Beyond the Scroll: Exploring the Design Space of Balanced Short-form Video Consumption through Everyday User Experiences

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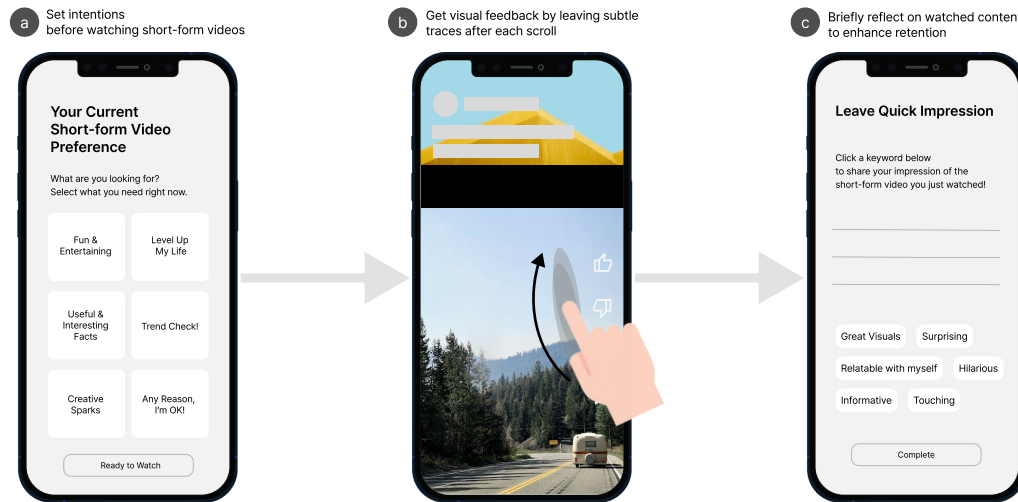Republic of Korea
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Figure 1: Based on insights from our diary study, we propose a holistic intervention composed of three components that support balanced short-form video consumption across the viewing journey. Before viewing, the (a) Purpose Tag encourages users to set clear intentions regarding what and why they watch. During viewing, the (b) Scroll Footprint provides subtle visual feedback with each scroll, enhancing users' awareness of their consumption patterns. After viewing, the (c) Micro Reflection prompts brief reflections on watched content, improving content retention and fostering mindful consumption.

ABSTRACT

Short-form videos on platforms like YouTube Shorts provide accessible entertainment and quick information. Yet, excessive consumption can lead to psychological, cognitive, and emotional side effects. To design effective interventions that seamlessly integrate balanced short-form video consumption into daily routines, understanding how users engage with these videos in their everyday lives is crucial. However, few studies have qualitatively explored users' daily interactions with short-form videos. To address this gap, we conducted a four-day diary study with eight active users. Our findings reveal that users often watch short-form videos during brief breaks or when mentally fatigued, frequently leading to passive binge-scrolling and feelings of regret afterward. Despite these negative experiences, participants valued short-form videos for their convenience and entertainment. Based on these insights, we suggest intervention design that support balanced consumption, naturally aligning with users' existing habits and activities.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI**.

KEYWORDS

Short-form Videos; Diary Study; Media Consumption; Intervention Design

1 INTRODUCTION

Short-form videos, typically between one and three minutes long [25], have surged in popularity. They attracted over 1.5 billion monthly viewers on YouTube Shorts [2] and 1 billion on TikTok

[18]. Prior research highlights their appeal as convenient entertainment that fits into users' fast-paced lifestyles [20], capturing attention through concise yet immersive content [22]. To further enhance user satisfaction and positive experiences, researchers have explored improvements such as personalized recommendation systems [15, 23], adaptive streaming strategies [9], and visual summaries for greater accessibility [19]. Nevertheless, excessive consumption of short-form videos can lead to negative consequences. Continuous exposure to repeated and intense stimuli could lead to psychological and cognitive side effects such as impaired prospective memory [6] and difficulties in sustaining attention [4, 14]. Furthermore, it affects emotional well-being, leading to feelings of regret, anxiety [5, 10], and depressive symptoms [26].

Since the effect of short-form videos significantly varies depending on how they are consumed, there is a pressing need for interventions to regulate short-form video consumption habits. While many studies have explored interventions for other forms of media [12, 13], short-form videos differ in key ways including that they are short in length, driven by highly personalized algorithms, and require only a simple swipe to move between videos [25]. These characteristics could shape unique patterns of engagement and responses, questioning the effectiveness of existing interventions and highlighting the need for strategies tailored to short-form video consumption. To design media interventions, it is essential that they be seamlessly integrated into users' existing behaviors and experiences, as interventions could lead to unintended negative outcomes and low user acceptance [1]. Therefore, it is crucial to first understand their everyday experiences, emotions, and behaviors in real-life contexts. So far, most studies investigating real-world engagement with short-form videos have focused on broad-scale approaches such as large-scale surveys. While these methods reveal general trends and statistical relationships, they often fail to capture the nuances of how users watch, feel, and interact with these videos in daily life.

To this end, we conducted a four-day diary study with eight active short-form video users, employing a qualitative approach. Our findings revealed that participants frequently engage with short-form videos during brief daily breaks or when mentally fatigued, benefiting from easy entertainment but often losing track of time due to passive binge-scrolling behaviors. Although participants experienced regret and overstimulation afterward, they still valued short-form videos as accessible entertainment and quick sources of information, emphasizing the need for interventions supporting balanced and mindful consumption. Based on our findings, we offer some design suggestions for more positive and meaningful engagement of short-form videos.

The key contributions of this study are threefold: 1) We employed a diary study to qualitatively capture the everyday, nuanced experiences of the participants. 2) We report empirical findings about triggers people start and quit watching short-form videos, watching patterns, emotions and experiences associated with them. 3) We offer novel design suggestions for interventions to regulate short-form video consumption practices.

2 METHOD

Among the existing short-form video platforms—YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels, and TikTok—YouTube Shorts was selected as the focus of this diary study for its high usage rates [2] and the convenience of unrestricted access to short-form consumption data via Google login. This data was collected not only to complement participants' diary entries but also to analyze quantitative metrics including the number of videos watched.

2.1 Participants

Through social media ads and online university community posts, individuals who frequently watched Shorts for more than 30 minutes per day were invited. A total of eight frequent Shorts viewers (Age min/mean/max = 21/24.75/29, SD = 2.82, 4 females) were enrolled. Before the study, we gathered demographic data and details of their short-form video consumption habits (e.g., the number of videos watched, viewing duration). On average, they reported watching 63.75 minutes and 55 short-form videos per day. Participants received 40,000 KRW (approximately $30 USD). The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the first author's institution.

2.2 Study Procedure

2.2.1 Diary Study. As short-form video has become a part of many people's daily lives, individuals watch short-form videos multiple times a day [24]. Due to its repetitive nature, capturing participants' viewing behaviors through a single interview would have been insufficient. Instead, a diary study, in which participants could periodically record the context of their behavior and their subjective experiences, could capture numerous instances [11]. Thus, we conducted a four-day diary study, covering both weekdays and weekends. Participants received online diary prompts via the text messages three times daily: at 12 PM for morning viewing, at 6 PM for afternoon viewing, and at 10 PM for evening and nighttime viewing. Since participants might not have watched Shorts during a given period, we provided two sets of diary prompts.

If participants had watched Shorts, they described the most interesting Shorts they had seen, what they were doing beforehand, and what prompted them to start watching. They also recalled moments when they wanted to stop but continued, what made stopping difficult, and what eventually led them to stop. Finally, they shared how they felt and what thoughts they had afterward.

If participants had not watched Shorts, they explained why they did not watch, whether they had considered watching but chose not to, what influenced that decision, what they did instead, and how that choice affected them.

2.2.2 Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis. While the diary provided qualitative insights into participants' consumption behavior, obtaining precise quantitative data on viewing duration and frequency was challenging. Asking those data to participants could introduce recall biases and increase burden. To address this, we designed and developed the tool named *YouTube Shorts Analysis* [1], which enabled us to extract insights from YouTube viewing history data. We provided participants with detailed instructions on how

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to extract their YouTube viewing history from Google Takeout [8]. The tool featured the following key functionalities:

- **Daily View Count and Proportion**: The number of long-form videos and Shorts watched within the YouTube each day, along with the proportion of Shorts in the overall viewing activity.
- **Hourly View Graph**: Shorts consumption trends throughout the day, aiding in the identification of peak viewing times.
- **Continuous View Log**: The number of instances where participants watched Shorts consecutively without switching to other activities (e.g., watching long-form videos), along with the duration of these sessions.
- **Count by View Completion**: Shorts consumption categorized into four levels of completion (0-25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, 75-100%) to analyze partial and full video views.

Its interface was developed using React. After uploading the YouTube history data file, the application filters and parses the data, extracting metadata (e.g., video ID, title, timestamp). In addition, we retrieved supplementary information through the YouTube Data API v3. To present findings effectively, we integrated D3.js for data visualization. We also implemented hover interactions, including tooltips, to enable intuitive data exploration.

2.2.3   Post-interview. Participants took part in an online post-interview lasting approximately 40 minutes. The interview aimed to further explore their perspectives on short-form videos, viewing patterns and habits, as well as their thoughts on interventions to regulate short-form video consumption. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded.

2.3   Data Analysis

This study generated valuable data including 96 diaries and about 300 minutes of audio recordings. The audio recordings were transcribed after all identifiable information was removed to ensure anonymity. The primary pillars of analysis were the triggers for watching Shorts, reasons for continuous viewing, triggers for stopping, and participants' experiences after watching. We analyzed both the interview transcripts and diaries using thematic analysis [3]. Following the initial coding, the researchers conducted an iterative process of open coding to align with the objectives and main focus of the study. Based on the codes, we identified key themes from both the paper worksheets and interview data. Through axial coding and affinity diagramming, we organized and synthesized the codes [7].

3   FINDINGS

3.1   What Triggers People to Start and Quit Watching Short-form Videos

3.1.1   Easy Grip and Instant Entertainment. Participants watched 117.19 Shorts per day on average. Participants are triggered to watch short-form videos during small gaps in their daily routines, such as using the restroom (P3), during commutes (P5), or during breaks at work (P8). With short-form videos, they could make the most of brief moments of downtime, quickly absorbing content and getting enjoyment from it. In such small gaps, watching long-form

content was less ideal, as it disrupted the viewing flow and required users to rewatch sections to fully grasp important information or context. Additionally, participants are triggered to watch short-form videos when feeling exhausted or mentally drained. The immediate entertainment provided by short-form content allowed them to refresh and relieve stress. Some also noted that when they lacked the energy to actively choose content, they preferred short-form videos since the algorithm curated videos aligned with their interests, requiring no effort to search or decide: *"When I just want to rest without thinking, I prefer watching Shorts because I can simply swipe through them effortlessly."* (P8)

3.1.2   When Reality Strikes, Scrolling Stops. Participants decided to stop watching short-form videos when they realized that they have tasks to complete, such as work or exercise. Additionally, the moment they became aware of their short-form consumption behavior—whether it was realizing how much time had passed after checking the clock or having the self-awareness that they had watched too many short-form videos—prompted them to stop. These internal and external cues triggered them to disengage from being deeply immersed in short-form videos. Without such interruptions, participants tended to continue watching until reaching an extreme point, such as feeling too sleepy to hold their phone (P1), experiencing a headache (P7), or facing an imminent work deadline (P4).

3.2   Watching Behaviors

3.2.1   No Thought, Just Dive In and Scroll. People consume short-form videos passively, watching them without much effort. Because of the easy interaction of swiping with just a finger, they move on to the next video effortlessly. The consumption tends to be more about passively going through the provided videos rather than actively searching content. P4 said, *"Watching Shorts feels very passive. Once I open YouTube, I just click one UI, and it's all set. I feel like I'm using almost no mental energy."* Moreover, participants watch short-form videos without a specific goal in mind. While people search for long-form videos with a clear purpose, they often open the app without specific purpose and start watching curated Shorts at the top of the YouTube app.

3.2.2   Unaware Engagement and Temporal Disorientation. Participants reported experiencing a lack of awareness regarding their usage while watching short-form videos. S Since these videos typically do not display a clear timeline, users found it difficult to track how much time they had spent watching. This often led participants to continue watching without realizing how long they had been engaged. Furthermore, the short length of these videos contributed to a distorted perception of time. The short length of short-form video makes users feel like they have not watched much, creating a distorted awareness of consumption. As a result, they were frequently surprised to realize that far more time had passed than expected: *"I thought I had only watched a few Shorts, but an entire hour had flown by…"* (P1).

3.2.3   Repetitive Swiping and Loss of Control. Participants demonstrated a tendency to selectively seek out engaging content, which often led to prolonged viewing sessions, approximately 25.41 videos per session. They made rapid, intuitive judgments within the first

few seconds of each video to decide whether it was worth continuing or skipping. This behavior is reflected in the completion rate data: 36.51% of Shorts were watched only briefly (0–25%), while 46.85% were viewed almost in full (75–100%). In contrast, the middle-range completion rates were notably lower (9.06% for 25–50% and 7.58% for 50–75%), indicating that users quickly dismissed content that did not immediately capture their attention. This made participants feel as if they were trapped in a loop—they frequently lost awareness of their consumption and ended up watching far more videos than they had intended.

3.3 Post-Viewing Experiences and Behaviors

3.3.1 Ephemeral Stimulation, Lasting Regret and Exhaustion. Despite watching many short-form videos, participants had difficulty recalling memorable content. Continuous exposure to rapidly changing, stimulating videos overshadowed earlier ones, weakening memory retention. Passive consumption further limited meaningful engagement and reflection. P5 noted that he often found himself enjoying certain Shorts as if they were new, despite having watched them just a week before. This shallow experience often resulted in feelings of regret and emptiness, with participants sensing they had wasted time unproductively. P1 shared, *"I just lied down and wasted two or three hours watching Shorts. I feel empty afterward. I think, 'I should have exercised instead.'"*

3.3.2 Rebalancing After Overload. Following periods of excessive short-form video consumption, participants typically responded by promptly engaging in restorative actions rather than lingering in feelings of guilt or regret. Instead of dwelling on the negative emotions associated with perceived time wasted, many made a conscious effort to redirect their focus toward more constructive activities. These included tasks such as studying, working, or engaging in other purposeful routines that helped them reestablish a sense of productivity. Participants viewed such actions not only as a means to recover lost time, but also as a way to regain a sense of control over their behavior and daily schedule.

3.4 Perspectives of Short-form Videos and the Need for Intervention

3.4.1 Daily Companion for Entertainment and Learning. Although participants acknowledged that short-form videos were not as enriching as movies or books, they did not perceive short-form videos as a negative media. Participants appreciated short-form videos for keeping them updated on viral memes and trends, introducing them to new topics, and helping them quickly explore and absorb information that would otherwise take much longer to find. Moreover, when feeling exhausted, stressed, or overwhelmed in their daily life, watching short-form videos provided a sense of relief and refreshment. Short-form videos help them regain the energy to continue with their routine.

3.4.2 Toward Autonomous Self-Regulation. Considering both the benefits of short-form videos and the drawbacks of excessive consumption, participants expressed a need for interventions that could help regulate their viewing behavior. In terms of the type of intervention, most participants expressed resistance toward restrictive interventions (e.g., limiting access to or blocking short-form videos).

They considered these methods frustrating and noted that they could intensify the urge to consume even more short-form content. Participants who had previously tried such restrictive strategies (e.g., P1 used an app to block YouTube; P2 turned off his phone during certain hours; P3 deleted Instagram and hid the YouTube app) further reported that these approaches were unsustainable. P1 eventually deleted the blocking app, and P3 reinstalled Instagram, noting that hiding the YouTube app proved ineffective.

Ultimately, participants expressed a preference for interventions that enhance self-awareness and self-regulation, rather than relying on external control: *"When external restrictions force me to limit my viewing habits, I feel like I'm not controlling myself anymore. I believe the future solution should involve strengthening my own self-control and intentionally managing my behavior."* (P2)

4 DISCUSSION AND DESIGN SUGGESTION

In this study, we explored the context, behavior, and experience associated with short-form video consumption. We observed that participants effectively leveraged short-form videos during brief daily gaps, using them for quick entertainment, information gathering, or as a stress-relief mechanism. However, after excessive short-form video consumption, participants reported experiencing feelings of regret and self-blame for having spent their time unproductively. These experiences led them to express a need for interventions that could help them manage their short-form usage more appropriately. In particular, they preferred interventions that would support their ability to self-regulate, rather than relying on external restrictions.

To inform the design of such interventions, we identified certain consumption behaviors that warrant attention. First, participants often experienced blurred and distorted awareness during viewing (see Section 3.2.2). In addition, they frequently found themselves in a loop of repetitive and compulsive scrolling behaviors, driven by the desire to find personally engaging content (see Section 3.2.3). This behaviors result in surprise or regret upon realizing they had spent much longer than intended. Second, consumption was largely passive and effortless, with users often scrolling through content presented by algorithms without actively seeking specific videos (see Section 3.2.1). Lastly, despite extensive short-form video viewing, participants struggled to recall memorable content afterward. This high ephemerality frequently led users to feel regretful and empty, perceiving their time as unproductively spent (see Section 3.3.1).

Addressing these issues, we should design interventions that support more mindful and intentional consumption, rather than imposing external restrictions or eliminating short-form video use altogether. Therefore, we propose a holistic intervention framework composed of three complementary features, each targeting one of the key behavioral challenges identified above (see Figure 1). This design could guide users through a more deliberate and reflective video-watching process.

Before watching, users are prompted to set an intention with the **Purpose Tag**. This feature encourages users to actively decide what type of video they want to watch and the purpose behind it. By setting this intention before viewing, users are more likely to stay focused and deliberate throughout their consumption.

During the viewing process, the **Scroll Footprint** feature helps users become aware of their consumption habits. After each scroll, a faint shadow appears and darkens with continued usage. These marks persist until the app is closed, subtly reminding users of how many videos they have watched, helping them recognize patterns in their behavior.

After watching, users are prompted to reflect on their viewing experience with the **Micro Reflection**. A simple question, such as "What was the most memorable part of this video?" encourages users to pause and reflect on what they just watched. Additionally, users can easily record their impressions using predefined tags, eliminating the need for manual text input. This reflection process helps enhance content retention and reduces feelings of regret or guilt.

5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Our study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, the small sample size (N=8) may limit the diversity of insights regarding short-form video consumption. A larger participant pool could yield broader perspectives. Additionally, our participants were primarily in their twenties. While this age group is representative of typical short-form video users [16, 17], media consumption patterns may vary across different age groups [21]. Future studies should include participants from diverse age groups to better understand varied consumption behaviors and contexts.

6 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we explored how people engage with short-form videos in daily life. Findings from our four-day diary study highlight both the benefits and challenges of short-form video consumption. While users appreciate them for entertainment, relaxation, and quick access to information, they often lose track of time, engage passively, and struggle to recall what they watched, leading to post-viewing regret. To address these issues, we suggest the intervention that help users become more aware of their habits and foster healthier viewing experiences. We hope this study paves the way for future research on intervention design in the context of short-form videos.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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