



Short-Form Editing's Influence on Gen Z's Expectations on Film Pacing

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INTRODUCTION

Short-form platforms like TikTok have changed how Gen Z watches media. Fast cuts, quick hooks, and constant visual stimulation may be shaping what younger viewers consider engaging and may make slower films feel too slow. Film editing has already sped up over time, and this project explores whether Gen Z now prefers faster pacing in narrative film. This matters for both attention research and the future of filmmaking, because directors may need to balance emotional storytelling with changing audience expectations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

This study used one short boxing film shown in three different edits:

1-minute version: TikTok-style, fast-paced

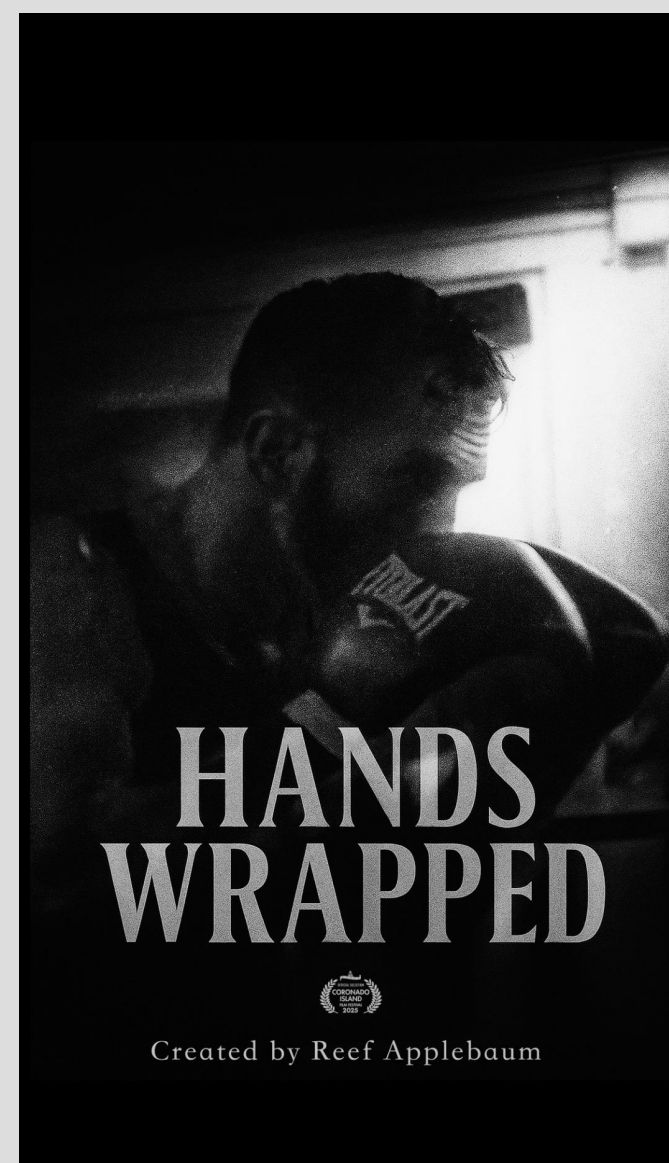
5-minute version: normal/control pacing

10-minute version: slow-paced

Participants were high school students ages 14–18. They were assigned to watch one version, then completed a survey about:

- comprehension of the story
- attention
- pacing
- social media use
- viewing preferences

The study used both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data came from scores for comprehension, attention, pacing, and engagement. The main goal was to compare how different editing speeds affected engagement and whether heavier social media use related to lower engagement.



DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

The results support the idea that short-form editing influences Gen Z's expectations for pacing. The 1-minute version had the strongest engagement score, showing that faster edits, quicker hooks, and shorter runtime were more effective at holding Gen Z's attention. The 5-minute version had the weakest pacing score, which may reflect that students found the standard pacing less satisfying than what was expected. Interestingly, the 10-minute version scored a little higher than the 5-minute version in engagement, which may mean that viewers were better able to connect with a slower story if they stayed with it.

The most clear trend in the data comes from the social media usage. Participants with 5–6 hours of daily use had a lot lower comprehension and engagement than users with less hours. This reflects the idea that a lot of exposure to fast, high-stimulation media, makes it harder to stay focused on longer or slower narratives.

DATA AND FINIDNGS

Sample

Total participants: 38

1-minute version: 12 participants

5-minute version: 12 participants

10-minute version: 14 participants

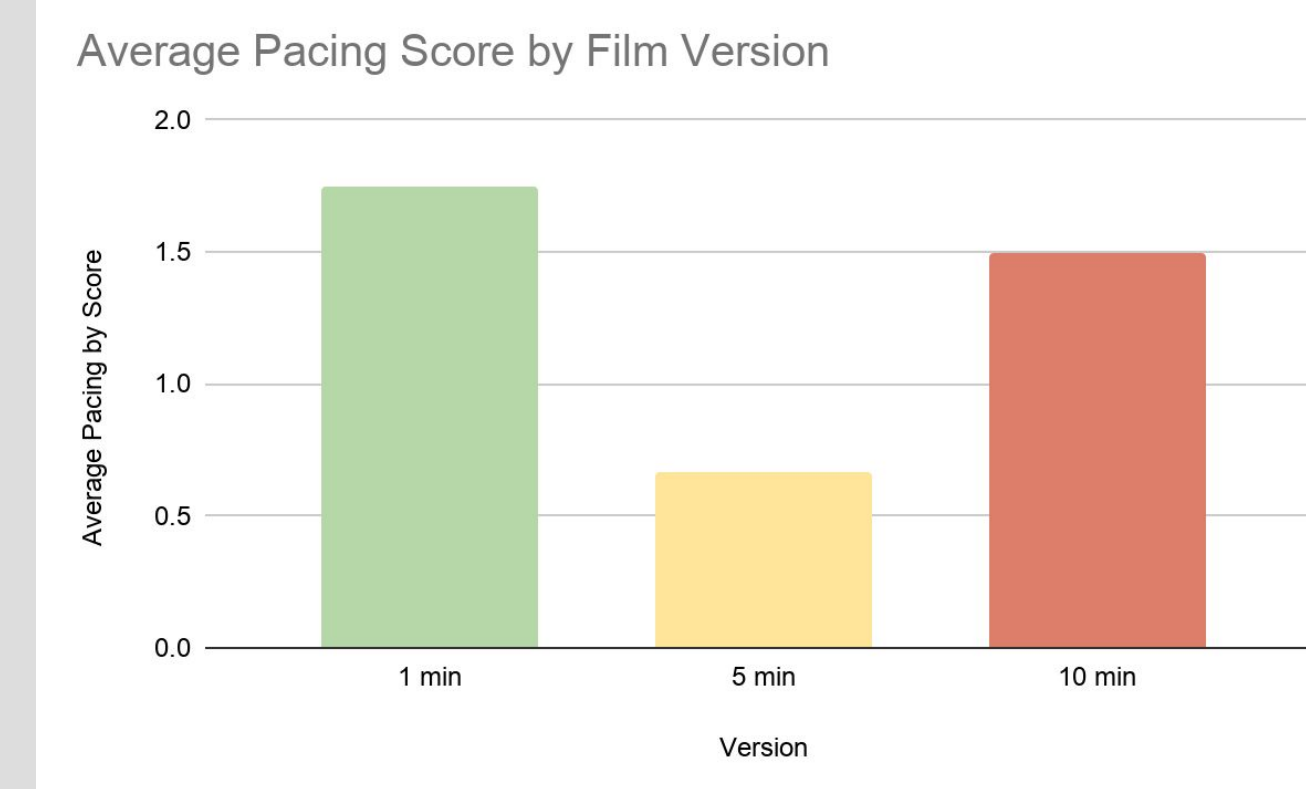
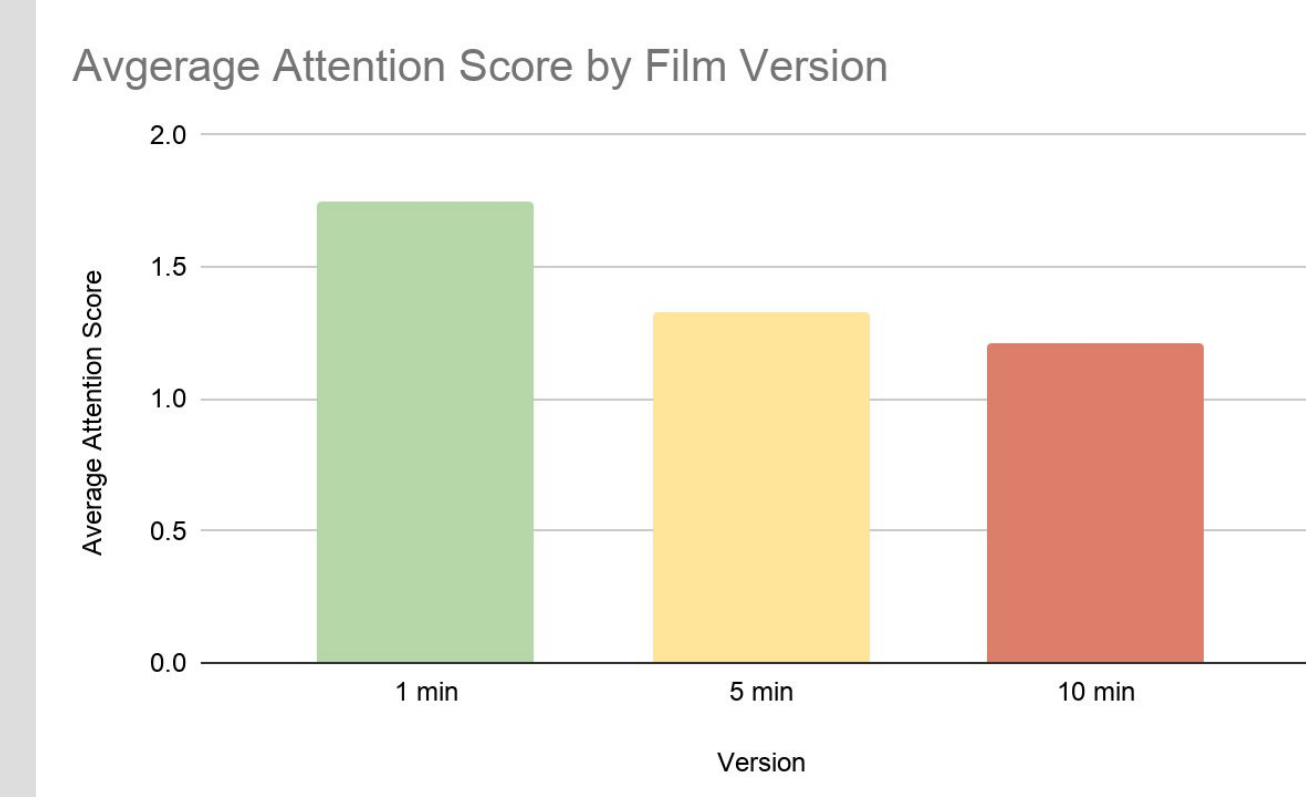
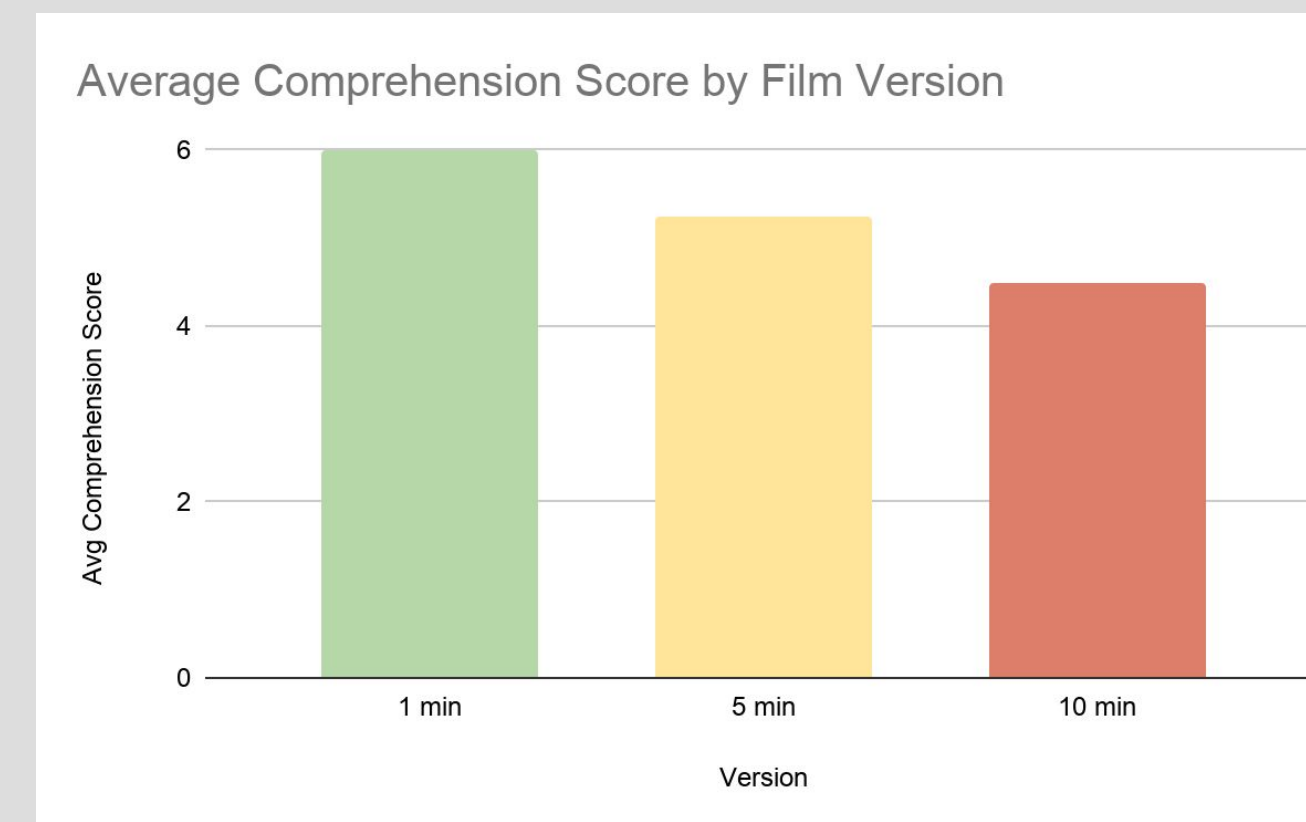
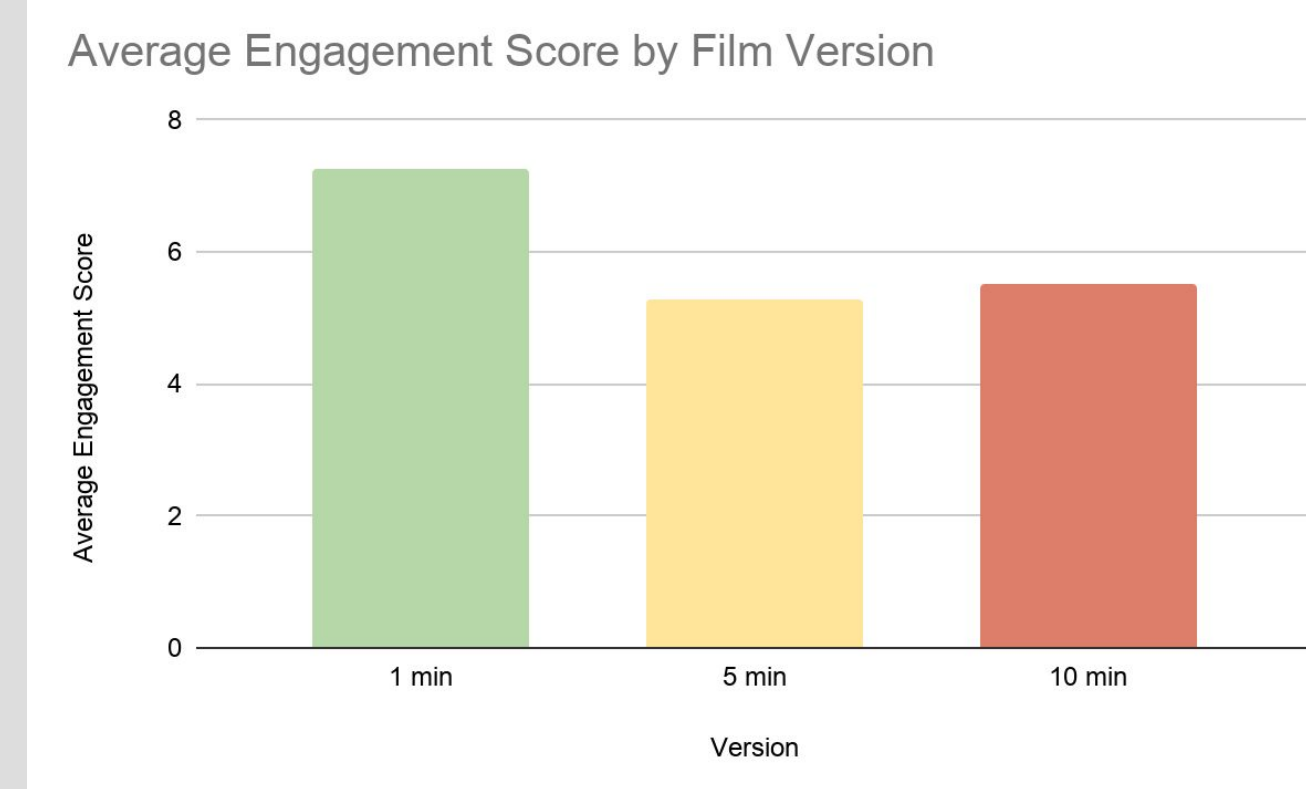
Comprehension (out of 5): How well they understood the story: % correct on a 8-question quiz

Attention (out of 2): Did it hold their focus?

Pacing (out of 2): Did it feel too slow or too fast?

Total Engagement (out of 9): Combined score of everything above

$$\text{Comprehension (number correct} \div 8 \times 5) + \text{Attention} + \text{Pacing} = \text{Engagement}$$



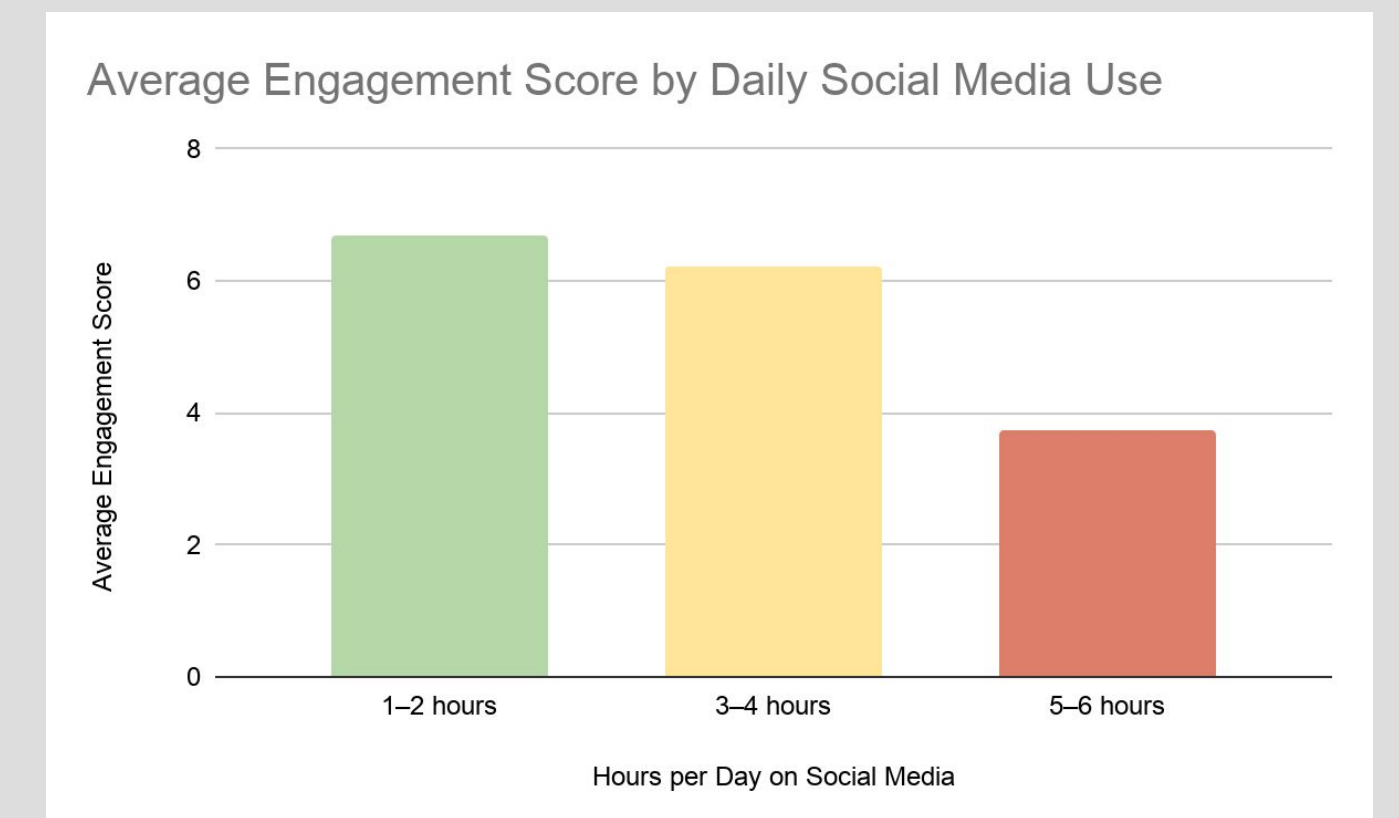
Engagement generally dropped for the heaviest users:

1–2 hours/day: comprehension 5.5/8, engagement 6.69/9

3–4 hours/day: comprehension 5.6/8, engagement 6.22/9

5–6 hours/day: comprehension 2.8/8, engagement 3.75/9

This supports the idea that higher social media use may be linked to lower engagement and lower comprehension, especially for longer-form content.



CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

This study reflects that Gen Z responds better to a faster-paced editing, and that heavy social media use reduces engagement and comprehension in film. The fast-paced version had the highest scores in comprehension, attention, pacing, and engagement, while the most social media hour users reflected the weakest results overall.

The most important takeaway is how the viewers experienced the pacing. The one minute and ten minute version scored the highest, reflecting that just because the five minute was shorter, viewers thought that the pacing wasn't efficient. I think this is a result to how the film plays out, the ten minute really lets you breathe with the character, following his anxieties before and after the fight. The one minute breezes through it, almost explaining rather than showing like the ten minute. The five minute version sits in between the two, confusing viewers and weakening their relationship to the films pacing.

These findings matter for filmmakers because they demonstrate that pacing is becoming an important factor in whether or not young audiences will stay engaged. However, films should not just become shorter and faster, instead, the industry needs to shift to adapt pacing in a way that keeps attention without losing the emotional depth that makes film beautiful.

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