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Exploring the Influence of Reels and Short Videos on Hiking Motivation

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of reels and short hiking videos on hiking motivation and interest among hikers. This research examines how reels and short videos affect individuals' motivation to participate in hiking. The popularity of social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok has transformed how people perceive and engage with outdoor activities. This study explores how short-form video content influences participants' attitudes and motivation toward hiking by surveying the hikers. The results indicate that visually appealing content significantly boosts motivation, encourages outdoor exploration, and fosters a sense of community among viewers. These findings highlight the potential of social media as a powerful marketing tool for promoting outdoor activities and provide valuable insights for organizers aiming to increase participation in hiking and other nature-related pursuits.

Keywords: *Outdoor Activities, Hiking, Short Reels, Social Media*

1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a notable rise in outdoor recreation, with hiking becoming one of the most popular activities across diverse demographic groups. Social media platforms have evolved into powerful tools for sharing experiences and inspiring others to explore the outdoors, particularly through short-form video content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok (Becker, 2020). These platforms allow users to share visually captivating and easily consumable content that motivates others to explore nature and engage in outdoor activities (Benton, 2019). As more individuals turn to social media for inspiration and encouragement, it is essential to understand how reels and short videos influence hiking behavior.

Research indicates that visual content plays a significant role in shaping decision-making, especially regarding recreational activities (Floyd & Shinew, 2018). Short-form videos, known for their brevity and engaging visuals, can evoke strong emotional responses that prompt viewers to take action (Liu & Zhang, 2021). The interactive features of these platforms also foster a sense of community, enhancing motivation to participate in hiking and other outdoor activities (Becker, 2020). Although the positive effects of social media on outdoor engagement are recognized, the precise ways in which short videos impact motivation for hiking have yet to be fully explored.

This study aims to analyze the influence of reels and short videos on individuals' motivation to hike, focusing on the emotional and social factors that drive this engagement. By implementing a quantitative survey method, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital content influences hiking behaviors. The findings will offer valuable insights for outdoor organizers and marketers aiming to promote hiking and encourage wider participation in outdoor activities.

2. Literature Review

There are several subtopics relevant to this study, such as the benefits of outdoor activities, recent trends in hiking, and the influence of social media in promoting hiking activities.

Outdoor Activities

Outdoor activities, encompassing a wide range of physical exercises such as hiking, biking, and camping, have long been recognized for their contributions to both physical and mental health (Outdoor Foundation, 2022). Engaging in outdoor activities is highly beneficial for physical well-being. Regular participation in activities like hiking, biking, or jogging helps improve cardiovascular fitness, strengthen muscles, and enhance endurance

(Barton & Pretty, 2010). According to the Outdoor Foundation (2022), 50% of Americans participated in outdoor activities in 2021, with hiking and biking being among the most popular choices.

Outdoor activities also have significant positive effects on mental health. Research demonstrates that spending time in natural settings reduces stress, anxiety, and depression (Korpela et al., 2014). A study by Jordan and Hinds (2016) highlighted the therapeutic benefits of nature, emphasizing that outdoor experiences can foster emotional healing and personal growth.

Recent Trends in Hiking

Hiking has become increasingly popular in recent years, driven by factors such as health awareness, digital media influence, and the growing desire for outdoor experiences. Several factors are shaping the world of hiking today, including the post-pandemic hiking boom, technology-enhanced hiking, and the influence of social media.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a surge in hiking as people sought safe, socially distanced activities. According to a 2021 report by the Outdoor Foundation, participation in hiking grew by over 16% from 2019 to 2020, with millions of first-time hikers taking to the trails during lockdown periods. The pandemic reshaped recreational habits, making outdoor activities more appealing due to their associated physical and mental health benefits (Zhao et al., 2022).

Secondly, technology plays a larger role in hiking today, with apps such as AllTrails and Strava helping hikers find new trails, track their progress, and share their experiences online. GPS navigation tools and fitness trackers have also enhanced the hiking experience by providing detailed maps, route planning, and real-time information on weather and terrain (Qin et al., 2022). Social media platforms allow hikers to document and share their journeys, further connecting the hiking community. However, there is ongoing discussion about the balance between technology and immersion in nature, as excessive screen time can detract from the benefits of outdoor experiences (Smith & Jones, 2020).

Lastly, platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have had a substantial impact on hiking trends. The rise of visually-driven platforms has popularized certain hiking locations, turning previously obscure trails into "must-visit" spots. Instagram hashtags such as #hikingadventures and viral TikTok videos showcasing scenic routes have contributed to the growing appeal of hiking, particularly among younger generations (Qin et al., 2022). Short videos highlighting picturesque trails often inspire viewers to explore these areas for themselves.

Influence of Social Media to promote hiking

In recent years, social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have transformed how users engage with outdoor activities, including hiking. Research on the influence of short-form video platforms, such as TikTok, suggests that these platforms significantly impact user behavior and motivation through engaging content and algorithmic recommendations, particularly among younger audiences (Kaur & Dhir, 2022). Studies highlight how the immersive nature of short videos and "flow experiences"—which include enjoyment and time distortion—can influence behaviors like social media addiction and may play a role in shaping users' motivation for outdoor activities like hiking (Becker, 2020).

The rise of "Instagrammable" hiking spots and adventure tourism is evident, with travellers seeking unique experiences in lesser-known locations. For instance, in the last three years, there have been 88K Twitter posts using the hashtag #hikingadventures in Malaysia and 955K globally. Additionally, there have been 344K Twitter posts on #hiking in Malaysia, highlighting the growing interest in hiking as a social media trend (Outdoor Social Media Report, 2022).

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative survey approach to gain a thorough understanding of the influence of short-form video content on hiking motivation.

Sample Population

The study targeted a diverse group of individuals, aged 18 and older, who engage in outdoor activities. A total of 66 participants were recruited through social media platforms and hiking-related online communities. The sample included individuals with varying levels of hiking experience, from beginners to seasoned hikers, to capture a broad range of perspectives and insights.

Data Collection

Participants were asked to complete an online survey consisting of 15 questions, which included a mix of multiple-choice and Likert scale items. The survey aimed to assess key variables such as demographics, the frequency of short-form video consumption, motivations for hiking, and factors influencing their hiking decisions.

The survey also explored specific motivators, such as scenery, adventure, and community engagement, and examined how these factors, influenced by short-form videos, affected participants' likelihood to engage in hiking activities. The summary of the survey results is presented in the result and discussion section.

4. Results and Discussion

The survey conducted for this study is aimed to glean valuable insights from both novice and experienced hikers. It sought to gather demographic data, assess participants' hiking experiences, and solicit opinions on the influence of reels and short videos on their motivation to hike. The survey sample comprised 66 respondents, providing a diverse representation of hikers. Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic information and survey results.

Table 1: Survey questions and results

Question	Option	Result (%)
Section 1: Demographic Information		
Age :	18-24	18.2
	25-34	36.4
	35-44	28.8
	45-54	9.1
	54 and above	7.6
Gender :	Male	30.3
	Female	69.7
How often do you engage in hiking?	Never	18.2
	Occasionally (1-2 times a year)	30.3
	Sometimes (3-5 times a year)	21.2
	Regularly (6-10 times a year)	12.1
	Frequently (more than 10 times a year)	18.2
Section 2: Short-Form Video Consumption		
Which platforms do you primarily use to watch short-form hiking videos? (Select all that apply)	Instagram	57.6
	TikTok	77.3
	YouTube Shorts	15.2
	Facebook	31.8
	Other: _____	7.5
How often do you watch short-form videos related to hiking?	Never	4.5
	Rarely (less than once a week)	39.4

	Occasionally (1-3 times a week)	25.8
	Frequently (4-6 times a week)	30.3
What type of content do you enjoy the most in hiking short-form videos?	Trails reviews	62.1
	Scenery views	83.3
	Group hikes	33.3
	Tips & tricks	45.5
	Other:_____	3.0
Section 3: Motivation to Hike		
After watching a short-form video about hiking, how likely are you to plan a hike? (1 = Not likely at all, 5 = Very likely)	1	7.6
	2	12.1
	3	22.7
	4	24.2
	5	33.3
What motivates you to hike after watching short-form videos? (Select all that apply)	Beautiful scenery	81.8
	Nice hiking trails	60.6
	Adventure and exploration	63.6
	Recommendations from others	45.5
	Feeling part of a community	30.3
	Other: _____	3.0
How do you feel when you watch short-form hiking videos? (Select all that apply)	Inspired	69.7
	Excited	74.2
	Overwhelmed	34.8
	Motivated	65.2
	Indifferent	21.2
	Other: _____	3.0
Have you chosen specific hiking locations or trails based on videos you've seen?	Yes	71.2
	No	28.8
If no, what factors influenced your decision not to choose any hiking locations or trails after watching the videos? (Select all that apply)	Difficulty levels	42.6
	Safety concerns	48.9
	Duration & Accessibility	46.8
	Scenery quality	21.3
	Lack of information	44.7
	Other:_____	8.5
Section 4: Short-Form Video Effect		
How important do you think social media is in promoting outdoor activities like hiking? (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important)	1	0.0
	2	4.5
	3	9.1
	4	25.8
	5	60.6
Do you feel a sense of community or connection with other hikers when you watch their videos online?	Yes	62.1
	No	34.8
	Sometimes	3.0

Analysis of the data revealed several key findings regarding the impact of reels and short videos on hiking motivation. For the demographic, the majority of participants were aged 25-34 (36.4%) and predominantly female (69.7%). This demographic data indicates a significant representation of younger individuals engaging in hiking.

A significant majority of participants (71.2%) indicated that watching short-form videos made them more likely to consider specific hiking locations or trails based on videos they have seen, with many citing beautiful scenery and adventure and exploration as primary motivators.

Thus, the results indicate that the most influential motivators for hiking after watching short-form videos were beautiful scenery (81.8%) and adventure and exploration (63.6%). This highlights the importance of visually appealing content in inspiring outdoor activities.

Moreover, the emotional responses to short-form videos were overwhelmingly positive, with 69.7% of respondents feeling inspired and 74.2% feeling excited after viewing hiking content. This suggests that short videos effectively evoke emotions that can lead to increased hiking participation.

Furthermore, 62.1% of respondents felt a sense of community and connection with other outdoor enthusiasts when watching these videos, which encouraged them to participate in hiking. This indicates the potential for social media to foster connections among outdoor enthusiasts.

An additional thought on how short-form videos have influenced your hiking motivation or experience also has been asked of the respondents that many individuals experienced immediate emotional responses to the content, describing feelings of excitement and inspiration that prompted them to plan hiking trips shortly after viewing the videos. Participants also noted that nice hiking trails significantly enhanced their motivation to explore new trails.

Overall, these findings highlight the powerful role that short-form video content plays in shaping individuals' attitudes toward hiking and promoting outdoor activities. These findings align with existing literature that suggests visual content, particularly short-form videos, can significantly impact recreational behaviors and decision-making processes (Floyd & Shinew, 2018; Becker, 2020).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has investigated the significant influence of reels and short videos on individuals' motivation to engage in hiking, underscoring the role of visual media in shaping outdoor recreation behaviors. The findings reveal that short-form video content not only inspires viewers through captivating imagery but also fosters a sense of community among outdoor enthusiasts. Participants reported increased motivation to hike after engaging with visually appealing content, illustrating the power of social media as an effective tool for promoting outdoor activities.

As outdoor organizers strive to attract a wider audience, leveraging the potential of short videos can be an effective strategy to encourage participation in hiking. The emotional and social connections fostered by this content can play a crucial role in motivating individuals to explore nature and adopt healthier lifestyles. However, creators and marketers need to be mindful of potential issues, such as unrealistic representations of outdoor experiences, which could lead to disillusionment among viewers and negatively impact their engagement with hiking.

Future research should delve deeper into the long-term effects of short-form video consumption on actual hiking participation and examine how various demographic groups respond to different content styles. Investigating factors such as age, gender, and prior hiking experience will provide a comprehensive understanding of audience motivations. By further understanding these dynamics, stakeholders in outdoor recreation can develop more effective strategies to engage and inspire the next generation of hikers.

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