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Strategic Use of YouTube for Business Development in China and Europe

Case study of “Very Venture China”

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ABSTRACT:

In the growing creator economy, YouTube has become a vital tool for startup entrepreneurs to build personal brands and drive strategic business development. This thesis examines how individuals can leverage Western digital platforms, specifically YouTube, for visibility, credibility, and opportunity generation in politically restricted environments. Using an ethnographic case study of the Very Venture China (VVC) project, the research explores how platform strategy, cultural adaptation, and content optimization enabled real business outcomes despite algorithmic and geopolitical constraints. With over €25,000 invested and a cross-functional team, VVC applied Lean Startup and emergent strategy principles to build audience engagement through emotional storytelling, SEO, and Shorts-first publishing. This visibility led to consulting offers, partnerships, and job invitations from international firms, validating the power of platform-native personal branding. The study introduces the Visibility–Credibility–Conversion (VCC) Framework, showing how entrepreneurs can translate digital presence into professional results. It contributes to research on digital entrepreneurship, platform branding, and cross-cultural communication—highlighting the rising cost, complexity, and strategic importance of content-driven growth in constrained digital ecosystems.

KEYWORDS: YouTube, SMM, Social Media, Creator Economy, Content Creator, China, Europe, Digital Marketing, Very Venture China, Ethnographic Case Study, Platform Economy, Digital Entrepreneurship, Strategic Communication, Startup, Algorithmic Visibility

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Abbreviations

AI – Artificial Intelligence

CSDDD – Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive

CRM – Customer Relationship Management

DeFi – Decentralized Finance

DLT – Distributed Ledger Technology

eWOM – Electronic Word-of-Mouth

KOL – Key Opinion Leader

KPI – Key Performance Indicator

NFT – Non-Fungible Token

SEO – Search Engine Optimization

UGC – User-Generated Content

VC – Venture Capital

VCC – Visibility–Credibility–Conversion Framework

VVC – Very Venture China (YouTube Channel)

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent years, the rise of digital ecosystems has transformed entrepreneurship, enabling individuals—not just corporations—to build brands, engage communities, and create value across borders. Digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Telegram, and emerging Web3-based ecosystems now serve as strategic tools for entrepreneurs to bypass traditional gatekeepers and communicate directly with global audiences (Cusumano, Gawer, & Yoffie, 2019). Personal branding and community-driven engagement have become not just advantageous but essential for business development in increasingly competitive and fragmented markets. This shift has contributed to the emergence of the ‘Creator Economy,’ a socio-economic system in which individuals—known as creators or influencers—build audiences across digital platforms and monetize their content through sponsorships, ads, merchandise, and subscriptions (Goldman Sachs, 2023; Morning Consult, 2024).

This transformation is particularly evident in politically and culturally restricted digital environments. In contrast, platforms like YouTube, central to the global Creator Economy, are inaccessible in mainland China, requiring entrepreneurs to reinvent strategies when operating across both environments (Hanif, 2022). Gehrke (2019) reinforces the necessity of strategic engagement beyond reciprocity, noting that EU-China economic interactions demand nuanced approaches that strategically integrate political sensitivity and cultural adaptation. In China, the exit of Western technology giants such as Google and YouTube led to the rise of a highly localized and regulated digital ecosystem, dominated by platforms like WeChat (Weixin), Douyin (TikTok’s Chinese counterpart), Xiaohongshu (RED), and Bilibili. These platforms are deeply embedded in the local regulatory landscape and cultural context, requiring entrepreneurs to adapt their messaging and digital strategies accordingly (Yang, 2015). The platform landscape does not merely reflect technological choices but is structured by state policies and evolving media consumption norms that reward domestically aligned behavior. While large corporations often navigate these

challenges with dedicated localization teams, individual entrepreneurs face greater strategic constraints, relying on creative workarounds and platform-specific engagement techniques (Jia, Kenney, & Zysman, 2019; Sander, 2025; Gilardi et al., 2018). As Gehrke (2019) notes, the future of EU-China economic cooperation lies not in mere reciprocity but in the development of long-term strategic alignments. This study builds on that premise, examining how entrepreneurial digital engagement—like the VVC project—can act as a micro-level reflection of broader geopolitical strategy.

Contrastingly, the European Union presents a more open digital environment, with continued access to global platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. However, entrepreneurs in this region contend with other constraints, including GDPR regulations, increasing algorithmic opacity, and growing competition from newer platforms like TikTok (Jia, Kenney, & Zysman, 2019; Sander, 2025; Gilardi et al., 2018). As such, the EU's digital landscape demands a different kind of strategic adaptability, one that balances personal branding with compliance, content saturation, and evolving platform-user dynamics.

In 2025, advertising spend in the European influencer marketing sector is projected to reach \$5.33 billion, with per-user spending averaging \$7.00 (Statista, 2024a). This growth reflects broader global trends, as the total influencer market is forecasted to reach \$32.55 billion USD worldwide by 2025 (Statista, 2024b). Notably, the European market is witnessing a strategic shift toward micro-influencers, favored for their niche engagement and perceived authenticity. As younger generations, particularly Gen Z, increasingly seek content from relatable creators rather than traditional celebrities, personal branding emerges as a competitive necessity rather than a mere differentiator (Morning Consult, 2024).

Parallel to these regional challenges, the emergence of blockchain technologies, decentralized finance (DeFi), and Web3 ecosystems has created new entrepreneurial pathways. These innovations empower creators to mobilize funding, foster community-led growth, and operate independently of traditional intermediaries (Krause, 2024; Panos, 2021; Zhao et al., 2024). This trend reflects a broader economic transformation described by Davis and Meyer (2000) in *Future Wealth*, where the locus

of control over financial value is shifting from institutions to individuals. They argue that wealth creation in the Information Age increasingly comes not from producing goods but from managing risks, investing in human capital, and leveraging intangible assets in real time. In this context, digital presence becomes not just a marketing tool but a foundational strategy for entrepreneurial success. These developments are further supported by increasingly accessible content creation tools—ranging from high-quality smartphone cameras to cloud-based editing suites—that have enabled individual creators to compete with traditional production houses (Goldman Sachs, 2023). As a result, creators are now equipped not only to participate in, but to shape, global digital economies.

Finally, the rise of content creators, particularly on YouTube, has demonstrated how individuals can use emotionally resonant, authentic storytelling to achieve branding outcomes that rival or exceed those of traditional institutions. Rudoviq (2019) found that promotional content created by vloggers often outperformed tourism board videos in conveying emotional brand values and attracting engagement. This insight underscores the growing power of personal branding through digital platforms as a core strategic asset for entrepreneurs operating in complex, cross-cultural, and often restricted markets.

For example, YouTube's top creators can earn between \$23 and \$45 per minute, and brands reportedly pay up to \$6,700 per video to collaborate with influencers having 500,000–1 million subscribers (Prawar, 2025). A significant portion of Gen Z—88%—follows at least one influencer, and 70% of teenage users prefer YouTube creators over traditional celebrities, demonstrating a cultural realignment of trust and engagement (Morning Consult, 2024).

1.2 Personal Motivation

Recent research has highlighted that content creators are not merely digital entertainers or marketers, but strategic actors actively reshaping innovation, consumer behavior, and product lifecycles (Karp, Fu, & Friis, 2024). Their influence—

particularly that of micro and nano creators—is driving demand for hyper-specialized products and accelerating digital disruption across traditional industries.

The motivation for this research stems from a series of formative personal experiences that shaped the author’s interest in digital entrepreneurship, cross-cultural strategy, and platform-based branding. A pivotal moment occurred in 2016 at Arcada University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki during a guest lecture by Sebastian Nummelin, a Swedish-speaking Finnish executive working in Asia. His story of transforming an exchange semester into a successful international career with companies like BioGaia in China illustrated the strategic value of educational mobility and personal branding across culturally and politically distinct markets. This lecture planted the seed for a long-term aspiration to explore entrepreneurship at the intersection of East and West.

This interest deepened through firsthand academic and professional experiences in both Europe and China. While studying and working in Guangzhou, the author observed that the two regions present contrasting yet equally complex digital environments: Europe offers open access to Western platforms but is shaped by regulatory demands such as GDPR, while China features a closed digital ecosystem dominated by domestic platforms and state censorship. This contrast raised an important question: how can individual entrepreneurs navigate these distinct platform environments while building visibility, credibility, and business opportunities? It became clear that platform-based communication was not merely promotional—it was foundational to professional success in fragmented digital markets (Florida, 2022; Kenney & Zysman, 2016).

The creation of the *Very Venture China* (VVC) YouTube project emerged from this realization. Designed as a living case study, VVC became a platform to experiment with storytelling, audience engagement, and brand positioning across cross-border contexts. The project documented business trends in Southern China, interviewed professionals, and shared actionable insights for a European audience. Through this content, the author developed not only a growing digital presence but also an unexpected level of professional credibility. The visibility gained through VVC resulted in

real-world business development opportunities, including job offers and project engagements from organizations such as VNTR (Portugal), Zhong Lun Law Firm (Guangzhou), Aston Swiss (Switzerland), and Timosha (Russia).

These experiences validated the strategic importance of personal branding and cross-cultural communication. They also aligned with empirical insights from Rudoviq (2019), who demonstrated that vlogger-generated YouTube content often outperforms institutionally produced material in delivering emotional engagement and audience trust. For the author, this translated into tangible results: outreach from high-net-worth individuals, invitations to collaborate on consulting and legal projects, and a growing perception of being a cross-border business expert.

These experiences also prompted the author to explore established strategic management frameworks that could explain and support the adaptive processes observed throughout the VVC project—particularly Mintzberg’s (1994) concept of emergent strategy, Teece’s (2007) theory of dynamic capabilities, Kim and Mauborgne’s (2005) Blue Ocean Strategy for non-competitive positioning, and Blank’s (2013) Lean Startup model that emphasizes continuous learning and experimentation. These frameworks not only reflect the realities of digital entrepreneurship in uncertain or restricted environments but also form the theoretical foundation of this study.

A guiding realization that emerged from this journey was: *“You can be the smartest person in the world, but if you don’t communicate it, no one will know.”* In today’s attention-driven economy, digital communication is no longer optional—it is strategic. This realization shaped the formulation of the research questions, the selection of the methodological approach, and the academic contribution of this thesis.

1.3 Research Problem

While digital platforms have globally reshaped entrepreneurship by lowering entry barriers and enabling direct audience engagement (Cusumano, Gawer, & Yoffie, 2019), their strategic use in politically restricted environments remains

underexplored in academic literature. In markets such as China—where core Western platforms like YouTube, Google, and Instagram are blocked—entrepreneurs face complex structural and cultural constraints that challenge traditional platform strategies (Yang, 2015; Checchinato & Hu, 2018). Platform participation becomes not only a matter of audience targeting but also of regulatory fluency and cultural signaling, particularly for foreign-facing brands or creators. Despite these limitations, some micro-entrepreneurs continue to engage global audiences through creative platform adaptations. However, the mechanisms through which they build visibility, credibility, and business opportunities remain insufficiently studied.

This strategic dilemma is especially pronounced in the Chinese digital landscape, where the "Great Firewall" restricts access to many globally dominant platforms. Entrepreneurs seeking to bridge cross-border audiences often rely on workaround tactics, such as VPN usage, content repurposing across platforms like Bilibili, WeChat, or Xiaohongshu, or maintaining dual-channel strategies to simultaneously engage global and domestic audiences (Jia, Kenney, & Zysman, 2019; Sander, 2025; Gilardi et al., 2018). These adaptive behaviors have received limited scholarly attention, as platform strategy research still predominantly focuses on open markets and institutional actors.

Beyond technological access, entrepreneurs in these environments must also navigate cultural, ideological, and regulatory constraints that influence digital communication and brand authenticity. The interplay of regulatory control and cultural divergence creates a complex setting in which strategic adaptation becomes critical. This context aligns with Mintzberg's (1994) theory of emergent strategy, which emphasizes learning and adaptation over rigid planning, and Teece's (2007) concept of dynamic capabilities, which highlights the entrepreneur's ability to adjust resources and strategy in response to uncertainty.

In addition, the recent evolution of decentralized ecosystems, blockchain, and Web3 technologies offers new strategic possibilities for creators and entrepreneurs. These innovations allow for funding and community engagement without reliance on centralized platforms or traditional gatekeepers (Blank, 2013). As Davis and Meyer

(2000) argue in *Future Wealth*, wealth creation in the information age increasingly shifts from institutional control to individual agency. Yet academic literature has not sufficiently examined how such decentralization plays out in restricted digital markets.

This thesis addresses these gaps by analyzing how a single entrepreneur—the founder of Very Venture China (VVC)—strategically leveraged YouTube to build an expert brand, engage international communities, and generate business development outcomes, despite operating in a geopolitically restricted market. The study explores the tensions between visibility and censorship, authenticity and localization, and global reach versus platform control. By analyzing this real-world case, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of platform strategy, personal branding, and entrepreneurship under constraint.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on Mintzberg's (1994) emergent strategy, Porter's (1980) competitive positioning, Christensen's (1997) disruptive innovation, Teece's (2007) dynamic capabilities, Kim and Mauborgne's (2005) Blue Ocean Strategy, and Blank's (2013) Lean Startup methodology. These frameworks collectively support the analysis of how entrepreneurs in restricted digital ecosystems can create visibility, adapt strategically, and build sustainable brand value across borders.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how individual entrepreneurs can strategically leverage digital platforms to build personal brands and develop business opportunities in politically restricted environments. Using the Very Venture China (VVC) YouTube project as a case study, this research explores the practical strategies employed to overcome digital censorship, navigate cultural and regulatory barriers, and engage both international and localized audiences.

This study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digital entrepreneurship under constraint by analyzing how visibility, platform adaptation, and strategic communication are used to generate credibility and cross-border opportunities. It examines the intersection of platform strategy, personal branding, and regulatory navigation in a real-world entrepreneurial context.

On a theoretical level, the study applies contemporary strategic management frameworks—including emergent strategy (Mintzberg, 1994), dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007), value innovation (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005), and lean experimentation (Blank, 2013)—to assess how micro-entrepreneurs in restricted digital ecosystems adapt and create competitive advantage.

1.5 Research Questions

As outlined in the previous section, this study investigates how digital platforms can be strategically leveraged by individual entrepreneurs to build personal brands and generate cross-border business opportunities in politically restricted environments. Building upon that purpose, this chapter frames the research within the growing phenomenon of the creator economy, where entrepreneurial individuals use content platforms—such as YouTube—not only to communicate value, but also to build credibility and develop real-world commercial outcomes.

Within this context, the study addresses an important gap: how creator-entrepreneurs operating under regulatory constraints develop adaptive strategies to overcome censorship, build trust with diverse audiences, and engage in business development across borders. These actors combine platform literacy, strategic communication, and cultural sensitivity to turn visibility into opportunity—despite algorithmic, geopolitical, and institutional limitations.

In developing the research questions, this study follows the logic of problematization as outlined by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011). Rather than simply identifying an empirical gap, the research aims to challenge assumptions in the existing

literature—particularly the tendency to view digital entrepreneurship through the lens of open-market, Western-centric platforms. By shifting the focus toward entrepreneurs navigating politically restricted environments, the study constructs questions that generate novel insights into strategy formation, trust-building, and cross-cultural communication within constrained digital ecosystems (Alvesson, Sandberg, 2011).

By analyzing the case of Very Venture China (VVC)—a creator-driven entrepreneurial project that blends storytelling, market insight, and brand-building—this study aims to deepen our understanding of platform-based entrepreneurship in complex environments.

To fulfill this aim, the research is guided by the following main question and three sub-questions:

How can individual entrepreneurs strategically use Western digital platforms to build personal brands and drive business development in politically restricted digital environments?

Sub-RQs:

- 1) How did the Very Venture China (VVC) project develop a platform strategy on YouTube to build visibility, expert status, and audience trust despite digital restrictions in China?
- 2) What specific business development opportunities and strategic partnerships emerged as a result of the VVC project's digital visibility and personal branding efforts?
- 3) What strategic lessons can entrepreneurs draw from the VVC case when planning platform-based brand building and business development in regulated digital markets?

1.6 Delimitations

This study focuses on a single case—the Very Venture China (VVC) YouTube project—as a representative example of platform-based entrepreneurship in a politically restricted digital environment. It does not aim to generalize findings across all digital creators or geopolitical contexts but rather to offer in-depth, exploratory insights grounded in one real-world experience.

The scope of the analysis is delimited to platforms that were actively used or strategically evaluated during the project—namely YouTube, LinkedIn, Bilibili, and WeChat. An Instagram page was created at the outset, but due to limited resources and a different content strategy and audience alignment, it was consciously deprioritized to maintain focus and consistency. TikTok (Douyin) was excluded due to platform restrictions that require Chinese or regional identification (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, or Taiwan), which were not available to the author as a foreign student. Similarly, regulatory hurdles and usability issues—such as upload limitations and discoverability constraint reduced the feasibility of sustained engagement on Bilibili and WeChat.

While emerging technologies like Web3, blockchain, and decentralized platforms are discussed conceptually, they are not the primary focus of empirical analysis. The research also centers on the strategic actions of a micro-entrepreneur rather than institutional actors, and is geographically bounded to the Chinese and European digital contexts.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured into five chapters. It adopts an ethnographic case-based research approach, using the *Very Venture China* (VVC) YouTube project as a real-world, lived case of strategic digital entrepreneurship in a politically restricted environment. Each chapter builds toward answering the research questions and generating both theoretical insight and practical recommendations.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduces the research background, outlines the author's personal motivation, defines the research problem, presents the research questions, and describes the study's theoretical and practical contributions. It also provides a roadmap for the thesis structure.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Reviews key literature on platform strategy, digital entrepreneurship, personal branding, and business development in constrained digital environments. It introduces and contextualizes the main strategic frameworks used in the analysis: emergent strategy, dynamic capabilities, lean startup, Blue Ocean Strategy, and others.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Describes the ethnographic, case-based research design and explains the rationale for selecting the VVC project as a single embedded case study. It outlines data sources (e.g., platform analytics, business interactions, field notes), and discusses reflexivity, limitations, and validity in the research process.

Chapter 4: Case Study Findings

Presents empirical findings from the VVC project, including platform strategy development, content engagement approaches, credibility-building actions, and real-world business outcomes such as job offers, consulting projects, and cross-border partnerships.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

This final chapter interprets the findings through the lens of strategic management theory and integrates the study's conclusions. It discusses how the VVC project supports or extends frameworks such as Lean Startup, emergent strategy, cross-cultural credibility, and platform branding. The chapter consolidates theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research—highlighting how personal branding and

strategic platform use can enable business development across digital and geopolitical constraints.

2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin this study, drawing from strategic management, digital entrepreneurship, branding, communication, and cultural studies. These disciplines collectively provide a foundation for understanding how digital platforms are strategically used to build entrepreneurial ventures—particularly within politically restricted or culturally complex environments.

The literature review is organized thematically, beginning with digital platforms as strategic ecosystems and continuing through strategic communication, lean content development, personal branding, cultural adaptation, regulatory constraints, and future platform trends. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of key theories and highlights critical gaps in the current literature.

Based on this review, five recurring strategic processes emerge as crucial for creators operating under constraint:

1. Selecting appropriate platforms and building within digital ecosystems.
2. Developing strategic communication and cultivating engaged communities.
3. Iterating content based on real-time feedback and platform analytics.
4. Adapting content for cultural resonance and local platform behaviour.
5. Building personal branding and trust to establish long-term credibility and commercial value.

2.1 Digital Platforms as Strategic Ecosystems

The rise of influencer-driven entrepreneurship has given birth to what Edwards (2022) calls the “influencer para-industry,” a system built around branding, lifestyle retreats, and aspirational content designed to commercialize the self. The Creator Economy represents a transformative shift in entrepreneurial dynamics, where

individual creators—ranging from YouTubers and TikTokers to podcasters and streamers—leverage digital platforms to build audiences, establish brand credibility, and monetize their work (Goldman Sachs, 2023). This shift has not only democratized content production but also redefined how visibility, trust, and conversion are achieved in digitally mediated economies. YouTube played a pivotal role in shaping this paradigm with the launch of its Partner Program in 2007, allowing creators to earn a share of advertising revenue—an initiative that sparked new business models and creator-platform dynamics (Hanif, 2022). The platform continues to lead innovation with features like Shorts, Super Thanks, and expanded monetization options tailored to small and large creators alike.

As Craig, Lin, and Cunningham (2021) argue, the rise of *wanghong* in China exemplifies how digital platforms strategically enable user-generated content to fuel new economies of visibility, labor, and monetization. This reflects global trends seen in the Western creator economy, particularly around YouTube’s evolving creator strategies and the broader economic structures that support content-driven growth.

Change in media consumption habits led to platformization of broadcasters and filmmakers, which created opportunities for anyone with a smartphone and internet access to reach a global audience. The emergence of a new generation of UGC creators has disrupted conventional media industries as marketers begin to see their potential as brand advocates. More and more people are participating in UGC activities on video platforms as they become more affordable and easier to use (Perry, 2016). Furthermore, UGC not only facilitates content creation but also plays a central role in building trust and influencing consumer behavior on digital platforms. Nguyen, Hoang, and Khoa (2025) show that UGC enhances online trust and purchase intention in social commerce environments by providing authentic, peer-generated experiences. This insight reinforces the strategic role of UGC in both platform design and creator branding strategies.

The creator economy has grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry over the last decade, driven by YouTube creators who generate content on various subjects. Understanding the creator economy as an emerging industry involves taking an

interdisciplinary perspective on the trends in new media shaping the industry, the creator-side strategies employed by YouTube to support its creators, and the broader platform-side strategies in the creative economy that rely on user-generated content (UGC) (Craig, Lin, & Cunningham, 2021).

Industry reports project that the global creator economy will grow from \$250 billion in 2023 to \$480 billion by 2027, with Gen Z driving this growth both as creators and consumers (Goldman Sachs, 2023; Morning Consult, 2024). YouTube remains the top monetization channel, where influencers with 500,000–1 million subscribers can earn \$6,700 per video, while advertisers pay \$20 per 1,000 views—outperforming TikTok and Instagram in ROI (Prawar, 2025).

In Europe, influencer advertising spending is expected to reach \$5.33 billion in 2025, growing to over \$7 billion by 2029, while in Asia, China is projected to lead global spend with \$21.55 billion USD in 2025 (Statista, 2024a, 2024b). These statistics reinforce the increasing strategic role of creators in shaping public perception, driving economic value, and generating cross-border business opportunities (Edmiston, 2019). As this thesis explores, the Very Venture China (VVC) project operates precisely within this evolving economic logic.

Social media platforms like YouTube have evolved from participatory networks into complex infrastructures governed by platform capitalism. According to van Dijck (2013), the shift from a "culture of participation" to a "culture of connectivity" highlights how platforms are no longer neutral facilitators of user expression but active mediators that encode commercial and algorithmic priorities into their design. This development reinforces asymmetries in visibility and access, favoring users who align with monetizable or engagement-optimized content structures. In the case of Very Venture China (VVC), these dynamics are reflected in both the growth trajectories and constraints faced during attempts to scale visibility (van Dijck, 2013). Kotler, Armstrong, and Opresnik (2021) outline how digital channels transform traditional marketing by shifting value creation from firms to co-creation with audiences.

As the foundation of modern digital entrepreneurship, platforms like YouTube, WeChat, and TikTok have evolved from simple communication tools into complex ecosystems that shape how content is created, distributed, and monetized. This section examines how digital platforms function as strategic environments for creators—enabling global reach, community formation, and iterative experimentation. It also explores how platform-specific features and constraints influence entrepreneurial strategy, especially in cases like Very Venture China (VVC), where geopolitical and regulatory factors add additional layers of complexity.

Digital platforms have redefined the structure of contemporary business models by evolving from linear pipelines into dynamic ecosystems that facilitate direct interaction between producers, consumers, and third-party actors (Van Alstyne, Parker, & Choudary, 2016). These platforms generate value not merely through internal operations but through orchestrating interactions, leveraging demand-side economies of scale, and enabling modular innovation across user communities. This shift from resource control to resource orchestration forms the foundation of platform-based strategy. (Edmiston, 2019)

Van Alstyne et al. (2016) and Adner (2017) emphasize that platforms derive competitive advantage by fostering network effects, governing interactions, and accumulating data as strategic assets. In this view, value is co-created not by a firm alone but through ecosystem participation. For entrepreneurs and creators, this environment allows for rapid internationalization, low-cost brand building, and access to global communities—especially relevant in projects like Very Venture China (VVC), where content creators bypass traditional market entry barriers.

Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and WeChat exemplify this logic. As Cusumano, Gawer, and Yoffie (2019) argue, these platforms enable scalable engagement, data-driven personalization, and decentralized content creation—features that align with Porter's (1980) differentiation and cost-leadership strategies. Given the global significance of these platforms, it becomes crucial to understand how their strategic dynamics shift in constrained environments. In particular, China presents a

compelling case where global digital strategies must be adapted to fit national regulatory and cultural realities.

Meanwhile, Teece's (1997; 2007) concept of dynamic capabilities highlights how entrepreneurs must sense, seize, and transform opportunities within rapidly evolving platform environments. But this requires not only strategic agility but also the continuous reconfiguration of internal resources and routines to align with shifting technological, regulatory, and audience dynamics that define the platform economy.

Li et al. (2019) further introduce the idea of ecosystem-specific advantages (ESAs), suggesting that firms—and by extension, individual entrepreneurs—must adapt governance models, user interfaces, and value propositions to institutional and cultural contexts. These ESAs are especially critical in markets like China, where regulatory constraints affect platform usability and strategy transferability.

User behavior across platforms also reflects this complexity. Pelletier et al. (2020) describe “platform swinging” as users move between YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to satisfy varying cognitive and emotional needs. This behavior aligns with Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), both of which explain how users choose platforms based on message complexity and personal motivations. Glaser (2024) synthesizes these frameworks into a “Media Affordance Synthesis,” arguing that platform capabilities and user intent must be strategically matched for optimal engagement. Treem and Leonardi (2012) identify core affordances of social media—visibility, persistence, editability, and association—that influence user behavior and content strategy. These affordances shape how creators tailor content formats, emotional tone, and strategic communication based on platform characteristics. Similarly, Shao (2009) emphasizes that User-Generated Media (UGM) derives impact through public visibility, creative input, and emotional resonance. These insights support the notion that platform capabilities and user intent must be strategically aligned for engagement.

Social media also plays a critical role in early-stage internationalization. Born Global firms increasingly rely on platforms like Amazon, Facebook, and Alibaba to access

markets, generate leads, and test value propositions (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Jean, Kim, & Cavusgil, 2020). Similarly, social platforms support branding and customer relationship building for digital entrepreneurs at minimal cost (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Fang Li's (2022) synthesis of 327 articles categorizes social media strategies into four streams: social commerce, content strategy, monitoring, and social CRM. These strategies confirm the role of platforms as embedded strategic ecosystems, not merely communication tools.

However, while platform affordances and user behaviors provide a robust operational landscape, they do not in themselves explain how creators strategically navigate uncertainty, algorithmic change, and audience volatility. To fill this gap, entrepreneurial strategy frameworks offer an additional layer of analysis.

Mintzberg and Waters (1985) first introduced the distinction between deliberate and emergent strategies, suggesting that many real-world strategies form as patterns over time rather than through formal planning. Later, Mintzberg (1994) reinforced this perspective by criticizing the rigidity of strategic planning and highlighting the value of emergent, adaptive strategies. Mintzberg's theory of emergent strategy and Lean Startup methodology (Blank, 2013; Ries, 2011) offer a practical framework for navigating platform dynamics under uncertainty. In the case of VVC, the creator's content and growth strategies evolved through iterative experimentation, feedback loops, and adaptive learning in response to platform performance data and audience feedback.

While platform theories offer robust insights into ecosystem dynamics and user interaction, they often assume stable, open-market conditions. In the VVC case, these assumptions must be adjusted to account for regulatory barriers and the need for adaptive multi-platform strategy in politically constrained environments.

These constraints fundamentally shape how communication unfolds on digital platforms. In such environments, strategy is not only about reach and scale, but also

about navigating censorship, cultivating community trust, and signaling legitimacy through coded or indirect messaging.

2.2 Strategic Communication and Community in Restricted Markets

While digital platforms offer transformative opportunities for global engagement, these opportunities are unevenly distributed. In politically restricted environments—such as China—access to Western platforms is blocked or heavily censored, forcing entrepreneurs to adopt alternative strategies for communication, community-building, and brand positioning. The strategic use of digital platforms in such settings requires careful navigation of both technical and cultural constraints.

The withdrawal of major Western firms such as Yahoo, Google, and TechCrunch from China created an information vacuum, opening a space for agile digital actors to fill cross-border communication gaps (Tripathi, 2010; Reuters, 2021). However, this space is highly regulated. Entrepreneurs operating within or in relation to China must engage in “networked authoritarianism,” where content must be coded in irony, satire, or local vernaculars to evade censorship while still reaching audiences (Yang, 2009). These dynamic forces content creators and digital entrepreneurs to continuously recalibrate their strategy, balancing visibility with compliance.

Authenticity and emotional resonance are essential tools in this context. Chen, Ma, and Sharma (2024) find that TikTok users build trust and maintain engagement through relatable, humorous, and emotionally honest content—traits that also help creators manage platform backlash. These insights are particularly relevant for platforms like YouTube and Bilibili, where creator-audience trust becomes a proxy for institutional legitimacy in environments where institutional trust is lacking (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Rudoviq, 2019).

Community thus becomes a strategic asset. As Eves (2021) notes, in attention-scarce and algorithm-driven ecosystems, the mantra “community is the brand” is more than

rhetoric—it is a survival strategy. This holds especially true for creators like those behind the Very Venture China (VVC) project, where geopolitical constraints limit formal visibility, making grassroots audience support and peer engagement critical to sustained relevance.

In such environments, adaptive communication practices are essential. Li (2022) emphasizes social CRM—integrating customer-facing processes across digital platforms—as a strategic tool for collaborative dialogue. This is particularly important where traditional marketing infrastructures are weak or inaccessible. As Kietzmann et al. (2011) argue through the “honeycomb framework,” community elements such as conversation, presence, and reputation form the core of platform-based brand trust, especially in opaque or politically sensitive markets. Hewett et al. (2016) extend this view by introducing the concept of the “echoverse”—a dynamic, interconnected system where brand perception is co-constructed through interactions between firm-generated and user-generated content across multiple platforms. In restricted or volatile digital environments, this feedback loop becomes a strategic vector for building credibility, as entrepreneurs must actively manage how messages resonate, mutate, and amplify across fragmented media spaces.

Strategic community-building often relies on alternative ecosystems. Jorge et al. (2018) highlight the strategic negotiation of authenticity and branding within digital communities, suggesting creators must continuously balance genuine audience engagement with strategic promotional efforts. In China, localized platforms such as WeChat, Bilibili, and Xiaohongshu serve as substitutes for blocked Western platforms. Entrepreneurs also turn to Telegram, Discord, and private groups for cross-border engagement, leveraging trusted relationships and influencer networks. Hofstede’s (2011) cultural dimensions—particularly collectivism, high power distance, and uncertainty avoidance—help explain the emphasis on relationships (*guanxi*), conformity, and indirect messaging in these settings.

In such contexts, key opinion leaders (KOLs) and micro-influencers serve not just as amplifiers but as cultural brokers. Their credibility and embeddedness in community rituals can compensate for institutional mistrust and limited platform access.

Checchinato and Hu (2018) suggest that communication in restricted markets must emphasize trust, subtlety, and alignment with local norms, particularly when platform algorithms penalize controversial or unapproved narratives.

Kim and Mauborgne's (2005) Blue Ocean Strategy further applies in this context. Rather than competing in saturated or high-risk media environments, entrepreneurs can "create uncontested market space" by crafting culturally hybrid, high-trust offerings. The VVC project exemplified this by offering knowledge-focused, documentary-style content rather than entertainment, avoiding direct competition and appealing to niche yet valuable audience segments in China.

Ultimately, strategic communication in restricted environments is not merely a matter of messaging—it is a continuous process of adaptation, risk management, and relational investment. The ability to build credible, emotionally resonant communities under conditions of control and uncertainty becomes a defining strategic capability.

However, building a community is only the first step. To sustain and grow that audience, digital entrepreneurs must continuously test and refine their content, platform choices, and engagement strategies. This is where Lean Startup methodology becomes a crucial tool—offering a structured framework for experimentation, iteration, and learning, particularly under the uncertainty and constraints characteristic of restricted digital ecosystems.

Although theories of strategic communication and community-building highlight the importance of authenticity and user engagement, they often overlook how creators must navigate state surveillance, censorship, and algorithmic suppression. In the VVC case, these conditions fundamentally shape not only what can be said, but how and where communities are built, requiring constant strategic adaptation.

2.3 Lean Startup Principles in Digital Content Creation

The Lean Startup methodology, developed by Eric Ries (2011) and further articulated by Steve Blank (2013), provides a framework for entrepreneurial experimentation under conditions of extreme uncertainty. Originally conceived for early-stage tech ventures, its principles—build-measure-learn feedback loops, minimum viable products (MVPs), and continuous iteration—have proven equally applicable to digital content creators operating in volatile or constrained environments.

The Very Venture China (VVC) project exemplifies the application of Lean Startup logic in a non-traditional context. Operating as a one-person media brand in a geopolitically restricted digital space, the project embraced rapid experimentation with content types, audience engagement styles, and platform strategies. Each content cycle functioned as an MVP—testing hypotheses about what kinds of videos (e.g., Shorts vs. long-form documentaries) would resonate with different audience segments, especially when subject to censorship constraints or algorithmic unpredictability.

This iterative approach is not unique to startups or platform businesses. As Christensen (1997) noted in his work on disruptive innovation, success in emerging or unstable markets hinges on the ability to plan through discovery, rather than rigid projections. In the creator economy, where monetization structures and audience expectations are fluid, creators must “learn their way” toward a viable brand model. For VVC, this meant using analytics from YouTube—such as retention curves, click-through rates, and comment sentiment—as real-time feedback for strategic pivots.

Eves (2021) describes the content creation process as a continuous “Try, Fail, Analyze, Adjust” cycle—a model closely aligned with Lean Startup’s build-measure-learn loop. This mindset allows creators to treat each piece of content as a low-cost experiment rather than a final product. By lowering the stakes and speeding the iteration cycle, creators enhance their responsiveness to both platform algorithms and audience feedback.

Although Lean Startup principles are not always explicitly referenced in social media strategy literature, Li (2022) highlights a parallel in her discussion of dynamic capabilities. She describes how firms reconfigure internal resources in response to digital feedback—mirroring Lean Startup’s emphasis on agility and responsiveness. This convergence suggests that content creators, much like startups, operate within ecosystems that reward adaptive experimentation over fixed long-term planning.

Moreover, these principles are particularly valuable in regulated digital ecosystems, where algorithmic visibility, political risks, and user behavior are less predictable. The MVP approach allows for flexibility in testing formats that are culturally sensitive, avoid triggering censorship, and still engage users. For instance, VVC’s decision to use storytelling and knowledge-sharing rather than direct political commentary reflects a calculated iteration based on both content performance and geopolitical risk analysis.

By using YouTube Analytics as a learning tool rather than merely a performance dashboard, VVC exemplifies how content creators can transform data into strategic insight. This aligns with Blank’s (2013) assertion that metrics should guide learning—not just track growth. Watch time, bounce rates, viewer demographics, and geographic data served as proxies for product-market fit in the digital attention economy.

While Lean Startup principles focus on short-term experimentation and real-time feedback, Christensen (1997) offers a complementary strategic distinction between sustaining and disruptive innovation. Traditional media companies and established influencers often engage in sustaining innovation—refining content production quality or monetization strategies for existing, loyal audiences. In contrast, the VVC project exemplifies disruptive innovation by emerging outside these institutional frameworks. With minimal resources and institutional support, it leveraged low-cost experimentation and data-driven iteration to attract a new audience segment, operating in grassroots, creator-led model of strategic disruption.

Christensen (1997) further argues that market leaders tend to overserve mainstream audiences, leaving niche or emerging user needs unaddressed. This opens

the door for disruptive entrants to target these underrepresented segments with more tailored, flexible solutions. VVC capitalized on this dynamic by creating content specifically for international entrepreneurs and cross-cultural professionals interested in East–West business exchange—an audience largely ignored by mainstream media. By addressing this gap, VVC positioned itself disruptively, offering practical insights and emotionally resonant narratives that mainstream players overlooked.

In summary, the Lean Startup framework provides digital entrepreneurs—especially those operating in uncertain or constrained markets—with a robust model for continuous adaptation. It enables creators like VVC’s founder to navigate uncertainty not through predictive control, but through iterative learning, real-time experimentation, and data-informed decisions.

With communication tactics and content iteration in place, creators must also focus on strategic branding. Establishing authority, emotional connection, and consistency across platforms is key to building a credible and lasting audience.

While Lean Startup principles offer a flexible framework for experimentation, they assume a level of platform stability and access that may not hold in politically restricted environments. In the VVC case, the application of Lean Startup logic had to account for external factors like platform censorship, VPN reliability, and shifting algorithmic biases—limitations rarely addressed in standard entrepreneurial theory.

2.4 Strategic Branding, Platform Authority, and Audience Building

Strategic branding in the digital economy has evolved from traditional corporate messaging into dynamic, person-centric ecosystems where authenticity, consistency, and community-building play central roles. In the creator economy, individuals act as both brand and business, leveraging platform visibility and emotional resonance to build audience trust and long-term value. Foundational models such as Aaker’s (1991) brand equity framework and Keller’s (1993) customer-based brand equity theory remain relevant, providing a structure for evaluating dimensions like brand

awareness, perceived quality, and audience loyalty—now applied to personal brands in online ecosystems. Personal branding has become a critical professional competency, with digital platforms acting as amplifiers of individual visibility and career development (Kleppinger & Cain, 2015). Grier and Deshpande (2001) argue that consumers interpret advertising messages through the lens of their social identity and perceived group status. This insight underscores the importance of tailoring video content not only by platform but also by sociocultural segments. In the VVC project, for instance, narrative tone and reference points were adapted based on whether the content targeted Chinese domestic audiences, Western viewers, or international professionals, aligning with their differing distinctiveness motives and identity expectations.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a critical component in this landscape. Alalwan et al. (2017) define eWOM as user-generated communication that amplifies or contests brand narratives through likes, comments, shares, and video reactions. It represents a decentralized mechanism of brand validation, where audience interaction becomes an active form of social proof. In the case of Very Venture China (VVC), engagement metrics such as comment threads, viewer testimonials, and share rates function as both feedback and amplification, reinforcing perceived authority and trustworthiness. Unlike traditional endorsements, eWOM in restricted digital environments (e.g., China) also signals credibility where institutional trust is lacking or politicized. Jorge et al. (2018) highlight that the authenticity of branded content significantly influences audience trust and engagement, emphasizing the strategic importance of transparently negotiating sponsorships and audience relationships.

Branding in the context of short-form video platforms such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts requires a personalized, emotionally engaging approach. Entrepreneurs craft “person-brands” where transparency, relatability, and storytelling authenticity are crucial (Chen et al., 2024). These characteristics align closely with Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), which posits that media is consumed to fulfill emotional, cognitive, and social needs. By addressing these motivations, creators can build deeper audience relationships and enhance brand

stickiness. Perry (2016) further notes that strategic brand management significantly impacts creators' monetization outcomes on platforms such as YouTube, highlighting the importance of consistent branding and algorithmic adaptability.

The role of narrative identity is especially pronounced. According to the concept of Primal Branding (Godin, 2006; Eves, 2021), successful digital brands construct community rituals, shared lexicons, and belief systems that foster audience cohesion. For VVC, this included consistent stylistic elements, recurring themes (e.g., entrepreneurship in China), and a clear brand mission—to bridge Europe and China through authentic, on-the-ground stories. These branding elements created familiarity and ideological alignment, key drivers of long-term audience retention. Yet branding in the creator economy is not limited to personal storytelling or community rituals—it is also shaped by the architecture and affordances of the platforms themselves.

Strategic branding also benefits from platform-specific authority. Platforms such as YouTube and LinkedIn offer not just reach, but contextual credibility. YouTube's algorithm rewards content that drives retention and engagement, reinforcing visibility for creators who align with audience expectations. Meanwhile, LinkedIn bolsters professional legitimacy through network effects and institutional signaling. The cross-platform strategy employed by VVC thus served both discovery (YouTube) and trust reinforcement (LinkedIn).

The experience of Vladimir Smerkis, founder of BLUM.io, illustrates how strategic content ecosystems outperform centralized corporate branding. By launching multiple YouTube channels, Telegram communities, and Discord networks, Smerkis created a decentralized Web3-native brand with over 14 million users. This model exemplifies what Bruhn et al. (2012) describe as the superior impact of user-generated, community-based content over top-down institutional campaigns. In such models, the brand is co-created with the community.

In a European context, social media marketing has also proven essential for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to build international brand equity. Empirical studies show that platforms like Instagram and Facebook drive brand loyalty and credibility when consistently used for storytelling, interaction, and user-generated

content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lempinen, 2020; Zahoor & Qureshi, 2017). These findings highlight the role of digital presence in shaping strategic perceptions, even in low-resource contexts.

YouTube in particular offers unique affordances for multimodal storytelling and emotional engagement. Vahedi (2023) notes that although skippable ads often disrupt user experience, storytelling techniques, background music, and emotional cues improve recall and persuasion. This aligns with Broadbent's (1958) Attention Theory, which posits that individuals selectively process stimuli based on limited cognitive capacity, filtering incoming information before semantic processing. In digital environments characterized by stimulus saturation, such as YouTube, emotionally salient content is more likely to pass through this cognitive filter. Similarly, Selective Perception Theory (Fox et al., 2002) explains how users prioritize content that aligns with pre-existing interests or emotional states, thus both academics explain how users process emotionally salient content amidst information overload.

Finally, Holt's (2016) concept of "crowd cultures"—digitally connected subcultures that produce cultural meaning—reframes branding as cultural participation. Rather than imposing a message, successful creators engage with emerging subcultural norms, humour, and values. In restricted markets such as China, where official narratives dominate, authentic subcultural engagement provides a powerful alternative channel for influence. For VVC, this included integrating cultural elements, language nuances, and local experiences that resonate across both Chinese and European audiences.

In summary, strategic branding in the digital creator economy is a multi-dimensional process that combines platform authority, audience alignment, and emotionally resonant content. It is strengthened by feedback loops such as eWOM and governed by platform-specific affordances and cultural context. For individual entrepreneurs like VVC's founder, personal branding is not a supplementary activity but a core strategic engine for business development, cross-border engagement, and long-term positioning.

Branding strategies do not operate in a vacuum. They must be adapted to reflect the cultural norms, expectations, and communication styles of different markets. This section examines how cultural frameworks influence platform use and audience engagement in diverse regions such as China and Europe.

Although traditional branding frameworks like Aaker and Keller remain relevant, their application in the creator economy requires recalibration. In fragmented and politicized media environments, brand equity is not just a function of consistency or awareness but of agility, emotional resonance, and perceived authenticity—factors often shaped by platform-specific dynamics and socio-political context.

2.5 Cultural Dimensions and Market Adaptation

Cultural variation plays a critical role in shaping digital platform engagement, influencing how content is interpreted, shared, and acted upon across different geographies. For digital entrepreneurs operating across borders—particularly between Western markets and more culturally distinct environments like China—understanding and adapting to these differences is essential. Theoretical frameworks such as Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (1983; 2011) and Hall’s (1989) context communication theory provide valuable lenses for interpreting cross-cultural behavior, strategic messaging, and platform use. As Geertz (1973) argued, culture is best understood through its symbolic actions and interpretive frameworks. For entrepreneurs and content creators navigating international audiences, branding becomes a semiotic act—where stories, visuals, and tone must align with the cultural “webs of significance” within which meaning is produced and interpreted.

Hofstede’s dimensions—particularly individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance—offer a structural understanding of how consumer expectations differ. In highly individualistic cultures, such as Finland or the United States, direct and personalized communication is often more effective. Conversely, collectivist societies like China place greater emphasis on communal values, relationship-building, and indirect messaging. This affects not only how messages are

crafted but also which platforms are trusted and how communities are built (Hofstede, 2011; Tsai & Men, 2012).

High-context cultures such as China (Hall, 1989) rely more heavily on implicit communication, symbolism, and visual storytelling. Here, meaning is often derived from tone, aesthetics, and interpersonal cues rather than explicit verbal content. This is particularly relevant for video marketing and social media, where platform affordances must align with cultural preferences. Research by Li (2022) emphasizes that firms operating in such environments adapt their social media strategies accordingly favouring relationship-oriented, symbolic content over direct calls to action. Corben et al. (2015) similarly highlight that understanding local contexts and trust-building strategies are critical when attracting venture capital in China, reinforcing the significance of cultural adaptability in strategic communication.

These cultural frameworks are not abstract theories but practical tools for content adaptation. Keane (2016 b) discusses the strategic complexities faced by Chinese media going global, emphasizing that effective internationalization involves balancing cultural specificity with global market expectations. The Very Venture China (VVC) project applied this insight by adjusting its storytelling tone, visual aesthetics, and platform language depending on the intended audience. In China, this meant using more relationship-focused narratives, integrating culturally familiar references, and avoiding overt political discourse. In Europe, content was more direct, informative, and individualized, reflecting the region's lower-context communication norms. Lin (2018) highlights how creative professionals in China often align their content with state narratives, underlining the hybrid space between autonomy and state expectations that creators must navigate.

Moreover, cultural values impact trust dynamics, especially in politically sensitive or heavily regulated environments. In China, the concept of *Guanxi*—the system of social networks and influential relationships—continues to govern much of business communication. As Rudoviq (2019) highlights, digital entrepreneurs who can demonstrate trustworthiness and connection through localized social signaling gain higher audience engagement. For VVC, this included collaborating with local

professionals, showcasing on-the-ground experiences, and referencing shared values across East-West cultural contexts.

The implications for platform strategy are clear: cross-cultural digital ventures must go beyond language localization and adapt the entire communication ethos. Strategic content creation requires cultural framing—understanding not only what is said, but how, when, and through which medium it is said (Hofstede, 2011; Kim & Papacharissi, 2003). This involves aligning media richness (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and message style with culturally appropriate affordances—a process described as content affordance alignment (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Treem & Leonardi, 2012; Glaser, 2024). This alignment involves tailoring message modalities, emotional tone, and narrative framing to suit both technological affordances and user expectations, shaped by cultural preferences and psychological traits (Leung, 2013; Meng & Leung, 2021). Practically, entrepreneurs in the Creator Economy should tailor content to cultural self-construals, using direct, low-context strategies like personal vlogs for individualistic audiences and visually rich, high-context narratives for collectivistic audiences, ensuring alignment with cultural expectations (Hofstede, 2011; Kim & Papacharissi, 2003).

Firat (2019) identifies four value dimensions of YouTube advertising—entertainment, informativeness, credibility, and irritation—which directly shape viewers' purchase intentions and perception of brand value. These findings are crucial for entrepreneurs designing cross-cultural or cross-platform campaigns, as each content element must be tailored not only to platform affordances but also to the emotional and cognitive triggers of the audience

The complexity of cross-border engagement also raises challenges for platform governance. Li et al. (2019) argue that while ecosystem governance models (e.g., moderation, algorithmic visibility) may be exportable, they must be adapted to local institutional and cultural contexts. This aligns with findings by De Mooij (2018), who notes that successful global marketing strategies require cultural sensitivity not just in content but in platform behavior, user interface design, and interaction norms.

Despite its critical role, cultural adaptation remains under-theorized in digital entrepreneurship literature. Future research could build on Hofstede, Trompenaars, and other cross-cultural frameworks by examining how creators adapt humor, norms, and interaction styles across different digital audiences. The VVC case suggests that effective market adaptation involves not only strategic localization but also cultural empathy and flexibility—capabilities that are increasingly essential in a multipolar digital world.

Despite the growing academic interest in digital platforms and entrepreneurship, gaps remain in literature, particularly regarding content creators operating across regulated, multi-platform environments. The following section reviews these limitations.

While Hofstede's and Hall's models offer valuable macro-level insights into cultural behaviors, they risk oversimplifying complex, hybrid audience dynamics. In practice, creators must navigate nuanced, overlapping cultural identities, especially in globalized digital ecosystems, which demands a more flexible and context-aware approach to adaptation than existing frameworks fully accommodate.

2.6 Challenges in Strategy for the Creator Economy

Despite substantial academic interest in digital platforms, entrepreneurship, and branding, the unique strategic position of digital content creators—particularly those operating in politically or technologically constrained environments—remains under-theorized. Existing models tend to reflect either firm-centric perspectives (e.g., Porter's Five Forces) or consumer-oriented approaches, neither of which fully capture the dynamics of individual digital entrepreneurs navigating multi-platform ecosystems with regulatory, cultural, and algorithmic barriers. Keane (2016 a) further emphasizes that China's 'Internet+' initiative significantly impacts strategic innovation, highlighting the unique opportunities and challenges digital entrepreneurs face within such a regulated yet innovation-driven environment. Keane (2016a) identifies this strategy as a national innovation policy designed to accelerate economic reform through digital transformation. For digital entrepreneurs

operating in or around China, this environment presents both opportunities and regulatory constraints. The VVC project leveraged this innovation-driven context by adopting culturally resonant narratives and platform-native formats.

Traditional strategy frameworks, such as Porter's (1980) Five Forces, offer valuable insights into industry structure and competitive dynamics but they are increasingly limited in their ability to account for platform-specific governance mechanisms, algorithmic content moderation, and political censorship—factors that critically shape strategic behavior in today's digital environments. In environments like China or Iran, where platforms like YouTube and Instagram are inaccessible without circumvention tools, creators must develop entirely new strategic models to build visibility and trust. Likewise, classical brand equity models (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) emphasize awareness, loyalty, and perceived quality but often overlook how authenticity, algorithmic favorability, and eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) now serve as central pillars of credibility and influence (Alalwan et al., 2017; Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

A growing body of research critiques this theoretical mismatch. Lempinen (2020) argues that most social media marketing literature remains fragmented and lacks actionable frameworks for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or individual content creators. Similarly, Li (2022) highlights that much of the literature is overly consumer-centric, focusing on user behavior rather than on the strategic actions and feedback loops employed by creators themselves. This results in an incomplete picture of how value is actually created, sustained, and scaled in the platform economy.

Furthermore, the literature lacks integrated, multi-platform models of creator strategy. While studies on YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram exist, they are often siloed and do not reflect the synergistic nature of multi-platform branding or audience migration behavior (Buzeta et al., 2020; Glaser, 2024). Meng & Leung (2021), Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz (2020) research illustrates how creators adapt tone, content type, and engagement level across TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, but lacks a unifying model. These findings highlight the fragmented nature of current literature on cross-

platform branding and reinforce the need for an integrated, affordance-based strategy framework.

As a result, creators who operate across multiple platforms face strategic blind spots not addressed by existing research. The phenomenon of “platform swinging” (Pelletier et al., 2020)—where users and creators fluidly shift between platforms—requires strategic models that are adaptive, responsive, and built for real-time experimentation. This strategic fluidity is further intensified by emerging technologies such as blockchain, NFTs, and decentralized platforms, which allow creators to reclaim audience ownership and redefine platform dependency. These innovations offer promising alternatives to centralized control yet remain underexplored in current models.

Content creators also operate in a hybrid space that blurs the boundaries between personal and professional identity, production and consumption, and local versus global visibility. This complexity demands a rethinking of traditional entrepreneurship models. Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014) and Olanrewaju et al. (2020) suggest that social media engagement should be studied as a co-creation process, but current strategy literature seldom integrates this co-creation logic into models of entrepreneurial success. Strategic tools designed for stable, firm-led industries do not translate well into fast-moving, decentralized creator ecosystems characterized by frequent pivots, experimental branding, and low entry barriers.

In addition, the rise of content creators as *de facto* brands has not yet been adequately reflected in strategy or marketing curricula. Although influencers, vloggers, and educational content creators now command global audiences and economic clout, few studies examine how they build competitive advantage under constraint. This is particularly true in non-Western contexts, where creators may face limitations in monetization, content distribution, or even physical safety. These creators are not just marketers—they are strategists, negotiators, technologists, and community managers.

Thus, there is an urgent need for theoretical convergence: a framework that integrates branding, lean startup principles, platform affordances, regulatory

compliance, and cultural adaptation into a cohesive model of strategic behavior in the creator economy. Such a model would enable scholars to move beyond siloed case studies and develop comparative, cross-platform, and cross-market insights.

Finally, the strategic literature has yet to fully address how creators in restricted environments adapt Western platforms for localized use. While localization studies exist in global marketing, few have explored how entrepreneurs reverse-engineer accessibility, deploy VPNs, or create “dual-channel” strategies to reach both local and international audiences. These hybrid tactics are crucial in markets such as China, Iran, or Russia, where creators operate in liminal digital spaces that evade straightforward categorization.

Although platform strategy is well-explored, the literature still lacks a robust theoretical treatment of the creator economy. Most frameworks were developed around firm- or platform-centric logic, rather than content creators who now constitute key actors in digital ecosystems. This suggests a gap for future research integrating entrepreneurship, media studies, and strategy.

Among the most significant contextual factors shaping digital strategy is regulation. Entrepreneurs must operate within legal frameworks that vary greatly across regions, which directly affects content distribution, audience targeting, and platform choice.

While this section identifies key blind spots in current strategic models, it largely assumes a Western-centric research perspective. There is a risk of overlooking indigenous strategies and informal entrepreneurial practices already present in non-Western creator communities, which could offer valuable theoretical contributions if more deeply explored.

2.7 Regulatory Impacts on Digital Strategies

Regulatory environments play a defining role in shaping digital strategy, particularly for entrepreneurs operating on or through global platforms. While many strategic frameworks assume a free-market or open-access context, real-world conditions are

increasingly marked by digital sovereignty, data localization laws, and varying levels of censorship. These political and regulatory dynamics have profound implications for platform accessibility, user targeting, and content creation—yet remain under-explored in mainstream strategy literature.

In restrictive environments such as China, content regulation is institutionalized through mechanisms like the Great Firewall, which blocks access to Western platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Google. Entrepreneurs operating in these markets must adopt workaround strategies, such as VPN usage, repurposing content for domestic platforms (e.g., WeChat, Bilibili, Douyin), or implementing dual-channel approaches that maintain both domestic and global reach (Yang, 2009; Yang, 2015). These adaptations represent a form of "strategic compliance," in which creators balance innovation and visibility with local regulatory requirements. Regulatory friction is not confined to authoritarian regimes. In the European Union, entrepreneurs must navigate complex frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which imposes strict controls on data collection, processing, and consent (Saunders et al.'s, 2023). While these rules protect consumers, they also raise the costs of compliance, particularly for micro-entrepreneurs and small firms. Strategic adjustments—such as data minimization, anonymized analytics, and transparent cookie policies—become essential for continued platform-based operations. The VVC project operates in a liminal space shaped by asymmetrical digital freedoms. This echoes Gehrke's (2019) argument that effective EU–China interaction requires not just transactional logic, but nuanced strategic communication grounded in mutual understanding and long-term positioning.

Berthon et al. (2012) argue that digital strategy is shaped by the intersection of technology, culture, and governance. This triad becomes especially salient in geopolitical contexts where platforms face bans, state intervention, or politicized content filtering. For example, Facebook's exit from China and TikTok's threatened bans in the United States and India exemplify the rising politicization of digital tools. Entrepreneurs in such scenarios must not only adapt content and branding strategies but also manage geopolitical risk.

The increasing regulation of platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram across various jurisdictions has led to an evolving landscape of platform governance. Strategies such as co-option, localized partnerships, or legal arbitration are used by large platforms to retain market access, but such options are unavailable to individual creators. Thus, creators in constrained markets must become *de facto* legal strategists—understanding which content formats, keywords, or collaborations are permissible without triggering sanctions or content takedowns.

Yang (2009) introduces the concept of “networked authoritarianism,” wherein the state allows limited civic dialogue online while simultaneously co-opting platform governance. This model has implications not only for political communication but also for entrepreneurial activity. Content creators must tread carefully to avoid platform penalties or state scrutiny, and this risk directly informs the kind of content they produce and the tone they adopt.

The strategic implications of regulation are not static. Policies such as GDPR, China’s Cybersecurity Law, or the evolving Digital Services Act in the EU alter the digital terrain continuously. As such, entrepreneurs require what Teece (2007) calls “dynamic capabilities”—the ability to sense, seize, and reconfigure strategies in response to shifting institutional environments. These capabilities are particularly critical for creators who rely on global platforms but operate within localized constraints.

Despite these realities, strategic management literature rarely engages deeply with the concept of regulatory affordance or constraint. Regulation is often framed as a compliance issue rather than a strategic variable. Yet for digital entrepreneurs, especially those in restricted or emerging markets, regulatory context is a central element of platform strategy. Whether one can monetize content, engage an audience, or even access a platform depends on local legal frameworks and their global interoperability.

Therefore, this study positions regulatory impact not as a backdrop but as a strategic driver. By examining how the Very Venture China (VVC) project adapted its platform strategy in response to regulatory limitations—through VPN use, content

localization, and dual-audience engagement—this thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of entrepreneurship within digitally sovereign environments.

This section emphasizes the strategic role of regulation but primarily frames it as a constraint. Future research could also explore regulation as a driver of innovation, showing how creators leverage legal boundaries to develop new formats, ethical storytelling practices, or alternative platforms—turning limitation into opportunity.

2.8 Video Marketing and Engagement Strategies

Video marketing has become a dominant force in digital engagement strategies, particularly within the creator economy. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram Reels enable entrepreneurs and content creators to deliver immersive, emotionally resonant messages that go beyond traditional advertising models. These platforms allow for real-time audience feedback, enhanced personalization, and greater storytelling depth, aligning well with both branding and community-building strategies in digital ecosystems.

From a strategic perspective, video content enables creators to combine visual, auditory, and narrative techniques to shape brand identity and engage viewers across cultural boundaries. Reino and Hay (2011) emphasize that video marketing enhances emotional connections and purchase intentions by allowing businesses to humanize their message. This aligns with Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell's (1995) consumer decision-making model, which identifies emotion as a key driver of attention and preference. Grier and Deshpande (2001) demonstrate that consumers' social identity and perceived group status strongly influence how they interpret and respond to advertising. More recent studies by Firat (2019) show that music, storytelling, and visual design can significantly increase recall and brand loyalty.

In the context of short-form video, platforms like TikTok and Douyin cater to hedonic, entertainment-focused consumption, particularly among younger users. Chen, Ma, and Sharma (2024) demonstrate that content designed to satisfy information,

humor, and emotional connection is more likely to succeed in highly competitive attention economies. Their findings align with Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021), who show that emotional and authentic video content consistently outperforms other formats in key engagement metrics such as watch time, likes, and shares. This supports a content–affordance alignment strategy where creators adapt emotional or informational content to fit the interactive and visual capabilities of each platform—leveraging video features to maximize resonance and user response.

To explain why certain content styles perform better across platforms, Glaser (2024) introduces the concept of Media Affordance Synthesis. This model integrates Media Richness Theory and Uses and Gratification Theory to argue that platform features must align with users’ emotional and cognitive needs to drive engagement. Treem and Leonardi (2012) offer a foundational model for understanding how media affordances—such as visibility and persistence—shape user behavior on social platforms. Shao (2009) and Whiting & Williams (2013) build on this by showing how engagement is driven by gratifications like entertainment, self-expression, and social connection. Their combined insights support the idea that platform design must match user intent and emotional triggers to optimize engagement and strategic messaging.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) further amplifies the effectiveness of video content. Alalwan et al. (2017) argue that eWOM generated via comments, shares, and user replies plays a dual role—extending the reach of content and serving as social proof that enhances trust and perceived credibility. This is particularly critical in restricted markets, where institutional trust may be low and content validation is often community driven.

The importance of video format choice is underscored by Shao (2009) and Treem and Leonardi (2012), who link media affordances such as interactivity, visibility, and persistence to user experience and engagement. Building on Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and Uses and Gratification Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973), demonstrating how platform capabilities (e.g., interactivity, visual density,

feedback mechanisms) must be matched to user motivations and content goals. For instance, Meng and Leung (2021) further show that complex, high-context messages—such as cross-cultural business insights—are more effectively delivered through longer-form videos on YouTube, whereas emotionally-driven or entertainment-based content performs better in short formats on TikTok.

Moreover, Vahedi (2023) identifies YouTube as a powerful tool for digital advertising due to its broad reach and multimodal engagement. He notes that attention and perception theories—such as Broadbent’s (1958) attention filter model and Fox et al.’s (2002) selective perception—are crucial to understanding how viewers filter and interpret video stimuli. YouTube’s skippable ad formats allow creators and marketers to test creative approaches and iterate based on real-time viewer interaction, aligning with the Lean Startup model (Blank, 2013; Ries, 2011).

Strategic video marketing is not limited to content production. Engagement must also include community management, responsive interactions, and iterative improvements. Metrics such as viewer retention, comment quality, and click-through rates are used to fine-tune content and maintain relevance. These analytics are particularly valuable for entrepreneurs operating in culturally diverse or regulated markets, where content resonance depends on audience trust, cultural familiarity, and local relevance (Cerci, 2011). Practical insights from Cannell and Travis (2018) reinforce this view by highlighting the importance of consistent audience interaction, authenticity, and feedback-driven iteration. They argue that creators who respond to comments, optimize thumbnails and titles, and adapt content using YouTube analytics are more likely to build loyal, trust-based communities—especially in markets where visibility and trust are hard-won. Supporting this, Çiçek and Erdoğan (2012) empirically demonstrate that relevant content, popular peer engagement, and platform activity across mobile and social channels significantly influence brand loyalty. Their findings underline the importance of not only producing engaging content, but also maintaining a responsive and interactive presence across platforms to meet audience expectations and increase retention.

However, scholars such as Holt (2016) caution against overly corporatized “branded entertainment” strategies that fail to resonate with authentic subcultural groups. Instead, creators who embed their messages within community rituals, subcultural narratives, or emotionally honest storytelling are more likely to build lasting influence. In China, for example, local entrepreneurs stress the value of visual storytelling but warn that saturation and state influence limit the shelf life of formulaic content (Chen, Ma, & Wang, 2021).

In sum, video marketing functions as both a strategic tool and an adaptive communication method. It supports emotional engagement, platform authority, and audience development—particularly when guided by theories such as media richness, eWOM, and attention economics. For entrepreneurs like those behind the Very Venture China project, the challenge is not merely to produce content, but to align it with audience needs, cultural expectations, and strategic goals across fragmented and regulated media environments

This remains a notable gap and warrants further investigation in future strategy research. As digital media consumption habits evolve, new formats such as short-form content and live social commerce are reshaping how creators monetize and interact with audiences. This section explores these emerging trends and their strategic implications.

While this section highlights video’s strategic value in digital engagement, it assumes that creators have the technical and emotional literacy to use these tools effectively. Future research could explore how access to production skills, tools, and storytelling competencies shapes strategic outcomes in video-driven platform ecosystems.

2.9 Future Trends: Short-Form Content and Social Commerce

As media consumption habits evolve, short-form content and social commerce are reshaping digital engagement and monetization strategies. Platforms such as TikTok (international) and Douyin (China) have spearheaded this transformation by enabling creators to deliver concise, emotionally impactful videos that cater to mobile-first audiences and algorithm-driven discovery.

Short-form video appeals to changing attention spans and content consumption behaviors, especially among Gen Z and Millennial users, emotionally engaging content optimized for mobile-first, algorithm-driven platforms like TikTok (Meng & Leung (2021). Manic (2024) describes this as a generational shift toward vertical, rapid-fire storytelling that fits seamlessly into everyday browsing. These videos, typically under 60 seconds, optimize for both engagement and shareability, and often rely on trending sounds, memes, and user participation to go viral. As Glaser (2024) highlights, platforms like TikTok meet hedonic and social needs, serving as both entertainment channels and identity-forming spaces, as also supported by scholars Shao, (2009); Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, (2020).

This new form of media engagement disrupts traditional brand-building processes. Tolentino (2019) notes that TikTok's content algorithm offers equal visibility potential to both unknown users and established brands, leveling the competitive field. The viral logic of TikTok redefines brand equity as a dynamic, community-driven process rather than a function of legacy or media spend. As a result, creators and micro-influencers now play a central role in shaping brand narratives, often outperforming traditional campaigns through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and organic engagement (Alalwan et al., 2017).

This shift in branding dynamics, characterized by the decentralization of branding and creator empowerment in visibility and revenue, parallels a broader reconfiguration of monetization strategies. As creators gain influence through community-driven branding, they also unlock new revenue streams embedded within

platforms—transforming engagement into economic value beyond ad revenue or sponsorships.

At the same time, the rise of social commerce—where shopping functionalities are integrated directly into social media platforms—further illustrates how engagement and monetization now converge. This blending of content and commerce has gained significant traction, particularly in China, where platforms like Pinduoduo, WeChat Mini Programs, and Taobao Live exemplify seamless transactional experiences embedded in social interaction. These developments reflect a shift from an attention economy—focused on visibility and reach—to a conversion economy, where platform interactions such as views, likes, and comments are strategically leveraged to drive transactions and measurable economic value (Statista, 2022; Li, 2022).

Li (2022) identifies "social commerce strategy" as one of the most rapidly expanding areas within social media marketing. She explains that when short-form content is paired with trust-enhancing mechanisms—such as live interactions, user reviews, and influencer testimonials—it significantly boosts purchase intent by fostering perceived authenticity and immediacy. This supports findings by Stephen (2016) and Lamberton & Stephen (2016), who argue that social commerce reduces friction in consumer journeys by collapsing content discovery, decision-making, and transaction into a single interface.

These trends are not limited to China. In Europe and the United States, platforms such as Instagram and YouTube have introduced features like Reels, Shoppable Posts, and Live Shopping, attempting to replicate the success of Chinese social commerce. This convergence of entertainment and transactional functionality reflects a global shift toward "commerce through content," where audiences not only consume but also convert directly within the same platform experience. Reino and Hay (2011) note that user-generated video content, when linked to commerce, significantly improves purchase intent and brand recall.

Importantly, these trends require strategic agility from creators and entrepreneurs. The ability to adapt content to trending formats, leverage micro-moments, and integrate monetization seamlessly into storytelling is becoming a key differentiator. This

environment rewards creators who can rapidly translate cultural trends into commerce, transforming audience engagement into economic value. Holt (2016) suggests that this new paradigm demands cultural branding, where success is tied not to product placement but to participation in digitally networked subcultures.

In this context, the Very Venture China (VVC) project offers a timely illustration of hybrid content strategy under constraint. While positioned primarily as an educational and cross-cultural initiative, VVC leverages both short-form and long-form video formats to build thought leadership, enhance algorithmic reach, and foster emotionally engaged communities. Its use of Shorts enables discovery and virality, while long-form content sustains credibility and depth—together supporting both indirect monetization (via audience growth and authority) and potential future social commerce pathways. The future viability of such ventures depends on their ability to navigate algorithmic visibility, embed monetization within storytelling, and continuously adapt content for cultural and platform-specific expectations.

However, attempts to establish a dual-platform strategy within the Chinese ecosystem faced significant friction. A Bilibili channel was initiated, but technical limitations—such as slow upload speeds and editing constraints—reduced its usability. A WeChat presence was maintained but limited by private account discoverability, foreign number restrictions, and the temporary nature of a student visa. Most critically, TikTok (Douyin) required verified identification from citizens or residents of China, Hong Kong, Macao, or Taiwan, preventing registration. These challenges led to the eventual withdrawal from the dual-platform strategy, underscoring how infrastructural and regulatory constraints shape the feasibility of platform expansion in restricted markets.

Social commerce further enhances consumer engagement by seamlessly blending shopping experiences with social media interactions. In China, platforms like Pinduoduo exemplify the integration of e-commerce with social networking, creating highly interactive purchasing experiences. European markets similarly see an

increasing integration of shopping functionalities within social media platforms, emphasizing interactive, community-driven buying experiences (Reino & Hay, 2011).

Although this section captures the disruptive potential of short-form content and social commerce, it presumes seamless adaptability across cultural and regulatory contexts. Future research should investigate how these trends play out differently in restricted environments, where monetization pathways and content formats may be constrained by platform availability and state controls.

2.10 Gaps in Strategy Literature

While a growing body of research explores digital platforms, entrepreneurship, and branding, significant theoretical and empirical gaps persist—especially regarding the creator economy in restricted or geopolitically sensitive environments. Much of the current literature remains fragmented, with limited integration across strategic management, digital communication, platform affordances, regulatory studies, and cultural adaptation. This fragmentation weakens the analytical toolkit available to scholars seeking to understand creator-led ventures, which often span multiple domains simultaneously.

First, traditional strategy models such as Porter’s Five Forces (1980) and the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) are ill-suited to capture the fluid, platform-mediated environments in which creators operate. These models often neglect the non-market forces such as censorship, content moderation, and platform dependency, which are especially relevant in regions like China. Ashley & Tuten (2015) critique classical branding literature for overlooking how digital visibility, transparency, and eWOM now shape credibility more than institutional affiliations or ad spending.

Second, most studies adopt either a consumer-centric lens (focusing on social media engagement and satisfaction) or a firm-centric lens (examining platform monetization and scalability), leaving creators—especially individual entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises—under-theorized (Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Hollebeek, Glynn, &

Brodie, 2014). This creates a conceptual blind spot: content creators often operate across both spheres, functioning as both brand and business in a complex ecosystem.

Third, current research rarely explains how creators succeed when using several platforms at once in today's complex media landscape. Although Buzeta et al. (2020), Meng & Leung (2021), Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz (2020), and Glaser (2024) provide helpful insights for specific platforms—such as how creators adjust content and tone for YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn—their findings are mostly separate from one another. What's still missing is a full, combined model that shows how creators plan and coordinate content, timing, and audience engagement across all platforms to grow consistently and keep people interested over time.

Fourth, strategic frameworks tend to assume open-market conditions and ignore the realities of creators in restricted markets. For instance, there is little guidance on how entrepreneurs use VPNs, dual-channel strategies, or localized messaging to operate across borders when platforms like YouTube or Instagram are banned (Lin, 2023; Checchinato & Hu, 2018; Yang, 2015). The strategic decisions made under these constraints—whether to localize, circumvent, or hybridize—remain under-researched.

Additionally, while literature on lean startup and digital experimentation has grown (Blank, 2013; Ries, 2011), it is rarely applied to the creator economy, particularly in non-Western contexts. Few studies explore how creators use feedback loops, audience analytics, and MVP thinking to develop branding and monetization models under regulatory or cultural constraints.

Finally, ROI metrics and success frameworks for creators remain underdeveloped. Both Li (2022) and Lempinen (2020) argue for better strategic and operational clarity in measuring brand value, audience engagement, and monetization outcomes in creator-led businesses. Without such models, strategic decisions often remain anecdotal or driven by platform metrics rather than broader entrepreneurial logic.

In summary, there is a pressing need for an integrated strategic framework that accounts for the hybrid position of digital entrepreneurs: navigating between

platforms, adapting to regulatory landscapes, engaging cross-cultural audiences, and building sustainable brand equity through content. The Very Venture China (VVC) case contributes to this emerging dialogue by providing a real-world example of entrepreneurial adaptation across geopolitical, technological, and cultural boundaries.

This section identifies substantial theoretical and empirical blind spots in current strategy literature, yet it primarily draws from digital and Western academic traditions. A deeper integration of non-Western strategic thought and alternative epistemologies could further enrich the understanding of creator entrepreneurship in restricted and hybrid digital ecosystems.

To conclude this chapter, the following table synthesizes the key theoretical models and frameworks discussed throughout the literature review. Each framework is aligned with its practical application in the Very Venture China (VVC) case, illustrating how strategic decision-making was informed by academic theory. This synthesis not only bridges conceptual insights with entrepreneurial practice, but also highlights the interdisciplinary nature of platform-based strategy in restricted digital environments.

2.11 Theoretical Framework Synthesis

The literature reviewed in this chapter reveals a multidimensional landscape in which digital entrepreneurs operate—marked by dynamic platform ecosystems, cultural constraints, regulatory asymmetries, and evolving consumer behaviors. To analyze the Very Venture China (VVC) case effectively, this thesis synthesizes the key theoretical frameworks into an integrated table. Each theory contributes uniquely to understanding how micro-entrepreneurs adapt platform strategies, build brand equity, and drive audience engagement under constraint.

Theory	Author(s)	Application in VVC
Emergent Strategy	Mintzberg and Waters (1985); Mintzberg (1994)	Explains VVC's flexible, iterative decision-making under uncertainty and lack of long-term predictability. VVC strategy was not fully planned, but evolved through real-time learning and reaction to platform/political constraints.
Five Forces	Porter (1980)	Used to analyze competition and barriers in YouTube/TikTok ecosystems from the creator's perspective
Lean Startup	Blank (2013), Ries (2011)	VVC applied build-measure-learn loops to test formats, audience reactions, and channel growth hypotheses.
Brand Equity Model	Aaker (1991), Keller (1993)	Helps assess how VVC built visibility, trust, and content quality to signal expert branding.
Dynamic Capabilities	Teece (2007)	VVC reconfigured its resources (time, partnerships, topics) in response to audience data and feedback.
Blue Ocean Strategy	Kim & Mauborgne (2005)	VVC created an uncontested niche: China-Europe business insight through a personal, hybrid lens.
Disruptive Innovation	Christensen (1997)	Explained how VVC targeted an underserved niche with a lean, adaptive model outside traditional media systems. VVC gained traction by addressing emerging needs that mainstream legacy platforms ignored.
Cultural Dimensions	Hofstede (2011)	Informed the adaptation of content tone and themes for Chinese and European audiences.

Theory	Author(s)	Application in VVC
Regulatory Im- pacts	Checchinato & Hu (2018) Lin (2023)	Addressed censorship by using VPNs, dual-plat- form strategies, and politically neutral topics.
Media Richness Theory (MRT)	Daft & Lengel (1986)	Justified the use of video (YouTube) for high-con- text storytelling versus low-richness text updates.
Uses and Grati- fication Theory (U&G)	Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch (1973); Shao (2009)	Explained platform selection by users (e.g., YouTube for learning, TikTok for entertainment, LinkedIn for authority) and the appeal of short- form UGC.
Media Af- fordance Syn- thesis	Treem & Leonardi (2012); Glaser (2024)	Informed how VVC selected formats/platforms based on emotional tone, user intention, and sto- rytelling needs, reflecting both technical af- fordances and engagement context.
Content Af- fordance Align- ment	Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021); Glaser (2024); Shao (2009)	Aligned content types (emotional/informational) with format-specific affordances such as short- form video, memes, or expert cues to engage audi- ences cross-culturally.
User-Content Affinity	Buzeta et al. (2020); Glaser (2024); Leung (2013)	Helped tailor content formats across platforms like YouTube and LinkedIn to suit viewer motiva- tions (identity, curiosity, affiliation)

The preceding literature review has outlined the theoretical foundations guiding this study, including platform strategy, lean startup methodology, personal branding, strategic communication, and cultural adaptation. These frameworks provide the analytical lens through which the Very Venture China (VVC) project is examined, particularly within the context of operating a Western digital platform under the geopolitical and regulatory constraints of the Chinese market. Building on these concepts, the next chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted for this thesis.

Specifically, it introduces an ethnographic case-based research design that positions the author as both researcher and participant, allowing for a deeply contextualized and reflexive analysis of platform-based entrepreneurship in a restricted digital environment.

Figure 1 presents the integrated theoretical framework that underpins the analysis of the Very Venture China (VVC) case. It synthesizes key concepts from platform ecosystem theory, emergent strategy, lean startup methodology, brand equity, cultural adaptation, and regulatory navigation. Situated within the broader context of the creator economy, the framework illustrates how elements such as visibility, algorithmic literacy, cross-cultural trust, platform affordances, and regulatory strategies interact to enable personal branding, audience engagement, and business development. These dynamics are particularly relevant for entrepreneurs operating on Western digital platforms within politically restricted environments. The model is designed to address the main research question and sub-questions related to strategic digital entrepreneurship under constraint in the age of platform-mediated content creation.

Strategic Business Development by Utilising Personal Brand in SMM

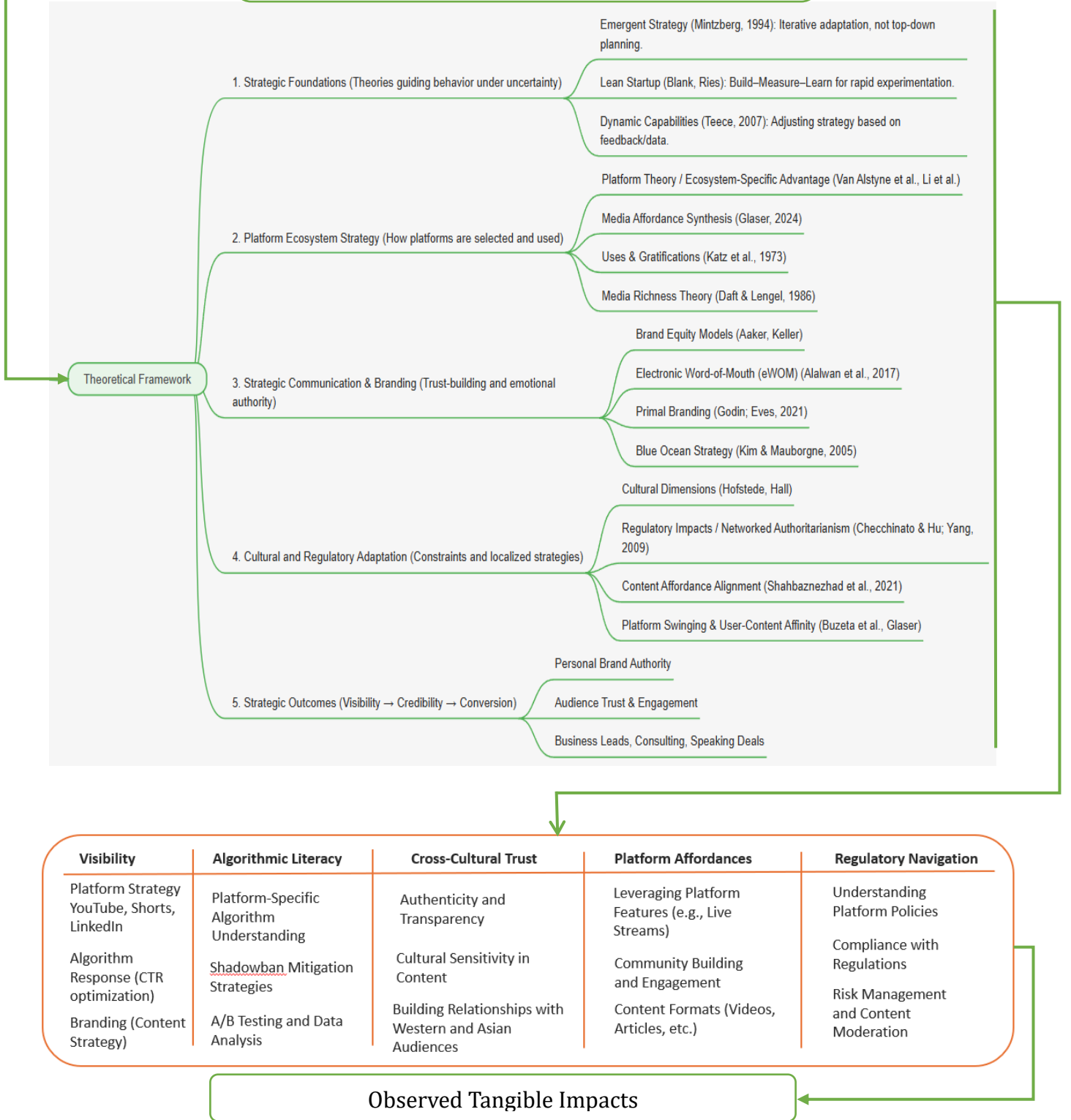


Figure 1 Integrated Strategic Framework for Personal Branding, The Case of Very Venture China (VVC)

3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to investigate how individual entrepreneurs strategically use Western digital platforms, such as YouTube, to build personal brands and drive business development in politically restricted digital environments. The study focuses on the “Very Venture China” (VVC) project, applying a hybrid ethnographic case study approach that integrates qualitative immersion with measurable performance analysis.

The methodology is structured using Saunders et al.’s (2023) Research Onion, which provides a systematic way to align philosophical assumptions, research approach, strategy, data collection, and analytical techniques. This model supports methodological coherence and transparency, guiding each layer of the research design in relation to the study’s aims and context (see Figure 2).

Given the exploratory nature of this study, an interpretivist paradigm was adopted, emphasizing the socially constructed meanings and lived experiences of the researcher as entrepreneur within a geopolitically sensitive digital environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013). This stance is well-suited for understanding the ‘how’ and ‘why’ behind strategic decision-making and adaptive behavior in cross-cultural, digitally mediated settings.

Ethnography was chosen for its strength in capturing cultural nuance and reflexive insight, while the case study lens provides a bounded focus on the VVC initiative as a single, strategic platform experiment (Yin, 2018; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The hybrid design enables both deep contextual interpretation and applied analysis.

The interpretivist and ethnographic orientation supports the use of abductive reasoning (Alvesson, 2003; Gehman et al., 2018), allowing for iterative theory-building informed by real-time platform data, journaling, and business interactions. This approach aligns with the emergent nature of the VVC project, where strategy evolved dynamically based on digital feedback and environmental constraints.

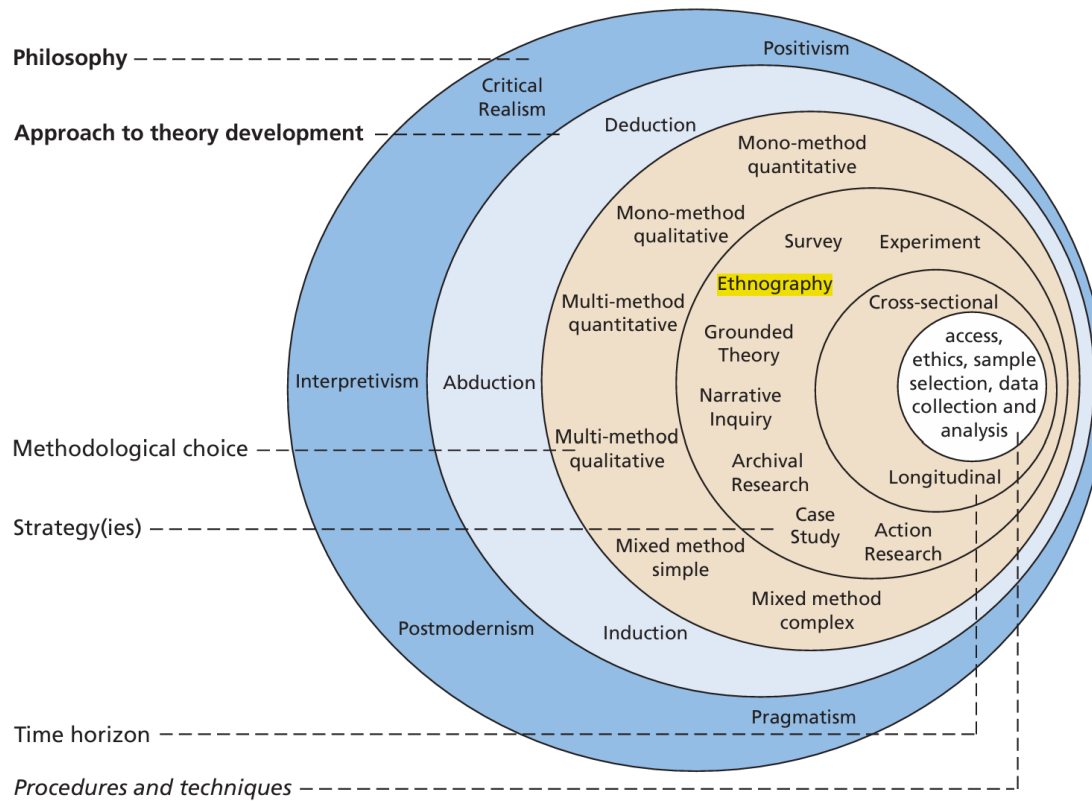


Figure 2 The research onion (Saunders et al., 2023).

Source: © 2022 Mark NK Saunders; developed from Saunders et al. 2019

This chapter presents the research methodology used to explore the central question: *How can individual entrepreneurs strategically use Western digital platforms to build personal brands and drive business development in politically restricted digital environments?* The research focuses on the Very Venture China (VVC) YouTube project, led and operated by the author, and draws on a hybrid ethnographic case study approach.

This chapter is structured as follows:

- 3.1** explains the research approach and philosophical orientation;
- 3.2** introduces the VVC project as the selected case;
- 3.3** describes the data collection methods;
- 3.4** outlines the data analysis process;

3.5 addresses trustworthiness and reflexivity;

3.6 presents the analytical framework used to evaluate strategic impact.

Each section builds upon the last, offering a transparent and coherent account of how the study was designed and executed.

3.1. Research Approach

This study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which posits that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the subjective meanings individuals assign to their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2013). This philosophical stance is particularly suited for this research, as it aims to uncover the nuanced strategies, perceptions, and adaptive responses of an entrepreneur navigating the complex cultural and geopolitical landscape of China while using a Western digital platform. Interpretivism allows for an in-depth exploration of the 'how' and 'why' behind the VVC project's strategic decisions and outcomes, prioritizing contextual understanding and lived experiences. The selection of this paradigm was guided by Saunders et al.'s (2023) "research onion" framework, which encourages a layered and coherent approach to methodological choices, starting from the philosophical assumptions that underpin the study.

The research employs a hybrid ethnographic case study (ECS) design. This approach synergistically combines the immersive, context-rich perspective of ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Pink et al., 2016) with the bounded, in-depth focus of case study research (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). Ethnography was essential for capturing the cultural nuances, the researcher's lived experience as the project founder, and the emergent nature of strategic decision-making within China's high power-distance cultural context and evolving digital constraints. The case study component provides a focused lens on the VVC project as a single, bounded system—specifically its YouTube platform strategy, its operation within China with European outreach, and its activities between April 2024 and February 2025. This hybrid design is further enriched by Liu's (2023) conceptualization of hybrid ethnography, emphasizing

multi-access, multi-positionality, and the integration of online and offline data to navigate complex research spaces.

An abductive reasoning approach underpins the analytical process, facilitating an iterative movement between empirical observations from the VVC project and existing theoretical frameworks (Gehman et al., 2018; Alvesson, 2003). This was particularly relevant given the emergent nature of the VVC strategy, where insights from practice (e.g., platform analytics, audience feedback) continually informed and reshaped the application of theories such as Lean Startup and emergent strategy. This iterative "systematic combining" allowed for the development of the most plausible explanations for observed phenomena within the VVC case. The research is qualitatively led, integrating quantitative data (e.g., YouTube analytics) primarily for triangulation and to substantiate qualitative insights (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

3.2. The Case Study: Very Venture China

The single, instrumental case purposefully selected for this study is the "Very Venture China" (VVC) YouTube project, founded and operated by the author. This case was chosen for several compelling reasons that align directly with the research objectives and ensure a rich, nuanced investigation.

Firstly, the VVC project offers theoretical relevance by embodying the core research themes: digital entrepreneurship under regulatory constraints, strategic platform experimentation, and cross-cultural brand building in a politically restricted environment (Checchinato & Hu, 2018; Lin, 2023). Its operation across Chinese and European digital spheres provides a unique context to study visibility and credibility creation under asymmetric conditions.

Secondly, the researcher's role as the founder provides insider access and immersion, a cornerstone of the ethnographic component (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This privileged position allowed for unparalleled access to internal strategic decision-making, real-time adaptations, and stakeholder interactions, yielding rich autoethnographic data.

Thirdly, the VVC case presents significant strategic and cultural complexity. Navigating YouTube from within China involves managing censorship, adapting to high-context communication norms (Yang, 2015), and engaging diverse stakeholders, making it a fertile ground for analyzing adaptive strategies. VVC's platform choices and messaging tactics exemplify the need for strategic hybridity in navigating digital authoritarianism while maintaining international relevance.

Fourthly, the project is a bounded and measurable case (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995), clearly defined by its primary platform (YouTube), geographical focus (China-based with European outreach), operational timeframe (April 2024–February 2025), and specific, measurable outcomes (e.g., subscriber growth, business leads). This boundedness facilitates focused analysis. Theory building from such a case is particularly appropriate when existing theory is limited or constructs are difficult to measure quantitatively (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

Finally, the VVC project directly contributes to answering the research questions by providing empirical data on platform strategy development, audience engagement, and tangible business outcomes. It serves as a "critical case" (Gibbert et al., 2008), offering potent insights into digital entrepreneurship and personal branding within the creator economy, particularly in geopolitically complex settings. Table 1 effectively demonstrates the coherence and deliberateness of the methodological strategy applied to VVC study.

Table 1 Methodology Justification Matrix.

Research Question/Sub-Question	Key Methodological Elements Employed	Primary Data Source(s) Utilized	Justification for Choice in Relation to RQ & Thesis Context
Main RQ: How can individual entrepreneurs strategically use Western digital platforms to build personal	Hybrid Ethnographic Case Study (ECS) of VVC; Interpretivist	All data sources (Participant Observation, Reflexive Journaling,	The ECS approach allows for deep, contextualized understanding of a complex, real-world phenomenon.

<p>brands and drive business development in politically restricted digital environments?</p>	<p>Paradigm; Abductive Reasoning; Triangulation of multiple data types and analytical techniques.</p>	<p>Platform Analytics, Audience Interaction Analysis, Business Documentation, Informal Interviews).</p>	<p>Interpretivism is suited for exploring subjective meanings and strategic sense-making. Abduction facilitates theory-data interplay. Triangulation enhances credibility for this multifaceted question.</p>
<p>Sub-RQ1: How did the Very Venture China (VVC) project develop a platform strategy on YouTube to build visibility</p>	<p>Ethnographic participant observation; Reflexive journaling; Platform analytics analysis; Thematic analysis of audience comments; Content analysis of VVC videos.</p>	<p>Researcher's field notes/journal; VVC YouTube channel content & backend analytics; Public YouTube comments on VVC videos.</p>	<p>This combination enables an in-depth, triangulated understanding of strategy development (captured through ethnography/journaling of the researcher's decisions), its manifestation (content analysis), its impact (platform analytics), and its reception (audience comments), all crucial for understanding how visibility/trust were built under restriction. The interpretivist lens is vital for capturing the nuanced, lived experience of this process.</p>
<p>Sub-RQ2: What specific business development opportunities and strategic</p>	<p>Business documentation review; Analysis of</p>	<p>Emails/messages from businesses; Formal</p>	<p>These methods directly capture the tangible outcomes of the VVC project. Business</p>

<p>partnerships emerged as a result of the VVC project's digital visibility and personal branding efforts?</p>	<p>informal inter-views/stakeholder feedback; Reflexive journaling on outreach and responses.</p>	<p>offers/proposals; Field notes from stakeholder interactions; Researcher's journal entries.</p>	<p>documentation provides concrete evidence of opportunities, while stakeholder feedback and journaling offer context on how these opportunities arose and were perceived, linking digital presence to real-world business development.</p>
<p>Sub-RQ3: What strategic lessons can entrepreneurs draw from the VVC case when planning platform-based brand building and business development in regulated digital markets?</p>	<p>Narrative construction of the VVC journey; Thematic analysis of strategic pivots and learnings from reflexive journal and field notes; Integration with theoretical frameworks (e.g., Lean Startup, Emergent Strategy).</p>	<p>Researcher's comprehensive journal and field notes; Synthesized findings from RQ1 & RQ2 analyses; Existing strategic management literature.</p>	<p>This reflective RQ requires synthesizing the entire VVC experience. Narrative construction allows for the articulation of the strategic journey, while thematic analysis of the researcher's documented learnings, cross-referenced with established theories, helps distill transferable strategic principles for entrepreneurs in similar contexts.</p>

3.3. Data Collection

A multi-method data collection strategy was employed to capture the multifaceted nature of the VVC project, ensuring depth and enabling triangulation (Yin, 2018).

The primary methods included:

1. **Participant Observation:** As the project founder, the researcher was deeply embedded in all aspects of VVC, from content ideation and production to SEO strategy and business outreach.

Objective: To gain firsthand, longitudinal insight into strategic decision-making, operational dynamics, and real-time adaptations.

Raw Data: Field notes documenting content planning, audience targeting, guest interactions, collaboration negotiations, and reactions to platform shifts.

Relevance to RQs: Provided granular understanding of how platform strategy (RQ1) was formed and adapted, and how professional relationships (RQ2) were negotiated.

2. **Reflexive Journaling:** The researcher maintained a detailed journal throughout the project.

Objective: To critically document evolving experiences, emotional responses, strategic reflections, and cultural learnings (Finlay, 2002).

Raw Data: Entries on decision rationales, cultural misalignments, audience perceptions, strategic dilemmas, and emotional impacts (e.g., shadowban, rejections), captured via Notion, Telegram, and handwritten notes.

Relevance to RQs: Enriched autoethnographic depth, revealing how internal sense-making shaped platform strategies (RQ1) and provided transferable insights for entrepreneurs (RQ3).

3. **Platform Analytics:** Quantitative data was systematically collected from YouTube Studio.

Objective: To quantitatively assess the impact of VVC's platform strategies on audience visibility and engagement.

Raw Data: Metrics such as impressions, click-through rates (CTR), watch time, average view duration, subscriber growth, traffic sources,

and engagement actions (likes, comments, shares), collected weekly and at critical intervention points.

Relevance to RQs: Provided empirical evidence for the effectiveness of visibility and trust-building strategies (RQ1) and correlated platform performance with business inquiries (RQ2).

4. **Audience Interaction Analysis:** Publicly available comments on VVC YouTube videos and direct messages were analyzed.

Objective: To understand audience engagement, perceived credibility, trust signals, and resonance with content and communication styles.

Raw Data: YouTube comments (coded for sentiment, feedback type, credibility cues), and direct messages via Telegram, WeChat, and email.

Relevance to RQs: Offered direct insights into how audiences perceived VVC's authority and trustworthiness (RQ1).

5. **Business Documentation:** Records of professional interactions resulting from VVC's visibility were collected.

Objective: To trace the tangible link between the VVC project's personal branding efforts and real-world business development outcomes.

Raw Data: Anonymized inbound emails, WeChat/Telegram messages, formal job/consulting offers (e.g., from Zhong Lun Law Firm, VNTR), and event invitations.

Relevance to RQs: Provided concrete evidence of business opportunities and partnerships (RQ2) emerging from digital visibility.

6. **Informal Interviews and Stakeholder Feedback:** Qualitative perspectives were gathered from internal collaborators and external stakeholders.

Objective: To obtain diverse feedback on VVC's perceived value, credibility, and professional quality, informing strategic evolution and academic interpretation.

Raw Data: Notes from verbal feedback during team meetings, voice messages, post-interview debriefs, and reactions from mentors and media contacts.

Relevance to RQs: Validated internal interpretations of strategic success (RQ1, RQ3) and demonstrated how credibility is co-constructed (RQ1).

This mixed-methods approach, while qualitatively led, allowed for robust triangulation by cross-referencing insights from diverse data sources.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was an iterative and multi-layered process, aligning with the interpretivist paradigm and the hybrid ECS design. Key techniques included:

1. **Thematic Analysis:** Applied to qualitative data (reflexive journals, audience comments, business documentation, stakeholder feedback) following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process: familiarization, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This helped identify recurring patterns related to credibility-building, algorithmic adaptation, cultural negotiation, and strategic iteration. The Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2012) further guided the inductive development of concepts, ensuring a transparent chain of evidence from informant-centric terms to researcher-centric themes. This approach was vital for understanding the emergent nature of VVC's platform strategy (RQ1) and deriving strategic lessons (RQ3).
2. **Content Analysis:** Conducted on VVC video materials and associated audience feedback. A structured coding frame was developed to evaluate

narrative elements, emotional appeal in titles, calls to action, localization efforts, and markers of trust in audience responses. This analysis helped explain how specific communication patterns contributed to platform engagement and trust-building (RQ1), particularly in a cross-cultural context.

3. **Platform Analytics Analysis:** Quantitative data from YouTube Studio (impressions, CTR, watch time, subscriber growth) were tracked and analyzed to assess the impact of strategic interventions (e.g., SEO optimization, Shorts implementation). This provided empirical validation for qualitative observations about strategy effectiveness (RQ1) and correlated platform performance with business outcomes (RQ2).
4. **Narrative Construction:** Autoethnographic insights were developed by reconstructing the VVC project's trajectory, focusing on key decisions, emotional turning points, and strategic adaptations (Langley et al., 2013). Drawing from reflexive journals and participant observation notes, this method provided rich context to platform metrics and illustrated how strategy emerged in response to lived experiences (RQ1, RQ3).
5. **Triangulation and Cross-Validation:** Findings from different data sources (qualitative and quantitative) were systematically cross-referenced to enhance interpretive reliability and internal consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). For instance, journaled reflections on a strategic shift were compared with subsequent platform analytics and audience comments. This process was crucial for validating the connections between platform strategies, audience perceptions, and business development outcomes (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3).
6. **Integration with Theoretical Frameworks:** Empirical findings were iteratively compared and contrasted with the theoretical concepts introduced in Chapter 2 (e.g., Emergent Strategy, Lean Startup, Dynamic Capabilities, cross-cultural communication theories). This abductive process allowed for a theoretically informed interpretation of the VVC case, explaining how micro-level entrepreneurial actions aligned with or challenged broader strategic

and platform dynamics, thus enriching the study's theoretical contributions (RQ1, RQ3).

A multi-criteria analytical framework, developed during the study, was also used to structure the analysis of strategic channel improvements, matching interventions (e.g., content optimization, SEO) with performance metrics to evaluate their effectiveness. This systematic approach ensured that data analysis was not only descriptive but also evaluative, directly informing the strategic lessons derived from the VVC project.

3.5. The Assessment of the Quality of the Data

Ensuring the quality and trustworthiness of the research findings was paramount, particularly given the researcher's dual role and the study's interpretivist nature. This was addressed through a commitment to reflexivity, rigorous application of trustworthiness criteria, and adherence to ethical principles.

Trustworthiness: The study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework to establish trustworthiness. This framework was further followed by the practical guidance of Nowell et al. (2017), who demonstrated how each of Lincoln and Guba's four criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—can be effectively addressed in thematic analysis through careful coding, documentation, and reflexivity practices.:

Credibility: Achieved through prolonged engagement (over nine months in the VVC project), persistent observation, triangulation of multiple data sources (journal entries, analytics, business documentation, audience feedback), and informal member checks with collaborators and stakeholders to validate interpretations.

Transferability: While statistical generalization is not the aim of a single case study, analytical generalization (Yin, 2009, 2018) is supported by providing "thick descriptions" of the VVC project's context, strategic

processes, and outcomes. This allows readers to assess the potential applicability of findings to other settings.

Dependability: Maintained by creating a detailed audit trail, including a research log documenting data sources, methodological decisions, and analytical steps. This transparency allows for the research process to be scrutinised.

Confirmability: Ensured through reflexive journaling, which documented the researcher's assumptions and decision-making processes, and by seeking feedback from project collaborators, which provided external perspectives on interpretations. The clear link between data and interpretation, supported by evidence in appendices, further bolsters confirmability.

Reflexivity and Positionality: The researcher's dual role as the founder of VVC and the academic investigator was actively managed.

Reflexivity (Finlay, 2002) was practiced through continuous self-examination via journaling, noting personal biases, emotional responses to project events (e.g., successes, rejections, the YouTube shadowban), and their potential influence on data interpretation.

Positionality as an "insider-outsider" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) offered unique access but also necessitated strategies to mitigate bias. These included triangulation of data, peer debriefing with project collaborators who could challenge assumptions, and a conscious effort to separate entrepreneurial aspirations from academic analysis. Crucially, this study aligns with Brannick and Coghlan's (2007) argument that insider research, when conducted with methodological rigor and transparency, offers unique epistemological advantages. Rather than viewing embeddedness as a liability, they advocate for recognizing the potential of native researchers to produce context-rich, practice-informed insights. In this vein, the researcher's position was viewed as a source of depth and relevance, while reflexive tools and collaborative checks were applied to ensure analytical integrity.

Ethical Considerations: The research adhered to stringent ethical guidelines (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001; Creswell, 2013) :

- **Informed Consent:** Obtained verbally or in writing from all participants (interviewees, collaborators), who were informed of the research's academic nature and their right to withdraw.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Ensured by anonymizing personal names and company affiliations where necessary, especially given the politically sensitive context of China. Data was presented in aggregated or redacted forms to protect identities.
- **Dual Role Transparency:** The researcher's dual role was disclosed to all participants to maintain honesty and avoid power imbalances.
- **Cultural and Regulatory Compliance:** Content and interactions were managed with sensitivity to Chinese cultural norms and regulatory restrictions, avoiding politically charged topics that could endanger participants.
- **Ethical Use of Public Online Data:** When analyzing public YouTube comments, consideration was given to users' potential expectations of privacy. While attribution is sometimes appropriate for content creators (Evans, 2020) , comments were generally analyzed thematically, and direct quotes were used judiciously and anonymized where any potential for identification or sensitivity existed, aligning with guidelines on reusing public social media data (LSE, 2025). The study acknowledged that platforms themselves are not neutral actors but shape interactions and visibility (van Dijck, 2013).

By addressing these aspects, the study aimed to produce findings that are not only insightful but also credible, dependable, and ethically sound, reflecting a rigorous engagement with the complexities of qualitative and autoethnographic research in a challenging digital environment.

3.6. Analytical Framework

To structure the analysis of strategic improvements made to the *Very Venture China* (VVC) YouTube channel, a multi-criteria evaluation framework was developed (see Figure 3). Each criterion reflects a targeted area for improvement aligned with platform growth and revenue objectives. Corresponding methodologies were applied to implement changes, and the outcomes were tracked through specific performance metrics. This framework enables a structured, comparative evaluation of what actions were most effective in improving the channel's key performance indicators (KPIs).

The model builds on the premise that performance enhancement in digital channels often requires multifaceted interventions. Therefore, each criterion within the framework represents a distinct strategic direction—such as content optimization, SEO, engagement tactics, or platform diversification—matched with a dedicated methodology. By isolating and analyzing the outcomes from each intervention, the framework allows for a clear understanding of what strategies were most impactful under the contextual constraints of the project.

This framework also incorporates elements of active categorization (Grodal, Anteby, & Holm, 2021), in which data points are not treated as fixed codes, but as evolving interpretations that interact with the researcher's understanding of strategic outcomes. Each criterion reflects a theoretically informed decision point, shaped by both observed patterns and conceptual refinement. In this sense, the multi-criteria model is not just an operational tool, but also a mechanism for iterative theory development in line with qualitative rigor.

This analytical structure not only supports rigorous examination of actions taken during the VVC initiative but also offers a replicable model for other entrepreneurs operating in similarly regulated or competitive environments.

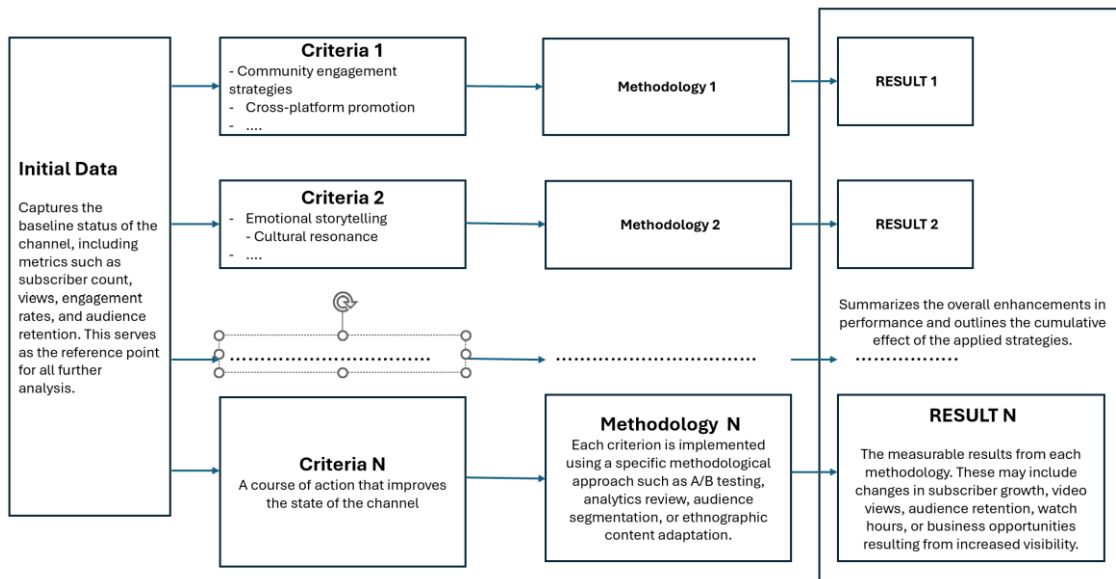


Figure 3 Multi-Criteria Analytical Framework for Strategic Channel Development

While the overall research approach remains ethnographic and case-driven, the following section introduces an analytical framework that complements this by providing a structured, criteria-based assessment of the strategic actions undertaken during the project.

The following chapter presents the results and findings derived from applying this framework to the VVC project. It details the channel's initial state, the strategic criteria and methodologies implemented, and the outcomes observed in terms of visibility, engagement, and business opportunities. Through both quantitative performance data and qualitative insights, Chapter 4 offers a comprehensive view of the project's evolution and strategic impact.

4 Results and Finding

This chapter presents the findings from the *Very Venture China (VVC)* case study, based on the hybrid ethnographic case study methodology introduced in Chapter 3. The goal is to provide evidence-based answers to the central research question: “*How can individual entrepreneurs strategically use Western digital platforms to build personal brands and drive business development in politically restricted digital environments?*”

The discussion is structured around two primary sub-research questions and one reflective sub-question:

- **Sub-RQ1** focuses on how the VVC project developed platform strategies to achieve visibility, audience engagement, and credibility under digital and cultural restrictions.
- **Sub-RQ2** investigates the real-world business opportunities and strategic partnerships that resulted from the VVC channel's digital visibility and perceived expertise.
- **Sub-RQ3** is reflective in nature, aiming to extract broader strategic lessons that may be useful for entrepreneurs operating in similarly constrained environments.

The findings are based on a combination of YouTube platform analytics, comment analysis, reflexive field notes, video content review, and business documentation. All data were thematically analyzed and triangulated to ensure validity and depth.

Firstly, the chapter presents findings related to digital visibility, credibility, and engagement strategies (Sub-RQ1). Secondly, it explores the concrete business development outcomes linked to the platform's growth and positioning (Sub-RQ2). Thirdly, the chapter reflects on transferable insights and patterns that may inform future platform-based entrepreneurial strategies (Sub-RQ3). Finally, a dedicated case

example illustrates the strategic intervention process that applied the research insights in a practical, iterative manner.

4.1 Overview of Data Sources and Analysis Process

This chapter presents the key findings from the *Very Venture China (VVC)* project, aligned with the three sub-research questions introduced in Chapter 1. The results are organized thematically and supported by both qualitative and quantitative data, gathered and analyzed using the hybrid ethnographic case study methodology outlined in Chapter 3.

The analysis is based on six core data sources:

1. YouTube platform analytics, including impressions, click-through rate (CTR), watch time, and subscriber growth;
2. Reflexive field notes and journaling, documenting strategic shifts, cultural observations, and emotional turning points;
3. Audience comments and feedback, used to identify patterns of credibility, trust, and engagement;
4. Video content and presentation analysis, including visual design, titling, and storytelling approaches;
5. Business interaction records, such as consulting invitations, partnership negotiations, and job offers (e.g., VNTR, Zhong Lun Law Firm, Aston Swiss, Timosha);
6. Stakeholder interviews and collaborator feedback, offering external validation of perceived channel value and credibility.

The findings are structured around the following research questions:

RQ1 explores how the VVC platform strategy was developed on YouTube to build visibility and trust in a constrained digital landscape.

RQ2 identifies the real-world business opportunities that emerged from the project's visibility and perceived expert status.

RQ3 distills the project's journey into actionable strategic lessons for entrepreneurs navigating regulated digital markets.

Throughout the chapter, data is presented as descriptive analytics, thematic excerpts, and narrative insight, supported by direct reflections from the researcher's autoethnographic journal. Where appropriate, platform metrics are visualized, and key patterns are triangulated with user comments or stakeholder responses.

This chapter does not offer interpretation or theoretical synthesis — that is reserved for Chapter 5 (Discussion). Rather, it presents the core empirical and experiential results that form the evidence base for subsequent analysis.

The next section (4.2) presents findings related to RQ1, beginning with an examination of VVC's visibility-building strategies, content performance patterns, and audience trust signals under digital restrictions.

4.2 Findings Related to Sub-RQ1

Sub-RQ1: *How did the Very Venture China (VVC) project develop a platform strategy on YouTube to build visibility, expert status, and audience trust despite digital restrictions in China?*

Visibility-Building Strategies

Theme: Strategic Use of Platform Features

To gain algorithmic exposure and organic traffic within YouTube's search and recommendation system, the VVC project relied heavily on tactical video optimization, informed by best practices and in-field experimentation.

Key tactics included:

- Emotionally charged video titles, often personal or provocative (e.g., “I wanted to go home after a week in China”) which generated up to 6,000 views per episode (VVC 4th episode, 2024).
- Descriptive tagging and keyword-rich descriptions, aligned with SEO best practices (VivIQ).
- YouTube Shorts, published in sets of 3–5 per long-form video, used to activate discovery features and reach wider audiences.
- Thumbnail improvements, including facial close-ups, contrast, and clear text overlays.

These tactics were refined over time using YouTube Studio insights, trial-and-error testing, and referencing trending content within the travel/business niche.

“Once we began pairing emotional headlines with culturally rich scenes, we saw organic spikes without relying on paid promotion.” — Field note, July 2024

External Content Audit: Insights into Visibility Challenges

To complement the internal platform analytics and field observations, an independent content audit was conducted by two external digital content specialists. The audit focused on a selection of VVC long-form episodes to assess structural, visual, and narrative effectiveness from an audience-centric perspective. The goal was to identify specific content-level factors that might be limiting visibility and viewer retention despite strong titles and platform optimization.

Identified Visibility Barriers

Five recurring patterns were identified as potential constraints to platform discoverability and user engagement:

1. Lack of Effective Preview Frames and Context Matching

Many videos opened with generic or visually disconnected frames (e.g., an

unknown man with no visual clues about China), which failed to support the emotional titles and undermined immediate viewer interest.

2. **Weak Introductory Hooks**

The first 10–20 seconds lacked a compelling reason to continue watching. The audit emphasized the absence of a clear “promise” or value proposition early in the video—a critical component in retaining algorithmically-driven audiences.

3. **Suboptimal Thumbnail Design**

Existing thumbnails were described as “flat,” with poor text readability, minimal emotional expression, and inconsistent branding. The audit recommended systematic A/B testing of alternative thumbnail styles: minimalist design, emotional faces, and curiosity-driven clickbait formats.

4. **Insufficient Use of Visual Infographics and Data Anchors**

Videos that included data comparisons, infographics, or maps showed higher engagement in retention graphs. The audit confirmed that viewers in the business niche expect structured insights alongside narrative elements.

5. **Title–Content Disconnect (CTR Betrayal)**

Several titles promised outcomes (e.g., IPO strategies or factory scaling tactics) that were not directly addressed in the content. This mismatch led to early drop-off and a potential loss of trust, negatively affecting the algorithmic reach over time.

Strategic Implications

The audit findings validated the hypothesis that visibility is not only algorithm-dependent but also content-structure sensitive. Even with SEO-optimized titles and external media amplification, poorly designed intros and visual elements can reduce the likelihood of sustained engagement. This supports the decision to experiment with new editing templates, intro formats, and thumbnail prototypes in subsequent content iterations.

“Without emotional clarity and visual purpose in the first 10 seconds, viewers bounce—even if the topic is strong. YouTube is a thumbnail economy.” — External Auditor Feedback

These insights were later applied in the second YouTube channel project (Dennis Richard Investments), which adopted a Shorts-first structure, tighter intros, and emotionally optimized thumbnails—leading to over 250,000 views in its first two months.

Theme: Press-Driven SEO Amplification

In addition to native YouTube strategies, each long-form video was accompanied by up to seven press releases or online news articles. These were published on external sites such as Washington, Asian Morning and Stankevicius.co, improving the video’s backlink profile and raising its visibility in Google Search.

This hybrid content strategy — blending internal (YouTube) and external (news media) SEO — created a form of multi-platform discoverability that helped bypass regional digital constraints.

Theme: Outcome — Visibility Metrics Over Time

Table 2 Visibility Metrics.

Period	Monthly Views	Monthly Impressions	CTR	Watch Time (Hours)
April 2024 (launch)	56	~5,000	~5%	0.07
October 2024 (peak)	26,941	~250,000	8%	601.06
February 2025 (post-shadowban)	1,792	~30,000	3–4%	52.02

This shows a substantial visibility spike following sustained optimization efforts. However, visibility dropped sharply after the shadowban incident in November 2024, when the channel was algorithmically suppressed for U.S.-based users.

Reflection

These strategies proved effective in creating visibility, despite limited resources and platform-level restrictions. However, they also demonstrated the fragility of growth on algorithmic platforms, where geopolitical dynamics or policy shifts can neutralize visibility gains overnight.

“We learned that visibility isn’t just about uploading — it’s about managing timing, titling, thumbnails, and distribution like a business campaign.” — Reflexive Journal, October 2024

Building Audience Trust and Credibility

While visibility attracted new viewers, sustaining growth required building credibility and audience trust. In the context of politically restricted environments, trust was not only algorithmic but human — developed through narrative authenticity, social proof, cultural fluency, and content consistency.

Theme: Storytelling as Credibility-Building

One of the core strategies used in the VVC project was narrative positioning: Dennis, as the host, regularly framed his experiences as a foreign entrepreneur trying to understand and navigate China. Rather than presenting himself as an authority, he used humility, curiosity, and personal storytelling to invite the audience into his learning journey.

Key storytelling patterns included:

- Using “outsider learning” narratives (e.g., “How I was wrong about Chinese business”) to build empathy.

- Structuring episodes around discovery and first-time experiences, making the audience part of the journey.
- Including visible emotional reactions, vulnerability, or self-doubt to foster relatability.

“I think people don’t just want information about China. They want to see someone like them navigating it.” — Reflexive Journal, August 2024

This storytelling approach built perceived authenticity, which is often a stronger driver of trust than technical expertise, especially in cross-cultural digital branding (Karp, 2024; Morning, 2024; Checchinato & Hu, 2018).

Theme: Cross-Cultural Credibility Cues

Operating across Chinese and Western cultural boundaries required adapting credibility signals. In the Chinese context, interviewees often expected signs of status and formality, whereas the global YouTube audience preferred spontaneity and informality.

To balance both:

- Visual professionalism (studio lighting, high production value) was used to satisfy expectations of authority.
- Conversational tone, humor, and occasional casual settings (e.g., street interviews, tea houses) preserved approachability.
- The channel also leveraged visible networks (e.g., references to Chambers of Commerce, international guests) to increase perceived legitimacy.

Theme: Audience Feedback as a Mirror

Analysis of 50+ long-format video comment sections revealed:

- Frequent praise for transparency (“Thanks for showing the real side of rural China”)

- Curiosity-driven engagement (“Where did you meet this guest?” or “Can you cover AI companies next?”)
- Gratitude for non-political, business-focused storytelling (“Finally a channel that talks about China without propaganda”)

Positive sentiment was especially concentrated on videos that included:

- Unscripted moments
- Personal transformation arcs
- Cross-cultural comparisons

These insights confirmed that credibility was built less through technical claims and more through perceived honesty and relational connection. This echoes Jorge et al. (2018), who found that teen audiences interpret influencer content through ongoing negotiation of perceived authenticity, especially when commercial or strategic elements are subtly embedded. Such dynamics are relevant to the VVC project, where content strategy balanced honest storytelling with strategic positioning to maintain audience trust and engagement.

Outcome: Engagement Metrics

Table 3 Audience Engagement Metrics.

Metric	Value (Peak Month: October 2024)
Average comments per video	25–35
Average watch duration (minutes)	1.20–2.26
Positive sentiment (manual coding of comment samples)	~85%

“The first time someone from a government-affiliated incubator commented positively, I realized we were building not just views, but influence.” — Field note, September 2024

Reflection

Trust was not built through declarations of expertise but through consistency, cultural humility, and storytelling. By crafting a persona that was both competent and coachable, VVC established a credible digital voice across geographic and ideological divides.

“Credibility isn’t about proving you’re right — it’s about proving you’re real.” — Reflexive Journal, October 2024

4.3 Findings Related to Sub-RQ2

Sub-RQ2: *What specific business development opportunities and strategic partnerships emerged as a result of the VVC project’s digital visibility and personal branding efforts?*

While visibility and engagement formed the foundation, it was perceived expertise and cross-cultural credibility that translated VVC’s media presence into tangible business opportunities. These ranged from consulting offers to partnership invitations, reflecting the project’s growing influence in cross-border business circles. Similar findings were observed by Corben et al. (2015), who note that successful venture capital attraction in Hangzhou hinged on trust-building, credibility signaling, and clear value proposition articulation—principles mirrored in the VVC project’s inbound opportunities.

Theme: Inbound Consulting and Speaking Requests

Starting in **Q3 2024**, the VVC platform began receiving inbound messages via LinkedIn, WeChat, and YouTube from individuals and companies interested in:

- Strategic insights into doing business in China
- Help navigating cross-cultural communication
- Collaboration on content, branding, or market entry

“After your Shenzhen tech episode, we’d like to speak with you about working on our European outreach strategy.” — LinkedIn Message, October 2024

Examples of responses included:

VNTR (Portugal): Contacted Dennis after an AI-focused VVC episode and initiated a collaboration proposal for speaking and consulting on China-Europe market integration.

Zhong Lun Law Firm (China): Reached out via WeChat after multiple business guests shared their VVC episodes. Dennis was offered a position as a client service manager for their international department (EU/RU markets).

Timosha (Russia): A Russian importer of Chinese medical and beauty equipment requested branding support and product marketing exposure following a VVC episode on e-commerce and logistics.

Aston Swiss (Switzerland): An Agrotech company invited Dennis to join a cross-border project team exploring Sino-European investment trends in agriculture.

These opportunities were not formally solicited but emerged from the perceived expertise demonstrated through the channel’s visual, narrative, and cross-platform reach.

Theme: Use of Platform as Proof of Concept

The VVC project functioned as a living portfolio, replacing the need for static CVs or formal credentials in many conversations.

- Prospective partners cited specific episodes or storytelling formats as justification for collaboration.

- Dennis’s host role and multilingual presence (e.g., in English, Russian, Finnish) demonstrated both technical knowledge and cultural adaptability.
- The fact that VVC operated in China, with interviews conducted locally, offered strong contextual credibility that traditional resumes could not match.

“This channel is basically your pitch deck to the world.” — Comment from LinkedIn business mentor, November 2024

Theme: Business Network Expansion Through Content

Beyond direct business offers, the project also generated:

- Warm introductions via Chambers of Commerce, alumni groups, and online expat communities
- Increased invitation rates to business accelerators, pitch events, and panel discussions
- Credibility transfer from featured guests to the host — i.e., the reputation of VVC’s guests increased perceived legitimacy of the brand

“After featuring speakers from IoT Gizwits, Professors from Jinan, VC firms visits, RONGO Energy, Tencent, and legal firm, we began to see a pattern: people judged us not only by what we said, but by who we were talking to.” — Reflexive Journal, October 2024

Outcome Summary

Table 4 Business Development Opportunities Emerging from the VVC Project.

Business Entity	Country	Opportunity Type	Channel of Contact
VNTR	Portugal	Speaking and market strategy consulting	LinkedIn;Telegramm

Business Entity	Country	Opportunity Type	Channel of Contact
Zhong Lun Law Firm	China	Client Service Manager role	WeChat
Timosha	Russia	Product marketing and consulting	Email / LinkedIn
Aston Swiss	Switzerland	Cross-border investment project (Agrotech)	YouTube / LinkedIn

Reflection

The project’s digital footprint became a business asset, blurring the lines between personal brand, content platform, and professional service. Visibility and credibility weren’t ends in themselves—they became leverage points for cross-border market entry and collaborative opportunities.

“Without even pitching, I was pitching. The content was doing the work of a proposal, a CV, and a case study all in one.” — Reflexive Journal, November 2024

4.4 Findings Related to Sub-RQ3

Sub-RQ3: *What strategic lessons can entrepreneurs draw from the VVC case when planning platform-based brand building and business development in regulated digital markets?*

As a reflective component of the research, this section distills insights from the VVC project into a practical framework. The goal is to provide actionable guidance to other digital entrepreneurs operating in politically restricted or culturally complex markets, especially those using Western platforms (e.g., YouTube) to build personal brands across borders.

Theme: Strategic Framework Emerged from Practice

Based on recurring patterns in journal reflections, analytics cycles, and outreach outcomes, five core strategic principles emerged:

1. Start with Visibility, Then Build Trust

Lesson: Treat visibility as the first threshold. Without impressions, there is no opportunity to earn trust.

Tactics: Use emotional titling, Shorts, and consistent publishing to “warm the algorithm.”

VVC Evidence: Peak visibility preceded business offers (e.g., October 2024's growth surge).

“You can’t build trust with people who never find you. Visibility is the gateway to credibility.” — Reflexive Journal

2. Use Storytelling to Humanize the Brand

Lesson: Personal storytelling outperforms fact delivery in high-context markets.

Tactics: Frame episodes as learning journeys, not lectures; allow space for vulnerability.

VVC Evidence: Most engaging comments were on unscripted, emotionally charged narratives.

“People want to learn from you—but only if they feel they’re learning *with* you.”

3. Leverage the Platform as a Proof-of-Work Portfolio

Lesson: Your channel is your living resume, pitch deck, and case study.

Tactics: Ensure every piece of content reflects quality, voice, and clarity of values.

VVC Evidence: Job offers and speaking invitations referenced specific VVC episodes as validation.

“I didn’t need to send a CV. I sent a playlist.”

4. Expect Friction — Build Strategically Within Constraints

Lesson: Restricted environments require indirect strategy.

Tactics: Avoid sensitive topics, use cross-border SEO (e.g., news sites), build external credibility first.

VVC Evidence: Initial rejections (80+ interview refusals) were overcome through social proof, patience, and adaptation.

“When you’re in a system that doesn’t show your content, you need another system that does.”

5. Design for Pivot and Transferability

Lesson: A successful platform strategy is not static — it must evolve with market response.

Tactics: Test multiple content formats; be ready to relaunch or repackage knowledge.

VVC Evidence: The strategic lessons from VVC were transferred to the second YouTube channel “Dennis Richard Investments”, launched in March 2025. That channel surpassed 250,000+ views within two months, validating the new format (Shorts-first, broader topics, trend-driven storytelling).

“The first channel was the lab. The second channel was the product.”

Summary Framework for Platform-Based Strategy in Restricted Markets

Table 5 Strategic Stages and Tools.

Stage	Strategic Focus	Key Tools
1. Visibility	Algorithm warming	Shorts, SEO, Emotional Titles
2. Engagement	Trust-building through story	Authenticity, Cultural Adaptation
3. Conversion	Social proof & inbound interest	Guest credibility, outreach validation
4. Expansion	Transferring insights	Channel 2 relaunch, broader monetization

Reflection

The VVC case illustrates that digital entrepreneurship is not only technical, but cultural and geopolitical. Building a personal brand in a restricted environment is not about hacking an algorithm — it is about strategically navigating social norms, visibility rules, and global perception.

“What began as a visibility experiment became a lesson in diplomacy, communication, and cross-cultural trust.”

4.5 Strategic Intervention Case – VVC Optimization in Practice

To demonstrate the practical application of the hybrid ethnographic case study methodology, this section presents a focused intervention within the Very Venture China (VVC) project: the strategic optimization of the channel’s performance. The intervention aimed to increase subscriber growth, audience engagement, and content visibility—key indicators of platform success in the context of entrepreneurial personal branding.

This section showcases how ethnographic insights, real-time experimentation, and performance data were combined to inform iterative strategy and decision-making. It serves as a concrete example of how the methods described earlier contributed to addressing research questions.

Step 1: Establishing Key Performance Criteria

Informed by platform studies (Morning, 2024; Oxford Economics, 2021, 2022, 2023a,b; Checchinato & Hu, 2018; Cusumano et al., 2019), three core performance areas were selected:

Subscriber Growth – measured monthly

Audience Engagement – assessed via watch time, likes, comments

Content Visibility – tracked through impressions and click-through rates (CTR)

These metrics aligned with YouTube’s discovery algorithm and were used to evaluate the effectiveness of strategic interventions.

Step 2: Baseline Assessment and Constraints

The VVC channel launched on April 18, 2024. By February 28, 2025, it had reached:

- 1,253 subscribers
- 87,543 views
- 2,078.6 watch hours
- 876,866 impressions

However, performance was uneven. The highest spike occurred in October 2024, with:

- 771 new subscribers
- 601.06 watch hours

- 26,941 views

Key limitations included:

- A €25,000 total project budget, covering equipment, part-time staff, editing, and travel
- A lean team (interviewer, editor, project manager, translator, production lead, trainee)
- A platform-level shadowban in November 2024 during the U.S. presidential election, drastically reducing U.S. visibility and subscriber growth

These constraints influenced all optimization decisions.

Step 3: Strategic Intervention Design

Grounded in prior analytics, field observations, and stakeholder feedback, the following interventions were implemented:

SEO Optimization: Strategic titling (e.g., emotional hooks), improved descriptions, and consistent hashtags

YouTube Shorts: Publishing 3–5 short vertical videos per long-form episode

Cross-platform Distribution: Sharing content via LinkedIn, WeChat, and email (while avoiding TikTok, Instagram, Bilibili due to resource constraints)

External SEO Articles: Publishing over 7 media features per episode on platforms like *Washington Morning*, *Economic World*, *Asia Morning* and *Stankevicius.co*

Visual Improvements: Use of thumbnails, timestamps, and local language subtitles

These were informed by reflexive field notes, conversations with team members, and pattern recognition from high-performing content.

Step 4: Results and Impact

Table 6 Performance Metrics of the VVC.

Metric	Baseline 04.2024	Peak 10.2024	(October Post-shadowban (Feb 2025))
Subscribers	13	1,003 total	1,253 total
Watch Time	0.07 hrs	601.06 hrs	52.02 hrs
Average Views per Video	56	~5,000	~200
Impressions (monthly)	~5,000	~250,000	Cumulative: 876,866
CTR	~5%	8%	3–4%

These results reflect both the **short-term success** of the strategy and the **vulnerability** of platform-driven projects to external algorithmic and geopolitical forces. Strategic platform actions resulted in measurable business outcomes, including increased monetization potential. Perry (2016) validates these findings, emphasizing that consistent and strategic brand management on YouTube significantly enhances monetization and long-term audience retention.

Step 5: Ethnographic Learning and Adaptation

Beyond the numbers, the performance optimization process generated critical ethnographic insight:

Cultural Communication: Success required adapting the interview approaching compliments, local social norms, and informal trust-building—to overcome the high rejection rate (80+ declined interviews).

Iterative Learning: The initial hypothesis that long-form videos alone would drive engagement was revised; Shorts proved more effective for algorithm exposure.

Emotional Reflexivity: Moments of demotivation (e.g., shadowban, rejection) were documented and analyzed, shaping later decisions on channel structure and outreach tone.

Methodological Integration

This intervention exemplifies the **integration of methods** outlined in previous sections:

Participant observation informed how strategies were executed

Platform analytics confirmed the outcomes of specific changes

Reflexive journaling helped adapt to cultural norms and algorithm shifts

Triangulation connected internal decisions with audience behavior and business responses

Together, these illustrate how a hybrid ethnographic case study can be used not just to document outcomes, but to **guide and improve real-world strategy** in complex environments.

4.6 Summary of the findings and revised theoretical framework

In this section, the most relevant empirical findings are summarized in light of the study's main research question and sub-questions. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how individual entrepreneurs can strategically use Western digital platforms to build personal brands and drive business development in politically restricted environments.

Social Media Platform Strategy and Engagement

The case of Very Venture China (VVC) demonstrates that in politically regulated digital markets, visibility must be intentionally designed, and credibility must be gradually earned through storytelling, transparency, and adaptive communication.

Regarding social media features, both short-form content (e.g., YouTube Shorts) and emotionally resonant long-form episodes proved to be highly effective in gaining algorithmic traction and initiating audience engagement.

The case project employed a platform strategy that combined data-driven experimentation with reflexive learning, illustrating the value of flexibility and responsiveness in volatile digital environments. Specifically, the strategic use of:

Emotional titling and authentic storytelling

Localized, culturally sensitive messaging

Multi-platform SEO amplification (external press articles)

allowed the project to generate visibility and credibility across geographically and ideologically fragmented audiences.

Business Development through Digital Credibility

Digital visibility alone was insufficient to produce tangible outcomes. Instead, what transformed content into opportunity was perceived expertise, built through consistency, presentation quality, guest reputation, and linguistic/cultural fluency. The channel's ability to create trust with both viewers and stakeholders translated into several real-world business development opportunities, including:

- Job offers from multinational legal firms (e.g., Zhong Lun Law Firm)
- Consulting partnerships (e.g., VNTR, Aston Swiss)
- Product marketing collaborations (e.g., Timosha)

This confirms the theoretical proposition that personal branding on social media platforms acts as a credibility amplifier, when supported by platform literacy and audience alignment (Edmiston, 2019; Checchinato & Hu, 2018; Cusumano et al., 2019). Perry (2016) reinforces this insight, showing that monetization on YouTube is strongly linked to brand consistency, visual style, and strategic content alignment—factors that directly influenced the VVC project's approach.

Strategic Lessons and Emergent Framework

The reflective analysis in Sub-RQ3 allowed for the development of a revised strategic framework for entrepreneurs operating in restricted digital environments. This framework includes five key phases:

Phase	Strategic Focus
1. Visibility	Algorithm warming through Shorts, SEO, and titling
2. Engagement	Humanized storytelling and audience interactivity
3. Trust-building	Guest credibility, visual consistency, narrative
4. Conversion	Inbound outreach, platform-to-business transfer
5. Replication	Testing findings in new channels/contexts

The final phase—replication and transferability—is already being tested in Dennis Tuominen’s second YouTube channel “Dennis Richard Investments”, launched in March 2025, which achieved over 250,000 views in two months (Appendix 14). This channel adopted a Shorts-first strategy, broader content scope, and improved production workflows, validating many of the insights generated through the VVC case.

Observed Risks and Constraints

The study also uncovered common threats in platform-based brand building within restricted environments:

Algorithmic instability (e.g., shadowban during U.S. elections)

Cultural misalignment with interviewees or local audiences

Limited access to paid promotion tools due to geographic or policy restrictions

Emotional exhaustion and burnout tied to rejection and unpredictable platform performance

These findings support a revised view of digital entrepreneurship as not only a strategic activity, but also a psychological and adaptive journey, especially when conducted from politically complex environments.

The platform architecture of YouTube structures user agency in subtle yet powerful ways. As van Dijck (2013) observes, social media platforms guide user behavior through interface design and algorithmic incentives, effectively shaping what types of content are likely to succeed. While creators may perceive themselves as autonomous agents, their strategic decisions—ranging from video length to thumbnail design—are often responses to opaque algorithmic expectations. The VVC project exhibited this tension, particularly in the post-shadowban phase, where alterations in content delivery were necessitated by the system’s invisible recalibration of “preferred” formats and themes.

The theoretical–empirical alignment of the study is further illustrated in Figure 4, which maps the core findings of the VVC case to their corresponding theoretical foundations introduced in Chapter 2. It serves as a conceptual basis for interpreting the VVC case findings and demonstrating their contribution to the broader academic discourse.

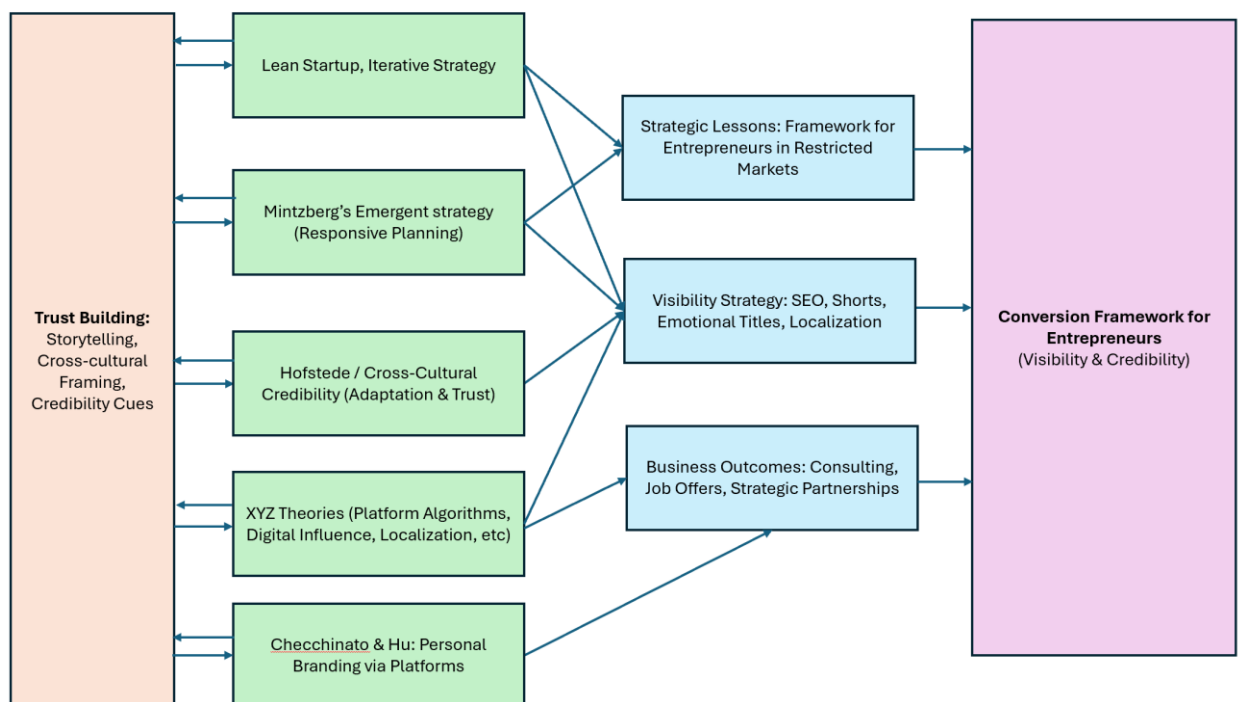


Figure 4 The diagram highlights how each set of findings, visibility strategies, trust-building, business outcomes, and strategic lessons—is supported by relevant theoretical models.

The results presented across all research questions are reflected in—and reinforced by—the strategic optimization intervention summarized above. This practical implementation of iterative experimentation and reflexive learning will now be synthesized in Chapter 5, which interprets the findings through theoretical frameworks and broader implications.

5 Discussion and Conclusions

At this stage of the thesis, the research journey has progressed through clarifying the topic, presenting the research objectives, reviewing relevant theoretical frameworks, and conducting empirical analysis through a hybrid ethnographic case study. The purpose of this thesis was to examine and critically analyze the opportunities and challenges faced by individual entrepreneurs when using Western digital platforms to build personal brands and pursue business development in politically restricted environments. Regulatory barriers such as geo-blocking have had a tangible effect on the project's digital visibility, particularly in restricted markets like China or Russia (Dearing, 2023).

This chapter interprets the findings in light of the central research question: "How can individual entrepreneurs strategically use Western digital platforms to build personal brands and drive business development in politically restricted digital environments?" The discussion addresses this question through both theoretical and practical lenses, drawing on empirical insights from the VVC case.

The theoretical chapter previously explored concepts such as Lean Startup methodology (Ries, 2011), emergent strategy (Mintzberg, 1985), cross-cultural credibility theory (Hofstede, 2001), platform-based personal branding (Karp, 2024; Florida, 2022; Checchinato & Hu, 2018), and digital platform dynamics (Florida, 2022; Cusumano, Gawer, & Yoffie, 2019). These concepts provided the lens through which the Very Venture China (VVC) project was conducted and analyzed.

Although much has been written about influencer marketing and creator branding, existing literature has not adequately examined these dynamics in the context of restricted digital markets or for entrepreneurs working across regulatory, cultural, and linguistic barriers. The findings from VVC help fill this gap by demonstrating how visibility, credibility, and conversion can be achieved through iterative experimentation, reflexivity, and cross-cultural storytelling on platforms like YouTube.

The case study shows that a YouTube-based business case can function not only as a marketing channel but as a proof-of-concept, trust-building tool, and inbound funnel

for real-world business development. The insights from this thesis can be transferred to other digital platforms—such as TikTok, LinkedIn, or Discord—when adjusted for platform-specific algorithms, trends, and audience behaviors. This makes the framework applicable for personal branding, product marketing, and guerilla growth strategies within the broader Creator Economy.

For instance, the recent emergence of Upside VC, a fund launched by the YouTube collective Sidemen (over 150 million subscribers), illustrates how media platforms are no longer just distribution tools—they are becoming integrated into venture strategies. Startups in their portfolio such as FanBasis, Ceartas, and Pockla are supported not just financially, but strategically—leveraging the creators' social capital to reduce CAC (customer acquisition cost) and scale rapidly. This example highlights how platform-native branding and community trust are now critical assets in entrepreneurship.

The current study concludes with a discussion of theoretical implications, practical applications, limitations, and recommendations for future research—particularly for those operating at the intersection of personal influence, digital strategy, and restricted environments.

5.1 Interpretation of Findings in Light of Theories

This section interprets the findings of the VVC case study in relation to the theoretical models presented in Chapter 2. The aim is to critically assess how the observed patterns align with, extend, or challenge existing concepts in the fields of digital entrepreneurship, strategic communication, and platform-based personal branding. The discussion follows five theoretical strands: Lean Startup, Emergent Strategy, Cross-Cultural Credibility, Platform Branding, and Platform/Algorithmic Influence.

Lean Startup: Iterative Testing and Strategic Adaptation

The findings align strongly with the principles of the Lean Startup methodology (Ries, 2011), which emphasizes iterative experimentation, rapid feedback loops, and learning through small bets. The VVC project exemplified this through:

- Testing content formats (long-form vs. Shorts)
- Monitoring performance metrics (CTR, watch time, impressions)
- Pivoting strategies based on underperformance (e.g., shift toward emotional titles, reduced reliance on long-form discovery)

The project's visibility-building strategies reflect the Build–Measure–Learn cycle. For example, emotional titles and SEO-based Shorts were implemented, analyzed for impact, and retained based on watch time and subscriber growth. This cycle was visible in platform behavior, but also reflected internally in reflexive journaling and team decision-making.

Moreover, the shadowban incident in November 2024 demonstrated how Lean principles allowed the team to respond quickly to algorithmic setbacks and reconfigure outreach and topic targeting. Rather than abandoning the project, the team used analytics and audience feedback to reposition content.

“We learned to launch fast, observe carefully, and pivot without emotional attachment to any one video.” — Reflexive Journal, October 2024

In alignment with Lean Startup principles, a professional content audit conducted in late 2024/early 2025 functioned as a structured form of “validated learning.” The audit confirmed many internally suspected issues—such as weak video intros, poor thumbnail design, and title–content mismatch—that were causing low audience retention and suboptimal click-through rates. This third-party assessment reinforced the need for data-driven experimentation, prompting specific A/B testing of thumbnails and restructuring of video narratives. These adjustments marked a direct application of Lean Startup methodology in the context of media optimization.

Mintzberg's Emergent Strategy: Strategy as Discovery

The VVC project also reflects Mintzberg's (1985) theory of emergent strategy, which contrasts formal, top-down planning with bottom-up, adaptive learning. Rather than being guided by a fixed content strategy, VVC's trajectory unfolded through real-time interaction with the audience, the algorithm, and external actors (e.g., business partners).

For instance, the original assumption that long-format storytelling alone would drive growth proved insufficient. Only after several videos underperformed did the team adopt a Shorts-first distribution model. This shift wasn't pre-planned, but emerged from platform feedback, aligning with Mintzberg's argument that "strategy is a pattern in a stream of decisions."

Emergent strategy also explains the development of the channel's business identity. The move from visibility to perceived expertise to job offers and consulting proposals was not mapped out in advance but formed organically through cumulative micro-decisions, guided by reflexive observation and stakeholder interaction.

Several VVC episodes triggered high levels of audience engagement in the form of comments, shares, and message forwarding—creating a ripple effect beyond YouTube. This aligns with Hewett et al.'s (2016) observation that consumer-generated buzz in the echoverse enhances perceived brand authenticity and influence. Notably, the VVC brand benefitted from this buzz when it led to unsolicited consulting inquiries, job offers, and cross-platform recognition, indicating the strategic value of earned media over traditional outreach.

"Each pivot wasn't random. It was like drawing the map as we walked the path." —
Field Note, November 2024

These patterns also align with Gehrke's (2019) analysis of EU-China economic dynamics, which highlights that sustainable cross-border initiatives require more than transactional reciprocity—they depend on long-term strategic alignment and nuanced, culturally embedded engagement approaches. This reinforces the idea that

adaptive content and communication strategies are not only desirable but essential in geopolitically sensitive contexts.

Cross-Cultural Credibility and Hofstede's Framework

The VVC project highlights how cross-cultural dynamics directly shape platform credibility, trust, and engagement. Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (2001), particularly power distance and uncertainty avoidance, we can interpret key audience reactions and speaker interactions during the research period.

In China's high power-distance context, many interviewees initially declined participation unless they perceived the interviewer as legitimate and well-connected. This reinforced Hofstede's proposition that status, hierarchy, and indirect communication styles strongly influence interpersonal decision-making in high-context cultures. The early rejections (over 80 declined interviews) illustrate the difficulty of establishing initial credibility without social proof.

To adapt, the researcher implemented credibility-enhancing signals:

- Soft framing (compliments, informal tone)
- Reference to known networks (Chambers of Commerce, university affiliations)
- Demonstration of cross-cultural humility and patience

This shift increased interview success and improved engagement metrics, confirming the practical role of cultural fluency in digital entrepreneurship across borders. Additionally, findings show that content perceived as "authentic" in the West—e.g., casual vlogging—did not automatically transfer as trustworthy or authoritative in the Chinese context. This supports Hofstede's argument that cultural values mediate message interpretation, especially in trust-sensitive interactions.

"Credibility was never given — it had to be earned, not only with the algorithm, but with the culture." — Reflexive Journal, September 2024

Personal Branding via Platforms

The VVC case supports Checchinato & Hu's (2018) findings that in digitally advanced yet restricted markets like China, maintaining a controlled presence on local platforms is a strategic necessity. Their study shows that brands must align their digital content with cultural expectations and platform norms to maintain brand integrity and audience engagement. Extending this logic to individual entrepreneurs, the VVC case illustrates how consistent, platform-aligned content can foster perceived expertise and long-term brand equity.

The VVC case confirms that platform-based personal branding functions as a strategic tool to build perceived expertise and professional credibility. As Edmiston (2019) highlights, personal branding is not merely a marketing exercise but a foundational asset for entrepreneurs, where consistent, value-driven content aligned with one's identity and audience expectations creates long-term brand equity. This is especially vital in environments where first impressions and online presence precede formal credentials. Extending this further, Karp et al. (2024) show how creators—especially micro and niche influencers—are reshaping strategic communication norms, not only influencing consumer behavior but acting as market validators by demonstrating knowledge, identity consistency, and engagement fluency across platforms. In the VVC case, this content-led authority replaced traditional CVs and cold outreach, illustrating that in the Creator Economy, content becomes the currency of credibility. Thus, strategic alignment between message, medium, and audience trust—combined with algorithmic fluency and narrative control—emerges as a critical driver of entrepreneurial legitimacy (Karp et al., 2024; Edmiston, D., 2019). The success of VVC's long-form interviews and documentary-style narratives may be also explained through Geertz's (1973) concept of culture as a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms. These stories served not just as entertainment but as vehicles for transmitting cultural knowledge and building interpretive bridges between Europe and China.

VVC's transformation from a visibility-focused content channel to a business-generating brand exemplifies this theory. Instead of directly selling services, the platform established Dennis Tuominen as a credible source on China-Europe relations, entrepreneurship, and digital strategy. This trust, built gradually across episodes, directly led to consulting offers, interviews, and business inquiries from organizations like:

- Zhong Lun Law Firm (China)
- VNTR (Portugal)
- Aston Swiss (Switzerland)
- Timosha (Russia)
- Verb Ventures (UK)

The research findings extend their work by showing that personal branding in politically restricted environments requires not only consistency, but algorithmic fluency, cultural sensitivity, and performance measurement across platforms. Moreover, the YouTube channel served as a living portfolio, replacing traditional CVs or cold outreach methods. Stakeholders referenced specific episodes as evidence of credibility, showing how content becomes the proof of expertise in the Creator Economy.

"I didn't send documents. I sent links. And they already knew who I was before the first call." — Field Note, October 2024

The content audit also exposed key discrepancies between perceived brand identity and actual content delivery. Several video titles promised high-value insights (e.g., "From Zero to IPO"), but the actual content failed to deliver on that promise, resulting in early viewer drop-off and negative trust signals. This supports Checchinato & Hu's emphasis on alignment between message and delivery. By identifying such issues, the audit enabled strategic realignment of VVC's brand voice to better match audience expectations—enhancing both platform credibility and long-term brand equity.

Platform and Algorithmic Influence (XYZ Theories)

The findings from the VVC project also align with contemporary theories of platform governance, algorithmic visibility, and creator–platform interaction, which we refer to collectively as XYZ theories. These models emphasize that creators operate within digital ecosystems shaped by opaque algorithms, policy shifts, and attention economies, where content performance depends not only on quality but also on algorithmic favorability (Bucher, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018).

Throughout the VVC project, algorithmic behavior had a measurable impact on platform strategy. YouTube’s recommendation system initially responded well to:

- Emotional titles and thumbnails
- Short-form vertical content (Shorts)
- Consistent release schedules

However, the shadowban incident in November 2024, which coincided with the U.S. presidential election, demonstrated the fragility and unpredictability of algorithmic environments. Although no direct violation was committed, the channel’s reach to U.S. audiences dropped drastically, suppressing visibility and halting subscriber growth. This confirmed a core argument in platform theory: creators are subject to non-transparent moderation and shifting visibility thresholds (Gillespie, 2018).

In response, the team adapted its platform behavior:

- Reduced U.S.-targeted content
- Refocused distribution on WeChat, LinkedIn, and regionally relevant platforms
- Launched a second channel with a Shorts-first strategy and different thematic scope

These actions reflect a growing strategic necessity for entrepreneurs to treat platforms not just as channels, but as co-actors with their own logics, rules, and risks. The experience reinforces the idea that digital entrepreneurship is embedded in

platform governance regimes, where visibility can be both earned and revoked beyond the creator's control.

Moreover, VVC's iterative use of SEO optimization, metadata structuring, and trend analysis supports the idea that success on platforms like YouTube now requires algorithmic literacy — an entrepreneurial skill as critical as marketing or finance in the Creator Economy.

"We were not just publishing. We were optimizing for an invisible gatekeeper." — Reflexive Journal, November 2024

Third-Party Content Audit: Empirical Validation of Platform Strategy

The inclusion of an external content audit during the thesis process introduced a unique layer of triangulated insight, serving both as a validation tool and as a strategic mirror. While ethnographic journaling and platform metrics provided internal reflections, the audit exposed visual and structural content weaknesses not captured in self-assessment alone. This confirms the theoretical value of integrating third-party sensemaking mechanisms into digital strategy formation—especially in environments where credibility is hard-earned and visibility is algorithmically fragile. It aligns with the concept of *strategic ambidexterity*, where internal learning is complemented by external sense-checks to ensure market relevance, as developed by O'Reilly and Tushman (2004), where internal learning is complemented by external sense-checks to ensure market relevance. In dynamic or restricted markets, such ambidexterity (efficiency, execution, scaling) becomes critical for entrepreneurs who must continually refine internal processes while monitoring external feedback loops to ensure relevance, compliance, and growth (innovation, experimentation, agility). The VVC team consistently published and refined content while utilizing established tools such as YouTube SEO, thumbnails, and tagging strategies. In parallel, the team also experimented with new content formats, adjusted its messaging in response to evolving China–Europe geopolitical dynamics, and explored alternative platforms and funding models to enhance reach and sustainability.

Consistent with Lou and Xie (2021), the VVC project benefited most from content that blended informative depth with entertaining and socially engaging elements. While emotionally rich narratives promoted deeper audience trust, formats that incorporated humor, relatability, and community cues significantly enhanced comment activity and returning viewer rates—indicating that entertainment and social affordances are essential even in knowledge-driven brand ecosystems.

Thus, to supplement internal analytics, autoethnographic reflections, and platform experimentation, a third-party audit was conducted in late 2024/early 2025 by two external content creators with domain expertise in YouTube content strategy. This audit served as an independent empirical validation of the VVC platform's content design, narrative structure, and visual engagement.

The audit revealed several critical areas for improvement:

Weak first impressions: Video intros often lacked a compelling hook within the first 10–15 seconds, leading to early audience drop-off despite emotionally engaging titles.

Thumbnail mismatch: Many thumbnails featured visually disconnected or low-context images (e.g., unfamiliar faces, low contrast), which contradicted viewer expectations and likely depressed click-through rates.

Narrative gaps: Some episodes failed to deliver on the promises implied by their titles (e.g., "From Zero to IPO"), reducing trust and increasing what the auditors termed "CTR betrayal."

Lack of data visual storytelling: Episodes that lacked infographics, numbers, or data-driven comparisons underperformed, suggesting a need for more structured insights alongside emotional storytelling.

From a theoretical perspective, the audit validated the *Build–Measure–Learn* loop in Lean Startup (Ries, 2011) and supported Mintzberg's (1985) emergent strategy model by offering an external lens for strategic correction. The findings echoed Edmiston's (2019)

and Checchinato & Hu's (2018) proposition that personal branding must be consistent and expectation-aligned across touchpoints—from thumbnails and titles to content tone and delivery.

Importantly, the audit confirmed that internal intuition and reflexive journaling were not always sufficient to detect structural weaknesses. By functioning as a *strategic mirror*, the audit introduced an externalized feedback loop that enhanced the reliability of the VVC strategic decisions.

“The audit was a wake-up call—it showed us that content quality is not just about production, but about psychological triggers, consistency, and emotional clarity.” — Reflexive Journal, December 2024

Table 7 Results of Audit. Appendix 7.

<p>No Infographics</p> <p>No interesting visual info. Charts, numbers, diagrams, pictures. Or there is very little of it.</p>	<p>Dead Content</p> <p>Uninteresting, no exotic elements, nothing to catch the eye.</p>	<p>No Chinese People</p> <p>No representatives of the region you trust more. A guide is needed to lead me into the world of China (why the other bearded guy works—he's older, no fluff, with infographics, and you trust him as an expert).</p>
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No Introduction	CTR	Deception
No idea what's in the video, why I should watch it or spend my time (good example: https://youtu.be/rcFKdG6P_wv?si=HEJYxg-YB3Qp5K8u)	(Thumb-nail) Needs to be changed and made more click-bait-like (good examples: Varlamov, Pogнали)	The video doesn't contain what the title or thumbnail promises.

Following the audit, the team implemented thumbnail A/B testing, improved intro scripting, and adjusted the content planning process. These changes contributed to the early success of the second YouTube channel “Dennis Richard Investments”, which adopted a tighter hook structure and emotionally optimized visuals, achieving 250,000+ views in just two months.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions of the Study

This thesis contributes to both academic theory and entrepreneurial practice by exploring how individual entrepreneurs can develop strategic digital presences and achieve business development in politically restricted environments. Through the case study of Very Venture China (VVC), this research demonstrates how micro-entrepreneurs can adapt platform strategies, build expert brands, and create economic opportunities—even when operating within digital systems that limit access and visibility.

This strategic navigation, however, does not occur in a neutral environment; rather, it unfolds within a broader socio-technical system shaped by algorithmic

infrastructures and commercial imperatives. The influencer economy illustrates a form of algorithmic control, wherein content creators navigate behavioral norms set by unseen but pervasive systems of incentivization and penalty (Hund, 2023). In entrepreneurial projects such as Very Venture China (VVC), this algorithmically driven environment not only limits expressive autonomy but also intensifies the instability of digital work, compelling strategic choices to align with opaque platform priorities and engagement-driven metrics.

To better understand how entrepreneurs respond to these constraints and identify opportunities within platform-based environments, this study applies a combination of established theoretical frameworks and adapts them to this emerging empirical context. The VVC project's trajectory mirrors Mintzberg and Waters' (1985) concept of emergent strategy. While the initial vision was to build cross-cultural dialogue and visibility on multiple platforms, real-time constraints and unexpected feedback loops shaped the actual path. Strategic pivots—such as shifting focus to emotional titles or dropping the Chinese platform—emerged through experimentation rather than from deliberate planning.

By applying well-known frameworks such as Lean Startup (Ries, 2011), Emergent Strategy (Mintzberg, 1994), Cross-Cultural Credibility (Hofstede, 2001), and Platform Branding (Checchinato & Hu, 2018) in a new empirical context, this thesis extends their applicability and reveals new insights into how these models function under constraint. These contributions span three domains: digital entrepreneurship, platform-based branding, and cross-cultural communication strategy.

Contribution to Digital Entrepreneurship Research

This study enriches the field of digital entrepreneurship by demonstrating that strategy formation on digital platforms can be shaped not only by customer feedback and iteration, but also by platform governance, algorithmic volatility, and geopolitical conditions. The VVC project shows how known strategic models—like Lean Startup's Build–Measure–Learn loop—can be applied in volatile conditions where even visibility is unstable (e.g., shadowbanning during the U.S. presidential election).

The research introduces the concept of platform-aware iteration: a cycle of decision-making that is informed as much by platform behavior (CTR, impressions, algorithm responsiveness) as it is by market response. This reframes the Lean Startup model to account for opaque algorithmic gatekeeping, which is central in the Creator Economy but underexplored in strategic literature.

Moreover, the thesis bridges strategic management theory and digital entrepreneurship by operationalizing Mintzberg's emergent strategy and Teece's dynamic capabilities in a constrained digital environment. The VVC case illustrates how adaptive strategic sense-making occurs in real time, supported by reflexive journaling, rapid feedback interpretation, and ongoing content experimentation.

Contribution to Platform Branding in Restricted Markets

The VVC project also contributes to the growing literature on platform-based personal branding, particularly in contexts of limited digital freedom and regulated media spaces. Most research on digital branding assumes open access to audiences and scalable advertising models. In contrast, this thesis examines how trust, reach, and influence can be constructed organically using culturally sensitive messaging, unpaid distribution channels, and reputation spillover from guests and collaborators. The proposed Visibility–Credibility–Conversion (VCC) Framework offers a structured model for building personal brand equity under platform constraints. It explains how:

1. Visibility is earned through algorithmic alignment (e.g., Shorts, emotional titles);
2. Credibility is developed through cultural adaptation and guest association;
3. Conversion occurs when this trust leads to business outcomes (consulting, hiring, partnerships).

This framework contributes to platform branding theory by showing that guerilla marketing, proof-of-work positioning, and media-driven networking can serve as alternatives to paid growth models in restrictive contexts.

Furthermore, the VVC project becomes a living business case, showing that content-based platforms like YouTube can function not only as media tools but also as personal CRMs, inbound lead engines, and credibility validators.

Contribution to Cross-Cultural Strategy and Branding Theory

This research advances cross-cultural branding theory by exploring how digital creators navigate trust-building across vastly different cultural contexts. The findings validate Hofstede's emphasis on power distance and uncertainty avoidance, but extend the theory by analyzing how credibility cues shift depending on both audience expectations and platform dynamics.

In high-context cultures like China, initial trust was not earned through informal authenticity (as is common in the West), but through perceived professionalism, status signals, and indirect credibility markers—such as association with reputable institutions or speakers. The project thus shows that brand authenticity is not universal; it must be contextualized, localized, and sometimes negotiated culturally.

Additionally, this thesis contributes a real-time account of how language, framing, and emotional tone must be continually adapted to match audience psychology across borders. These micro-adjustments—reflected in titling, host persona, and narrative structure—are often missing in top-down cross-cultural strategy models but prove critical in practice.

The entrepreneurial behavior observed in VVC resonates with van Dijck's (2013) insight that platforms institutionalize neoliberal values such as competition, optimization, and branding. YouTube's interface and monetization features encourage creators to internalize business-like thinking, shifting the logic of content creation from storytelling to strategic signaling. This platform-induced rationality supports the study's conclusion that YouTube operates not only as a media outlet but as a market-

oriented actor that subtly redefines what it means to be a cultural entrepreneur in the digital age.

Ultimately, the theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in extending known frameworks by embedding them into a real-world case that reveals new variables, adaptive strategies, and practical constraints relevant to today's platform-native, cross-border entrepreneurs.

5.3 Practical Implications for Entrepreneurs

The findings of this thesis offer several practical implications for entrepreneurs, particularly those building personal brands, launching ventures, or developing platform strategies in politically restricted or resource-constrained digital environments. Drawing from the Very Venture China (VVC) case and the resulting Visibility–Credibility–Conversion (VCC) Framework, this section translates the research into actionable guidance for content creators, consultants, and solo entrepreneurs navigating global digital platforms.

Kanasan (2024) emphasizes that recent graduates must adopt proactive social media branding strategies to differentiate themselves in saturated digital environments. Influencers operate within a structural paradox where economic precarity drives the embrace of self-branding as a pathway to autonomy (Hund, 2023). Yet this pursuit often reinforces neoliberal demands of continuous visibility, platform compliance, and algorithmic optimization. For solo entrepreneurs like the founder of VVC, the use of strategic storytelling becomes not only a means of audience building but a form of self-preservation in a volatile attention economy. For entrepreneurs operating in uncertain markets, the VVC case reinforces the value of maintaining strategic flexibility. Following Mintzberg and Waters (1985), embracing an emergent strategy approach enables creators to align with platform shifts, algorithm changes, and socio-political barriers in real time.

Visibility Requires Algorithmic Literacy and Content Fit

Entrepreneurs must recognize that visibility is not guaranteed—it is algorithmically mediated. This study shows that platform success requires an understanding of:

- Content formats that trigger distribution (e.g., Shorts, optimized thumbnails)
- Title strategies that increase CTR (e.g., emotionally loaded or curiosity-driven headlines)
- Publishing cadence and relevance signals

YouTube content that balances trend-sensitivity and audience value—without over-reliance on advertisements—is highly important for early growth, especially for entrepreneurs without large budgets. Furthermore, cross-publishing via SEO-optimized external media (e.g., press releases, LinkedIn posts) can act as organic traffic boosters in environments where algorithmic performance fluctuates unpredictably. This reflects Keane’s (2016a) exploration of China’s “Internet+” strategy, where digital platforms are not just technical tools, but strategic enablers of cultural and economic innovation. Entrepreneurs targeting Chinese markets must view digital platforms not merely as communication tools but as strategic levers for innovation and credibility—precisely the role envisioned in China’s “Internet+” strategy (Keane, 2016a). YouTube entrepreneurs can enhance monetization in the Creator Economy by aligning platform affordances with cultural preferences, using interactive features like live streams and community posts for collectivistic audiences and direct, resource-driven content for individualistic viewers. (Hofstede, 2011; Shahbazzhad et al., 2021; Treem & Leonardi, 2012).

Trust is Built Through Framing, Not Just Expertise

This research confirms that content alone is insufficient to build trust. Entrepreneurs need to actively design credibility cues based on audience expectations. In cross-cultural and politically sensitive markets, trust-building should be approached as a layered process involving:

- Narrative positioning (e.g., outsider learning vs. expert lecturing)
- Cultural tone-matching (formal in China, informal in the West)

- Association with trusted individuals or networks (guest selection, affiliations)

In international markets, especially high-context cultures like China, appearing qualified often outweighs appearing relatable. Entrepreneurs operating across borders must therefore design adaptive identity strategies that shift depending on audience segments and platform norms.

Social Media Marketing as Strategic Positioning

This study reframes social media not just as a distribution tool, but as a strategic asset. The VVC case illustrates how a content-driven platform can:

- Reduce CAC (Customer Acquisition Cost)
- Generate inbound leads through content credibility
- Replace traditional cold outreach methods

Entrepreneurs should treat their social media presence as a multi-layered business case, where videos, interviews, and engagement patterns act as dynamic proof-of-work. Platforms like YouTube, when correctly managed, can function as living pitch decks, especially valuable for consultants, advisors, or service-based entrepreneurs.

Additionally, platform-specific user motivations must be considered when positioning content strategically. Drawing on Buzeta et al. (2020), who identify distinct user drivers—such as identity signaling, curiosity, and social affiliation, this study shows how VVC tailored its approach accordingly. On YouTube, long-form episodes addressed discovery-oriented viewers through storytelling and cultural immersion. On LinkedIn, content emphasized professional alignment, thought leadership, and affiliation with global entrepreneurship communities. This differentiated platform strategy helped increase engagement by aligning content formats with what each audience expected and valued, offering a blueprint for entrepreneurs navigating complex digital ecosystems.

Opportunities and Challenges in Restricted Digital Environments

Operating in politically restricted or algorithmically unstable environments presents a number of risks, but also unique leverage points.

Opportunities include:

- Lower content competition in niche sectors (e.g., China-Europe business insight)
- Increased trust transfer through strategic affiliations
- Platform-native visibility strategies (e.g., early Shorts adoption)

Challenges include:

- Shadowbanning and unpredictable visibility shifts
- Inability to run ads or access monetization features
- Emotional burden of constant rejection or data suppression

To mitigate these challenges, entrepreneurs must be both technically literate and emotionally resilient. Continuous feedback loops, diversified outreach (e.g., using WeChat, LinkedIn, or email groups), and reflexive awareness of cultural norms are essential tools for navigating uncertainty.

Applying the VCC Framework in Practice

Entrepreneurs seeking to apply these lessons can follow the VCC Framework as a practical roadmap:

Stage	Action
Visibility	Use Shorts, emotional titles, and SEO to trigger platform discovery
Credibility	Build trust through storytelling, guest credibility, and network signaling
Conversion	Monitor for consulting, speaking, and partnership opportunities
Replication	Adapt the model for new audiences, platforms, or business verticals

The second YouTube channel “Dennis Richard Investments” serves as proof of this model’s transferability. Within two months, it surpassed 250,000 views, confirming that the VVC approach can be replicated and localized with new production strategies and topics—indicating its broader applicability across sectors and geographies.

Entrepreneurs developing content strategies should consider not only platform choice but also the affordance structure of each platform—such as its capacity for emotional expression, interactivity, and community engagement. As Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) suggest, aligning content format with platform capabilities leads to higher user engagement. In the case of the VVC project, emotionally rich and informative storytelling in long-form, horizontal YouTube videos aligned well with the platform’s affordance for deeper narrative immersion and high-context communication. Short-form videos (YouTube Shorts) did not outperform the longer content on VVC, suggesting that complex topics—such as cross-cultural business insights—benefit from extended formats.

However, on the “Dennis Richard Invest” YouTube channel, short-form content yielded significantly higher engagement, with some Shorts reaching over 35,000 views. This highlights how content–affordance alignment must also reflect the nature of the content and audience intent: informational and niche for VVC, fast-paced and attention-grabbing for the investment-focused Shorts. Strategic alignment of content style, length, and emotional tone with platform affordances—and audience expectations—is therefore critical for optimizing reach and resonance across diverse digital strategies.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

While the findings of this thesis offer valuable insights into strategic platform use and digital entrepreneurship in restricted environments, several limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations relate to the scope of the case study, the nature of the data, and the contextual specificity of the platform environment.

Single-Case Design and Generalizability

This research was based on a single, embedded case study—the Very Venture China (VVC) YouTube project—conducted by the researcher in a dual role as practitioner and investigator. While this approach allowed for deep ethnographic immersion and reflexive analysis, it also limits the generalizability of the results. The findings are context-specific and tailored to a platform (YouTube) and environment (China-facing digital business) that may not fully reflect other geographies, platforms, or user types.

Thus, while the study offers transferable insights and a conceptual framework (VCC), its application to other contexts requires adaptation and further validation.

Researcher Positionality and Subjectivity

The researcher's dual role—as both the creator of VVC and the primary analyst—introduced subjective bias risks, including selective interpretation and self-reinforcement of success narratives. Although reflexive journaling, data triangulation, and peer feedback were used to mitigate bias, complete objectivity cannot be claimed. This limitation is inherent in ethnographic case study research but is acknowledged as part of the study's epistemological positioning (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Platform-Specific Constraints

The findings are grounded in the YouTube ecosystem, which has its own unique affordances, algorithmic dynamics, and content norms. Results may not directly apply to platforms with different structures, such as:

- LinkedIn (professionally gated)
- TikTok (short-form and trend-first)
- WeChat or Telegram (closed, semi-private networks)

The platform's algorithmic logic, visibility mechanisms, and moderation policies play a significant role in shaping both strategy and outcomes. These platform variables are difficult to control or replicate, which places natural limits on the repeatability of the VVC results.

Temporal and External Influences

This research was conducted during a period (2024–2025) that included a significant external shock: a shadowban on U.S.-targeted content linked to YouTube's algorithmic adjustments during the U.S. presidential election. This event disrupted the channel's growth and shaped many strategic decisions. While this made the study richer in learning, it also introduces a temporal bias—future algorithm changes, platform policy shifts, or global events may alter the viability of similar strategies.

Cultural Specificity

The study focused on China-facing content and cross-cultural branding involving Chinese and European markets. Many strategic decisions—such as interview tactics, framing choices, or platform outreach—were shaped by cultural expectations in a high power-distance, high-context environment. These cultural dynamics may not be applicable to all global markets, particularly Western or decentralized creator ecosystems where authenticity and individualism dominate.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a valid and rich real-world account of entrepreneurial strategy formation under constraint. The reflexive methodology and mixed data sources support internal credibility, while the VCC Framework offers a valuable starting point for future research.

5.5 Managerial implications

This thesis has also produced relevant managerial implications for entrepreneurial support organizations, marketing professionals, and policy stakeholders interested in enabling digital growth across complex, regulated, or resource-limited environments.

The role of social media is increasingly central in modern marketing activities. As demonstrated through the VVC case, platforms such as YouTube can function not only as communication tools but also as credibility engines, brand incubators, and business development pipelines. However, entrepreneurs and managers alike must consider the volatile and context-sensitive nature of social media environments.

Algorithms and content trends are constantly changing. Visibility is not guaranteed, and strategic success often requires adaptation to opaque platform policies, evolving audience expectations, and socio-political constraints. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to understand that social media is not a fixed marketing solution—its strategic utility must be evaluated case-by-case, with awareness of cultural, geopolitical, and platform-specific factors.

The codification of influence through metrics—such as engagement rates and audience demographics—has become central to monetization and visibility (Hund, 2023). These metrics-driven valuations incentivize content creators to optimize for algorithmic compatibility rather than narrative depth or social relevance. Within the VVC case, the transition to short-form video formats and title reconfigurations illustrates the adaptive behavior required to meet platform-defined thresholds of success.

Additionally, while personal branding and storytelling can generate credibility and inbound opportunities, it cannot be assumed that international SMEs will achieve brand equity through social media alone. The influence of other marketing actions—such as partnerships, offline events, community integration, or influencer co-

branding—should also be considered, especially in industries where trust and reputation evolve slowly.

Practical Contributions for Managers and Institutions:

1. **Strategic Application of the VCC Framework**
Offers a real-world framework for entrepreneurs and startup teams seeking to build visibility, credibility, and business development across restricted or cross-cultural digital markets (e.g., China–EU).
2. **Validation of Content-Led Business Development**
Demonstrates how personal branding and community-building efforts—when supported by platform strategy—can generate measurable business outcomes, including consulting projects, cross-border partnerships, and market entry positioning.
3. **Guidance for Educators, Policymakers, and Incubators**
Provides insight into how digital entrepreneurship can be supported under constraint through adaptive storytelling, decentralized tools, and platform-native experimentation—without reliance on institutional media or paid advertising.

Ultimately, the findings emphasize that strategic media use is both a creative and analytical function, requiring alignment between content design, platform logic, and audience psychology. For managers and ecosystem builders, supporting creators and entrepreneurs in this process means investing in strategy literacy, cross-cultural readiness, and experimental capability.

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

This study focused on examining the opportunities and challenges of using Western digital platforms for personal branding and business development in politically restricted digital environments. Based on the Very Venture China (VVC) case, it explored how platform strategy, cultural adaptation, and algorithmic responsiveness intersect to shape entrepreneurial outcomes.

Firstly, the study aimed to understand how individual entrepreneurs can gain visibility and credibility using tools like YouTube Shorts, SEO optimization, and culturally localized storytelling. It highlighted that success depends not only on content quality but also on timing, framing, and algorithmic literacy.

Secondly, the study proposed that personal branding on digital platforms can act as a multi-functional asset—serving simultaneously as a marketing engine, proof-of-competence, and inbound opportunity generator. This idea opens the door for researchers to further investigate platform-native strategies that substitute traditional CVs, sales funnels, or cold outreach methods.

Thirdly, the results of the study also gave rise to the Visibility–Credibility–Conversion (VCC) Framework, a model that could be tested across other platforms (e.g., TikTok, LinkedIn, Discord) or industries (e.g., coaching, consulting, creator-backed commerce). This framework serves as a flexible tool for solo entrepreneurs navigating complex digital environments.

Lastly, one opportunity for further research lies in testing this framework in non-Western or emerging market contexts. For example, entrepreneurs in African or Middle Eastern digital spaces may use platforms differently based on regulatory access, internet infrastructure, or linguistic preferences.

Additional Directions for Future Research

- **Cross-platform replication:** Studies can analyze how the VCC model performs on platforms with different algorithms and discovery models, such as TikTok (trend-first), Telegram (private group-based), or LinkedIn (credibility-signaling).
- **Cultural adaptability:** Additional research could be conducted to explore whether the opportunities and challenges of utilizing digital platforms for

credibility-building vary across high-context (e.g., China, Japan) and low-context (e.g., Germany, USA) societies.

- AI and automation: Future research could examine how automated tools like ChatGPT or Synthesia affect the authenticity, scalability, and trustworthiness of digital personal brands.
- Platform governance and ethics: Scholars could investigate the ethical implications of algorithmic control over visibility, such as shadowbanning, demonetization, and creator manipulation in restricted environments.
- Entrepreneurial investment ecosystems: Inspired by models like *Upside VC* (launched by YouTube's Sidemen), future work could explore how creators evolve from brand builders into investors, and how their media influence affects portfolio growth and startup credibility.

This thesis establishes a comprehensive understanding of how strategy, technology, and trust intersect within contemporary digital platforms. It provides a robust foundation for future researchers to delve deeper into platform entrepreneurship, particularly through multidisciplinary, globally conscious, and creator-focused lenses. The study of platforms necessitates a technical understanding of their computational infrastructure (Helmond, 2015).

In today's swiftly evolving digital environment, concepts like the 'creator economy' and 'influencer economy' have risen prominently, marking a significant shift away from traditional content production and distribution methods. This transition is predominantly driven by the widespread adoption and continuous evolution of social media platforms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The core questions guiding future research should address precisely how these emerging economies transform content creation, distribution, and audience interaction. (Anderson et al., 2023)

A pivotal transformation within this landscape has been the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into content production. AI now assists creators in diverse tasks, including scriptwriting, video editing, and social media management, dramatically enhancing efficiency and democratizing access to high-quality content production

(Kietzmann et al., 2011). A prominent illustration of AI's impact is automated subtitle generation, which significantly expands creators' capabilities in engaging global audiences (Anderson et al., 2023; SimplyDigital, 2023).

Historically, filmmaking and media production have demanded considerable resources, restricting opportunities to individuals with substantial funding and extensive professional networks. However, digital platforms, notably YouTube, have revolutionized this model by providing creators accessible tools for content production, distribution, and monetization (Van Dijck, 2013). The significance of this shift lies not only in increased accessibility but also in creators' ability to directly engage audiences, bypassing conventional gatekeepers and distribution networks (Anderson et al., 2023).

Looking forward, the ongoing evolution of the creator and influencer economies is set to substantially reshape the media and entertainment industries. Continued advancements in AI promise increasingly sophisticated tools, further lowering barriers to content creation. Consequently, we anticipate a more diverse and democratized media environment, empowering individuals globally to effectively share their unique narratives and perspectives (Anderson et al., 2023, SoraVideoAI, 2024; FinSMEs, 2025).

5.7 Conclusion of the Thesis

This thesis set out to explore how individual entrepreneurs can strategically use Western digital platforms to build personal brands and drive business development in politically restricted digital environments. Through an in-depth case study of the Very Venture China (VVC) YouTube project, the research addressed key questions surrounding platform strategy, audience credibility, and cross-cultural engagement.

In line with Pratt's (2009) guidance, this thesis emphasizes a clear and transparent write-up—the way the research is presented, including what was done, what was found, and what it means—so that readers can follow the thought process,

understand the interpretations, and trust the insights drawn from complex qualitative data.

The study began by analyzing the visibility-building mechanisms used in the VVC project, including SEO-optimized titles, emotional storytelling, and the adoption of Shorts. These findings responded directly to Sub-RQ1, showing how platform-based visibility and trust were achieved despite algorithmic constraints and limited marketing budgets.

In addressing Sub-RQ2, the research demonstrated how VVC's perceived credibility and expert positioning led to tangible business development opportunities, including consulting projects, job offers, and strategic partnerships. These outcomes confirmed that personal branding, when built with authenticity and consistency, can serve as a foundation for inbound business growth.

Sub-RQ3 focused on extracting transferable strategic lessons. The result was the development of the Visibility–Credibility–Conversion (VCC) Framework, which maps the entrepreneurial journey from initial discovery to business engagement. This framework is already being tested in new platform contexts and provides a practical roadmap for entrepreneurs in digitally or politically constrained environments.

In answering the main research question, “how individual entrepreneurs can strategically use Western digital platforms to build personal brands and drive business development in politically restricted digital environments”, this thesis shows that success depends on adaptive experimentation, platform-literacy, cross-cultural credibility, and strategic storytelling.

Theoretically, this thesis contributes to research in digital entrepreneurship, platform branding, and cross-cultural credibility. It applies and extends frameworks such as Lean Startup, Emergent Strategy, and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, offering new interpretations grounded in lived entrepreneurial experience. Practically, it presents a blueprint for those working in emerging markets, under algorithmic uncertainty, or with limited access to traditional funding and media exposure.

By combining autoethnographic reflection, platform analytics, and strategic experimentation, this study confirms that strategy formation in the Creator Economy is both a technical and cultural act. It requires not only growth tactics but also contextual fluency, resilience, and the ability to read both the algorithm and the audience.

In a world increasingly shaped by platform dynamics, algorithmic visibility, and digital influence, this thesis demonstrates that individual entrepreneurs can cultivate global presence and unlock strategic opportunities—one view, one decision, and one video at a time. The Very Venture China (VVC) case illustrates how personal branding and purposeful content creation, even in politically restricted environments, can lead to tangible business development and influence.

As the creator economy continues to evolve, its collective force—rooted in niche engagement and rapid content cycles—presents both disruptive challenges and transformative opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs alike (Karp, Fu, & Friis, 2024). This dynamic shift underscores the need for adaptability, authenticity, and strategic collaboration in navigating the future of digital entrepreneurship.

In sum, understanding social media requires a holistic approach that considers the interplay between evolving technological capabilities, diverse user motivations, individual psychological differences, and socio-demographic contexts. The dynamism of the social media landscape necessitates ongoing research to capture its evolving forms and impacts.

Looking ahead, the future of the Creator Economy holds colossal promise. As technologies evolve and societal expectations shift, digital creators will gain unprecedented opportunities to shape industries, communities, and narratives. Yet, they will also encounter rising challenges—from intensifying competition to more complex regulatory landscapes. The evolution of this economy will be a dynamic and continuous process—reshaping not only how we work and create, but also how we connect, influence, and thrive in the digital era.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Project Budget Calculator

WVC Budget approx v2.0 MLBX ☆ 📄 🏠

Arkiv Redigera Visa Infoga Format Data Verktyg Hjälp

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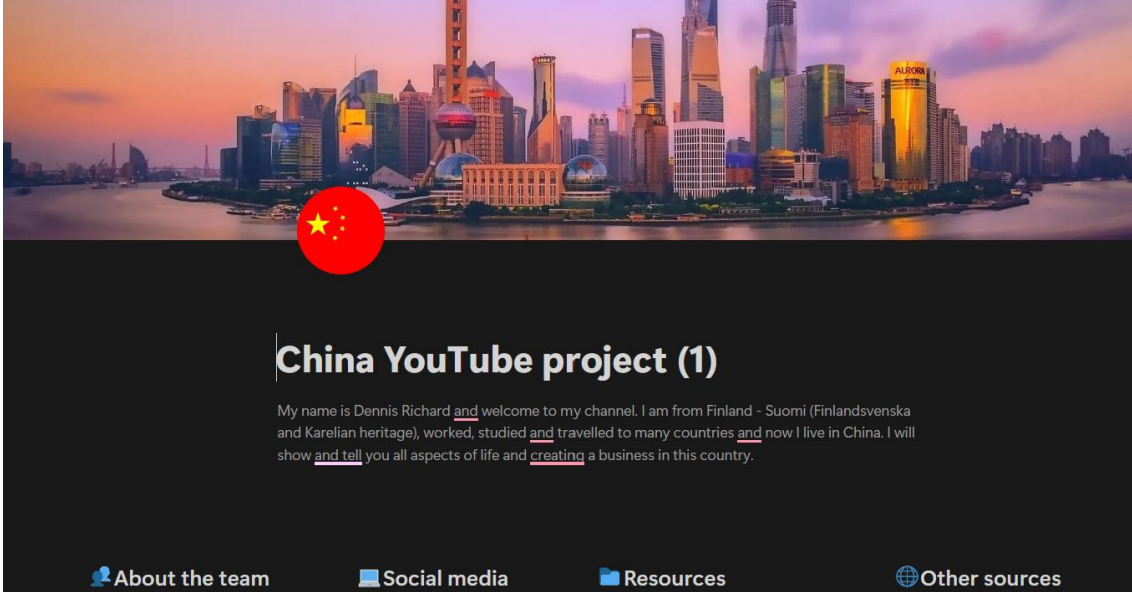
A	B	C	D	E	F	G
	Category	Details	Estimated Cost per Item/Event	Details	Total Cost	
Staff						
1	probably it will be the same person	Cameraman in China	Cost per day (assuming 10 video shoots)	200 €	te 500 RMB per hour, depends on a task and what equipment will be used	2 000 €
2		Personal Assistant in China	Cost per day (assuming 10 video shoots + 20 busi	80 €	10-15 000 RMB per month full time 9-6; 5 or 6 days a week	3 333 €
3	Yan	Video Producer/Editor	Cost per video	230 €		2 300 €
4	Eugenii	Scenario & SMM	Cost per month	200 €		1 000 €
Staff TOTAL						8 633,33 €
Equipment						
1		Sony Camera	One-time purchase or rental fee	2 500,00 €		2 500,00 €
2		Microphone DJI	One-time purchase	105,00 €	699 RMB	105,00 €
3		DJI Osmo 3	One-time purchase	800,00 €	4500 RMB +55 €	800,00 €
4		SD Card x2	Needed for storage	60,00 €	200RMB+200RMB	60,00 €
5		External Hard Drive 2 TB	For video file storage and backup	130,00 €	945 RMB	130,00 €
6		Lights and Stands	Basic set for video production	90,00 €	300+300+70	90,00 €
7	Chinese style	Local Style Clothes (2 sets)	Cost per set	€150/set	To discuss as not sure yet	300,00 €
8		Rayban META Glasses	One-time purchase for video aesthetics	700,00 €	approximately 3509 - 5500 RMB	700,00 €
9	сидим на работе	DJI Gimbal or Camera DJI 2	One-time purchase	350,00 €	is ok, discussed	350,00 €
10	head labo	Lenovo	for work purposes away from home	500,00 €	To discuss as not sure yet	500,00 €
11		Chair for Work	Ergonomic office chair	70,00 €	approximate cost is between 400-500 RMB	70,00 €
Equipment TOTAL						5 605,00 €
Variable costs						
1		Events Participation Fee	Cost per event (assuming 5 + - events)	100,00 €	Music festival? Business events? короткие дистанции довольно дешево стоят 3-5 евро, но зависит от города, времени суток и дальности поездки, если больше 5 км то at the low cost place 210 RMB	500,00 €
2		Local Transport	Cost per day of shooting (10 days)	30,00 €		300,00 €
3		Restaurants	Meals for and during shoots (10 days)	30 €		300,00 €
4		Restaurants	Meals for shooting at nice places x2	150,00 €	3 restaurants (fish, hot pot local cousine, and at some skyscraper hotel)	300,00 €
5		Travel	Several cities - further plan	200,00 €	Shanghai, Shenzhen etc 10 place?	2 000,00 €
6		Accommodation	Several cities - further plan; 10 days ?	100,00 €	tourist hotels - price depends on the city. Usually 500-1500 RMB	1 000,00 €
7		SPA	1 video	100,00 €	699 RMB	100,00 €
8		Muay thai training	1-2 hours to film different positions & to include i	80 €	Personal training 1 hour is 600 RMB	160,00 €
9		GOLF	2-3 times to go for the range & may be 1 game w	100,00 €	approximate price rental, green fee, booking	300,00 €
10		Snowboarding	1 day at the indoors ski resort in Guangzhou	150,00 €	rental + entrance fee	150,00 €
11		Maksim course about moving to ch	https://boosty.to/masenshen/media/all	23 €	per month, but we take a single month only	23 €
12		Extracurriculum activities	trying out something new in China!			
Variable TOTAL						5 133,00 €
GRAND TOTAL						19 371,33 €

+ ☰ TOTAL Budget Money needed now #1 Introduction video #2 interviews #3 Shaoguan & Dutch #4 Canton Fair & Law & Temple & #5 Golf & Rongo & Tencent & Mua

Appendix 2. Sample Interviews and Episodes

	Interviewee	Company	Experience	Length (min)
1	Zhong Lun MD Partner	Zhong Lun Law Firm	Law, Business	320
2	Rongo Factory Owner	Furniture & Energy JV	Manufacturing, Family office	350
3	GIZWITS CEO	Top IT Company in China	IoT, Tech Leadership	160
4	Tencent Delegation	Tech Giant	Digital Ecosystem,	250
5	Culture/Religion Professor	Academia Jinan	Religion, Cross-cultural	360
6	Guangzhou Golf Club	Elite Social VIP Club	High-level Networking	320
7	Metso Group CEO	Industrial JV	Nordic-China Industry	180
8	TAETEA CEO	Tea Company	Tea, Culture	360
9	Marketing Firm founders	PepsiCo, Lays Partner	Branding, Marketing in China	360
10	INTE Bridge MD Partner	Gov. Incubator	Funding, Innovation Policy	370
11	Troublemaker CEO	Private Tech Incubator	Startup Acceleration, Shenzhen	320
12	GBA Incubator CMO	Gov. Accelerator	Startup Strategy, GBA Region	310
13	President of Fiskars	Consumer Products	Nordic Global Trade	40
14	UPM Executive	Forestry/Industry	Sustainable Business	45
15	CMO of Oddly Good	VALIO Brand	Food Innovation	30
16	CEO of Stora Enso	Forestry & Paper	Global Market Strategy	40
17	Maki VC, Lifeline Ventures	Investments	Venture Capital	120

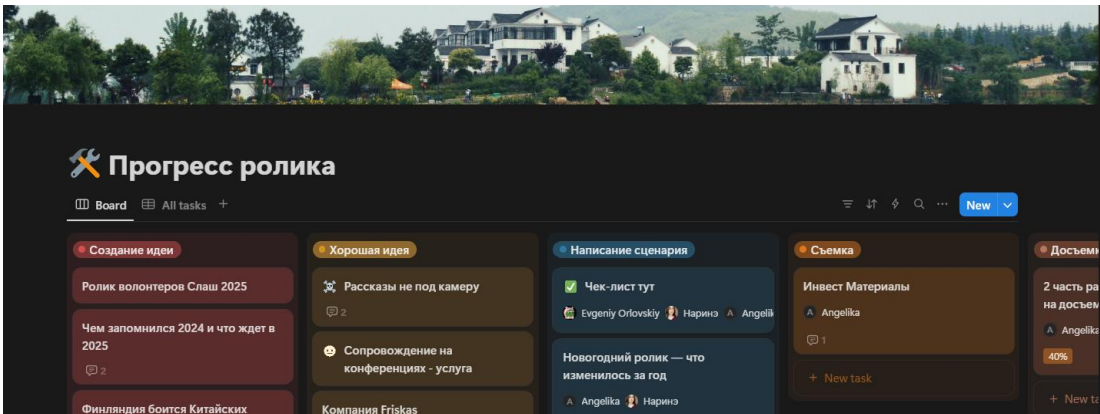
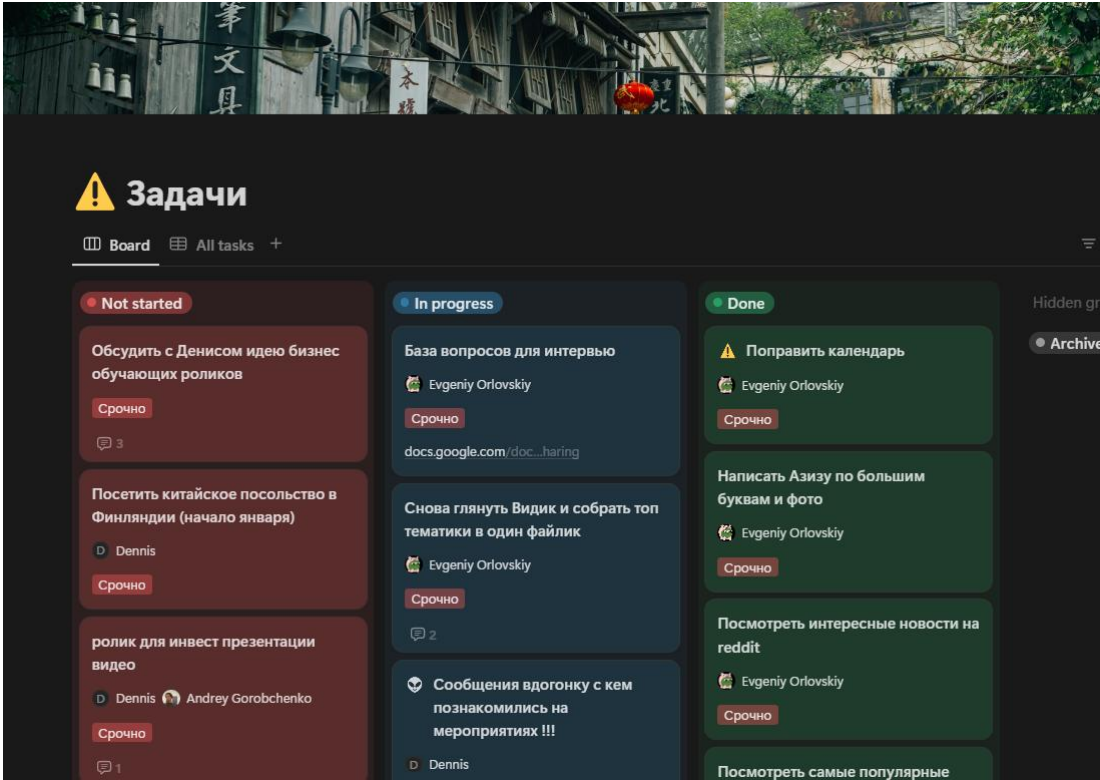
Appendix 3. Project Management and CRM

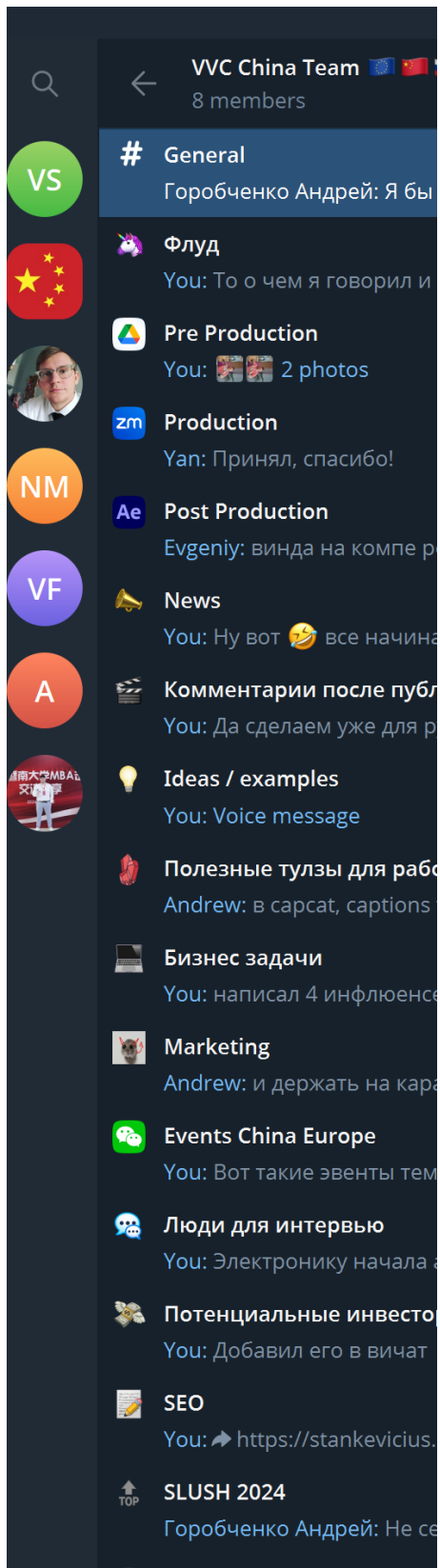


China YouTube project (1)

My name is Dennis Richard and welcome to my channel. I am from Finland - Suomi (Finlandsvenska and Karelian heritage), worked, studied and travelled to many countries and now I live in China. I will show and tell you all aspects of life and creating a business in this country.

[About the team](#)
[Social media](#)
[Resources](#)
[Other sources](#)





Appendix 4. Sample interview questions

Baisha Zhang, full-time lawyer, partner director at Zhong Lun Law Firm:

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself to our audience?
2. Were you born here in Guangzhou?
3. What attracted you to the legal profession?
4. You've practiced law for many years — what keeps you passionate about it?
5. Why did you choose to become a partner at Zhong Lun Law Firm?
6. How would you describe China's business culture in three words or qualities?
7. Is there something like a "Chinese Dream" — and how would you compare it to the American Dream?
8. Can you share a case or two that illustrate common challenges foreign companies face in China?
(*e.g., "Timosha Agricultural Products" or a software development company*)
9. Have you worked with clients or cases from other countries? What differences have you noticed?
10. Would you say the legal business environment in China is fast-paced, medium, or slow?
11. On average, how long does it take to register a company and open a bank account?
12. What are common difficulties in choosing a good law firm in China?
13. How can clients distinguish between high-quality and low-quality legal services?
14. What are the main stages of company registration in China?
15. What documents are typically included in the application package?
16. I heard companies need a corporate secretary — who else is legally required?
17. What's the minimum yearly budget to maintain a company with minimal activity?
18. Does your firm provide corporate secretarial and other related services?
19. What makes your firm and your personal expertise stand out in this field?
20. Which economic zones or regions do you recommend for registration?
21. How should one choose the right city or zone for their specific business?

22. For a trading company in food (like chickpeas, sunflower seeds, lentils), how long does licensing typically take?
23. How hard is it to start a Wholly Foreign-Owned Enterprise (WFOE) in China?
24. I've heard that for trading companies, the 300,000 RMB capital requirement is important. Is that true?
25. What are the main advantages of WFOEs?
26. When would you recommend setting up a WFOE instead of a Joint Venture?
27. What does a business plan for company registration usually look like? How is it different from a typical investment business plan? How many pages does it usually run?
28. If someone is doing a Joint Venture for the first time, what's the best way to find a reliable partner? Would you recommend roadshows or industry networking?
29. What are HNTE certifications, and what incentives do they offer (e.g., CIT reductions)?
30. How difficult is it to obtain the HNTE status?
31. If done with a trusted partner, how long does it take to secure the certification?
32. How often do company inspections occur in China?
33. Do you recommend participating in business events organized by local authorities? What kinds of benefits can companies gain?
34. How well are intellectual property rights protected in China?
35. What about patenting inventions — is it reliable and enforceable?
36. Can IT companies protect their source code or proprietary software?
37. What are the top 3 places in Guangzhou (or Shanghai) for business negotiations?
38. Is there someone in China whose professional journey really inspires you? Should I interview him or her next?
39. I've been struggling to find freelancers or blue-collar workers in China. Are there any local platforms for this? Is there a product or service you wish existed in China — something you'd pay money for?
40. If someone in our audience wants to work with you or your law firm, what's the best way to reach out? Do you have a website or contact page?

Interview questions for Gizwits' CEO Jack:

1. A. Personal Journey & Company Origins
2. Could you share the story of how you joined Gizwits? What is your current role and responsibility in the company?
3. How was Gizwits founded? Who were the key founding figures we should know about? Are they still actively involved in the company today?
3. How many people currently work at Gizwits, and how many of them are developers?
4. What does your typical workday look like? How many team members or departments do you directly manage?
5. Gizwits was named one of China's Top 50 Most Innovative Companies back in 2015. Where do you see the company's position nearly a decade later, in 2023 and beyond?
6. How would you describe the competitive landscape over the last three years? Is competition increasing, and if so, which regions or companies are driving it?
7. Gizwits works with a wide range of product types—from smart locks and water heaters to fitness equipment. What was the company's core product focus at the time of launch? What is your biggest product category today?
8. What would you say are the three pillars of success for Gizwits as a company?
9. Do you think Confucianism or traditional Chinese philosophy plays a role in business? Could you share a moment where it inspired you at work?
10. What proportion of your workforce is made up of non-Chinese employees? Do you actively promote an international work culture at Gizwits?
11. Do employees often relocate between offices within China or abroad, or is it uncommon? What's the broader trend across China in this regard?
12. Gizwits has secured partnerships with global giants like Qualcomm and A.O. Smith. Were these partnerships initiated by your team or did the partners approach you? Do you frequently receive inbound partnership inquiries?
13. Does Gizwits participate in international conferences outside China? If so, could you name some key events or regions where you're active?

14. Do you have distributors or dealers in other countries? Are there plans to expand into new international markets?
15. Why do your clients choose Gizwits over competitors? What sets you apart in the eyes of your partners and customers?
16. Do you believe the “Chinese Dream” exists? How would you personally describe it?
17. In your view, what are the top three economic achievements of Xi Jinping’s administration? Are there areas where you feel particularly grateful as a businessperson?
18. Do Chinese businesses typically make decisions quickly, or is it a slower process—especially when it comes to joint ventures, entering new markets, or building manufacturing sites?
19. What are your top three pieces of advice for foreigners who want to start a business in China today?
20. As a side question—I collect recommendations for business travelers. What are your favorite places for business meetings in the city, besides your office?

TAETEA Executives, Interview Questions:

1. A. Tea Investment and Business Strategy
2. Is it true that there are people in China who actively invest in tea as an asset?
3. Do some Chinese people view tea as a way to preserve or grow their fortune over time?
4. Is it humanly possible to invest \$100,000 in tea and turn it into \$1 million? What timeframe would that realistically require?
5. Is the tea industry in China a family-dominated sector, where knowledge is passed down through generations and hard for newcomers to access?
6. What are the current challenges facing the Chinese tea industry from an economic or competitive standpoint?
7. How has global demand for Chinese tea influenced local production practices and cultural traditions?
8. What are the economic implications of tea cultivation in China, especially in traditional tea-growing regions?

9. How do tea producers ensure quality and authenticity in an era of mass production?
10. What role does sustainability play in the modern tea industry in China?
10. Could you describe the historical significance of tea in Chinese culture?
11. How has the role of tea ceremonies evolved in modern Chinese society?
12. What is “Cha Dao” (the Way of Tea), and why is it important in Chinese tea culture?
13. How do tea ceremonies reflect broader Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism?
14. How is the art of tea-making intertwined with Chinese business practices?
15. How is tea used in formal business settings or diplomatic meetings in China today?
16. What are the main types of Chinese tea, and what are their specific cultural associations?
17. Are there types of tea that correspond to different seasons of the year? If so, how are they selected and why?
18. What was the most expensive or rare tea you’ve ever tasted? What made it so unique?
19. What is traditional tea etiquette in China? Could you name 3–5 common mistakes foreigners make during Chinese tea ceremonies?
20. How do younger generations in China view tea culture today? Are they maintaining, transforming, or losing the tradition?
21. If someone new wants to learn about tea ceremonies in China, what is the best way to respectfully start?

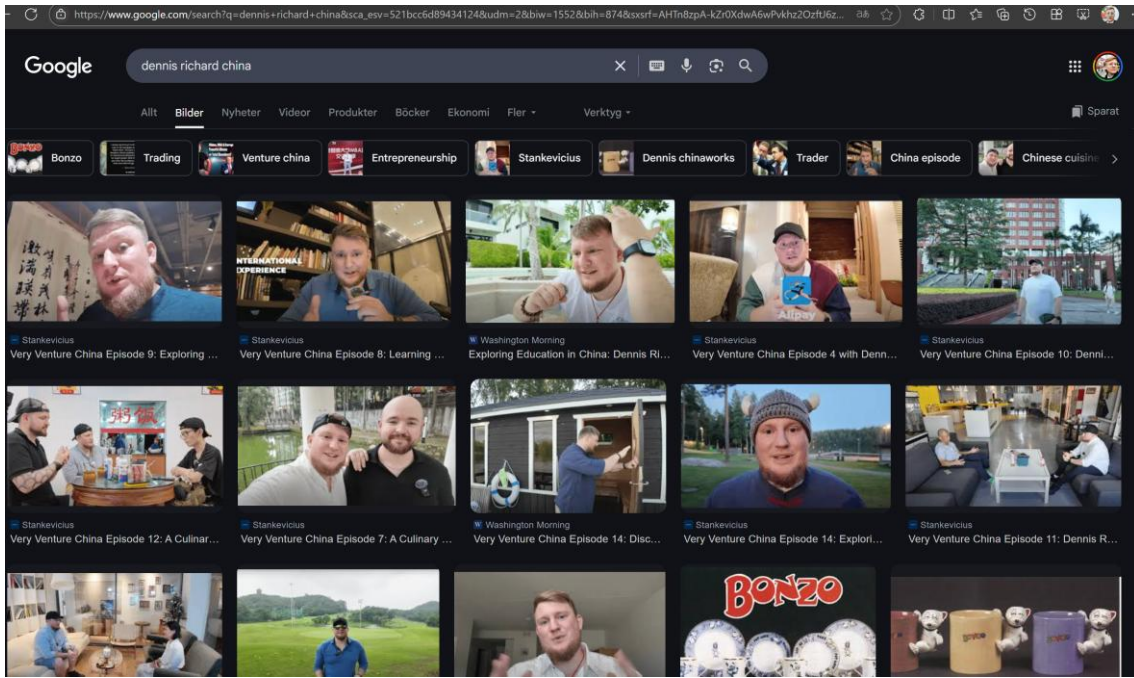
22. What is the most unusual tea flavor you’ve ever created or encountered? What inspired it?
23. Can you share a memorable or humorous moment from a tea ceremony that was unexpected?
24. If you could host a tea ceremony for any historical figure, who would it be and why?

25. What are some common misconceptions people have about tea that you find amusing?
26. Have you ever had a tea-tasting session go wrong? What happened?
27. Which Chinese tea pairs best with an unexpected or international food item, in your opinion?
28. Can you show or describe a surprising or little-known technique used in professional tea preparation?
29. How would you describe the personality of your favorite tea?
30. If tea could talk, what would it say about the people who drink it?
31. What's the most creative use of leftover tea leaves you've seen or tried?
32. Have you ever hosted or participated in a themed tea party? What was the theme?
33. What's the funniest or most unusual reaction you've seen from someone trying a particular type of tea for the first time?
34. If you could invent a modern or futuristic tea ceremony, what unique elements would it include?
35. What's the biggest tea-related disaster you've had to avert during a ceremony?
36. If different Chinese teas were characters from famous movies, which tea would represent which character, and why?

Appendix 5. Sample Web Links to the VVC SEO news

1. <https://nationalinsider.co.uk/very-venture-china-episode-7-dennis-richard-explores-chinese-cuisine-with-special-guest-jeff-the-chef/>
2. <https://londonerpost.co.uk/2024/07/very-venture-china-episode-7-exploring-chinas-culinary-landscape-with-host-dennis-richard-and-european-culinary-expert/>
3. <https://asianmorning.com/2024/10/17/china-in-focus-now-dennis-richard-blueprints-roadmap-for-startups/>
4. <https://londonerpost.co.uk/2024/05/very-venture-china-a-dive-into-entrepreneurial-ventures-with-dennis-richard/>

5. <https://economicworld.co.uk/exploring-china-with-dennis-richard-episode-2-very-venture-china/>
6. <https://nationalinsider.co.uk/very-venture-china-episode-2-conversations-with-dennis-richard-in-china/>
7. <https://asianmorning.com/2024/05/19/delving-into-chinas-business-arena-with-dennis-richard-very-venture-china-episode-2/>
8. <https://washingtonmorning.com/2024/05/19/very-venture-china-episode-2-exploring-chinas-business-landscape-with-dennis-richard/>
9. <https://stankevicius.co/video-series-very-venture-china/very-venture-china-episode-2-winning-over-chinese-hearts/>
10. <https://asianmorning.com/2024/11/12/very-venture-china-a-european-entrepreneurs-journey-in-china/>
11. <https://londonerpost.co.uk/2024/07/episode-6-of-very-venture-china-exploring-chinese-culture-and-religion-with-dennis-richard/>
12. <https://economicworld.co.uk/very-venture-china-episode-6-dennis-richard-exploring-chinese-culture-and-religion/>
13. <https://stankevicius.co/world/very-venture-china-with-dennis-richard-discovering-the-heart-of-chinese-culture-and-religion/>
14. <https://nationalinsider.co.uk/dennis-richard-explores-the-heart-of-chinese-culture-and-religion-in-the-episode-6-of-very-venture-china/>
15. <https://asianmorning.com/2024/07/03/very-venture-china-episode-6-dennis-richard-unveils-the-depths-of-chinese-culture-and-religion/>
16. <https://washingtonmorning.com/2024/07/03/very-venture-china-episode-6-an-in-depth-exploration-of-chinese-culture-and-religion-with-dennis-richard/>



Stay Hungry! The time to act is now. Don't let this opportunity slip through your fingers.



GBA




Very Venture China

ASIAN MORNING Asia Issues Business Politics Technology World ESG

ASIA ISSUES BUSINESS

China in Focus: Now Dennis Richard Blueprints Roadmap for Startups

by Very Venture China October 17, 2024



Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area
Innovation and Entrepreneurship
Incubation Base

TOP NEWS


- Emirates Airline Reports Record \$6.2 Billion Profit — Rewards Staff with 22 Weeks' Salary Bonus
- Donald Trump's 2025 Visit to Saudi Arabia: A New Era of Strategic Engagement
- From Dreams to Destiny: How Long-Time Filipino Expats in the UAE Built a Life of Success
- Your Family Guide to Visiting Disneyland Abu Dhabi with Epic Click Travel & Tourism
- Embodied: Rex Fernando Unveils a Transformative Couture Experience at Cannes 2025

ASIAN MORNING Asia Issues Business Politics Technology World ESG

ASIA ISSUES

Very Venture China: A European Entrepreneur's Journey in China

ASIA by Staff Report November 12, 2024



Appendix 6. Consulting cooperation Evidence

CGTN Europe, VoyagerGlobal, VNTR VC, Verb Ventures, Timosha and Zhong Lun. Screenshots, Received Offers and Workflow:

Strategic Collaboration Proposal

[Very Venture China \(VVC\)](#) × [CGTN Europe](#)

1. Executive Summary

Very Venture China (VVC) is a European-founded media platform based on the ground in China, created by Dennis Richard — alumnus of Jinan University, Guangzhou. VVC offers exclusive access to authentic, human-centered stories across China. Its editorial mission aligns directly with CGTN's objectives: reducing misinformation, broadening international understanding, and amplifying local narratives.

2. Media Portfolio Overview

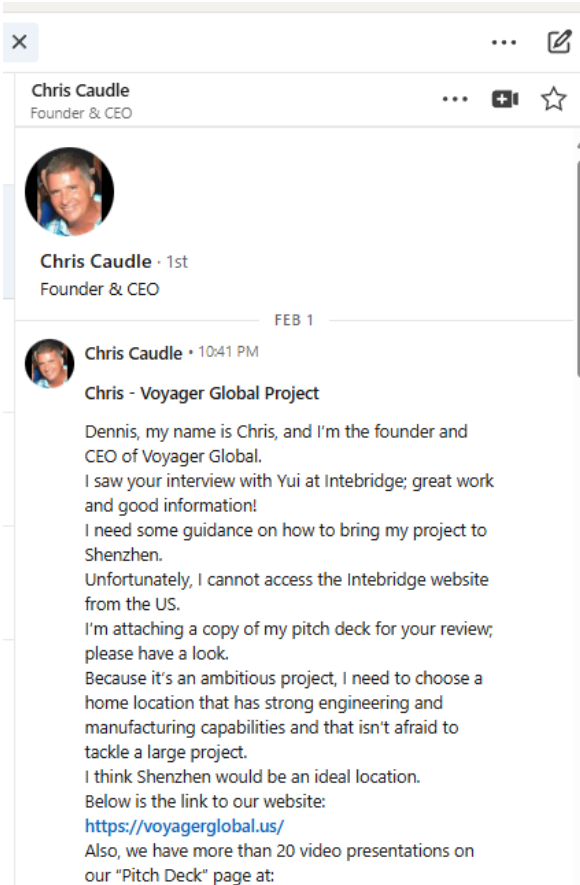
Total Videos Published: 185 (as of March 2025)

YouTube Subscribers: 1,260

Total Views: 90,000+

Core Editorial Categories:

- Urban Transformation & Infrastructure
- Culture & Heritage
- Culinary Traditions
- Entrepreneurship & Local Innovation
- Rural China and Ecological Diversity



events for business development.

ZHONG LUN

Workplan overview 2025

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
	Planning TIMEFRAME: Months 1-2	Execution TIMEFRAME: Months 3-6	Monitoring & Control TIMEFRAME: Months 7-12	Project Review TIMEFRAME: Months 13 +
	Onboarding and Strategic Preparation	Marketing Initiatives and Networking	Client Acquisition Strategies	Review and Adaptation
ACTIVITY PROMPTS	Integrate into the firm. Learn about day to day operation of CSLM. Read about key people of Zhong Lun. Align on SALES goals for the next 6, 12, 18, 24 months; Learn from most successful cases.	Participate in conferences, join 8 chambers of commerce; Regular check-ins between clients and internal team; Identify & Verify Marketing hypothesis; Write / Facilitate 4 Media articles and Conduct 4 Interviews per month; SEO.	Implement client acquisition plans; deepen relationships. Talk to 20 people per conference; at least 3 follow up calls/meetings/emails after conference. Attend 1-3 closed by invitation only events with decision makers; 10 potential leads per event.	Verify project deliverables; align with evolving goals and objectives; Maintain frequent touchpoints with the client; Cover in Business Media 100+ Articles about practices and researches done by Zhong Lun.
	Meet key personnel in China, London and Antananarivo. Partners, Business Development Directors, Account Managers)	Implement project plan according to schedule; Introductory meetings between clients and legal teams; Conduct competitor research - top 10 global Law firms - identify blind spots and partisan marketing possibilities.	Identify risks and implement risk mitigation strategies; Collaborate with NGOs and NCOs on trends; allocate sponsorships and align future lobby strategies.	Obtain client or stakeholder sign-offs; Identify potential selling opportunities for 50 existing clients and 50 potential.
	Learn existing materials and services. Understand 3 most important practices (ex. M&A, Arbitration, Litigation)	Organize own events according to a plan; Identify corporate decision makers; Initial Client engagement.	Secure new clients & Adjust project plan based on any deviations.	Document key lessons learned and finalize project report. Drive Sales Growth to \$1 million per Year.
OUTCOMES	Clear project objectives finalized; Approved project plan; Learn common objections, pitfalls and obstacles from offices visit; Established cooperation framework; 121 meetings biweekly scheduled.	Deliverables produced; Project activities underway; Reporting structure is well understood; Became a keynote speaker at 3 conferences. Become liaison between client and internal teams.	Regular updates to the Business Development Team and Managing Partners about potential new opportunities or issues that need attention.	3-10 New clients onboarded; Client satisfaction criteria met; Project objectives achieved; Performance metrics reached; Global / European / Russian Awards applied; Project relaunched.
	Legal teams met; Coordination initiated; Budget for 2025 is negotiated; Identified stakeholders and formed project team.	Team collaboration aligned; Efficient resource utilization is monitored; CRM workflow established. Regular featuring in the Key Media outlets in EU / Russia. 3-5 media channels per country. 2-4 monthly articles/videos.	Made risk assessment and implemented mitigation strategies; Service quality standards are met while also client relationships are in focus;	Generated lessons learned and project assurance report; Identified further legal needs; support or advisory.
	Marketing and BizDev teams met; Coordination and Processes established; Resource allocation complete; Stakeholder alignment done.	Regular client updates on their case sent; Client feedback gathered; Concerns and plans allocated to relevant internal team.	Reported on project status and updated project schedule. Stakeholder informed; Project remains on schedule;	Created final documentation and manuals; Post onboarding client relationship supported; Cross selling other services / support is initiated.

ZHONG LUN

Budgeting Cost & Profit Estimation

Cost Category	Monthly Estimate (€)	Annual Estimate (€)	Potential Benefit (Sales Equivalent €)	Key Metrics	Estimation
Client Service Manager	10,000 €	120,000 €	300,000 €	Client satisfaction, deal closure rate	5-10 closed deals from existing and new clients
Support Staff Costs	4,000 €	48,000 €	100,000 €	Efficiency in service delivery	2-3 support staff, handling 10-20 ongoing projects
Chambers of Commerce Memberships (8)	2,500 €	30,000 €	150,000 €	Number of networking opportunities, client acquisition	Access to 8-10 networking events, leading to 10-15 leads
Closed VIP Events	5,000 €	60,000 €	200,000 €	Client conversion from VIP events	Participation in 5-7 VIP events, resulting in 5-8 clients
Accommodation & Travel Expenses	7,000 €	84,000 €	150,000 €	Travel ROI, client meetings per trip	10-15 business trips with 20-25 client
Media Collaborations (3 per 5 Countries)	6,000 €	72,000 €	200,000 €	Brand visibility, new client leads	Media visibility in 5 countries, generating 15-20 leads
Golf Clubs, Skiing, Ceremonies, etc.	3,500 €	42,000 €	100,000 €	Networking opportunities, client relationship building	Attend 5-8 leisure events, leading to 3-5 client engagements
NGO, ESG, & Charity (Lobbying, Campaigns and Scholarships)	3,000 €	36,000 €	50,000 €	CSR impact, network expansion, lobbying success	Involvement in 3-4 NGO/CSR events, contributing to 2 leads
EXTRA - VVC Media Platform	10,000 €	120,000 €	500,000 €	Content engagement, client acquisition from media	15-30 video episodes, generating 20-25 new clients
Total		612,000 €	1,750,000 €	Total	
ROI: 185.95%		Sales Conversion Rate: 20%		Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC): €18,600	
Profit Margin: 65.03%		CLV to CAC Ratio: 5.38		Marketing Efficiency Ratio (MER): 4.70	



Engagement in Key European Institutions During Studies

Highlighting my participation in events at the EU Parliament, EU Court, and key locations like Luxembourg, Strasbourg, and Frankfurt. These experiences were part of my studies and extracurricular activities, deepening my understanding of European governance and policy.



Proven
Leadership
Around the
World



Bridging Europe and China: Business and Cultural Exchange; Started VVC Channel.

During my MBA exchange in Guangzhou, I facilitated numerous meetings between European and Chinese stakeholders, including politicians, business owners, and state-owned companies. These interactions enriched my understanding of China's business environment and culture, fostering cross-cultural collaboration.





Offer from Zhong Lun



business developer position in Zhonglun Guangzhou Office

ZHANG, Baisha /ZL <baisha_zhang@zhonglun.com>
 To: You
 Tue 11/26/2024 4:51 PM

Flagged

Hi Dennis,

Hope you are doing well.

First of all, thank you for your interest in the Account Manager position, we are very pleased to offer you this position with Zhong Lun Law Firm Guangzhou Office.

Please take your time to review our offer below, which is in line with the packages offered to the other two Account Managers of the firm. They are from France and Australia respectively and have worked for the firm for years. We believe they would be happy to share with you their experiences in client development and daily life in this dynamic city.

The offer below contains detailed information about your position, fixed salary, commission, and other conditions of the job.

A. **Position** - This is a full-time position as a business developer to generate new business opportunities for the firm and you will be reporting to Baisha ZHANG.

B. **Compensation: Fixed Salary + Commission**

- The firm is offering a fixed salary of CN¥ 11,000.00 (before tax) per month.
- Also, you will receive a commission as part of your compensation. And its structure is as follows:

Commission = Legal Fees Generated x Commission Ratio
Legal Fees Generated = the received legal fees generated from clients developed by the Account Manager
Commission Ratio = 10%
Old Client = the client(s) developed by the Account Manager prior to each commission settlement period
New Client = the client(s) newly developed by the Account Manager in each commission settlement period
Accumulative Accounts - In each year, any newly received legal fees generated from the Account Manager's Old Client(s) would still account the Legal Fees Generated for that year. And the Account Manager is entitled to this Accumulative Accounts as long as the employment relationship between the Account Manager and the firm continues.

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/verb-ventures_very-venture-china-activity-7243979753253220354-p0nX?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAABGLdZ4BlvH_Gi41Xp6UejySZw8e7Z0R3Qs

Verb Ventures – Onboarded

ADVISORY BOARD AND VENTURE PARTNERS



ie Dennis Richard Tuominen | Very Venture China



Verb Ventures

1,409 followers
7mo •

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We are excited to welcome [Dennis Tuominen](#) to our team as a Venture Partner!

Dennis brings a wealth of experience in marketplace and business development, and he'll be instrumental in expanding our presence in the Nordics [DK IS SE NO FI](#) and Chinese [CN](#) markets. His deep understanding of these regions, coupled with his strategic insights as a multilingual Strategy MBA from both China and Finland, makes him an invaluable addition. With a background that spans across Automotive, Education, MedTech, and Blockchain industries, and extensive experience working with family offices and high-growth ventures, Dennis has a proven ability to connect and develop markets on a global scale. We're confident that he will be a perfect fit for our team and the entrepreneurs we support!

Dennis hosts the YouTube channel "Very Venture China", where he explores the business and cultural ties between China and Europe. A must-watch is his recent interview with Jack Huang, CEO of [Gizwits](#), a world leading IoT company (<https://lnkd.in/eeRNgbqe>). They discuss innovations in smart home and industrial IoT, and the challenges of scaling in China, with insights valuable to entrepreneurs and investors alike.

If you are looking for more insights on doing business in China definitely check his channel for more insightful!

Join us in welcoming [Dennis Tuominen](#) to the team! 🇺🇸



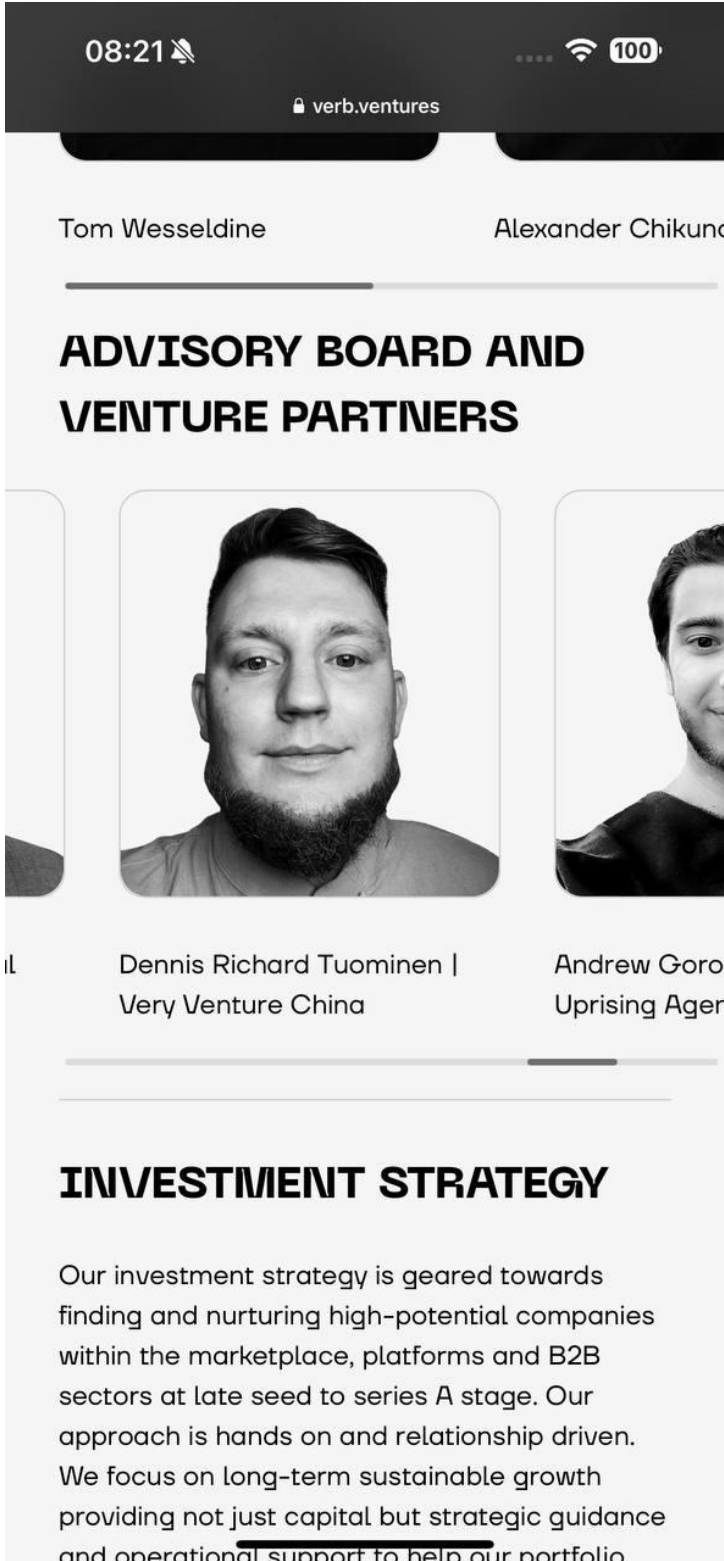
Very Venture China

youtube.com



9

1 comment · 1 repost



Tom Wesseldine

Alexander Chikunc

ADVISORY BOARD AND VENTURE PARTNERS



il

Dennis Richard Tuominen |
Very Venture China

Andrew Goro
Uprising Ager

INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Our investment strategy is geared towards finding and nurturing high-potential companies within the marketplace, platforms and B2B sectors at late seed to series A stage. Our approach is hands on and relationship driven. We focus on long-term sustainable growth providing not just capital but strategic guidance and operational support to help our portfolio

https://www.linkedin.com/company/verb-ventures/posts/?feedView=all

Home My Network Jobs Messaging Notifications Me For Business Learning

Verb Ventures Message Follow

Home About Posts Jobs People Insights

18 5 comments · 8 reposts

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Join us in welcoming **Dennis Tuominen** to the team! 🎉

Very Venture China
youtube.com

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IntelliJ IDEA Ultimate
Helposti, edullisesti ja nopeasti valtuutetuilla kumppanilla!

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Timosha cooperation with China Project

А	В	С	Д	Е
Категория	Описание	Июнь (\$)	Июль (\$)	Август (\$)
Денис Туоиминен (Руководитель проекта)	Полная занятость, 40 час./нед., \$7,000/мес; 12 мес.	\$3 500,00	\$3 500,00	\$3 000,00
Менеджер по продажам	Полная занятость, 40 час./нед.; 12 мес.			
Менеджер по продажам / логист	Полная занятость, 40 час./нед.; 12 мес.			
Делопроизводитель	Полная занятость, 40 час./нед.; 12 мес.			
Налоги	20% НДС			
Бэк-офис аналитика и биздев	Настройка инструментов Outreach, CRM поддержка, подбор клиентов, сбор контактов, сегментация, анализ компаний и собственников, подготовка материалов к встречам менеджеров по продажам, мониторинг номенклатуры			\$4 000,00
Итого по ФОТ	12 месяцев	\$3 500,00	\$3 500,00	\$7 000,00
Анализ рынка. Исследование цен и ассортимента по онлайн и оффлайн каналам продаж	Аналитический отчет по продажам на китайских маркетплейсов по выбранной категории (данные по продажам, аналитика в формате excel-таблицы) Аналитика оффлайн продаж, полевое исследование, исследование цен и ассортимента в оффлайн каналах продаж разного сегмента аудитории (фото-отчет, excel-таблица) Анализ рынка: изучение потребителей и продуктов конкурентов (презентация, не менее 20 слайдов, анализ не менее 5 конкурентов)	\$8 600,00	\$8 600,00	
Анализ стратегий конкурентов				
Бюджетирование и расчет экономической целесообразности	Финансовая модель офиса продаж и расчет экономической эффективности (excel) NPV анализ на 3-5 лет		\$8 200,00	
Расчет ценообразования и каналов сбыта	Анализ логистических и накладных расходов Разработка ценовой политики Разработка маркетинговой стратегии План продаж на 4 квартала и детализация 1 квартала по месяцам		\$3 000,00	

Table of Contents

- 6 Подготовка IT-навыков и адаптация сотрудников
- 7 Операционная деятельность
- 8 Преимущества Wite
- 9 Предлагаемая модель взаимодействия
- 10 Вопросы для дальнейшего обсуждения
- 11 See you in China!
- 12

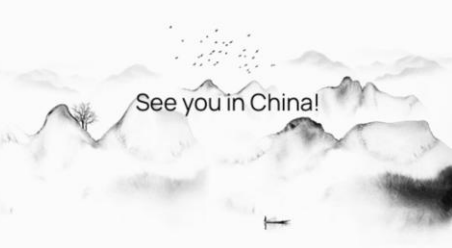
Предлагаемая модель взаимодействия

В целях реализации проектных задач предлагаем рассмотреть взаимодействие с учетом:

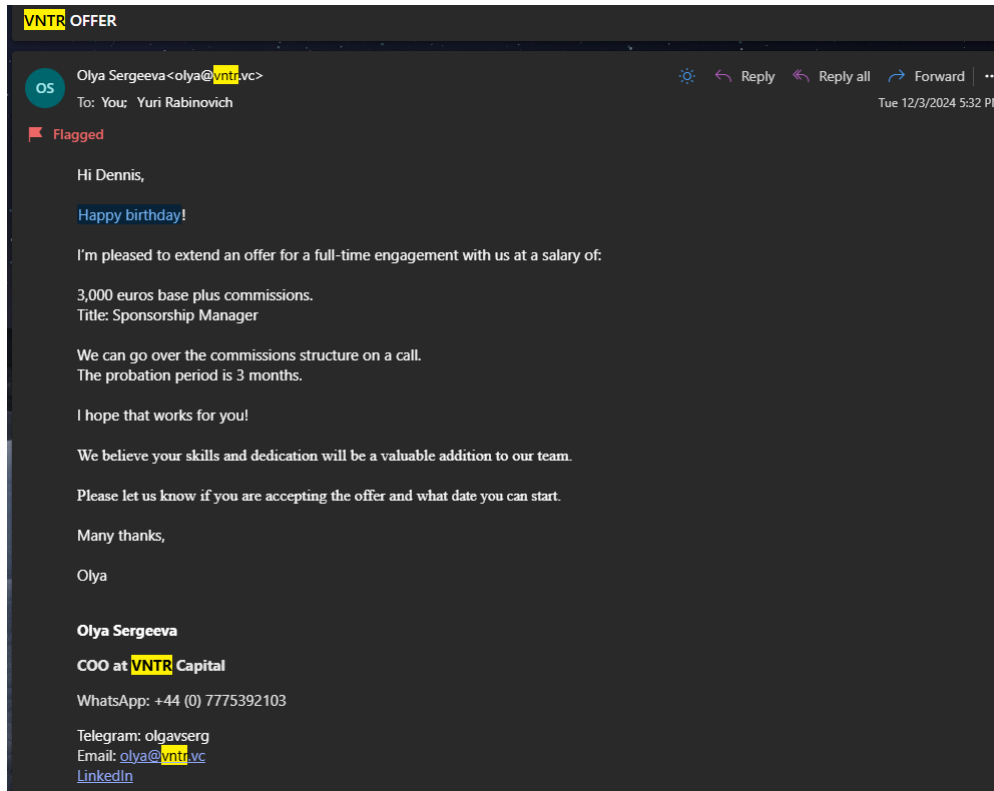
- Миноритарной доли менеджмент-команды в совместном предприятии (sweet capital)
- Доли от финансовых результатов филиала при превышении плана продаж / достижения заранее установленных KPI

Вопросы для дальнейшего обсуждения

- Предпочтительная форма регистрации организации (JV или WFOE)?
- Пороговые значения по NPV, IRR ?
- Возможные KPI по объемам продаж?
- Определение приоритетных позиций для продаж с точки зрения коммерческой эффективности?



The Offer From VNTR Venture Capital Firm



Appendix 7. Thumbnails of the Audited Videos





Не хватает эмоций, не цепляет, текст плохо читаем



Полностью противоположно. Есть эмоции, яркие образы. Завлекает

Что предлагаем

Сделать 3 варианта разных обложек и протестировать



Как сейчас, переделанный под Варламова. Но доработанный



Погнали



Александр Панчин (нейронка минимализм)



DISCOVER CHINESE VILLAGES | REAL RURAL LIFE IN CHINA 2



CHINESE VILLAGES
WHERE OLD MEETS NEW

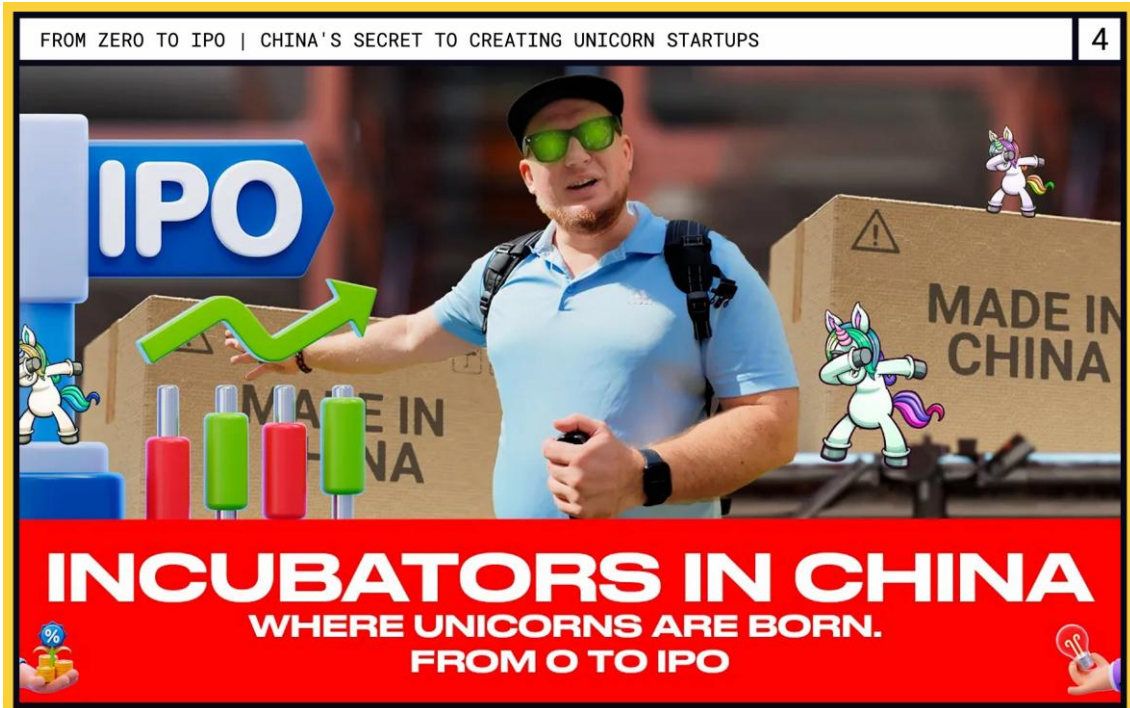
This video thumbnail features a man with a beard and a blue jacket, smiling and looking towards the camera. He is wearing a dark cap and a light-colored scarf. In the background, there is a black car and a rural landscape with mountains and a village. Two chickens are visible: one is perched on the man's shoulder, and another is standing on the ground near the car. The title 'CHINESE VILLAGES WHERE OLD MEETS NEW' is written in white on a red background at the bottom, flanked by two yellow eggs.

GUANGZHOU: 11 DISTRICTS THAT WILL BLOW YOUR MIND 🤯 | CHINESE MEGAPOLIS OF THE FUTURE 3



GUANGZHOU : 11 DISTRICTS
THAT WILL BLOW YOUR MIND 🤯

This video thumbnail features a man with a beard and a grey shirt, looking surprised with his hands raised. The background is a night cityscape of Guangzhou, China, with many lit-up buildings. A red map of Guangzhou is overlaid on the cityscape, with a small figure of the man standing on it. In the bottom left corner, there is a futuristic model of a city. The title 'GUANGZHOU : 11 DISTRICTS THAT WILL BLOW YOUR MIND 🤯' is written in white on a red background at the bottom.



Appendix 8. Concept Building Evidence

Clipboard F5 Slides Section Font Paragraph Drawing Editing Voice Sensitivity Add-ins reMarkable

CONCEPT – WHAT ?

To show audience real case of business building abroad from scratch to the moon.

Format of episodes – like a series movie.

Dennis is discussing with the audience and people around him what to do next to make good profit – engagement of audience.

The YouTube channel documents the journey of Dennis, a European entrepreneur in Guangzhou, China, with a bold goal: to build a business from scratch and generate \$1 million in revenue within six months. This adventure delves into the intricacies of navigating a foreign business landscape, highlighting cultural nuances, challenges, and the entrepreneurial spirit.

Episodes cover the entire process, from initial market research and business model development to the nitty-gritty of setting up operations and scaling the venture. Dennis's interactions with local entrepreneurs, industry experts, and potential customers offer valuable insights into Chinese business practices and consumer behavior.

The series is not just a business venture; it's a bridge between cultures, showcasing the fusion of European ambition with the dynamism of the Chinese market. Viewers are taken on a real-time entrepreneurial journey, experiencing the highs and lows of starting a business in an unfamiliar environment.

Through documentary-style storytelling, the channel engages the audience, encouraging them to participate in the journey, offer advice, and learn alongside Dennis.

Social media platforms complement the series, extending the narrative through live updates, behind-the-scenes content, and community challenges. This venture is more than a business experiment; it's a story of personal growth, resilience, and the universal quest for success against the odds.

Ultimately, the channel aims to inspire and educate aspiring entrepreneurs worldwide, proving that with determination, anything is possible, even making a million dollars in a foreign land.

Click to add notes

4 of 22 English (Finland) Accessibility: Investigate Notes Display Settings

Appendix 9. Scenarios Evidence

Namn	Ägare	Ändringsdatum	Filstorlek
intebriidge	shizuqqqu	13 nov. 2024 shizuqqqu	6 kB
Intebriidge УБЕР ЛАСТ ВАРИАНТ	shizuqqqu	15 nov. 2024 shizuqqqu	11 kB
№ 9 Китайские бани	shizuqqqu	4 sep. 2024 shizuqqqu	4 kB
№1 ENG Первый ролик_9.04.24	shizuqqqu	23 maj 2024 shizuqqqu	6 kB
№3 ENG EU-China Collab: Shaoguan Hosts EU Delegates for Factories' Visits	jag	25 maj 2024 jag	10 kB
№3 RUS Поездка в Шаогуань	shizuqqqu	26 maj 2024 jag	3,6 MB
№4 Переезд в Китай.docx	kurilkinang	16 juni 2024 jag	18 kB
№4. Moving to China.docx	kurilkinang	16:46 jag	21 kB
№5 ENG Фошань	kurilkinang	20 juni 2024	13 kB
№5 Фошань	kurilkinang	16 juni 2024 jag	10 kB
№6 ENG Религия	shizuqqqu	1 juli 2024	10 kB
№7 ENG ЕДА КИТАЙ	kurilkinang	26 juni 2024 kurilkinang	11 kB
№7 RUS ЕДА КИТАЙ.	kurilkinang	16 juni 2024 jag	10 kB
№8 University ENG	shizuqqqu	2 aug. 2024	13 kB
№8 Универс RUS	shizuqqqu	21 juni 2024 shizuqqqu	27 kB

"I wanted to go home after a week in China. Moving to China in 2024. What do you need to know?"
Описание под роликом написать.

Cut 1: What about personal boundaries? (файл DJI_20240531214733_0286_D (дл 04:05) примерно на 01:52)
Cut 2: Just a hole in the floor! (файл DJI_20240531214733_0286_D (дл 04:05) примерно на 03:35-03:40)
Cut 3: Hot and humid! (из файла DJI_20240531214733_0286_D (дл 04:05) 00:00-00:32)
Cut 4-6: VPN! VPN! VPN! (из части про VPN три равных куска нарезать)
Cut 7-9: Download. Install. Download. (из части про приложения)
Cut 10: I just want to leave! (или "I wanted to go home" в файле DJI_20240531224051_0290_D (дл. 01:06))

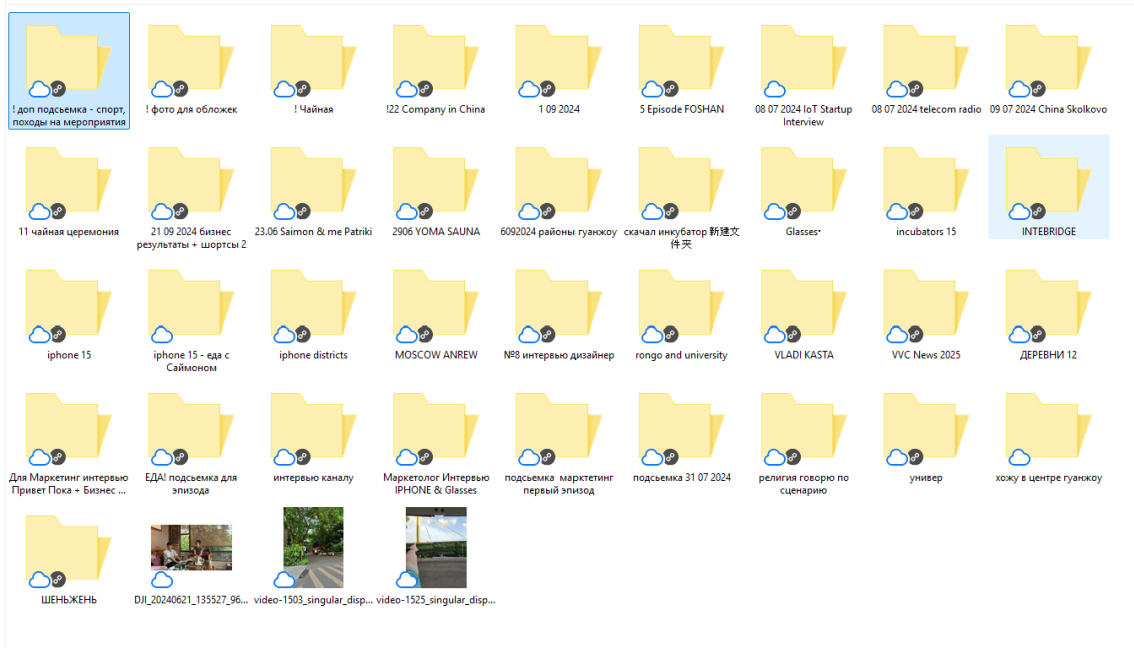
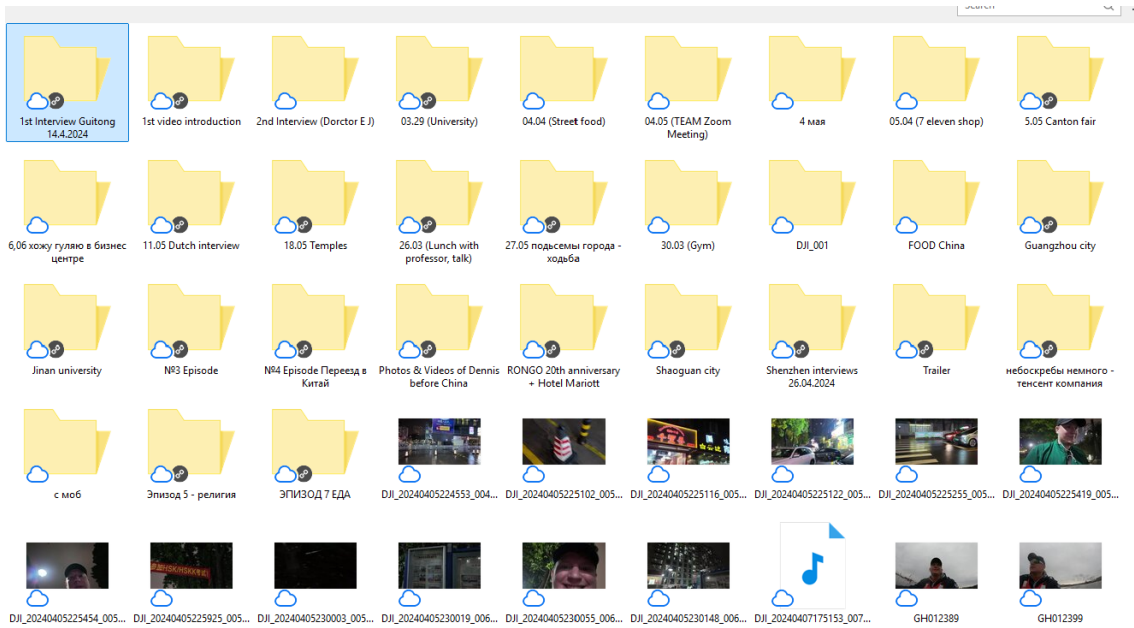
ЭТМ.

Панорама города. Музыка. Вырезать красивые части из трех видео:
файл IMG_8222.mov
файл DJI_20240521205344_0034_D
файл DJI_20240521204551_0015_D

файл DJI_20240601184515_0306_D (дл. 0:51)
В чб 00:00-00:06
В обычном цвете
00:06-00:11
00:12-00:27

файл DJI_20240601184515_0306_D (дл. 0:43) - полностью
Hey, it's Deni.
I have been living in Guangzhou for 3 months. And honestly, after a week in China, I wanted to go home.
The thing is, I wasn't 100 percent prepared for what I saw here. Although it is almost impossible to prepare completely, in this video I have collected all my tips for you to make

Appendix 10. Interview and Notes Evidence



Vitaly Stockman 维塔利·斯托克曼、Jack(3)



Vitaly Stockman 维塔利·斯托克曼

Hi @Jack!



Vitaly Stockman 维塔利·斯托克曼

Greetings from Finland!



Vitaly Stockman 维塔利·斯托克曼

Please, meet Dennis, my friend and entrepreneur from Finland, partner in UK venture firm and who just finished MBA in China. He will be in Shenzhen next week, would you be available to meet him? Maybe he even can record a podcast with you a the meeting about business in China, about startups, hardware development in China? He would also be glad to visit your factory if possible.

0.41

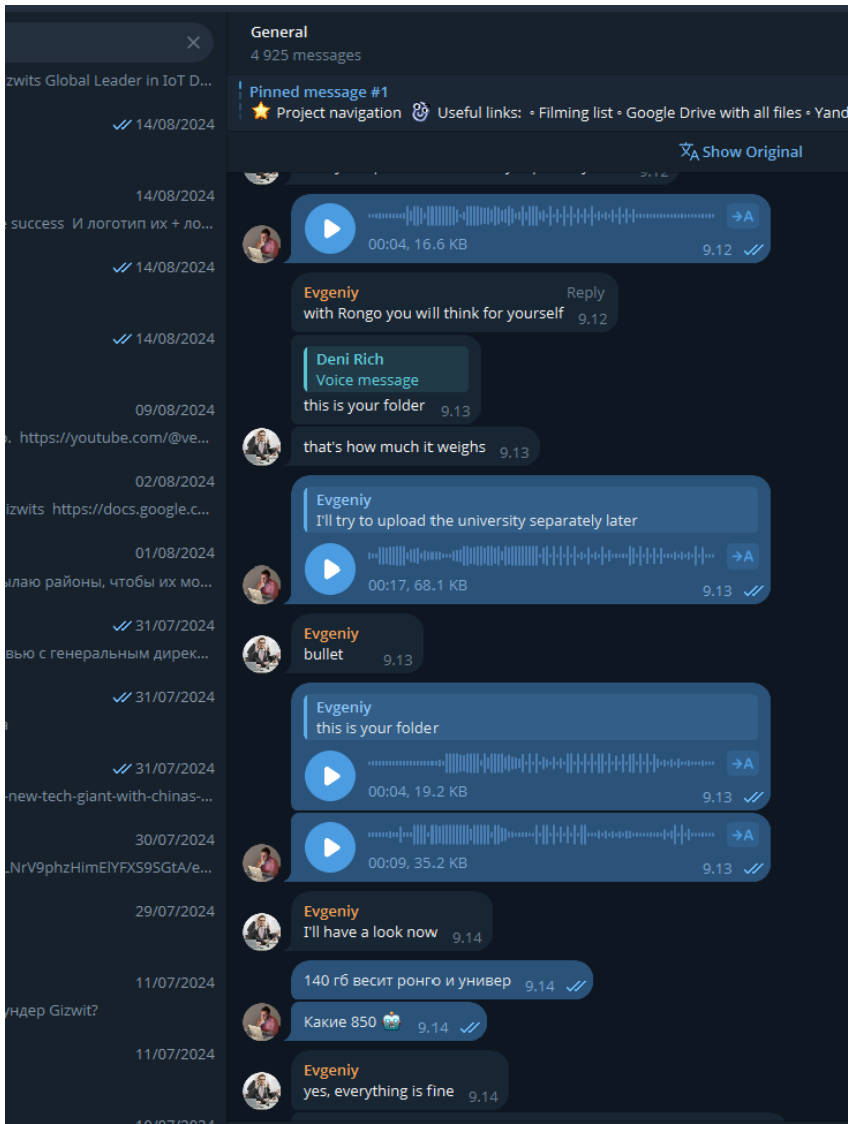
Hi Jack

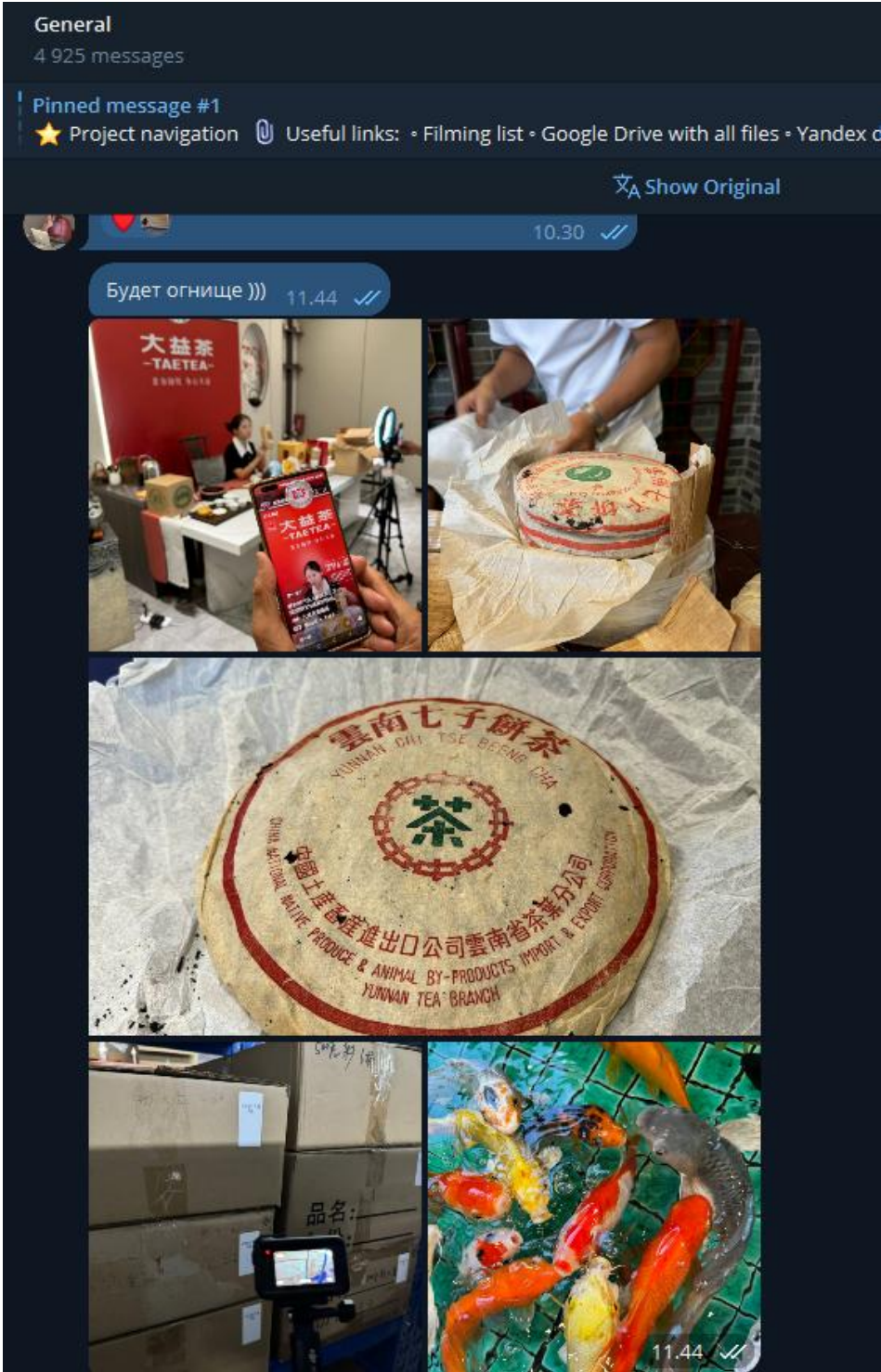
1.05



Jack

Dennis, nice to meet you









**IRISH
FINTECH
INVESTOR**



Laura Davies
UK Ambassador to Finland

Ilkka Kivimäki
co-Founder of Slush
and Venture Capitalist







Justin Kan – founder of TWITCH







Kommentarer



Populärast

Senaste



@louislam4000 · för 59 min sen



A highly commendable insight of the Chinese religions from a foreigner. If more Westerners were to come to China to learn and experience the culture, the current virulent anti-China agenda propagated especially by US and its media will be debunked. Great job, Dennis! Looking forward to more enlightening videos like this.



1

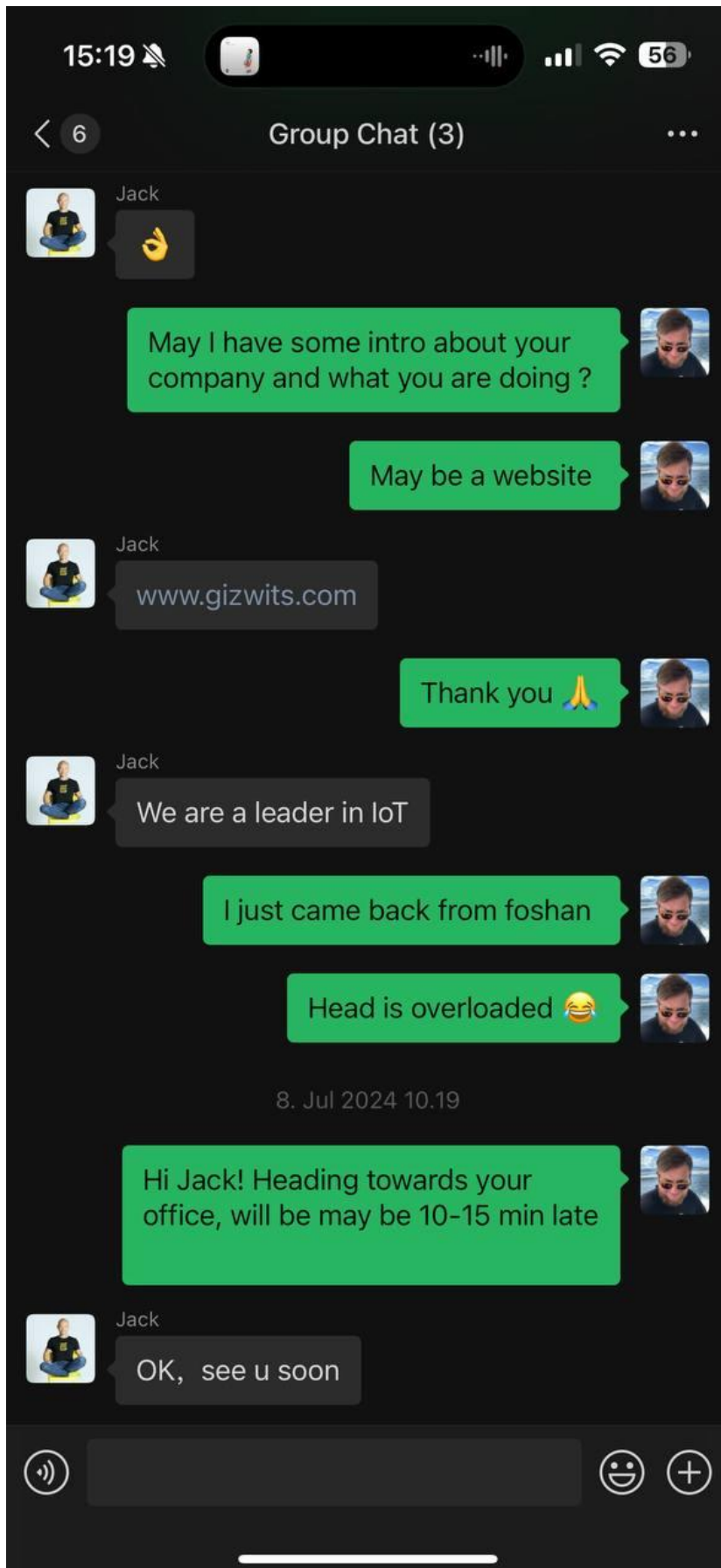


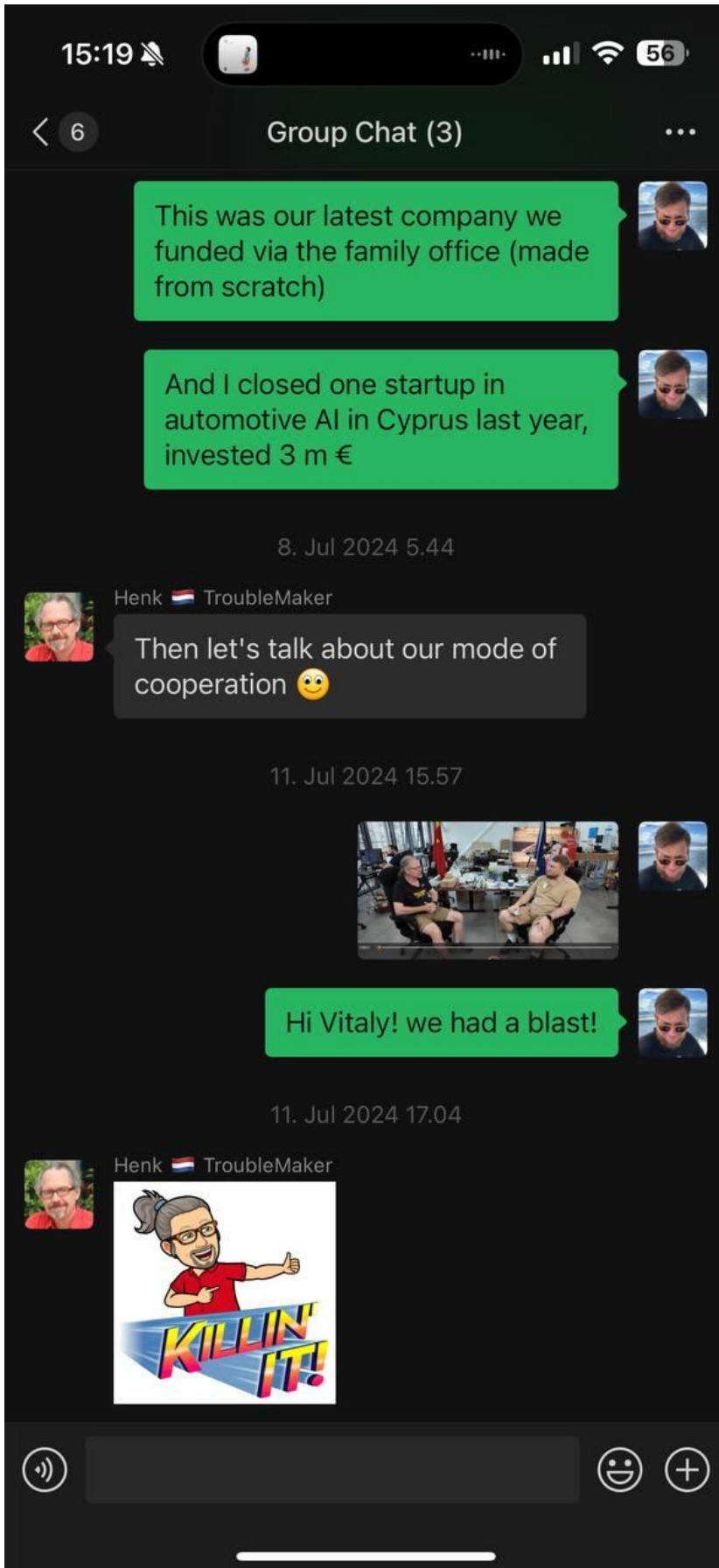
@user-be3fh9et2o · för 23 tim sedan

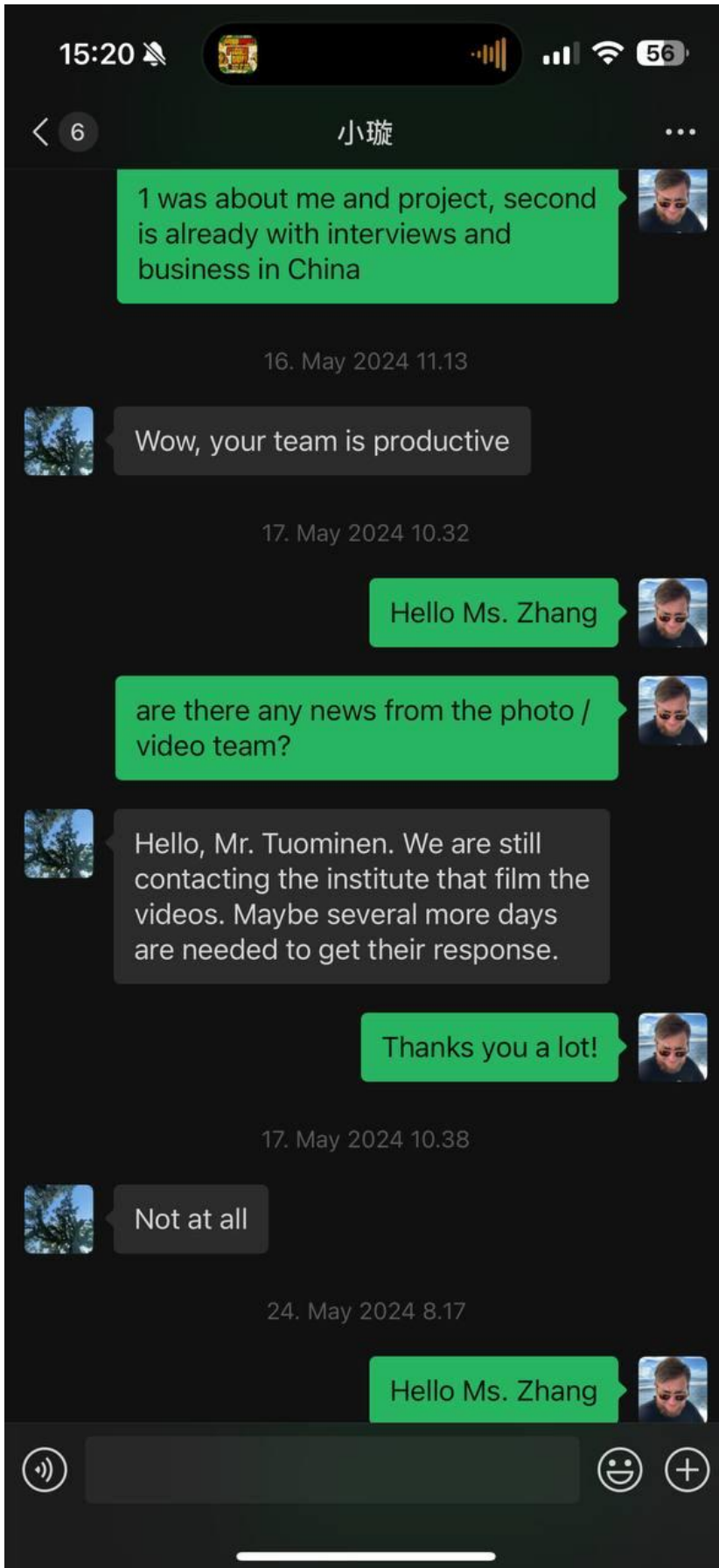


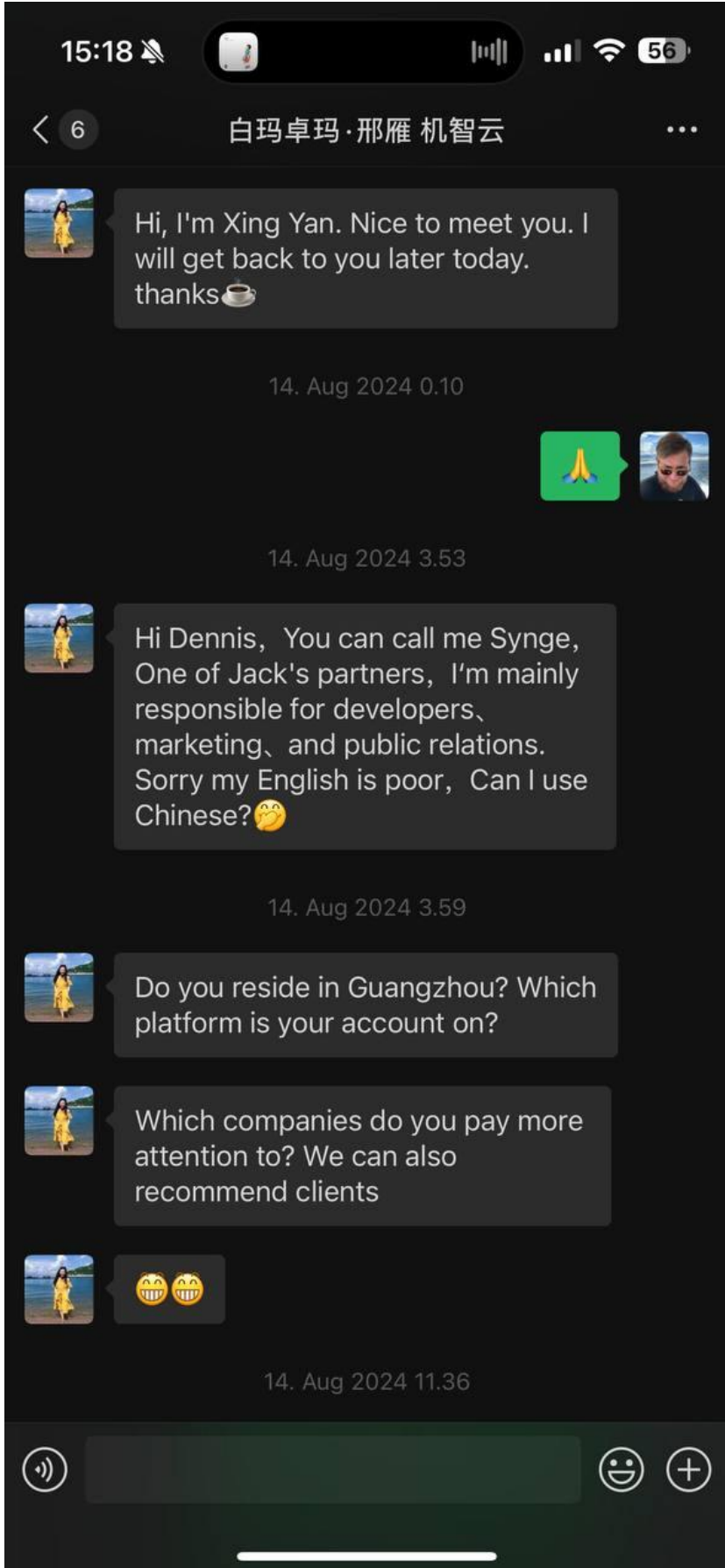
Качество и контент растут! Супер

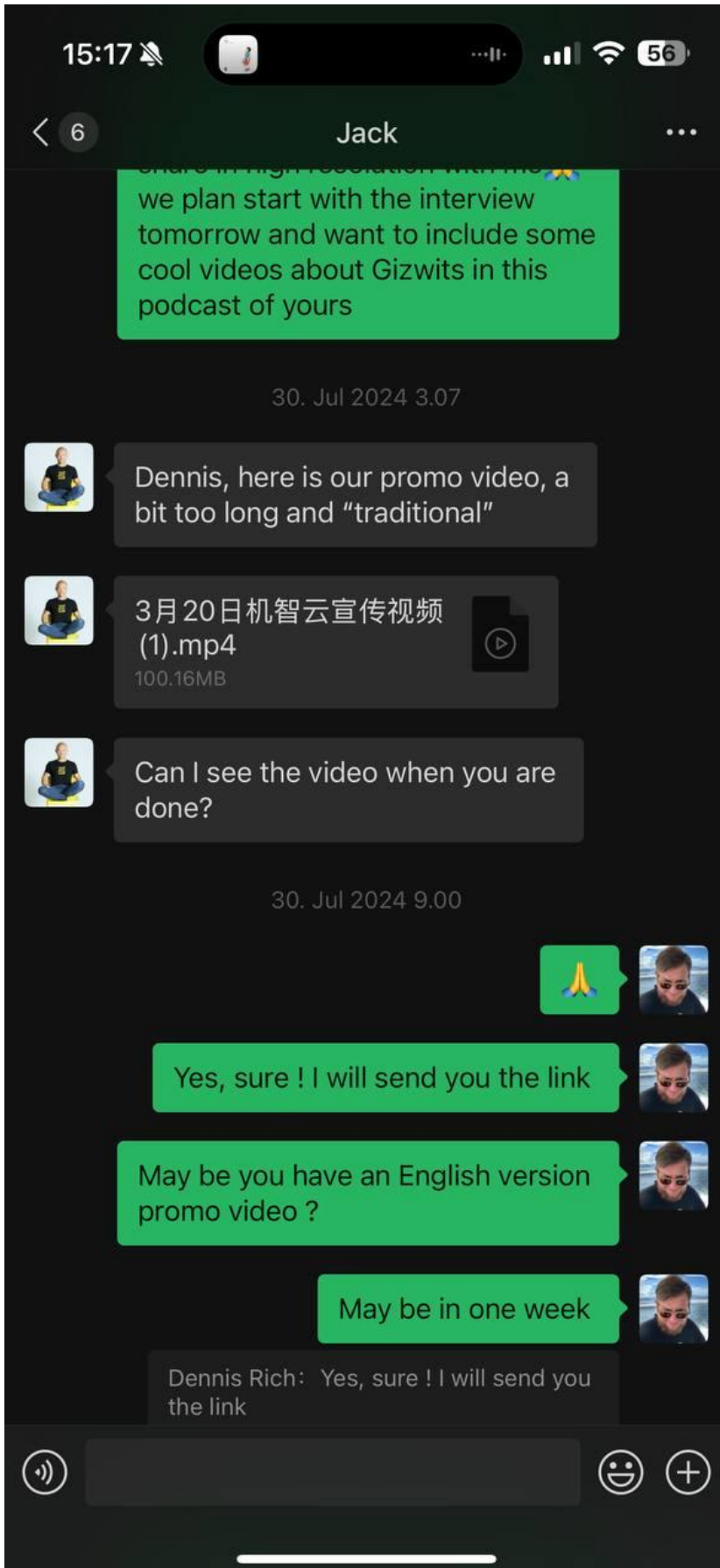


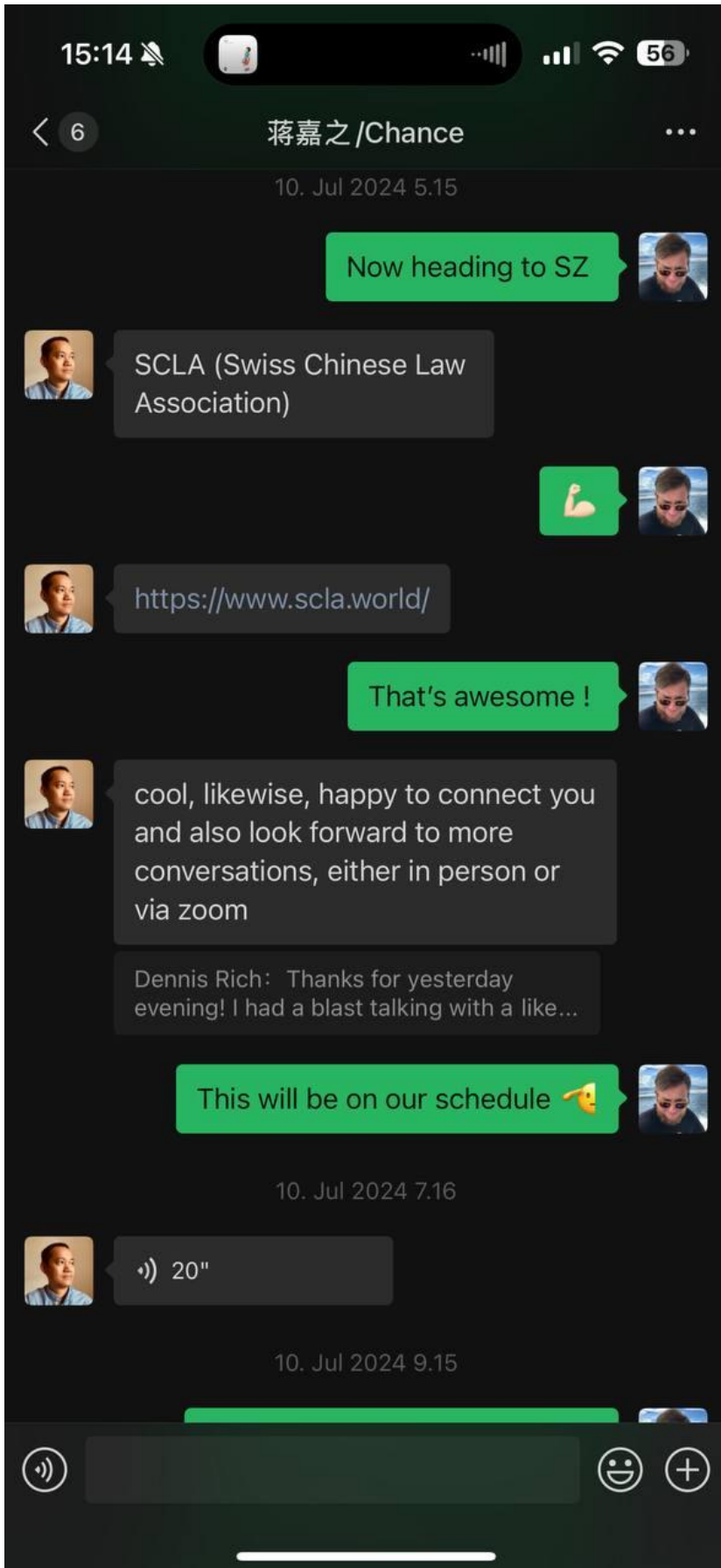


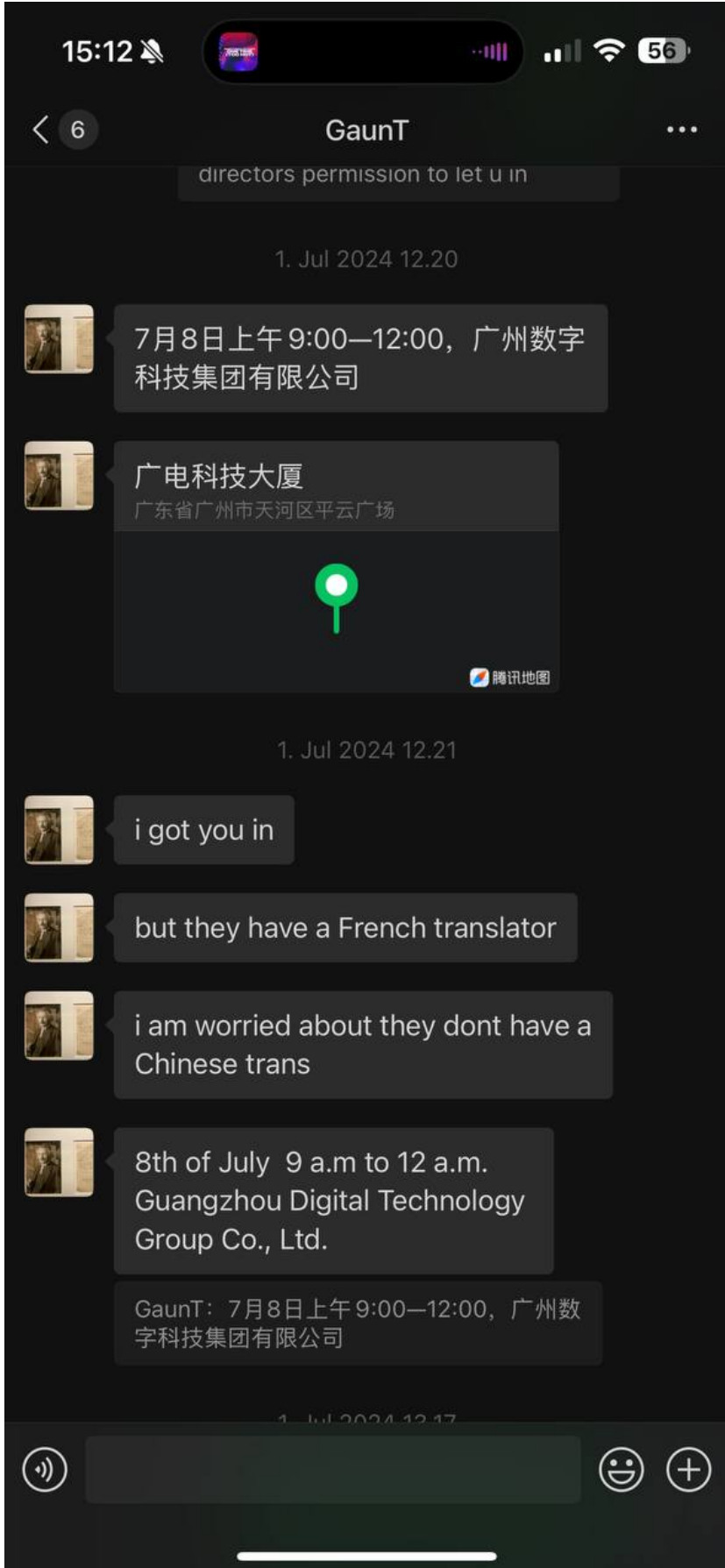














Appendix 11. Video Content Pipeline of VVC

The goal was to capture diverse aspects of life, business, and culture in China through high-quality visual storytelling optimized for YouTube and short-form platforms.

1. Lifestyle & Culture

- Village Life: Hanxi, Dawei, Shendun – rural modernization and traditions
- Tea Ceremony: Tools, rituals, cultural context, 360° room views
- Bathhouses: Yoma Space, Osotto – interiors, user experience
- Traditional Values & LGBT: Exploring identity, tolerance, and culture
- Local Attractions: Lotus Park, pedestrian safari, park life
- Urban Culture: Districts of Guangzhou (Yuexiu, Tianhe, Liwan, etc.), architecture, markets, nightlife
- Cost of Living Comparison: Finland vs. Guangzhou
- Stereotypes & Misconceptions: Western myths about China

2. Business & Entrepreneurship

- Weekly Business Recap: China market highlights
- Company Registration in China: Step-by-step with expert interview
- Popular Business Models & Success Cases
- Startup Ecosystems: Incubators, accelerators, and VC culture
- Business Culture & Etiquette: Cross-cultural communication, meetups
- Visa & Money Matters: APEC visa, payment systems, ATMs
- International Marketing & Apps: Western tools in Chinese context
- Tencent HQ Feature: Corporate innovation case study

3. Transportation & Infrastructure

- Public Transit: Buses, trolleys, metro – ticketing, comfort, frequency
- Rail Travel & Stations: Intercity mobility
- Taxi & Car Rentals: Prices, accessibility, local apps
- Citywide Transport Montage: Daily motion of Guangzhou

4. Healthcare

Pharmacies & Hospitals: Access, signage, local experience

Emergency Services: Ambulances, public health messaging

5. Education & Student Life

University Footage: Campus, classrooms, canteens, dorms

Affordable Dining: Local student cafés

Sports & Recreation: Campus fitness and leisure areas

6. Automotive & Technology

Chinese Cars: Street view, dealerships, auto expos

Factory Visit: Manufacturing context

Gadget Testing: Example – Meta Ray-Ban in China

7. Interviews

Key Guests: Including Simon and business leaders

Themes: Design, business, culture – all supported by written scripts

8. Finance & Environment

Chinese Stock Market: Investment trends and history

Ecology & Sustainability: Urban planning, environmental challenges

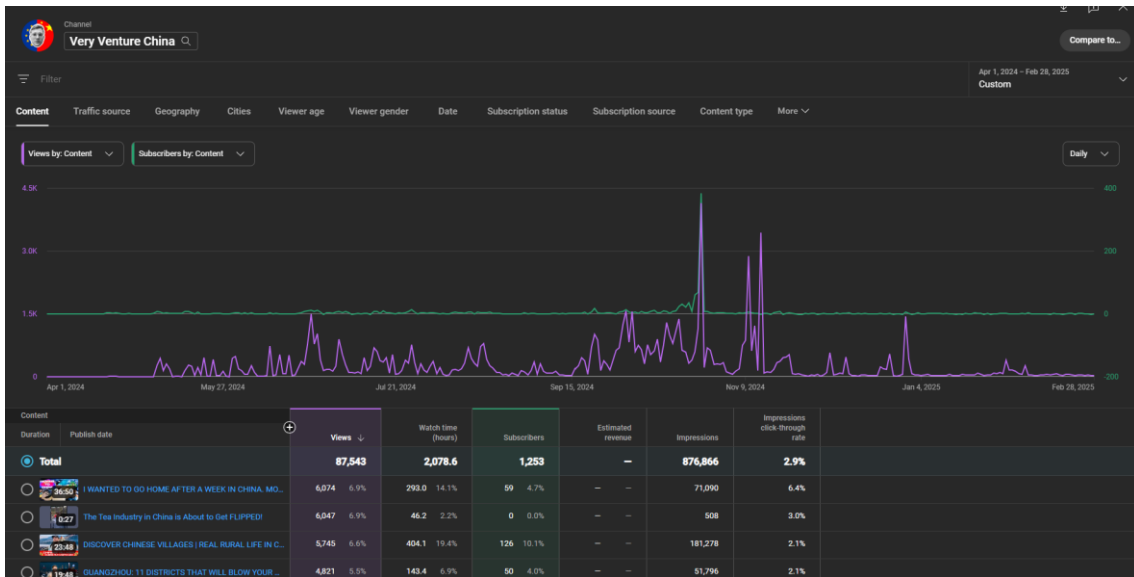
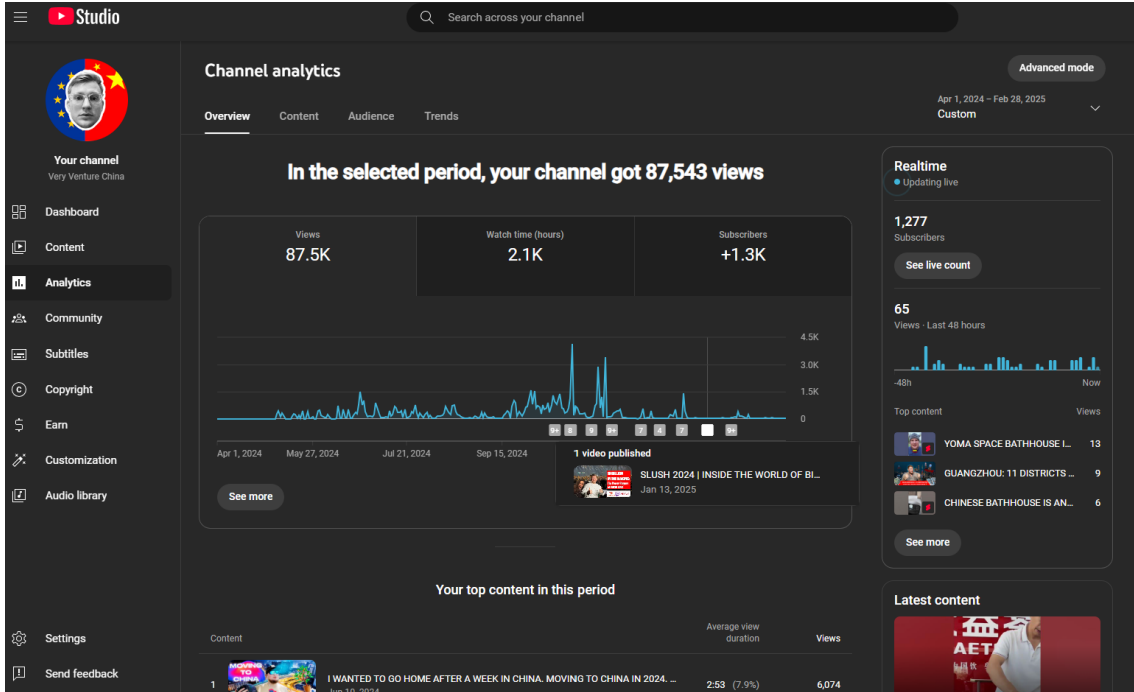
Appendix 12. Evidence of author's Governmental communication in China

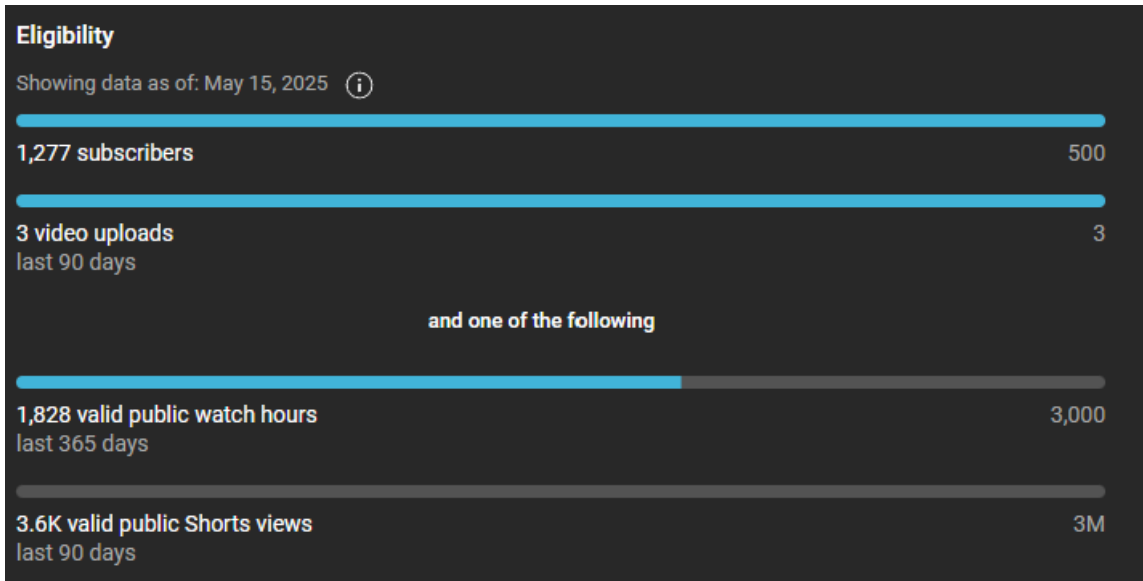






Appendix 13. Evidence of Channel Analytics





Appendix 14. New Channel Dennis Richard Investments

https://www.youtube.com/@Dennis_Richard

DENNIS RICHARD

Дэннис Ричард | Альтернативные Инвестиции
@Dennis_Richard · 166 subscribers · 68 videos
Привет! Добро пожаловать на мой канал. Я Дэннис Ричард – инвестор и ...more
[t.me/dennis_richard_invest](#) and 1 more link

Subscribed

Shorts

Latest Popular Oldest

Мечты стоят дорого

Кинг

В кроссы

заработал

10 000 ₪

Супергерой

Links

- Мой Telegram t.me/dennis_richard_invest
- Мой Linktree linktr.ee/deni_rich

More info

- View email address
- www.youtube.com/@Dennis_Richard
- Singapore
- Joined Mar 10, 2025
- 166 subscribers
- 68 videos
- 271,861 views

Share channel Report user

ые Инвестиции

...more

Shorts

МЕЧТЫ СТОЯТ ДОРОГО Дубайский шоколад: от фантазии ... 37K views	конец Самый известный инфоцыган 20 века 19K views	в кроссы Самые дорогие кроссовки в мире 23K views	заработал Как Дэдпул заработал целое состояние? 15K views	10000 ₪ бизнесмена Самая дорогая пицца в мире! 14K views	100 000 000 \$ Как Мистер Бист "развёл" Amazon на ... 26K views
как От 9 млрд до тюрьмы: крупнейшая афера ... 15K views	топ пять Топ 5 фильмов для инвестора! Это лучш... 7.3K views	состояние Не пей – инвестируй! Как заработать на ... 3.8K views	0% 500% Главный конкурент CocaCola сейчас! 5.5K views	это была худшая инвестиция в истории Самый невезучий инвестор в мире! 5.1K views	ты Все скины CS2 исчезнут за секунду! ... 6.3K views

Appendix 15. Poster Marketing at University Evidence



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