

MARKETING

Forget short video, "medium-form" video is China's latest brand battleground

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Can Kuaishou translate its success in the short drama format to longer-form video? Image credit: Kuaishou

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The rise of short-video platforms over the past half-decade has boosted the visibility of top short video creators and made the format irresistible for brands angling to capture global Gen Z.

In China, where [Douyin](#) TikTok's Chinese counterpart has received much of the attention from luxury brands, over the past 18 months more brands have experimented with niche albeit fast-growing platforms such as Bilibili, which [doubled](#) its monthly active users (MAUs) in just three years and boasts a young user base predominantly under the age of 30.

Louis Vuitton, Gucci and Dior are among the digitally adventurous luxury brands that have launched official accounts or ad campaigns on [Bilibili](#).

But one platform that has largely flown under the radar of luxury brands is Kuaishou, a short-video pioneer founded in 2011 that boasted a whopping 578 million MAUs as of the fourth quarter of 2021 a rise of 21.5 percent from the same period a year earlier.

Not only is Kuaishou sticky users spend an average of 118.9 minutes on the platform per day it is an ecommerce powerhouse. In the fourth quarter of 2021, the total gross merchandise value (GMV) of ecommerce transactions facilitated on Kuaishou leapt nearly 36 percent year on year to reach 240.3 billion yuan (\$37.7 billion).

To date, [luxury's ambivalence toward Kuaishou](#) likely comes down to a misreading of its user demographics.

Although its growth is distributed throughout mainland China, the majority of Kuaishou's users are concentrated in lower-tier cities and rural areas, in contrast to Douyin and Bilibili, which are geared towards the users in first- and second-tier cities, traditionally a more desirable audience for luxury brands.

But audiences in smaller Chinese cities are not to be ignored, as these individuals are eager to consume content and, in many cases, are flush with cash and big ecommerce spenders.

In addition to a vast and captive audience, Kuaishou is not to be ignored as it is shaping up to be a leader in

medium-form video, a somewhat newer area dominated by Bytedance's Xigua Video and Bilibili although the latter is now experimenting with **long-form content** like documentaries and even feature-length films.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kuaishou has beefed up its investment in high-quality content to better compete with rivals such as Douyin and Bilibili and, presumably, poach more users hailing from first- and second-tier cities.

According to Chinese-language media, Kuaishou's medium-form push centers around five-minute-long episodic dramas, looking to ride the coattails of the **still-hot** short drama format in which the platform already excels. But where Kuaishou's medium-length drama push gets interesting is in the platform's commitment to incentivize aspiring creators and small-scale filmmakers to produce high-quality content via its "Wings Support Program" (). This follows similar efforts in recent years to support the production of high-quality short-form content (often one minute or less in length).

The new program also indicates that Kuaishou is aware of its reputation as a specifically short-video platform and wants to expand into longer formats dominated by domestic tech giants.

At the Xigua Video PLAY Curiosity Conference in October 2020, Ren Lifeng, CEO of Bytedance-owned Xigua Video, defined medium-form video as professional user-generated content (PUGC) with a duration of 1-30 minutes that is shot in landscape format, in contrast to the **vertical format** popularized by short-video platforms.

Compared to UGC, PUGC according to **Zhihu** is more consistent in terms of quality and more often made by professional or seasoned content creators who are themselves key opinion leaders KOLs, i.e., influencers and subject-matter experts.

Looking to consolidate Bytedance's position in the PUGC realm, last June the company launched its "Medium Video Partner" program spanning portfolio companies Xigua Video, Douyin and Toutiao.

In addition to offering profit-sharing with high-quality and influential content creators, the initiative looked to entice creators by pushing accounts traffic across all three platforms.

In his 2020 presentation, Mr. Ren identified Xigua Video and Bilibili as the key medium-form video platforms in China, comparing them to YouTube in the West and noting lifestyle and knowledge-based content as their main content types.

Kuaishou, according to Mr. Ren, like Douyin, is a short-video platform centered around creative content and UGC. With its latest support plan and pivot towards medium-form content, Kuaishou looks intent on pushing into the home turf of Xigua Video and Bilibili and boosting its PUGC prowess.

Where Kuaishou's plan gets interesting is that the platform will now allow creators with few or no followers to apply to take part, although perks such as profit splitting and production cost subsidies are only reserved for more popular accounts with more than one million followers.

For accounts with less than one million followers that are accepted into the support program, Kuaishou offers promotional assistance to push them more traffic. The promise of this promotional support, according to Sohu, could potentially lure professional creators and filmmakers away from other platforms and encourage them to launch new accounts on Kuaishou.

With Bilibili **in freefall** over the past year and **hit hard by Beijing's ongoing crackdowns** on the entertainment and gaming segments, there is room in the market for Kuaishou to see success in its medium-form video effort, provided it can attract influential creators, offer compelling programming and entice the right brands to advertise or sponsor new programs.

That said, questions remain on the extent to which Kuaishou's core users will gravitate towards a different longer and horizontally oriented format, given they have become accustomed to short bursts of video on their morning commutes or while idling on the couch. But one thing the platform has going for it is a steady stream of popular content.

During this year's winter holiday season, Kuaishou boasted around 50 short drama programs, many of which theoretically could be adapted to longer formats and attract brand sponsors looking to diversify beyond Bilibili or Xigua Video or longer-form platforms such as iQiyi or Tencent Video.

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