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Analysis and Reflection on WeChat Channels of Scientific Journals (Postprint)

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Abstract

WeChat Channels is an emerging short-video platform, and a cohort of scientific journals have already integrated WeChat Channels into their publication practices. The platform exhibits distinctive features in content timeliness and dissemination precision, which align more closely with the niche characteristics of scientific journals. In the context where short videos have become the mainstream format for social media, WeChat Channels, compared to Douyin, Kuaishou, and WeChat Official Accounts, will confer upon scientific journals broader development prospects and richer possibilities.

Full Text

Analysis and Reflection on WeChat Channels for Scientific Journals

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Abstract: WeChat Channels is an emerging short-video platform that has already been adopted by a number of scientific journals in their publishing practices. The platform offers unique advantages in content timeliness and dissemination precision that align well with the niche nature of scientific journals. Against the backdrop of short videos becoming a mainstream social media format, WeChat Channels promises broader development space and richer possibilities for scientific journals compared to platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, and WeChat Official Accounts.

Keywords: scientific journals; WeChat Channels; mainstream social media format; short videos

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Introduction

While corporate legal person and relevant qualification certificates are generally required for official certification, the absence of certification does not impede normal publishing activities on WeChat Channels. Practice and research on video journals, video abstracts, and video columns are not uncommon in the scientific publishing world. The Journal of Visualized Experiments (JOVE), the first video-based scientific journal, was launched in 2006, and Chinese journals such as the *Chinese Journal of Injury and Repair* have experimented with video columns [1]. Publishers like Taylor & Francis and Wiley have also explored video abstracts to enhance journal impact and dissemination, with *CELL* magazine's video abstracts achieving 2,947 views per article [2]. Additionally, some scientific journals have attempted integration with short-video platforms like Douyin [3].

1.2 Encouragement of Original Content

Shortly after its launch, WeChat Channels introduced an “Original Content Plan” that reduces certification thresholds (minimum follower count for interest-based certification decreased from 1,000 to 500) and promotes original content more extensively to enhance dissemination. However, scientific journal researchers have paid scant attention to WeChat Channels; a CNKI search using the keywords “journal” and “WeChat Channels” yields zero results. This is notable given that WeChat is the most influential social media application in the Chinese-speaking world, with 1.2 billion users, making the future prospects of WeChat Channels highly promising. In practice, journals including *Journal of Mechanical Engineering*, *Light: Science & Applications*, *Chinese Journal of Lasers*, *Materials Science and Engineering*, *Sports Medicine and Health Science*, *Horticulture Research*, *Acta Automatica Sinica*, and *Journal of Software* have established their own Channels. Although the overall number remains small, these pioneering efforts warrant systematic summary and analysis.

Simultaneously, WeChat Channels emphasizes copyright protection for original content with strict regulations on content forwarding. Even for non-malicious forwarding, if the platform detects logos from other video channels or platforms in a video, it will contact the uploader and artificially restrict the content's distribution scope, reducing its view count. Consequently, the author contends that WeChat Channels is more favorable to original content. While this increases operational costs for scientific journals—requiring editorial departments to invest greater effort in discovering and producing original content—it also enables journals to leverage these rules to protect their hard-won original works and expand their industry influence.

2.1 Suitability for Niche Dissemination

The application and activation of WeChat Channels requires only a mobile phone number; the entire process, which takes only 1-2 minutes, can be completed within the WeChat app without needing a PC or additional offline procedures. After activation, users can upload video content directly. Content may be original productions or other materials. For scientific journal editorial departments, certification can be pursued after activation. WeChat Channels offers three certification types: interest-based, professional, and corporate/institutional. The first two cater primarily to individuals, while corporate/institutional certification is most suitable for journal editorial departments.

Scientific journals, by their nature, require specific professional and academic standards from their readers and authors, making them unsuitable for mass-market dissemination. Leveraging WeChat's powerful social attributes, WeChat Channels facilitates niche dissemination centered on one's social circle. Compared to popular platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, and Bilibili, WeChat Channels enables more precise targeting and accurate dissemination within specific communities.

Locating a specific journal on Douyin, Kuaishou, or Bilibili requires deliberate searching. The author once searched these platforms using keywords such as "journal," "advances," and "research" and found no journals. Later, through other channels, the author learned that some scientific journals had indeed established presences on these platforms. The difficulty lies in keyword selection: journal names vary widely, making blanket searches akin to finding a needle in a haystack. Without dedicated dissemination channels, such journals remain difficult to discover.

In contrast, WeChat Channels enables distribution through social circle likes, substantially reducing discovery costs. Since most people already habitually browse WeChat, seeing a friend's like on a journal's video provides immediate access to that Channel, with a simple tap to follow. The author has discovered several journal Channels through this feature. Although the total number remains limited, discovery costs are significantly lower compared to other video platforms. This "word-of-mouth" dissemination model, based on social circle recommendations, better suits the niche characteristics of scientific journals. Indeed, scientific journal Channels can achieve effective dissemination even without specific promotion. For example, a video titled "Zhejiang University publishes breakthrough: soft robot successfully driven at 10,900-meter depth" posted by the *Materials Science and Engineering* Channel received numerous likes.

2.2 Real-time Effectiveness

WeChat Channels offers significant advantages in timeliness over WeChat Official Accounts. Regardless of certification status or whether they are subscription or service accounts, Official Accounts face restrictions on publishing times and

quantities. For subscription accounts, which have more lenient restrictions, only one post can be published daily, with a maximum of eight articles per post. In contrast, WeChat Channels imposes no daily publishing limits, allowing scientific journals to release multiple videos as needed. The *Journal of Mechanical Engineering* Channel, “JME Academy,” once posted multiple academic conference presentation videos in a single day, achieving excellent dissemination within the mechanical engineering community and effectively facilitating interaction between the journal and scholars.

2.3 Unique Innovation in the Chinese Journal Landscape

Rooted in the WeChat platform—the most widely used mobile social software in the Chinese-speaking world—scientific journals’ exploration of WeChat Channels holds significant value for China’s scientific publishing development. Notably, WeChat Channels benefits not only Chinese-language journals but also English-language journals founded in China, with top-tier publications such as *Nano Research* and *Horticulture Research* having established their own Channels.

Particularly against the backdrop of “building world-class scientific journals,” exploration of WeChat Channels assumes special contemporary significance. Due to differences in underlying software, no foreign short-video sharing platform with such strong social networking genes has yet emerged. While international social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have numerous users and some applications in scientific publishing, WeChat Channels appears fundamentally different. Its unique style allows it to be journal-based while following video-specific operational logic. This approach may offer fresh insights for international scientific journal development. If properly utilized, these experiences could become an important tool for achieving the goal of building world-class scientific journals.

3. Outlook

On one hand, video presentation technology may represent the future direction of scientific journals. As science and technology rapidly evolve, so do journal dissemination methods. Websites are already considered “traditional media,” and following this trend, WeChat Official Accounts may become traditional media within a few years. To continuously enhance dissemination effectiveness, scientific journals must keep pace with the times and seize every transformation in communication methods. With the rise of various video platforms and continuous development of video production technology, the video-ization of journal papers—once seemingly remote—may soon become widespread. Therefore, scientific journals should plan ahead by establishing WeChat Channels to prepare for future development.

On the other hand, WeChat Channels may itself be a transitional form, as AR/VR technology is poised to emerge. After several years of technological maturation, AR/VR will likely bring entirely new reading experiences to scien-

tific journals. In the evolution from print to AR/VR, Channels may serve as an excellent transitional technology, since AR/VR is ultimately a form of video presentation. Transitioning from Channels to AR/VR is clearly more convenient than direct conversion from text. Thus, on a longer timeline, WeChat Channels will play a crucial role in the technological evolution of scientific journals.

In summary, video technology will likely drive unexpected transformations in scientific journals. Rapid internet development has already revolutionized submission methods, review processes, dissemination means, and presentation forms, yet these technologies have not altered the text-centric nature of scientific journals. In the future, as video technology advances and production barriers lower, research outcomes may appear in pure video format. In such a scenario, text would shift from protagonist to supporting role, or even disappear entirely, and “writing papers” might transform into “producing papers.” Should this become reality, Channels could become a publishing platform for research outcomes and important infrastructure for academic dissemination, enabling WeChat Channels to play an even greater role in the scientific journal landscape.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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