

## WeChat Channels: Development Analysis and Future Prospects (Postprint)

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### Abstract

As the short video market matures, WeChat's launch of Channels has entered the competitive landscape, securing a preliminary foothold. This paper analyzes the development environment and current status of Channels, and based on these analyses, examines the primary pathways for future commercial monetization of WeChat Channels and proposes feasible recommendations for its future development.

### Full Text

#### Preamble

**Title:** Development Analysis and Future Prospects of WeChat Video Channel

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**Abstract:** As the short video market matures, WeChat's launch of Video Channel has entered the fray and secured an initial foothold. This paper analyzes the development environment and current status of Video Channel, and based on this analysis, explores its primary commercial monetization pathways and feasible recommendations for future development.

**Keywords:** short video; Video Channel; WeChat; commercial monetization; future trends

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### 1.2.3 Product Experience

From a market experience perspective, the proliferation of similar products has thoroughly educated short video creators and cultivated the ecosystem, yielding a constant stream of high-quality creators ready to “move in” to new platforms. For platform operators, short video marketing and integration strategies have matured, platform values have gradually formed, and industry standards continue to improve, providing ample reference benchmarks and a tolerant environment for new products. From Tencent’s own R&D experience in the video domain, the company launched its video platform “Weishi” in 2013 and subsequently developed over a dozen video products within less than a decade, accumulating substantial product experience for WeChat Video Channel’s breakthrough.

Since 2016, with the rise of video bloggers such as Papi Jiang, Office 小野, and 大胃王密子君, short videos have become a new frontier for internet content entrepreneurship. According to the 46th China Internet Network Development Statistics Report by CNNIC, as of June 2020, China’s online video (including short video) user base reached 888 million, with short video users accounting for 818 million, representing 87.0% of all internet users. The trend toward mobile, video-based content is irreversible, capturing vast amounts of user time and generating considerable revenue. Particularly in the unique pandemic context of 2020, the “stay-at-home economy” transformed user media consumption habits, while “work resumption” catalyzed new commercial monetization pathways through live streaming e-commerce. With future 5G technology development, mobile video content will have even broader development space, and the short video industry will enter its next rapid growth phase, with continued upward trajectory in industry scale and more new ecosystems poised to “enter” and “break through.”

### 1.2.1 Market Analysis

From an industry-wide perspective, the short video market currently shows strong momentum, with user preference for short video products continuously increasing and the user demographic expanding from young people to middle-aged and elderly populations. However, examining specific products within the market, current blockbuster platforms have inherent shortcomings. First, these hit products are generally entertainment-focused, targeting limited user groups and lacking universality. Second, the trend toward refined, polished content on current short video platforms corresponds to high editing costs and technical barriers, with strong operational attributes but insufficient connection to everyday life display norms. Under these circumstances where the short video market still has substantial development capacity, a universal, comprehensive, and lifestyle-oriented short video product possesses natural advantages for breaking through.

## 1.2.2 Technical Support

From an audience perspective, communication technology development, especially the gradual popularization of 5G, has continuously reduced the traffic costs for users to watch and share videos. From a content creator perspective, improved camera equipment clarity and convenient knowledge access have also provided a solid technical foundation for short video production and dissemination, lowering operational costs while enhancing user experience.

## 2.1 Basic Form Introduction

For creators, each WeChat account can only create one Video Channel, and the bound personal WeChat account cannot currently be changed after creation. For viewers, ordinary users entering Video Channel encounter two content formats: image-plus-text and video-plus-text, where text content can include hashtags, locations, and official account links. Both formats offer two aspect ratios: 3:3.5 and 16:9. Content is displayed in groups of 30, with users able to swipe vertically to access the next piece of content. After viewing 30 pieces, a “More New Updates” prompt appears; clicking it loads a new group, while pulling down from the top also refreshes to a new group. In its basic form, Video Channel is a tool for publishing short content and a platform for browsing such content.

## 2.2 Route Positioning and Content Ecology

To further clarify Video Channel’s positioning and content ecology, we compare it with the two current giants in the short video market: Douyin and Kuaishou. Douyin is an independent creative short video entertainment platform and social software characterized by vertical-screen content, with blockbuster content leaning toward entertainment, music, comedy, and attractive personalities, highlighting an entertainment-oriented tone and relatively weak media attributes, better suiting younger generations’ needs for entertainment, stress relief, and time consumption. Kuaishou shares similar characteristics, being a short video community targeting specific user groups, with its user base skewing toward lower-tier cities and rural areas, featuring lifestyle-oriented content that had early issues with vulgarity.

In a statistical analysis of Video Channel’s December hot list, among the top 50 accounts, emotional content accounted for 36%, music for 18%, lifestyle for 14%, education and comedy each for 8%, and food and travel photography each for 4%. This demonstrates that Video Channel, relying on WeChat’s one billion daily active users, is not a short content social platform with limited audiences or specific cultural characteristics targeting particular groups. Instead, it is a universal, comprehensive content square where media information and entertainment/life/people’s livelihood sections coexist equally. Therefore, WeChat Video Channel’s launch was not specifically aimed at the short video market but rather intended to fill gaps in WeChat’s larger ecosystem through a new short content social media function.

### 2.3.1 Low-Threshold Short Content Creation

Compared with long-form graphics on the Official Accounts Platform and Douyin’s creative entertainment orientation, Video Channel has lower creation thresholds and stronger lifestyle orientation. Based on a social recommendation logic, content timeliness is unrestricted, and accumulated attention gives content ample time to ferment. Video Channel creations can synchronize with Moments content, featuring low creation costs, short time investment, and natural traffic exposure foundations, making it a truly platform for everyone to create. Short content platforms also share the characteristic of being “short, flat, and fast” in dissemination, aligning with contemporary fragmented information consumption habits and similar to current blockbuster social media platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, and Weibo.

Taking the emotional account “Changchun Qidian” as an example, as a top account on the current hot list, it had no substantial accumulation in any ecosystem before Video Channel—no official account fan base, private domain traffic foundation, or “incumbent advantages” on platforms like Douyin, Kuaishou, or Bilibili. The blogger gained a large following by sharing lifestyle-oriented emotional experiences and advice, with low creation costs but excellent dissemination results.

### 2.3.2 Social Recommendation-Based Dissemination Characteristics

Video Channel’s dissemination chain, which breaks through Moments to achieve public dissemination, is essentially based on a recommendation mechanism combining 熟人社交 (acquaintance social networking) with algorithms. The content display interface currently features a dedicated “Friends” section, where the system automatically recommends videos created or interacted with (including likes, comments, shares) by friends, fully leveraging WeChat’s existing strong social attributes. Under the trust of friend creation and interaction chains, Video Channel’s dissemination enjoys stronger recognition and greater virality, while the acquaintance social plus algorithm recommendation mechanism also ensures consistency in tastes within specific circles.

### 2.3.3 Ecosystem Linkage and Marketing Conversion Between Short and Long Content

The mutual 打通 (integration) allowing official account links at the bottom of Video Channel posts represents a complementary relationship between short and long content models. For Video Channel, limitations in duration and content can be supplemented through the long content official account platform, and Video Channel in its early development stage can also leverage official accounts with existing fan and traffic bases for 引流 (traffic guidance). For official accounts, Video Channel’s visual content and built-in traffic exposure platform

offer creators an excellent opportunity to upgrade and transform by seizing the short video era's opportunities. Video Channel can also serve as a marketing gimmick to drive traffic to long content in official accounts. Both content creation formats can be shared to WeChat Moments and private chat dialogs, and with the convenience of WeChat Pay, WeChat forms a reliable commercial closed loop using its complete ecosystem.

### 3. Video Channel Commercial Monetization Path Analysis

Current short video industry commercialization pathways can be broadly divided into three types: brand marketing, e-commerce traffic guidance, and content payment. For WeChat, Video Channel represents the culmination of its social traffic, product capabilities, and commercial tools. Official accounts have already accumulated substantial content creators, mini programs have established infrastructure and user shopping habits, and WeChat Work provides more refined private domain operation tools. Video Channel's reliance on WeChat's relatively complete and mature ecosystem for commercial monetization possesses inherent advantages.

#### 3.1 Brand Marketing

Short video brand marketing, i.e., advertising, primarily includes in-feed ads and native content ads. These ads have strong dissemination power, can effectively reach target audiences, and enhance marketing effectiveness. Tencent's 2019 annual financial report noted that social advertising growth was mainly driven by Moments and WeChat mini program ads. Video Channel's addition can provide more powerful support for its social advertising business. By collecting content categories users view on Video Channel, user information can be analyzed more precisely to improve ad effectiveness and attract more advertisers. With WeChat's abundant traffic supply, Video Channel and Moments ads complement each other, building a complete advertising ecosystem that allows ads to be more precisely injected into target customer groups for sustainable growth.

#### 3.2 E-commerce Traffic Guidance

Video monetization through e-commerce traffic guidance mainly includes platform traffic guidance and influencer live streaming, characterized by significant scenario-based features and simplified purchase decision processes, though conversion rates are subject to multiple factors and heavily dependent on conversion platforms. 2020 was the inaugural year of live streaming e-commerce and a competitive battleground in the e-commerce sector. WeChat Video Channel has already launched live streaming functionality, and relying on WeChat's massive traffic, mini program purchase entry points, and mature WeChat Pay system, Video Channel live streaming can completely achieve a one-stop purchase experience from product promotion to purchase.

For existing private domain traffic KOCs (Key Opinion Consumers) in WeChat such as micro-business groups, combining Video Channel with Moments to convert private domain traffic into public domain traffic and leveraging Video Channel's social recommendation algorithm for user 裂变增长 (viral growth) represents an excellent development direction.

### 3.3 Content Payment

Content payment in short videos includes user tipping and knowledge payment. This model features high user stickiness and obvious circle-based characteristics but demands higher content quality, must overcome some users' habit of obtaining information for free, and faces copyright issues in content creation. For WeChat Video Channel, popular content across categories—cultural, educational, lifestyle, emotional, and food—can all be developed to guide user payment. In terms of conversion formats, Video Channel live streaming has already launched WeChat Beans for users to purchase and tip hosts. Video Channel can leverage live streaming access for monetization through courses or sharing content, and the official account links that can be added below videos can also serve as traffic guidance sections for knowledge payment.

### 4.1 Attracting More Creators

Video Channel has a creator certification mechanism. In its current early development stage, there are few yellow V and blue V top accounts, and few Video Channel native creators starting from “zero foundation.” Currently, more accounts are those that have already accumulated certain private domain traffic on other video or social platforms. Attracting more WeChat native users to create Video Channel content helps 打通 (connect) the Video Channel and Moments ecosystems, making WeChat Video Channel content more lifestyle-oriented and diverse, creating differentiation and irreplaceability in the saturated short video market. Simultaneously, corporate account entry can also empower commerce through public-to-private domain traffic conversion, with Video Channel facilitating more efficient fan acquisition and conversion for corporate brands.

### 4.2 Leveraging Live Streaming to Amplify Commercial Value

According to iResearch' s “2020 China Live Streaming E-commerce Ecosystem Research Report,” in 2019, live streaming e-commerce's total transaction volume reached 451.29 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 200.4%, accounting for 4.5% of overall online shopping scale. The live streaming e-commerce scale is expected to exceed one trillion yuan in 2020 and reach 2,854.83 billion yuan by 2022, accounting for 20.3% of overall online shopping scale. With substantial room for live streaming e-commerce growth, Video Channel live streaming holds significant value for Tencent, which has yet to secure a position in live streaming

and e-commerce. Compared with Douyin and Kuaishou's influencer live streaming for product sales and tipping, Video Channel can focus more on content payment monetization formats, with cultural, educational, and even lifestyle content sharing promoted and disseminated through live streaming courses, cultivating users' consumption habits of paying for information and exploring new commercial opportunities in live streaming to amplify Video Channel's commercial value.

Meanwhile, when exploring and experimenting with new live streaming domains, Video Channel needs to establish and rely on a more robust and mature risk control system, improve and pay attention to details in user transaction processes, avoid current live streaming issues such as poor quality control, data fraud, and counterfeit products, strictly respond to the "Live Streaming Marketing Standards" issued by the China Advertising Association in July 2020, and establish stable order in live streaming functions to bring better user experience and quality assurance for consumers.

### **4.3 Strengthening the Bond Between Video Channel and WeChat Users**

Relying on WeChat platform's existing traffic, Video Channel, which seeks to break through in the saturated short video market, also faces potential drawbacks: how to avoid merely serving as a tool to fill gaps in the WeChat ecosystem and instead elevate itself into a sharing tool that displays user identity and closely connects with user lives. As Zhang Xiaolong stated, Video Channel's significance lies in giving everyone a public voice, where the meaning of "Channel" outweighs that of "Video."

Video Channel currently supports "displaying Video Channel on personal profile cards." To form a strong binding relationship with users, Video Channel could become an important display component of personal cards in the future, broadening Video Channel's display space, creating and disseminating product philosophy ads that convey Video Channel as a personal video album for recording life and growth marks, which also helps Video Channel establish its own core value and differentiation in the entire short video market.

### **4.4 Expanding Plugins and Enriching Product Features**

As Video Channel's daily active users gradually increase, its development has entered a new stage with intensifying industry and market competition. Users' horizontal comparisons with similar products will become inevitable, and expectations and user experience demands for Video Channel will continuously rise. Since its beta launch, features and plugins have been continuously upgraded based on user feedback, such as comment modes, like modes, and display formats. In the second half of 2020, Video Channel successively added long videos, mini stores, live streaming, official account page cards, original sound follow-along, live streaming mini programs, and shopping components, continuously

enriching user experience. For video creators, functions such as filters, stickers, hashtags, editing templates, music, and duets still require refinement, and even more unique creative operations will 沉淀 (accumulate) more value for Video Channel, developing along the “tool-oriented” positioning.

#### 4.5 Controlling Content Tone and Balancing Comprehensiveness with Differentiation

For current blockbuster short video products, each product has obvious stylistic features—Douyin’s entertainment orientation and Kuaishou’s rustic character have cultivated fixed and stable audiences. For Video Channel, WeChat platform’s existing user base is large, diverse, and wide-ranging, so Video Channel’s content tone cannot be too limited or cater only to specific groups’ tastes. Simultaneously, content tone cannot be overly conservative and bland, making it 可有可无 (dispensable). For Video Channel, content must first be valuable to users—“worth watching,” second, creative enough to make users “can’t help but watch,” and finally, maintain social dissemination advantages to make users “develop a habit of watching.” The platform can recruit diverse creators, guide development in valuable and distinctive long-tail fields, while strengthening supervision to filter out 违规 (non-compliant) and vulgar content.

Whether it’s the increasingly mature short video industry, long-established official accounts, or support from various technological developments, Video Channel’s entry and development have a solid foundation. How to leverage WeChat as a giant ship to build a more universal short content platform has become Video Channel’s expectation. Fully 打通 (integrating) WeChat’s various ecosystems, encouraging more creators to produce content, establishing stable commercial monetization models, binding strong relationships with users, and conveying product philosophy may be feasible recommendations for amplifying value.

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

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