

CULTURE

Asia’s microdrama boom is turning spare minutes into premium media



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Across Asia, short drama, or microdrama, apps have evolved into a serious media channel — and buyers say they could soon become a major part of media plans, from China to Southeast Asia, directly challenging short-form social video.

According to a recent Omdia report, the top five microdrama apps in the region have already [surpassed 150 million monthly active users](#). In China alone, [revenues exceeded traditional box-office takings in 2025](#), up from \$500 million in 2021 to \$7 billion in 2024, and are expected to exceed \$16.2 billion by 2030.

For marketers navigating fragmented attention spans, that evolution is hard to ignore, and investment is already following. Industry forecasts show [continued growth](#) in both user adoption and ad spend tied to microdrama platforms.

Meanwhile, ad tech players are [taking notice](#), opening up new programmatic pathways into the fast-growing media channel.

Traditional media companies are [also experimenting](#), with Disney [exploring microdrama formats](#) as part of its broader push into gaming IP and mobile-first storytelling. Localized productions, including emerging Australian efforts, point to the [format’s global potential](#).

According to Darren Woolley, CEO of TrinityP3, the value of microdramas lies in their ability to capture the “micro-void” — fleeting moments of attention throughout the day.

“We are looking at a specific window of the day, the three-minute commute, the elevator wait, the retail queue, where traditional streaming platforms fail

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because they require a psychological commitment,” Woolley told The Current. “Microdrama platforms outperform every other channel in these moments because they are frictionless.”

Competing with social media

Brands creating the most value are those targeting Asia’s “striving middle” class. “These are audiences with high mobile literacy but fragmented time,” Woolley said.

Further, microdramas are built around narrative hooks, often delivering a cliff-hanger every 60 to 120 seconds, maximizing engagement that can rival that of social video platforms.

And unlike most social video content, microdrama apps often give viewers an incentive to watch an ad to earn coins that unlock the next episode, in a model called [“virtual currency.”](#)

“When you look at the engagement data, the comparison to traditional social media is night and day,” Woolley added.

“On a platform like TikTok, Douyin and WeChat, attention is fleeting; you’re competing with a billion different creators. Microdrama platforms, however, are built on a ‘hook-per-minute’ structure that generates a level of focus that hasn’t been seen since the heyday of linear soap operas.”

The microdrama-to-commerce pipeline

Vicki Iszatt, director at OMDIGI Group, compared the rewarded ad mechanism to gaming platforms.

“What I find compelling is how closely the economics mirror gaming,” she said. “Once someone is inside a content loop with emotional investment, their receptivity to brand messaging is considerably higher than in passive media.”

“First movers who figure out the creative approach now will have a real advantage.”

It’s because of that model, and viewers’ emotional engagement with the format’s soapy stories, that the apps are increasingly tied to commerce, experts said.

“China’s microdrama platforms are deeply integrated with e-commerce ecosystems like JD, Pinduoduo and Taobao,” said Christine Wang, strategy director at Mediaplus China. “We are seeing a shift from ‘brand awareness’ to ‘short drama plus e-commerce.’ Brands use dramas to plant interest through emotional storytelling and immediately harvest via embedded links. ... This creates a direct path from story to interest to conversion.”

A new measurement frontier

Because many microdrama platforms operate on a pay-per-episode or reward-based model, user journeys can be tracked with precision. Woolley points to emerging capabilities, such as AI-driven sentiment analysis, that can link specific narrative elements to purchase behavior.

“Once you can prove to a CMO that a ‘revenge’ plotline [might] yield a 20% higher conversion rate for luxury goods than a ‘romance’ one, the floodgates for brand-direct investment will open entirely,” he said.

But while there’s clear momentum from media buyers, some barriers do remain. Iszatt points to the need for standardized viewability metrics, clearer brand safety frameworks and greater transparency from platforms before large-scale budgets shift.

“There’s a trust gap slowing investment, although the brands I talk to are interested,” she said. “They just need the same proof points they’d require from any emerging channel before they move meaningful budget.”

Still, Woolley anticipates microdramas could capture a significant part of the total digital video ad spend in Asia within the next few years.

“They are set to become the primary engine for ‘narrative commerce,’” he said. “When that happens, they won’t just be an ‘add-on’ to a media plan; they will be the cornerstone of any mobile-first strategy.”

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