



## Micro-Drama: From Chinese Phenomenon to Global Trend

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## Abstract

This article analyses the emergence and globalisation of Chinese micro-dramas (duanju), a mobile-first, short-form drama format characterised by vertical video aesthetics, rapid production cycles, and data-driven storytelling. Originating in China's platform economy, the format has grown into a multi-billion-yuan industry, propelled by algorithmic recommendation, bingeable episodic structures, and monetisation models integrating pay-per-view, product placement, and e-commerce. Drawing on industry reports, scholarly literature, and media analysis, the study examines the interplay between technological affordances, audience behaviours, and industrial organisation, with particular emphasis on the role of multi-channel networks (MCNs) in scaling production and optimising content for platform metrics.

The paper identifies key aesthetic and narrative innovations, including the reconfiguration of mise-en-scène for vertical framing, the privileging of melodramatic archetypes, and the strategic deployment of cliffhangers to maximise engagement. It also considers regulatory interventions in China aimed at shaping content towards "positive energy" and mitigating concerns about addictive consumption patterns, especially among younger audiences.

The international expansion of micro-dramas is explored through case studies of localisation strategies in the United States and the United Kingdom, highlighting opportunities for UK producers to adapt the format for domestic and global markets. The analysis positions micro-dramas within broader debates on media convergence, transnational content flows, and the economics of creative industries in the smartphone era.

The article concludes with strategic recommendations for UK production companies, higher education institutions, and policymakers to engage with micro-drama production, fostering cross-border collaboration, skills development, and culturally resonant storytelling in this rapidly evolving sector.

**Keywords:** Micro-drama, Duanju, Chinese micro-drama industry, Vertical video aesthetics, Mobile-first storytelling, Algorithmic content recommendation, Short-form drama monetisation, Digital platform economies, Transnational media flows, Creative industries in China.

# Micro-Drama: From Chinese Phenomenon to Global Trend

## The Rise of Micro-Drama in China

Micro-dramas, also known as “micro-short dramas” (微短剧), emerged as a significant new form of entertainment in China during the late 2010s, catalysed by the proliferation of smartphones, 4G/5G networks, and short-video platforms such as Douyin, Kuaishou, and WeChat Video. By 2023, the Chinese micro-drama industry had achieved revenues of CNY 37.39 billion, marking a 267.65% year-on-year increase (iResearch, 2024, p.6). Forecasts suggest continued rapid expansion, with the market expected to reach CNY 100 billion by 2027 (iResearch, 2024, p.6). Their affordability, portability, and immediacy make them a “fast-food” form of entertainment, with episodes typically lasting one to two minutes and entire series comprising 60–100 episodes.

The iResearch (2024) report outlines how low barriers to entry, combined with scalable monetisation models, have turned micro-dramas into a cultural and commercial juggernaut in China. In 2024, over 3,000 new micro-dramas were released, with genres ranging from historical romance to urban fantasy. Increasingly, production companies deploy highly targeted algorithmic marketing to capture niche audiences, echoing broader trends in China’s “fan economy” (Duan et al., 2025). Leading companies such as 酷影 (Cool Film), 七猫文化 (Seven Cats Culture), and 小满文化 (Xiaoman Culture) operate industrialised pipelines for high-volume content production, often in collaboration with MCNs<sup>1</sup> and platforms like Douyin for distribution and monetisation (iResearch, 2024, pp. 28–29).

Revenue streams are dominated by paid episode unlocking, product placement, and live-stream commerce tie-ins, with sophisticated e-commerce integration such as embedded shopping links within episodes (iResearch, 2024, p. 17). The core audience skews female (68%) and aged 25–34, with strong representation from lower-tier cities, consuming content primarily via mobile in vertical video format optimised for short attention spans (iResearch, 2024, p. 13). Douyin leads the distribution market, followed by Kuaishou and WeChat Video Channels, with platforms serving as both distributors and content incubators through creator training, algorithmic promotion, and monetisation tools (iResearch, 2024, p. 11).

Episodes typically range from 60–90 seconds and employ a high-tempo, cliffhanger-driven structure. Popular genres include romance, workplace drama, and fantasy revenge arcs,

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<sup>1</sup> MCN (*Multi-Channel Network*): A type of organisation that works with multiple content creators—often across platforms such as YouTube, Douyin, or TikTok—to provide production, distribution, audience development, and monetisation support. MCNs act as intermediaries between creators and platforms, leveraging data analytics to optimise content performance.

with scripts often shot in full-season batches of 30+ episodes within a week to meet binge consumption trends (iResearch, 2024, pp. 19–20).

## Narrative & Aesthetic Innovations

A hallmark of micro-dramas is the **vertical video format**, designed for phone screens. This portrait orientation “reconstructs the aesthetic expression of images” and concentrates the visual field (Xu, 2025). Unlike traditional widescreen cinema, which conveys epic scale and deep focus, vertical drama frames are tighter and more intimate, maximising use of vertical space to suit one-handed mobile viewing. The result is an immediate viewing experience—closer to a FaceTime call than a cinema screen—fostering a direct emotional connection with viewers. Visually, scenes are composed for small displays: close-ups, simplified backgrounds, and text overlays or captions are common. This has triggered new aesthetics and even ideological shifts, challenging the habits of classic film viewing.

From an *aesthetic* standpoint, this shift is not merely technical but conceptual. Vertical framing invites a new visual grammar: subjects are often centrally aligned, with vertical depth replacing horizontal breadth, while set design and blocking are rethought to exploit height and layers rather than width. The *mise-en-scène* becomes more akin to portrait photography than landscape cinema, creating a sense of direct address and intimacy. Additionally, the use of close-ups, simplified backgrounds, and screen text overlays reflects an aesthetic shaped by mobile-first platforms, where legibility and immediacy are paramount. This “small screen” composition style privileges faces, gestures, and emotive immediacy over spectacle, signalling the development of a recognisably new micro-drama visual identity (Xu, 2025).

The notion of an *ideological shift* is equally significant. Vertical dramas disrupt the long-standing cinematic ideal of widescreen as the ‘proper’ or ‘authentic’ format for storytelling—a norm rooted in the cultural prestige of cinema and television as public, large-screen experiences. Instead, they legitimise and celebrate the personal, handheld screen as the default site of narrative engagement. This signals a broader move toward individualised, on-demand, mobile-first consumption, where the viewer’s convenience and interaction take precedence over collective viewing rituals. In this sense, micro-dramas embody the values of the “post-film era” of media convergence (Xu, 2025), where the boundaries between cinema, television, social media, and gaming dissolve, and the audience is recast as both consumer and co-curator of narrative flows.

Narratively, micro-dramas condense stories into ultra-brief chapters, favouring fast-paced, fragmented storytelling over slow, immersive buildup. Episodes often end on dramatic cliffhangers or “successive climaxes” to hook the viewer into immediately watching the next one (Khomami, 2025). The genre has been described as “TV for the TikTok generation,” relying on clickbait titles and exaggerated twists to grab attention. Common tropes mirror those of online fiction communities: enemies-to-lovers romances, secret billionaire heirs, revenge dramas, time travel, and supernatural themes are prevalent (Khomami, 2025).

These familiar formulas, delivered in concentrated form, provide instant emotional payoffs. One British fan notes the shows are “full of classic tropes” and unapologetically cheesy yet addictive, offering “a gorgeous love story” in miniature (Khomami, 2025).

With minimal time for deep characterisation, micro-dramas lean heavily on bold acting and archetypal scenarios. Melodrama is embraced—“windswept hair, smouldering stares, glittery ingénues”—with outrageous plot twists sustaining engagement (Yang, 2025). Some apps integrate interactive elements such as bullet comments or polls, blurring the lines between audience and content. The format’s narrative DNA draws from serialized web novels and interactive “movie-games,” showing convergence between multiple storytelling media (Xu, 2024).

## Platform Influence & Production Model

The rise of duanju is inseparable from the platforms that distribute them. In China, micro-dramas first gained traction on Douyin (TikTok) and Kuaishou, where short vertical videos became daily entertainment. These platforms’ algorithms aggressively promote content that drives engagement, which suited micro-dramas perfectly. The ability to auto-play the next 90-second episode and algorithmically recommend series turned casual scrollers into binge-watchers. Algorithm-driven personalised feeds capture viewers’ attention and can foster binge behaviour (and even addiction) in young audiences (Duan et al., 2025). The platform economy has shifted audiences from passive viewers to active users, constantly selecting and reacting to bite-sized content. In this environment, user data and AI-driven recommendation heavily influence creative decisions—popular genres or formats are quickly replicated to ride trends.

The boom is also reshaping production. Traditional TV dramas are made by studios with large crews, high budgets, and months of shooting. By contrast, micro-dramas are often produced by MCNs (Multi-Channel Networks) or nimble production teams working on internet time<sup>2</sup>. There is a shift “from the studio model to MCN organisations” to meet the demand for rapid, online content like micro-series (iResearch, 2024). MCNs act as bridges between creators and platforms, leveraging big data insights to optimise content for clicks and shares. Creators effectively become “algorithm optimisers” – crafting plot points and episode breaks that maximise viewer retention and platform metrics. Production is highly streamlined and iterative: scripts are often adjusted based on real-time audience feedback, and multiple micro-dramas might be filmed simultaneously. A UK-based director notes that a vertical drama can shoot 25 pages of script per day, versus perhaps 3 pages for a

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<sup>2</sup> In the context of micro-dramas, “internet time” means that content is **planned, shot, edited, and published in days rather than months**, with scripts and storylines adjusted on the fly according to algorithmic performance and audience feedback.

conventional feature film, allowing an entire 70+ page series to be filmed in a week (Milmo & Savage, 2025).

A Multi-Channel Network (MCN) is an intermediary entity that partners with multiple content creators—particularly on short-form video platforms—to provide support services such as audience development, monetisation, content strategy, and analytics in exchange for a share of revenue (Wikipedia, n.d.; Gardner & Lehnert, 2016). Operating as production and distribution facilitators in the digital platform ecosystem, MCNs assemble content creators into organised networks and offer marketing, rights management, and cross-promotion services (Vonderau, 2016; Gardner & Lehnert, 2016). They mediate between creators, platforms, advertisers, and sometimes educational or institutional partners, standardising content formats, piloting campaign strategies, optimising release schedules, and helping ensure creators align with platform algorithms (Wang, 2024). In doing so, MCNs industrialise creative production processes, symbolising a shift from artisanal to highly optimised, platform-centric output.

MCNs typically negotiate revenue-sharing agreements with creators, taking anywhere between 10–40% of advertising earnings, although these terms can vary depending on the creator’s scale and the services provided (Liang & Ji, 2024; Lobato, 2016). Additional income streams may include branded content deals, affiliate marketing, live-stream engagements through virtual gifting, merchandise licensing, and e-commerce tie-ins (Chen & Yang, 2023; Vogue Business, 2025). For brands, MCNs act as a streamlined point of access to large pools of influencers, reducing the complexity of negotiating individually with multiple creators (Liang, 2025). Contracts between creators and MCNs often include clauses on revenue share, content guidelines, platform strategy, and term duration, with some arrangements controversially retaining long-term rights for the MCN (Lobato, 2016). While established creators can leverage MCN resources for greater reach and production value, emerging talents may find themselves “tethered” to MCNs in exchange for access to opportunities and audiences (Liang 2025; Lobato, 2016).

One prominent example in China is Mango MCN (芒果MCN), founded in 2018 and operated by Hunan Broadcasting System’s entertainment channel (Wikipedia, 2025). Built from the legacy of a traditional TV channel, Mango MCN expanded into digital short-form content creation and distribution, combining television production experience with new media agility. It has launched multiple vertical-based sub-brands—including Drama TV, Show TV, Content Commerce (“Mango Engine”), and New 4 (brand marketing)—positioning itself as a full-spectrum content and marketing platform (Wikipedia, 2025). Mango MCN offers talent training, content production, cross-platform syndication, and e-commerce integration, effectively functioning as a centralised hub for storytelling, distribution, and monetisation. Its operations span relationships with creators, platforms, brands, and traditional media. With creators, Mango MCN provides strategy, brand collaborations, and platform optimisation; with platforms such as Douyin, Kuaishou, WeChat, and Taobao Live, it uses its institutional connections to secure premium distribution and promotional advantages; with brands and advertisers, it facilitates integrated product placements and e-commerce tie-ins via its “Mango Engine” unit; and with traditional media, it merges legacy broadcast

infrastructure with agile digital production workflows. This hybrid approach exemplifies the broader shift from studio-dependent to platform-driven production in China's fast-evolving micro-drama industry.

Taken together, the convergence of platform-driven recommendation systems, MCN-led production ecosystems, and low-cost, high-volume workflows marks a fundamental restructuring of how scripted video content is conceived, made, and consumed in China's micro-drama boom. Platforms dictate discoverability through algorithmic curation, MCNs industrialise and standardise creative labour to meet these demands, and the reduced financial barriers allow for rapid experimentation at scale. This model favours speed, data-responsiveness, and audience targeting over the artisanal craftsmanship of traditional drama, signalling both a technological and organisational shift in the entertainment industry. As the sector matures, the challenge will be whether the efficiencies and reach of this new system can be matched with sustained improvements in quality, ensuring that the vertical drama remains more than just an ephemeral trend in the platform economy.

## Audience Reception & Concerns

Audience reception is bifurcated. Fans celebrate the instant gratification and binge-ability, while critics decry formulaic plots and a perceived lack of artistic depth (Reuters, 2024). Regulatory authorities in China have expressed concerns about sensationalist content, depictions of excessive wealth, and the potential for addictive consumption patterns. Subsequently issuing new guidelines, removing thousands of titles, and advocating for micro-dramas to promote "positive energy," reflecting a broader pattern of intervention in online media (Time, 2024). Industry insiders predict greater regulation to ensure "positive energy" messaging, echoing earlier interventions in online gaming and live streaming (Duan et al., 2025).

*Youth Appeal and Binge Behaviour:* Micro-dramas initially found a devoted audience among Chinese youth. Their smartphone-centric format and sensational plots resonate with Gen Z's media habits – many viewers report they "just couldn't stop" once they started watching, as episodes are engineered to be cliffhanger-laden and easily accessible (Time, 2024). The convenience factor is key: viewers can consume a full story in short bursts, such as during a meal or commute. For those who feel too busy or distracted for hour-long episodes, micro-dramas fill an entertainment niche. A 2024 study of Chinese college students found typical binge-watching sessions lasted over five hours and included around seven episodes (Yu & Alizadeh, 2024). College students remain a core demographic, though recent data indicate widening appeal, including women aged 20–50 overseas (Duan et al., 2025; Reuters, 2024).

*Addiction and Content Critiques:* The flip side of micro-dramas' bingeable design is concern over addictive usage and content quality. Heavy exposure to these fast-paced videos can encourage addictive viewing patterns, especially among teens and young adults.

Psychological studies (Kuo, 2024) link the quick-reward cycle of vertical dramas to symptoms of internet addiction and short attention spans. In extreme cases, students have reported staying up all night consuming dozens of episodes in a row. This has raised alarms



in China about potential impacts on mental health, academic performance, and values of young viewers. The content of many micro-dramas has been criticised as low-brow or “trashy” – sensational melodramas with implausible plots, reinforcing stereotypes or materialism. Chinese regulators have also flagged issues of homogenisation of content and distorted values in some mini dramas (Reuters, 2024; Yu, 2024).

*Positive Engagement:* On the other hand, proponents argue that micro-dramas provide harmless enjoyment and even comfort. The over-the-top storylines are understood by audiences as campy fun. Moreover, these dramas have attracted audiences underserved by mainstream media. Some viewers feel that major streaming platforms aren’t offering content that appeals to their demographic, whereas the romance and family sagas in micro-drama apps do fill that void. Thus, micro-dramas are creating new communities of engaged viewers, and even inspiring user-generated content such as fan fiction or parody videos (Duan et al., 2025).

In sum, micro-dramas occupy a complex position in China’s evolving media ecosystem—simultaneously celebrated as accessible, fast-paced entertainment and criticised for their addictive potential, repetitive storytelling, and perceived cultural shallowness. While regulators seek to shape the industry towards socially approved values, audiences continue to embrace its immediacy and participatory culture. This tension between commercial optimisation, creative diversity, and regulatory oversight will likely define the next stage of the sector’s development, with future growth hinging on its ability to balance mass appeal, cultural responsibility, and artistic innovation.

## **Monetisation & Market Growth**

Micro-dramas monetise through a diverse set of revenue streams, including direct pay-per-episode models, subscriptions, in-app tipping, merchandise, and IP licensing (iResearch, 2024). Successful series have demonstrated strong cross-media potential, with some expanding into feature films, long-form TV dramas, or even games. The domestic market remains robust, but platforms and producers are increasingly targeting overseas Chinese diasporas and experimenting with localisation strategies for non-Chinese audiences (iResearch, 2024).

The iResearch (2024) report identifies the freemium model as the dominant monetisation structure, where viewers can access a limited number of episodes for free before being required to pay or watch advertisements to continue. Specialist apps such as ReelShort employ hybrid monetisation strategies, allowing users to purchase single episodes, unlock bundles, subscribe for unlimited viewing, or buy in-app virtual currencies, mirroring monetisation patterns from the mobile gaming sector. Prices can range from \$1–\$5 to binge a full series, with premium annual subscriptions offering higher-margin recurring income.

Beyond direct viewer payments, micro-dramas benefit from embedded product placement, where items featured in episodes are directly linked to online retail platforms. This



approach is particularly prevalent on Chinese apps, which integrate content with e-commerce platforms such as Taobao, allowing viewers to purchase items without leaving the viewing environment. Live tipping—where viewers send virtual gifts to actors or production teams—is another significant contributor to revenue, especially during livestream promotional events tied to series launches (iResearch, 2024).

The sector's earning potential is substantial: according to iResearch (2024), hit micro-dramas can generate over ¥100 million (≈£11 million) in user payments within days of release. For example, the 2023 hit **Escape from the British Museum** (逃出大英博物馆), distributed on Douyin, combined a dramatic romantic plot with nationalistic themes and viral marketing campaigns. Within a week of release, it reportedly attracted over 300 million views, generated millions in tipping revenue, and sparked significant merchandise sales, from themed jewellery to limited-edition art prints. Its popularity also drove brand collaborations, with featured products selling out within hours on linked e-commerce platforms (iResearch, 2024).

By early 2023, 2–3 new series were launching daily, and more than 40 dedicated short-drama apps had either entered the market or expanded overseas. In 2024, overseas micro-drama app revenues reached \$1.2 billion, with approximately 60% originating from U.S. audiences. Chinese owned ReelShort<sup>3</sup> currently dominates Western markets due to its first-mover advantage and aggressive ad-spending strategy.

With comparatively low production costs—often \$10,000–\$100,000 per series—paired with high return on investment, micro-dramas have emerged as a major growth frontier for global entertainment. The rapid production cycle, scalable business models, and cross-media adaptability suggest that the format is poised to become a lasting fixture in both domestic and international content economies (iResearch, 2024).

## International Expansion & UK Engagement

What began in China as a niche mobile video trend has evolved into a global phenomenon. Since 2022, Chinese companies have aggressively expanded micro-dramas into North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific, often through apps like ReelShort, a California-based platform owned by China's COL Group. ReelShort topped the U.S. iOS App Store entertainment charts in late 2023, earning around \$5 million per month from user spending (AppMagic, 2024). While initially adapted from Chinese web novels, many series are now produced locally with native actors and settings, such as the American-cast hit *The Double Life of My Billionaire Husband*.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.reelshort.com/>

Other platforms, including ShortTV<sup>4</sup>, FlexTV<sup>5</sup>, GoodShort<sup>6</sup>, and DramaFlix<sup>7</sup>, have entered markets from Southeast Asia to the Middle East. Localisation strategies—employing local talent, adapting genres, and tailoring themes—are key to their uptake. UK audiences are only beginning to discover the format, but the country is already an active production hub. In 2024–2025, Britain became popular for filming micro-dramas aimed at U.S. and global markets, thanks to appealing actors, distinctive locations, and competitive costs.

A notable example is ReelShort’s short-form adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, produced in the UK in late 2024. Filmed over just six days in historic locations across southern England, the production condensed Jane Austen’s classic into a high-drama, 16-episode vertical format, each episode running under two minutes. The cast combined emerging British screen talent with experienced crew drawn from the UK’s freelance TV drama pool, offering continuous work over a series of back-to-back micro-drama shoots. According to industry observers, the project not only demonstrated the adaptability of British period drama aesthetics to mobile-first storytelling but also highlighted the potential for steady employment in the sector if the micro-drama trend continues to grow (Milmo & Savage, 2025). In addition, *Pride and Prejudice* was strategically designed for global audiences, with a focus on romance, class conflict, and recognisable settings—elements that travel well across markets (iResearch, 2024).

Beyond servicing overseas productions, the UK has scope to develop its own micro-drama IP for domestic and international distribution, leveraging platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Co-productions with Chinese companies could tap established pipelines, and British creative voices may find in micro-drama a low-cost, agile format for culturally resonant storytelling.

## Conclusion & Business Insights

Micro-dramas represent a fusion of technological affordances, shifting audience habits, and innovative production practices. For UK producers, the challenge is to localise the format without losing the immediacy and addictive qualities that drive its success in China. This could involve experimenting with hybrid genres, interactive elements, and cross-platform storytelling, while exploring monetisation strategies suited to Western markets.

The evolution of micro-dramas from a Chinese social media fad into a worldwide industry highlights several important themes. First, it exemplifies media convergence – blending online literature, video entertainment, and mobile technology into a new hybrid form. The

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<sup>4</sup> <https://shorts.tv/en/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.flextv.cc/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.goodshort.com/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://dramaflix.unreel.me/>

traditional boundaries of filmmaking are challenged by algorithm-driven content and vertical aesthetics, forcing creators to rethink narrative techniques and production workflows. Second, the micro-drama boom underscores shifting audience behaviours, with viewers gravitating toward content that is accessible, interactive, and tailored to personal schedules. There is a clear appetite for short, emotionally charged stories that mainstream media had not fully addressed, unlocking new demographics (notably women and younger viewers on mobile) for serialised drama content. Third, the phenomenon raises questions about quality versus quantity in the streaming era. Producers are already experimenting with improving writing and cinematography for vertical series, and we may see the gap to traditional TV narrow.

From a business perspective, micro-dramas represent a significant commercial opportunity. Low production costs combined with direct monetisation of passionate fanbases can be highly profitable when scaled. Chinese companies have demonstrated that with savvy localisation and platform strategy, micro-dramas can succeed in overseas markets, evidenced by multi-million-dollar revenues in the U.S. and beyond. The projected \$14bn global market by 2027 hints at further room for growth, with Europe just beginning and Africa and Latin America potential future markets. For the UK, the format offers creative and economic prospects – from partnering on international short-form productions to developing original British micro-dramas that leverage local storytelling strengths for global audiences. Genre diversification could see UK writers pioneering short-form thrillers, comedies, or educational micro-dramas.

However, challenges remain: content saturation, fickle audiences, and the need to maintain diversity and quality. Platforms must invest in varied content to prevent homogeneity and consider user wellbeing to counter addiction criticisms. Regulators will assess how content aligns with local standards. The balance between cultural specificity and universal appeal will be key to success.

In summary, micro-dramas have moved from a niche Chinese subculture to a global trend with staying power, reflecting how entertainment adapts to the smartphone era – shorter, faster, and data-driven. The Chinese model, blending tech platforms, web fiction, and entrepreneurial production, is now being adapted worldwide, including in the UK. For media and production businesses, this is a promising new avenue for content creation, cross-border collaboration, and platform innovation, with high growth potential and increasing international traction.

## Appendix A: Strategic Actions for UK Production Companies in the Micro-Drama Market

1. Pilot a Low-Cost Vertical Drama Series
  - Produce a short run (10–15 episodes, 90–180 seconds each) to test audience appetite.
  - Focus on genres that resonate internationally but allow for local flavour – e.g. romantic comedy, crime thriller, or supernatural themes adapted to British settings.
2. Integrate Data-Driven Story Development
  - Partner with platforms or analytics providers to track genre, trope, and pacing trends.
  - Use audience engagement metrics from early episodes to refine scripts mid-production.
3. Develop Cross-Platform Distribution Strategies
  - Release on TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts to build visibility before negotiating with dedicated micro-drama platforms.
  - Explore exclusive content deals with emerging UK or European vertical drama services.
4. Build Partnerships with MCNs and Tech Platforms
  - Collaborate with Multi-Channel Networks experienced in rapid-turnaround production.
  - Engage with mobile-first tech companies to integrate interactive features (polls, live Q&A, branching storylines).
5. Upskill Production Teams for Vertical Storytelling
  - Train crews in vertical cinematography, fast-paced editing, and mobile-first set design.
  - Encourage writers to adopt episodic cliffhanger structures optimised for short-form binge viewing.
6. Experiment with Hybrid Monetisation Models
  - Test direct-to-consumer micro-payments, ad-supported streams, and in-app purchases for premium scenes or interactive content.
  - Seek brand sponsorships that can be woven naturally into storylines.
7. Position for International Collaboration
  - Partner with Chinese, US, and European studios for co-productions, sharing IP and accessing wider audiences.
  - Leverage UK storytelling strengths – wit, character-driven drama, and genre innovation – for global appeal.
8. Address Quality and Sustainability Challenges
  - Balance speed with storytelling depth to avoid content fatigue.
  - Invest in a development slate that alternates between quick-turnaround experiments and higher-quality flagship micro-dramas.

## Appendix B: 12-Month Roadmap for UK Market Entry into Micro-Drama Production

### Phase 1 – Exploration & Pilot (Months 1–4)

- *Market Research:* Analyse trending genres, tropes, and pacing styles on TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and international micro-drama platforms.
- *Talent Pooling:* Identify writers, directors, and editors with short-form or social media experience.
- *Concept Development:* Commission three pilot scripts (different genres) for testing.
- *Pilot Production:* Film one low-cost, 10–15 episode vertical drama (~90 seconds per episode) to trial workflow and audience reception.
- *Test Release:* Soft-launch the pilot on TikTok/Instagram Reels to collect engagement metrics.

### Phase 2 – Scaling & Partnerships (Months 5–8)

- *Data-Driven Refinement:* Adjust storytelling techniques, pacing, and episode length based on pilot analytics.
- *Platform Outreach:* Initiate discussions with UK streaming start-ups, international vertical drama apps (e.g. ReelShort), and MCNs for co-production opportunities.
- *Workflow Optimisation:* Implement faster turnaround systems (e.g. shooting multiple episodes per day, concurrent editing).
- *Skill Development:* Deliver targeted training for cinematographers, set designers, and editors on mobile-first storytelling.
- *IP Strategy:* Protect pilot content and secure rights for potential adaptations into other formats (webcomics, games).

### Phase 3 – Monetisation & Brand Building (Months 9–12)

- *Multi-Platform Distribution:* Release refined series across TikTok, YouTube Shorts, and any exclusive partner platforms.
- *Revenue Models:* Test premium episode bundles, in-app purchases, and sponsorship integration.
- *International Collaboration:* Co-develop one series with a Chinese or US partner to tap into their audience base.
- *Marketing Campaign:* Use social media challenges, influencer collaborations, and behind-the-scenes clips to build fan communities.
- *Evaluation & Next Steps:* Conduct a full performance review to inform scaling into multiple concurrent series for Year 2.

Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation Strategy
<b>Content Saturation</b> – Rapid growth of similar micro-drama formats leading to audience fatigue.	High	Medium	Diversify genres beyond romance (e.g. thriller, comedy, docu-drama), introduce interactive elements, and collaborate with niche communities to ensure unique propositions.
<b>Platform Dependency</b> – Over-reliance on one or two platforms (e.g. TikTok) that may change algorithms or monetisation rules.	High	High	Adopt a multi-platform release strategy, negotiate direct distribution deals, and invest in building owned channels (e.g. app, mailing list).
<b>Quality Perception</b> – Association of vertical dramas with low production values could limit brand credibility.	Medium	Medium	Invest in strong writing and distinctive visual style; promote “quality-first” micro-dramas as a brand differentiator.
<b>Regulatory Compliance</b> – Differences in media standards, advertising rules, or content classification across territories.	Medium	Low	Conduct compliance checks for each target market, consult with legal advisors on sponsorship and IP agreements.
<b>Monetisation Challenges</b> – Difficulty in converting free viewers into paying customers.	High	Medium	Experiment with hybrid revenue streams (ads, merchandise, subscription tiers, licensing deals) and leverage community engagement to encourage premium purchases.
<b>Rapid Trend Cycles</b> – Formats or genres losing popularity before production ROI is achieved.	Medium	High	Shorten production timelines; develop multiple series concurrently to pivot quickly; maintain a “trend scout” role in the team.
<b>Talent Retention</b> – High turnover among creators skilled in vertical drama production.	Medium	Medium	Offer profit-sharing, development opportunities, and creative autonomy to retain top talent.

## Appendix D: Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Integrating Micro-Drama into Curriculum

### 1. Embed Micro-Drama into Existing Media Production Modules

- Incorporate vertical video and short-form storytelling exercises into film, TV, and digital media units.
- Use micro-drama briefs to teach concise storytelling, rapid production workflows, and audience-first content design.

### 2. Develop Dedicated Micro-Drama Electives or Pathways

- Create specialist modules focused on micro-drama aesthetics, platform strategy, and monetisation models.
- Encourage interdisciplinary projects with creative writing, marketing, and game design departments to explore hybrid formats.

### 3. Partner with Industry Platforms & MCNs

- Collaborate with companies like TikTok, ReelShort, or emerging UK-based MCNs for live briefs, internships, and guest lectures.
- Negotiate student access to platform analytics for data-driven content development.

### 4. Focus on Algorithmic Literacy & Platform Economics

- Teach students how algorithms influence narrative structure, release timing, and audience growth.
- Include critical analysis of ethical and cultural implications (e.g. addictive design, cultural localisation).

### 5. Establish “Micro-Studio” Environments on Campus

- Equip small studios optimised for vertical format production, including lighting rigs, mobile-friendly cameras, and editing stations.
- Run micro-drama “hackathons” where teams produce an entire mini-series in under a week.

### 6. Build International Collaboration Opportunities

- Partner with overseas institutions, particularly in China and emerging micro-drama markets, for cross-cultural co-productions.
- Enable students to test their content with global audiences through subtitling and multi-platform release.

### 7. Integrate Business & Entrepreneurship Training

- Include micro-drama case studies in media business modules, focusing on revenue diversification and IP management.
- Guide students in pitching micro-drama concepts to funding bodies, brands, or streaming platforms.

### 8. Support Research & Knowledge Exchange

- Encourage academic research into micro-drama aesthetics, cultural impact, and industry models.
- Host public symposia or festivals showcasing student work alongside industry panels.



## Appendix E: Framework for Collaborative R&D Between HEIs and Production Companies in Micro-Drama

### 1. Joint Innovation Labs

- Establish shared “micro-drama labs” combining HEI facilities, academic expertise, and industry production resources.
- Focus on experimentation with new formats (interactive, cross-platform, gamified storytelling) and vertical video aesthetics.

### 2. Live Brief Collaborations

- Industry partners provide real-world micro-drama briefs; students and researchers develop pilot episodes or proof-of-concept series.
- Projects to be co-supervised by academic staff and industry professionals, ensuring both creative innovation and market relevance.

### 3. Audience Data Sharing & Analytics Research

- Production companies share anonymised audience metrics with HEIs to support research into engagement patterns, binge behaviour, and cultural preferences.
- Joint analysis feeds into both commercial optimisation and academic publications.

### 4. Co-Funded Research Projects

- Apply for joint grants (e.g. Innovate UK, AHRC, ScreenSkills) targeting innovation in short-form storytelling, platform strategy, and monetisation.
- Prioritise projects with clear pathways to industry application and public dissemination.

### 5. Skills Pipeline Development

- HEIs train students in high-demand micro-drama production skills (vertical cinematography, rapid scripting, editing for mobile) with input from industry.
- Industry partners offer internships, shadowing opportunities, and talent scouting from student showcase events.

### 6. Intellectual Property (IP) Co-Creation Agreements

- Develop fair IP-sharing arrangements so both HEIs and production companies benefit from commercially viable student/academic concepts.
- Include frameworks for licensing, co-ownership, and profit-sharing where applicable.

### 7. International Pilot Projects

- Collaborate on cross-cultural micro-drama R&D with global partners to test localisation strategies and audience reception.
- Use HEI networks to facilitate overseas partnerships, particularly in fast-growing micro-drama regions.

### 8. Public Engagement & Knowledge Exchange Events

- Host co-branded micro-drama festivals, screenings, and panels open to the public, policymakers, and the creative industries.
- Disseminate R&D findings through industry white papers, academic journals, and conference presentations.

### 9. Long-Term Research Alliances

- Formalise partnerships through Memoranda of Understanding, ensuring sustained collaboration beyond one-off projects.
- Establish annual review meetings to assess outcomes, adjust focus areas, and set new joint objectives.

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