 30 million yuan investment movie gained 200 million at the box office. After the theme song was published on the Internet, the film marketing team put out more than fourty kinds of viral videos to make an explosive promotion, and the video was played more than 5 million times within 24 hours. Furthermore, "Little Apple" was also performed at the American Music Awards. From the point of view of movie marketing, using theme music is a very successful marketing strategy.

TOPIC SPECULATION

Topic speculation means using an abstract topic or news story to set up an interesting discussion and to grab the attention of Internet users. Now it is widely used for marketing. It can be created in many ways, such as on TV or in a newspaper. What I refer to here is using social media platforms to initiate topic speculation. Social media marketing is two-way communication with consumers (Kim & Ko, 2011). Just as marketers create some topics online, Internet users follow and make comments on the topics, and then the marketers communicate with them. It is the fastest and most direct way to get feedback from customers, and marketers communicate with them to form a two-way marketing interaction. Online topic marketing can, not only save marketing budgets, but can also enhance loyalty. Online platforms have the ability to reach all over the world, creating some attention-getting news or topics that let more people know and become interested in the movie.

From my inventory, I found that every film used topic speculation. This is like the main point for film promotion, because it digs out the most valued topics of the movie and then expands and spreads them. For Chinese movies, they have official Weibo accounts, and use the social media platform to launch online interaction topic marketing. Film marketers usually combine the movie with special holidays or Weibo hot topics to attract web users to participate in the discussion. In addition, some famous directors and actors have many followers online; therefore they use their accounts to spread a film's posters or news and could reward a good communication effect. The fans have a great influence. In addition, online fans' interactive interviews are also a common method. Fans come up with some questions for their idols. In the meantime, directors and actors can promote their new films. Hollywood, the center of film culture, has huge production budgets, technology to create fantastic special effects, and famous

directors and actors. Hollywood films collect good timing, geographical convenience and good human relations. These three are the main reasons that make them success.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND AMERICAN MOVIE MARKETING

TICKETING WEBSITES

According to Chinafilm, in China, since 2011, Internet ticketing has gradually become one of the main channels buying tickets. Forty percent of the total box office revenue was obtained from online tickets in 2014, and the figure increased by 15% compared to 2013. However, in 2015, over 70% of tickets were bought from the third party websites or using mobile applications (apps). The main mode of cooperation between the film production company and the ticketing website is the activity tickets, and seckill(low group price) tickets. Customers can also make comments, communicate and judge films on ticketing websites. For example, *Women's Day* actually did not belong to the popular movie release schedule. A few months before *Women's Day*, ticketing websites launched many absorbing activities such as free movie tickets or 62% off movie tickets, which brought lots of revenue to the movie box office. In 2015, because of cooperation with ticketing websites, the single day of box office arrived to 120 million *yuan* on the mainland of China. This kind of commercial mode makes film marketing more flexible.

However, based on my research, I found that although in the USA there are some third party platforms, they do not have professional platforms only for movie discounts, especially there are little mobile app coupons used for films. There are some websites for selling movie tickets, like IMDb, movietickets, and FANDANGO, however these websites do not have special discounts or coupons for online movies. In contrast, in China there are more than ten professional websites or

mobile APPs to offer direct discounts for audiences. The inventory for American movies shows there are four main ways to get discount movie tickets: buying gift cards, choosing a limited time of a week to see the movie, being a theater member, and being part of a preview audience, are the common approaches to getting deals, but none of these get discounts via social media platforms. For group deals, like Groupon and LivingSocial, there are also a few deals for online movies.

OFFICIAL WEBSITES

From my inventory, this is an obvious difference in movie marketing between the two countries. Different than China, official websites are often created for American movies to promote products. On the websites, all of the latest movie information is included: movie posters, background music, movie trailers, and a link for buying merchandise. Most movie websites are fantastic. Designers usually use a movie's theme to design a unique website, like *The Hunger Games*. In China, creating an official Weibo account is the most common way of marketing, however almost none of the movies have official websites. In America, no matter how much the film's production budget is, setting up an official website is a necessary window to promote the movie. One hundred percent of movies have official websites in the inventory, however for Chinese movies the percentage is zero.

This phenomenon is interesting. The many differences between the countries encourage this different film promotion strategy. Haiyang Li, a friend of mine who works in the Chinese film promotion industry, told me there are two reasons Chinese movies do not have official websites: limited promotion budget and different film-watching habits. In Hollywood, marketing is a huge

part of the movie budget, because most movie marketing begins in the first week. Gerbrandt reported on data related to ad views that, "in 2009 there was \$26.5 million in media spent on the opening weekend of a 2,000-to 5,000-screen release, and 80 percent went to network, cable and spot TV buys" (The Hollywood Report, 2010). Compared with Hollywood, where movie-marketing fees are more than half of a total budget, Chinese marketing costs even less than one-third of the total cost of production. In addition, Chinese people do not have the habit of searching for movie information specifically from official websites. Sina Weibo is the biggest online platform to get the newest information for most Chinese young adults. Therefore, combined with these two reasons, unlike American Hollywood films, Chinese movies have Sina Weibo official accounts instead of an official website.

BLOG USAGE

A blog is a kind of earlier form of social media platform. In my inventory, there are two trends that attract my attention. The first observation is that in recent years, the percentage of blog usage has declined, especially by teens. "Since 2006, blogging by teens has dropped from 28% of teen Internet users to 14% of online teens in 2009" (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). A similar situation also occurred in young adults (18-29 years). Lenhart et al. reported that from 2007 to 2009, use by young adult declined 9% in just two years. I found this phenomenon also reflected in movie marketing, because teens and young adults are the main movie audience groups. Although in my inventory results, just two American movies do not have blogs, other official blogs are not as active as other social media platforms such as Facebook. By going through and comparing those movies' blogs and official websites or Facebook pages, usage of

blogs seems to be diminishing. Another finding is that in China, film marketers rarely use social media blogs to do marketing. In my top ten Chinese movies inventory, there are just three movies with established blog accounts, the same situation as official websites as I mentioned above.

SINA WEIBO VS FACEBOOK MARKETING

Sina Weibo is the most popular social media in China, and Americans use Facebook. Both of them play leading roles in social media marketing of movies. The reason that they need to be compared is in China, we cannot use Facebook. There is a sophisticated firewall to block it, because China practices self-censorship. Blocking usage of Facebook can avoid many sensitive topics and enhance Internet management. This is a government requirement. Therefore Chinese movies market through Sina Weibo, and American movies via Facebook. Sina Weibo, founded in 2009, is the most popular Chinese micro blogging website. According to the Sina Weibo Data Center, "by the end of September 30, 2015, monthly active users (MAU) had reached 220 million." Since 2013, Weibo has become one of the most important social media platforms for movie marketing. In 2015 alone, 268 movies opened official Weibo accounts, published 13 thousand times on Weibo, and were broadcasted to 5 billion users. Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg founded in 2004. According to The Statistics Portal, in the fourth quarter of 2015, the MAU of Facebook was 1.59 billion, including 1.31 billion used by mobile phones. Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the world. Terry Curtin, Relativity Media president of marketing, said marketing on Facebook is a kind of direct and full relationship with the fan group (Kessler, 2011).

Like Sina Weibo, every American movie also has their official Facebook page. On the Facebook page, marketers not only post their movie's newest information and interact with fans, most of them also create a game according to essential plot elements, and invite more users to join and compete, like *The Hunger Games* (English, 2013). Furthermore, Facebook can also offer direct ticket sales, and users can invite their friends to the Facebook page to go the film with them. Moreover, there is another characteristic of Facebook marketing, which is different from Sina Weiibo: film marketers can put related games on Facebook pages or create specific apps for the movie, like a Facebook app called the TRONiVerse that was designed for the film *TRON:*

HOME VIDEO

Home video does not belong to social media marketing, however there are still differences between the two countries. In America, the movie revenue from DVDs or Blu-ray usually makes up a large part, even exceeding theatre box office revenue. According to Wasko, "in 1980, only \$20 million, or 1 percent of the industry's total revenue, while by the end of 1992, \$5.3 billion revenue come from home video, nearly 50 percent of the studios' total revenue" (1994, p. 142). "By 2001, video sales and rentals totaled \$118.7 billion, and proliferation of DVD technology promised further risers in revenues" (Wasko, 2003). However, in China, the box office is still the main channel for the whole film industry. Liu Chi (2014) states that 90% of total revenues came from box office receipts in 2012, and only 10% was collected from other channels containing DVD sales. So far, not every Chinese movie releases on home video, because few people are

willing to pay money to buy DVDs compared with the lower costs online. The more important reason is that there are too many pirated copies in the Chinese market.

CASE STUDY

After building up a general background on the use of social media marketing strategies through inventory research, in order to identify more specifically the procedures of movie marketing strategies, it is necessary to narrow down and focus on *Fast & Furious 7* (America) & *Lost in Hong Kong* (China).

I. LOST IN HONG KONG (CHINA)

INTRODUCTION

Lost in Hong Kong is a comedy directed by Xu Zheng, which was released on September 25, 2015. The main plot is Xu Lai (Xu Zheng) has a vacation with his wife Cai's overbearing family. He plans to secretly visit his first love Yang Yi. However, his wife's brother always keeps a camera and follows him and creates a series of unexpected accidents in Hong Kong. According to Kevin Ma, on the first day the movie was released, Lost in Hong Kong earned RMB208 million (US\$32.6 million), breaking a new record for the biggest box office revenue on the first day and becoming the first mainland movie that created more than 200 million yuan during the first three consecutive days. Lost in Hong Kong brought in RMB1.6 billion (\$243 million) to the box office. Yan & Sun (2015) used a word from Yuan Lin, the research director of EntGroup, which produces analysis for the entertainment industry, said, "there's no doubt that Lost in Hong Kong is the best marketing performer in China's film industry this year." The reason I chose this movie as a case study is the significance of how its marketing strategies played a vital role during

the film's release. In other words, if they had not planned such novel and precise marketing strategies, they would not have broken so many box office records.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

Timeline of marketing events

Lost in Hong Kong came out on September 25, 2015, while the promotion began as early as

March.

March 25, 2015

Set up of the official Sina Weibo account.

March 30, 2015

First film press conference.

• June 9, 2015

Director Xu announced the film would release on September 25, 2015 on the mainland of China.

• July 12, 2015

Released clearance version poster.

• July 14, 2015

Released an extra episode video and two main actors' together poster.

July 23, 2015

Released four viral videos and a new official trailer.

• July 27, 2015

Second film press conference and release of the first version of the official trailer. This conference was interpreted as nagging. Marketers used many words to attract attention.

August 2, 2015

Released new posters, which was the first time for gathering all the main actors in the posters.

• August 27, 2015

Held a lingerie show press conference combined with movie plot.

August 30, 2015

Released upgraded trailer, and a new poster for IMAX and some stills.

September 9, 2015

Released the theme music, sung by a famous Chinese musician.

September 11, 2015

Held advanced film-viewing at the University of Science and Technology of China.

September 23, 2015

Held a film premiere.

September 25, 2015

Film was shown on the mainland of China.

CATEGORY OF MARKETING STRATEGY IN LOST IN HONG KONG

1. IP Marketing

IP is Intellectual Property. Simply said, it is the source of movie adaptation, such as fiction, game, and short video networks. *Lost in Hong Kong* is also an IP production, and belongs to the *X Lost* series directed by Xu Zheng. Before *Lost in Hong Kong*, there were two films: *Lost on Journey* (06/04/2010) and *Lost in Thailand* (12/12/2012). Both of them had a big impact and created new records at the box office, therefore the *X Lost* series has become of great commercial value

and an IP brand resource. There are three standards for the IP: all people are fit to watch, the whole audience can laugh, and the whole audience offers praise.

2. Events Marketing

Prom the marketing timeline of *Lost in Hong Kong*, it can be seen that their marketing team planned three press conferences, one advanced viewing, and one film premiere. All of these marketing events were combined with the film's plot and were held in different promotional periods. Every event drew attention. Like the first press conference on March 30, a specific conference, they imitated the Apple release conference to hold a Xubos conference, and used the model of Internet productions' way to introduce *Lost in Hong Kong*. It was an innovative and unique film conference because the press conference broke the normal form of how stars meet and interact. Director Xu not only introduced *Lost in Hong Kong*, but also analyzed the whole Chinese film industry and conducted detailed data analysis. For the lingerie show press conference, Xu acted as a lingerie designer, the same as the role in the movie, and presented an unforgettable visual effect. On September 23, the film premiere gathered together nearly a hundred famous stars to present and create a luxurious line-up premiere. Each time these marketing events attracted a lot of media attention, and were broadcast all over the country, attracting more and more people to find out about and be interested in the movie.

3. Social Media Marketing

For *Lost in Hong Kong*, the main forum of social media marketing was Sina Weibo. On March 25, 2015, the marketing team set up an official Weibo page; the first scene they published was a

preview of the trailer, which caused the video to be played more than fifty thousand times. At the same time, Weibo also made a preparation for March 30, the first press conference. After analyzing the Weibo page, they published a total of 2365 scenes gaining more than thirty-five thousand followers. The last scene was published on November 11. The whole Weibo promotion lasted 231 days, which means the marketing team on average posted ten situations per day. From the number it seems this was not a huge challenge for a professional marketing team, however, how to improve the quality of each Weibo scene, how to attract more Internet users to take part in a film topic discussion, and how to come up with unique promotional ideas over 231 days is difficult to execute. They were successful, and caused topic speculation.

In the movie, there are many nostalgic Hong Kong classical elements, such as old Cantonese songs, and classic lines of actors from Hong Kong movies. These elements resonated with people to remember the old time, after which the marketers used this point to create a discussion topic on Sina Weibo. Through communication the marketers raised lots of interest in the movie. The countdown poster, one of the most attractive marketing strategies, started a month before the movie was released. Every day, they posted one differently themed version of the poster through Sina Weibo, and all of these posters were gif pictures. These thirty countdown posters present classic elements of the movie, and they caused many people to pay attention to *Lost in Hong Kong* because of the interesting and innovative posters. Apart from the Sina Weibo page, they also had a wechat official account to report the latest movie's information using words and pictures.

4. Big Data Marketing

With the advent of the Internet era, big data can analyze users' needs, which helps marketers achieve precision marketing. *Lost in Hong Kong* makes full use of the advantages of big data. The marketing team cooperated with Taobao Film, catEye Movie, Baidu Nuomi, and Alipay because these are widely used Chinese Internet platforms which means they have huge data collection capacity, combining them with the movie's own characters, and finally using analytical data for the movie promotion. Big data helped director Xu identify a release time, target audience groups, and to cooperate with ticketing websites. It made a great contribution to the successfully marketing of the movie.

5. Cross-border Marketing

From the film's inventory, it is obvious to see that not all of Chinese movies do cross-border marketing, while *Lost in Hong Kong* had many products. The marketing team cooperated with Baidu Travel, using the film set to make a *Lost in Hong Kong* tour line. They also produced a little game, which broadcasted through cellphones. In addition, with the help of Mid-autumn Festival, they cooperated with Tmall, a shopping website, and came up with a kind of moon cake called Lost Moon Cake. Furthermore, many classic Hong Kong songs in the movie were made as a nostalgic music theme collection and published on different music platforms.

II. FAST & FURIOUS 7 (AMERICA)

INTRODUCTION

Fast & Furious 7, directed by James Wan, written by Chris Morgan, was released on April 3, 2015 in the United States. This film continues the overall plot line of the Fast and Furious franchise by following the lives of various characters through a series of murders, car chases, explosions, and thefts of important property. The movie ends with a card that reads "For Paul" in memory of an actor from the film who died in an off-set accident. The box office revenue of Fast & Furious 7 was \$1.51 billion worldwide. The budget was \$190 million, and the net asset value was around \$354 million. In the first 5 days alone, the film grossed \$397 million around the world. Fast & Furious 7 broke many records in the film industry, both in North America and beyond, becoming "the third highest-grossing film of 2015 in the world, the highest-grossing film in The Fast and Furious franchise and the second highest-grossing Universal Pictures film" (Wikipedia, 2016). It also came forth place in the global box office behind Avatar, Titanic, and the Avengers.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

Timeline of marketing events

September, 2013

Principal photography and planned release for Summer 2014.

• November 30,2013

Paul Walker died in a car crash, temporary halt in shooting.

April, 2014

Filming of the movie resumed again.

July, 2, 2014

Studio announced the official release date of April 3, 2015.

• October 26, 2014

Posted the first official announcement named, "The road to FURIOUS 7 starts here" on the

Facebook page, and began to post the first "7 Seconds of 7" video.

• November 1, 2014

The first trailer was released on Facebook.

• November, 2014

A video selfie app named Dubsmash was on line.

• February 1, 2015

Published a new trailer during Super Bowl XLIX and posted on Facebook.

• 12:07 am, March 16, 2015

Movie premiered at the SXSW Film Festival

• March 27, 2015

A free video game called "Forza Horizon 2 Presents Fast & Furious" was released.

• April 1, 2015

Held global premiere in Los Angeles.

• April 3, 2015

Film was shown in North America.

CATEGORY OF MARKETING STRATEGY IN FAST & FURIOUS 7

1. IP Marketing

In 2001, *Furious 1* was released; this Furious series has lasted fifteen years, and it still has not come to the end. Universal Studios has already posted a new cast poster for *Fast & Furious 8* on its Facebook page. For Furious fans, they do not need to consider whether the movie is good to go to watch or whether they like it when the new Furious series shows online. Furious has already become a super IP, and fans chase it like chasing an idol.

2. Emotional Marketing

The most emotional reason for *Fast & Furious 7* was audiences wanted to watch the last film of Paul Walker. He had completed 80% of filming before death, and his brother helped him to complete the rest. Walker's death shocked people, especially his fans. However, Universal Studios did not change the script to let his role disappear or change another actor to reshoot.

The studio used special effects to show Paul Walker still alive in the movie. This decision gave some comfort to his fans. At the same time, this was the best strategy to ensure box office sales.

The studio issued many respectful messages and posted different versions of posters of the late Paul Walker. Co-star Vin Diesel also shared many images and stories between him and Walker on Facebook. At the end of the film, there was a hashtag "#ForPaul" on screen to offer fans communication on social media. Paul Walker's death stimulated the movie to reach a high emotional point.

3. Social Media Marketing

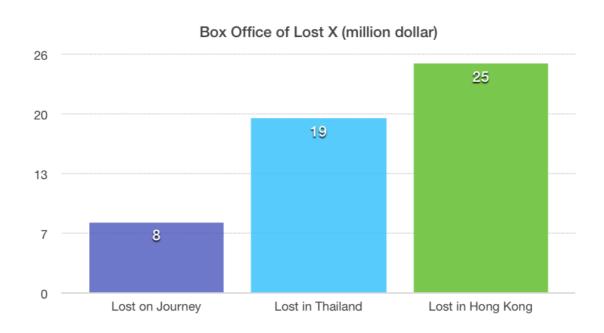
Fast & Furious has a huge social media platform. It includes an official Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube page. Unlike Lost in Hong Kong, for which a new social media account is set up for every new movie, Universal Studios posts all the Fast & Furious movies into the same account. That means, the movies 1 - 7 are gathered into one social media platform. When audiences open their Facebook page, they can find all the information about the Fast & Furious movies and therefore do not need to search separately. Furthermore, except for posting trailers and pictures through social media platforms, the studio also came up with new information to attract fans, like "7 seconds of 7." They posted different seven-second behind-the-scenes videos on Facebook and Instagram, and satisfied people's curiosity about 'behind-the-scenes'. Until April 10, 2016, their Facebook had more than 57.7 million followers, Instagram had 2.2 million followers, Twitter had 1.07 million followers, and the YouTube page had 840 thousand followers. Fast & Furious already has enough of a powerful social media platform to broadcast its newest news all over the world.

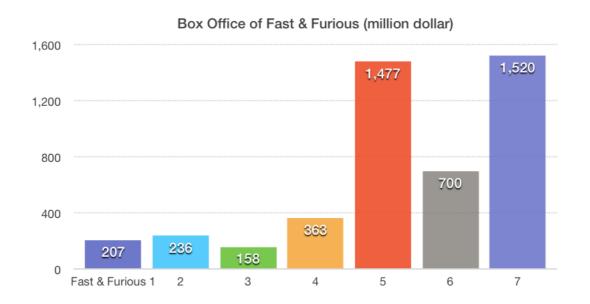
4. Cross-border Marketing

Except in the marketing of the film itself, there were other movie derivative products promoted by *Fast & Furious 7* marketing. On its official site, there were limited Blu-ray packages for sale. Universal Studios cooperated with Best Buy, Walmart, Target, and Amazon, and put the links to an official site where the product was simple and convenient to buy. In addition, creating video games is also a normal kind of derivative marketing for Hollywood. In March of 2015, the studio released the video game Forza Horizon 2 Presents Fast & Furious. In November of 2014,

an app named Dubsmash came online in order to promote *Fast & Furious 7*. The APP lasted for four months and topped ten free downloads on iTunes. All of these film derivative products helped the promotion of *Fast & Furious 7*.

COMPARISON BETWEEN LOST IN HONG KONG AND FAST & FURIOUS 7





It is obvious to see that these two series of films have huge differences at the box office. *Lost X* are low budget films, while *Fast & Furious* are huge production Hollywood films. It is not possible to do a horizontal comparison, but having a longitudinal comparison is meaningful. For the Lost series, every movie's box office revenue developed as an upward trend, and *Lost in Thailand* increased by 13.7% in box office revenue compared with *Lost on Journey*. For Fast & Furious, the seventh film had the highest gross. Unlike the Lost series, the box office of Fast & Furious reflects a fluctuating trend. By using the marketing strategies I mentioned above, *Fast & Furious 7* reached the highest return.

Comparing the marketing methods listed in the inventory, both *Lost in Hong Kong* and *Fast & Furious 7* used a launch event, outdoor advertising, viral music, posters, trailers, social media platform promotion, video marketing, topic speculation, and film derivative products. The differences between these two cases are that *Lost in Hong Kong* did not have official blog, but marketers cooperated with ticketing websites. *Fast & Furious 7* had an official website, which *Lost in Hong Kong* did not have. The comparisons of these two movies verify the conclusions in my inventory.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After I did the inventory and analyzed the case study, I made five recommendations below by summarizing connections and differences between the movies.

FOR AMERICAN MOVIES

——Cooperate With Professional Film Websites

From the inventory we know that the third party's official film website has become a fashion trend in the Internet environment, especially for young adults. However, combined with inventory and case study, it is clear that offering low group prices through some professional film websites is not a popular approach in America. Compared with the Chinese film industry, the American film industry could have a closer cooperation with some ticketing websites or APPs, which are especially designed for film marketing, such as IMDb. The film marketers could cooperate with ticketing websites to offer activity tickets or seckill tickets. In this way, there would be more customers buying tickets and therefore film producers and movie theaters would receive more income. I think IMDb and FANDANGO are good film websites; if they offered lower group prices or special discounts for movies it would be better.

——Set Sina Weibo Accounts To Chinese Market

Generally speaking, Hollywood films are released all over the world. They have huge budgets; therefore the scale of marketing is not just aimed at North America. China is a country, which has a huge potential film market, because there are a lot of people and it has a rapidly developing film industry. Therefore Hollywood could make a large income, if its movies were well-marketed in China. When marketing in China marketers should know what the Chinese preferred approaches are, and which social media platforms Chinese people like. After I did the inventory of ten American movies, I found none of these movies had an official Sina Weibo account, including *Fast & Furious 7*, a very successful film marketing case. For overseas films, if

they are released in China, the marketing work is usually done by Chinese marketing teams.

Hollywood film producers could create a contract with Chinese marketers and require them to set up an official Sina Weibo account when marketing in China. I think according to the Chinese habit of hiring a professional marketing team, producer could receive more box office reward.

FOR CHINESE MOVIES

——Improve IP Brands

As mentioned above, IP is Intellectual Property, a kind of source of movie adaptation. The source can be a novel or a game. In my inventory of top ten American movies, there are six movies belonging to IP movies. *Batman* had 6 different movies from 1989 to 2000; *Harry Potter* had eight movies from 2001 to 2011; *The Hunger Games* had four movies from 2012 to 2015; *Transformers* had four movies from 2007 to 2014; and *Fast & Furious* had seven movies from 2001 to 2015. In contrast, in the top ten Chinese movies, there are just two IP brands: *Tiny Times* had four movies from 2013 to 2015; and *Lost* series had three movies from 2010 to 2015.

Compared with the Chinese film industry use of IPs, Hollywood has a long IP history and a mature system for developing IPs. Walter McDaniel, the former chief painter of Marvel Entertainment, and now the founder of Black Dragon, said, "the real IP can be everlasting. The present IP in China cannot be called IP, but only brand. A brand has a life period, it will vanish at a specific time, but the IP will not" (Yu, 2015). Much of a film's IP in the Chinese market is relatively isolated, or relies on the participation of stars. To improve Chinese film IP marketing, first of all, Chinese film marketers need to discover the deep value of IP contents, and to cultivate

a mature IP. Secondly, they need to develop a loyal fan base and maintain the fame of the brand.

Studying Hollywood, Chinese film producers should focus on the content, connect with literature, animation, games and other cross-border fields to carry out a diversified business IP model.

——Try To Create an Official Website

The inventory and case study verified that Chinese films do not have official websites. I am not sure if a set official website is very helpful to Chinese film marketing, because no film has practiced yet. If there is a Chinese film that has enough of a marketing budget in the future, I recommend film marketers try to set up an official website to do marketing. Learning from Hollywood marketing methods, marketers should compare them with the domestic situation, such as putting a website link on Sina Weibo. It is an innovative film marketing strategy for the Chinese market, and it is worth a try.

——Use Social Media Platforms To Market Abroad

Like American movies, more people should know about Chinese movies, and about Chinese culture. These films do not need to be released overseas; marketers could use social media platforms to let more people know about Chinese movies. Marketers could create a Facebook page or Instagram account using a legal enterprise VPN to introduce the film to other countries. Social media platforms are low cost and do not need too many staff members to operate. The aim of using this way to broadcast abroad is not in order to increase box office revenue, but to

improve the reputation of movies. It is a good choice for movie marketers to use a cheap but widely broadcast way to promote their movies.

CONCLUSION

In summary, I conducted a comparison of American and Chinese commercial movies, and two inventories. A case study approach' helped me to identify some differences and similarities in marketing strategies. I believe this research can give some suggestions and directions for film industry. Through the individual research process I found some new points that have rarely been mentioned in this field before. For movie marketers, especially Chinese marketers, I made some recommendations by connecting my inventory and case study, and I think these suggestions are worthy of practice. For most ordinary people who do not work or study film marketing, they may have a basic knowledge of social media and movie marketing. The most significant process is that I compared two countries' film marketing contexts and used an international view to do this research. Finally, there is one thing that needs to be remembered: social media changes quickly. The research conclusion I came to only reflects this past time, and does not represent the future. This field needs more people to continue this research.

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APPENDIX

1. Conceptual framework schematic



2. Research methodology schematic



3. Inventory of Chinese film marketing strategy

Lost in Hong Kong	Monster Hunt	Old Boy: The Way of The Dragon	Tiny Times 1.0	So Young	Lost in Thailand	Love is Not Blind	Let The Bullets Fly	Painted Skin	Hero	Film's Name
09.25.2015	07.16.2015	07.10.2014	06.27.2013	04.26.2013	12.12.2012	11.08.2011	y 12.16.2010	09.26.2008	12.20.2002	Marketing Ways Release
•	R	•	<.	R	R	Q	C.	R.	C.	ng Launch Event
Z.	•		Z.	Z.	•		e.	Z.	R.	Outdoor Advertising
	•		<	Q	•		-	Z.	-	Viral Music
	<		<	<	•	<	×.	<	•	Poster
Q	Œ.	Œ.	R	Z.	×.	Q	R	Z.	R	Trailer
	_		-	Z.			-	Z.	K	Blog & MSN
«	•	Œ.	K	Z.	×.	Œ.	R.	Œ.	K	Topic Speculation
Q	_	Œ.	K		•	•	-		K	Video Marketing
	•	•	R	Z	Z.		•			Cooperation With Ticketing Website
	Z.	C.	R	Z.	•	C	R			Official Weibo Account
	•		K		_	×.	-		K	Film Derivative

TOP 10 Chinese Most Influential Commercial Films Marketing Ways

4. Inventory of American film marketing strategy

Fast & Furious 7	Transformers: Age of Extinction	Frozen	The Avengers	The Hunger Games	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows-Part 2	Inception	Avatar	Batman: The Dark Knight	The Blair Witch Project	Film's Name
04.03.2015	06.27.2014	11.27.2013	05.04.2012	03.23.2012	11.11.2011	07.16.2010	12.16.2009	07.18.2008	07.30.1999	Marketing Ways Release
<	K	<	•	<	K	R	•	C.	-	g Launch Event
Z	Œ.	Q	R	•	R	R	R	R		Outdoor Advertising
R	•	<	R	R	•		•		-	Viral Music
R	K	C	R	Q	R	R	R			Poster
C		<	K.	R	R	<	<	R		Trailer
C		Z.	Z.	C			Z.			Blog & MSN
Œ.	R	<	<	Z	R	C	R.	R	Œ.	Topic Speculation
«	×.		-	Z.	R	<	-	R	Œ.	Video Marketing
R	R	R	Z.	Z	R	Z.	R	R	R	Official Website
R		R	K	R	•	<	R			FaceBook Account
R		R	K	R	K	C	R			Film Derivative

TOP 10 American Most Influential Commercial Films Marketing Ways