

Analysis of Chinese Hospital's Sina Weibo Profiles:
Organizational Disclosure, Information Dissemination and Audience Involvement

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In October 2013, in Wenling, Zhejiang province of China, a man who was unsatisfied with the result of an operation stabbed a doctor to death and wounded two others. In March 2012, a 17-year-old male patient rushed into a doctor's office and crazily stabbed doctors, resulting in one death and three serious injuries. In January 2011, several family members of a patient stabbed ten doctors in Shanghai after the hospital refused to provide treatment because the patient could not afford the high cost of treatment. Such cases are currently widely seen in China. According to the official data from China's Ministry of Health, in 2006, there were 9,831 "grave incidents" with 5,519 doctors injured in China and this number doubled in 2008, with a tendency that is increasing (Liebman, 2013).



A good communication between patients and hospitals may help to solve some of the problem of medical disputes in China. To help change such conflicting relationship, Chinese hospitals started to use the Internet to enhance communication between individuals and health organizations. Social media thus has great potential to augment public health communication. Inspired by the dialogic and relationship theories from public relations literatures (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Waters & Jamal, 2011), this article aims to examine the adoption of Sina Weibo by Chinese hospitals to foster and maintain relationship with audiences and find out what differences, if any, exist between different types of hospitals in China.

Sina Weibo is the most popular social media currently in China. This Twitter-like microblogging service was launched on August 14, 2009, with more than 300 million users by May, 2012 (Chen & She, 2012). A content analysis of 200 Chinese hospital's Sina Weibo profiles was conducted, which contained 100 public hospitals and 100 private hospitals. All profiles were examined for the presence of items regarding organizational disclosure, information dissemination, and audience involvement. In addition, the number of followers was collected. The hospitals were also identified as public or private.

Among these three public relations strategies, organizational disclosure was most commonly used, followed by information dissemination and audience involvement. In addition, this study

tested which type of relationship cultivation strategy would be positively related to the number of followers. Results showed that the more organizational disclosure strategies were used, the more followers a hospital would have on its Sina Weibo account. Although audience involvement strategies were least common, it had a significant and positive relationship with the number of followers. These findings thus indicated that Chinese audiences expect hospitals to be more open and transparent to them by disclosing more important information on the organizational level. At the same time, Chinese hospitals failed to utilize the interactive nature of social media, which was found to be a significant facilitator of audience engagement. Last, although public relations strategies were not fully utilized by Chinese hospitals, private hospitals scored significantly higher than public hospitals in all these three public relations strategies.

In the future, Chinese hospitals should focus their communication on the two-way model, through which audiences could obtain information that satisfies their needs and organizations themselves might also reap benefits later from the communication with followers. The end goal of the two-way communication is to build up mutual understanding and win-win situation between an hospital and its audiences (Waters & Jamal, 2011).

Reference

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Short bio

Shaohai is a PhD student at the intersection of health communication and new media studies. His research deals with how Internet use can enhance the communication between health organization, doctor and patient, and ultimately improve patient's health outcome. He is also interested in health campaign in the Web 2.0 era.