

# Features and Improvement Strategies of the Mobile Reading Application “WeChat Read” Post-print

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## Abstract

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## Full Text

### Abstract

The rapid development of mobile internet has made mobile reading a widely popular form of reading among the public. This paper takes the “WeChat Reading” application as a case study, introduces its distinctive features, identifies existing problems, and proposes corresponding improvement strategies.

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## 1. Background of the WeChat Reading Application

WeChat Reading was officially launched on August 28, 2015, as the official reading application developed by the WeChat team. Against the backdrop of rapidly evolving internet technology, mobile reading has increasingly become a major trend, giving rise to various mobile reading applications. The accelerating pace

of modern life and the growing fragmentation of information have created a demand for applications that enable users to acquire knowledge during fragmented time periods. According to the “Amazon China 2018 National Reading Report” released on April 23, 2018, 70% of respondents reported that starting to read e-books effectively increased their total reading volume. Additionally, as public awareness of copyright has improved and the wave of knowledge payment has swept across society, acceptance of paid reading has gradually increased—80% of respondents stated they had paid for digital content in the past year, with nearly 30% frequently purchasing e-books and using e-book lending services. Mobile reading, particularly mobile paid reading, has become one of the public’s favorite reading methods, effectively consolidating fragmented moments in daily life.

WeChat Reading provides users with a meticulously crafted, ultimate reading experience, supporting EPUB and TXT formats. It enables users to navigate the vast sea of books alongside their WeChat friends, discovering quality books suitable for themselves through collaborative filtering. The application facilitates exchanging reading insights with friends, encountering friends’ thoughts during reading, and sparking more ideas through shared reflections. It also introduces a competitive element by allowing friends to compare reading durations, creating a sense of achievement and stimulation alongside knowledge acquisition. As a company that uses social networking as its traffic gateway, Tencent leverages its social advantages to launch this reading application that continues its social DNA, providing a platform for users to access quality content. The product slogan of WeChat Reading is “Let Reading No Longer Be Lonely.”

## 2. Distinctive Features of WeChat Reading

### 2.1 Socialized Reading Philosophy

What sparks might fly when reading meets social networking? Since its launch, WeChat Reading has embodied social attributes, inheriting Tencent’s social genes and emphasizing knowledge acquisition through social interaction. The most significant difference between WeChat Reading and other mobile reading applications lies in its social interactivity—traces of WeChat friends are ubiquitous throughout the platform.

First, in the “Discover” tab, users can see what books their friends are currently reading, helping them capture quality and interesting titles from the vast ocean of books. Users can click on a friend’s avatar to view their bookshelf, finished books, and corresponding book reviews. Second, in the “Thoughts” tab, users can discover their friends’ ideas while reading, and can forward, like, or comment on these thoughts, enabling online sharing of reading experiences. Reading friends’ thoughts also deepens understanding of friends and brings them closer together. Third, WeChat Reading features a reading leaderboard, similar to WeChat’s step counter leaderboard, where users can view each person’s reading duration. This promotes mutual supervision among friends, creates healthy competition,

and further motivates users to engage in reading. Finally, the application has designed promotional activities such as “Share to Get Free Books” and “Gift to Get One Free.” Users sharing links in their Moments or with friends and groups enhances interaction among friends and stimulates reading to some extent.

Reading is traditionally a private hobby—leisurely holding a beloved book to pass the time. WeChat Reading transforms this intimate activity into a community affair, leveraging the power of WeChat’s massive social network to create a dissemination effect for books similar to how articles from public accounts are shared in Moments.

## 2.2 Rich Content Resources

WeChat Reading boasts abundant content resources. Tencent wholly acquired Shanda Literature and effectively integrated it with Tencent Literature to establish China Literature Limited (Yuewen Group), the largest online literature company in China, occupying approximately 50% of the mobile online literature market. China Literature’s absolute advantage in content resources is mainly reflected in several aspects: numerous contracted writers, large literary work reserves, and abundant original content. WeChat Reading integrates China Literature’s content resources with WeChat’s social resources, creating a strong alliance that leverages WeChat’s accumulated user base to further promote nationwide reading.

Opening the WeChat Reading app and entering the bookstore reveals 30 book categories, including mystery and suspense, classic masterpieces, and signed book talks. The platform also includes quality WeChat public accounts, leveraging WeChat’s unique advantage by seamlessly integrating public account content with WeChat Reading. The Hot Listening list includes audio novels and signed book talks. As modern life becomes increasingly fast-paced and fragmented time more common, users sometimes need to “free their eyes” and switch to a different reading mode. The “book talk” reading mode is gaining popularity among users, helping lower the threshold for reading anytime, anywhere. WeChat Reading’s signed book talkers split and integrate book content, helping users understand books more quickly and accurately. Users can find concentrated recommendations in the Hot Listening list on the bookstore page, discover “What Friends Are Listening To” on the Discover page, or search for book talk audio independently. The diversity of reading modes satisfies different user needs to a certain extent.

## 2.4 Successful Business Model

With the iterative development of internet technology, knowledge payment has emerged as a response to people’s unprecedented thirst for knowledge and their desire to acquire cross-disciplinary knowledge to alleviate real-life pressures and knowledge anxiety. WeChat Reading has capitalized on this knowledge payment trend by adopting a paid subscription model, offering continuous monthly cards,

monthly cards, quarterly cards, and annual cards. Benefits include free access to all publications, free audiobooks, free comics, and 20% discount on online novels.

To increase user stickiness and expand coverage, WeChat Reading provides some books for free. For new and bestseller titles, it offers trial chapters to spark users' interest and stimulate purchase desire. Users purchase books using book coins, which can be obtained through several channels: initial registration bonus, inviting friends to download the app, direct purchase (1 RMB per coin), or exchanging reading time for coins. This incentive mechanism enhances users' enthusiasm for reading.

### **3. Problems in WeChat Reading and Countermeasures**

With the rapid development of internet technology and the deepening of nationwide reading, people' s acceptance of mobile reading is increasing daily. However, mobile reading applications like WeChat Reading still have certain problems. This section proposes strategies to address these issues.

#### **3.1 Strengthen Cooperation with Traditional Publishers to Enrich Book Resources**

Content is the core resource of reading and the key to increasing user stickiness and retaining users. Enhancing content advantages and enriching the content system is a gradual construction process, as quality content requires substantial time to accumulate. Traditional publishing units and mobile reading service providers must cooperate hand-in-hand, complementing each other' s strengths to continuously improve content quality.

In terms of content, WeChat Reading' s original online novels account for a large proportion, but the audience for such novels is relatively limited and belongs to shallow reading content. The lack of academic deep reading content somewhat restricts user base expansion and may even cause user loss. WeChat Reading should appropriately add non-bestseller books covering various fields to meet the reading needs of different users.

#### **3.2 Improve Product Functions and Optimize User Experience**

Humanized operational design can improve user satisfaction with the reading experience. In terms of interaction design, opening WeChat Reading and entering the bookstore requires two steps, and adding a book to the bookshelf from search also requires two steps. The bookshelf does not categorize books, mixing finished and unfinished titles together. When the bookshelf contains many books, the process of finding and opening a book becomes complicated. In terms of interface design, the "Discover" page navigation is relatively complex with numerous contents under the tab, and the search bar placeholder text appears on the author' s detail page.

WeChat Reading could implement the following optimization measures. First, simplify the book opening process by presenting the bookshelf on the navigation tab's home page. Second, categorize books in the bookshelf into "currently reading" and "finished," displaying the current reading progress. When users are reading multiple books simultaneously, this makes it easy to check each book's progress. Books could be marked as "finished" or "50% read." Adding a recently opened function in the bookshelf would help users quickly locate recently read books. Finally, the search box should be optimized to accurately indicate support for searching by author, book title, or public account.

### 3.3 Align with User Needs and Explore New Operation Models

WeChat Reading's operation model is "social + reading," which emphasizes social interaction while underemphasizing reading itself. Among similar applications, the bookstore is always placed in the most prominent position, whereas WeChat Reading's bookstore entrance lacks a dedicated function tag and is placed at the second level. As a product riding on WeChat's coattails, WeChat Reading bears deep social imprints. Today, social networks have gradually become public spaces for self-presentation, and the era of "I share, therefore I am" has arrived. People strive to carefully craft a perfect self-image in virtual space. Choosing to forward and share books that don't actually match one's personal temperament or interests is, to some extent, driven by vanity—attempting to show friends a different version of oneself through book sharing. This model violates the original intention of reading; blindly strengthening social attributes cannot provide users with targeted knowledge services.

WeChat Reading could attempt to provide personalized, customized, and multi-media reading services, enabling users to obtain precise knowledge information. Multi-modal content has more powerful appeal than text symbols alone and can provide users with personal experiences. WeChat Reading currently has resources for paper books and e-books and could further develop video resources, allowing users to obtain cross-domain information through multiple channels. In addition to online exchange of reading ideas, WeChat Reading could also organize offline community activities. Combining online and offline channels to provide opportunities for communication between users or between users and authors can enhance user stickiness and serve a promotional function.

In conclusion, only with high-quality and rich content resources, superior product experience, and operation models focused on user needs can WeChat Reading establish a solid foothold and seize opportunities in the mobile internet era.

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