

# Chapter 4

## Development Report on China's WeChat in 2014

Xiucui Yu, Tianhao Zhao and Shishi Tong

**Abstract** With the rapid development of Chinese society, people's lives have become increasingly fragmented, and social alienation has been gradually on the rise. The rise of WeChat meets people's needs of interaction and communication in an increasingly fragmented society and constitutes an indispensable part of people's daily lives. In 2014, China's WeChat continued to develop and brought out many new functionalities. This article presents the development of WeChat and the problems arising out of WeChat's development from six perspectives: communicative functions and features, development status and characteristics, major apps and features, security status and features, management status and features, trends, and prospects.

**Keywords** Wechat · Communication functionality · Major apps · Security status

WeChat became a hot topic of the media industry in 2014, and with the uninterrupted growth in the number of mobile Internet users in China, the communication loop created by WeChat through the mobile phone number and QQ ID will continue to inject new vitality into micro-communication. In 2014, the number of monthly active users of WeChat reached 400 million, which had fundamentally led to its rapid development. In a certain sense, WeChat is not just an ordinary communication application but is also a means of communication that could completely change the way people communicate and interact with each other, both online and offline.

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## **4.1 Communication Functions and Features of WeChat**

As a newly-emerging social media app, WeChat has unique communication functions and features and differs from both traditional media and existing social media apps such as Weibo.

### ***4.1.1 Higher Levels of Information Accuracy and Arrival Rate***

WeChat is different from Weibo in terms of information dissemination. Weibo supports interaction, but the interaction is mostly unidirectional, and its users are on the same footing in the process of communication. In stark contrast, WeChat is a social network of contacts from mobile phone contacts and QQ friends, suggesting that people in this network know and trust each other. This improves the credibility and influence of information sent via WeChat. The administrator of a WeChat public account can easily group the followers according to their attributes through backend settings and oversee the operation of the account to ensure that accurate information can be sent to each user.

In terms of the communication channel, the signal noise of WeChat is small while the rate of information arrival is high. After a WeChat public account releases information, its publisher can precisely track the effects of information transmission based on reading and sharing rates of information displayed in the backend. The rate of information arrival is high.

### ***4.1.2 WeChat Is a Multi-dimensional and Elastic Social Media App Which Has Extended the Theory of Six Degrees of Separation***

Social networking provided by WeChat is a combination of interactions between friends and strangers. Therefore, it is a multi-dimensional social media app that has extended the theory of Six Degrees of Separation.

WeChat allows users to connect with strangers, which has completely subverted the theory of Six Degrees of Separation and transformed social relations from a time-based one into a space-based one. For example, WeChat users can connect with strangers by moving the app. The “Shake” feature is also a scene-based means of communication. In addition, the “Drift Bottle” feature of WeChat allows users to meet strangers randomly. These three means of networking have different

characteristics and functions, but they are all based on geographical location, which has completely subverted the theory of Six Degrees of Separation, enriched user experiences and broadened their vision when networking.

Multimedia social networking of WeChat also strengthens its social elasticity. The concept of elastic social network originates from an app called Color which refers to an instant, impulsive and elastic social network constructed by people related to each other purely based on scenes and scenarios, instead of differentiation between acquaintances and strangers. Temporally, WeChat social networks can be divided into acquaintance networks and stranger networks. Spatially, it can be divided into short-distance networks, such as “moments”, medium-distance networks, such as using the “people nearby” feature to determine user groups around, and long-distance networks, such as scanning the QR code or using the “shake” and the “Drift Bottle” features to extend the scope of social networking. From a time-based network to a space-based one, from strangers to acquaintances, from short-distance to long-distance, WeChat develops a multimedia social network that transcends time and space and surpasses the breadth of social networking of all previous social media apps.

#### ***4.1.3 WeChat Is a Small but Powerful App that Has Become a Rich and Hypermedia App***

Tencent's strong technical and financial support makes WeChat a rich media app. Unlike mobile text messaging, WeChat uses Internet data; unlike QQ, WeChat has the voice-talk function; and unlike Weibo, WeChat allows instant communication. In addition, as a social networking platform, with the continuous increase of its social networking functions, WeChat communication is becoming more complicated, encompassing organizational communication, group communication, and mass communication. Communication content is becoming richer and the forms of communication more diversified, making WeChat a veritably rich media.

Later versions of WeChat provide payments function and games, and are open to business service platforms, as a result of which WeChat does not appear to be just a “we media” application. Some scholars call the commercialization of WeChat as such as de-mediation. Consequently, WeChat looks more like a mixture of QQ, TalkBox (systematic instrumental software developed by Google), Path (social network) and Instagram (mobile application).<sup>1</sup> Its nature as a platform is becoming more obvious, and a hypermedia ecosystem has taken shape.

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<sup>1</sup>Yongdong Chen, “WeChat is a complement to rather than a replacement of Weibo,” *Journalism Writing*, 2013, Issue 4.

#### ***4.1.4 WeChat Communication Achieves the Representation of the Communication Scene and Resource Sharing***

In the book *Community and Society*, German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies defined community as groupings based on a feeling of togetherness. It is a web of close, useful and personal social relations established between homogeneous people sharing common values and focuses on geographical location, sense of togetherness and behaviors.<sup>2</sup> The success of WeChat is largely attributed to its successful simulation of context community which allows WeChat users to find the community that meets their needs and gives them a sense of belonging. For example, Moments integrates mobile contacts and QQ friends as well as people we meet through the “People Nearby” feature, which has achieved the integration of virtual and real communities to some extent. With the information sender and receiver known to each other, the interaction is more active. In addition, the fact that “Comments” and ‘Likes’ on Moments can only be seen by the publisher and his/her friends increases the users’ privacy and models real life in a greater way.

WeChat’s successful simulation of virtual communities determines that its representative communication feature is the sharing of resources. According to official data, in 2014, WeChat users read 5.86 articles on average daily, and 80% of the posts by subscription accounts are read on Moments. In addition, 61% of the articles are reposted on Moments by users. The community feature of WeChat and resource sharing has led to a polarization trend in communication and created the Matthew effect in communication. Namely, information that is more-frequently read will be read more frequently on Moments.

## **4.2 WeChat’s Development Status and Features**

WeChat is not the only instant mobile messaging app based on smartphones that quickly sends all sorts of information through mobile phones. Currently, similar apps widely used abroad include WhatsApp, Line, Kik, TalkBox and KakaoTalk. In China, similar apps include MiTalk developed by Xiaomi Inc. and Felio, Wing-talk and Woyou launched by China Mobile, China Telecom, and China Unicom respectively. By providing various means of communication, including voice messaging, video, images, etc., WeChat has created good user experience in communicating across networks, terminals, and platforms, making it so far the most successful mobile Internet application and the fastest-growing Internet service.

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<sup>2</sup>Tönnies Ferdinand (1957), *Community and Society*, Charles Price Loomis.

### ***4.2.1 Technological Development Status: Acceleration of Version Updates and Greater Emphasis on User Experience***

WeChat is a new media platform with the fastest technological upgrades. Over a short span of four years, it has evolved from WeChat 1.0 with only simple social networking functions to WeChat 6.0 with multiple functions. Version 2.0 differs from Version 1.0 in that the compression technology is adopted for audio data compression so that the audio data packet can be transmitted in a mobile network environment. WeChat 3.0 provides even better social networking services with the “Shake”, “Drift Bottle” and “People Nearby” features. Location-based services (LBS) are integrated into the three features which, therefore, enables WeChat to facilitate networking with familiar faces as well as stranger networking based on location search.

Since WeChat launched Version 3.5, it began to tap into commercial activities. Users of WeChat 3.5 could obtain product and sales information of a certain business by scanning its QR code. WeChat 4.0 introduced the Moments feature, which enhanced the social networking and commercial functions of WeChat. WeChat 4.2 adopted voice and video technologies and WeChat 5.0 launched the Payments feature in collaboration with TenPay, thus further consolidating its role as a commercial platform. WeChat 5.4 unified the subscription account and service account as the gateway to WeChat public accounts and improved the payment feature at the same time. WeChat 6.0 focused on small videos and card package features (see Table 4.1).

In terms of technical development, WeChat's product development has three features: (1) rapidly upgraded technology and short product lifecycle; (2) greater emphasis on comprehensive media integration of social networking and commerce; (3) prioritizing user experience, underscoring “social togetherness” both online and offline.

### ***4.2.2 Usage and Development Status: WeChat Excelled in China While Gradually Accumulating More International Users***

WeChat is the fastest growing media app of all media apps. In 2009, the total number of Weibo users exceeded 300 million in just 991 days after its launch. This record was, however, refreshed by WeChat, which gained a record number of 50 million WeChat users in just ten months after its launch in January 2011. By January 2013, the number of WeChat users exceeded 300 million. It only took 789 days for WeChat to achieve such a large number of users, compared with 991 days for Weibo.

**Table 4.1** WeChat's technical development and functions

Date of upgrade	Version	New Features
21/01/2011	WeChat 1.0	Send texts and images and change profile photo
10/03/2011	WeChat 1.1	Search people via WeChat ID, name, contacts list
21/03/2011	WeChat 1.2	Group chat
06/04/2011	WeChat 1.3	Emoticons
10/05/2011	WeChat 2.0	Voice intercom, photo filtering, QQ mail reminder
08/06/2011	WeChat 2.1	Add friends via mobile contacts, share WeChat ID and set privacy
30/06/2011	WeChat 2.2	Receive offline QQ messages, recommend friends, verify friend requests and manage extensions
03/08/2011	WeChat 2.5	Audio message, 'people nearby', voice notes, personalized signatures
01/10/2011	WeChat 3.0	Shake, drift bottle and contact list security assistant
27/10/2011	WeChat 3.1	Switch between text messages and voice messages
23/11/2011	WeChat 3.5	QR code, customized sickers, customized background
20/12/2011	WeChat 4.0	Album, "moments", open interface, geographical location, group, bulk messaging
19/04/2012	WeChat 4.2	Video chat, Web version, reply on "moments"
19/07/2012	WeChat 4.3	Shake and upload photos, unlock mobile QQ accounts, download sticker, QR code scanning
05/09/2012	WeChat 4.5	Real-time group chat, shake, voice reminder, location navigation
05/02/2013	WeChat 5.0	Public accounts, games, new version of "scan QR code", WeChat payment
05/08/2014	WeChat 5.4	Search public accounts and articles, receive money and transfer money using QR code
01/10/2015	WeChat 6.0	Mini video clips and digi-card holder

WeChat also has the largest user scale and the most extensive coverage. It has been embraced and sought after by users since its launch. According to Tencent's Q2 2014 earnings report, the number of monthly active users of WeChat increased from 396 million in the first quarter to 438 million in the second quarter. In comparison, in the first half of 2014, the number of users of China's social networking sites was 257 million, down by 4.3% compared with 2013. By the end of 2014, WeChat users exceeded 600 million, covering more than 200 countries and regions, making WeChat the fastest-growing and most widely-used social media app in terms of user scale and coverage. This showed the expanding size and growing influence of WeChat in the mobile Internet field.

WeChat is a leading app in terms of localization while its globalized development is still in early stages (see Table 4.2). As a global media app, WeChat has achieved good results in domestic coverage, but in terms of overseas users, it is still in its primary stages. The statistics by Analysys showed that the market share of WeChat in the markets outside the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong is low.

**Table 4.2** Data on monthly active users of global instant messaging apps *unit %*

Countries and regions	FB Messenger	KaKao Talk	Line	Pinger	WeChat	WhatsApp
USA	12	1	1	8	1	9
Canada	17	1	2	—	2	18
UK	15	—	1	—	1	49
Australia	19	1	4	—	5	22
Argentina	29	—	—	—	—	96
Brazil	32	—	4	—	—	90
Colombia	27	—	26	—	—	96
Mexico	31	—	14	—	—	94
German	29	—	1	—	—	91
Spain	13	—	44	—	—	99
France	19	—	1	—	—	17
Italy	33	—	3	—	—	83
China	—	2	11	—	82	15
Hong Kong	21	3	46	—	53	96
Japan	18	9	71	—	6	8
South Korea	6	95	12	—	—	3

*Note* Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp belong to Facebook

*Data sources* Onavo Insights, Analysys International, Analysys

<http://www.enfodesk.com/SMinisite/newinfo/article/detail-id-402768.html>

WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are two formidable rivals in the Americas while South America and Europe have basically been dominated by WhatsApp. Thus, it will take a while before WeChat's globalization campaign succeeds.

### ***4.2.3 User Behavior: High Level of WeChat User Loyalty and the Focus on "Strong-Tie" Networks***

WeChat has the highest level of user loyalty. According to the Report on Chinese Social Networking App User Behaviors published by China Internet Network Information Center, the usage of in the first half of 2014 was 65%, higher than that of other instant-messaging applications in China. In addition, it surpassed Weibo and other social networking apps to be the most frequently-used app. People often used WeChat before getting up in the morning, when they were on the bus/train or waiting in the queue. In terms of usage frequency, over 56% of the users used WeChat more than twice a week, of which 31.4% used WeChat every day. It is evident that WeChat has a strong appeal and has obtained a high level of user loyalty.

WeChat focuses on the “strong-tie network” and is complemented by the “weak-tie network”. The American sociologist Mark Granovetter believes that interpersonal networks can be divided into strong ties and weak ties. WeChat’s Moments focuses on a network of strong ties (interactions with friends) and is complemented by a network of weak ties (interactions with strangers). According to the Report on Chinese Social Networking App User Behaviors by China Internet Network Information Center, over 90% of the contacts that WeChat users follow were their friends and classmates, over 80% were their colleagues and relatives and about 50% were their teachers and employers. This shows that “strong-tie” networks are the mainstay of WeChat. In comparison, WeChat news media public accounts had the strongest appeal to WeChat users within weak-tie networks.

### **4.3 WeChat’s Key Functions and Features**

In 2014, WeChat remained the most important social networking app. Thanks to continuous technical upgrades and user experience improvements, WeChat continued to promote instant, rapid and effective interactions between people both online and offline and thus became a must for Chinese people. In addition, while its basic social communication functions continued to improve, its advantages in providing social services, especially in government affairs and interaction, and business, became prominent at the same time, taking on the following new features.

#### ***4.3.1 The Proliferation of WeChat Public Accounts and the Emergence of Integrated Platforms***

On 18 August 2012, the WeChat public account was opened mainly to major media outlets and enterprises for them to promote their businesses by publishing information, sending messages to customers, automated businesses maintenance, one-to-one communication, etc. Leading brands, businesses and developers registered their WeChat official account one after another, and the WeChat subscription account, the WeChat service account, and the WeChat enterprise account became three principal applications of WeChat.

In 2014, the development of the WeChat public account took on the following features.

##### **4.3.1.1 The Number of WeChat Public Accounts Grew Explosively**

Official data shows that as of June 2014, the number of WeChat public accounts exceeded 5.8 million and the number of new accounts on average daily rose from 8000 in 2013 to 15,000.



#### **4.3.1.2 User Experiences Continued to Improve**

WeChat public accounts began to support bilateral interactions between the sender and the receiver of information. The updated WeChat public platform enabled its users to view the number of reads of each article, and also like and share them. This indicated a shift from passive marketing through the publication of QR codes to active marketing that allowed the WeChat public account to send articles directly to certain followers. This also provided more ways to conduct effective advertising on WeChat.

#### **4.3.1.3 The Number of WeChat Public Accounts of Chinese Media Outlets Continued to Grow, and Introducing WeChat to All Media Outlets Became a Reality**

In 2014, the number of WeChat public accounts of Chinese media outlets continued to grow. Traditional media outlets such as newspapers (e.g. People's Daily, Nanfang Metropolis Daily), radio (China National Radio), TV (CCTV), Xinhua news agency as well as new media like news websites (people.com.cn), business portal websites (news.baidu.com.cn, news, sohu.com.cn, news Ynet.com.cn) and all-media news center (ND media) registered their WeChat public accounts one after another to interact with WeChat users in real time.

#### **4.3.1.4 WeChat Moments Was Flooded with Micro-Shop Feeds**

Micro-shop is a new app combining features of WeChat and Taobao. Micro-shop marketing is based on "moments", which includes adding and managing orders and stock, protecting consumer rights, etc. General WeChat users can add large quantities of items and open a shop to sell products to their friends/acquaintances through this interface. As their friendship circle of clients continues to increase, clients of these micro-shops would increase progressively. As a result, secondary connections can also become clients, making it a typical phenomenon in 2014 for "moments" to be flooded with promotional information continuously.

#### **4.3.2 *WeChat's Vertical Applications Are Diversified, and the WeChat Payment Drives Offline Consumption***

In 2014, WeChat continued to improve its vertical apps. At the same time, it placed great emphasis on the diversified development of its vertical applications, enhanced compatibility and connection between applications, and the embedded and common development of both itself and its mobile clients in order to provide more convenient, personalized user experiences. The compatible development of WeChat and

Tencent News serves as a good example. At the beginning when WeChat and Tencent News were completely independent, users could not read news on the Tencent News client interface unless they logged out of WeChat. This situation changed when WeChat and Tencent News client interface became compatible. Users could now read Tencent News without logging off WeChat, and even forward or share news to WeChat. The direct impact of the diversification of WeChat's vertical applications was that previously independent and incompatible mobile applications were connected and compatible, and the personalized demands of users were satisfied.

After one year's development, the WeChat payment feature was improved, and the online and offline sales platforms established on the basis of the WeChat payment platform became increasingly popular among users, especially young people. It also drove the rapid development of other vertical applications. For instance, the cooperation between the WeChat payment and Didi Taxi brought a large market share for Didi Taxi. In addition, WeChat payment functionalities also encompassed shopping, lottery, phone credit recharge and charitable donations. Tencent's Q2 Revenue Report in 2014 showed that WeChat payment was most frequently used by Didi Taxi users. 52.3% of WeChat users were aware of Didi Taxi and 29.1% used Didi Taxi. Second to Didi Taxi was mobile phone recharge, which had a usage rate of 32.6%. QQ coin recharge ranked third, the usage of which was 9.8%.

### ***4.3.3 Government WeChat Continued to Develop, and There Was a Growing Consensus that Weibo and WeChat Needed to Be Combined***

According to the Internet + WeChat Government Affairs and People's Livelihood White Paper jointly published by WeChat and the Tencent Research Institute, as of the end of December 2014, China had 40,924 government WeChat accounts. The government accounts in 2014 took on these features: (1) provincial and municipal government bodies were the mainstay of government bodies that opened WeChat accounts; government accounts for public security, and medical affairs made up the bulk of the accounts; while government accounts for transportation, tourism, culture, radio and television and education had the greatest potential.

From the central government to local governments, government WeChat accounts have completed the transition from a platform for posting information to an integrated platform to facilitate communication. A mobile service-oriented government gradually took shape on WeChat, and WeChat gradually became a new way for government agencies to provide innovative services and a window to showcase their identity. Many of them were attempting to combine Weibo and WeChat, and there was a growing consensus that the two applications should be combined to integrate information dissemination and government services.

## **4.4 Security Status and Features of WeChat**

In 2014, the development of WeChat was accompanied by a wide range of security problems, thus posing challenges to WeChat's development and providing other micro-apps with the opportunity to steal market share and promote themselves. Broadly speaking, security problems with WeChat existed in the following three aspects.

### ***4.4.1 Technical Risks: Technical Issues Frequently Occurred with WeChat Payment Risks Being a Prominent Problem***

Technical security relies on technological support. Therefore, upgrades and innovation in technology determine the level of technical security. Specifically, there were two major technical security problems with WeChat: technical loopholes and WeChat payment risks.

2014 saw the frequent occurrence of technical security loopholes of WeChat, including problems with WeChat's financial app "Li Cai Tong" in January, Red Packet problems in February, and video leakages caused by WeChat technical faults. Technical faults became a problem that could not be ignored. Additionally, WeChat payment also presented with security risks. Basically, the real-name authentication of WeChat Payment is not put through an online examination, which would cause security problems for Internet finance. For WeChat, these problems were inevitable growing pains, but if left unchecked, they would affect user experience and lead to destructive consequences.

### ***4.4.2 Content Security: Rumors Ran Rampant on WeChat and Content Regulation Was an Urgent Task***

Content security refers to the security of information posted in WeChat Moments. In 2014, problems such as rumors, false information, flaunting wealth, vulgarity, verbal attacks and online violence occurred on WeChat frequently. In addition, WeChat also faced the problem of information overload. It is not uncommon to see users subscribed to public accounts that they trusted, yet many of these accounts pushed junk information to them irresponsibly, such as insurance and real-estate advertisements, substantially undermining user experience and causing inconvenience. The regulation of junk information as such remains the key to content regulation of WeChat.

### ***4.4.3 Privacy Issues: The Ratio of WeChat Crimes Rose and Privacy Protection Was an Uphill Battle***

In 2014, privacy issues with WeChat particularly privacy leakage became prominent. The use of LBS by WeChat users to expand their social networks made it easy for others to track and identify their location. Therefore, protecting the privacy of WeChat users is crucial.

Crimes are another WeChat problem that deserves the same attention as privacy leakage. In 2014, the number of crimes committed via WeChat nationwide continued to rise. WeChat was typically used to commit crimes in the following ways: (1) steal WeChat ID and deceive others; (2) use WeChat to commit theft and robbery; (3) use WeChat to visit prostitutes, sell sex or commit rape. Furthermore, relevant data showed that the majority of the criminals were young people aged under 30 and that the majority of victims were female. The crimes committed via WeChat were becoming diversified.

On 15 March 2015, CCTV's "Consumer Day Gala" exposed the WeChat red packet fraud in which criminals took advantage of WeChat users' limited knowledge of the WeChat AA payment collection function and incited users to transfer money. This showed that WeChat was gradually becoming a new tool to commit crimes. It is now an urgent task to prevent and address crimes committed via WeChat.

## **4.5 Management Status and Features of WeChat**

China takes a combination approach of routine and emergency management and a combination of management by law and prevention with technology to manage new media. It adopts the principle of combining administrative regulation, industry self-discipline and public oversight to regulate the online communication order and curb the communication of illegal or harmful information online in an earnest way. In 2014, regulation and management became the key words of WeChat's development, and continuous management at government levels and official regulation of WeChat became the principal aspects of WeChat development.

### ***4.5.1 Government Management Status and Features***

In 2014, mobile public opinion platforms attracted enormous government attention, with policies and regulations for WeChat and other mobile clients introduced and comprehensive efforts made to regulate the content on clients.

#### **4.5.1.1 Policies and Regulations: Ten Commandments of WeChat and Ten Provisions on WeChat Nicknames**

On August 7, 2014, the National Internet Information Office issued the Interim Provisions on Public Information Service and Development of Instant Communication Tools, which set specifications for the qualification and certification of public accounts and required the public accounts to be reported to and recorded with relevant departments. This regulation clearly specified that public information service providers should obtain relevant certifications. It emphasized the importance of protecting user privacy, exercising real-name registration, reviewing and recording public accounts and restricting political news releases. It also clearly defined punishment for violations.

On February 4, 2015, the Central Network Security and Information Leadership Group issued regulations on the management of internet user names, which regulated the use of Weibo and WeChat user names (including profiles and profile photos) and set out more than ten provisions against using user names that violate laws, endanger national security, undermine national unity and insult and/or slander others.

#### **4.5.1.2 Content Regulation: Carry Out Multi-faceted Content Regulation on Mobile Clients**

In 2015, under the guidance of *Internet Thinking on Mobile Public Opinion Outlets* various government departments carried out multi-faceted mobile client content management. For instance, the Central Network Security and Information Leadership Group exposed 50 illegal websites and public accounts forced to be closed down on January 13, and it closed another 133 WeChat public accounts for sharing distorted information about the Communist Party of China on January 19.

In addition, local government departments issued notices to strengthen the management of WeChat public accounts. For example, on August 5, 2014, Zhaoqing Municipal Government of Guangdong Province issued a notice to the effect that a general census would be carried out about WeChat public accounts, and all WeChat public accounts would be registered and recorded. The notice specified that all individuals and organizations using WeChat public accounts within the city were required to register their public accounts, including but were not limited to party and government departments, utility departments, civil organizations, traditional media and network media, telecommunications operators and other businesses. Information that needed to be recorded included basic information on WeChat public accounts, account holders, and contact details.

## **4.5.2 WeChat Team's Management Status and Features**

To deal with various prominent issues, especially security issues that occurred throughout WeChat's development, the WeChat team assumed its social responsibilities and exercised strict control over content in an attempt to minimize the negative impact of WeChat and create a secure and private interaction platform. Specifically, in 2014, WeChat officially introduced rules and regulations, established a rumor interception system and improved the public reporting system to regulate content.

### **4.5.2.1 Establishment of a WeChat Safety Center, Introduction of Regulations on Using WeChat Moments Safely and on Penalizing Plagiarism on WeChat Public Accounts**

On February 3, 2015, WeChat officially released the regulations on punishing plagiarism on WeChat public accounts, with the process of reporting violations such as plagiarism on public accounts clearly defined. WeChat officially supported and encouraged public accounts to publish valuable and original content and took a firm stance against plagiarism. Users could report plagiarism and other infringement actions to WeChat through the "infringement complaint" link, and severe violations might lead to the closure of public accounts.

On March 15, 2015, the WeChat security center public account (ID: weixinsrc) was formally launched. This indicated that WeChat had doubled its efforts to crackdown on and control illegal activity on WeChat. It also showed WeChat's determination to fulfill its social responsibilities and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of users. On the same day, the WeChat security center launched regulations on using WeChat moments safely. It also established alliances to maintain trademark rights and outlined a process of maintaining trademark rights to effectively deal with trademark infringement and other illegal acts.

### **4.5.2.2 Establishment of a Rumor Interception System to Contain the Spread of Rumors on WeChat**

In 2014, WeChat established technical interception, manual reporting and rumor rebuttal tools to boycott rumors. Once the information was identified by authorities as false or reported as false information by the public, WeChat would provide prompt assistance to relevant authorities to prevent the further spread of the information. In the early stages of the campaign against rumors, nearly 1000 articles were removed, and more than 400 accounts were closed.

### **4.5.2.3 Improvement of the Manual Reporting System, Rectifying the Act of Collecting “Likes” on WeChat Public Accounts**

In the daily operations of WeChat, Tencent had a professional team responsible for reports from users. Once the reported content was confirmed to be in breach of national rules and regulations, polices, the public order or social ethics, such as infringement, leakage, rumors, harassment, advertising and spam, WeChat would impose different degrees of penalties on the related accounts depending on the severity of the violation.

On June 6, 2014, WeChat released a mechanism to rectify the act of collecting likes on WeChat public accounts. Public accounts found to be collecting likes once would be closed for 7 days; Public accounts found to be collecting likes twice would be closed for 15 days; Public accounts found to collect likes three times would be closed for 30 days; Public accounts found to collect likes four times would be closed indefinitely. From June 9, 2014, WeChat began to use the “technological reporting plus manual reporting” approach to clean up and regulate the act of collecting likes on WeChat public accounts.

## **4.6 Development Trends and Prospects**

Like any other forms of media, WeChat's development was not without setbacks. It made remarkable achievements during the past three years of rapid development. Although many problems occurred in the process, the appeal and impact of WeChat continued to grow. In 2015, the scope of influence of WeChat would continue to expand, and WeChat would demonstrate the infinite possibilities that new media could bring to people's lives in the future.

### ***4.6.1 WeChat's Applications Would Continue to Penetrate into Offline Businesses and Create Infinite Possibilities for Life***

With the continuous innovation of WeChat's applications and increased diversification of vertical WeChat's applications, an increasing number of offline businesses would be involved in WeChat marketing, and WeChat's applications would impact on the performance of more offline businesses in 2015. The combination of online applications and offline businesses based on mobile clients will significantly influence a variety of hardware in the physical world, and WeChat will continue to evolve into a huge ecosystem, spanning a wide range of industries including social networking, business, and entertainment, forging new types of interactive relationships and opening new possibilities for life in the future.

#### ***4.6.2 WeChat's Mobile Security Platform Will Continue to Become Safer and More Reliable***

In 2015, WeChat's security performance would continue to improve in response to the previously exposed security loopholes. This would mark a technical upgrade on a bigger scale, and the WeChat platform would have better performance in user privacy protection, anti-harassment, user property protection and safe dating tips, etc. In addition, platform security for operators, mobile manufacturers, app stores and developers would continue to improve, and cooperation between platform development teams would be strengthened to promote the development of a secure and reliable mobile ecosystem on the whole.

#### ***4.6.3 WeChat's Influence on Public Opinion Would Continue to Grow, and WeChat Would Become an Important Force in Guiding Public Opinion***

With the growth of WeChat's interactive features, and more importantly, the growth of government and media WeChat public accounts, the opportunities for public discourse on WeChat would increase. WeChat would become an important platform for public discourse and an important channel for the dissemination of public opinion in 2015. When major public emergencies occur, WeChat would play a more significant role in releasing information and guiding public opinion and would also produce impact that other forms of media cannot.

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