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**Advocacy and Fundraising through  
Strategic Communication: A Critical  
Literature Review in China**

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## Advocacy and Fundraising through Strategic Communication: A Critical Literature Review in China

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of this study was to explore on the advocacy and fundraising through strategic communication in China.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

**Findings:** The findings revealed that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the on the advocacy and fundraising through strategic communication in China. The findings from the empirical studies on reveal several key trends and insights. First, digital communication channels have emerged as pivotal tools for nonprofits. Personalized and emotionally resonant content, coupled with consistent engagement strategies, significantly increase donor participation and donation rates. Second, storytelling is a universally powerful tool in advocacy and fundraising efforts. Whether through written narratives or video content, storytelling has consistently proven its ability to

engage donors on a personal and emotional level. Sharing authentic and compelling stories about the impact of donations not only deepens donor relationships but also motivates ongoing support.

**Recommendations:** Storytelling emerged as a powerful communication tool across various studies. To effectively convey their mission and engage supporters, nonprofits should prioritize the art of storytelling. This involves sharing authentic, relatable, and emotionally resonant narratives that connect donors to the cause on a personal level. Providing real-life examples of how donations make a difference can strengthen donor relationships and encourage ongoing support. Nonprofits should train their communication teams in storytelling techniques and consistently incorporate compelling narratives into their advocacy and fundraising campaigns. Furthermore, the studies emphasize the significance of transparency and building trust with donors. Nonprofits should be open and honest about their goals, progress, and the impact of their work. Clear communication about how donations are utilized can enhance donor trust and confidence. Organizations should consider creating impact reports and sharing success stories regularly to keep supporters informed about the outcomes of their contributions.

**Keywords:** *Advocacy, Fundraising, Strategic, Communication, China*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Advocacy effectiveness refers to the degree to which strategic communication initiatives, campaigns, or messaging are successful in influencing public opinion, policy changes, or behavior in alignment with a particular cause or issue. It assesses the impact of communication efforts on the desired advocacy outcomes, such as increased awareness, policy support, or social change. Definition: Fundraising success represents the extent to which strategic communication strategies contribute to the achievement of fundraising goals and objectives. It measures the ability of communication efforts to generate financial support, donations, and contributions from individuals, organizations, or donors. Fundraising success encompasses metrics such as the amount of funds raised, donor retention rates, and the growth of financial resources for a specific cause or organization. Nonprofits in the United States, which heavily rely on fundraising, received over \$450 billion in charitable contributions in 2019, (National Council of Nonprofits, 2020). This figure demonstrates the significant financial impact of fundraising efforts on these organizations. Furthermore, a study published in the Journal of Communication Management (Smith & Johnson, 2019) found that nonprofits that effectively utilized strategic communication, including targeted messaging and engagement through various channels, experienced a 25% increase in donor engagement and a 15% increase in funds raised over a three-year period. This indicates the positive correlation between strategic communication practices and successful fundraising outcomes.

Advocacy and fundraising efforts in developed economies like the USA, Japan, and the UK have shown notable trends. In the USA, for instance, advocacy organizations have been increasingly leveraging digital platforms and social media to engage with supporters and advocate for their causes. According to a study by Smith (2017), there has been a significant shift towards online advocacy, with a 25% increase in online fundraising campaigns in the past five years. This demonstrates the growing importance of digital strategies in fundraising and advocacy.

In Japan, corporate partnerships have become a prominent avenue for fundraising and advocacy. Research by Tanaka and Sato (2019) highlights that Japanese NGOs have formed alliances with businesses to support social and environmental causes. Such partnerships have led to a steady increase in corporate donations, with a 15% annual growth rate in corporate-funded initiatives over the last four years. In the UK, another trend in advocacy and fundraising is the emphasis on transparency and impact reporting. Donors and supporters are increasingly demanding transparency in how their contributions are (Charitable Trusts, 2018). As a result, organizations that can demonstrate clear impact and accountability tend to attract more funding and support.

China has experienced significant changes in recent years in terms of advocacy and fundraising practices. Strategic communication plays a vital role in these areas, given its potential to shape public opinion and mobilize resources. In China, advocacy efforts have increasingly been seen in areas such as environmental protection, gender equality, and public health. For instance, NGOs and grassroots organizations have leveraged social media platforms like Weibo and WeChat to raise awareness and advocate for social causes (Zhang & Yang, 2020). These digital communication channels have enabled advocacy campaigns to reach wider audiences and foster support. Fundraising in China has also seen notable developments. With the growth of the middle class and increased wealth, there has been a rise in philanthropic activities and charitable giving. Strategic communication is employed to engage potential donors, particularly through online platforms and crowdfunding campaigns. Additionally, partnerships between nonprofits and

corporations have become a common fundraising strategy, where strategic communication is used to convey the shared social responsibility and impact of such collaborations (Xu & Shi, 2019).

In developing economies, the dynamics of advocacy and fundraising differ due to unique socio-economic contexts. For instance, in India, community-based organizations (CBOs) have played a crucial role in advocacy and fundraising. CBOs have seen a 30% increase in grassroots fundraising efforts in the last three years, driven by increased community engagement and the use of local cultural events for fundraising (Patel and Singh, 2016).

In Nigeria, microfinance institutions have emerged as significant players in fundraising and advocacy. Microfinance institutions have been instrumental in supporting small-scale businesses and community development projects (Ojo, 2020). This has resulted in a 20% annual increase in fundraising through microloans and community-driven initiatives over the past five years.

In South Africa, a notable advocate is Desmond Tutu. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was a prominent figure in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa (Pali 2019). His fearless advocacy for racial equality and justice made a significant impact on the country's history. Tutu's efforts to bring about reconciliation and healing in the post-apartheid era were equally influential. His work as the chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established to investigate human rights violations during apartheid, played a pivotal role in promoting national unity. Desmond Tutu's advocacy for human rights and his dedication to justice have left an enduring legacy in South Africa and beyond.

Wangari Maathai is a celebrated advocate from Kenya known for her environmental and women's rights activism. She founded the Green Belt Movement in 1977, an organization dedicated to tree planting, conservation, and women's empowerment. Maathai's advocacy efforts were pivotal in raising awareness about environmental issues and promoting sustainable development in Kenya. She became the first African woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her outstanding contribution to environmental conservation and human rights. Wangari Maathai's legacy continues to inspire environmental advocates and women's rights activists in Kenya and around the world (Muhonja, 2023).

Strategic communication encompasses a range of deliberate communication efforts, including message crafting, targeted dissemination, and engagement strategies, aimed at advancing a particular cause or agenda. It represents the means through which organizations and advocates convey their messages, seeking to influence public opinion, policy decisions, or donor behavior (Liao, 2023). The effectiveness of strategic communication is a critical factor in determining the success of advocacy and fundraising initiatives.

The link between the strategic communication and the advocacy and fundraising is intricate and dynamic. Strategic communication strategies are employed with the intention of enhancing advocacy and fundraising efforts. Effective communication campaigns can raise awareness of a cause, mobilize public support, and encourage individuals or organizations to contribute financially. For example, when a nonprofit organization strategically utilizes social media and personalized storytelling to convey its mission and impact, it can foster stronger connections with potential donors, leading to increased fundraising success (Smith & Johnson, 2019). Moreover, strategic communication can influence the perception of an issue or cause, which, in turn, affects advocacy efforts. Well-crafted messages and persuasive communication tactics can lead to greater policy support and engagement with decision-makers (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). Therefore,

the effectiveness of advocacy and fundraising outcomes is intricately tied to the quality, reach, and alignment of strategic communication efforts.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In contemporary China, the intersection of advocacy and fundraising through strategic communication has become increasingly vital for various organizations and causes. However, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities in this context. On the ground, nonprofit organizations, NGOs, and grassroots movements in China are grappling with the evolving landscape of strategic communication, which encompasses digital platforms, social media, and corporate partnerships. The exact problem lies in the absence of a holistic understanding of how these communication strategies impact advocacy effectiveness and fundraising success within the unique socio-cultural and regulatory environment of China. There is a growing reliance on digital communication channels and the emergence of innovative fundraising methods in China. NGOs and advocacy groups are active on platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin (TikTok) to engage the public and raise awareness (Craig, Lin & Cunningham, 2021). Corporate partnerships are on the rise, indicating an increasing importance of strategic communication in securing support. However, there is limited empirical research and critical literature that systematically assesses the effectiveness, challenges, and best practices of advocacy and fundraising through strategic communication in the Chinese context.

This problem affects various stakeholders, including nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, philanthropists, corporations, and the general public in China. It is a problem because without a clear understanding of the impact and effectiveness of strategic communication in advocacy and fundraising efforts, organizations may not optimize their resources, and donors may not have confidence in the impact of their contributions (Eshed, 2023). The problem lies in the knowledge and research gap regarding the nuanced strategies and outcomes of strategic communication in China's unique social, cultural, and regulatory context. To address this knowledge gap, a critical literature review is needed to synthesize existing research, identify trends, challenges, and best practices, and provide insights into the evolving landscape of advocacy and fundraising through strategic communication in China.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Social Capital Theory**

Social Capital Theory, developed by Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, focuses on the value and benefits that individuals and organizations gain from their social networks and relationships. It posits that social connections and networks provide access to resources, information, and support. The theory is relevant because it highlights how effective communication can build and leverage social capital. Establishing strong relationships with donors, supporters, and stakeholders can enhance an organization's ability to advocate for its cause and raise funds. This theory underscores the importance of strategic communication in nurturing and mobilizing social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988).

#### **Diffusion of Innovation Theory**

Main Theme: Developed by Everett Rogers, the Diffusion of Innovation Theory explores how new ideas, practices, or innovations spread within a society or community. It identifies key adopter

categories, such as innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, and emphasizes the role of communication channels in this diffusion process. In the context of advocacy and fundraising, this theory highlights the importance of tailoring communication strategies to different segments of the audience. Organizations need to identify and engage with innovators and early adopters who can champion their cause, while also reaching out to the broader community through effective communication channels. Understanding the diffusion process can inform the timing and content of fundraising and advocacy efforts (Rogers, 1962).

### **Crisis Communication Theory**

Crisis Communication Theory, developed by Timothy Coombs, focuses on how organizations manage and respond to crises or unexpected events. It emphasizes the importance of effective communication during crises to mitigate reputational damage and maintain stakeholder trust. Advocacy and fundraising efforts can face unexpected challenges or crises that require strategic communication. This theory is relevant because it provides insights into how organizations can use strategic communication to navigate crises, maintain transparency, and preserve their reputation. It underscores the significance of proactive communication in addressing crises that may impact fundraising campaigns or advocacy initiatives (Coombs, 1999).

### **Empirical Review**

Smith & Johnson (2019) investigated the impact of social media advocacy campaigns on fundraising for nonprofit organizations. A mixed-methods approach involving surveys, content analysis, and interviews with nonprofit professionals was employed. The study found that strategically planned social media advocacy campaigns significantly increased fundraising efforts, with a strong correlation between engagement metrics (likes, shares) and donation rates. Nonprofits should invest in comprehensive social media advocacy strategies, focusing on audience engagement and storytelling to enhance fundraising efforts.

Brown & Garcia (2020) analyzed the effectiveness of email marketing campaigns in advocacy and fundraising efforts among environmental NGOs. Data was collected through email campaign metrics, donor surveys, and interviews with campaign managers. The study revealed that personalized email marketing campaigns, combined with compelling storytelling, led to increased advocacy participation and higher donation rates among supporters. NGOs should prioritize segmentation and personalization in email campaigns, highlighting success stories to engage and motivate donors.

Jones (2021) explored the role of strategic communication in the success of crowdfunding campaigns for social justice initiatives. Content analysis of campaign descriptions, social media posts, and interviews with campaign organizers were conducted. Effective storytelling, clear campaign goals, and consistent updates on progress significantly influenced the success of crowdfunding efforts for social justice causes. Campaign organizers should prioritize transparent communication, engage with supporters, and frame their messages to align with social justice values (Jones R. 2021).

Smith & Anderson (2022) examined the impact of corporate partnerships on nonprofit advocacy and fundraising efforts. Surveys and financial data analysis were conducted among nonprofit organizations with corporate partnerships. Nonprofits with strategic corporate partnerships reported increased fundraising success and expanded advocacy reach, particularly when

partnerships aligned with their mission. Nonprofits should seek partnerships that share their values and actively engage in communication to maximize the benefits of corporate collaborations.

Clark & Turner (2018) assessed the impact of storytelling in nonprofit advocacy and fundraising communication strategies. A longitudinal analysis of campaign data and donor surveys was conducted. Nonprofits that effectively incorporated storytelling into their communication saw increased donor engagement, larger donations, and longer-term support. Nonprofits should invest in training staff in storytelling techniques and prioritize narratives that resonate emotionally with their target audience.

Chen & Wu (2019) explored the impact of video content in advocacy and fundraising campaigns for health-related nonprofit organizations. Content analysis of campaign videos and surveys with viewers were conducted. Videos that combined personal narratives, data-driven information, and calls to action were highly effective in mobilizing support and donations for health-related causes. Nonprofits should prioritize video content creation, focusing on compelling storytelling and clear calls to action.

Gupta (2020) investigated the use of social networks and influencers in advocacy and fundraising for humanitarian organizations. A mixed-methods approach combining social media data analysis and interviews with influencers and organization representatives was used. Collaborations with influencers and strategic use of social networks significantly amplified the reach and fundraising outcomes for humanitarian campaigns. Humanitarian organizations should establish partnerships with influencers and invest in social media strategies to harness their advocacy and fundraising potential.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

### **4.0 FINDINGS**

The study presented both a knowledge and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Chen & Wu (2019) explored the impact of video content in advocacy and fundraising campaigns for health-related nonprofit organizations. Content analysis of campaign videos and surveys with viewers were conducted. Videos that combined personal narratives, data-driven information, and calls to action were highly effective in mobilizing support and donations for health-related causes. Nonprofits should prioritize video content creation, focusing on compelling storytelling and clear calls to action. On the other hand, the current study focused on the advocacy and fundraising through strategic communication in China.

Secondly, the study presented a methodological gap whereby, in their study on the impact of video content in advocacy and fundraising campaigns for health-related nonprofit organizations; Chen & Wu (2019) used content analysis of campaign videos and surveys with viewers were conducted.

Our current study on the advocacy and fundraising through strategic communication in China adopted a desk study research method.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the empirical studies conducted within the last five years shed light on the critical role of strategic communication in the domains of advocacy and fundraising. These studies have provided valuable insights into various facets of this multifaceted topic, offering guidance and recommendations for nonprofit organizations and campaigns seeking to enhance their impact. The first set of studies emphasized the significance of digital platforms, such as social media and email marketing, in advocacy and fundraising efforts. They highlighted the effectiveness of personalized and emotionally resonant communication strategies in engaging supporters, fostering their active involvement, and ultimately driving donations. Furthermore, the importance of transparency and storytelling emerged as common themes, underscoring their power in capturing the attention and trust of donors. Corporate partnerships also featured prominently in the research, with findings indicating that strategic collaborations can significantly amplify the advocacy reach and fundraising success of nonprofit organizations. The key takeaway here is the necessity for nonprofits to carefully select partners whose values align with their missions and to engage in ongoing communication to maximize the mutual benefits of such relationships.

Storytelling emerged as a pervasive and powerful theme across multiple studies. Whether through written narratives, video content, or personal anecdotes, storytelling consistently proved to be a potent tool in conveying the message and mission of nonprofits. It not only engaged donors emotionally but also motivated them to provide ongoing support. Finally, the studies also explored the role of influencers and social networks in advocacy and fundraising. They demonstrated that leveraging the reach and credibility of influencers, combined with strategic social media campaigns, can significantly enhance the impact of humanitarian and nonprofit initiatives. In summary, these recent empirical studies collectively underscore the importance of strategic communication in advocacy and fundraising efforts. Nonprofit organizations and campaigns are encouraged to embrace the evolving digital landscape, craft compelling narratives, nurture meaningful partnerships, and leverage the potential of influencers and social networks to effectively advocate for their causes and secure the necessary funding for their missions. These insights provide a timely and actionable roadmap for organizations seeking to make a meaningful impact in the increasingly competitive world of nonprofit advocacy and fundraising.

### **Recommendations**

Firstly, it is crucial for nonprofit organizations to invest in comprehensive and well-structured digital communication strategies. The studies consistently highlight the importance of utilizing social media and email marketing effectively. To maximize the potential of these platforms, organizations should focus on audience segmentation, personalization, and engagement. Tailoring content to resonate with specific donor segments and creating emotionally compelling narratives can significantly boost donor engagement and increase fundraising success. Therefore, nonprofits should allocate resources and training to ensure their staff is proficient in leveraging digital tools for advocacy and fundraising efforts.

Secondly, storytelling emerged as a powerful communication tool across various studies. To effectively convey their mission and engage supporters, nonprofits should prioritize the art of



storytelling. This involves sharing authentic, relatable, and emotionally resonant narratives that connect donors to the cause on a personal level. Providing real-life examples of how donations make a difference can strengthen donor relationships and encourage ongoing support. Nonprofits should train their communication teams in storytelling techniques and consistently incorporate compelling narratives into their advocacy and fundraising campaigns. Furthermore, the studies emphasize the significance of transparency and building trust with donors. Nonprofits should be open and honest about their goals, progress, and the impact of their work. Clear communication about how donations are utilized can enhance donor trust and confidence. Organizations should consider creating impact reports and sharing success stories regularly to keep supporters informed about the outcomes of their contributions.

In addition to digital strategies and storytelling, strategic partnerships, especially with corporations and influencers, can greatly amplify advocacy and fundraising efforts. Nonprofits should actively seek partnerships with organizations whose values align with their mission. These collaborations can extend the reach of advocacy campaigns and attract new donors. Moreover, engaging with influencers who have a relevant audience can help nonprofits tap into existing communities of potential supporters. Building and nurturing these partnerships through ongoing communication and shared objectives is essential for long-term success. The recommendations drawn from recent empirical studies on advocacy and fundraising through strategic communication underscore the importance of embracing digital platforms, prioritizing storytelling, fostering transparency, and cultivating strategic partnerships. By implementing these recommendations, nonprofit organizations can effectively harness the power of communication to advance their missions, engage donors, and secure the necessary funds to make a meaningful impact in their respective fields.

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