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口譯員在社交媒體上的個人品牌策略：以新浪微博為例

Interpreters' Personal Branding Strategies on Social Media: Sina

Weibo as an Example

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Sina Weibo as an Example

本論文係張若怡君（學號 R04147014）在國立臺灣大學  
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## 謝辭



終於寫到致謝了，我好開心。此刻心中充滿了不可置信，我居然要寫完了。

寫論文的過程非常艱辛，一開始覺得很後悔為什麼沒有多修六學分的課，這樣就可以做實驗，不用寫行銷類的論文。後來發現學姐寫了台灣口譯員的自我行銷，當時覺得像吃了一整顆白煮蛋還沒喝水，整個人懵掉了。還好論文指導教授范家銘老師機智過人，叫我研究大陸口譯員，當下覺得完蛋了我一個人也不認識肯定沒有人願意接受訪談，可是為了畢業只能試試看了。再然後自己化身勇氣少女私信一群不認識的口譯員，加上指導教授告訴我很多口譯員的聯繫方式讓我碰碰運氣看，老師大恩大德，弟子無以為報，只能快快畢業還您耳根清淨。結果真的找到了十幾位受試者，大家真的人好好，我都覺得自己像詐騙集團。訪談的過程讓我覺得自己真的選對了主題，我非常喜歡跟別人聊天，這是最喜歡的部分。

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## Abstract



Social media is considered an indispensable part of people's daily life and has become a new channel for big brands, as well as individuals, to do digital marketing to gain more exposure. Wang (2016) found that fan pages can be a platform for interpreters to be known by potential clients. While existing research has explored the use of fan pages in Taiwan, little is known about how interpreters in Mainland China use social media to benefit their career. This study aims to investigate the result of interpreters' self-branding on Sina Weibo, the third largest social media in Mainland China, by means of quantitative analysis and semi-constructed interview.

Sina Weibo posts of five interpreters with the largest amount of fans were analyzed and the interpreters were then interviewed to cross-examine their personal branding strategies. Seven interpreters who did not brand themselves were also interviewed to talk about their views on such phenomenon. The results revealed trends of how the subjects established themselves in the market, which can be followed by interpretation students and self-taught interpreters.

Key words: social media, interpreter, personal branding, interpretation market, Sina Weibo

## 摘要



社群媒體已經成為人們日常生活中不可或缺的一部分，同時也為企業和個人提供了數位行銷的平台，來增加知名度。Wang (2016)的研究發現 Facebook 的粉絲專頁增加了口譯員被潛在客戶看見的機會，分析了台灣口譯員使用粉絲專頁的方式，本研究旨在探究經營社群媒體是否有助於大陸口譯員的職涯發展。研究以大陸第三大社群媒體新浪微博為例，採用量化分析和半結構式訪談的方式，瞭解大陸口譯員在微博上的自我行銷策略。

本研究分析了粉絲數量排名前五的口譯員在微博上的發文，並用訪談的方式進一步佐證他們建立自我品牌的策略。另外，作者也邀請了七位沒有建立自我品牌的口譯員講述了他們對口譯員在社群媒體上自我行銷的看法。研究結果揭示了大陸口譯員如何進入市場、獲取穩定客源，供口譯學生和自我成材的口譯員參考。

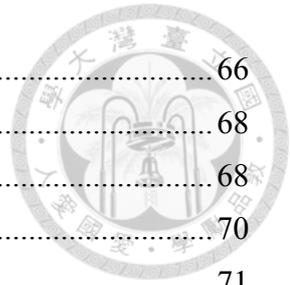
**關鍵字：**社群媒體，口譯員，塑造個人品牌，口譯市場，新浪微博

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# Chapter 1 Introduction



## 1.1 Background of the Study

The Internet has tremendously changed our lives in the past few decades. Social networking sites have been an integral part of people's daily practice. Most sites not only help maintain existing social networks, but also help strangers connect with each other based on shared interests, political views, or activities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The emergence of Internet-based social media has made it possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people, which has changed our way of social interaction (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). People are willing to share their thoughts and daily life with friends or even strangers. With the advancement of technology, social media has gradually become an indispensable part of people's life.

Websites and applications dedicated forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and wikis are different types of social media. They serve as a good platform for organizations and individuals, especially freelancers, to increase their visibility and brand themselves.

Huang (2015) explored how non-profit organizations advocate their ideas through



social media. Four women welfare/rights organizations' Facebook Pages were used as study objects. Results showed that at strategic level, these women welfare/rights organizations strive to find a balance between their core values and Facebook fans' favor. For them, Facebook is a necessary “media” to create discourses and spread ideas, and it is also an important “social community” to interact with targeted audiences and accumulate energy for collective actions in the future.

A brand is anything that is recognizable and known, liked, and trusted because it is consistently the same (FORTIS, 2017). There is a trend for individual freelancers to treat themselves as organizations to brand themselves. Chen (2011) looked into the reason that some dermatologists need online marketing and the way they established relations of trust and conveyed their brand charisma. Twenty-nine people were interviewed, including dermatologists, their marketing team workers, participating community members, social media marketing experts, and scholars. This research found that if dermatologists hoped to benefit from online community communication, they may need unique brand positioning, select social media according to the preference of the target audience, respond to negative messages carefully, and spread good words of mouth by regular customers.



Previous studies also pointed out that social media serves as a good platform to make connections with clients and colleagues. People who want to make social connections tend to post more announcements and re-share posts. In this way, they can stay in touch and share experiences with others.

As freelancers, interpreters can also make use of social media to increase their visibility and gain a good reputation. FORTIS (2017) published an article on AIIC to point out interpreters should build their personal brands so that they are seen as distinctive and irreplaceable. Interpreters should be distinguishable because that is what clients expect. Clients prefer to choose interpreters whom they know, like and trust to avoid surprises. There are freelance interpreters realizing the importance of marketing themselves and networking, so many of them have LinkedIn profiles and some of them have Facebook Pages, blogs, and Sina Weibo accounts to build a good image.

The author, coming from Mainland China, is now pursuing a master degree of interpretation in Taiwan. The Chinese-English conference interpreting industry in Taiwan can be characterized as a monopolistic competition industry, where there is significant information asymmetry between the suppliers and consumers (Tseng, 2005).

The National Academy for Educational Research pointed out that 83% clients



would turn to interpreters who they have worked with previously and consumer loyalty is partly caused by market intransparency and a lack of self-marketing of freelance interpreters. The situation has not changed in 2012 according to another report of the National Academy for Educational Research (2012). Results also show that a major problem faced by Taiwanese interpreters is a lack of platforms for promoting themselves.

Huang (2010) proposed an analytical framework to delineate conference interpreters' impression management behaviors, which was categorized into acquisitive, protective, and adjustment tactics in interpreting services in terms of the first encounter, pre-service stage, in-service stage, post-service stage, and off-work interactions with agents and clients. He also mentioned that referrals played a significant role in the conference interpreters' career development.

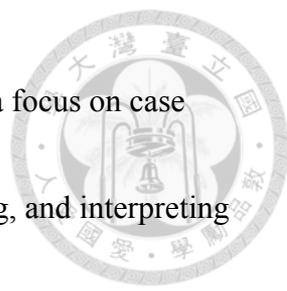
Wang (2016) investigated how Taiwanese interpreters and translators built their brands on Facebook fans page from four perspectives, including motivation, personal identity, online personal branding and impression management. Taiwanese interpreters and translators post working conditions, emerging technologies, and how they work on Facebook fan pages to increase their visibility, though it may not be the best way to find

more cases. She also suggests that future research could put more emphasis on interpreters and translators' personal branding strategies.



Wang mentioned that translators and interpreters did not gain many job opportunities through fans page. If building personal brand helps interpreters increase visibility, why does not it help them gain more jobs? Is it the same case in Mainland China? If there are no more job opportunities, then is it worth investing time and energy for interpreters to brand themselves on social media?

Dawrant and Jiang (2001) published an article on AIIC to introduce the Chinese interpretation market. The Chinese government set up a joint interpretation project with the United Nations to train professionals for the UN in 1979. Most graduates became staff interpreters or officers in government ministries and agencies. Later some interpreters decided to quit their jobs in the government or leave their in-house positions and then established conference interpreting as an independent profession. While the monopoly was broken, freelancers who did not have government background would find it difficult to get started. The report was published in 2001. What does today's interpretation market in China look like? Does the popularity of social media change the way Chinese interpreters start out?



Currently, Interpretation Master dissertations in Mainland China focus on case studies of internship projects, interpreters' role, interpretation training, and interpreting process. However, there is no research investigating how interpreters manage their images and build their brands on social media. So this study aims to find out how interpreters in Mainland China market themselves via social media and whether it helps them find more jobs.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Research and Research Questions**

To fill the research gap on this subject, this study is intended as a follow-up study on Wang's research into interpreters' personal branding strategy on social media in 2016 but with a different focus. Interpreters in Mainland China are observed to use social media to promote themselves. Although Wang's study revealed how interpreters in Taiwan manage their Facebook fans page, little is known about how interpreters in Mainland China build their personal brands on Sina Weibo, one of the most popular social media in Mainland China. Therefore, the present study aims to look into Mainland Chinese interpreters' personal branding strategies on social media. It sets out

to answer the following research questions:



1. How do conference interpreters in Mainland China build their personal brands on social media?
2. Does building personal brands help conference interpreters in Mainland China find more job opportunities?

By answering the above research questions, this study should yield additional insight into the self-marketing process of interpreters in Mainland China, particularly into their personal branding strategies on social media, and ultimately have practical implications for interpreters on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review



In this chapter, the definition and history of brand and branding will be given in 2.1 to demonstrate that the goal of launching brands by companies is to assure quality and differentiate themselves from competitors. The process of building and managing a brand will also be introduced. In 2.2, the social and economic reasons behind the rise of personal branding will be explained. Then the focus is put on the influence of the popularity of social media to personal branding, which will be specified in 2.3. Referring to the branding strategies adopted by companies (see in 2.1), personal branding strategies can be summarized into three steps, which will be discussed in detail in 2.4. As freelancers, interpreters are suggested to build personal brands to distinguish themselves from others, which is also expected by clients. In 2.5, the emphasis is placed on the interpretation market and the use of social media in Mainland China to facilitate the further discussion of personal branding strategies adopted by Mainland Chinese interpreters.



## 2.1 Brand and Branding

The first practice of branding was to put symbols on products. Initially, a brand was used to identify products and assure quality. In ancient Egypt, unique symbols were put on bricks by brick-makers to identify their products. In medieval Europe, trade guilds used “trademarks” as a way to demonstrate the quality of the products and to protect themselves legally in an exclusive market. In the early sixteenth century, whiskey distillers burned the name of the producer onto the top of each barrel to help customers identify their products, as well as make sure that their products would not be replaced with cheaper ones (Farquhar, 1989). Brands have also been burned onto animals’ fur, which serves as the best way to prevent livestock theft, loss, and dispute (Keller, 2008, p.2).

The goal of this practice was to identify products and assure quality. Due to the mass production and the standardization of quality products, the purpose of branding evolved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century into distinguishing products and services of companies from their competitors. According to American Marketing Association, a brand was then defined as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or a combination of them that is designed to



identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those competitors”. For companies, a brand enables companies to charge higher prices and basically guarantees the success of launching new products and services, giving companies competitive advantages. For consumers, a brand can “simplify choices, promise a particular quality level, reduce risk, and/or engender trust” and “reflects the complete experience that customers have with products” (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p.740). Financially, a brand is also perceived as an asset. The value added to the three aspects is called brand equity (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

The first step of building a strong brand is to develop brand positioning to direct marketing activities and programs, which involves creating associations in the minds of customers and increasing competitiveness. Though products and services are at the core of brands, brand intangibles are also extremely relevant to positioning (Keller, 2002). Intangibles include a variety of brand associations of customers (Keller, 2001). Aaker (1997) found that the most common associations of U.S. brands can be categorized into sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. It is worth noting that different people tend to be influenced by different brand associations in different consumption settings (Aaker, 1999). Customers’ entire experience with products and

companies is also a part of brand intangibles, which should be strategically managed (Schmitt, 2000).



After developing brand positioning, a series of branding and marketing activities can be conducted to introduce brands and build brand equity. Various channels of marketing and communication are suggested to be integrated to create synergistic effects (Tom, 2002). Brand elements, such as logos, symbols, slogans should also be consistent with the brand image. In other words, the effectiveness of marketing and communication activities not only relies on “how well they work singularly but also on how they work in combination” (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p.743).

The process of building brands does not stop here. It is necessary to monitor brand performance constantly by measuring brand equity at different levels (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). From the perspective of customers, brand equity plays a significant role in their attraction to a certain product or a certain company generated by nonobjective part of the product (Broniarczyk & Gershoff, 2003). From the perspective of companies, brand equity means additional values that help secure distribution, make marketing and communication activities more effective, protect a product from competition, boost growth, and ensure the success of expanding into other product

categories (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). From the perspective of a financial market, brands are perceived as assets that can be bought and sold (Ambler & Barwise, 1998).



Assessing brand equity from the abovementioned three perspectives is a good way to measure the effectiveness of marketing and communication activities comprehensively, making the process more target-oriented.

With the guidance of brand positioning, marketing and communication activities can be conducted more effectively. But branding is an endless process. Measuring different brand components is a comprehensive way to assess brand performance, ensuring the ultimate success of a brand.

## **2.2 The rise of personal branding**

Branding is used by companies to deliver products and services in a unique and distinguishable way, helping them stand out from their competitors. Strategies adopted by them can also be used by individuals to build “personal brands”. The fundamental changes in ways of communication and the employment market led to the rise of personal branding as a self-reliant solution for individuals to stand out in an unstable

economic situation. (Lair, 2005).



Since the mid 1980s, significant changes took place in the business world, including widespread privatization of public services, corporate mergers and consolidation of industries, technological replacement of many jobs, elimination of middle management in many firms, reduced labor costs through industrial relocation and outsourcing. These changes totally transformed the employment climates in many countries, especially in the United States, which experienced a transition from an industrial to an information-based economy (Tapscott, 1997). Work became less stable, benefits packages shrunk, available jobs were increasingly located in low-paying, part-time services sectors, and there was a growing number of temporary and contract labors (Sennett, 1998). Against this backdrop of destabilized work conditions, personal branding was depicted as an inevitable and self-reliant way to stand out in the information-based economy (Lair, 2005). Like companies, individuals can also treat themselves as brands and strive to build their personal brands in order to increase competitiveness and stand out in the job market.

In addition to the turbulent business world, communication media also witnessed great changes. During the 1970s, television networks started using viewers' age,



income, education, and ethnicity to break down the mass audience into smaller groups and collecting detailed data about the audience to create programs that appeal to specific groups, transforming the marketing practice. Though conventional advertising through paid media was still an important part of marketing and communication activities, multimedia promotion became more common and promising (Olins, 2000). The explosion of communication media and the maturity of the marketing culture posed new challenges as well as opportunities to branding, because of its flexibility in responding to a crowded communication world.

As a result, companies started branding themselves independently of their product lines. Brands were no longer primarily linked with products, but services. In the meantime, a long-term push for project-based employment led to the rise of a freelance workforce (Christopherson, 2002). According to a survey conducted by Freelancers Union and Elance-oDesk (2014), 53 million Americans worked as freelancers in 2013, making up 34% of the entire American workforce. In a fragmented and highly individualized labor market, freelancers who construct a professional image and reputation are believed to have a larger chance to achieve career progress and success.

This could be why AIIC, the International Association of Conference Interpreters<sup>1</sup>, once suggested that interpreters should build personal brands to add values to the service they deliver.



The basic idea of people establishing a perceived image or impression in the mind of others was first introduced by Goffman (1959). His “self-presentation theory” proposed that people try to control how they are perceived by others in various social interactions, and the presented self is based on the context and who the audience is. The process of people creating an identity that they would like to be seen as in public by sending positive and deliberate messages was termed “impression management” (Goffman 1959).

In 1997, Peters used the term “personal branding” to describe the practice of people marketing themselves and their careers as brands. He called for everyone to build a personal brand:

It's time for me -- and you -- to take a lesson from the big brands, a lesson that's true for anyone who's interested in what it takes to stand out and prosper in the new

---

<sup>1</sup> The International Association of Conference Interpreters is the only global association of conference interpreters. There are more than 3,000 professionals from every continent in AIIC. It has promoted high standards of quality and ethics in the profession and represented the interests of its practitioners for over 60 years.

world of work. Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You. It's that simple -- and that hard. And that inescapable. (p.83)



The idea of personal branding basically suggests that the road to success is found in self-packaging, meaning the ultimate success of one's career "is not determined by individual's internal sets of skills, motivations and interests, but rather by how effectively they are arranged, crystallized and labeled, or in other words, branded" (Lair, 2005, p.308). Individuals are encouraged to discover and develop their distinguishable qualities as a product and take advantage of those qualities as selling points, "making sure you control your package and the message it sends" (Peters, 1999, p.46)

To build personal brands, individuals are suggested to adopt strategies that work successfully for big companies and actively "sell" themselves in various situations (Peters, 1999; Roffer, 2002; Schawbel, 2011). The ultimate goal is to "let your brand become a vehicle for your most authentic self", "distinguish yourself from others who do similar work, affirm your true identity, highlight your talents, and establish your

reputation in business” (Roffer, 2002, p.2).



Establishing personal brands brings four benefits (Dutta, 2011): first, people can charge a premium price or demand a higher salary, just like products of famous brands are more expensive (Suchomelova, Prochazka, & Durinik, 2016). Second, with more visibility, people are more likely to be recognized by peers and hiring managers. Third, the network developed because of the brand can protect individuals from the uncertain work environment and allow them to grow their business. Fourth, branding also gives individuals confidence and a sense of purpose.

To conclude, branding benefits individuals by making them unique and protecting them from fierce competition in a job market where work is organized based on projects and tasks. Individuals can learn from big companies and develop their own personal branding strategies with expected return for the acquisition of a professional image and reputation, which is beneficial to career development (Gandini, 2016).

### **2.3 Personal branding in the age of the social media**

Technological advancements have fundamentally transformed the world in the past

decades, especially the way of communication. The way that brands, both corporate brands and personal brands, are built and managed has also been influenced as social media affords a low-cost and accessible platform for creating professional images and managing social relationship.



Today, 69% of U.S. adults use social media, thanks to the growing availability of the high-speed Internet access and the popularity of mobile devices, while just 5% of Americans reported using these platforms in 2005. Social media is especially popular among younger adults, as 86% of 18 to 29-year-olds use social media. It is also worth mentioning that 80% of those whose age is between 30 and 49 and 64% of those whose age is between 50 and 64 use social media (Smith, 2017). Social media is so popular that nowadays even recruiters use social media to include and exclude candidates from a search (Hood, Robles, & Hopkins, 2014), so it is suggested that job seekers need a personal brand to help secure employment in today's competitive job market.

Like the United States, the number of Chinese internet users increased greatly in the past decade, growing from 137 million in 2006 to 731 million in 2016, according to the 39<sup>th</sup> China Statistical Report on Internet Development. In terms of the age group, those between the ages of 10 and 39 made up the largest share in 2016. Compared with



2015, the number of internet users aged under 10 or above 40 grew gradually in 2016.

With the increased accessibility of mobile devices, 95.1 % of the netizens used mobile phones to surf online in the same year. Social media is also quite popular in China as 79.6% of netizens ranked Wechat, the largest social media in China, as the most used application.

Such an evolution did not happen overnight. The Bulletin Board System (BBS) marked the era of the Internet, serving as a platform to facilitate the exchange of software, data, messages, and news between users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Low-cost, high-performance modems drove the growth of the internet services and BBSs through the early 1990s. The late 1990s witnessed a popularity surge in homepages, where ordinary people could share information about their private lives.

Open Diary, founded by Bruce Ableson and Susan Ableson in 1997, was an early example of social media which allowed users to create diaries that were public, private, or friends-only and brought online writers into one community. Social media was defined as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). To understand what social media is, it is

necessary to clarify what Web 2.0 and User Generated Content are.



Web 2.0 is a term that was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to take advantage of the World Wide Web, meaning “content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Applications which were popular in the era of Web 1.0, such as personal web pages and Encyclopedia Britannica Online, are replaced by blogs, wikis, and collaborative projects in Web 2.0, serving as the technological platform for the evolution of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

User Generated Content (UGC) was defined as content made publicly available over the Internet, reflecting a certain amount of creative effort. It is also created outside of professional routines and practices (OECD, 2007). In other words, it can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media provides individuals with web-based services that allow them to construct a public or semi-public profile, build connections and share information with other users within a bounded system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).



With the growing number of social media users, companies have placed increasing importance on online marketing and communication channels and changed the way they build and manage brands to suit new needs in a world where information is exchanged freely. For example, AIIC, founded in 1953, established its official website in 1998 and issued a web magazine named *Communicate!*, promoting high standards of quality and ethics in the profession and representing the interests of its practitioners.

Social media also affords individuals a platform which is low-cost and easy to manage for building personal brands, by facilitating people's self-expression, helping individuals make sure that they are seen by others the same way they see themselves (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Swann Jr., 1990; Rogers 1951). Individuals have greater freedom on social media to express their identities where they are allowed to conceal aspects of their selves that they find undesirable and present constructed and ideal selves (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). Individuals are also offered one venue for establishing new contacts and the opportunity to communicate across communities and cultures around the world, connecting people who are often physically dispersed and sustaining interpersonal ties (Vasalou & Joinson, 2009; Wellman et al., 1996; Shirky, 2014). On top of that, social media offers people an opportunity to impress others and to

gain attentions of others (Zinkhan et al., 1999).



By assisting individuals to present desirable selves and build connections with people whom they could not reach in the past, social media helps its users fulfill their communication goals. Many celebrities, businessmen, entrepreneurs utilize social media to build personal brands. For example, Tom Dickson, the CEO of Blendtec, made videos of blending items like wood, marbles and golf balls and posted these videos on Youtube. The “Will It Blend?” series exploded, attracting over 172 million views. Blendtec became a household name and the sales of the product that Tom used in the videos has increased over 1000%. Since social media has played an increasingly important role in the branding process, strategies which can be adopted by individuals to build personal brands on social media will be introduced in detail in 2.4.

## **2.4 Personal branding strategies in the era of social media**

To build personal brands, individuals can learn from companies’ branding strategies to secure employment opportunities and achieve success in today's competitive job market. Personal branding strategies can be summarized into three



steps: (1) developing a personal brand identity, (2) managing a brand's position, (3) assessing a personal brand image (Khedher, 2014, 2015; Redmond, 2015), which will be discussed in section 2.4.1, 2.4.2, and 2.4.3.

### ***2.4.1 Developing a personal brand identity***

To launch a brand, the first step is to develop a personal brand identity. Large companies usually take the “feature-benefit model” to create a brand, meaning every feature they offer in their product or service yields an identifiable and distinguishable benefit for their customers or clients. When building a personal brand, it is also necessary to consider what benefits a personal brand can offer.

Johnson (2017) pointed out that self-awareness is essential to building a personal brand, meaning that individuals need to understand their strengths and weaknesses so that they can effectively present themselves. To better understand themselves, individuals need to know how they are perceived by others and then identify their talents, skills, and values. (Grant, 2015; Peters 1997). It is also suggested to undertake a self-audit based on a full understanding of one's target market because it makes the process more effective (Shepherd, 2005; Redmond, 2015).



Like big corporates, being distinctive is a major priority of personal brands (Montoya and Vandehey, 2002). Peters (1997) emphasized that individuals should relentlessly focus on their qualities and characteristics that make themselves remarkable and unique instead of “usual descriptors” and “job titles” (p.86).

After spending time learning about themselves, individuals need to select a niche so that they can position themselves in the marketplace (Dutta, 2011). The first impression shapes how everything else about a personal brand is perceived (Grant, 2015), so it is vital to develop a brand identity in the first place by asking oneself “what I want to be famous for” (Peters, 1997, p.85).

In conclusion, the goal in the first stage is to differentiate a personal brand from its competitors and to stand out from a crowd while fitting expectations of a specific target market.

#### ***2.4.2 Managing a brand's position***

After the brand identity is decided, the next step is to manage the position of the brand by introducing the brand and actively communicating the brand (Khedher, 2014).

In today's information-flooded world, the scarcest resource is not ideas or even talents,

but attention (Davenport & Beck 2002). The free exchange of information on social media has given rise to an “attention economy” where visibility plays an essential part of achieving success.



For large companies, communicating the brand means TV advertisements and print advertisements designed to impress the public. Personal brands also need visibility, but there is little budget to buy advertisements. For individuals, attending professional networking events, writing articles for magazines and media sites, commenting on blogs, connecting with people on social networks, and reaching out to the press are ways to gain visibility and communicate the brand (Dutta, 2011).

In addition to promoting personal brands actively, it is also important to adopt the “word-of-mouth marketing” strategy (Peters, 1997). Peters wrote:

The key to any personal branding campaign is “word-of-mouth marketing”. Your network of friends, colleagues, clients, and customers is the most important marketing vehicle you've got; what they say about you and your contributions is what the market will ultimately gauge as the value of your brand. So the big trick to building your brand is to find ways to nurture your network of colleagues -- consciously. (p.87)



After all, being recommended by someone else is better than self-promoting (Giang, 2015). Word-of-mouth marketing in today's world means both online and face-to-face interaction. With the increasing use of social media as a communication platform, word of mouth has become an even more powerful and useful resource both for consumers to refer to and for marketers to make use of. For companies, word-of-mouth marketing means asking customers to share their views on a certain product, serving as a more personal and persuasive source. For personal brands, recommendations from clients, colleagues, and friends are more trustworthy than how they are depicted by themselves, so great emphasis should be placed on building networks and connections, which is also called social capital.

Developing a personal brand involves investing in social capital, defined as “networks together with shared norms, values, and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups” (OECD, 2001, p 41.). Investing in social capital is believed to improve the performance of organizations and strengthen values shared by strategic alliances, bringing benefits for the branding process. For personal branding, group memberships should be deliberately emphasized since individuals are thought to share similarities with the other members of groups to which they appear to belong and

can benefit from positive stereotypes and halo effects (Grant, 2015).



In this stage, the goal is to make the personal brand known by the public, especially the target audience, by actively promoting the brand, using a word-of-mouth marketing strategy, and investing in social capital. It should be noted that bragging about oneself is not something to be embarrassed about (Giang, 2015).

#### ***2.4.3 Assessing a personal brand image***

Like corporate brands, introducing brands to the public is not the end of the branding process. Evaluating the image of a personal brand constantly is necessary to fulfill personal and professional objectives (Khedher, 2014). When promoting a personal brand, “everything you do and everything you choose not to do matters” as it communicates the value and character of the brand (Peters, 1997, p.84). In the era of social media, it seems that every trivial thing is a part of the larger message sent about a personal brand, so it is even more important to monitor its performance from time to time. Individuals can learn from corporate brands to measure brand equity from the perspective of consumers and individuals in order to assess a personal brand image.

From the perspective of consumers, brand equity is the value added to the service

that attracts them, which lies in the consistency and leadership of a personal brand.

The manner that the service is delivered should be consistent with the brand

identity designed in the first stage (Farquhar, 1989, p.27). For a personal brand, there

also should be a coherence between the brand image and the words and behaviors of the

individual in private, as the brand and the individual are intimately intertwined

(Shepherd, 2005; Ibarra, 2015). So individuals need to work through their personality,

their lifestyles, their clothing choices, and their habits to make sure that there is

consistency (Montoya and Vandehey, 2002, p.6).

For consumers, brands also mean leadership, which is about creating a vision and providing inspirations. People who share the same views but are geographically isolated

are bound together into communities on social media, giving rise to crowdcultures

(Holt, 2016). To stand out in the era of social media, personal brands need to target

novel ideologies from crowdcultures to forge ties with the target audience. Since it is

impossible to please everyone, taking a stand is necessary to attract target audience and

build a strong brand. Sharing views about issues being heated discussed is a good way

to form ties with people who hold the same attitude, but it also takes the risk of

offending those who have opposite opinions, so dealing with negative comments and

criticism is also a part of the branding process.



Consumers expect to interact directly with brands in the age of social media and their support plays an increasingly important role in brands' success in the digital era.

To satisfy their needs, a personal brand needs to send a consistent message during the interaction process and enlighten its customers in an overstuffed media environment.

Brand equity at the individual level means additional values that stimulate personal growth, protect them from competition, and make self-marketing activities more effective, thus maintaining an active presence on social media and being flexible to embrace new trends plays a key role in ensuring the success of a personal brand (Dutta, 2011).

In an information-flooded world, losing attention means failure. To avoid being forgotten, a personal brand needs to be active on social media by sending posts at a certain frequency. Every accomplishment and progress made by individuals should be updated to represent the current brand in order to maintain media visibility (Peters, 1997). Being active also means interacting with consumers on social media in real time to establish personal and emotional ties. In the era of social media, corporate brands have started to use the first-person perspective to interact with their followers to create

personal ties. Individuals should particularly leverage the advantage of personal brands which allows them to directly engage followers with the help of advanced technologies, such as live streaming.



The world of social media changes at extremely fast speed, so the ability to react to what's happening in the marketplace and the willingness to change minds is of vital importance to personal brands (Joseph, 2013). Though planning in advance is necessary, personal branding is not all about planning, but about living. Being flexible means adjusting branding strategies when necessary. As a personal brand grows and matures, monitoring the brand image by “reflection-in-action” is an important tool to improve practices and assure success (Khedher, 2015; Schön, 1983). Reflection-in-action means thinking while doing and stopping to make necessary adjustments or alter methods to improve practice. The process of building a personal brand is full of twists and turns. Individuals need to reflect on the branding strategies adopted from time to time to identify which ones are effective and which ones are not and make sure that efforts made achieve expected results.

Branding is a never ending process, both for corporate brands and personal brands. Assessing a personal brand's image and measuring brand equity from different

perspectives makes sure that the adopted personal branding strategies are effective to present the ideal brand image. In this study, interpreters in Mainland China are taken as an example to see how personal brands can be built and managed on social media, so section 2.5 will focus on the Chinese interpretation market to provide a better understanding of their work life.



## **2.5 The interpretation market in Mainland China**

The year 1979 witnessed the beginning of the profession of conference interpreting in China with the establishment of the United Nations Training Program for Interpreters and Translators (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001). The purpose was to train professionals for the United Nations. In 1994 the program was reconstituted as the Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation of Beijing Foreign Studies University. Since then, its graduates have to find jobs on their own (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001).

At first, almost all graduates worked for the Chinese government. “Almost every government entity, from the central government to the provinces and municipalities, and from ministries to agencies to state-owned enterprises, has a unit specifically in charge

of dealing with the ‘non-Chinese’ world” (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001, para 6). When interpreters are needed, government ministries are responsible for recruitment.



Before the 1990s, most conferences were organized by the government. In the 1990s, the Chinese conference market witnessed a huge growth in the private sector, as Dawrant and Jiang (2001) wrote:

The beginning of real growth in the Chinese conference market came in the 1990s... The most dynamic segment of the conference market, however, is the private market sector, as the international corporate community implements aggressive business plans in a growing and more open China, and becomes increasingly active in organizing conferences, seminars, and workshops as part of its government and public relations campaigns. (para.16)

Zhang Wei, a graduate of the UN program working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, became the first interpreter who quit his job and started working as a freelance interpreter in 1993 (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001). Soon, other interpreters determined to follow his step to leave their in-house positions and work as independent professionals. Together they built the Chinese interpretation market. Since then, freelance interpreters have “become a strong competitor and even a preferred service-provider for many users,

especially in the private market sector” (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001, para.11).



With rapid institutional reform and the growth of the private economy, the interpretation market has been influenced accordingly (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001). On one hand, the line between the public and private sector has been blurred. Some staff interpreters have worked in the private sector, which is permitted by their employers. On the other hand, there has been a surge of private translation agencies and English schools offering all kinds of T&I services, but they “tend to be clustered toward the lower end of the market”, while “a more significant source of work for conference interpreters is the higher-end intermediation service, like international PR companies and PCOs (Professional Convention Organizers)” (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001, para.30).

As there is a growing demand for interpretation, the need for training has expanded greatly (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001). An increasing number of universities nowadays offer both T&I postgraduate and graduate programs and courses, and the number of English schools offering T&I training has also been on the rise.

Though the government monopoly over the interpretation market was broken, it is still hard for a freelancer to get started without having worked in the government (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001). If one wants to work in the high-end private sector,



professional credentials, significant working experience, and in some cases solid references, are necessary for an interpreter to demonstrate his/her competence. Besides, with the growing number of formally-trained graduate interpreting students, it is even harder for freelance interpreters to obtain job assignments and stand out in the fierce competition.

Against such backdrop, Mainland China interpreters should particularly follow the suggestion given by AIIC to build personal brands to make themselves unique and distinctive, instead of being seen as an interchangeable and fungible commodity (FORTIS, 2017). Like other personal brands, interpreters can resort to social media to promote themselves as brands. Since the social media landscape of China is extremely different from other regions, it will be discussed in section 2.6 to facilitate the understanding of Mainland Chinese interpreters' personal branding strategies.

## **2.6 The social media landscape of China**

Though Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube, the three leading international social media, cannot be used in Mainland China, China's social media landscape is not

incomparable with its western counterparts. Mainland China is the world's largest social network market with 731 million internet users by December 2016.



According to the 39<sup>th</sup> China Statistical Report on Internet Development, the largest social media in China is Wechat, one of the world's most innovative and versatile mobile application software with many functions from instant messaging, commerce to payment services. But it is impossible to tell the number of a user's connections and how many comments and likes their posts receive. The second largest is QQ, an instant messaging software which also provides services including online social games, music, shopping, microblogging, movies, and group and voice chat. A majority of its users are teenagers who are born after the year 2000, which means they have not entered the job market. Sina Weibo, a Chinese microblogging website which is quite similar to its American counterpart Twitter, is the third largest social media with 297 million monthly active users by September 2016. Compared with Wechat and QQ, Sina Weibo is a more public platform as most published posts on it are visible to the public.

The initial idea of Weibo (or micro blogging in English) is similar to Twitter. Users can publish posts and follow other users, celebrities, businesses, and government agencies. Unlike Twitter, Sina Weibo allows users to post under 2,000 Chinese

characters and upload photos or relevant files. Sina Weibo is mostly used for the acquisition of news and information. Users can also perform live broadcasting, buy and sell products, start polls, play games, upload short videos, and make money via advertisement, paid posting, monetary rewards by other users and paid subscriptions.



Before 2013, Netease, Sohu, Tencent, and Sina Weibo all attracted many users. However, according to the 33<sup>rd</sup> China Statistical Report on Internet Development, the total number of Weibo users slumped 27.83 million in the year 2013. Among them, 37.4% turned to Wechat. Since then, the Weibo market was restructured. Netease, Sohu, and Tencent gradually stopped investing in their Weibo service and later fully suspended it. In the first half of the year 2015, since its competitors quit the market, Sina Weibo established itself at the dominant position. Due to the attraction of celebrities and its investment in short video and live broadcasting, users have been drawn back to Sina Weibo, and later it became the third largest social media in Mainland China (China Internet information center, 2017).

Seeing its potential for advertising and marketing, companies signed up for their own Sina Weibo accounts to reach their target consumers. Around 40% of micro blogging verified accounts are company accounts. According to the 39<sup>th</sup> China



Statistical Report on Internet Development (2017), there were 164,522 government official accounts by December 2016. The number of celebrities and businessmen, who use Sina Weibo to promote themselves has also been growing exponentially, giving rise to “the Wanghong economy” (or Internet celebrity economy) in 2016. There are two types of Wanghongs (or internet celebrities) in China – those who create original content and the “fashionistas”. The first type produces high quality content on social media to attract users’ attention. When they have enough followers, companies will pay them for advertising products. The other type uses social media to sell their self-brand products via customer to customer websites and applications, like Taobao. They post pictures and video of themselves wearing clothes, or accessories, or makeups of their own brands, and conduct live streaming sessions at times to interact with their fans, playing a role as key opinion leaders (KOLs). Both types of Wanghongs highly rely on the support of their fans, thus there is a new advertising mode in “the Wanghong economy” that Wanghongs use live streaming to directly interact with their followers. They are successful examples of personal brands whose strategies can be referred to by those who also want to promote themselves on social media.

According to the 39<sup>th</sup> China Statistical Report on Internet Development, live



streaming platforms play an increasingly important role in China's social media landscape. By June 2016, there are more than 200 live streaming applications and 325 million live streaming platform users, accounting for 45.8% of the total netizens (Liang & Luo, 2016). At first, live streaming technology was used to broadcast parties or news conferences to attract more audience. Then, several large video websites started embracing live streaming technology. Live streaming channels have been used to broadcast online games and other User-generated Content. As live streaming is increasingly popular, many social media, including Sina Weibo, have introduced the live streaming function to satisfy users' need.

According to Weibo User Growth Report in 2016, live streaming business gained great growth momentum. There were more than 23 million live streaming programs in the third quarter of 2016, which translates to 260,000 programs every day, a 124% increase from 2015. More than 40% of the users watched more than twenty minutes.

Wanghongs' success demonstrates that for those who want to build personal brands on Sina Weibo, live streaming is a good tool to engage followers, grow follower bases, and enhance their loyalty (Liang & Luo, 2016).

To sum up, individuals, especially freelancers who is not employed by one single

employer, are suggested to treat themselves as brands and take lessons from the branding strategies of companies. In doing so, individuals can build their personal brands to respond to the turbulent job market, aiming to differentiate themselves from competitors and pursue career development. The arrival of the age of social media has fundamentally changed the world, giving individuals a flexible platform to promote themselves and more opportunities to gain visibility. Interpreters in China are taken as an example to see how individuals can build personal brands on social media. In this light, the purpose of reviewing China's unique social media landscape and interpretation market is to help the researcher capture both challenges and opportunities faced by Chinese interpreters and, in turn, contribute to the further discussion of their personal branding strategies.



## Chapter 3 Research Methodology



### 3.1 Research design

The study adopted an integrated approach to collect data that combined qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the Mainland Chinese interpreters' personal branding strategies on Sina Weibo. First, posts of the five most popular Chinese-English interpreters who were based in China were collected to generate quantitative data and then analyzed using descriptive statistics. After that, interview questions were developed based on the results of quantitative analysis and literature. A pilot interview was conducted to obtain feedback, based on which interview questions were finalized. Semi-structured Interviews were then taken to gather more data. The interviews were transcribed and a text-based version was used for manual analysis. The process of data analysis involved thematic analysis to identify overarching themes and content analysis to pull out representative quotes to elucidate various themes.



### 3.2 Subjects

Two Chinese keywords, “口譯” (“interpretation” or “interpreter”) and “同傳” (“simultaneous interpretation” or “conference interpreters”), were used to search on Sina Weibo to find subjects. By searching “口譯”, 2140 users were found. By searching “同傳”, 5882 users were found. They were then ranked in terms of fans numbers. For the purpose of this study, users whose main jobs were not interpreters, such as interpretation teachers and master of ceremonies, and who were not based in Mainland China were excluded. Some interpreters with a lot of fans have not posted for a long time. According to the 33<sup>rd</sup> China Statistical Report on Internet Development, a large amount of users left Weibo since 2013, so it might be safe to suggest that these interpreters stopped using Sina Weibo. Since they stopped managing their online images on Sina Weibo, interpreters who had not posted for more than six months were not included in the sample. To conduct analysis in a premise way, interpreters whose working language pairs were not Chinese-English were not selected. According to the abovementioned criteria, five interpreters with the most followers were chosen as subjects, due to the limitation on time and resources. Each of them was assigned a letter

according to the chronological order in which their posts were analyzed.

The background information and working status of the five subjects are

summarized in Table 3.1 and 3.2 respectively.



*Table 3.1 Background information of the subjects*

Subject	Age	Gender	Education (Bachelor; Master)	Location	Years of being freelance interpreters
A	34	Female	Guangzhou; UK	Guangzhou	10
B	28	Female	Chongqing	Fuzhou	6
D	40	Male	Beijing; Beijing & USA	Beijing	12.5
E	36	Male	Nanjing; Beijing	Beijing	7.5

*Table 3.2 Working status of the subjects*

Subject	Total working days	Sina Weibo Fans Number	Other job	Other active social media
A		38,058	Lecturer	Zhihu; Wechat
B		26,393	Translator; Wechat group	Wechat
D	2011-2016: over 150 per year	31,323	No	
E	ca. 750	21,375	Graduate student	Wechat



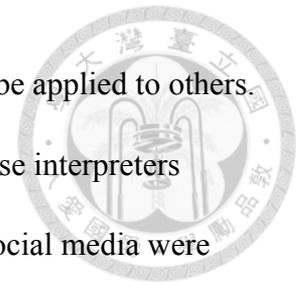
Messages were sent to invite the five subjects to take interviews. Unexpectedly, subject C replied that she did not brand herself on Sina Weibo and she refused to be interviewed. Subject A and D also claimed that they do not intend to promote themselves on social media. They loved interpretation, so they posted their ideas and thoughts and shared things related to interpretation. Consequently, they attracted many fans who also love interpretation on Sina Weibo. They were willing to share views on such phenomenon. Subject B and D were too busy to spend 45 minutes on interviews, so they briefly wrote their views and sent them to the researcher by email.

### ***3.2.1 Adjustment***

To invite more interpreters who adopted personal branding strategies on social media, the author turned to the thesis instructor and other interpreters in mainland China for help. Four interpreters who were thought to brand themselves successfully on social media, were recommended. Interestingly, only two of them claimed to do so: one branded himself on Zhihu (a question-and-answer social media where questions are asked, answered, edited and organized by the community of its users), the other on LinkedIn (a business and employment-oriented social networking service, allowing members to create profiles and make connections to each other). They both agreed to be interviewed. Though social media was different in forms, it might be safe to suggest that

interpreters' personal branding strategies on one social media could be applied to others.

To better comprehend the context under which Mainland Chinese interpreters branded themselves, interpreters who did not brand themselves on social media were also invited to share their views on interpreters' personal branding.

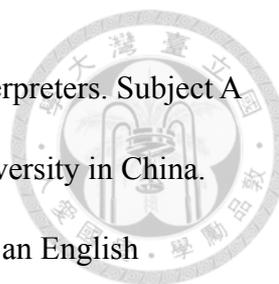


### ***3.2.2 Background information and working status of the subjects***

Six of the subjects were male and five were female. Two of the eleven subjects were under 30 and one was 40 years old. The remaining eight were between 31 to 39.

Two of the four subjects who built their personal brands on social media had master degrees (one was underway), while all the seven subjects who did not brand themselves had master degrees, one of which even had two master degrees, one in Beijing, the other in the USA. The four subjects who received their master degrees in China were based in the cities where they got master degrees while three of the four subjects who received their master degrees in the UK were based in Shanghai and the other one chose to work mainly in Guangzhou.

Subjects had worked as freelance interpreters for different years. Two were under five years, five were between five to nine years, and four were over nine years. Their total working days varied greatly due to different working years, from 90 days to 2175 days. Subject D did not give an exact number, but he reported that he worked more than 150 days annually since 2011. Considering the fact that he had worked as freelance interpreters for 12.5 years, it was estimated that his total working days may exceed 1500 days.



Five subjects had in-house jobs before working as freelance interpreters. Subject A still had a day job, lecturer teaching interpretation in a renowned university in China. Subject B, F, J, and L also worked as translators. Subject B managed an English learning Wechat Group and L taught English. Subject H had another identity, fashion Sina Weibo blogger.

In terms of social media usage, four subjects were also active on Zhihu, five on Moments of Wechat, one on LinkedIn, and two of them had Wechat Official Accounts.

The background information and working status of subject F, G, H, I, J, K and L are summarized in Table 3.3 and 3.4 respectively.

*Table 3.3 Background information of the subjects*

Subject	Age	Gender	Education (Bachelor; Master)	Location	Years of being freelance interpreters
F	29	Male	Shanghai	Shanghai	4
G	31	Male	Chongqing; UK	Shanghai	6
H	32	Female	Shanghai; UK	Shanghai	6.5
I	36	Female	Shanghai; Shanghai	Shanghai	10.5
J	33	Female	Beijing; Beijing	Beijing	9
K	33	Male	Wuhan; UK	Shanghai	10
L	28	Male	Anhui; Xiamen	Xiamen	3

Table 3.4 Working status of the subjects

Subject	Total working days	Sina Weibo Fans Number	Other job	Other active social media
F	ca. 400	434	Translator	Zhihu
G	more than 1000	9,679	No	Linkedin; Wechat
H	ca 600	10,527	Fashion Sina Weibo blogger	Zhihu; Wechat
I	2175	941	No	Zhihu
J	ca. 800	818	Translator	No
K	ca. 1200	919	No	Wechat

Eventually, four subjects, B, E, F, and G, who established personal brands on social media, were invited to talk about their strategies. Seven subjects, A, D, H, I, J, K, and L, were interviewed to reveal how they see interpreters' personal branding. The interviews were conducted during April 11<sup>th</sup> to April 29<sup>th</sup> in 2017.

### 3.3 Research process

#### 3.3.1 Quantitative analysis

The number of posts number of the five subjects were tabulated by year. Their posts and interactions, including reposts, comments, and likes, of each post in the year 2016 was used to conduct thematic analysis and content analysis. The reason why the year 2016 was chosen was that since 2013, a large number of users left Sina Weibo. Due

to its investment in short video and live streaming, Sina Weibo has come back and was reported to be the third largest social media in the 39<sup>th</sup> China Statistical Report on Internet Development published in January 2017. So it might be safe to suggest that their posts in the year 2016 comprehensively reflect their personal branding strategies.



After browsing the posts of the five subjects, it was discovered that subjects' posts content could be categorized into five groups, including (1) daily life, (2) translation and interpretation, (3) work life, (4) news and (5) others. Posts about how they spent their free time were categorized into daily life. Posts related to translation and interpretation include but are not limited to bilingual texts, good search engines, and learning materials. "Work life" included information about translation and interpretation jobs and the interpretation market. Posts related to latest news, either in Chinese or English, were categorized as "news". Posts which did not fit in the abovementioned groups were classified as others.

To further the discussion of subjects' personal branding strategies, comments posted by subjects in regards to the Kobe Bryant interpreter incident were analyzed to see how their followers responded to their posts and how they replied to negative comments. Kobe Bryant's retirement announcement press conference was held on April



14<sup>th</sup> 2016, which was live streamed online in Mainland China. As the press conference was conducted in English, two interpreters were invited to provide simultaneous interpretation, which was also broadcast live. The performance of one interpreter sparked heated discussions both inside and outside the interpretation industry. As all of the subjects' posts in 2016 were analyzed, a total of 20 posts concerning the Kobe Bryant interpreter incident were collected. All twenty posts and the interactions of their posts, including 199 reposts, 66 comments, and 88 likes, were analyzed to cross-examine points made by interviewees concerning crisis management and personal branding strategies.

### ***3.3.2. Semi-structured interviews***

The study adopted one to one in-depth interview, designed to cross-examine subjects' personal branding strategies. The researcher hoped to lead subjects to review their past experience and find out common personal branding strategies adopted by Mainland Chinese interpreters.

The interviews were all conducted via Skype and Wechat at the subjects' convenience and were all recorded under their consent. During the interviews, the

researcher first read from a pre-written instruction informing the subjects of the purpose of the interviews and the fact that they had agreed to be recorded. The researcher also assured the subjects that their answers would be kept anonymous and used for academic purposes only. All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese.



All the recordings were transcribed and illustrative segments in the recordings were translated from Chinese to English. To retain only the gist of the responses, the researcher made sure that the translation was grammatically correct without indicating fillers or other aspects of delivery in the translation. The actual responses that appeared in Chapter 4 would be polished and meaning-based for the sake of clarity.

A pilot interview was conducted to test questions for appropriateness, interview length, and quality of initial responses. The pilot subject was invited to give suggestions. During the pilot interview, the researcher found that the subjects' educational background and working status may influence their decisions about whether or not to promote themselves on social media. Compared with formally trained interpreters who usually got their first job through recommendations of their teachers or previous graduates who were also interpreters, it was more likely for self-taught interpreters who may face a hard time finding clients to use social media to promote



themselves (Tseng, 2005). So questions in this regard were added. The finalized interview questions for subjects who branded themselves on social media included three parts (See Table 3.3), educational background and working status, the effectiveness of personal branding, and the strategies they adopted.

*Table 3.5 Interview questions I*

Research question	Dimension	Interview questions
	Educational background and working status	How old are you?
		What is your educational background?
		How long have you been working as interpreters?
		Could you please calculate the total number of your working days?
		Do you have other jobs except for interpretation?
		How did you obtain your first job?
Do interpreters gain more job opportunities because they build their personal brand on social media?	Effectiveness	Do you gain job opportunities because you build a personal brand on Sina Weibo?
		If yes, how do you think clients perceive such a way of recruiting interpreters?
		If no, do you think building a personal brand on Sina Weibo benefits indirectly your career development?
How do interpreters in Mainland China brand	Developing a personal brand identity	Do you find out your strengths before you brand yourself on Sina Weibo?
		Do you try to differentiate yourself with your competitors before you brand yourself on

themselves on social media?		Sina Weibo?
		How do you describe your brand identity?
	Managing a brand's position	Do you promote your Weibo account through connections?
		Do you take a stand or comment on heated debates, such as the discussion of the performance of Kobe's interpreters?
	Assessing a personal brand image	Do you send a consistent message on Sina Weibo?
		How often do you post?
		Which topics are covered in your posts?
		Do your posts show your strengths?
		Are some of your posts related to your personal life?
		Do you consider using live streaming?
		How do you manage crisis, like receiving negative comments?
		Do you pay attention to your progress?
		Do you have any suggestions to interpretation students and self-taught interpreters who want to brand themselves on Sina Weibo?

Interview questions for subjects who did not brand themselves on social media are listed in Table 3.4, including their educational background and working status, why they did not brand themselves, and how they viewed interpreters' personal branding practice.

*Table 3.6 Interview questions II*



Why don't you promote yourself on social media, like Sina Weibo?
What is your view about interpreters promoting themselves on social media, like Sina Weibo?
Do you think clients will look for interpreters on social media, like Sina Weibo?
Do you think personal branding on social media, like Sina Weibo, helps interpreters gain more job opportunities?

The results of the analysis and discussions of the emerged themes would be presented in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4 Results and Discussion



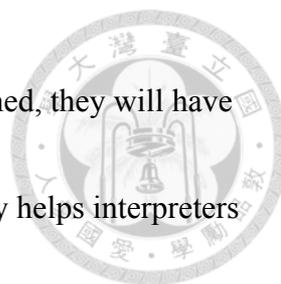
The research finds that what helps interpreters gain more job opportunities is a good reputation. In order to establish a good reputation, Mainland Chinese interpreters are suggested to build personal brands on social media since it is both low-cost and easy-to-manage. Four social media are recommended, Sina Weibo, Wechat, LinkedIn, and Zhihu. Among them, subjects reported that LinkedIn brought them overseas job opportunities and helped them connect with interpreters of other working language pairs who were based in other countries. On top of that, subjects claimed that building personal brands on Wechat brought direct benefits because it helped interpreters strengthen existing ties with clients and colleagues. Though personal branding on social media is believed to benefit interpreters' career development, it may not be the best way to enter the high-end market. To build a personal brand on social media, interpreters are suggested to first develop brand identity, which should stress professionalism and distinctiveness, to guide future marketing and communication activities. Next step is to launch the brand by investing in social capital and adopting word-of-mouth marketing. In order to maintain the brand's leading role, interpreters should keep a consistent and

active image, display leadership, and be willing to embrace changes in the business environment.



#### **4.1 The purpose of interpreters' personal branding**

Interestingly, among the eight subjects who were thought to build their personal brands on social media, half of them reported not promoting themselves purposely, but all of them have received jobs from social media. Subject A and D posted and shared things related to interpretation just because they loved it. As a result, they were followed by a large number of fans who also loved interpretation on Sina Weibo. Subject H and I were invited to introduce what interpreters did and how they were trained on a program called “職人介紹所” (“Job Center”) on Zhihu. Many interpreters use Zhihu to obtain insightful information when preparing for interpretation cases. Since the program was viewed by a lot of people, including Zhihu users who were interpreters, the two subjects were followed by a large number of fans on Zhihu, gaining visibility both inside and outside the interpretation industry. However, they claimed that they did not intend to promote themselves on social media. It seems that it does not matter whether



interpreters intend to promote themselves, as long as they are renowned, they will have job opportunities. So it might be safe to suggest that gaining visibility helps interpreters obtain job opportunities:

***Subject B:** The point of branding oneself on social media is to be known by more potential clients and their friends. They know what you do and whether you do it well through your posts on social media. So when they need translation and interpretation service, they will think of you or recommend you.*

***Subject D:** Branding oneself on Sina Weibo and other social media helps interpreters obtain more job opportunities. Since there is an increasing number of interpreters, it is harder for interpreters to be known by clients, which is the premise of obtaining clients. Promoting oneself on Sina Weibo and other social media helps interpreters be recognized by more clients and customer loyalty will be increased through constant communications on social media.*

The result demonstrates that the aim of freelancers' self-branding activities is to gain a reputation in the industry (Gandini, 2016). The competition in the interpretation market in Mainland China is quite fierce. Novice interpreters usually find it difficult entering the market, especially for those who are self-taught. Branding oneself on social

media is a good way for them to be known by other interpreters and potential clients.

Interpreters' personal branding is a ubiquitous phenomenon. Many subjects expressed that "proficiency is always first, and self-promotion comes second". They also mentioned that self-branding on social media is "the current trend" because the number of interpreters has been increasing over the years:

***Subject I:** Interpreters who branding themselves on social media are quite active.*

*It is the current trend. Today, you need to interpret well and promote yourself as well. In the past, I thought being proficient was all I needed to do. But today, exposure is also important...Proficiency in interpretation was always the priority, but promoting yourself was also necessary when the number of interpreters in the market has been increasing.*

Interpreters in Mainland China mainly have three job sources, one is direct clients, another is intermediary agencies which provide interpretation service, the third is peer referral, which is similar to the interpretation market in Taiwan (Lin et al., 2012).

Subject E claimed that he mainly worked with interpretation agencies because they could issue invoices. 70% of his jobs came from agencies. Direct clients and peer referral took up 10% and 20% respectively. However, the situation of subject F and G



were totally different with E. 40% of subject F's job came from interpretation agencies, 20% direct clients, and 40% peer referral (both to clients and interpretation agencies).

The ratio for subject G were 40% from interpretation agencies, 30% from direct clients, and 30% from peer referral.

Interpreters usually use different social media for different purposes at the same time. Sina Weibo, Zhihu, and LinkedIn serve as platforms for interpreters to gain visibility, offer interpreters one more channel to reach out to clients, and display strengths. Subject B suggested the purpose of promoting oneself on social media:

***Subject B:** Personal branding helps you build connections with other interpreters whom you do not know before, to be known by more potential clients, and show your expertise. So when your followers need interpretation service, they will think of you because they recognize your ability.*

Subject E and L told their stories about how Sina Weibo enabled them to reach out to more clients and interpreters:

***Subject G:** I got two opportunities through Sina Weibo. An interpreter who got to know me somewhere recommended me to the client to be his/her partner. He/she only had my Sina Weibo account. I put my email address on my profile. So the*

*client sent an email to me. I decided to take the case. I did not remember the other time clearly... Sina Weibo serves as a window for clients to know you.*



**Subject L:** *I followed an experienced interpreter on Sina Weibo. After he quit his day job, I asked him whether his company hired interpreters by sending a message on Sina Weibo. We got to know each other after that. Later I found that we had a mutual friend, which brought us closer. So we exchanged Wechat accounts. Later he introduced me an interpretation case.*

Subject F branded himself on Zhihu by “answering questions related to interpretation in a profound way” to show his expertise. Gradually, he was known both inside and outside the interpretation industry, followed by more than 6,000 fans. As he also positioned himself as a video game lover, his colleagues “recommended conferences related to games” to him.

#### **4.1.1 LinkedIn**

Among the four social media mentioned by subjects, what is special about LinkedIn is that it is believed to bring overseas job opportunities and help interpreters build connections with interpreters of other working language pairs who were not based in Mainland China.



Linkedin, a platform for job searchers and employers to build connections, helps interpreters gain visibility, as well as assist them to get into foreign interpretation markets. Subject H reported obtaining several escort interpretation cases and translation cases on Linkedin. Subject D also said he knew interpreters receiving overseas job opportunities on Linkedin as many of its users were foreigners. Subject G mainly branded himself on Linkedin. He said that he had obtained many jobs on it and connected with interpreters of different working language pairs:

***Subject G:** I got many job opportunities through Linkedin. You can put your working experience on it, which can be seen by potential clients. Several clients who searched for interpreters to interpret financial meetings contacted me on Linkedin. One of them hired me several times. He/she is a foreigner. I asked him why me. He/she answered that he/she thought I was the best choice after browsing through my CV. I was impressed by the experience. There are many interpreters' groups on Linkedin. Interpreters of different language pairs communicate with each other. There are three to four headhunters contacting me on Linkedin. They use Linkedin, 51 Job or Zhi lian zhao pin (job recruitment websites) to find interpreters. Linkedin is the most trustworthy one. I got over 10 jobs on Linkedin.*

Linkedin provides employment-oriented social networking service, so the main purpose of its users is to find jobs or seek candidates. There are over 500 million users in more than 200 countries on Linkedin by April 2017, which means it offers overseas job opportunities. Linkedin gives interpreters a channel to connect with colleagues of

other working language pairs and to enter foreign interpretation markets.



#### ***4.1.2 Moments of Wechat***

Moments, a function of Wechat allows users to share and get access to accepted WeChat friends' information, and create an intimate and private communicating circle within the users' choice of close friends. Many subjects stressed the significance of building personal brands on Moments. As it is the largest social media in Mainland China, interpreters can use it to maintain relationships with clients and colleagues whom they already know, bringing direct benefits for interpreters' career development. Clients, agents, and colleagues often use Wechat to contact each other, so posts on Moments help shape how interpreters are perceived by others. The grouping function enables interpreters to decide which posts can be seen by whom, making the self-promoting process more target-oriented. Subjects, whether they promote themselves or not, all acknowledged the benefits of self-branding on Moments and several of them mentioned the grouping function:

***Subject D:*** *Interaction on Wechat is very helpful. If your client goes to Japan and posts photos, you should click the Like button and leave comments, which shows*

*that you are here to support him/her. Some clients like receiving Likes. Your image is strengthened and enhanced by clicking the Like button.*



**Subject G:** *Sometimes I post work life photos on Moments to tell clients that I am still an active freelance interpreter and I am capable of interpreting difficult conferences. But I do not do that frequently or they will think I am annoying... When I started working as a freelance interpreter, I posted many work photos. I also shared my thoughts and my daily life.*

**Subject I:** *According to my knowledge, the more interpreters post working photos on Moments, the more job opportunities they have. I suggest interpreters classifying friends into different groups and make sure that work photos can only be seen by clients.*

According to Tencent, there were 889 million monthly active users of Wechat by December 2016, over 30% of whom used it more than 4 hours a day. 79.6% of China's netizens chose Wechat as their most frequently used APP, which shows Wechat now plays an integral role in Chinese people's life. Since interpreters' friends on Wechat are those who they have already known or worked with, their self-branding activities are believed to bring direct benefits. With the help of the grouping function, their efforts

can be made in a more target-oriented manner that impresses clients but not offends colleagues.



#### **4.2 The high-end interpretation market in Mainland China**

Subjects who do not brand themselves on social media gave their reasons to explain why they chose not to do so. Subject D, J, and K said that they mainly worked for high-end clients. These clients usually work with specific interpreters. Subject J further mentioned that even if clients chose another conference organizer, they would stay with the same interpreters, instead of finding new ones on social media. The result demonstrates that interpreters need to have professional credentials, rich working experience and sometimes peer referral to work in the high-end market (Dawrand & Jiang, 2001).

Other reasons to not promote themselves on social media included heavy workload, personality, and unreliable clients. All of the four subjects who mentioned heavy workload had worked as freelance interpreters for more than nine years and accumulated over 800 working days. Two subjects said they wanted to be low-profile and preferred face-to-face communication. One subject did not think clients on social media were reliable as they may not sign contracts and the price they offered usually was not high.

Personal branding on Social media helps interpreters gain visibility by offering a



platform to build connections with clients and colleagues and show expertise. It is especially helpful for self-taught novice interpreters who want to enter the increasingly competitive interpretation market in Mainland China. Sina Weibo, Zhihu, and LinkedIn provide interpreters a channel to reach out to a larger number of clients, with the last one bringing overseas job opportunities. Moments of Wechat serves as a platform to tighten exiting ties with clients and colleagues who are already known, making the process more target-oriented. Different social media can be employed for different purposes to benefit interpreters' career development, but it may not be the best way to get into the high-end sector.

### **4.3 Interpreters' personal branding strategies**

Since most subjects claimed that building personal brands was helpful for interpreters' career development, four of them who branded themselves on social media were invited to share how they did it. Their strategies are summarized into three steps, developing a personal brand identity (see section 4.4.1), managing the position of a personal brand (see section 4.4.2), and assessing a personal brand image (see section

4.4.3).

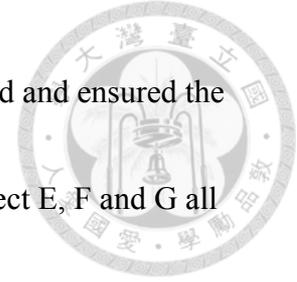


#### ***4.3.1 Developing a personal brand identity***

To build a brand, it is very important to develop a personal brand identity to guide self-branding strategies. During the interviews, subjects were found clearly knowing their strengths and reflecting them in their personal brands:

***Subject G:*** *I know my advantage. I am good at researching information and organize information in a systematic way. For example, I interpreted for a comprehensive conference covering many fields several months ago, including astronomy, geography, science, new technologies, robotics, and even poems and philosophy. I searched speakers online to gather information about their researches and organized them in a systematic way. I also made a glossary. My good command of background knowledge is very helpful when interpreting the conference...I also promote such strength on Moments.*

***Subject F:*** *I know my strength. I have a better command of English. I am good at using social media to promote myself. I know user habits and what kind of information they want to know.*



Such self-awareness made their marketing process more focused and ensured the success of their brands. When describing their personal brands, subject E, F and G all stressed their professionalism and tried to differentiate with other interpreters.

#### ***4.3.1.1 Be professional***

Interpreters perceive themselves as facilitators in communication, believing that interpreting is a high-demand job which requires skills and expertise. In addition to be proficient in working languages and having a good command of background knowledge, interpreters also need to be able to work under great pressure (Bontempo & Napier, 2011). However, interpreting is depicted as a low-profile profession, which leads to the fact that those who are outside the industry usually have a vague understanding of the industry. Interpreters are thought to be ‘parrots’ whose jobs are saying exactly what speakers say in another language. Furthermore, there is a wide assumption that anyone who can speak two languages can work as interpreters without professional training (Yang, 2017).

Since interpreters are not recognized socially, they have been making great efforts to push forward the professionalization of the industry worldwide (Yang, 2017).

Interpreters in Mainland China also seek to create a professional image of their own.

When asked to use several keywords to describe their brand identity, subjects all

mentioned professionalism, resonating with Wang (2016)'s finding that Taiwanese

interpreters sought to create a "professional" image on Facebook fan pages.

Like interpreters in other regions, Mainland Chinese interpreters see and brand themselves as professionals to increase their social status. When building personal brands, it is very important to depict individuals' jobs as professions and position themselves as professionals so that clients are more willing to pay high prices. When developing a personal brand identity, it is also vital to distinguish oneself from competitors, which will be discussed in the next section 4.4.1.2.

#### ***4.3.1.2 Be distinguishable***

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the purpose of branding changed into distinguishing products and services from competitors, which is also true for personal brands. In order to be distinctive, recognizing one's own strengths and reflecting them in the personal brand is necessary. Interpreters are encouraged to show their advantages on social media so that clients can better understand their specialties:



*Subject G: I put my working experience on LinkedIn. I worked as an in-house interpreter in two insurance companies, so I am good at interpreting conferences in the field of economics and finance. I believe everyone's working experience is unique.*

Wang (2016) found that interpreters wrote their specialties in the introduction column of their Facebook fan pages to show their strengths. The same strategy was used by the subjects. Subject A verified herself on Sina Weibo as a famous educator, B we media of Sina Weibo with CATTI accreditation for interpreters of level 2, D a freelance interpreter and AIIC member. Subject E identified himself as an interpreter with abundant experience in the fields of engineering, science, and medicine. In this way, they stressed their expertise in hope of gaining more jobs.

For interpreters and other freelancers, the first step of building strong personal brands is to develop brand positioning to guide marketing activities. Individuals are encouraged to emphasize their professionalism and what they are good at to distinguish themselves with competitors and increase their competitiveness.



### ***4.3.2 Managing the position of a personal brand***

After developing brand positioning, a series of branding and marketing activities should be conducted to introduce and communicate brands. Since there is little budget for individuals to buy advertisement to promote their personal brands, social media affords interpreters and other freelancers a low-cost platform to brand themselves. They are suggested to invest in social capital, which is the networks of relationships, by associating themselves with renowned organizations and employ word-of-mouth marketing by interacting with celebrities and their colleagues who are broadly recognized.

#### ***4.3.2.1 Invest in social capital***

For personal brands, investing in personal brands means emphasizing group memberships since individuals are thought to share similarities with the other members of groups to which they appear to belong and can benefit from positive stereotypes and halo effects (Grant, 2015).

The most famous association of interpreters is AIIC. To join the association,



interpreters need to be recommended by formal members. There are only 35 AIIC members based in Mainland China. Since it is a well-recognized organization, being a member of AIIC shows one's expertise and professionalism. The only subject who holds AIIC membership is subject D. He verified himself as an AIIC member on Sina Weibo, which is believed to be one reason why he attracted so many fans (more than 31,000).

In addition to being a member of a renowned organization, reaching out to the media is another way to exploit social capital (Dutta, 2011). Subject H and I were invited to introduce their profession in an online program called Job center on Zhihu, which is the reason why they were believed to successfully brand themselves and recommended as subjects. After the program was broadcasted, subject H and I received many fans on Zhihu and were known by more clients and colleagues.

Interacting with celebrities on Sina Weibo is also a good way to gain visibility. Subject E and G claimed that if their posts were shared by celebrities or if celebrities tagged them in their posts, they would receive more fans.

Subject H shared a story about how interacting with celebrities on Sina Weibo brought her a job opportunity:

***Subject H:*** *Once a celebrity attended an event I interpreted for. He did not use*



*interpretation devices because he had a good command of the three languages. I sent a post on Sina Weibo to compliment his language ability. Somehow he saw my post and reposted it. Suddenly many people followed me. One interpretation agency also knew me because of it. Later, when they needed interpretation service, they contacted me.*

Individuals can benefit from positive stereotypes and halo effects by being a member of a renowned organization, reaching out to the media, and interacting with celebrities, which ensures the success of communicating personal brands. Another way to promote personal brands is to adopt word-of-mouth marketing, which will be discussed in the next section 4.4.2.2.

#### **4.3.2.2 Word of mouth marketing**

For personal brands, a wiser method than self-marketing is to be recommended by someone else. After all, comments from clients, colleagues, and friends are more credible than how individuals depict themselves.

Subject G, who branded himself on LinkedIn, asked his colleagues and clients to write endorsement to testify his capabilities because he thought clients gave more credit

to others' comments.



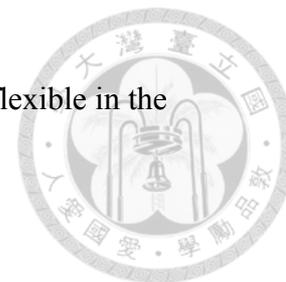
To manage the position of a personal brand, it is necessary to promote and communicate the brand identity actively. To reach more target audience, individuals are encouraged to exploit social capital by associating themselves with renowned organizations and individuals. Though bragging about themselves is not something to be embarrassed about (Giang, 2015), individuals can also choose to ask colleagues and clients to recommend them. The goal is to make the personal brand known by the public, especially the target audience. The branding process does not end here.

Assessing a personal brand image from time to time is needed to adjust marketing strategies and ensure its success in a fast-changing world, which will be discussed in the next section 4.4.3.

#### ***4.3.3 Assessing a personal brand image***

Evaluating the image of a personal brand from time to time is necessary to fulfill personal and professional objectives (Khedher, 2014). A successful personal brand is consistent and should display leadership because it adds values to the service provided.

It also needs to be active to stay in-touch with its clients, as well as flexible in the constantly-changing business world.



#### ***4.3.3.1 Consistency***

For a personal brand, consistency means the brand image should be the same since the first day the brand is introduced, meaning the service provided should be delivered in the same manner that is expected by clients. Consistency also means an individual's words and behaviors should reflect the brand identity as the brand and the individual are intimately intertwined (Shepherd, 2005; Ibarra, 2015).

Subject E, F, and G all claimed that they tried to create a consistent image on social media. Subject E's profile was a photo of him interpreting in a booth wearing a suit, which matches his identity as a professional interpreter. Subject E also maintained that online images should be consistent with offline images because "clients and colleagues worked with or will work with you". Subject G noted that he always wore a suit to work because he positioned himself as a professional interpreter. On top of that, delivering high-standard interpretation service is a key part of professionalism. Interpreters'

appearance, performance, their posts and everything about them should display professionalism and their distinctiveness which is defined in the brand identity.



A consistent personal brand assures clients that the service they require will be delivered in an expected way, which makes them willing to pay a higher price. As a personal brand represents the personal and professional image of an individual, there also should be a coherence between the brand image and the words and behaviors of the individual in private. In addition to being consistent, a personal brand should also display leadership to bound its followers together, which will be discussed in the next section 4.4.3.2.

#### ***4.3.3.2 Leadership***

A brand means leadership. It needs to forge ties with its target audience by creating a vision and providing inspirations. Commenting on heated discussed issues is a good way to form ties with people who hold the same attitude, but may also offend those who hold opposite opinions, which makes dealing with negative comments and criticism an integral part of the branding process.

Subject E said he “actively participated in the discussion of hot topics” and even

“led the discussion” because he wanted to condemn wrongdoings and protect the whole industry:



***Subject E:** I took an active part in the discussion. I even led the discussion. I contacted the interpreter of Kobe via Wechat and criticized him on Sina Weibo in an appropriate way. If interpreters who are not competent interpret for high-level conferences, the whole industry will be affected negatively. Clients will think if that is all they can do, then there is no need to hire interpreters in the future. I criticized him because I wanted to defend the industry. I know I am a little bit hot-tempered. That is just the way I am. Those who have same views with me become my fans while others hate me.*

Subject F once had argument with another interpreter on Zhihu who exaggerated his working experience. He thought such behavior was wrong and he knew that social media users like watching people have argument.

Subject G preferred to be neutral, but he acknowledged that “expressing thoughts in an aggressive way may help individuals gain more visibility”.

When asked how to respond to criticisms and negative comments, subject E and F said they replied to some and ignored personal attacks. Subject F shared two stories about crisis management. One was about how he responded to an interpreter’s trolling after he attacked the interpreter for exaggerating working experience. The other was

about how he responded to a mistake he made during interpretation:



**Subject F:** *After I revealed that an interpreter exaggerated his CV on Zhihu, he left many negative comments on my posts. But I did not reply to them. I did nothing wrong, so I did not care...Several days ago, I interpreted for a conference consecutively, which was live streamed on a website. I forgot a word. I made an announcement later that I did forget the word and I would copy it ten times to keep it in mind. Most comments were encouraging because overall I did a good job.*

Subject G remembered an incident and shared how he responded:

**Subject G:** *Once I taught interpretation in an organization which is relevant to my Sina Weibo verification. Later the organization had some financial problems, which put my credibility into question. I chose to delete my verification and made it clear that I did not work for the organization and I was a freelance interpreter who taught their employees interpretation. That is all.*

To better understand how subjects dealt with criticisms and negative comments, the Kobe Bryant interpreter incident, which evoked heated discussion online in 2016, was chosen as an example to cross-examine their answers. The results will be presented in the next section 4.4.3.2.1.



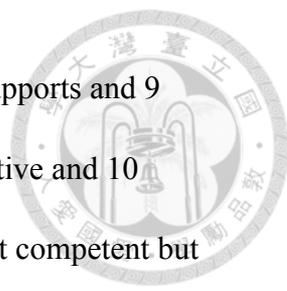
#### ***4.3.3.2.1 Quantitative analysis of crisis management***

Kobe Bryant's retirement announcement press conference was live streamed online in Mainland China. Two interpreters were invited to provide interpretation services simultaneously. The performance of one interpreter sparked heated discussions in the interpretation industry. Subject A, B, and D commented on such incident on Sina Weibo, receiving both supports and objections. They replied selectively and ignored personal attacks, which is in line with their interview answers.

Subject A made two comments on the interpreter's performance and then sent three follow-up posts, suggesting interpretation agencies should recruit fans to interpret for sports related conferences and should not cut costs for interpretation fee. Her posts received 49 reposts, 16 comments, among which seven were positive, one was negative and eight were neutral, and 110 likes. She replied twice to share thoughts from different perspectives.

Subject B sent one post to urge interpreters and translators to keep learning as learning is an endless process. Her post was reposted 18 times, commented five times and liked 31 times and there is no negative comment.

Subject E sent 14 posts to comment on the incidents in total, among which six posts were about the interpreter's performance, five were about the interpreter's identity and three were follow-up posts. His posts received 199 reposts, 66 comments, among which 31 were positive, 19 were negative and 16 were neutral, and 88 likes. He shared another interpreter's article about features of a good interpreter, one of which was a



good command of Chinese. Such idea was discussed, receiving 17 supports and 9 oppositions. His posts about the interpreter's identity received 9 positive and 10 negative comments. His supporters thought interpreters who were not competent but took difficult jobs should be criticized so that other interpreters could learn from their lessons while opponents thought everyone made mistakes, so there was no need to identify and expose the interpreter to public humiliation. Subject E replied once, claiming that he was not trying to humiliate anyone and explaining that such information was leaked somehow from a closed Wechat group and should not be discussed in public.

In conclusion, the result was in line with subjects' interview answers that they did not reply to negative comments one by one. Instead, they expressed their views in an appropriate way and chose to ignore personal attacks.

A personal brand's leadership comes from influence. Commenting on heated discussed issues is a way to attract audience who hold the same attitude, but risks offending others. So responding to negative comments and criticisms appropriately is an integral part of building a strong brand. In addition to displaying leadership, a personal brand also needs to be active and flexible to stay as clients' first choice.

#### ***4.3.3.3 Be active***

Since attention is the scarcest resource in an information-flooded world, a personal brand needs to maintain an active presence to avoid being forgotten by clients. Most



subjects mentioned the importance of being active during interviews. Several of them said that they posted work photos more frequently when they started working as freelancers in hope of gaining more jobs. Subject E suggested giving likes to and leaving comments on clients' posts on Moments of Wechat helped forge closer ties with clients.

To make the research more comprehensive, the frequency and the content of posts of the five subjects with the largest fans numbers on Sina Weibo were analyzed. The results will be discussed in section 4.4.3.3.1 and 4.4.3.3.2.

#### ***4.3.3.3.1 Post number***

The number of posts of subject A, C and D dropped greatly after 2013 while the general trend of the posts number of subject B and E was increasing. The reason for the drop in the posts number of subject A, C and D may be that they were more attracted to Wechat, as stated in the 33rd China Statistical Report on Internet Development. Subject B and D intended to brand themselves on Sina Weibo, so they seemed to be loyal to the social media.

Subject A posted most frequently. On average, she posted 89.1 times per month in



2016. The general trend of subject B' annual posts number was increasing by the year, except for the year 2014 and 2015. According to her posts, it is believed that the reason was that she had a baby and was busy taking care of her. On average, she sent 74 posts per month in 2016. The number of posts of subject C slumped greatly since 2013, which was below 50 each year since 2014, while subject D posted less than 30 times since 2015. The posts number of subject E soared in 2016. He averaged 58.6 times every month.

Figure 4.1 Posts by the year

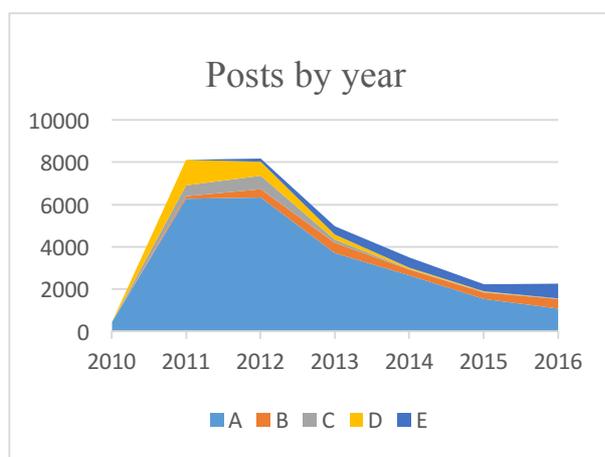




Table 4.1 Posts by year

Subject	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Establish time
A	435	6289	6339	3703	2655	1522	1069	2010/7/19
B	0	98	390	481	249	307	453	2009/10/6
C	7	519	635	142	41	40	22	2010/12/14
D		1209	654	257	72	28	2	2011/2/15
E			151	399	469	318	704	2012/3/2

#### 4.3.3.3.2 Post content

Subject A posted 1069 times in 2016. Her posts were categorized into five groups, namely Translation and interpretation, Daily life, news, work and others which include jokes, film reviews, music and so on. The top three categories were others (31.3 posts per month), translation and interpretation (27.3 posts per month) and work (12.3 posts per month), accounting for 35%, 30%, and 14% respectively. Interestingly posts related to her daily life received the most interaction (36.3 times) on average, followed by posts categorized into the translation and interpretation group (32.7). Daily life related posts also ranked top in terms of average comments (8.5) and likes (23.1), but translation and interpretation related posts were most reposted (15.6 times).



Figure 4.2 Ratio of different posts of subject A

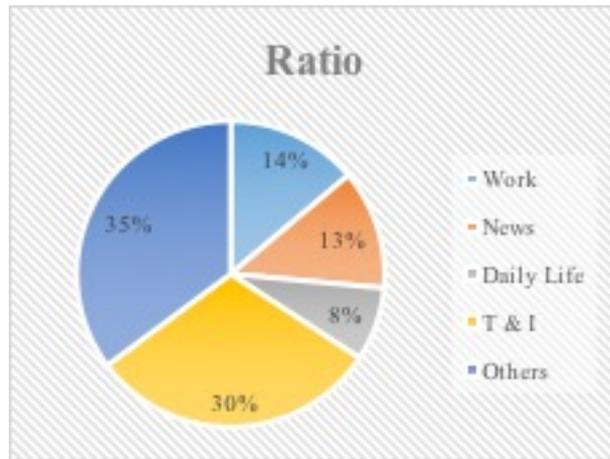


Figure 4.3 Monthly posts of subject A

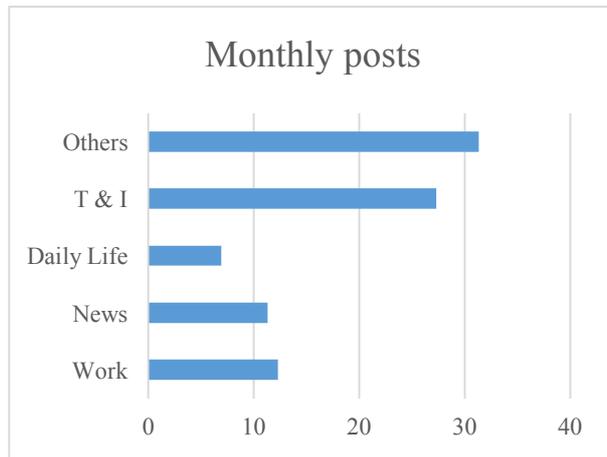
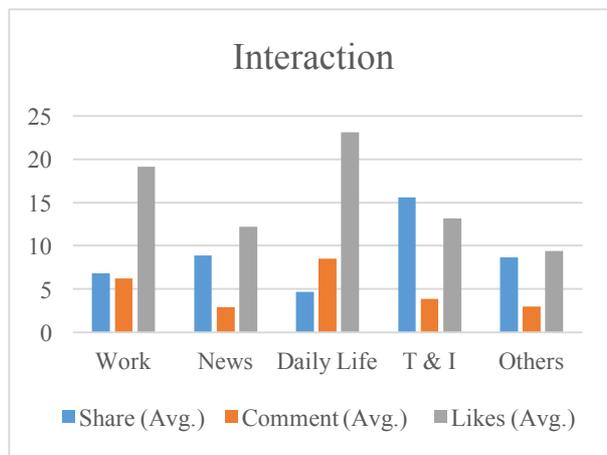


Figure 4.4 Interaction of subject A





Subject B posted 887 times in 2016. Her posts can be categorized into six groups, daily life, news, translation and interpretation, video and audio, work and others which include advice for parenting, music, film review and etc. Her video and audio posts were either about translation and English, or activities held by the owner of a women Wechat group she participated in. Her another identity was the owner of an English learning Wechat group, so her work related posts included study notes of the group. Translation and interpretation related posts (33%, 24.7) took up the largest share of monthly posts, followed by work (18%, 13.4) and others (18%, 13.3). When it comes to the number of interactions, the top three categories were translation and interpretation (50.4), daily life (40.5) and work (39.2). To be specific, translation and interpretation related posts were most reposted (18.7) and reviewed (8.6), while daily life related posts received most likes (28.6), which again implies that daily life is also a part of a personal brand.

Figure 4.5 Ratio of different posts of subject B

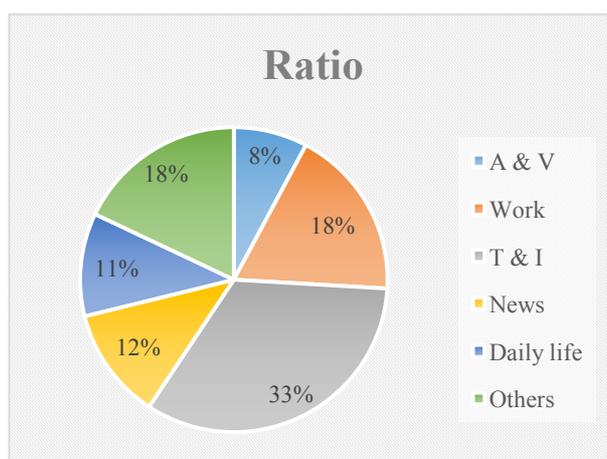




Figure 4.6 Monthly posts of subject B

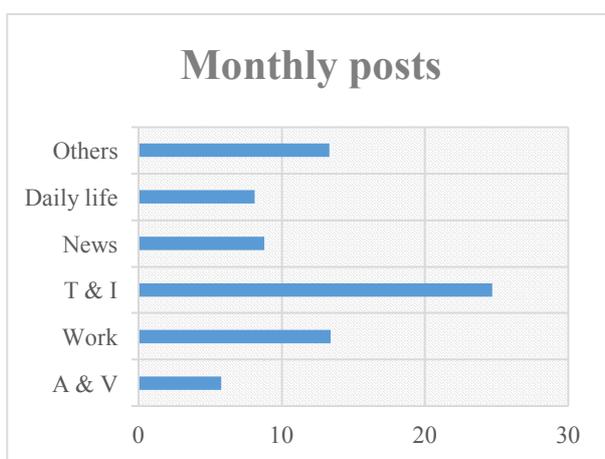
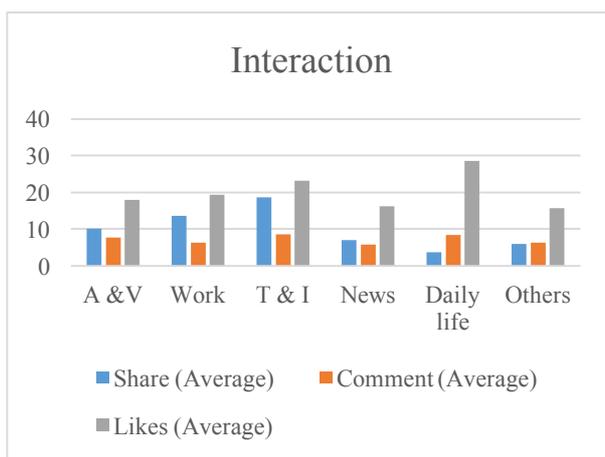


Figure 4.7 Interaction of subject B



Subject C posted 22 times in 2016. Unlike the above two subjects, there is no post related to translation and interpretation. But she posted things related to work (4%), like work photos, which received most interactions (43), and also most comments (8) and likes (34). She also posted things related to news (5%), daily life (9%), and others (82%), which included beautiful sceneries, delicious food and so on.



Figure 4.8 Ratio of different posts of subject C

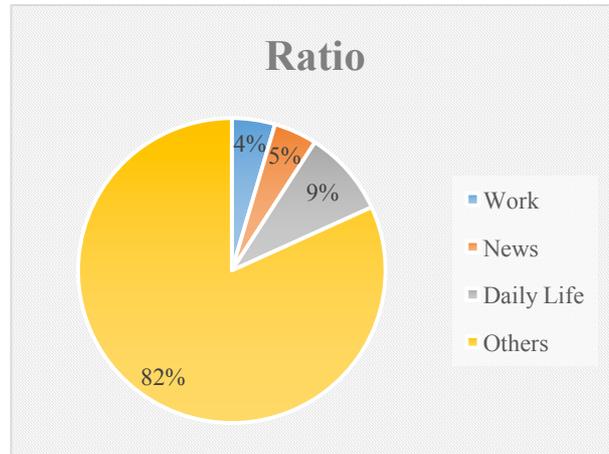


Figure 4.9 Monthly posts of subject C

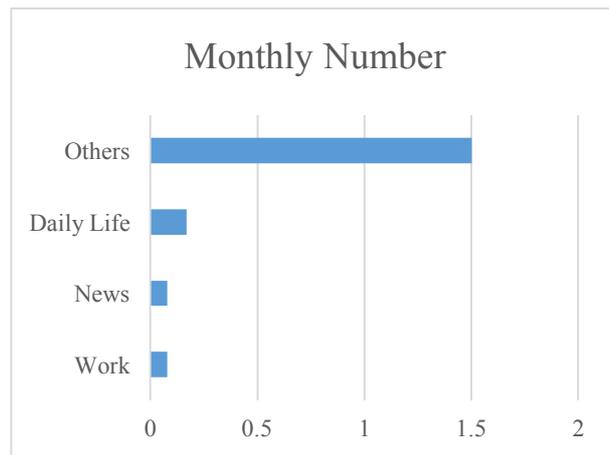
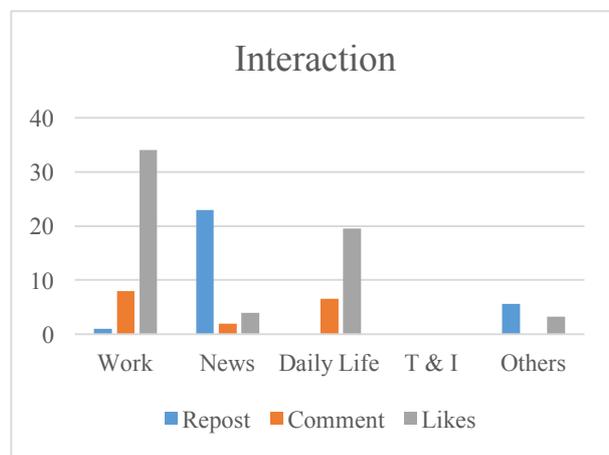


Figure 4.10 Interaction of subject C





Subject D only posted twice in 2016. Both of the posts were related to his job as a visiting lecturer in a renowned interpretation program, receiving 3.5 reposts, 2 comments and 6.5 likes on average.

Subject E posted 704 times in 2016. His posts could be categorized into five groups, work (5%), news (11%), daily life (9%), translation and interpretation (37%), and others (38%) including news and knowledge related to finance, healthcare and so on, which conforms to his profile, an experienced conference interpreter specialized in science, engineering and medicine. He sent 85.7 posts every month, among which 22.4 were others and 21.5 were in the translation and interpretation group. Like subject A and B, his posts related to translation and interpretation were most reposted (9.5), while posts related to daily life received most comments (9.9) and likes (16.7). In general, posts in the group of translation and interpretation received most interactions (25.9).

Figure 4.11 Ratio of different posts of subject E

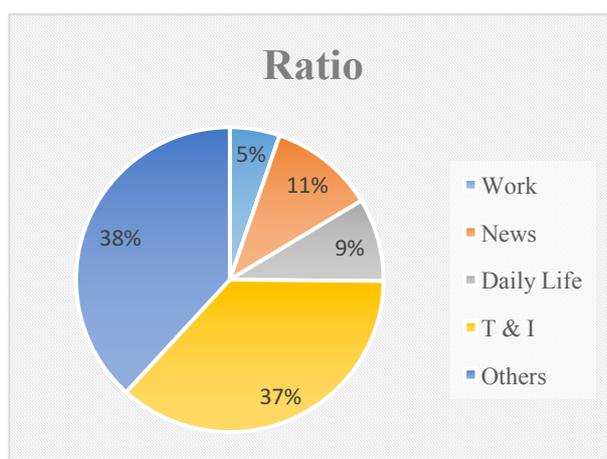




Figure 4.12 Monthly posts of subject E

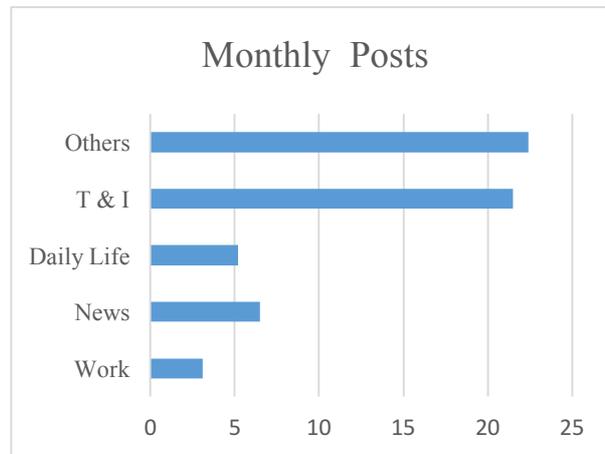
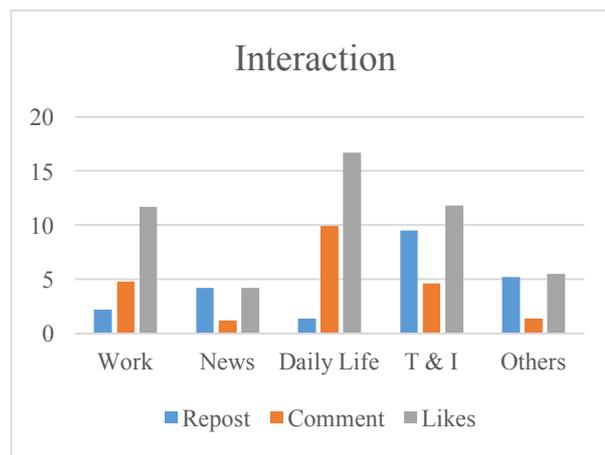
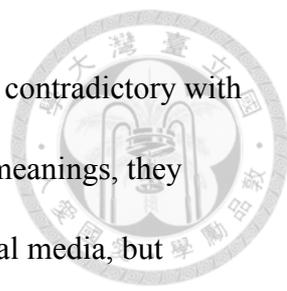


Figure 4.13 Interaction of subject E



In general, posts related to translation and interpretation, including but not limited to bilingual texts and effective search engines, took up a large share of posts of subject A, B, and E, which were most reposted. All five subjects posted contents related to work, including but not limited to work photos and recruitment information. Four subjects, except subject D, sent posts related to news.

Most subjects posted things related to their personal lives which received many likes and comments from their fans. However, subjects said they tried to separate their



personal life with their online images during the interviews, which is contradictory with the result of quantitative analysis. When further asked their implied meanings, they explained that they tried to avoid showing negative emotions on social media, but would post photos of themselves working in the gym, going travelling, or eating delicious food. In other word, they tried to create a positive image on social media. On top of that, it seems that Goffman's self-presentation theory may not be applied to today's world when people highly rely on mobile phones and social media as all subjects reported that some of their posts on Moment of Wechat were related to their daily lives.

Subjects' personality and expertise were also reflected in their posts, such as subject A, a college lecturer, shared news related to college life, subject B, a mother, shared suggestions for parenting, and subject D, an experienced interpreter, posted learning materials and shared information about finance and medicine.

To build strong personal brands, individuals should attract attentions of target audience by maintaining an active presence. They can send posts at a certain frequency covering different topics to make sure that their audience will not be bored. Interacting with audience is also suggested to build closer relationships with them. The aim is to avoid being forgotten by audience. After all, their attention is the most valuable resource and makes brands prosper.

The average number of five subjects' posts per month are summarized in table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Monthly posts number

	Work	News	Daily Life	T & I	Others	Audio & Video	Total
A	12.3	11.3	6.9	27.3	31.3	0	89.1
B	13.4	8.8	8.1	24.7	13.3	5.8	74
C	0.08	0.08	0.17	0	1.5	0	1.83
D	0.17	0	0	0	0	0	0.17
E	3.1	6.5	5.2	21.5	22.4	0	58.7

#### 4.3.3.4 Be flexible

To build strong personal brands on social media, it is vital to be flexible, meaning individuals should be willing to embrace changes when necessary and be able to respond to changes in the environment (Joseph, 2013). As personal brands grow and evolve, subjects reported to constantly monitor the branding progress so that they could identify the effectiveness of marketing activities.

Since live streaming is extremely popular in Mainland China, many celebrities use it on Sina Weibo to promote their personal brands. One AIIC member who worked in UN broadcasted his classes and conferences he interpreted for on Sina Weibo, while many interpretation teachers used live stream to give classes on social media. However, most subjects said they did not know what to broadcast. Some subjects thought “口譯網紅” (“celebrity interpreter”) was a contradictory idea. They believed that conference



interpreters who served as communicators should be low-profile. Yet, on the other hand, they recognized the importance of gaining visibility as competition in the Chinese interpretation market has been increasingly fierce with a growing number of interpreters entering the market.

Subject F used live stream on Zhihu twice to introduce the interpretation market in Mainland China and how to learn English. Live streaming on Zhihu is different from other live streaming platforms where an event is broadcasted as it happens. Instead, all the users who buy tickets can send texts, pictures and voice messages to leave comments and raise questions and the initiator is responsible for giving a speech and answering questions by sending texts, pictures and voice messages. Subject F said that he received many fans after each live stream event and he would broadcast programs in the future.

In the fast changing world of social media, individuals should be able to recognize new trends and make use of technological advances, such as live stream, to communicate their personal brands. Evaluating the effects of marketing activities from time to time is necessary to help brands prosper.

Building personal brands is a long-term investment. Individuals should first decide their brand identity to guide the future marketing and communicating activities. Emphasized should be put to professionalism and distinctiveness in brand images both for interpreters and other individuals who want to brand themselves. To manage brand positions, individuals are encouraged to take advantage of their social capitals to communicate their brands by associating themselves with renowned organizations or

celebrities. Reaching out to the media is another way of promoting personal brands.

After launching personal brands, individuals should constantly assess brand images to ensure success, which requires brands to be active and flexible, to display leadership, and to maintain consistency in the images.



#### **4.4 Comparison between the interpretation markets on both sides of the Taiwan**

##### **Strait**

There are both similarities and differences in interpreters' personal branding strategies between both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Interpreters on both sides tried to create a professional, consistent and positive image on social media, and they claimed that their online image partially reflected their personalities (Wang, 2016, Yang, 2017). Both Mainland Chinese interpreters and Taiwanese interpreters adopted a differentiation strategy by posting work photos and emphasizing their working experience in a certain field to show their advantages (Wang, 2016).

To attract more followers, interpreters in Taiwan tend to post interesting things while avoiding being extreme (Wang, 2016). However, interpreters in mainland China claimed not afraid of taking a stand on hot issues. They both utilized their social capital to gain visibility. Interpreters in Mainland China chose to interact with celebrities on social media, while their counterparts in Taiwan opted for cooperating with other

websites and fan pages to make themselves known by more people.

Interpreters on both sides claimed that they gained visibility by promoting themselves on social media. However, interpreters in Taiwan maintained that their fan pages served as their CVs and brought limited job opportunities, while Mainland Chinese interpreters said their personal branding activities brought them direct benefits such as building more connections with clients and colleagues, and increasing visibility.



## Chapter 5 Conclusion and limitation



The present study set out to explore whether building a personal brand on social media benefits an interpreters' career development and what strategies interpreters adopt to promote themselves. Qualitative and quantitative methods were both used by conducting content analysis, thematic analysis, and semi-structured interviews.

Social media has permeated every aspect of our lives, offering a low-cost and easy-to-manage platform for individuals to promote themselves. Worldwide, a huge number of people build their personal brand via social media, leading to the boom of the "Internet celebrity economy". Interpreters are among those who grasp the opportunity to build their personal brand. Several Taiwanese interpreters and translators interviewed by Wang (2016) admitted that their Facebook fan page helped them increase visibility. Since the researcher comes from Mainland China, whether building a personal brand is beneficial to interpreters in Mainland China triggered the researcher's interest.

As the number of interpreters has been growing tremendously, the competition in the market has become increasingly fierce, thus making it more challenging for novice interpreters, especially those self-taught ones, to establish a niche. To have a niche

interpreters have to strategize and enhance their visibility, which can be achieved by the use of social media. Since China has a unique social media landscape, interpreters' strategies for personal branding may be different from the counterparts in other regions.



To understand how Mainland Chinese interpreters use social media to benefit their career development, the study interviewed four Mainland Chinese interpreters who built their personal brand on social media. The results showed that interpreters received more job requests if they had a good reputation, which could be established through personal branding on social media. Among different social media channels, Mainland Chinese interpreters preferred Sina Weibo, Zhihu, LinkedIn, and Wechat for personal branding. The first three channels had large user bases and interpreters used them to reach more clients and already famous colleagues. LinkedIn was special because interpreters could tap into its global user base and get into foreign markets. Wechat was employed to strengthen ties with clients and colleagues whom they already know. However, personal branding may not help interpreters enter high-end sectors as these sectors require interpreters to have professional credentials, abundant work experience, and in some cases peer referrals (Dawrant & Jiang, 2001).

According to the research results, Mainland Chinese interpreters' personal



branding process could be summarized into a three-step strategy. Most participants said that their first step was to define their personal brand identity. Emphasis was laid to create a professional image on the Internet as it was one of the factors that influenced how much clients were willing to pay interpreters. It was believed that clients were more willing to pay higher to interpreters with a polished and professional image on the Internet. Another purpose of branding, according to the interviewees, was to distinguish themselves from competitors. In the posts and introduction column on their social media platform, they tried to highlight their forte by reflecting challenging work experience. For example, one participant wrote in the introduction column of his Sina Weibo account that he was a professional interpreter specializing in medicine, science, and engineering, hoping to differentiate himself from others.

The second step could be concluded as actively communicating a personal brand to increase visibility. Interviewees claimed to utilize their social networks to promote their brands. One subject suggested associating oneself with renowned organizations and individuals so as to increase reputation. For example, if an interpreter was an AIIC member, one of the most prestigious international associations of interpreters, he/she was encouraged to publicize it. Two other subjects mentioned that interacting with



celebrities on social media received the same benefit. The number of their fans largely increased after their interaction with celebrities. On top of that, two of the participants chose to reach out through online programs. They joined an online interview show created by Zhihu, a question-and-answer platform and application where users can raise questions and receive feedback from other members. In the show, the two participants introduced their job and what interpretation was, unveiling the mysterious mask on interpreters for audience in Mainland China where the general public were not familiar with the profession. After the interview, the number of their followers greatly increased. Furthermore, one participant indicated that clients' recommendation was a wiser way to promote himself. He asked his clients to write endorsements on his LinkedIn profile because he believed clients' endorsements spoke louder than his own words.

The interviewed participants reported that launching a personal brand was just the beginning. A brand image is related to the brand's promise, and is closely related to every aspect of the interpreters' life. Except for maintaining a consistent and active image, interpreters who owned a personal brand were expected to show leadership qualities and be open-minded to new things. Therefore, participants evaluated their brand image and updated the branding strategy on a regular basis so as to establish a

niche in a fast-changing world.



First, participants maintained a consistent personal image on social media, meaning their posts on social media, their choice of words, their personal behaviors, even the taste of clothes matched the brand image they created. One participant claiming that he was an expert in medicine interpreting had extensive working experience in the field and received much recognition from his colleagues. He emphasized the importance of a consistent image.

*He said, "Clients and colleagues would know your capability so there was no point of exaggerating. If you depicted yourself as an expert in finance on social media, when clients found you were not as capable as how you described, they would also doubt your other brand promises."*

Participants all claimed that their personal brands were consistent since the first day their brands were launched and both their online and offline images were a part of their personal brands.

Second, according to the interviewees, interpreters who owned a personal brand needed to display leadership qualities. Several participants chose to voice their opinions when it comes to crucial issues, trendy topics, or latest news concerning interpreting. By



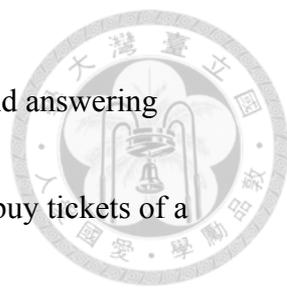
being opinion leaders, they formed ties with people who held the same attitude, but they admitted that there was a risk of offending those who held opposite opinions, which made it a vital part of the branding process dealing with negative comments and criticism. Subjects claimed that they usually responded to negative comments in an appropriate manner but ignored personal remarks. When asked to elaborate more on what they meant by “appropriate”, they took the Kobe Bryant interpreter incident as an example. Kobe Bryant’s retirement announcement press conference was live streamed with interpreting service. One interpreter’s performance sparked heated discussions. Three subjects voiced their opinions on Sina Weibo and received both supports and oppositions. They said they would approach the issue from different angles and discussed it with those who held opposite ideas objectively. But for those negative comments concerning personal remarks, they chose not to reply. Quantitative analysis results corroborated their claims and showed that the three subjects’ posts related to the incident received great attention from their followers, demonstrating that interpreters who owned a personal brand were expected to exhibit leadership qualities and that is part of the brand image.

On top of that, results showed that to establish their personal brands, interpreters



maintained their internet presence, which made regular updates essential. Quantitative analysis results showed that interpreters with personal brands created posts covering a wide range of topics regularly to interest their audience. It should be noted that subjects also posted things related to their daily life, such as photos of them working out in the gymnasium, the food they cook, or nice places they have been to. In a world where social media permeates everyone's life, the line between the so-called frontstage and backstage seems to blur. People are eager to share their lives with others online. Subjects mentioned that they were willing to share with their followers about things, such as where they travelled and which delicious food they ate. They believed such strategy brought them closer to their followers and helped them build a vivid brand image. But they would not post negative things because they did not want to be associated with negative connotations. In other words, for fear of being forgotten in the fast-changing online world, interpreters with personal brands updated frequently to build a positive and active online image.

Results also showed that being open-minded to new trends and being willing to embrace new technologies helped interpreters establish their personal brands. Live streaming is very popular in Mainland China. As opposed to other live streaming



platforms, on Zhihu the initiator is responsible for giving a speech and answering questions by sending texts, pictures and voice messages. Users who buy tickets of a certain live streaming program can send texts, pictures and voice messages to leave comments and raise questions. One participant initiated several live streaming programs on Zhihu and received good results. The number of his followers soared after each program. Then he was known by other interpreters who were also Zhihu users and gradually gained a reputation within the industry. Many other interpretation teachers and some interpreters also have live streamed online to interact directly with their fans, which was well received according to the positive comments left below.

Such phenomenon leads to a dilemma: though a large number of interpreters believe that interpreters should be low-profile, many interpreters keep high profile online and benefit from their personal brands. Several subjects mentioned that “the more active an interpreter is on social media, the more cases he/she receives”. But it is widely accepted within the industry that interpreters should be “invisible” communicator and facilitator. Being low-profile as an interpreter and being high-profile as a personal brand may not be contradictory. An interpreter can be active on social media to establish a personal brand. At the same time, he/she can be an “invisible”

facilitator and communicator during interpreting. As long as he/she follows work ethics and is recognized by clients and other interpreters, his/her personal brand will not compromise his/her image but benefit his/her career development.



The present study found out the comparison of how interpreters see self-promotion on social media between both sides of the Taiwan Strait were quite interesting. Mainland Chinese interpreters saw personal branding as a way to receive more cases, but their counterparts in Taiwan did not think so. Taiwan's Translation and Interpretation Industry Research (2012) showed that a large portion of interpreters' cases came from peer referral. Even if one wanted to work with agencies, he/she needed to be referred by other interpreters. Wang (2016) demonstrated that most interpreters with personal brands in Taiwan did not establish their brands to promote themselves. Instead, they posted their ideas online to share with others, and they did not think having personal brands benefits interpreters' career development. The interpretation industry in Taiwan was not as large as the one in Mainland China, so being recognized by influential figures in the industry was of utmost importance.

Another interesting observation was that interpreters in Taiwan seemed to have more roles than their counterparts in Mainland China. The interpretation industry in



Taiwan is highly influenced by season. During the off-season, even the most experienced interpreters in Taiwan do not have many cases, let alone others. So it is common for them to have other jobs, such as translation, teaching English or interpretation, being bilingual emcee, and so on. However, the market in Mainland China is much larger with much more opportunities. Since China has been playing a more dominant role in the global stage both economically and politically, more international conferences have been held in Mainland China, which translates into a rising number of interpretation cases. This may be the reason why Mainland Chinese interpreters tend to have fewer roles and focus more on interpretation.

## 5.1 Limitations of the study

The study has the following limitations:

First, by searching “口譯” (“interpretation” or “interpreter”) and “同傳” (“simultaneous interpretation” or “conference interpreter”) on Sina Weibo, interpreters whose user names do not contain the above two words but have a large number of fans may be excluded.

Second, the study is limited by the number of subjects who brand themselves on social media. Some interpreters are not willing to have an interview because they do not

have time. In addition, the study only focuses on interpreters whose working language pair is Chinese-English in order to be more accurate in terms of quantitative analysis. Therefore, the subjects cannot represent all the interpreters in Mainland China. That is to say, the results cannot be generalized. Further replication of the research with a larger sample is suggested.

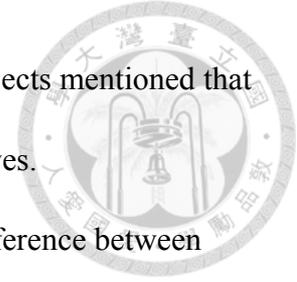
Last but not least, most qualitative analyses are at risk of being affected by subjectivity, though quantitative analysis was employed in the study to cross-examine some of subjects' answers.

## **5.2 Recommendations for future research**

While this study has limitations, it is hoped that it can serve as a starting point for further studies in how interpreters in Mainland China brand themselves. For example, it is recommended that the study be replicated in a larger number of participants to supplement or complement this present study. Questionnaires can be used to investigate whether there is any difference between how interpreters in different parts of Mainland China view such interpreters' personal branding and whether their personal branding practices benefit their career development. More studies can also be conducted to compare other aspects of the interpretation markets on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

An important area for future research will be exploring interpreters' personal branding strategies on other social media, like Wechat, Zhihu, and LinkedIn as subjects indicated they also used the above social media to promote themselves. Emphasis

should be especially placed on Moment of Wechat since several subjects mentioned that many interpreters in Mainland China used Wechat to brand themselves.



Another interesting venue of study might be to examine the difference between interpreters' personal branding strategies on different social media. Gynnild (2017) claimed that digitalization pushes convergence of media, which in turn creates needs for multi-media and cross-media strategies. How interpreters utilize the features of different social media to promote themselves could be revealing. The effectiveness of their self-branding efforts on different social media could also be assessed.

Similar studies can be conducted in other regions to see whether self-branding on social media benefits interpreters in general. Comparisons can also be made to explore unique features of different interpretation markets. On top of that, it would be beneficial to replicate this study on freelancers of other professions.

The author hopes that the findings of this study are intriguing enough to generate future research on interpreters' personal branding strategies and to restore its due place in interpreting studies.

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