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Hikers' Motives for Producing Hiking Content on Instagram

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Abstract
Social media transforms the way individuals produce, distribute, and consume information, enabling users to become active content creators. One growing phenomenon on Instagram is the increasing production of hiking-related content by hikers. While current literature extensively explores media consumption, empirical studies analyzing the specific motives and outcomes of producing nature-based user-generated content (UGC) remain limited. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze hikers' motives for producing hiking content on Instagram and to identify the gratification they obtained after publishing such content. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving six active Instagram users who regularly shared hiking content. The collected data were systematically processed through a structured categorization process to identify recurring patterns regarding hikers' motivations and outcomes. The findings indicated that hikers' motives were primarily driven by cognitive, affective, social integrative, and personal integrative needs. Instagram was utilized not only to document hiking experiences but also to share information, expand social networks, gain social appreciation, and construct a digital identity. The gratification obtained after publishing content encouraged participants to consistently create hiking-related content. These findings suggested that hiking content production represented both the fulfillment of communication needs and the construction of digital identity through social media.

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Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technologies has transformed the way people interact, access information, and establish social relationships. This transformation has become increasingly evident with the emergence of social media, which enables individuals to act not only as information consumers but also as content producers, commonly referred to as *prosumers*. Unlike conventional media, where audiences primarily receive messages, social media provides users with opportunities to create, distribute, and discuss various forms of content independently. Consequently, social media has evolved beyond a communication platform into a space for identity construction, self-expression, and social interaction that transcends geographical and temporal boundaries (McQuail, 2019; Nasrullah, 2022).

Digital platforms and media structures possess an immense capacity to direct public discourse and actively shape community values or common perceptions within the social

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landscape (Khoirunnisa et al., 2025). Within this communicative framework, the continuously increasing trend of hiking content on Instagram does not exist merely as private documentation or simple leisure archives. Rather, it operates as an active medium that shapes broader public opinion regarding outdoor activities and risk management among Indonesian youth. By presenting aesthetic yet educational representations of mountain peaks, individual content creators actively influence their audience's lifestyle aspirations, transforming personal hobbies into a widely recognized digital lifestyle trend.

Instagram has become one of the most popular visual-based social media platforms supporting these communication practices. Through features such as *Feeds, Stories, Reels,* and *Carousel*, Instagram allows users to creatively share photographs, videos, and personal experiences while encouraging continuous interaction with audiences. Its visual characteristics have positioned Instagram not only as a medium for information sharing but also as a platform for self-presentation and social recognition through audience engagement, including likes, comments, and content sharing (Arifin, 2022).

The increasing use of Instagram has also encouraged users to produce content that reflects their interests and lifestyles. One notable phenomenon is the growing number of hikers who actively create and publish hiking-related content. Activities that were once primarily regarded as recreation, outdoor sports, and interactions with nature have gradually become part of digital communication practices. Hiking experiences are documented through photographs and videos and subsequently shared on Instagram as a means of disseminating information, expressing personal experiences, and inspiring other users. This phenomenon indicates that hiking experiences no longer end with physical activities in nature but are transformed into digital content consumed by wider online audiences (Nugroho, 2021; Supriady et al., 2022).

Hiking-related content on Instagram serves purposes beyond documenting outdoor journeys. Many posts contain practical information regarding trail conditions, estimated hiking duration, required equipment, weather conditions, safety recommendations, and environmental conservation practices. Other users emphasize aesthetic photography, personal experiences, and hiking achievements. In digital communication perspectives, these observable variations in media texts do not automatically represent absolute user motivations; rather, they serve as preliminary indicators that creators structurally tailor their visual messages to fulfill specific underlying communication needs (Arifin, 2022). To fully comprehend this empirical phenomenon, it is crucial to analyze the internal goal-directed behaviors that drive individual hikers to transform their physical journeys into digital narratives.

This phenomenon can be explained using the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which views media users as active individuals who intentionally select media to satisfy particular needs (J. Severin & W. Tankard Jr., 2014). Rather than emphasizing the influence of media characteristics, the theory argues that media use is determined by users' motivations and expected gratifications. According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, media use fulfills several categories of needs, including cognitive needs, affective needs, social integrative needs, personal integrative needs, and tension release. Within the context of social media, these needs may be fulfilled through content production, information sharing, social interaction, and digital self-presentation (Karunia et al., 2021).

Previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of the Uses and Gratifications Theory in explaining social media behavior. Arifin (2022) found that Instagram users

actively utilized the platform to fulfill informational, entertainment, and social interaction needs. Likewise, Karunia et al. (2021) reported that social media functioned as a communication medium by enabling users to obtain and disseminate information simultaneously. Rohmah (2020) also concluded that social media had become an alternative source of information because of its accessibility, interactivity, and responsiveness to users' needs.

Studies on digital identity have further revealed that social media activities are closely related to self-presentation and identity construction. Hariatiningsih (2019) argued that Instagram provides a space where users construct their identities through the content they publish. Similarly, Pratama and Puspitasari (2021) found that Instagram users carefully selected the content they uploaded to represent their desired self-image. Furthermore, Sallahudin and Setianingrum (2024) reported that, among Generation Z hikers, uploading hiking-related content functioned not only as documentation but also as a strategy for personal branding on social media.

The increasing production of hiking-related content has also influenced digital communication practices by shaping how outdoor activities are represented, interpreted, and consumed on social media. Hiking content has become an important source of information for prospective hikers while simultaneously influencing public perceptions of hiking culture. Despite this growing phenomenon, scholarly attention has rarely examined why hikers actively produce content and how the gratification they obtain contributes to the construction of their digital identities. Consequently, investigating this phenomenon is important for advancing digital communication studies, particularly in understanding social media users as active content producers rather than merely passive media consumers.

Although previous studies have examined Instagram from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, most have focused on media consumption for information seeking, entertainment, promotion, or personal branding. For instance, contemporary studies such as Arifin (2022) and Rohmah (2020) predominantly analyze how users consume social media content to fulfill information and responsiveness needs. However, a significant theoretical gap remains unaddressed. As communication technology shifts audiences into proactive "prosumers" who concurrently consume and produce messages (McQuail, 2019; Nasrullah, 2022), empirical focus must expand to the active production phase. There is a profound lack of research evaluating how nature-based experiences are translated into digital artifacts on Instagram to fulfill pre-existing needs.

To address this gap, this study conceptualizes a clear distinction between "motives" (antecedent psychological needs driving creation) and "gratifications obtained" (post-publication feedback reinforcing behavior). Furthermore, the concept of "digital identity construction" is explicitly integrated as a core dimension of personal integrative gratification within the framework. Therefore, this study extends the application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory by emphasizing productive communication practices rather than merely media consumption behavior.

Therefore, this study aimed to analyze hikers' motives for producing hiking content on Instagram from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications Theory. It also examined the gratification obtained after content publication and explored how such gratification contributed to the construction of hikers' digital identities. The findings are expected to contribute to digital communication studies by providing a deeper understanding of social media users as active content producers who utilize digital platforms to fulfill communication needs while constructing their identities.

Instagram as a Digital Communication Platform

Instagram was officially launched in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger as a photo-sharing application designed to enable users to capture, edit, and share visual content through mobile devices. Since its introduction, Instagram has experienced significant development, evolving from a platform primarily focused on photographs into a multifunctional social media application equipped with various interactive features, including *Stories, Reels, Live, Carousel,* and *Direct Messages*. These features have transformed Instagram into a digital communication platform that supports information dissemination, social interaction, entertainment, business promotion, and personal identity construction. As a result, users no longer function solely as information consumers but also as active content creators who continuously produce and distribute user-generated content (McQuail, 2019; Nasrullah, 2022).

The rapid development of Instagram has significantly influenced the way individuals communicate and share experiences. The platform emphasizes visual storytelling, enabling users to communicate messages through photographs, videos, captions, and interactive features that encourage audience participation. Compared with conventional media, Instagram provides greater opportunities for users to establish communication networks, exchange information, and develop online communities based on shared interests. Consequently, Instagram has become one of the most influential platforms for representing lifestyles, hobbies, and personal experiences in contemporary digital society (Arifin, 2022).

The Growing Trend of Hiking Content on Instagram

Along with the rapid growth of social media, hiking has become increasingly popular among Indonesian society, particularly among young adults and Generation Z. Hiking is no longer perceived solely as an outdoor recreational activity but has also become a lifestyle that combines adventure, environmental appreciation, photography, and digital communication. The increasing accessibility of hiking destinations, improvements in transportation infrastructure, and widespread use of smartphones have encouraged more people to document and share their outdoor experiences through social media platform (Supriady et al., 2022).

Instagram has played a significant role in accelerating this phenomenon. Hiking-related content, including photographs of mountain landscapes, summit achievements, camping activities, hiking routes, equipment recommendations, and safety information, is frequently published and shared among users. Such content not only inspires others to participate in hiking activities but also functions as a medium for exchanging practical knowledge regarding outdoor recreation. As visual content becomes increasingly influential in shaping public interest, hiking experiences are transformed into digital narratives that can reach broader audiences beyond the immediate hiking community (Sallahudin Adani & Maya Setianingrum, 2024).

Hiking activities gained remarkable popularity among Indonesian young people following the release of the Indonesian film *5 cm* in 2012. Adapted from the bestselling novel by Donny Dhirgantoro, the film portrayed the journey of five friends climbing Mount Semeru and inspired many audiences to appreciate nature, adventure, and mountaineering. The film became a cultural phenomenon and was widely recognized as one of the factors that encouraged the growing interest in hiking across Indonesia. Since then, hiking has gradually evolved from a recreational outdoor activity into a lifestyle

closely associated with adventure, photography, and digital storytelling. As the popularity of social media continued to increase, hiking experiences were increasingly documented and shared through Instagram, transforming outdoor activities into digital content consumed by broader online audiences.(Suryawan, 2026)

Furthermore, the growing popularity of hiking-related content has altered the communication practices of hikers themselves. Rather than using Instagram solely as a platform for documenting personal experiences, many hikers intentionally create informative and educational content that provides guidance on hiking preparation, environmental conservation, weather conditions, and mountain safety. This transformation demonstrates that Instagram has evolved into a collaborative communication space where users simultaneously function as information seekers, information providers, and community members. Consequently, hiking-related content reflects not only recreational experiences but also knowledge-sharing practices, digital identity construction, and interpersonal communication within online hiking communities (Nasrullah, 2022; Nugroho, 2021).

Assumptions of The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The fundamental assumptions of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory* proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch are as follows:

1. Audiences are active and goal-oriented.

   Audiences are active media users who consciously select and use media to fulfill specific communication needs. Media use is purposive rather than passive, as individuals actively determine the media that best satisfy their expectations.

   According to Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas, audiences use media to fulfill several categories of needs, including:

   a. Surveillance (Information Seeking)

      Surveillance refers to the need to obtain information and increase knowledge about events, environments, or issues that are relevant to users' lives. Media are utilized as sources of information that help individuals understand situations, reduce uncertainty, and support decision-making.

   b. Diversion

      Diversion refers to the need for entertainment, relaxation, emotional release, and temporary escape from daily routines or stressful situations. Media provide enjoyment, recreation, and opportunities for users to experience emotional satisfaction.

   c. Personal Identity

      Personal identity refers to the need to strengthen self-understanding, reinforce personal values, build self-confidence, and develop one's identity. Media help individuals evaluate themselves, express who they are, and construct a desired self-image.

   d. Personal Relationships (Social Interaction)

      Personal relationships refer to the need to establish, maintain, and strengthen interpersonal relationships with others. Media facilitate communication, social interaction, and a sense of belonging within communities sharing similar interests.

The present study adopted these categories as the theoretical foundation for understanding hikers' motives in producing hiking-related content on Instagram. Based on the characteristics of the research findings, the categories of *surveillance*, *diversion*, *personal relationships*, and *personal identity* were operationalized into cognitive needs, affective needs, social integrative needs, and personal integrative needs, which were subsequently analyzed to identify the gratification obtained experienced by participants after publishing hiking-related content.

2. The initiative in linking need gratification to media choice lies with the audience.

   The decision to select particular media originates from the audience rather than the media itself. Users independently determine which media platform is most appropriate for fulfilling their cognitive, emotional, social, and personal needs.

3. Media compete with other sources of need satisfaction.

   Media are not the only sources capable of satisfying users' needs. Individuals may also fulfill their needs through interpersonal communication, direct experiences, or other information sources. Therefore, media compete with various alternatives in providing gratification.

4. Audiences are sufficiently self-aware to identify their motives and interests in media use.

   Users generally understand the motives underlying their media use and are capable of identifying the specific needs they expect to satisfy through the selected media.

5. Value judgments about media should be based on audience orientations rather than media content alone.

   The value and effectiveness of media should be assessed according to how audiences utilize them to fulfill their needs, rather than being determined solely by the characteristics or content of the media itself.

In the context of this study, these assumptions provide the theoretical foundation for understanding why hikers actively choose Instagram to produce hiking-related content and how the platform fulfills their cognitive, affective, social integrative, and personal integrative needs, ultimately leading to *gratification obtained*.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore hikers' motives for producing hiking-related content on Instagram from the perspective of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings regarding their content production practices (Morissan, 2013).

The unit of analysis in this study was the communication behavior of hikers who actively produced hiking-related content on Instagram. Six active hikers were selected as research participants using purposive sampling. The selection criteria included individuals who regularly participated in hiking activities, consistently shared hiking-related content on Instagram, and were willing to participate in the study. This sampling technique ensured that the collected data were relevant to the research objectives (Habsy & Nursalim, 2025).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' motivations, experiences, and reasons for producing hiking content on Instagram. Observations focused on participants' Instagram accounts, including the characteristics of

their posts, content presentation, and interactions with followers. Documentation, such as screenshots of Instagram posts and other relevant materials, was used to support and validate the findings.

To systematically interpret the raw data, the analytical procedure was operationalized through a thematic analysis approach, moving beyond general descriptive stages. First, data reduction was conducted by transcribing the interviews and open-coding the observational field notes to isolate text segments related to user goals. Second, during the data display stage, these initial codes were clustered into specific conceptual themes based on the categorical needs of the Uses and Gratifications framework (cognitive, affective, social integrative, and personal integrative). Finally, conclusion drawing was performed by mapping the relationship between the pre-publication motives and the post-publication outcomes experienced by the participants.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. This procedure enhanced the credibility of the data and ensured that the interpretations accurately reflected the participants' experiences (Habsy & Nursalim, 2025).

Results and Discussion

Six participants who actively produced hiking-related content on Instagram participated in this study. They met the predetermined criteria, including being active hikers, consistently publishing hiking-related content on Instagram, and willingly participating in the research. Data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation revealed that hikers' motives for producing content were influenced by cognitive, affective, social integrative, and personal integrative needs. Furthermore, participants experienced various forms of gratification after publishing their content, which encouraged them to continue producing hiking-related posts.

Table 1. Profile of Research Participants.

No.	Participant	Instagram Username	Started Hiking	Content Posting Frequency	Number of Followers
1	Tiya	@fdh.ah_	2025	Frequently (curated content)	1,108
2	Alwi	@alwysf_	2024	Occasionally (informative content)	905
3	Alvin	@al-anas14	2024	Regularly	729
4	Davit	@davit_choliq	2016	Frequently (spontaneous content)	2,593
5	Devi	@depitaaaaaa_	2023	Frequently	1,924
6	Dela	@delaern_	2025	Selectively (special occasions)	904

source: Author's analysis (2026)

The study involved six active hikers who consistently used Instagram to share hiking-related content. As presented in Table 1, the participants had different hiking experiences, ranging from beginners who started hiking in 2025 to experienced hikers who

had been active since 2016. Their content production patterns also varied, including curated, informative, spontaneous, and selective uploads. Furthermore, the participants had between 729 and 2,593 Instagram followers, indicating different levels of audience engagement. These variations enriched the findings by providing diverse perspectives on hikers' motives for producing hiking-related content on Instagram.

A. Hikers' Motives for Producing Hiking Content on Instagram

The findings indicated that hikers produced hiking-related content on Instagram for various reasons that reflected their communication needs. Based on the interview data, four dominant motives emerged: cognitive needs, affective needs, social integrative needs, and personal integrative needs. These motives demonstrate that participants did not merely use Instagram as a platform for sharing photographs and videos but also as a medium for exchanging information, expressing emotions, building social relationships, and constructing their identities as hikers. The following sections discuss each motive in greater detail.

1. Cognitive Needs

The findings revealed that cognitive needs constituted one of the primary motives underlying participants' production of hiking-related content on Instagram. Participants intentionally shared information that could benefit other hikers, including hiking trail conditions, estimated hiking duration, required equipment, weather conditions, and safety recommendations. Rather than merely documenting personal experiences, participants expected their content to become a useful source of information for individuals planning hiking activities.

Interview data further demonstrated that participants considered Instagram an effective communication platform because it enabled them to combine visual content with explanatory captions, making information easier to understand and more attractive to audiences. Several participants reported receiving direct messages from followers requesting additional information regarding hiking routes, equipment, and preparation before undertaking similar trips. Such interactions strengthened participants' motivation to continue producing informative hiking-related content while reinforcing their role as information providers within the hiking community.

These findings indicate that participants did not perceive Instagram solely as a platform for self-expression but also as a medium for transferring practical knowledge derived from direct hiking experiences. The information shared by participants reflected experiential knowledge acquired through actual outdoor activities, making their content more credible and relevant than information obtained solely from secondary sources. Consequently, the production of hiking-related content became a communication activity that contributed to collective learning within the online hiking community.

From the perspective of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, cognitive needs refer to individuals' desires to acquire knowledge, understand their environment, and satisfy curiosity through media use (McQuail, 2019). One of the fundamental assumptions proposed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch is that audiences are active and goal-oriented media users who consciously select particular media to fulfill specific needs. Rather than being passive recipients of information, users intentionally determine how media can help achieve their communication

objectives (J. Severin & W. Tankard Jr., 2014). The present findings support this assumption by demonstrating that participants deliberately utilized Instagram to communicate hiking-related knowledge accumulated through personal experience. Their decision to produce informative content reflected a conscious effort to fulfill cognitive needs, not only for themselves but also for other members of the hiking community.

Moreover, participants experienced cognitive gratification when the information they shared was acknowledged and utilized by other hikers. Questions, comments, and direct messages requesting additional explanations indicated that followers perceived the published content as useful and trustworthy. Such interactions encouraged participants to continuously improve the quality, completeness, and accuracy of the information presented in subsequent posts. This finding suggests that cognitive gratification was generated through reciprocal communication between content creators and audiences rather than through one-way information dissemination.

The findings are consistent with Arifin (2022), who reported that Instagram users actively employ the platform to obtain and distribute information according to their communication needs. Likewise, Karunia et al. (2021) argued that social media enables users to become both information consumers and producers, thereby facilitating knowledge exchange within digital communities. Rohmah (2020) also emphasized that social media serves as an alternative information source because it provides rapid, interactive, and easily accessible communication. Similarly, Adistri and Rusman (2024) found that digital platforms satisfy users' informational needs by enabling them to seek and share knowledge according to their individual interests. In the educational context, Herliana et al. (2023) demonstrated that social media is widely utilized by university students as an accessible source of learning materials, further reinforcing its function as a medium for cognitive gratification.

Despite these similarities, the present study contributes a distinct perspective by focusing on hikers as active producers of experiential knowledge rather than merely as information seekers. Previous studies have generally emphasized users' motives for consuming information through Instagram, whereas this study demonstrates that participants transformed firsthand outdoor experiences into educational digital content intended to support other hikers. The value of the shared information originated not only from its visual presentation but also from the credibility established through direct engagement with hiking activities. Consequently, Instagram functioned not merely as a platform for information exchange but also as a collaborative learning environment where practical outdoor knowledge was continuously created, validated, and disseminated through interactions among users.

2. Affective Needs

The findings revealed that affective needs constituted another important motive underlying participants' production of hiking-related content on Instagram. Participants described feelings of happiness, pride, gratitude, excitement, and personal satisfaction when documenting memorable moments during hiking activities. Uploading photographs and videos enabled them to preserve meaningful experiences while simultaneously expressing emotions associated with their journeys. For the participants, hiking-related content represented more than visual

documentation; it served as a medium through which emotions, memories, and personal reflections could be communicated to broader audiences.

Interview data further demonstrated that participants perceived Instagram as a digital archive where meaningful hiking experiences could be revisited at any time. Beautiful landscapes, successful summit attempts, unexpected challenges during hiking, and moments of togetherness with fellow hikers became emotionally valuable memories that participants considered worth preserving and sharing. Revisiting previously published content allowed participants to relive these experiences, generating feelings of nostalgia and reinforcing the emotional significance attached to their hiking activities.

These findings indicate that Instagram functioned not merely as a social networking platform but also as a medium for emotional expression through visual storytelling. The photographs, videos, and captions uploaded by participants reflected personal interpretations of their hiking experiences rather than objective documentation alone. Consequently, the production of hiking-related content became an emotional communication process through which participants expressed gratitude, achievement, excitement, and appreciation for nature.

From the perspective of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, affective needs refer to the desire to obtain emotional pleasure, aesthetic appreciation, enjoyment, and positive feelings through media use (McQuail, 2019). One of the central assumptions of the theory is that media users actively select communication channels capable of fulfilling their psychological and emotional needs (J. Severin & W. Tankard Jr., 2014). In the present study, participants consciously selected Instagram because its visual-oriented features enabled them to communicate emotions more effectively than text-based platforms. The integration of photographs, videos, captions, and interactive features allowed participants to transform emotional hiking experiences into meaningful digital narratives that could be appreciated by wider audiences.

Furthermore, participants experienced emotional gratification when followers expressed admiration, appreciation, or emotional responses toward their hiking-related content. Positive comments, supportive messages, and expressions of inspiration from other users strengthened participants' emotional attachment to both their hiking experiences and the content they produced. Such interactions demonstrate that emotional gratification was generated not only through self-expression but also through reciprocal emotional communication between content creators and audiences.

These findings are consistent with Hariatiningsih (2019), who argued that Instagram facilitates emotional expression and digital identity construction through visual communication. Similarly, Pratama and Puspitasari (2021) emphasized that users carefully select visual content to represent personal experiences and emotional values that they wish to communicate to others. Kurniawan and Sukmawati (2024) further explained that visual features available on Instagram encourage users to disclose personal experiences in ways that strengthen emotional engagement with audiences. In addition, Fahmi et al. (2024) suggested that social media users frequently utilize visual content to communicate achievements and

meaningful life experiences, thereby generating positive emotional responses from online communities.

The production and curation of hiking content on Instagram also serve as a vital mechanism for fulfilling the creators' affective needs, allowing them to derive emotional comfort, personal pride, and a sense of belonging from sharing their outdoor accomplishments. This digital manifestation of emotional fulfillment aligns with the evolving concept of mediated closeness in contemporary media environments. As argued by (Alivia Salsa Maritza et al., 2026) in their analysis of digital intimacy, media platforms have transformed into rich relational spaces capable of delivering immediate affective gratification through responsive digital interactions. However, while Maritza et al. (2026) highlight a structural paradox where digital intimacy risks constructing an illusion of closeness that detaches individuals from physical reality, the hikers in this study experience the opposite dynamic. For these climbers, the affective gratification received on Instagram does not substitute real-world connections; rather, it amplifies and authenticates the tangible, physical hardships and emotional triumphs experienced directly on the mountain trails.

Despite these similarities, the present research offers a distinct contribution to the literature. Previous studies have generally examined affective gratification in relation to lifestyle content, self-disclosure, or visual self-presentation on Instagram. In contrast, this study demonstrates that affective gratification among hikers originates from authentic outdoor experiences involving direct interaction with natural environments. Consequently, emotional satisfaction was derived not only from audience responses but also from participants' ability to preserve meaningful memories, reflect upon personal achievements, and communicate their appreciation of nature through digital storytelling. These findings extend the application of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory* by illustrating that affective gratification may emerge from experiential content grounded in real-life outdoor activities rather than from everyday social media practices alone.

3. Social Integrative Needs

Another important motive identified in this study was the fulfillment of social integrative needs. The findings further revealed that the fulfillment of social integrative needs constituted another important motive underlying participants' production of hiking-related content on Instagram. Participants explained that publishing hiking-related content enabled them to establish new friendships, maintain communication with fellow hikers, and expand their social networks within hiking communities. Instagram provided opportunities for participants to interact with individuals who shared similar interests despite geographical differences, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging to the broader hiking community.

These findings suggest that Instagram functioned as more than a communication platform; it also served as a social space where interpersonal relationships could be initiated, maintained, and strengthened through shared interests in outdoor activities. Consequently, hiking-related content became a medium through which participants developed social connections while simultaneously contributing to collective knowledge within hiking communities.

According to the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, social integrative needs refer to individuals' desire to establish interpersonal relationships, strengthen social

bonds, and maintain communication with others through media use (McQuail, 2019). One of the theory's central assumptions emphasizes that media users actively select communication channels capable of supporting social interaction according to their interpersonal objectives (J. Severin & W. Tankard Jr., 2014). In the present study, Instagram fulfilled these needs by providing interactive features that enabled participants to communicate continuously with fellow hikers before, during, and after hiking activities.

Participants also experienced social gratification through reciprocal communication established with their audiences. Positive interactions generated trust, strengthened friendships, and expanded participants' involvement within hiking communities. These findings indicate that gratification was not solely derived from publishing content but also from meaningful interpersonal relationships developed through continuous interaction on Instagram.

The findings are consistent with Karunia et al. (2021), who argued that social media facilitates communication and participation among users by enabling interactive exchanges of information. Similarly, Nurjanah and Rifai (2022) found that Instagram fulfills users' social communication needs by strengthening interpersonal relationships and encouraging active engagement within online communities. Sari and Kurniawan (2020) further reported that social interaction through digital platforms contributes significantly to user satisfaction by fostering communication and emotional connectedness. Rahmau'dina et al. (2024) likewise demonstrated that Instagram functions as an interactive communication medium where users establish meaningful relationships based on shared interests.

Therefore, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that social gratification among hikers extends beyond virtual interaction. Instagram not only facilitated communication within digital environments but also encouraged the formation of sustainable interpersonal relationships and collaborative outdoor experiences. This finding broadens the application of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory* by illustrating how social media simultaneously supports online interaction and offline community building among individuals who share common recreational interests.

4. Personal Integrative Needs

The findings further revealed that personal integrative needs constituted another important motive underlying participants' production of hiking-related content on Instagram. Participants perceived Instagram as an appropriate platform for representing themselves as active hikers while showcasing their experiences, achievements, and commitment to outdoor activities. Rather than merely displaying photographs from hiking trips, participants intentionally shared content that reflected their knowledge, preparation, and involvement in hiking activities. Through this process, Instagram became a medium through which participants communicated not only what they had accomplished but also who they were as members of the hiking community.

Interview data demonstrated that participants experienced increased self-confidence after receiving positive responses from their audiences. Appreciation expressed through likes, comments, direct messages, and reposts strengthened participants' confidence and encouraged them to continue producing

hiking-related content. Participants explained that recognition from fellow hikers provided personal satisfaction because it reflected appreciation for their experiences, knowledge, and consistency in outdoor activities. Consequently, audience engagement functioned as a form of social recognition that reinforced participants' confidence and commitment to maintaining their presence within digital hiking communities.

Despite receiving positive responses from followers, participants emphasized that they carefully selected the content they uploaded to ensure that it accurately represented their actual experiences. They avoided exaggerating achievements, manipulating hiking experiences, or presenting misleading information solely to attract public attention. Instead, participants preferred to share authentic moments, including both enjoyable and challenging aspects of hiking activities. This finding indicates that participants viewed credibility as an essential component of their digital identity, suggesting that recognition was meaningful only when it was based on genuine experiences rather than artificial self-presentation.

These findings suggest that Instagram functioned as more than a platform for displaying personal achievements. Instead, it became a medium through which participants negotiated, maintained, and reinforced their identities as hikers. The digital identities constructed by participants were grounded in authentic outdoor experiences, practical knowledge, and continuous engagement with hiking communities. Consequently, identity construction was closely associated with participants' credibility as experienced hikers rather than with the pursuit of popularity or social status on the platform.

From the perspective of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, personal integrative needs refer to individuals' desire to strengthen credibility, enhance self-confidence, gain recognition, and maintain personal status through media use (McQuail, 2019). One of the central assumptions of the theory is that media users actively choose communication channels capable of fulfilling psychological and social needs according to their personal objectives (J. Severin & W. Tankard Jr., 2014). The findings of the present study support this assumption by demonstrating that participants deliberately utilized Instagram to reinforce their identities as hikers while simultaneously establishing credibility through authentic experiences and informative content. Therefore, personal gratification was achieved not only through audience appreciation but also through participants' confidence that the identities they presented accurately reflected their real-life experiences.

Furthermore, participants experienced personal gratification when followers recognized them as reliable sources of hiking information and inspiration. Positive interactions encouraged participants to continue improving the quality of their content while maintaining consistency in documenting hiking activities. Rather than pursuing viral popularity or numerical indicators such as follower counts, participants considered credibility, trust, and meaningful engagement to be more valuable outcomes of their social media activities. This finding indicates that personal integrative gratification was closely associated with authenticity and perceived expertise rather than superficial online recognition.

The findings are consistent with Hariatiningsih (2019), who argued that Instagram serves as a platform through which users construct and negotiate digital identities. Likewise, Pratama and Puspitasari (2021) explained that Instagram users carefully select the content they publish to represent identities they wish to

communicate to broader audiences. Kurniawan and Sukmawati (2024) further emphasized that Instagram facilitates self-disclosure by enabling users to communicate personal experiences through visual narratives, thereby strengthening interpersonal connections and identity formation. Similarly, Fahmi et al. (2024) suggested that users frequently employ social media to communicate achievements and construct positive personal images, while Sallahudin and Setianingrum (2024) found that hiking-related content among Generation Z increasingly functions as an instrument of personal branding within digital environments.

In the contemporary landscape of digital communication, social media platforms are frequently criticized for creating echo chambers and filter bubbles that trap users within commercialized and algorithmically biased content flows (Maulidia et al., 2025). This algorithmic trap, as observed in recent Indonesian digital studies, heavily incentivizes provocative and sensational narratives to maximize platform retention and user engagement (Maulidia et al., 2025). However, the findings of this study reveal a fascinating counter-narrative among mountain climbers on Instagram. Instead of bending their creative output to fit the superficial demands of platform algorithms or engaging in identity fabrication for instant validation, the informants actively utilize Instagram's visual features to reconstruct and reaffirm their genuine personal identities. For these hikers, the process of content production functions as a tool for authentic self-expression and the fulfillment of personal integrative needs, which directly challenges the deterministic view that digital platform users are merely passive subjects governed by platform logic.

In contemporary digital media environments, platforms are frequently criticized as spaces where structural narratives are carefully manipulated to construct artificial realities (Bramantyo et al., 2026). This calculated approach to digital text and imagery often limits public perception to superficial traits and fabricated trends (Bramantyo et al., 2026). However, the climbers evaluated in this study display a contrasting communicative behavior. Instead of altering their experiences to meet the shallow demands of the platform's presentation layout, they strategically utilize Instagram's visual capabilities to reconstruct and display their authentic personal identities. For these hikers, the creative production of hiking content acts as a direct counter-narrative to artificial trends, enabling them to fulfill their personal integrative needs based on genuine, lived physical challenges in the natural world.

This finding also differs from previous studies that primarily associated Instagram with personal branding and online popularity. While recognition from audiences remained an important source of personal gratification, participants did not regard popularity as their primary objective. Instead, they valued credibility, authenticity, and meaningful contributions to the hiking community. Consequently, the present study extends the application of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory* by demonstrating that personal integrative gratification may emerge through the production of authentic experiential content that strengthens users' credibility, expertise, and social identity within digital communities. This contribution provides a broader understanding of identity construction on social media by emphasizing authenticity as a key determinant of personal gratification among content creators.

B. Gratification Obtained After Producing Hiking Content on Instagram

The findings revealed that participants experienced various forms of *gratification obtained* after publishing hiking-related content on Instagram. The gratification was reflected in positive audience responses, increased interaction with followers, opportunities to exchange experiences, and personal satisfaction derived from documenting meaningful hiking activities. Participants perceived that the outcomes of publishing their content corresponded closely with the expectations that initially motivated them to use Instagram, indicating that the platform successfully fulfilled multiple communication needs simultaneously.

Interview data demonstrated that participants experienced satisfaction when receiving likes, comments, reposts, story mentions, and direct messages from followers. Such interactions confirmed that the information they shared was considered useful, relevant, and inspiring by other hikers. Participants explained that appreciation from audiences encouraged them to continue producing informative hiking-related content while improving the quality of information presented in subsequent posts. Consequently, audience engagement functioned not merely as social feedback but also as an indicator that their communication objectives had been successfully achieved.

Beyond external appreciation, participants also experienced intrinsic gratification through the documentation of personal hiking experiences. Instagram functioned as a digital archive that enabled participants to revisit memorable moments, reflect upon personal achievements, and preserve valuable outdoor experiences. Several participants explained that reviewing previously published content allowed them to appreciate their personal development as hikers while recalling meaningful experiences shared with friends and hiking communities. Therefore, gratification was generated not only through audience recognition but also through personal reflection and emotional attachment to the documented experiences.

From the perspective of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, *gratification obtained* represents the level of satisfaction experienced after media use and serves as an evaluation of whether users' initial expectations have been fulfilled (McQuail, 2019). This concept is closely associated with the distinction between *gratification sought* (GS), referring to users' expectations before using media, and *gratification obtained* (GO), referring to the satisfaction actually experienced after media use (Haryanto & Lestari, 2022). The findings of the present study indicate that participants' *gratification obtained* closely corresponded with their initial motives. Participants who initially sought information sharing (*cognitive needs*) experienced satisfaction when followers considered their content useful. Those motivated by emotional expression (*affective needs*) experienced gratification through the preservation of meaningful memories. Likewise, participants who expected to strengthen interpersonal relationships (*social integrative needs*) achieved satisfaction through continuous interaction with fellow hikers, while those motivated by identity reinforcement (*personal integrative needs*) experienced increased confidence and recognition after publishing authentic hiking-related content.

These findings reinforce one of the central assumptions of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, namely that audiences are active media users who consciously evaluate whether selected media successfully fulfill their communication needs (J. Severin & W. Tankard Jr., 2014). Participants did not simply upload content without reflection; rather, they continuously assessed audience responses, personal satisfaction, and the broader impact of their published content. When participants perceived that

their communication objectives had been achieved, they became increasingly motivated to continue producing hiking-related content. This finding illustrates that media use constitutes a dynamic and cyclical process in which successful gratification strengthens future media behavior.

Furthermore, the present findings demonstrate that *gratification obtained* was not solely determined by quantitative indicators such as the number of likes or followers. Although audience engagement contributed to participants' satisfaction, they consistently emphasized that meaningful interactions, opportunities to educate other hikers, and the ability to inspire responsible hiking practices were considerably more valuable than numerical popularity. This finding suggests that gratification among hikers was primarily associated with perceived usefulness and authenticity rather than with social media visibility alone. Consequently, participants evaluated communication success based on the quality of interactions established with audiences instead of relying exclusively on algorithmic indicators commonly associated with social media performance.

The findings are consistent with Haryanto and Lestari (2022), who argued that *gratification obtained* emerges when media successfully fulfills users' initial expectations. Similarly, Nasution and Siregar (2022) reported that satisfaction among Instagram users is closely related to the correspondence between communication motives and the outcomes experienced after media use. Adistri and Rusman (2024) further explained that users actively evaluate whether digital platforms effectively satisfy their informational and communication needs. Likewise, Herliana et al. (2023) demonstrated that users tend to continue utilizing social media when previous experiences have generated meaningful cognitive and social gratification.

Despite these similarities, the present study contributes a broader understanding of *gratification obtained* by emphasizing the role of users as active content producers rather than merely media consumers. Previous studies generally examined gratification from the perspective of media consumption, whereas the present research demonstrates that satisfaction may also emerge through the production, dissemination, and continuous evaluation of user-generated content. Participants experienced gratification not only because they consumed information on Instagram but also because they successfully educated other hikers, strengthened interpersonal relationships, preserved meaningful experiences, and constructed credible digital identities through authentic outdoor activities.

Therefore, this study extends the application of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory* by demonstrating that *gratification obtained* among hikers represents a multidimensional communication outcome encompassing cognitive, emotional, social, and personal dimensions simultaneously. More importantly, the findings illustrate that authentic experiential content possesses greater potential to generate sustainable communication satisfaction than content primarily intended to achieve online popularity. This contribution enriches the theoretical understanding of *Uses and Gratifications* by highlighting the increasingly important role of user-generated experiential content within contemporary digital communication environments.

C. Educational Implications of Hiking-related Content on Instagram

The findings of this study indicate that hiking-related content published on Instagram extends beyond personal documentation and self-expression. Although

participants were primarily motivated by cognitive, affective, social integrative, and personal integrative needs, the content they produced also generated broader educational benefits for other Instagram users. Consequently, hiking-related content functioned not only as a form of digital communication but also as an informal educational medium through which knowledge and practical experiences were disseminated to wider online communities.

Interview data revealed that participants frequently shared practical information regarding hiking preparation, including trail characteristics, estimated hiking duration, required equipment, weather conditions, water sources, transportation access, and physical preparation before hiking. Participants explained that such information was intentionally included in captions, photographs, videos, and Instagram Stories to assist beginner hikers in preparing more effectively before undertaking similar hiking activities. Several participants also reported receiving direct messages from followers requesting additional information regarding hiking routes, equipment recommendations, and safety considerations. These interactions demonstrate that Instagram facilitated reciprocal communication in which knowledge was continuously exchanged between content creators and audiences.

Beyond practical information, participants also emphasized the importance of promoting environmental awareness through their content. Several participants intentionally reminded followers to maintain mountain cleanliness, minimize waste, respect local regulations, and preserve natural ecosystems during hiking activities. Environmental messages were often integrated naturally into captions accompanying photographs and videos rather than presented as formal educational campaigns. This finding suggests that educational communication can be effectively delivered through authentic personal experiences that encourage audiences to adopt responsible outdoor behaviors.

Furthermore, participants utilized Instagram to increase public awareness of hiking safety. Information concerning weather conditions, emergency preparedness, hiking ethics, appropriate equipment, and risk management frequently accompanied hiking-related posts. Rather than encouraging audiences solely to pursue aesthetic photographs or summit achievements, participants consistently emphasized that proper preparation and safety should remain the highest priorities during hiking activities. Consequently, Instagram functioned not only as a platform for inspiration but also as a medium for communicating responsible hiking practices.

From the perspective of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, these findings demonstrate that the fulfillment of cognitive needs extended beyond participants' personal information-sharing motives. The knowledge disseminated through Instagram subsequently generated educational value for audiences, enabling other hikers to acquire practical information before conducting hiking activities. This finding indicates that user-generated content contributes not only to individual gratification but also to collective knowledge construction within online hiking communities. Therefore, the communication process occurring on Instagram reflects a reciprocal relationship in which content creators satisfy their communication needs while simultaneously providing informational benefits for others.

The findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that Instagram has evolved into an effective medium for knowledge dissemination and public communication. Arifin (2022) argued that Instagram facilitates information sharing through visual communication, enabling users to communicate complex information

more attractively and efficiently. Similarly, Karunia et al. (2021) explained that social media encourages collaborative information exchange by allowing users to function simultaneously as information seekers and information providers.

However, the present study extends previous research by demonstrating that educational communication on Instagram emerges organically through authentic outdoor experiences rather than through institutional communication strategies or formal educational programs. Participants did not primarily perceive themselves as educators; instead, educational value developed naturally from their willingness to document, explain, and share real hiking experiences with broader audiences. Consequently, educational communication became an indirect outcome of participants' motivations to produce hiking-related content while simultaneously fulfilling their own communication needs.

These findings contribute to the development of digital communication studies by highlighting Instagram's potential as an informal educational platform within outdoor recreation communities. Hiking-related content not only satisfies individual communication motives but also supports knowledge sharing, promotes environmental awareness, encourages responsible hiking behavior, and strengthens collaborative learning among hikers. Accordingly, this study suggests that user-generated content possesses educational functions capable of extending beyond entertainment and self-presentation, thereby enriching the application of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory* within contemporary digital communication environments.

Conclusion

This study examined hikers' motives for producing hiking-related content on Instagram from the perspective of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory* and explored the gratification they obtained after publishing such content. The findings demonstrated that hikers actively produced content to fulfill cognitive, affective, social integrative, and personal integrative needs. Instagram was utilized not merely as a platform for documenting hiking activities but also as a medium for disseminating information, expressing emotions, establishing social relationships, and constructing digital identities. Furthermore, the study found that the gratification obtained after publishing hiking-related content was reflected in positive audience responses, increased social interaction, and personal satisfaction, all of which encouraged participants to continue producing content consistently.

The findings contribute to the development of the *Uses and Gratifications Theory* by demonstrating that gratification is derived not only from media consumption but also from active content production. In the context of hiking communities, Instagram functions as a communication platform that enables users to simultaneously fulfill communication needs, share experiential knowledge, and strengthen their digital identities. Therefore, this study extends the application of the theory by emphasizing the role of social media users as active content creators rather than passive media audiences.

Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for hikers, outdoor communities, and digital content creators in utilizing Instagram as a medium for educational communication, environmental awareness, and responsible information sharing. Encouraging the production of informative and authentic hiking-related content may contribute to improving public knowledge regarding hiking preparation, safety, and

environmental conservation.

Conclusion

This study examined hikers' motives for producing hiking-related content on Instagram from the perspective of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and explored the gratification they obtained after publishing such content. The findings demonstrated that hikers actively produced content to fulfill cognitive, affective, social integrative, and personal integrative needs. Instagram was utilized not merely as a platform for documenting hiking activities but also as a medium for disseminating information, expressing emotions, establishing social relationships, and constructing digital identities. Crucially, the construction of digital identity is identified not as an isolated outcome, but as a core manifestation of personal integrative gratification achieved through productive communication practices. Furthermore, the study found that the gratification obtained after publishing hiking-related content was reflected in positive audience responses, increased social interaction, and personal satisfaction, all of which encouraged participants to continue producing content consistently.

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This study was limited to six Instagram users who actively produced hiking-related content. Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve participants from broader demographic backgrounds and different social media platforms to provide more comprehensive insights into digital content production. Future research may also employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to examine the relationship between content production motives, audience engagement, and gratification across larger populations.

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