

Knowledge Communication Through Short Videos in China: Research Dynamics and Thematic Patterns

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ABSTRACT

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Short videos have become an important infrastructure for communicating knowledge in China, yet domestic scholarship remains dispersed across publishing, library and information science, journalism, education, platform studies and user research. This review maps and synthesises 93 Chinese-language journal articles indexed in CNKI and published between 2018 and July 2026. The corpus was coded by publication year, research object, platform, reported method, evidence-design family and one primary thematic category; 35 uncertain or boundary articles were checked against their full texts. Annual output increased from one article in 2018 to a peak of 20 in 2022. Institutional integration was the largest theme, with 31 studies (33.3%). The evidence base comprised 51 conceptual, normative or commentary-based studies, 21 quantitative or computational studies, 20 qualitative or bounded case studies and one mixed-methods study. Named-platform research concentrated on Douyin (13 studies) and Bilibili (nine). Quantitative evidence was strongest in research on communication characteristics and effects, whereas content, theoretical and platform studies remained predominantly conceptual. The field has therefore established substantial thematic breadth, but its evidence is uneven: institutional adoption and platform performance are documented more consistently than cross-platform comparison, longitudinal change or the substantive content of knowledge interaction. Future research should use clearer outcome definitions, more comparable units of analysis and stronger integration of content, user and platform evidence.

1. Introduction

Short video is no longer used only to package entertainment or promote products. In China, it has become an everyday format through which scientific, professional, cultural and practical knowledge is explained, demonstrated and circulated. The medium brings

together temporal compression, audiovisual expression, algorithmic distribution and visible audience response. Knowledge is therefore not simply moved from a book, journal, classroom or expert into a smaller container. It is selected, divided, reformulated and performed under platform-specific conditions, and it may subsequently be questioned, supplemented or reproduced by users.

Chinese scholarship recognised this transition early. Initial work described the rise of dedicated knowledge short-video services, the strategic turn of entertainment platforms towards knowledge inclusiveness and the growing institutional legitimacy of knowledge-oriented video (Diao, 2018; J. Wang, 2023; Qin, 2019). Other studies approached short video through publishing transformation, scientific communication, libraries, education, public culture and platform governance. This diversity demonstrates the field's relevance, but it has also produced a fragmented body of knowledge. Studies of publishing institutions often concentrate on operational transformation; communication-effect studies commonly use platform indicators; theoretical work examines changes in knowledge authority and form; and user research addresses motives, adoption or participation. Because these strands use different units of analysis and outcome definitions, their findings are difficult to compare directly.

The problem is not a lack of research but the uneven organisation of what is already known. In some studies, short video is primarily a channel through which established institutions extend their reach. In others, it is treated as a knowledge-production environment whose material and algorithmic conditions change what knowledge looks like and who may speak with authority. Empirical research has also expanded, but measures of views, likes, shares and comments frequently stand in for communication effectiveness without distinguishing visibility, participation, knowledge exchange and learning. The resulting field is broad enough to require synthesis, but it needs clearer comparison of what each strand actually demonstrates.

To address this problem, the review makes two contributions. Empirically, it provides a transparent profile of a rapidly changing Chinese-language literature at a point when generative artificial intelligence (AI), platform governance and institutional video production are becoming increasingly connected. Analytically, it compares the evidence composition of six thematic strands and shows how the concentration of topics, methods and platforms shapes what the field can presently conclude. This distinction is important because the breadth of a research field does not by itself establish a common mechanism, and platform visibility, audience participation and knowledge outcomes cannot be treated as interchangeable measures.

Accordingly, this review has three objectives: to map the development and thematic distribution of Chinese research on short-video knowledge communication; to examine the research objects, platforms and methodological approaches that shape its evidence base; and to identify cross-theme limitations and priorities for future research. These objectives are addressed through a bounded analysis of 93 Chinese-language journal articles indexed in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and are expressed in the following research questions. RQ1: How did Chinese research on short-video knowledge communication develop between 2018 and 2026, and how was attention distributed across major themes? RQ2: What research objects, platforms and methodological approaches shaped the evidence base? RQ3: What cross-theme limitations emerge from the six thematic categories, and what priorities do they suggest for future research?

2. Methods

2.1. Corpus Construction and Scope

The review used a final corpus of 93 Chinese-language journal articles retrieved from CNKI. The searches centred on Chinese expressions for “knowledge-based short videos”, “short video” and “knowledge communication”. Retrieved records were merged and deduplicated before coding. The database search was finalised in August 2026 and covered publications from 2018 to July 2026.

Articles were included when short video was the primary object of analysis or when short video formed a substantively relevant part of a broader inquiry into knowledge production, communication, service, learning, publishing or governance. The corpus deliberately retained a small number of boundary studies concerning livestreaming, mid-length video, annual online-audiovisual development or broader platform culture when their analysis contained an identifiable knowledge-communication dimension. This broad rule was used because the Chinese media ecology does not always separate short video, livestreaming, social video and platform-based video knowledge into stable categories. The rule expands contextual coverage, but the synthesis gives greater evidential weight to studies whose central object was knowledge communication through short video. Table 1 summarises these corpus-construction and coding decisions.

Table 1: Corpus Construction and Coding Procedure

Item	Operational decision
Database	CNKI
Coverage	2018 to July 2026; search finalised in August 2026
Search focus	Chinese expressions for knowledge-based short videos, short video and knowledge communication
Corpus construction	Retrieved records merged and deduplicated; 93 journal articles retained in the verified final corpus
Inclusion	Short video was the primary object or a substantively relevant part of knowledge production, communication, service, learning, publishing or governance
Boundary rule	Selected livestreaming, mid-length-video and online-audiovisual studies were retained when an identifiable knowledge-communication dimension was present; 14 of the 35 full-text-reviewed articles were broad-boundary inclusions
Coding fields	Year, authorship, journal, keywords where available, abstract, object, platform, reported method, main claim and primary theme
Theme assignment	One primary theme per article, determined by the main research question and contribution
Full-text verification	35 uncertain or boundary articles checked in full; all retained; one thematic reassignment (L62: T1 to T4)

Complete title, author, source, abstract, publication and URL information was available for all 93 records; keyword fields were available for 90. Thirty-five articles were examined in full because their reported method, thematic position or boundary relevance could not be determined confidently from bibliographic information and abstracts alone. All 35 were retained, and one article was reassigned from institutional integration to knowledge-communication theory after full-text review. Fourteen of the

35 were explicitly retained as broad-boundary articles involving livestreaming, mid-length video, wider audiovisual development or adjacent platform contexts.

2.2. Coding Framework

Each article was coded for year, authorship, title, journal, keywords, abstract, research object, named platform, reported method, central claim and one primary theme. Assigning a single primary theme prevented double counting and forced classification according to the article's main research question and contribution rather than every topic mentioned. The six themes were: (T1) integration with traditional knowledge institutions; (T2) communication characteristics and effects; (T3) content strategies and discourse; (T4) knowledge-communication theory; (T5) user cognition and interaction; and (T6) platform development and affordances.

The method field was recoded at the review level into four evidence-design families, with every article assigned to one family. "Quantitative or computational empirical" required a defined numerical dataset and a stated analytical procedure. "Qualitative empirical or bounded case study" required interviews, ethnography, textual or discourse analysis, or a clearly bounded organisational or platform case. "Mixed methods" required explicit integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence. "Conceptual, normative or commentary-based" covered theoretical, legal, policy, industry and strategic analyses that used examples or secondary statistics without describing an independently sampled empirical dataset. The article-level recoding produced 51 conceptual, 21 quantitative, 20 qualitative and one mixed-methods study; its thematic distribution is reported in Table 3. This classification distinguishes the type of warrant supporting an article's conclusions and does not rank theoretical and empirical contributions.

2.3. Analytical Procedure

Descriptive counts were calculated for publication year, primary theme, evidence-design family and explicitly named platform. Mentions of Douyin, Bilibili, WeChat Channels, Kuaishou, Xiaohongshu and YouTube were counted non-exclusively because comparative articles could name more than one platform. Within each theme, the synthesis compared research objects, evidence designs, recurring findings and reported limitations.

Cross-theme comparison focused on where research attention was concentrated, which evidence designs supported each thematic strand and which outcomes or platform contexts remained underrepresented. It was not used to infer a causal sequence among themes. Descriptive findings are reported in the Results section, while interpretive implications and author-proposed research priorities are presented separately in the Discussion.

3. Results

3.1. Temporal Development and Thematic Distribution

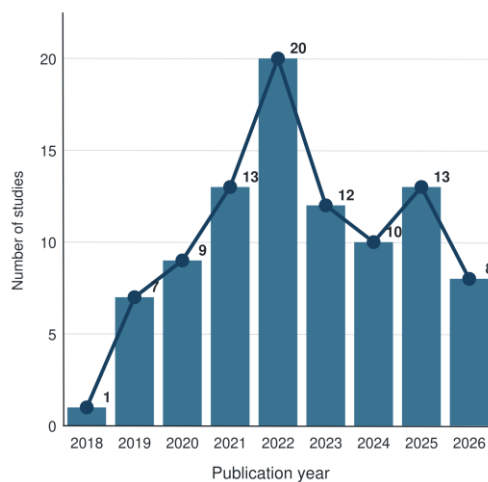
The annual distribution shows a rapid transition from emergence to consolidation. Only one article appeared in 2018, followed by seven in 2019 and nine in 2020. Output increased to 13 in 2021 and peaked at 20 in 2022, which accounted for 21.5% of the corpus. The next three complete years remained active: 12 articles in 2023, 10 in 2024

and 13 in 2025. Eight articles had appeared by July 2026. The period from 2021 to 2023 contributed 45 studies (48.4%), marking the principal consolidation phase of the field.

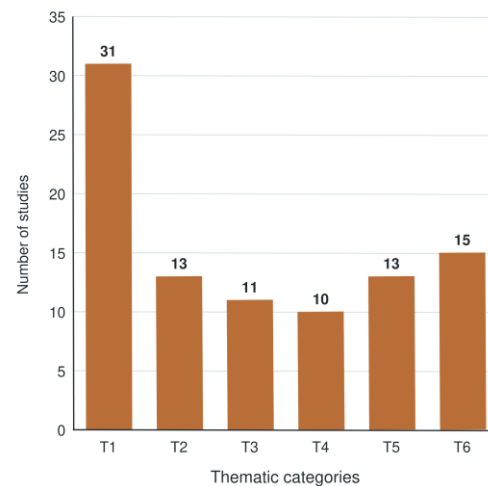
Later publications broadened the research agenda rather than replacing earlier topics. Studies from 2018 to 2020 concentrated on platform development, copyright, industry transition and initial institutional use. The 2021–2023 expansion added more work on publishing, libraries, scientific journals, discourse, knowledge legitimacy and user communities. Publications from 2024 to July 2026 introduced more regression, configurational analysis, experiments, model testing and computational evaluation, alongside work on algorithmic inequality, mediatization, platform governance and generative AI. The observable pattern is therefore one of thematic and methodological widening, not a single linear progression. Figure 1 presents the annual publication output and the thematic distribution of the reviewed studies.

Figure 1: Annual publication output and thematic distribution of the reviewed studies.

A. Annual publication output



B. Thematic distribution of studies



Note. T1 = integration with traditional knowledge institutions; T2 = communication characteristics and effects; T3 = content strategies and discourse; T4 = knowledge-communication theory; T5 = user cognition and interaction; T6 = platform development and affordances. The 2026 count covers publications through July.

The six themes were unequally represented. T1, integration with traditional knowledge institutions, contained 31 studies (33.3%). T6, platform development and affordances, contained 15 (16.1%). T2 and T5 each contained 13 (14.0%), T3 contained 11 (11.8%), and T4 contained 10 (10.8%). The field has therefore devoted substantially more attention to how established institutions adopt video than to theory, content form or user knowledge interaction. This imbalance is central to the synthesis that follows.

3.2. Evidence Designs and Platform Concentration

Slightly more than half of the corpus was conceptual, normative or commentary-based: 51 studies (54.8%). Formal empirical studies accounted for 42 articles (45.2%), comprising 21 quantitative or computational studies (22.6%), 20 qualitative or bounded case studies (21.5%) and one mixed-methods study (1.1%). The field therefore combines

a large body of conceptual and strategic argument with a substantial empirical base, but explicit integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence remains rare.

Platform naming was also concentrated. Douyin was explicitly mentioned in 13 articles and Bilibili in nine; WeChat Channels appeared in four, Xiaohongshu in three, Kuaishou in two and YouTube in one. These counts are non-exclusive and do not include generic references to “short-video platforms”. Douyin was commonly studied as a mass-market ecosystem for knowledge, science, books, learning and governance, whereas Bilibili was more often connected with knowledge zones, technical communities, interactive video, user cognition and knowledge production. WeChat Channels became particularly visible in research on publishing and popular-science journals. Table 2 presents the main evidence-profile results.

Table 2: Evidence Designs and Explicit Platform Mentions

Dimension	Category	n	Share / note
Evidence design	Conceptual, normative or commentary-based	51	54.8%
Evidence design	Quantitative or computational empirical	21	22.6%
Evidence design	Qualitative empirical or bounded case study	20	21.5%
Evidence design	Mixed methods	1	1.1%
Named platform*	Douyin	13	Non-exclusive
Named platform*	Bilibili	9	Non-exclusive
Named platform*	WeChat Channels	4	Non-exclusive
Named platform*	Xiaohongshu	3	Non-exclusive
Named platform*	Kuaishou	2	Non-exclusive
Named platform*	YouTube	1	Non-exclusive

Note. Evidence-design totals are based on the article-level recoding described in Section 2.2. Platform counts are non-exclusive; comparative articles may name more than one platform.

The platform pattern creates two limitations. First, conclusions may reflect platform-specific cultures while being expressed as general properties of short video. Second, many studies that use generic labels do not specify the affordances, recommendation systems or interaction architectures that structure the observed behaviour. The absence of platform detail reduces the ability to compare findings and to explain why a strategy succeeds in one environment but not another.

3.3. Six Thematic Strands

3.3.1. *Integration with Traditional Knowledge Institutions*

The largest theme documents how established knowledge institutions entered a platform environment. Early publishing research mapped children's-book marketing, publishing value chains and the conversion of editorial knowledge into visible digital labour (C. Zhang, 2020; Cong et al., 2020; Xue & Xia, 2020). Subsequent work reframed short video as an infrastructure for knowledge services, brand communication and traffic conversion, and examined the communication paradigm of book short videos, KOL-led reading promotion and “book plus short video” knowledge spirals (Kui et al., 2021; M. Zhang et al., 2022; Xia & Qi, 2022; Zou & Han, 2023). Later studies extended this line to publishing-institution operations, livestream-based knowledge services, scholar influencers, mid-length video, integrated publishing and bibliographic methods for book-

related video services (Cai & Yuan, 2024; Cheng & Lin, 2025; D. Wang, 2025; Meng & Chen, 2023; S. Liu, 2025; Xiao et al., 2023; Z. Wang et al., 2025). The newest articles add WeChat Channels, text-to-video systems and generative-AI short videos to the publishing workflow (J. Li, 2026; Qin & Fu, 2026; Yin, 2026).

Scientific and academic journals form a second major cluster. A 2019 case study proposed collaborative editing, controlled duration, focused structure and question-based extension for journal video (Wang & Wang, 2019). Later studies compared platform strategies, surveyed popular-science-journal accounts, documented medical-journal practice and assessed the generally weak communication capacity of many journal accounts (B. Zhang & Chen, 2022; H. Zhou et al., 2021; Ou et al., 2022; Xi et al., 2022; Y. Liu et al., 2022). The literature then moved towards evaluation systems, account-level performance analysis and symbiotic models linking journal depth with the reach and multimodality of short video (Liu et al., 2026; Wu et al., 2023; Zhan et al., 2024). Across these studies, institutional authority and expert resources are treated as advantages, but continuity of production, platform-specific expression and meaningful audience interaction remain recurring weaknesses.

Libraries and adjacent knowledge-service institutions show a similar pattern. Researchers constructed short-video knowledge-marketing models, examined social reading promotion and compared provincial public-library practices (Chu & Wu, 2021; Chu & Wu, 2022; Wu, 2021). A university-library short-video competition illustrated how collaborative guidance and open dissemination can mobilise institutional resources more flexibly (X. Li et al., 2024). Research on online health communities likewise proposed models in which short video supports micro-knowledge management, immersion and community-based sharing (C. Wang et al., 2023).

The thematic contribution of T1 is to show that knowledge institutions do not simply “use” a new communication channel. They reorganise editorial labour, professional roles, products, services and relationships with audiences. Its main limitation is that institutional adoption is often evaluated through operational presence, communication reach or strategic recommendations. Comparatively little work follows the internal transformation of a specific body of knowledge from source material through script, audiovisual representation, distribution and subsequent user discussion.

3.3.2. Communication Characteristics and Effects

T2 shifted the field from general descriptions to measurable relationships. The earliest large platform study analysed 5,743 records and found that systematic, content-based cues were more consequential for engagement than situational heuristic cues (Li et al., 2019). Other early articles described campus Douyin culture, audiovisual micro-narrative, social video and localised communication innovation, linking short video with changing cultural forms and social practices (Chen & Weng, 2020; Cui, 2019; S. Zhang, 2020; Wu & Zhang, 2019). These works established the breadth of the phenomenon but usually treated “effect” at a general cultural or communicative level.

A second phase examined configurations and differentiated predictors. A qualitative comparative analysis of Bilibili creators identified technical packaging, professional production and regular updating as important conditions, while also showing that different knowledge types were associated with different high-performance configurations (S. Liu & Zeng, 2022). Broader analysis described pan-knowledge video

through re-centralised production, ubiquitous scenes and platform support (Huang, 2022). Recent studies then used content analysis, regression or configurational analysis to examine emergency knowledge, scientific-journal videos, Chinese-culture communication, youth popular-science content and WeChat Channels (Chen & Liu, 2024; J. Liu et al., 2025; Shen et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2024; Zhan & Sun, 2025). A 2026 study added large-language-model-assisted quality evaluation to the methodological repertoire (Shen et al., 2026).

Collectively, T2 shows that communication results emerge from combinations of content, publisher, posting and platform features. It does not identify a universally effective duration, narrative or presentation form. More importantly, the dependent variables are usually views, likes, shares, comments, composite communication indices or expert quality scores. These outcomes are useful, but they answer different questions. Visibility is not identical to attention, attention is not identical to knowledge-related participation, and none of them alone demonstrates understanding or learning.

3.3.3. Content Strategies and Discourse

T3 examines how knowledge becomes short-video expression. Health and popular-science research argues that accessibility must be balanced with accuracy, content quality and a public-service orientation (Chen, 2021; J. Li & Hu, 2022; Lin, 2024; N. Zhou, 2021). Studies of discourse and narrative identify democratisation, commercialisation and technical mediation in knowledge-video language, while Bilibili research highlights collage, symbolic participation and tension between youth discourse and established knowledge contexts (Gao & Ge, 2021; Zhang, 2021). Theoretical analysis of short-video texts similarly describes a movement between attention-grabbing fragments and more intentional, organised presentation (Cao, 2022).

Educational and production-oriented studies propose content types, creation stages and application settings, and describe how knowledge videos reorganise knowledge boundaries, social connection and everyday experience (Gou et al., 2022; Shen & Qiao, 2023). More recent work frames production through three linked logics—fragmentation, integration and migration across platforms and AI systems—and examines how book bloggers transform high-context written knowledge into accessible audiovisual scenes (Huang & Chen, 2025; Q. Li et al., 2026). These studies make clear that brevity is not merely a reduction in duration. It is an active representational process involving selection, sequencing, visualisation, performance, narrative voice and the management of cognitive and emotional cues.

The limitation is that many T3 articles infer good practice from cases or theoretical principles rather than comparing coded content structures across sufficiently large samples. “High-quality content”, “appropriate entertainment” and “good storytelling” are frequently recommended but are not always operationalised. Future content research needs variables that distinguish knowledge selection, segmentation, simplification, demonstration, evidential support, uncertainty and extension, and then connect those variables with more than aggregate engagement.

3.3.4. Knowledge-Communication Theory

T4 asks what happens to knowledge itself when video becomes a dominant communicative form. Research on short-video news describes altered boundaries,

authority and knowledge forms, while constructivist and knowledge-sociological analysis treats media materiality as part of the conditions through which knowledge and social cognition are produced (X. Li, 2022; Zhu, 2022). Work on audiovisual micro-narrative argues that changes in viewpoint, discourse, structure and grammar reshape the range, encoding and acquisition environment of knowledge (Wang, 2022). Institutionalisation research further shows how platforms legitimise knowledge video through ideas such as knowledge inclusiveness, pan-knowledge and the metaphor of a video encyclopaedia (J. Wang, 2023).

Theoretical attention subsequently moved from de-centring to reconfiguration. Research on Bilibili knowledge influencers describes de-elitised reproduction and the movement of experts from enclosed institutional spaces to public media environments (Li & Chen, 2023). The idea of re-centralisation emphasises that professional and user production now coexist in hybrid relations rather than following a simple transfer of authority from institutions to individuals (Liu & Wang, 2024). Materiality-centred analysis points to both expanded access and negative effects, including accelerated knowledge consumption, weakened authority, shallow cognition and knowledge inequality (Y. Li & Shen, 2024).

The most recent work treats video as part of a broader transformation in knowledge systems. Mediatization analysis of Bilibili identifies an articulation among creators, users and platforms at both cognitive and industrial levels (Sun & Hu, 2025). Studies of “video society” and intelligent media describe changes in symbolic form, knowledge boundaries, production mechanisms and cognition, alongside risks such as immersive-reading decline, hallucination and value disorder (Chen & Meng, 2025; Ma & Li, 2025). T4 therefore provides the field’s strongest account of short video as a constitutive environment rather than a neutral channel. Its weakness is limited empirical linkage: theoretical claims about authority, cognition and public knowledge are seldom tested against the observable structure of videos and user exchanges.

3.3.5. User Cognition and Interaction

T5 contains the clearest evidence that audiences are not a single category. Early work used user data and grounded theory to model knowledge mobilisation and the needs driving short-video use (Guan & Li, 2020; Yao et al., 2020). Research on English-learning content found higher engagement for systematic content cues, while studies of interactive Bilibili video showed that narration and questioning can stimulate exploration even when knowledge remains fragmented (Cong et al., 2021; Fu, 2021). Digital ethnography of technical communities demonstrated how accessible technical knowledge supports taste, identity and informal learning (Liang & Song, 2022).

Other studies examined how knowledge becomes a social construction. Research on creators’ “algorithmic social knowledge” found that local explanations are assembled and verified through ongoing platform experience (Lai, 2022). Analysis of 360-degree video bullet comments showed evolving relationships between embodied experience and content cognition (Ma & Sun, 2023). User interviews identified seekers, collectors and casual viewers and, crucially, separated an immediate sense of gain from deeper cognitive improvement (X. Wang, 2023). These findings challenge the assumption that visible participation necessarily represents sustained knowledge development.

Recent research has become more differentiated. An experiment and survey model connected immersion, perceived usefulness and knowledge-adoption intention under different challenge-skill conditions (Wang & Zhang, 2024). A 1,000-user survey argued that inequality in content acquisition is driven more strongly by algorithmic attitudes and intervention practices than by abstract algorithm knowledge (Yu & Wang, 2025). Network ethnography of book bloggers described social reading, emotional feedback and meaning co-creation under conditions of algorithmic homogenisation and commercial pressure (Kong & Li, 2025). The corpus also includes a livestream case in which knowledge triggers emotional flow and consumption, and a historical-drama case that traces a chain from viewing to search, interpretation and re-circulation (D. Liu, 2022; K. Li, 2026).

Despite these advances, the user strand remains less developed than the institutional strand. Only a small subset examines the semantic content and relational structure of comments, replies or bullet comments. Most operationalisations stop at intention, self-reported perception or aggregate participation. Consequently, the literature can explain why users enter, continue or respond to knowledge video more confidently than it can explain how specific claims are questioned, corrected, integrated, validated or applied through interaction.

3.3.6. Platform Development and Affordances

T6 provides the environmental layer of the field. Early research described the exploratory status of knowledge-video platforms, the strategic movement from pan-entertainment to knowledge inclusiveness and the need for sustainable development paths (Diao, 2018; Qin, 2019). Legal and governance studies addressed intellectual-property disputes, licensing arrangements and public-opinion crisis response (Bi et al., 2019; Shen & Ma, 2020; Zhang, 2019). These studies established that knowledge communication depends on rights, responsibility and institutional rules as well as content production.

Industry research then connected 5G, paid knowledge, mobile-video growth and learning-oriented products with new content and business models (Ma, 2020; Wang & Liu, 2021; Y. Liu, 2022; Yu, 2021). Other studies diagnosed the popularity of short-video knowledge communication and reviewed industry expansion, disorder and governance needs (Gao & Wu, 2022; Gu & Xu, 2021). Annual analysis of online audiovisual production and the short-video industry positioned knowledge content within a wider ecosystem of platform competition, content verticalisation and regulatory change (Huang, 2023; Si et al., 2023).

The newest work broadens affordances from technical features to value distribution. Short-video platforms are presented as infrastructures for matching rural knowledge needs, reorganising resources and enabling value co-creation (Zhang & Zhang, 2025). Algorithm-era research argues that platforms reshape production, communicative power and user practice and should move from a traffic-centred orientation towards knowledge value (Yan & Cai, 2026). T6 thus explains why the same content does not circulate independently of recommendation systems, commercial incentives, technical formats and governance. Its main limitation is scale: platform conditions are often discussed macroscopically but are rarely connected to video-level and comment-level data within the same analysis.

3.4. Cross-Theme Evidence Structure

The cross-theme comparison produced four directly observable findings. First, institutional integration was the largest strand, but its 31 studies combined 16 conceptual, seven quantitative and eight qualitative designs rather than forming a single type of evidence. Second, T2 contained the strongest concentration of quantitative research: eight of its 13 studies used quantitative or computational designs to examine associations between content, publisher, posting or platform features and communication performance. Third, T3, T4 and T6 were predominantly conceptual or normative, with respective counts of 9/11, 8/10 and 13/15. Fourth, T5 was the most methodologically diverse strand, comprising five quantitative, seven qualitative and one mixed-methods study.

These distributions clarify both the strengths and the boundaries of the corpus. The reviewed literature can describe institutional adoption, identify features associated with platform performance, differentiate user motives and experiences, and explain broad technological or governance conditions. Because the six themes use different units of analysis, platform contexts and outcome definitions, their findings do not yet support a single unified explanation of knowledge communication. In particular, visibility and aggregate engagement are measured more consistently than learning, knowledge validation or the substantive development of ideas in comments. Table 3 reports the exact evidence-design composition underlying this comparison.

Table 3. Evidence-Design Composition across the Six Thematic Categories

Theme	n	Conceptual	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed
T1 Institutional integration	31	16	7	8	0
T2 Characteristics and effects	13	5	8	0	0
T3 Content and discourse	11	9	0	2	0
T4 Theory	10	8	0	2	0
T5 Users and interaction	13	0	5	7	1
T6 Platforms and affordances	15	13	1	1	0

Note. Categories are mutually exclusive at the article level. Column totals are 51 conceptual, 21 quantitative, 20 qualitative and one mixed-methods study (N = 93).

4. Discussion

4.1. An Institution-Centred but Analytically Uneven Literature

The thematic distribution demonstrates that Chinese scholarship has been strongly shaped by the digital transformation needs of publishing institutions, journals and libraries. This emphasis is understandable: short video created an urgent operational problem for institutions built around text, editorial authority and comparatively slow production. The literature has responded with models for marketing, knowledge service,

platform matrices, content conversion and technological innovation. It has therefore documented institutional expansion in considerable detail.

This concentration has shaped the kinds of questions the field answers most confidently. T1 documents organisational adoption and practical strategy; T2 tests relationships between observable features and platform performance; T3 and T4 analyse expression and changes in knowledge form; T5 examines users; and T6 addresses platform and governance conditions. These contributions are complementary, but they are usually based on different research objects and outcome definitions. Consequently, findings are difficult to compare across themes, and a platform-performance result cannot automatically be interpreted as improved understanding, knowledge interaction or application.

This imbalance also affects what counts as success. Institutional studies understandably value reach, brand visibility and service extension. Platform studies measure traffic and engagement. User studies examine intention and perceived gains. The corpus nevertheless contains repeated warnings that accessibility can coexist with fragmentation, entertainment pressure, shallow cognition, misinformation risk and inequality (Fu, 2021; J. Li & Hu, 2022; Ma & Li, 2025; S. Liu, 2025; X. Wang, 2023; Y. Li & Shen, 2024). A theory of successful knowledge communication must therefore preserve the practical value of accessibility without making it a substitute for explanatory adequacy, epistemic reliability or opportunities for verification.

4.2. Distinguishing Platform Engagement from Knowledge Outcomes

T2 contains eight quantitative studies and therefore provides the strongest basis for comparing observable short-video features. Large platform datasets, content analysis, regression, configurational analysis and automated evaluation have been used to compare publishers, titles, duration, tags, presentation forms and other features. However, most of this work operationalises success through platform responses or composite communication indices. A comment count can record the amount of response, but it cannot show whether users asked a substantive question, corrected an error, added evidence or applied the knowledge.

T5 provides complementary user-level evidence. Its quantitative, qualitative and mixed designs distinguish information need, perceived usefulness, immersion, identity, algorithmic practice and different user types. Bilibili studies also show that bullet comments, interactive video and community practice can support exploration and cognition. Nevertheless, only a subset analyses the semantic content or relational structure of interaction. The main evidence gap is therefore specific: the field measures whether audiences respond more consistently than it examines what knowledge-related work those responses contain.

This distinction matters for both scholarship and platform governance. If visibility, interaction and knowledge development are collapsed into one metric, creators may optimise for volume while believing they are improving learning. Platforms may similarly reward content that prompts low-cost reactions without recognising smaller but more substantive exchanges. A knowledge-oriented evaluation system needs multiple dependent variables rather than a single engagement score.

4.3. Methodological Maturation with Limited Integration

The method profile reveals a field in transition, but the transition differs by theme. Quantitative work is concentrated in T2 and parts of T1 and T5. By contrast, conceptual or normative studies account for 9 of 11 T3 studies, 8 of 10 T4 studies and 13 of 15 T6 studies. This distribution is not a weakness by itself: theoretical analysis is necessary when knowledge authority, video-based cognition and algorithmic governance are changing. It does mean, however, that the corpus supports stronger empirical conclusions about platform performance than about discourse quality, knowledge authority or platform power.

The clearer methodological limitation is integration. Only one article explicitly combined qualitative and quantitative evidence. Quantitative studies can identify associations but often provide limited explanation of why a feature matters to creators or users; qualitative studies provide interpretation but are less easily compared across platforms and samples. Stronger designs could combine structured content and interaction coding with interviews or digital ethnography, using each form of evidence to answer a distinct part of the same research question.

Longitudinal evidence was uncommon in the coded method descriptions, although longitudinal design was not recorded as a separate coding variable. The corpus therefore supports only a cautious conclusion: most reported analyses describe a bounded sample or platform setting rather than repeated change in platform interfaces, recommendation systems or governance. Future studies should report observation periods clearly and, where possible, use repeated samples, versioned interface analysis or panel designs.

4.4. An Agenda for the Next Stage

Based on these observed imbalances, this review proposes six priorities. These are author recommendations rather than conclusions jointly tested by the 93 studies. First, research should link a defined knowledge object to its source, audiovisual representation and user response. Second, communication outcomes should distinguish exposure, participation, knowledge interaction, retention and application. Third, comparative work should test whether findings travel across Douyin, Bilibili, WeChat Channels and other platform cultures. Fourth, repeated or longitudinal observation should be used to examine platform and governance change. Fifth, mixed designs should connect statistical patterns with creator and user explanations. Sixth, AI research should evaluate factual fidelity, uncertainty, authorship and correction alongside production efficiency.

Table 4: Author-Proposed Research Agenda Based on the Review Findings

Corpus-based observation	Priority question	Suggested design
No method description explicitly linked source, video and comment data	How does one knowledge object change across source, video and discussion?	Linked source-video-comment datasets; process tracing
Communication effect commonly relies on platform indicators	Which responses represent attention, knowledge interaction, retention or application?	Layered outcome coding; learning measures; semantic comment analysis

Corpus-based observation	Priority question	Suggested design
Named-platform studies concentrate on Douyin and Bilibili	Which findings are platform-specific and which travel across environments?	Comparative sampling across Douyin, Bilibili and WeChat Channels
Longitudinal observation was uncommon in method descriptions	How do platform and governance changes alter knowledge practices over time?	Repeated samples; longitudinal observation; interface-version records
Only one study explicitly integrated qualitative and quantitative evidence	Why do statistically associated features matter to creators and users?	Sequential mixed methods combining content models, interviews and ethnography
AI-related research expanded in the latest publications	How can efficiency be assessed alongside factual fidelity and accountability?	Human-AI comparison; error taxonomies; source tracing; correction studies

Note. The priorities and suggested designs are proposed by the author on the basis of the corpus patterns; they are not findings jointly tested by the reviewed studies.

These priorities also require clearer reporting. Articles should specify platform version and observation period, sampling procedures, unit of analysis, exclusions, codebooks and how composite engagement measures are calculated. Studies that use comments should state whether replies, creator comments, duplicate expressions and non-knowledge participation are included. Such information is necessary if the field is to compare findings rather than repeatedly construct platform-specific indicators. Table 4 summarises these author-proposed priorities and the research designs through which they could be addressed.

4.5. Implications for Knowledge Institutions and Platforms

For knowledge institutions, the review suggests that successful adoption requires more than posting frequency and cross-platform distribution. Editorial authority must be translated into a design process that identifies the indispensable explanatory relationships in a knowledge topic, decides what can be simplified, and provides routes for viewers to verify or extend what they encounter. Short video is particularly valuable as an entry point, demonstration or problem frame, but it should be connected with longer explanations, source materials and structured opportunities for questioning.

For platforms, the central implication is evaluative. Knowledge ecosystems cannot be assessed only by the amount of “knowledge content” uploaded or by aggregate traffic. Platforms can support higher-value interaction through visible source fields, creator correction mechanisms, question-focused comment organisation, links between short and extended explanations, and signals that distinguish verified supplementation from general popularity. These features would not guarantee learning, but they would make knowledge-oriented practices more observable and easier to sustain.

5. Limitations

This review has five limitations. First, it is restricted to Chinese-language journal articles indexed in CNKI and does not represent the international literature on educational, scientific or knowledge-oriented short video. Second, the broad inclusion rule retains 14 full-text-reviewed articles involving livestreaming, mid-length video or wider audiovisual and platform contexts. They clarify the surrounding ecosystem but are less directly comparable with core knowledge short-video studies. Third, a single primary

theme was assigned to each article. This improves counting clarity but reduces the visible overlap among institutional, content, platform and user questions. Fourth, evidence-design classification is based on reported procedures, so studies with limited reporting may appear less empirical than the work actually undertaken. Fifth, the audit materials preserve the verified final corpus but not query-level hit counts before merging and deduplication. The review is therefore reproducible at the coding and final-corpus levels, but not as a complete reconstruction of every retrieval step.

These limits define the review's purpose. It is a structured synthesis of how a Chinese research field has formed, not an estimate of universal short-video effects. Future reviews can combine Chinese and international databases, apply multi-label thematic coding and update the corpus as generative-video research develops.

6. Conclusion

The review answers its three research questions through four interrelated findings. First, Chinese research on short-video knowledge communication expanded from one article in 2018 to a peak of 20 in 2022; recent publications also address algorithmic governance and AI. Second, the field is institution-centred: 31 of the 93 studies examine how publishing organisations, journals, libraries and related knowledge institutions adopt video. Third, the evidence base is uneven. Fifty-one studies are conceptual, normative or commentary-based, and only one explicitly integrates qualitative and quantitative evidence. Quantitative research is concentrated in communication characteristics and effects, while content, theory and platform studies remain predominantly conceptual. Fourth, named-platform research is concentrated on Douyin and Bilibili, and communication success is more consistently measured through visibility and aggregate engagement than through learning, validation or the substantive content of user interaction.

In response to RQ3, these findings reveal a field characterised by substantial breadth but also by several cross-theme limitations, rather than by a single verified communication mechanism. Its strongest evidence concerns institutional adoption and the association between observable video features and platform performance. Its weakest areas are cross-platform comparison, longitudinal change, integrated methods and knowledge-level outcomes in user discussion. The next advance should therefore come from clearer outcome definitions, more comparable samples and units of analysis, and research designs that connect content, users and platform conditions without assuming that these elements form a tested causal sequence.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable. This review analysed published literature and did not involve human participants or personal data collection.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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