

Zhihu (ZH US)

Resilient education to offset subs slowdown

Zhihu delivered inline 3Q23 results with strong membership & vocational training and narrowing loss. Looking into 4Q23E, we expect topline -6% YoY, with adj. net loss at RMB200mn. Vocational training and online marketing would see sequential growth on seasonality and 11.11 promotion, while paid membership might slow down for a high base (forecasting +11% YoY). We think Zhihu is well positioned to capture the tailwinds of bite-size shows and IP monetization, by leveraging its vibrant IP & content library. Zhihu has also achieved good progress in Al application, with Zhihaitu to boost content productivity and enhance user experience. To reflect the membership slowdown, we trim its topline by 4%-7% in FY23-25E, with a new TP at US\$2.0.

- In-line 3Q23 with narrowing loss. Zhihu delivered largely in-line 3Q23 results with revenue +12% YoY, and narrowing adj. net loss of RMB225mn (vs. consensus of RMB243mn). The solid topline was driven by strong membership (+39.2% YoY) and vocational training (+85.6% YoY), while partially dragged by shrinking marketing services (-17% YoY). Adj. net loss narrowed to RMB225mn, attributable to a better GPM of 53.7% (vs. consensus of 52.8%) mainly on enhanced monetization efforts and improved efficiency. By 3Q23, Zhihu had repurchased 18.3mn Class A ordinary shares with US\$42.6mn, under the US\$100mn buyback program till Jun 10, 2024. User metrics trended well, with 110.5mn MAU in 3Q23 vs. 109.4mn in 2Q23.
- Vocational training & marketing to see sequential growth in 4Q23E. Strong vocational training should continue in 4Q23E, and we forecast rev +15% QoQ (+97% YoY), with seasonality and booming demand. Online marketing services might see gradual recovery (forecasting rev +10% QoQ, -26% YoY), on solid performance of 11.11 promotion. Given a high base, we expect membership growth to slightly decelerate to +11% YoY in 4Q23E. Zhihu succeeded in IP monetization for the recently hot IP-adopted drama of *Scent of Time* (from Xi Qianhua). We think Zhihu is well positioned to capture the tailwinds of bite-size shows and IP monetization, by leveraging its vibrant IP & content library. For the bottom line, we expect 4Q23E adj. net loss to continuously narrow to RMB200mn, with an improving GPM and disciplined S&M.
- Al in good progress. Zhihaitu, the self-developed Al model with more than 100bn parameters and multi-modality capabilities, obtained the business license in Nov 2023. Currently, Zhihaitu Al is deployed internally to boost content productivity and enhance user experience, to further improve monetization.
- Maintain BUY. To reflect the membership slowdown, we slightly trim FY23-25E rev by 4%-7%, and cut margin by 0.4-3.0ppts. Our DCF-based TP is adjusted to US\$2.0 for the financials adjustments.

Earnings Summary

(YE 31 Dec)	FY21A	FY22A	FY23E	FY24E	FY25E
Revenue (RMB mn)	2,959	3,605	4,111	4,946	5,693
YoY growth (%)	118.9	21.8	14.0	20.3	15.1
Adjusted net profit (RMB mn)	(747)	(1,196)	(768)	(226)	126
Diluted EPS (RMB cents)	(1.28)	(1.96)	(1.22)	(0.35)	0.19
YoY growth (%)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Consensus EPS (RMB cents)	NA	NA	(1.2)	(0.3)	0.3
P/E (x)	NA	NA	NA	NA	34.8
P/S (x)	1.3	1.1	1.0	0.9	0.8
Net gearing (%)	Net cash	Net cash	Net cash	Net cash	Net cash
Source: Company data, Bloomberg	g, CMBIGM est	imates			

BUY (Maintain)

 Target Price
 U\$\$2.0

 (Previous TP
 U\$\$2.10)

 Up/Downside
 117%

 Current Price
 U\$\$0.92

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Stock Data

Mkt Cap (US\$ mn)	103.0
Avg 3 mths t/o (US\$ mn)	1.3
52w High/Low (US\$)	1.98/0.94
Total Issued Shares (mn)	100.0
Source: FactSet	

Shareholding Structure

Mattews International	4.5%
Qiming Corporate GP	4.1%

Source: HKEx

Share Performance

	Absolute	Relative
1-mth	1.0%	-10.6%
3-mth	-1.0%	-3.3%
6-mth	0.0%	-9.1%

Source: FactSet

12-mth Price Performance



Source: FactSet



F	iaure	1:	3Q23	financial	review

RMB mn, Dec-YE	4Q21	1Q22	2Q22	3Q22	4Q22	1Q23	2Q23	3Q23	QoQ	YoY	Consensus	Diff %	CMBI	Diff %
Revenue	1,019	743	836	912	1,114	994	1,044	1,022	-2.1%	12.1%	1,019	0%	1,019	0%
Operating Profit	(460)	(500)	(526)	(472)	(504)	(437)	(534)	(529)	NA	NA	(343)	NA	(516)	NA
Net profit	(383)	(614)	(487)	(300)	(180)	(181)	(280)	(279)	NA	NA	(294)	NA	(304)	NA
Adj. net profit	(241)	(367)	(444)	(251)	(134)	(120)	(222)	(225)	NA	NA	(243)	NA	(234)	NA
Adj. EPS (RMB)	(0.41)	(0.61)	(0.72)	(0.41)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.37)	(0.38)	NA	NA	(0.43)	NA	(0.38)	NA
Margin (%)														
Gross margin	47.1%	45.1%	47.8%	48.7%	56.4%	51.5%	53.8%	53.7%			52.8%		53.2%	
Operating margin	-45.1%	-67.3%	-62.9%	-51.7%	-45.3%	-43.9%	-51.2%	-51.7%			-33.7%		-50.7%	
Adj. net margin	-23.6%	-49.4%	-53.1%	-27.5%	-12.0%	-12.1%	-21.3%	-22.0%			-23.8%		-23.0%	
Growth (%)														
Revenue (YoY)	96.1%	55.4%	31.0%	10.7%	9.3%	33.8%	24.9%	12.1%			21.9%		11.7%	
Revenue (QoQ)	23.8%	-27.1%	12.5%	9.1%	22.2%	-10.7%	5.0%	-2.1%			2.5%		-2.5%	
Operating Profit	NA			NA		NA								
Adj. net profit	NA			NA		NA								

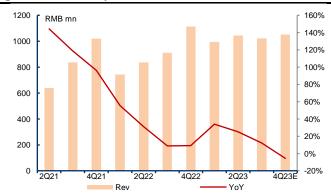
Source: Company data, Bloomberg, CMBIGM estimates

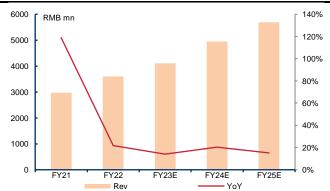
Figure 2: 3Q23 revenue breakdown

<u> </u>										
RMB mn, Dec-YE	4Q21	1Q22	2Q22	3Q22	4Q22	1Q23	2Q23	3Q23	QoQ	YoY
Total revenue	1,019	743	836	912	1,114	994	1,044	1,022	-2%	12%
Marketing services	745	444	478	462	572	392	413	383	-7%	-17%
Paid membership	209	222	271	335	403	455	449	467	4%	39%
Vocational Training	22	40	46	78	85	107	145	145	0%	86%
Others	43	38	41	36	54	40	38	28	-27%	-24%

Source: Company data

Figure 3: Quarterly rev estimates



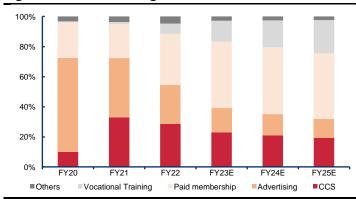


Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates

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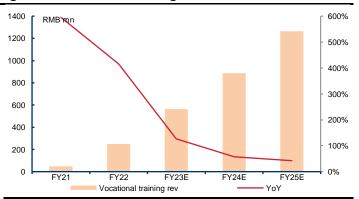
Figure 4: Yearly rev estimates

Figure 5: Rev mix change



Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates

Figure 6: Vocational training rev estimates



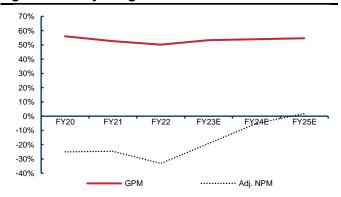
Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates





80% 60% 40% 20% -20% -40% -40%

Figure 8: Yearly margin estimates



Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates

Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates

Figure 9: CMBIGM estimates vs consensus

	CMBIGM				Consensus		Diff (%)			
RMB mn, Dec-YE	FY23E	FY24E	FY25E	FY23E	FY24E	FY25E	FY23E	FY24E	FY25E	
Revenue	4,111	4,946	5,693	4,251	5,160	5,968	-3.3%	-4.1%	-4.6%	
Gross profit	2,216	2,694	3,136	2,253	2,847	3,388	-1.7%	-5.4%	-7.4%	
Operating profit	(1,183)	(477)	(153)	(1,128)	(536)	(183)	NA	NA	NA	
Adj. net profit	(768)	(226)	126	(759)	(220)	224	NA	NA	-43.8%	
EPS (RMB)	(1.22)	(0.35)	0.19	(1.22)	(0.32)	0.26	NA	NA	-26.2%	
Gross margin	53.9%	54.5%	55.1%	53.0%	55.2%	56.8%	+0.9ppts	-0.7ppts	-1.7ppts	
Operating margin	-28.8%	-9.6%	-2.7%	-26.5%	-10.4%	-3.1%	-2.2ppts	+0.8ppts	+0.4ppts	
Net margin	-18.7%	-4.6%	2.2%	-17.8%	-4.3%	3.8%	-0.8ppts	-0.3ppts	-1.5ppts	

Source: Company data, Bloomberg, CMBIGM estimates

Figure 10: Earnings revision

	New				Old		Diff (%)			
RMB mn, Dec-YE	FY23E	FY24E	FY25E	FY23E	FY24E	FY25E	FY23E	FY24E	FY25E	
Revenue	4,111	4,946	5,693	4,287	5,269	6,138	-4.1%	-6.1%	-7.3%	
Gross profit	2,216	2,694	3,136	2,283	2,865	3,368	-3.0%	-6.0%	-6.9%	
Operating profit	(1,183)	(477)	(153)	(1,074)	(386)	(40)	NA	NA	NA	
Adj. net profit	(768)	(226)	126	(786)	(82)	272	NA	NA	-53.7%	
EPS (RMB)	(1.22)	(0.35)	0.19	(1.25)	(0.13)	0	NA	NA	-53.7%	
Gross margin	53.9%	54.5%	55.1%	53.3%	54.4%	54.9%	+0.6ppts	+0.1ppts	+0.2ppts	
Operating margin	-28.8%	-9.6%	-2.7%	-25.1%	-7.3%	-0.6%	-3.7ppts	-2.3ppts	-2.0ppts	
Net margin	-18.7%	-4.6%	2.2%	-18.3%	-1.6%	4.4%	-0.4ppts	-3.0ppts	-2.2ppts	

Source: Company data, CMBIGM estimates



Figure 11: DCF Valuation

DCF valuation (RMB mn)										
	2023E	2024E	2025E	2026E	2027E	2028E	2029E	2030E	2031E	2032E
EBIT	(970)	(263)	34	99	423	503	580	650	713	769
Tax	(7)	0	11	(2)	(51)	(75)	(87)	(98)	(107)	(115)
D&A	22	26	27	33	39	43	47	51	56	62
Working capital	(245)	(87)	600	70	60	51	44	37	31	27
CAPEX	(21)	(25)	(28)	(31)	(34)	(38)	(42)	(46)	(50)	(55)
FCF	(1,220)	(349)	643	169	436	484	542	595	644	687
FCF Growth		NA	NA	-74%	158%	11%	12%	10%	8%	7%
Terminal Value										7,583
PV (FCF+ Terminal Value)	(1,220)	(310)	510	119	274	271	270	264	254	2,904

Assumptions	
WACC	12.3%
Tax rate	15.0%
Risk free rate	3.2%
Beta	1.10
Market risk return	11.5%
Cost of equity	12.3%
WACC	12.3%
Terminal growth rate	3.0%

			WACC							
				10.3%	11.3%	12.3%	13.3%	14.3%		
Equity Value			1.5%	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.7		
PV	3,334		2.0%	2.2	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.7		
minus: Net cash	5,420	Growth	2.5%	2.2	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.7		
minus: Minority Interest	0	Glowan	3.0%	2.3	2.1	2.0	1.8	1.7		
Equity Value	8,754		3.5%	2.4	2.2	2.0	1.9	1.8		
Shares (mn)	612		4.0%	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.9	1.8		
Target Price (US\$) based on DCF	2.0		4.5%	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.8		

Source: Company data, Bloomberg, CMBIGM estimates

Figure 12: Valuation comps

Company	Ticker	Mkt cap	Currency	Price	CMBI	CMBI	PE			PS			FY23-25 EPS
		(USD mn)		F	Raiting	TP	FY23E	FY24E	FY25E	FY23E	FY24E	FY25E	CAGR
Zhihu	ZH US	561	USD	0.9	BUY	2.0	NA	NA	34.8	1.0	0.9	0.8	NA
Online Communi	ty												
Bilibili	BILI US	5,540	USD	13	BUY	24	NA	NA	43.9	1.7	1.5	1.3	NA
Kuaishou	1024 HK	31,707	HKD	57	BUY	97	25.9	15.7	10.5	2.0	1.7	1.5	58%
Average							25.9	15.7	10.5	1.9	1.6	1.4	58%
VAS													
China Literature	772 HK	3,544	HKD	27	NA	NA	17.0	15.1	13.4	3.3	3.0	2.8	14%
Tencent	700 HK	386,346	HKD	317	BUY	465	17.6	15.1	13.3	4.5	4.0	3.6	15%
JOYY	YY US	2,433	USD	39	BUY	51	10.4	10.5	9.1	1.1	1.0	0.9	11%
Huya	HUYA US	802	USD	3	BUY	7	NA	45.0	16.7	0.8	0.9	0.8	149%
Douyu	DOYU US	247	USD	1	NA	NA	16.2	14.3	10.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	40%
TME	TME US	14,415	USD	8	NA	NA	17.3	15.7	14.0	3.7	3.7	3.3	12%
Mango	300413 CH	6,858	CNY	26	NA	NA	22.5	18.9	16.4	3.4	3.0	2.7	18%
iQIYI	IQ US	4,437	USD	5	BUY	9	13.0	10.0	8.1	1.0	0.9	0.9	27%
Average							16.3	14.2	12.7	1.9	1.8	1.7	16%
Ad													
Baidu	BIDU US	41,822	USD	120	BUY	196	11.1	11.2	10.0	2.2	2.0	1.9	4%
Weibo	WB US	2,750	USD	12	BUY	24	5.5	5.2	4.7	1.6	1.5	1.4	7%
Average							8.3	8.2	7.4	1.9	1.8	1.6	6%
Average							14.5	13.0	11.6	1.9	1.8	1.6	21%

Source: Bloomberg, CMBIGM estimates



Financial Summary

INCOME STATEMENT	2020A	2021A	2022A	2023E	2024E	2025E
YE 31 Dec (RMB mn)						
Revenue	1,352	2,959	3,605	4,111	4,946	5,693
Cost of goods sold	(227)	(368)	(356)	(341)	(371)	(410)
Gross profit	758	1,554	1,808	2,216	2,694	3,136
Operating expenses	(1,361)	(2,945)	(3,412)	(3,399)	(3,170)	(3,289)
Selling expense	(735)	(1,635)	(2,026)	(2,031)	(1,915)	(2,027)
Admin expense	(296)	(690)	(622)	(442)	(436)	(433)
R&D expense	(330)	(620)	(763)	(926)	(819)	(829)
Operating profit	(603)	(1,391)	(1,604)	(1,183)	(477)	(153)
Other income	25	31	68	141	48	65
Gain/loss on financial assets at FVTPL	(69)	28	(177)	(20)	(24)	3
Investment gain/loss	56	59	70	41	13	13
Other gains/(losses)	74	(21)	78	35	0	0
Pre-tax profit	(516)	(1,293)	(1,564)	(986)	(440)	(72)
Income tax	(1)	(5)	(14)	(7)	0	11
Net profit	(518)	(1,299)	(1,578)	(993)	(440)	(61)
Adjusted net profit	(337)	(747)	(1,196)	(768)	(226)	126
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BALANCE SHEET	2020A	2021A	2022A	2023E	2024E	2025E
YE 31 Dec (RMB mn)		-			-	
Current assets	3,720	8,334	7,320	6,688	6,714	7,080
Cash & equivalents	958	2,157	4,526	2,948	2,660	3,403
Account receivables	486	832	834	1,295	1,622	1,248
Prepayment	124	272	199	238	226	223
ST bank deposits	1,093	2,816	948	948	948	948
Other current assets	1,060	2,258	812	1,258	1,258	1,258
Non-current assets	41	471	336	247	255	269
PP&E	8	10	7	27	37	45
Right-of-use assets	3	127	100	26	26	26
Investment in JVs & assos	0	19	na	na	na	na
Intangibles	23	68	80	67	66	71
Goodwill	0	74	126	126	126	126
Other non-current assets	6	174	22	0	0	0
Total assets	3,761	8,805	7,656	6,934	6,969	7,349
Total accord	3,737	0,000	7,000	0,004	0,000	1,040
Current liabilities	1,015	1,898	1,825	1,977	2,204	2,428
Account payables	734	1,340	1,200	1,291	1,436	1,590
Tax payable	7	66	26	5	5	5
Other current liabilities	271	451	546	627	710	780
Lease liabilities	3	41	53	53	53	53
Non-current liabilities	0	169	137	137	137	137
Long-term borrowings	0	82	43	43	43	43
Other non-current liabilities	0	87	94	94	94	94
Ohann annital	•	0	0	0	0	^
Share capital	0	0	0	0	0	0
Capital surplus	0 (400)	0	(34)	0	0	(220)
Retained earnings	(196)	(339)	(66)	(339)	(339)	(339)
Other reserves	0	13,350	13,615	13,971	14,218	14,435
Total shareholders equity	(4,949)	(6,281)	(7,862)	(8,852)	(9,292)	(9,353)
Total equity and liabilities	(4,949)	(6,281)	(7,862)	(8,852)	(9,292)	(9,353)



CASH FLOW	2020A	2021A	2022A	2023E	2024E	2025E
YE 31 Dec (RMB mn)						
Operating						
Profit before taxation	(516)	(1,293)	(1,564)	(986)	(440)	(72)
Depreciation & amortization	20	21	25	22	26	27
Tax paid	(1)	(5)	(14)	(7)	0	11
Change in working capital	(10)	291	(134)	(245)	(87)	600
Others	264	546	572	247	247	216
Net cash from operations	(244)	(440)	(1,115)	(969)	(254)	782
Investing						
Capital expenditure	(2)	(7)	(1)	(29)	(35)	(40)
Acquisition of subsidiaries/ investments	0	(33)	(61)	0	0	0
Net proceeds from disposal of short-term investments	(1,887)	(6,130)	(2,072)	1,000	0	0
Others	2,319	3,034	5,624	0	0	0
Net cash from investing	430	(3,137)	3,490	971	(35)	(40)
Financing						
Proceeds from share issues	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	9	4,876	(108)	(1,580)	0	0
Net cash from financing	9	4,876	(108)	(1,580)	0	0
Net change in cash						
Cash at the beginning of the year	900	958	2,157	4,526	2,948	2,660
Exchange difference	(138)	(100)	102	0	0	0
Cash at the end of the year	958	2,157	4,526	2,948	2,660	3,403
GROWTH	2020A	2021A	2022A	2023E	2024E	2025E
YE 31 Dec						
Revenue	101.7%	118.9%	21.8%	14.0%	20.3%	15.1%
Gross profit	142.7%	105.1%	16.4%	22.5%	21.6%	16.4%
PROFITABILITY	2020A	2021A	2022A	2023E	2024E	2025E
YE 31 Dec						
Gross profit margin	56.0%	52.5%	50.2%	53.9%	54.5%	55.1%
Operating margin	(44.6%)	(47.0%)	(44.5%)	(28.8%)	(9.6%)	(2.7%)
Adj. net profit margin	(25.0%)	(25.2%)	(33.2%)	(18.7%)	(4.6%)	2.2%
GEARING/LIQUIDITY/ACTIVITIES	2020A	2021A	2022A	2023E	2024E	2025E
YE 31 Dec						
Current ratio (x)	3.7	4.4	4.0	3.4	3.0	2.9
Receivable turnover days	98.8	81.3	84.3	94.5	107.6	92.0
Payable turnover days	988.3	1,028.2	1,302.4	1,332.0	1,341.7	1,347.1
VALUATION	2020A	2021A	2022A	2023E	2024E	2025E
YE 31 Dec						
P/E (diluted)	na	na	na	na	na	42.4
P/B	na	2.6	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.5

 $Source: Company\ data,\ CMBIGM\ estimates.\ Note:\ The\ calculation\ of\ net\ cash\ includes\ financial\ assets.$



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CMBIGM Ratings

BUY : Stock with potential return of over 15% over next 12 months
HOLD : Stock with potential return of +15% to -10% over next 12 months
SELL : Stock with potential loss of over 10% over next 12 months

NOT RATED : Stock is not rated by CMBIGM

OUTPERFORM : Industry expected to outperform the relevant broad market benchmark over next 12 months

MARKET-PERFORM : Industry expected to perform in-line with the relevant broad market benchmark over next 12 months

UNDERPERFORM : Industry expected to underperform the relevant broad market benchmark over next 12 months

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