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The Impact of Opening Hook Style on Engagement Rate in Short-form Motivational Videos on TikTok

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ABSTRACT

In the creator economy, the first few seconds of a short-form video can increase chances of higher engagement. This exploratory study analyzed 80 short-form motivational videos of four Myanmar TikTok influencers to examine how the opening hook style impacted on the engagement rate in these clips. In detail, the sample equally contained 20 of the most recent eligible clips from each of the four influencers, each having over one million followers on TikTok. Based on previous theories, five hook categories were coded using strict rules. Moreover, the researcher investigated which hooks were associated with higher engagement rates than direct informational hooks after adding control variables. The findings showed that the opening hook style of short-form motivational TikTok videos had significant influence on the engagement rate. Among five hook styles, Games-Howell post hoc test showed that the curiosity and pain-point hooks increased higher engagement than direct informational content. Additionally, multiple regression uncovered that the curiosity hooks outperformed direct informational hooks while controlling video length, subtitle presence and face visibility. In fact, the results conclude that the virality of short-form TikTok motivational videos relies on curiosity-driven hook style which can stimulate arousal among viewers. Moreover, this study provides practical recommendations for content creators to incorporate psychological phrases which plant a desire for more data among the audience rather than empathetic, valuable, narrative and contradictory framings.

***Keywords**: TikTok Hook Styles, Creator Economy, Engagement Rates, Information Gap Theory.*

Introduction

The world had over $250 billion worth of creator market in 2025, and it is estimated to reach over $1000 billion market value in 2033 (*Creator Economy Market Size, Share | Industry Report, 2033*, n.d.). In this creator economy, attention from the audience within the first few seconds of a video is essential (Mishra, 2025). In fact, Tiktok has over 1 billion active users consuming vertical short-form videos (Mishra, 2025). Although TikTok influencers can frequently create online trending effects, users can easily swipe away unless the first short period of a content stimulates them to keep viewing.

Previously, Mishra (2025) discovered that emotional hooks provided better engagement on TikTok, and curiosity gap and urgency statements were better in persuading viewers than instructional ones. Similar to the global trends, Myanmar has also been transformed by the creator market since 2013 (Ngu, 2025). In fact, the country emerged as the fastest growing digital landscape among the Southeast Asian nations until the junta censored Facebook, Youtube and X after the 2021 military coup (*Myanmar*, n.d.). As many online users have switched to TikTok, brands and influencers in Myanmar actively publish videos on this platform to obtain attention from audiences.

Statement of the Problem

Previously, Tellis et al. (2019, as cited in Mishra, 2025) examined emotional and informational content on Tiktok, and Jung et al. (2025, as cited in Mishra, 2025) found six main themes around video length, media algorithm, and attention-satisfaction nature. While other studies discovered the impact of hooks on engagement, few research can explain which hook categories drive more engagement in short-form content. As TikTok has become a major marketing platform for the Myanmar market since 2024, understanding audience responses is essential to produce viral videos. As categorization of hooks was not emphasized in past literature, the influence of opening hook style on engagement rate in short-form motivational TikTok videos was analyzed in this exploratory study using real-world data of Myanmar influencers.

Research Objectives and Questions

In this study, the opening hook style with five categories served as an independent variable and the engagement rate of videos was a dependent variable. The research also included some control variables such as video length, subtitle presence and face visibility. In particular, this study questions:

- whether opening hook style significantly affects engagement rate in short-form motivational TikTok videos
- which hooks have more impact than others
- how hook style can explain engagement rate

Scope of the Study

Among Myanmar TikTok creators, the researcher chose four motivational influencers who had over 1 million followers each. Then, the researcher equally collected 20 of the latest eligible videos of each chosen influencer so that the total sample size was 80 clips. Later, the researcher analyzed the first four seconds of each content to classify one hook style for one video based on the coding manual.

Literature Review

This paper carefully examined the previous studies such as behavioral theories, content analysis and so on.

Short-form content marketing on TikTok

As people integrate social media and their daily activities, firms use this as an opportunity to engage with their customers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann et al., 2011, as cited in Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Similarly, famous social media users, who have accumulated followers, influence consumers across platforms (Casalo et al., 2020; Lou et al., 2019; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020, as cited in Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Therefore, brands and social media influencers work together in this creator economy where influencers generate income through producing original contents which persuade viewers to purchase companies' products or services.

Importance of Hooks for TikTok videos

The verbal section of the first few seconds in any TikTok videos are defined as hooks, which have a large impact on viewers' continuity of watching (Mishra, 2025). Technically, successful hooks suggest TikTok to recommend them to other users. Moreover, researchers concluded that hooks generated biological responses based on the MRI research (Tong et al., 2020, as cited in Mishra, 2025). According to previous studies, creators generally use different enticing phrases to stimulate viewers' curiosity to keep watching their videos till the end (Matias & Quere, 2023). Therefore, Mishra (2025) encouraged creators to use various styles, such as humor, call-to-action, storytelling and curiosity, in the opening periods.

Hook Style (Independent Variable)

In this exploratory study, the opening hook style will become a categorized independent variable with five rhetorical framings.

- **Curiosity Hooks**

According to the information gap theory, curiosity drives leaders to collect unnecessary data and patients to gather more details about their health (Loewenstein, 1994). Academically, curiosity linked arousal in a previous research which made tension in listeners' arm muscles when inaudible sections of a recorded article tape appeared (Smith et al., 1954, as cited in Loewenstein, 1994). In fact, curiosity, which constantly annoyed scientists, irresistibly attracted them (Seeger, 1970, as cited in Loewenstein, 1994).

- **Pain-point Hooks**

Psychologically, bad situations have stronger impacts on humans than good ones. Academically, people processed negative impressions more intensely than positive ones (Baumeister et al., 2001). Although painful situations normally make most people sad, they have larger, long-lasting, and continuous effects. Even after related stimuli had been responded to, fearful events led to unforgettable memories in humans' brains (Ledoux et al., 1989, 1995 & Quirk et al., 1995, as cited in Baumeister et al., 2001).

- **Direct-informational Hooks**

Most marketers use content marketing, which emphasizes valuable information for the audience, to generate more leads than traditional methods (Sayankar, 2017). Generally, content marketing on social media obtains applause from various firms because it successfully connects with consumers and influences their purchase decisions (Baltes, 2015, as cited in Shkeer et al., 2024).

- **Storytelling Hooks**

If the audience feels the story has more real-world consequences, they are largely absorbed into this story (Green & Brock, 2000). As stories with good narratives may have more truthful events than persuasive messages, they motivate people to accept even a fantasy (Green & Brock, 2000). Additionally, when people consume stories, they are transported to imaginary worlds, transforming their belief based on the narratives (Green & Brock, 2000).

- **Shock/Contrarian Hooks**

Generally, absurd phrases get more attention from digital users because they include "illogical, irrational, and bizarre words" (Sleegers, n.d.). Theoretically, people feel shocked when they hear misleading, inappropriate and unusual words compared to their expectations (Loizou, 2005, as cited in Sleegers, n.d.). However, shocking phrases make advertisements more popular because higher attention due to absurdity can lead to deeper cognition among consumers (Arias-Bolzmann et al., 2000, as cited in Sleegers, n.d.)

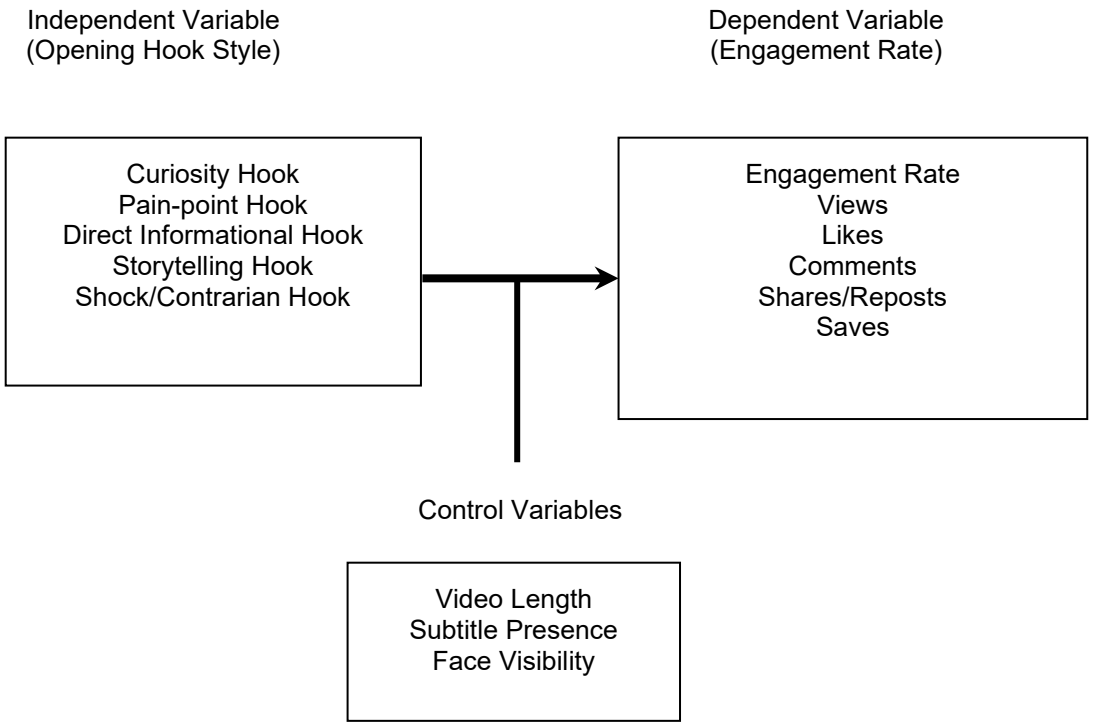
Research Gap

While previous studies have analyzed influencer marketing, creator communication and psychological impacts on consumer behaviors, there are some gaps to examine such as comparative behavioral effects of opening hook style in TikTok content engagement. Therefore, this paper decodes the real-world data of four Myanmar motivational TikTok Influencers to understand how their hooks affect viewers' engagement.

Hypotheses

Based on previous studies, hooks were classified into five categories to examine how they affect engagement rate (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Hypothesis 1 (H1)

H1: Opening hook style significantly affects engagement rate in short-form motivational TikTok videos.

Focused sub-hypotheses

H1a: Curiosity hooks drive higher engagement than direct informational hooks.

H1b: Pain-point hooks drive higher engagement than direct informational hooks.

H1c: Storytelling hooks drive higher engagement than direct informational hooks.

H1d: Shock-based hooks drive higher engagement rates than direct informational hooks.

Since direct informational hooks were neutral, value-oriented and less emotionally loaded, this hook style became a baseline for comparison. This study also incorporated control factors such as video length, face visibility, and subtitle presence.

Primary Dependent Variable

Since each influencer had different followers, the engagement rate was calculated by dividing the summation of likes, comments, shares by views to adjust variations.

Engagement rate = (Likes + Comments + Shares) / Views

Research Methodology

In this exploratory study, the researcher used purposive sampling, descriptive statistics, One Way ANOVA, and multiple regression analysis.

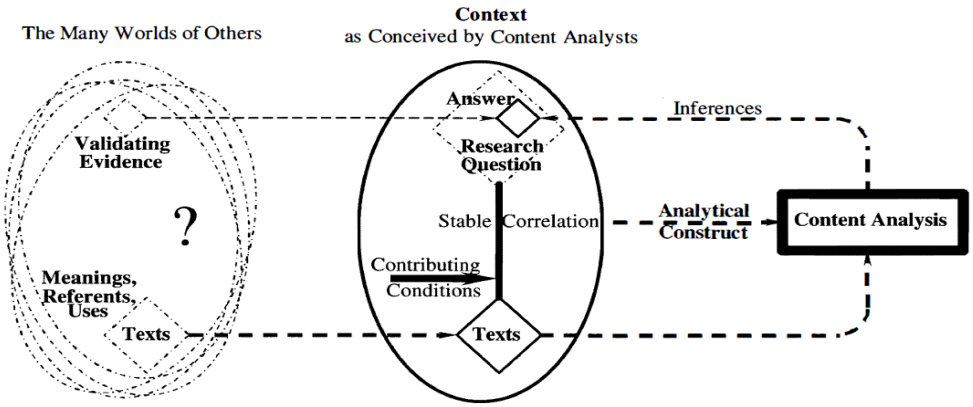
Purposive Sampling

It is better to use purposive sampling because this intentional selection of influencers can explain the research questions in detail and contextual understanding (Tajik et al., 2025). The researcher intentionally selected four Myanmar motivational TikTok creators, who had over one million followers each, and equally collected 20 of the latest eligible clips from each influencer while photo posts, live recordings, non-verbal videos and over four minute long videos were excluded to ensure consistency.

Quantitative Content Analysis

Based on coding instructions, words in speeches could be classified into analyzable representations (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Framework for Content Analysis



As researchers divide speeches into convenient sections, decode and analyze them with strict rules, explicit analytical steps are necessary (Krippendorff, 2004). Instead of searching which themes, this study assigned each video hook to numbers from 1 to 5. So, the current research is quantitative because hooks are classified into numbered groups and analyzed statistically.

Sample Size

Since the study was about short-form content, rhetorical hooks and social media engagement, motivational videos were appropriate units of analysis. As large creators had stable audience behavior and content strategies, it was meaningful to choose speakers with over one million followers. As all eighty videos were short-form and verbal for a motivational niche from Myanmar, the data set was relatively controlled and consistent. Therefore, exploratory study nature combined with manual coding burden and purposive homogenous sampling ensured that the sample size was feasible for this study.

Research Methods

Firstly, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize engagement metrics and distribution patterns across hook categories. Since the opening hook style had 5 categories and the engagement rate was continuous, the researcher used One Way ANOVA to specify whether there were differences among the five themes. After getting a significant result from One Way ANOVA, the researcher conducted Games-Howell post hoc test to determine significant hook groups compared to direct informational hook category. Finally, multiple regression investigated the strength of relationship between independent and dependent variables while controlling other variables.

$$Engagement_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Hook_i + \beta_2 Length_i + \beta_3 Subtitle_i + \epsilon_i$$

Operational Definitions and Coding Manual

The unit of analysis was one individual eligible Tiktok video. Each eligible content must be the most recent, motivational, verbal and less than or equal to four minutes long video from four chosen creators, and it must start with less than or equal to four seconds long rhetorical section. This dominant approach in the beginning of each eligible video was the opening hook style. In this study, only one primary hook category was assigned per one eligible video.

Generally, if the hook delayed the key information, implied hidden knowledge, and encouraged anticipation, it was coded as a curiosity hook. Moreover, if the hook identified a common problem, emphasized failures, and explained frustration, it was coded as a pain-point hook. Furthermore, if the hook immediately presented advice, and gave actionable guides, it was coded as a direct informational hook. Additionally, if the hook described a past event, used first-person narrative, and told an imaginable story, it was coded as a storytelling hook. Finally, if the hook contradicted a common belief, used provocative claims, and challenged social expectations, it was coded as a shock hook.

Firstly, the first three seconds of each eligible video was viewed by the coder and the dominant hook category would be identified. After that, the coder assigned one primary hook category and recorded related engagement metrics and control variables. If multiple hook framings appeared simultaneously, the hook category was assigned whichever was more dominant. The data of all eighty videos were collected on the 20th May to avoid engagement variances, coded twice by the researcher on 21st May and 23rd May, and coding discrepancies were resolved according to predefined coding rules.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 showed the frequency of every category.

Table 1: Frequency of the Opening Hook Styles

Hook Categories	Frequency
Curiosity Hook	20
Pain Point Hook	9
Direct Informational Hook	25
Storytelling Hook	7
Shock / Contrarian Hook	19
Total Video	80

Among hook framings, direct information hook style had the highest frequency with 25 videos, followed by curiosity and shock styles with 20 and 19 videos respectively while only seven and nine videos were coded as storytelling and pain-point hook categories.

Table 2 showed that direct information hook style had the lowest mean engagement rate (M=0.0820) while curiosity hook style appeared to generate the strongest audience (M=0.148) followed by pain-point hooks (M=0.122). Standard deviations indicated that engagement rates were generally clustered around their respective means.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Hook Categories

	Hook Type	Views	LIkes	Comments	Shares/ Reposts	Saves	Engagement Rate
Mean	Curiosity	73911	10448	78.8	367	884	0.148
	Direct Informational	106906	8688	198	418	822	0.0820
	Pain-point	139989	14995	198	668	1481	0.122
	Shock	193438	18255	178	915	1831	0.0906
	Storytelling	181729	19721	352	584	1561	0.0962
Standard deviation	Curiosity	104274	15627	91.3	566	1391	0.0566
	Direct Informational	127427	13049	543	957	1444	0.0567
	Pain-point	182782	19295	213	851	2375	0.0204
	Shock	432885	41338	355	2242	4815	0.0495
	Storytelling	170950	26009	607	920	2258	0.0572

One Way ANOVA and Games-Howell post hoc Test

Welch's ANOVA was used as Levene's test indicated unequal variances across hook categories ($p = 0.02$). Welch's p-value is 0.004, which revealed statistically significant differences in engagement rate across hook categories accepting hypothesis H1 (see *Table 3*). Games-Howell post hoc test showed that curiosity and pain-point framings had p values 0.003 and 0.038 respectively compared to direct informational hooks. Therefore, sub hypotheses H1a and H1b were accepted. However, storytelling and shock hooks didn't differ from direct informational content, rejecting sub hypotheses H1c and H1d.

Table 3: Analysis of engagement rate by opening hook style

One-Way ANOVA (Welch's)				
	F	df1	df2	p
Engagement Rate	4.92	4	27.4	.004

Homogeneity of Variances Test (Levene's)				
	F	df1	df2	p
Engagement Rate	3.12	4	75	.020

		Curiosity	Direct Informational	Pain-point	Shock	Storytelling
Curiosity	Mean df	—	0.0657	0.0259	0.05707	0.05156
	p-value	—	.003	.393	.015	.305
Direct Informational	Mean df		—	-0.0398	-0.00863	-0.01415
	p-value		—	.038	.983	.975
Pain-point	Mean df			—	0.03115	0.02564
	p-value			—	.161	.787
Shock	Mean df				—	-0.00551
	p-value				—	.999
Storytelling	Mean df					—
	p-value					—

Multiple Regression

Table 4 represented that R square was 0.28 explaining 28% of variation in engagement rates. As algorithms were unpredictable in social media research, it was acceptable. Based on the omnibus ANOVA test, hook style had significant p value (0.002) meaning engagement differed across hook categories even after adding controls. So, hypothesis H1 was accepted. As the p-value of the curiosity hook category was <0.001, they still significantly increased engagement rates by about 6.25% compared with direct informational hooks even after adding controls. So, it supported H1a while other hooks didn't show any significant results, rejecting sub hypotheses H1b, H1c, and H1d.

Table 4: Results of Multiple Regression

Model Fit Measures			
Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2
1	0.529	0.280	0.210

Omnibus ANOVA Test					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Length (T Sec)	1.10e-4	1	1.10e-4	0.0420	.838
Hook Style	0.04886	4	0.01221	4.6673	.002
Subtitle	0.00661	1	0.00661	2.5274	.116
Face Visible	6.73e-4	1	6.73e-4	0.2571	.614
Residuals	0.18842	72	0.00262		
Note. Type 3 sum of squares					

Model Coefficients - Engagement Rate						
			95% Confidence Interval			
Predictor	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	t	p
Intercept[a]	0.11763	0.0419	0.0340	0.20124	2.805	.006
Length (T Sec)	3.69e-5	1.80e-4	-3.22e−4	3.96e-4	0.205	.838
Hook Type:						
Curiosity – Direct Informational	0.06247	0.0156	0.0313	0.09364	3.996	<.001
Pain-point – Direct Informational	0.02543	0.0209	-0.0163	0.06716	1.215	.228
Shock – Direct Informational	0.00580	0.0156	-0.0253	0.03692	0.371	.711
Storytelling – Direct Informational	0.00995	0.0222	-0.0342	0.05413	0.449	.655
Subtitle:						
1 – 0	-0.02726	0.0171	-0.0614	0.00692	-1.590	.116
Face Visible:						
1 – 0	-0.01882	0.0371	-0.0928	0.05516	-0.507	.614
[a] Represents reference level						

Conclusion

This exploratory study tries to explore the hidden part of the opening hook style whether it has a distinct impact on the engagement rate. Theoretically, a major hypothesis and four sub hypotheses were formulated and tested to explore the impact of opening hook style on performance in short-form content on TikTok. The researcher used the recent eligible eighty videos of four TikTok motivational influencers who accumulated over 1 million followers on TikTok.

Welch's ANOVA described that the opening hook style significantly influenced the engagement rate in short-form motivational TikTok videos accepting hypothesis H1. Among five hook framings, curiosity hook style significantly affected engagement rate compared to direct informational hook style across Games-Howell post hoc test and multiple regression, even after controlling variables. Therefore sub hypothesis H1a was accepted while other sub-hypotheses were rejected. Interestingly, although pain-point hook style had significant differences from direct informational hook style in Games-Howell post hoc test, this was not supported in multiple regression.

Discussion

The results clearly explain that information alone is insufficient on TikTok because users more strongly respond to curious tension, psychological anticipation, and incomplete messages. Although shock hooks had the highest mean views, curiosity might create more meaningful audience interaction reflecting the differences between viral reach and engagement quality. As Loewenstein (1994) discovered that people collected more information due to their curiosity, the current findings support that information gap theory. Moreover, the study also aligns with the paper of Sleeger (n.d.) which stated that annoying curiosity could attract scientists. Approximately, unfinished information might raise engagement rate six percent higher based on the research data. Moreover, rhetorical framings mattered more than duration, comprehensiveness, and facial expressions.

Recommendation

This study points out that creators should realize how much curiosity can help them to attract their followers. Even though valuable messages can persuade users, it is not enough to boost engagement without psychological framing. On the other hand, creators can use absurd words to entice viewers, but it would not increase interactions in the long run.

In fact, presentation styles of content have more influence than the information involved in the videos. Especially, creators should psychologically present their hooks using incomplete information, and irresistible words rather than pure data, empathetic phrases, imaginations, and contrary themes.

Limitation and Future Research

Firstly, as the sample size was modest with eighty videos, and secondly, the study used a coding manual which may be subjective in some processes. Thirdly, audience responses might differ across various sectors such as entertainment, lifestyle, education and politics. Finally, the regression model explained approximately 28% of variance in engagement rate, which suggested to include other variables, such as editing quality, locations, posting times, topic sensitivity, content trends, and so on. In the future, the research should be extended to include more creators, coders, industries, and variables to obtain better representation of wider attention economy on TikTok.

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