

# As WeChat turns 10, marketers in China can leverage the ever-morphing app for Lunar New Year campaigns

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**Man-Chung Cheung**

As WeChat enters its second decade, Allen Zhang Xiaolong, chief architect of the super app, pledged at an annual conference to make videos its cornerstone in the coming years. More specifically, Zhang spotlighted Channels, its short-form video feature, and a more seamless user experience with official accounts and miniprograms (lightweight apps within WeChat that require minimal downloading and disappear after use).

WeChat has figured as a prominent part of the marketing stack in Lunar New Years past. Over the previous month or so, the number of new COVID-19 cases has become relatively high, and despite a decline in recent days, authorities are still sounding a cautious note and urging citizens to avoid unnecessary travel. More people are likely to stay local and indoors, rather than traveling to see family, as has been the tradition. This means the emphasis on digital will be greater than usual.

The app has recently made several new updates to boost user engagement, shareability, and discoverability, such as an enhanced search function, hashtags within chats, and livestreaming video. These changes have helped unleash tantalizing possibilities for marketers. WeChat users can now perform a search directly within a chat for content across the app's ecosystem, which include official accounts, articles, short videos, listings of related services, and miniprograms. WeChat Search had 500 million monthly active users (MAUs) at the end of last year.

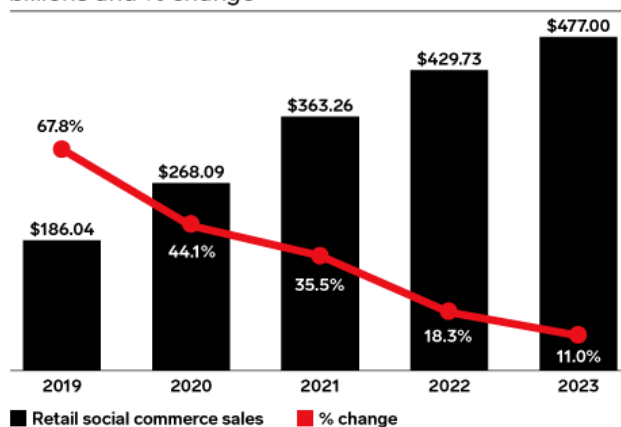
Channels launched in H2 2020 to meet the demand for short-form videos made popular by rivals Douyin (China's version of TikTok) and Kuaishou. According to Aladdin, a third-party data analytics company, WeChat Channels had more than 280 million daily active users (DAUs) by the end of 2020, with users spending an average of 19 minutes on the feature per day. Aladdin forecasts that WeChat Channels' number of DAUs will reach 400 million during the Lunar New Year period.

WeChat Mini Programs have continued to gain traction in the commerce arena. According to official data, transaction value via WeChat Mini Programs doubled year over year in 2020 and, per calculations by news site Caixin, reached RMB 1.6 trillion (\$231.58 billion), with transaction volume growing twofold as well. Its number of DAUs expanded from 300 million to more than 400 million over the same period.

According to our newest forecast, retail social commerce sales in China will reach \$363.26 billion in 2021, growing by 35.5% year over year.

### Retail Social Commerce Sales in China, 2019-2023

billions and % change



Note: includes products or services ordered via social networks, such as Facebook Marketplace, Instagram Checkout, WeChat Mini Programs, Line Shopping, VK Market, and others, regardless of the method of payment or fulfillment; excludes travel and event tickets, payments, such as bill pay, taxes or money transfers, food services and drinking place sales, gambling, and other vice goods sales  
Source: eMarketer, Jan 2021

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WeChat has also launched livestreaming functionality under Channels, where livestreamers and brands can easily connect to their WeChat Shops to enable shoppable live video.

Marketers now have an expanded set of tools to leverage the social network's massive reach, as well as its social commerce and content discovery capabilities, for their Lunar New Year campaigns. A number of brands are relying on tried-and-true tactics, which include limited-edition product launches inspired by the year's zodiac sign. Apple released a **Year of the Ox edition** of the AirPods Pro that features a special ox emoji on the packaging and charging case. Its WeChat campaign offers a custom Apple Music playlist to ring in the new year.

Prominent brands like adidas have also produced **short films** to mark the holiday. Family togetherness and traditional values, with a twist of modern societal dilemmas, have been popular themes, with subtle branding messages only to be revealed at the very end of the film.