



WECHAT “OFFICIAL ACCOUNTS” AND THEIR IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

The present research focuses on the role of "official accounts" on WeChat, designed for the dissemination of textual content in the Chinese language. Currently, it is the main channel for information dissemination in that language. The objective is to investigate changes in this function between 2020 and 2023, and their impact on the mode of production and dissemination of content. To achieve this goal, a qualitative comparative methodology has been used, comparing the services in the function as it was before 2020 and its current state in 2023. Specifically, innovations are classified into three aspects: content format, interaction, and text indicators

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1. Introduction

The advent of the Internet has led to a shift in the attention of most readers from traditional print media to new media. The recent onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has further reinforced the role of social networks as a valuable and indispensable means of communication, where users access information and disseminate content. This study focuses on China's most popular network, WeChat, and specifically on its "official accounts" function for the dissemination of textual content, which can be owned by an individual, company, organisation or institution.

WeChat is a superapp that integrates a wide range of functions similar to those provided by Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Uber, Amazon, PayPal, among others (Lamaoyangjin, 2018). Tencent created the platform in January 2011 and reached 1.336 billion active users in the third quarter of 2023 (Tencent, 2023), a figure approaching the number of China's inhabitants (over 1.4 billion).

Initially, WeChat's developers focused on providing messaging for mobile devices, refining chat-related features. By the end of 2011, WeChat had established itself as a full-fledged and mature messenger in comparison to its competitors, such as Mi Talk (2010), Momo (2011), which was known as 'Chinese WhatsApp' (Lamaoyangjin, 2018, pp. 1419). Furthermore, by the end of 2011, the network had reached 50 million active users, and just three months later, it had reached 100 million users (Li, 2013). This equates to WeChat reaching that figure in just 15 months, whereas Facebook and Twitter took 54 and 49 months, respectively, to reach 100 million users (Lamaoyangjin, 2018). Subsequently, the app began to develop additional functions to meet the diverse needs of users, evolving beyond its original role as a messaging platform. Currently, WeChat offers a range of functions, including broadcasting channels such as 'official accounts' and 'short video channels', as well as commerce functions such as 'mini-programs' and the payment function.

Among the functions that are not specifically aimed at messaging, the "official accounts" function, launched in August 2012, stands out. This function encompasses a set of public accounts created by individual or organisational users to provide a new channel for disseminating content to individuals and the media. The primary objective of this function is to disseminate information to all users within the WeChat environment, which is analogous to the functionality of traditional print media, such as newspapers or magazines, which offer news or entertainment topics (WeChat, n.d.). Users can register as a public account to share content. Readers can follow along with their favourite "official accounts" without the need to receive notifications but can access the accounts' profiles or the "subscriptions" section. This function is specifically designed for the publication and dissemination of textual content, which can be divided into two categories: short texts without additional formatting and long texts with multimedia. The latter is the main format. Texts are usually accompanied by images, and other types of multimedia, such as audio or video, can be added.

This function is characterised by collective communication and is widely used as a form of one-to-many communication for sharing information within groups (Wan et al., 2017). The developers of the app have created two sections: a "subscription" section and a "featured articles" section. In the "subscription" section, users can view newly published texts by all authors they follow, while in the "featured articles" section, the contacts of users they have marked with the "I'm watching" icon are displayed. The "I am viewing" service is analogous in functionality to the "I like" service, with the distinction that if a reader "likes" a text, this action will not be visible to their contacts. The creation of this function marked a pivotal point for the application, as it initiated a transition from a chat application to a content dissemination environment. Currently, this function is regarded as one of the most significant among WeChat's numerous functions. Its utility as a primary mobile information channel in China renders it a pivotal means of promoting products for businesses (Xiaokeduo, 2020). In 2022 alone, the "official accounts" function generated over 398 million texts, with an average of approximately 1,092,700 posts per day (Yun, 2023).

In the initial year of the introduction of this function, the following slogan could be read on its homepage: "Even the smallest individuals have their own brands." This slogan indicates that, from its early days, the function had a promotional character, with the intention of democratising text publishing by providing an opportunity for everyone, not only for companies, to disseminate their texts in the app. Since the launch of this function, numerous individuals and organisations have rushed to create their own "official accounts" on WeChat. The texts on the "official accounts" were primarily of two types, as illustrated in Figure 1. The first was a brief text, devoid of images, with a maximum of 300 words and no

possibility of interaction. The second was a longer text with images, comprising a minimum of 300 words and no length limit. In both formats, the external link was prohibited. As shown in Image 1, the long texts with images had a title page and title, while the texts without images did not. Consequently, the long text format with images constituted the principal mode of information dissemination.

Image 1. Two main text formats in the "official accounts".



Source: Weixinpai (s.f.)

It has generated a great deal of interest in academic circles, covering a wide range of disciplines. Research indicates that its utility extends beyond mere product promotion, with applications in various institutions, including public libraries (Gan, 2016), universities (Gao & Wang, 2017) and even government agencies (Jiang et al., 2021).

In the field of economics, studies have concentrated on the commercial aspect of the "official accounts" function. On the one hand, some studies investigate ways to monetise the function (Xu, 2015; Zeng, 2022). On the other hand, they seek to understand how readers participate and share the texts published by companies, in order to increase their profits and follower loyalty. However, most studies investigate users' behaviour and motives on "official accounts" from the perspective of product promotion (Guo et al., 2017).

Moreover, numerous research studies in the field of communication investigate the convergence between traditional media (mainly print journalism) and new digital media. These studies investigate methods for adapting traditional media to mobile use (Ma, 2015, Xia, 2015). In this field, the characteristics of texts that capture readers' attention with a focus on their titles have been further explored (Qi, 2021; She et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). She et al. (2021) delves even deeper, examining not only the titles but also the characteristics and format of content that can motivate readers to engage with the content in a positive manner, such as by clicking on the "like" button.

It is also important to consider the impact of this function on users. Chen et al. (2019) posit that the "official accounts" feature represents passive use, whereby users tend to read texts without interacting with other readers. In comparison with another passive usage function in WeChat, "Moments", this research demonstrates that the utilisation of "Official Accounts" can exert a beneficial influence on users' mood, thereby increasing their frequency of usage. Moreover, numerous studies have examined the impact of "official accounts" on the creation of content that enhances health literacy, demonstrating a positive influence on health literacy (Li et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2019).

A review of the literature reveals that the range of studies encompasses a diverse array of disciplines, including economics and institutional use, as well as communication. Furthermore, it is crucial to highlight that following the pandemic, the application has been offering novel services in this capacity. Consequently, it is of paramount importance to conduct a comprehensive examination of its evolution over the past four years.

In light of the impact of the pandemic on the population and the limited access to traditional sources of information since the early 2020s, the use of the internet to meet this need also grew disproportionately. According to GlobalWebIndex (2020), approximately six out of ten young people used social networks during this period to obtain information. WeChat was cognizant of this and determined that the advancement and enhancement of this functionality could fulfill the IT demand. The improvement of this function has continued to grow ever since, even when the pandemic was no longer the main concern. It is therefore necessary to investigate the evolution of the "official accounts" function from the perspective of the new services offered, exploring the impact on the way content is produced and disseminated over the last four years.

2. Objectives and Methodology

In the context of this study, the objective is to examine the evolution of the "official accounts" function on WeChat over the past four years, with particular attention to potential differences between pre- and post-pandemic periods and the anticipated trajectory of its future development. Furthermore, the study aims to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of new services for users in this function. Furthermore, the potential influence of these developments on the production and dissemination of content will be examined.

This research has been conducted in the post-pandemic period, specifically in the years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023. The sample comprises the new services created in the "official accounts" function over the four-year period, which encompass the following aspects:

- 1) Content formatting: The analysis will extend beyond the length of texts to encompass the multimedia content that can be attached to them.
- 2) Interaction: The modifications in the forms of interaction available, as well as the rules related to them, will be studied.
- 3) Text indicators: The ordering of texts published in "subscription" will be investigated. Furthermore, alterations to the data displayed on the front page of published texts will be investigated. This will include figures such as the number of reads, "likes", "shares", and other indicators of the texts. Finally, services related to the classification of published texts will be considered, including the "tag" and "collection" service.

A qualitative comparative and observational methodology will be employed to analyse these services.

The principal source for this study is WeChat's own blog and the technology pages on the Internet, which are updated on a regular basis and publish any changes that occur. In addition, studies carried out by relevant researchers will be consulted.

3. Results

The evolution of the "official accounts" over the four-year period under study has resulted in the introduction of new and diverse services for the function, as well as a change in the way content is produced and disseminated. Accordingly, the following three dimensions have been identified for the purposes of data analysis: 1) Content form, 2) Interaction and 3) Text Indicators. A summary of the results is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Changes in the role over the last four years and their advantages/disadvantages.

Aspectos	Servicios	2020	2023	Ventajas	Desventajas
Formato de los textos	texto corto sin imágenes	√ máximo 300 palabras	√ máximo 3.000 palabras	-Facilidad para publicaciones informativas -Alternancia textos largos con imágenes	-Menor profundidad creativa -Perjuicio en el hábito de lectura
	texto corto con imágenes	---	√ máximo 1.000 palabras	-Alternancia textos largos con imágenes	-Menor profundidad creativa -Perjuicio en el hábito de lectura
	textos con enlaces exteriores	---	√	-Fuente creíble	---
Interacción	comentarios para nuevas cuentas	---	---	---	-Desigualdad para autores nuevos
	Interacción en un solo lugar	---	√	-Mayor riqueza para contenidos de alta calidad -Interacción más accesible	---
	regla de cantidad de “me gusta”	---	√	-Mayor riqueza para contenidos de alta calidad -Mayor justicia a los autores	---
	regla para “pago de acceso a la lectura completa”	---	√	-Mayor riqueza para contenidos de alta calidad -Mayor justicia a los autores -Evitación de fraudes	---
	pago acceso a lectura completa	---	√	-Mayor riqueza para contenidos de alta calidad	---
	dos tipos de “me gusta”	---	√	-Mayor riqueza para contenidos de alta calidad -Interacción más accesible - Privacidad para los lectores	---
	comentarios de más de tres intervenciones	---	√	-Mayor riqueza para contenidos de alta calidad -Interacción más frecuente -Escenario interactivo para diversas opiniones	---
	filtro de comentarios	---	√	-Control de opinión pública	-Control de opinión pública
Indicadores de los textos	orden temporal de los textos sin filtro de calidad	√	---	---	-Llena de contenidos de basura
	orden de los textos con filtro de calidad	---	√	-Optimización del tiempo -Descenso contenidos “basura” -Aumento de lectura -Filtro inicial para encontrar contenidos interesados -Evolución gradual del entorno de creación	---
	“colección”	√	---	-Optimización del tiempo - Filtro inicial de selección -Comprensión rápida de una cuenta	---
	“etiqueta”	√	√	-Optimización del tiempo - Filtro inicial de selección -Comprensión rápida de una cuenta -Facilidad para selección de temas específicos	-Aumento de competencia entre los autores
	cantidad de textos en una etiqueta	---	√	- Optimización del tiempo -Comprensión rápida de una cuenta	-Saturación
	Cantidad: de lectura, “me gusta” y “compartir”	√	---	-Simplificación de datos -Motivación de lectura	-Saturación

1

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

3.1. Encouraging the Publication of Short Content

The form of content presentation represents the most fundamental aspect of a text, as it directly influences the initial impression that users receive when accessing it. This aspect pertains to the length of the texts and the various possibilities for incorporating different forms of multimedia. The characteristics of the content in question vary according to the specific objectives of its use in different

¹ "√" indicates the presence of the service in that year; "---" indicates absence of the service in the corresponding year and also means that there are no advantages/disadvantages in the service.

social networks. For instance, on Instagram, images are of paramount importance; on Twitter (X), brief messages are of significant consequence; on traditional blogs, users tend to create texts of varying lengths, with a single central idea. This discrepancy can be attributed to the differing purposes and constraints inherent to each application, which in turn influence the manner in which content is produced and utilised.

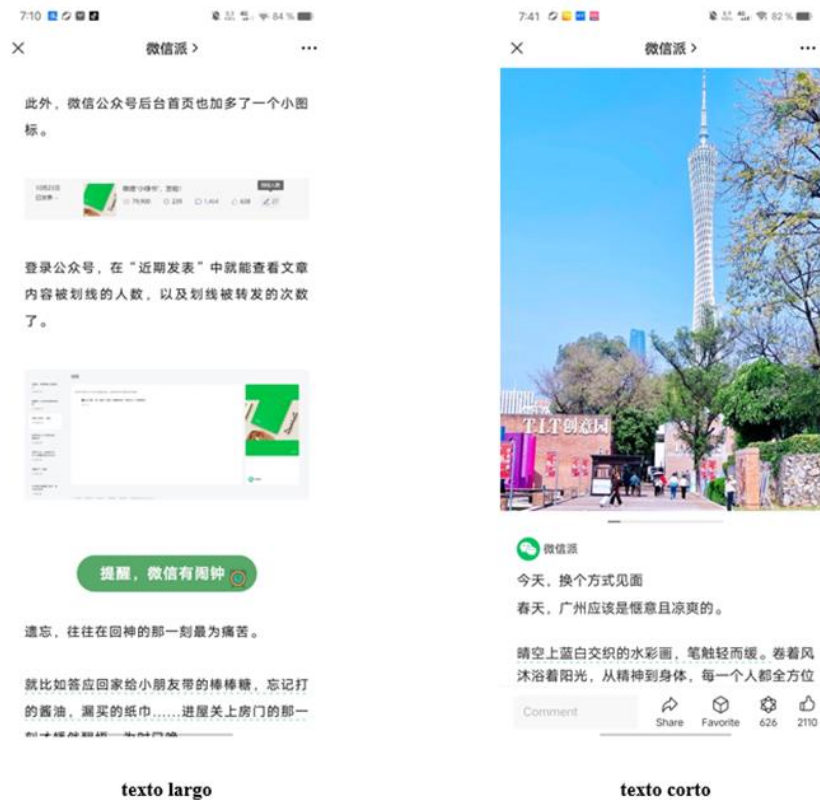
In the case of content posted on WeChat over the past four years, the changes have mainly affected short text formats. In 2020, the word limit for short texts without images was extended to 3,000 words, and it was also possible to have the same interaction services as for posts with images. Furthermore, authors have been able to insert links both within the application itself and to external websites, which has greatly guaranteed the authenticity of the source of the texts. A survey of users revealed that 93.4% considered authenticity to be the most important aspect, while 64% placed a high value on good quality, defined as interesting and abundant content (Wu, 2021).

Prior to 2020, text posts without additional formatting in "official accounts" were predominantly utilised in government publications, due to their distinctive length and dearth of interaction. This format conveyed a sense of comprehensive authority to users (Huicekeji, 2019). Consequently, the absence of images in the format of text posts without additional formatting in "official accounts" led to the assumption that these posts were informational or notification posts. Consequently, the evolution of the brief text format devoid of images markedly enhanced the publishing experience of government information notifications during the pandemic. This enabled the publication of texts of a specified length, which permitted institutions to provide a comprehensive account of the circumstances at this challenging period, supported by evidence that guaranteed their veracity. Furthermore, it offered an alternative solution for authors who were unable to publish lengthy texts accompanied by images on a daily basis. This prevented the loss of followers.

In 2023, the application introduced a novel approach to publishing brief textual content accompanied by images. This change has resulted in a notable transformation in the format of content disseminated through the "official accounts". The content is now more concise, with greater importance being placed on images. The evolution is clearly evident in the style of presentation of content in short texts, with a maximum of 1,000 words, which differs from that used in long texts, from a minimum of 300 words to an indefinite number of words at most. Furthermore, as illustrated in Image 2, the images in the longer texts are presented in a linear sequence, whereas those in the shorter articles are grouped together in a single section. This is analogous to the manner in which images are displayed on Instagram, where users can "swipe" left or right to view the photos, which are presented in a 3:2 ratio. Consequently, the aforementioned image demonstrates that in the short text interface, photos occupy a greater proportion of the page than text.

The characteristics of short texts with images are distinguished by a decrease in the level of creative depth. The current issue on the Internet, where texts are primarily constrained to a few words to express opinions, functioning more like summaries, and removing interesting stories and detailed opinions to satisfy the need for speed in information, was already identified by People's Daily, the Official Newspaper of China (Zhang, 2018). Furthermore, the advent of this new form of content has served to exacerbate the aforementioned problem, resulting in content that is somewhat superficial in nature. This is due to the fact that in short-article publications, the focus is on images, and the words in such texts are even more concise and easy to understand.

Image 2. Two forms of articles with images in the "official accounts".



Source: Weixinpai (2023)

In essence, it is evident that alterations in the format of "official accounts" tend to privilege the dissemination of brief content, irrespective of the presence of images. This reflects the preference of contemporary society, where there is a growing tendency for individuals to be less inclined to invest a significant amount of time reading a lengthy article in a leisurely manner. This phenomenon has also given rise to a new domain for advertising, as the format of short content accompanied by images is conducive to the promotion of products.

3.2. Meeting Needs in Interaction

It is imperative that interactions be encouraged in order to reinvigorate the efficacy of "official accounts." An effective interaction system within an application can facilitate the involvement of readers in providing feedback on content, while simultaneously encouraging authors to produce high-quality posts. A well-designed interaction system should offer a range of options and consider the rules governing data display in order to maintain a healthy environment. In the case of text interaction, although developers only evolved in this aspect in 2020, the multiple changes made throughout that year had the capacity to progressively satisfy, as far as possible, the diverse needs of users.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the developers have been implementing additional methods of interaction below the texts, which can be employed interchangeably. In 2019, the sole option available was "I'm watching," while by the end of 2020, four options for interaction had already been introduced. Furthermore, it is evident that, while providing a greater range of options for different modes of interaction, strict regulations have been implemented to establish an appropriate environment for the dissemination and public opinion in the "official accounts".

Image 3. Changes in the way articles interact in 2020.



Source: WeChat "official accounts" (2020)

With regard to this growth in diversity, it is notable that a greater number of services in the "like" option and in comments have emerged. Furthermore, a novel mode of interaction was introduced.

It is first necessary to note that since that year, two forms of "like" have been provided: one is a private "like", visible only to authors; the other is "I am viewing", which informs contacts that a text has been "liked". Consequently, the "I'm watching" service is somewhat distinct from the conventional "like" service. Following the introduction of the "featured articles" section, the sole remaining option was the "I'm watching" button, which prompted concern among users. To address this issue, the traditional "like" option was incorporated into the interface in 2020, situated below the texts. This evolution allows users to share their interest in a given text with all their contacts by clicking on the "I'm watching" button, as well as to express their interest privately by "liking" a text.

Secondly, the introduction of the ability for users to interact with authors on multiple occasions represents a significant departure from the previous limitations on comments. Both authors and readers are now able to leave multiple successive comments in response to an initial comment. The advent of this new service has created an interactive arena where users can engage in debate with a variety of opinions. It is, however, important to note that these services are currently only available for accounts that were registered prior to 2018. Consequently, newly created accounts do not have this mode of interaction. The data from Topklout (2022) illustrates the significance of the same rights between new and old accounts. During the months of August to November 2022, the majority of texts published were created by accounts between 5 to 7 years old (33.6%) or 2 to 5 years old (34.9%). These findings indicate that new accounts also play a significant role in this context. It is therefore only fair and necessary that these accounts be afforded the same right of interaction for their development.

Furthermore, the application introduced a novel mode of interaction in 2020: a paid service that enables users to access the full text of the articles. This mode of interaction is based on the concept of accepting a payment as a means of expressing satisfaction with the quality of the text and as a form of gratitude to the authors. Moreover, the initiative has generated a notable economic benefit, which has the potential to stimulate further creative endeavours.

In conclusion, with regard to the location of the interaction options, it can be observed that a number of options have been progressively consolidated in a single location, thus facilitating for users the ability to simultaneously engage with all the available buttons without the need to change location, as was previously the case. This modification facilitates more straightforward, more efficient, and more frequent interaction.

Conversely, since 2020, regulations governing interaction have been established, encompassing both traditional modes of interaction and this novel mode.

The most restrictive regulation for the "like" service is that the application no longer permits the account owner to "like" their own text. It can be argued that users rely on this data as a criterion to assess the quality of a text and make the decision to open it. Therefore, this rule implies that the data attached to a post is more plausible, particularly given that an official account can have a maximum of 25 administrators. Prior to the implementation of this rule, smaller groups of authors, who were previously disadvantaged by the lack of fairness in the system, will now have an equal opportunity to compete with larger groups.

With regard to comments, only those that have been manually marked by the authors as noteworthy will appear publicly in the comments section below the texts. This allows users to view them; otherwise, they would not be visible. This service serves as a filter for authors, as public opinion is considered an appendix to a text.

Finally, with regard to the pay-per-read full-text service, the app has established a number of rigorous criteria for both the quality of the account and the standard of the text, with the intention of ensuring the financial security of readers. In order for an author to apply for the service, their account must meet three criteria: it must have been registered for a period of more than three months, it must have published more than three original texts, and it must have no infringement records in the app. Furthermore, texts that wish to utilise this service must adhere to the following criteria: they must be original; they cannot be forwarded, paid in the form of a tip or insert advertising; and once such a text is published, authors cannot alter the price, the portion of the text displayed to readers without payment, or the percentage of proofreading. The implementation of these rules is intended to ensure the normal development of this function and to reduce the possibility of fraud to the detriment of readers. The objective of these regulations is to enhance the benefits for high-quality content.

In conclusion, the evolution of the interaction aspect has not only provided a greater diversity of options for readers, but also encourages the excellence of content in "official accounts," thereby conferring benefits upon their authors. It is, however, important to note that new accounts are somewhat disadvantaged in the application process, since, as previously stated, it does not offer them the comment service, which is a fundamental aspect for their development and the maintenance of their followers. Consequently, while it is evident that the enhancements to the interaction aspect of "official accounts" have largely met the expectations of the majority of users, there remains scope for further advancement.

3.3. Promoting High Quality Content

The metrics employed to assess the content of a text can influence the reading experience of the reader, as well as the popularity of the text in question. The information available to readers encompasses a range of elements, including the order in which texts are presented in a "subscription," content data such as readership figures, sharing statistics, and texts under the same account label. The modifications implemented in this area of WeChat demonstrate that the application is reducing the range of data displayed and increasing the visibility of high-quality content. This development has thus facilitated readers' access to such content with minimal difficulty, which is particularly beneficial in the context of the current information overload.

In addition to the aforementioned changes, the method of ordering the presentation of texts has also been altered. Previously, texts were ordered by time of publication in the "subscription" section. However, this has now been replaced by a new method. The new system considers the quality of official accounts, the degree of affinity of users towards them, and the excellence of the texts. In this manner, the application serves as an initial filter, thereby facilitating the more efficient identification of content of interest to users.

This change represents a functional improvement aimed at optimising the time spent by users, as well as a gradual evolution of the environment in the "official accounts" function. It implies a decrease of "junk" content in readers' "subscriptions" and a noticeable influence on the quality of authors' creations. Wu's (2021) analysis revealed that prior to the implementation of this new order, there was an increase in the content of the "official accounts" function, yet the reading frequency of such texts remained low due to the prevalence of "junk" texts. This development is undoubtedly favourable for the function itself, as it encourages users to utilise it due to the minimal effort required to access texts of interest to them.

Over the course of four years, the developers have implemented multiple modifications to the service for the purpose of sorting articles pertaining to a single topic. In 2020, the application introduced two new services for this function: one was the collection of articles and the other was the topic tagging of articles. These services pursue a similar objective, namely to facilitate the classification of published articles. The primary distinction between the two is that the "collection" is designed to classify original content belonging to the same account, whereas the topic tag can encompass all texts that have the same tag in the WeChat application. This allows users to find content related to a specific topic, even if it was created by a different author. When an author creates a collection or a tag, their name is displayed on their profile, thereby allowing users to rapidly ascertain the primary content.

Following their launch in 2020, these services enjoyed considerable popularity. However, in September of that year, the developers opted to merge the two services. This combination has facilitated the benefit of other authors from the shared themes and, from the user perspective, the ability to access all related texts in a single location is also advantageous. Furthermore, the competition between authors can be intensified, as readers can readily and expeditiously make comparisons of analogous content. The service has continued to evolve, and in 2023, the number of texts contained in an account will be included next to the name, thus facilitating an understanding of the relevance of the account. This information allows the reader to ascertain whether the account owner is an expert in a particular field without having to enter the tag.

Finally, over the past four years, various adjustments have been made to the services in question with the intention of encouraging interest in reading the texts included in the "official accounts". In 2020, the app introduced new information for users, including the presentation of data related to each text. This included the number of reads, the number of "likes" from contacts, and the number of times the text had been shared by all readers. However, from 2022 onwards, the developers have simplified this further, now only displaying the number of reads by contacts below the text. This is crucial to stimulate users' interest in a text, as research indicates that on WeChat, approximately half of the users follow official accounts or read texts based on their contacts' recommendations (Topklout, 2022). Consequently, the high number will act as an attraction for curiosity, facilitating access to the content, which will contribute to a further increase in the number of readings.

This streamlining can enhance the efficacy of enhancing the appeal of a text. This is because the act of liking and sharing an article necessitates that readers undertake an additional action subsequent to reading it, which does not always occur, as it depends solely on the reader's volition. Yun (2023) posits that even in accounts with the highest levels of popularity, it takes an average of one "like" for every 400.7 reads. Consequently, the number of reads will increase automatically, thereby encouraging reading.

In conclusion, enhancements in text indicators can, on occasion, serve to enhance motivation to read articles, while simultaneously eliminating content that is either detrimental or superfluous. The services provided by "official accounts" extend beyond the mere provision of simple data attachments. They are, in fact, services that save readers time and effort. Additionally, for the proprietors of "official accounts," these services can be advantageous for the purpose of attracting users who are interested in the content that they offer. Such factors may account for the increased frequency of use of this information offering in the wake of the pandemic. These novel services can facilitate the promotion of high-quality content and its creators, thereby fostering greater vitality within the domain of "official accounts." Ultimately, the use of "official accounts" will become even more prevalent, attracting users who did not previously utilise this function. This is due to the efficiency with which knowledge is disseminated and the ease with which it is accessed.

4. Discussion

This paper offers a comprehensive overview of the evolution of the "official accounts" function over the past four years. As it represents the primary source of textual content dissemination in China, a discernible trend in the production and dissemination of content style, and its impact in the Eastern context, can also be observed.

With regard to the first objective of identifying the changes in the "official accounts" function over the past four years, the following facts can be highlighted. Firstly, it can be observed that, particularly in 2020, there were more developments in this function than in previous years. This phenomenon can be attributed to the circumstances surrounding the pandemic, which prompted a more frequent utilisation

of these accounts. In order to facilitate more effective content dissemination, developers were compelled to enhance the function. In the same year, the aspect that underwent the most changes was the interaction aspect. With the introduction of new options such as the duality of two forms of "like", "pay to access the full reading" and improved accessibility, the way in which it was used was revitalised. The priority attention given by developers to this aspect can be attributed to the growing need to establish social connections during the pandemic, which necessitated the use of virtual communication channels. The provision of interaction-related services was instrumental in fostering a sense of companionship among users facing an unprecedentedly challenging situation of confinement.

Secondly, it has been observed that over the past four years, improvements have been made in relation to one particular aspect: the indicators of the "official accounts". These have undergone a significant evolution among the three aspects that have been analysed. To this end, the developers have introduced a significant new feature, namely the ability to alter the order of texts published in the "subscription" section. This has had a marked impact on the dissemination of content. At the present time, the texts published are no longer ordered according to the time of publication, but rather on the basis of the quality of the texts themselves. It is important to note that this sorting method is not dependent on the algorithmic process, but rather on the data associated with the texts, such as the number of reads or the number of "likes," among other factors. This eliminates the necessity for an additional, laborious step in the filtering process, which has increased the frequency of use of the function.

The advent of these developments has consequently transformed the manner in which readers access information. The new sorting method and the simplification of the data displayed have proven to be highly beneficial for readers, particularly in the context of information overload. Indeed, these alterations in the format of information for readers indicate a preference for the production of high-quality texts. This is consistent with the hypothesis put forth by Chang and Tian (2018), who predicted that publications in "official accounts" would prioritize the quality of content over the quantity of texts with catchy titles that attract readers without knowing in advance whether or not they are dispensable.

Finally, the evolution in the form of content should not be overlooked, despite the lack of significant changes in this area. These modifications are nevertheless crucial, as they could define the production model in the future. The prevailing trend is towards shorter and shorter text content in official accounts. Consequently, developers have made improvements in short-form content, both with and without images. It is probable that the new format of short texts with images will become the principal method of content dissemination in this context, potentially superseding the long text format with images. On the one hand, this content format has further lowered the threshold for textual content creation. On the other hand, the short text format with images has adapted to the current era of fragmentation, where people do not have the time or patience to read long texts. Moreover, the format is very suitable for product promotion, which will make this feature increasingly used. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that in the future there will be greater demands on image creation.

It can be reasonably assumed that the development trend of the "official accounts" function will be characterised by shorter, more figurative texts; a greater diversity of interaction forms; and the display of information indicators in a more straightforward, yet useful manner, tailored to the preferences of users.

With regard to the second objective, namely the advantages and disadvantages of the new services for users in this function, it is evident that the advantages are considerable. A greater range of content formats and interaction possibilities is now available, with the objective of optimising the accessibility of the function to the greatest extent possible. The incorporation of various services is designed to minimise the time required by users to locate useful and quality content, taking into account the current abundance of information. In this instance, the developers have opted to eschew the use of an algorithmic sorting mechanism, instead prioritising a quality-centric approach to text evaluation. This methodology has been deemed more efficacious and expedient. By prioritising the visibility of high-quality content, this approach will contribute to an overall improvement in the quality of all publications within the function. Furthermore, this novel environment guarantees a more equitable competitive landscape for authors, irrespective of the number of texts they have published.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider the potential drawbacks of these new services. It is evident that the reduction in text length has an impact on the reading habits of users, who will become

increasingly accustomed to reading at a certain length. The advent of the mobile phone and its pervasive use is undoubtedly one of the causes of this phenomenon. Additionally, the decreasing patience of individuals to engage with lengthy content can be observed in other reading and image applications that are currently popular, including TikTok and Twitter. The new adaptations in the "official accounts" will gradually have an impact on the severity of this trend.

This is consistent with Huang's (2019) assertion that, as a consequence of the fragmentation of reading habits, individuals will remain in a state of superficial reading, which could impede the assimilation of content and increase the difficulty of acquiring knowledge in a systematic manner. The forecast expressed by Huang (2019) was made prior to the pandemic, a period when the reliance on mobile phones was not as pronounced, and the length of texts still oscillated between short and long. In light of the evolution of the role of "official accounts" following the pandemic, where short posts are prioritised, this author's concern is growing.

Conversely, the new services also exhibit a significant shortcoming. Despite the attempt to establish appropriate interaction protocols, it is evident that most of these new services are not conducive to the success of new authors. This is because only accounts created prior to 2018 are equipped with a commenting service, which enables readers to interact with authors without restriction. However, this benefit is not included in new accounts, which consequently diminishes user loyalty. Consequently, the discrepancy between the two types of accounts widens in an uneven manner.

To conclude, the advent of new services in this role offers numerous advantages for both readers and authors. However, it is imperative to consider the potential detriment to user habitus and the inequalities faced by new authors.

Regarding the third objective, namely, to investigate the potential impact on the manner in which content is produced and disseminated, the evolution of this function will result in publications becoming increasingly fragmented, thus leading to the creation of content that is of a shallower nature. Furthermore, in order to meet the dual requirements of brevity and quality, authors must make extensive use of images to express their ideas. This may result in future content giving greater importance to images than to words. Furthermore, images are increasingly being used in place of words, thus circumventing the healthy habit of reading.

Conversely, the dissemination of content becomes increasingly personalised and group based. In the section designated for the subscribers, all the texts published by the authors and their followers are presented, and the application will sort the contents according to various criteria. The implementation of these two filters will undoubtedly enhance the adaptability of the content to the readers' preferences. However, it is essential to ensure that the readers are not constrained within a filter bubble. The dissemination of content to a specific group of people indicates the popularity of the texts in the users' physical social network. This is achieved by displaying data. This is a significant factor in determining whether or not a user will choose to read a particular text. It is therefore likely that the most read texts will become more popular in that social network group. Furthermore, if individuals within a social group consistently espouse similar opinions on a given topic, it is probable that the group will become increasingly polarized within the larger society.

5. Conclusions

This paper concludes that the changes to texts in the "official accounts" function of WeChat have altered both the manner in which content is produced and disseminated within society. The evolution of this function subsequent to the pandemic demonstrates that the content in "official accounts" has become shorter and more figurative; the role of images may be higher than that of text; the form of interaction has become more diversified and accessible; and the indicators of texts have become simpler and also more personalised for readers. The modifications to the "official accounts" function facilitate access for individuals and companies and enhance the number of interactions. The network is becoming increasingly transparent in its operation, thereby liberating users from the constraints of technological complexity. Nevertheless, it is essential to consider the potential adverse effects on users' reading habits, as well as the issue of equity between new and existing authors. Furthermore, care must be taken to avoid the phenomenon of isolation through the construction of filter bubbles and the polarisation of groups.

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