

# Media Production to Promote a Tourism Product Related to Wildlife Watching. Case: Digital Series Voices of the Forest, San Martin, Peru

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## Abstract

Managers of tourist destinations and products worldwide are in a constant search for innovation, improving their design processes, tourist service and promotion, with the intention of increasing the interest of travelers and improving the experience of their visit. In this context, new communication formats are emerging, highlighting audiovisual production in different formats, such as audiovisual series, as an effective and innovative format.

This article will analyze the production of audiovisual series related to wildlife observation and in particular, the case of the audiovisual series Voices of the forest, which is a digital series related to wildlife observation and whose objectives are to contribute to generate interest in traveling to Alto Mayo, in San Martin, Peru, and motivate the audience to carry out wildlife observation activities.

## Keywords

Video induced tourism, Wildlife based tourism, Digital series

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Video-induced tourism

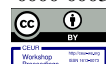
According to Araujo and Fraiz (2012) both the audiovisual sector and the travel sector offer leisure alternatives to people and are independently in the economy of experiences, but also the audiovisual sector can be linked to the activity of traveling, since audiovisual productions can provide the possibility of living and moving to places that in the future they may want to know or visit.

For example, a research study verified that the number of tourists increased 50% during the 5 years following the filming of 10 movies in different destinations. Likewise, this phenomenon gave rise to the name Set-jetter, which comes from set, stage, and jet, to fly, and refers to the traveler who has a travel motivation related to the destination seen in a movie.

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Based on this concept, there is great interest in transferring the benefits of cinema to a larger field, the audiovisual series, which, just as cinema, which proved to be very effective compared to the traditional promotion of tourist destinations within many cases, and can transfer certain parameters to the development of series or other audiovisual products, being a new opportunity as a tourism promotion tool [1].

According to, Araujo and Fraiz, some of the most important parameters are: (1) High involvement of the viewer with the narrative story, characters, and events of the series, (2) disbelief is suspended, fiction becomes reality, through the understanding of the story and images of the series and (3) The consumption of experiences through the feature film or series induces a desire to recognize the images and story of the series [1].

It is important to emphasize that the audiovisual media has an important influence on tourism destination image perception [2], and this is because visuals are currently more important than written material [2].

In that sense, tourist destinations or attractions that appear in films and series can generate greater recognition and admiration from viewers compared to a regular advertisement. These audiovisual media can produce empathy in consumers, that is, the audience gains shared affection, putting themselves in the place of the protagonist of the story and in many cases wish to live a similar story [2].

## **1.2. Tourism based on wildlife observation**

As part of nature-based tourism, wildlife watching is a very popular activity [3] that is related to the scientific study of nature [4]. In addition, it contributes directly to support nature conservation by increasing environmental awareness and education among visitors and local populations [5], as well as generating funds for activities that conservation requires.

The UNWTO indicates that wildlife watching tourism is associated with an animal species or a group of species, highlighting worldwide buffaloes, elephants, leopards, lions, rhinos, gorillas, lemurs, birds, whales, and dolphins [6].

Until before the pandemic by COVID-19 it was identified that more than 8 billion people approximately visit protected terrestrial areas worldwide each year, generating approximately \$600 billion per year in direct expenditures and \$250 billion per year in consumer surplus [7]. Likewise, within the benefits of visiting protected areas, it has been identified that interaction with nature generates physiological, physical, and social well-being [8, 9]. Due to the pandemic, these benefits have been placed higher levels of importance [10] and protected areas such as other natural spaces have become of greater interest.

About birdwatching, it is the practice of observing and identifying birds in their natural habitats by sight and sound [11], it is an activity related to nature-based tourism, which shows a worldwide expansion [12].

For example, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, birdwatching is the leading wildlife watching activity in the United States with approximately 45 million enthusiasts [13] and is one of the most popular outdoor recreational activities in Western countries [14]. Also, it has started to become more popular in other latitudes, especially in remote areas where more rare bird species can be found [12].

## **2. Background on video-induced tourism related to wildlife**

The productions related to tourism and wildlife watching are mainly associated with nature documentaries. There are many cases such as Our Planet, The Earth, Earth, A Life on our Planet, among others. Although these are very advanced audiovisual projects with high quality pre-production, image, production, and post-production, with large production companies and millionaire investments, their link with a particular destination or tourist product could be quite limited.

However, based on the concept of film-induced tourism, the appearance of natural spaces in these documentaries generates travel interest in terms of the ecosystems, landscapes and species shown, which are usually varied and refer to many places on the planet.

In addition, in recent years, documentaries related to more specific themes and territorial spaces have been shown on the main streaming platforms, which are linked to tourist destinations and/or attractions, as detailed below:

**Table 1**  
Wildlife documentaries or audiovisual series identified

Streaming platform	Documentaries or audiovisual series
<b>Netflix</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dancing with the Birds</li> <li>● Pacificum</li> <li>● Birders</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Galapagos</li> <li>● Iceland</li> <li>● Spirits of the Congo</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Birders</li> </ul>

Although most of the documentaries mentioned in the preceding table are not major film productions, and are mainly developed by independent production companies, in some cases with government funding in each country, they still have a considerable investment and broad expertise in the audiovisual field, mostly executed with an interest particularly related to the conservation of species and ecosystems and/or for environmental education purposes. It should be noted that these documentaries have been emerging recently, but before the pandemic.

An interesting case is *The Birders*, which stands out as an exceptional case for clearly considering an additional objective to those indicated before, to influence the interest of the birdwatchers' market to visit Colombia, with the intention of carrying out birdwatching and other nature-based activities. This audiovisual project was co-financed by government agencies in charge of promoting tourism in that country.

In addition to the above, in recent years and as a result of the pandemic, smaller budget audiovisual projects have emerged, in many cases worked by the tour operators themselves, and in the best of cases in alliance with audiovisual professionals, with the intention of showing permanence in the tourist activity based on wildlife watching and to generate future travel intentions of people interested in this activity.

Also, at the annual conference of the World Bank's Global Wildlife Program, in late 2020, noted the need to use digital media to advertise tourism while travel restrictions continue or the tourism sector recovers fully, with a considerable growth in virtual tourism.

Wild Earth, for example, increased the number of viewers of its virtual safaris by up to five times at the onset of the pandemic and travel restrictions; virtual tours mostly free to users, although others have been conducted for a fee, helping to offset lost revenue from tourist visitation. Finally, one of the most important findings was that virtual tours provide a way for people to experience natural attractions from their homes, while inspiring future travel plans once restrictions are lifted [15].

According to the European Commission and Directorate-General for International Partnerships, virtual tours created by protected areas and nature-based operators have received considerable traction and interest worldwide [15].

Among the main projects are audiovisual series, streaming programs, and virtual tours, some of which are identified below:

**Table 2**

Identified wildlife audiovisual series and wildlife virtual tours

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Audiovisual series
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Airpan, offers various 360° videos and photos of natural and cultural destinations around the world (European Commission and Directorate-General for International Partnerships, 2022).</li><li>● WildEarth is a subscription service for accessing wildlife virtual tours.</li><li>● Birds of Colombia - Virtual Tour, carried out by Manakin Nature Tours.</li><li>● Tropical birding virtual bird tours, carried out by Tropical Birding.</li><li>● Hummingbird Spot, is a channel that also develops different audiovisual material as a series with particular attention to hummingbirds.</li><li>● Birds of San Martin Virtual Tour was an event organized by the National Chamber of Tourism, the Natural Protected Areas Service, and the ecotourism company Ikam Expeditions.</li></ul>

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As can be seen in the preceding table, the audiovisual projects show very particular characteristics, mostly associated with a particular activity and/or destinations; in some cases we see some exceptions, where the business model is videos, such as Airpan and therefore offers a variety of videos of different destinations and activities; also highlights the case of WildEarth where the business model is the subscription of interested parties to participate in virtual tours and at the same time they are customers for future expeditions in person.

The peculiarity of the rest of the cases is that they are ecotourism operators, or related entities specialized in wildlife watching tourism that developed these projects and hope to increase their income by attracting more tourists or other related income.

### **3. Case presentation: Digital series Voices of the Forest, San Martin, Peru**

Voices of the Forest is an audiovisual series that promotes wildlife observation and the stories of those who strive to conserve it, the series shows incredible expeditions in search of unique wildlife species in northern Peru and this season the Alto Mayo Valley was chosen to be the tourist destination.

Based on the concept of video-induced tourism and wildlife observation, and the analysis of the background presented, especially the realization of digital series and virtual tours developed by tourism companies, the ecotourism company Ikam Expeditions, in partnership with the production company Videa, Cinefotorental, Conservation International Peru and the Chief of the Alto Mayo Protection Forest, with funding from the Tourism Emprende program of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism, a program that finances innovative tourism projects, produced the digital series Voices of the Forest following the methodology presented below.

#### **3.1. Methodology**

**Project Location:** The project was developed in northern Peru in the departments of Amazonas and mainly in Alto Mayo, department of San Martin. Alto Mayo is located north of San Martin, in the provinces of Rioja and Moyobamba.

**Duration:** The project had a duration of 7 months, from December 2020 to June 2021. Note that supporting videos of species were recorded from 2018.

**Materials and methods:** For the audiovisual realization, the stages of pre-production, production and post-production were considered [16].

### **3.1.1. Pre-production**

This is the planning stage, where the creative part of the series was defined, such as the concept, the chapters, and the main story to be developed for each chapter, the characters, the relevant wildlife species chosen for each episode, and the main locations, among others.

With the objective of promoting wildlife observation and the stories of those who work hard to conserve it, Voices of the Forest series proposed the development of short videos (between 5 to 8 minutes) referring to expeditions related to the search for wildlife species in the most important natural spaces of Alto Mayo, in the department of San Martín and surrounding areas of the department of Amazonas, Peru. Five chapters were planned: Hummingbird Route, Representative Birds of Alto Mayo, Nocturnal Fauna in Tingana, Wildlife in Tingana and Birding in Moyobamba.

Julio César Tello Alvarado, General Manager of Ikam Expeditions and an expert in wildlife research and monitoring, was selected as the main actor. Although he had no experience in audiovisual projects as a presenter, which required an induction and training in front of cameras.

Another interesting point to highlight is that the sites or locations selected were mainly unconventional natural tourist attractions, whose main characteristics are: (1) sites that are managed for their conservation, (2) high presence of wildlife species and biodiversity, and (3) there are companies or people in charge of providing services and facilitating wildlife observation.

The main locations in Alto Mayo, department of San Martín were: Arena Blanca Reserve, Parador Llantería, Fundo Alto Nieva and Sendero Royal (all in the zone of influence of the Alto Mayo Protected Forest), Tingana Concession, ZoCRE Morro de Calzada and Tahuishco viewpoint and port. In the department of Amazonas: Abra Patricia Private Conservation Area and Huembo Conservation Reserve.

For the creation of the scripts, research was carried out, mainly concerning wildlife species and natural characteristics of the ecosystems, as well as the itinerary proposed by the tour operator's team and shared with Videá's team.

Finally, in this part, the available budget was analyzed and based on what had already been planned, a recording plan was established. It should be noted that the chapters proposed shared locations, so the scheduling of field trips and recordings had to be very specific to avoid errors and generate additional expenses.

### **3.1.2. Production**

It had two stages, the first was filmed in the city of Moyobamba for chapter 5: Birdwatching in Moyobamba. Initially, the main reason for this first shooting was to test the scripts, train the main actor, Julio C. Tello Alvarado, and analyze the first sample videos. It is important to point out that this chapter, carried out in the city of Moyobamba, did not require considerable logistical costs and only a local audiovisual producer was hired.

The second stage was more complex and included going out to wildlife observation sites. Videá's production team came from the cities of Lima and Chiclayo and was formed by three members who played the role of producer, cameraman and editor. From Ikam Expeditions, the team included two members, the main actor, and the person in charge of travel logistics and local coordination. The entire shoot took 23 days.

### **3.1.3. Post-production**

It included two stages:

The first stage was related to the editing of the videos, the music and the colors of the images. Several prototypes were made, which required a lot of attention, especially those related to the sounds and the selection of images of the species; sometimes, because of the music, natural sounds were missed, or the selected images were not very attractive, so that were changed.

The second stage was related to the launching of the series, which involved coordination with other local organizations linked to tourism development and conservation. There was coordination with Conservation International Peru and the Alto Mayo Protected Forest, which belongs to the National Service of Natural Areas Protected by the State - SERNANP.

The launch was made through Facebook, on the accounts of the three organizations mentioned in the preceding paragraph. In the case of Ikam Expeditions, it was also presented on Instagram and later with English subtitles on YouTube.

For the main launch event of the series, which included an official presentation and the broadcast of the first episode, a small publicity campaign was carried out through social networks, which included making diagrammed material, publishing it on social media and paying for advertising.

Finally, it is important to point out that the screening of each chapter consisted of a reel that lasted less than a minute and appeared 2 days before the release of each chapter, the principal chapter video that was 4 to 7 minutes long and the publication of an article in the blog two days after each chapter was released.

### 3.2. Results

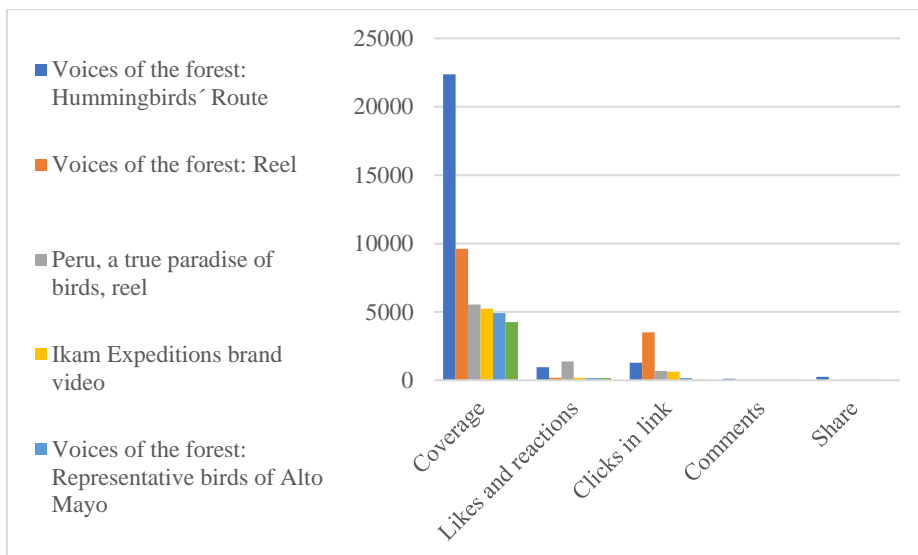
The chapters of the "Voices of the Forest" series are posted on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube platforms (subtitled in English). In addition, articles referring to each chapter of the series have been published on the Ikam Expeditions website (<https://ikamexpeditions.com/es/bloges/>).

**Table 3**

Voices of the Forest series related output

Outputs					
•	Digital	series	on	YouTube	available on:
	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhyNd6eGAdY4Jh2G2tybnViGQP04g7yNY">https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhyNd6eGAdY4Jh2G2tybnViGQP04g7yNY</a>				
•	Digital	series	on	Facebook	available on:
	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/watch/100063902924173/403226434556699">https://www.facebook.com/watch/100063902924173/403226434556699</a>				
•	Articles of Voices of the forest digital series available on:				
	<a href="https://ikamexpeditions.com/es/category/serie-digital-voces-del-bosque/">https://ikamexpeditions.com/es/category/serie-digital-voces-del-bosque/</a>				

By September 2022 on Facebook, the main platform, the publications related to the series lead the main statistical indicators of the Ikam Expeditions account. In this sense, 4 of the 6 publications with the highest reach are from Voices of the Forest.



**Fig. 1.** Social media advertising results of the digital series "Voices of the Forest".

After the release and projection of all the chapters of the series on the social media of the entities mentioned above, "Voices of the Forest" was requested by SERNANP central office to be screened again on its networks and was also very well received. (<https://fb.watch/eAikScBYkj/>).

In addition, a regional open and virtual channel in San Martin, GORESAMTV, screened the series and interviewed a representative of Ikam Expeditions (<https://www.facebook.com/100071172423351/videos/1529370534068337>, from minute 35).

Also, the series was presented at the XI South American Bird Fair, held in the city of Cusco, Peru from October 27 to 30, 2022.

Finally, it is important to underline that the production of the series has showed the company's knowledge and experience in wildlife observation expeditions.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Video-induced tourism contributes to the publicity and positioning of tourist destinations worldwide, as has been shown in this article, particularly wildlife-based tourism.

In this sense, the existence of different audiovisual projects stands out, especially in recent years, projects made by tourism companies specialized in wildlife-related activities, but with less investment, possibly in many cases less experience in audiovisual production and screening and advertising on social media or digital platforms.

In addition, as a result of COVID-19, and due to the paralysis of international tourism, many tour operators and other related businesses began to develop audiovisual material, with the purpose of maintaining contact with their clients, improving marketing strategies or others, and this generated greater audiovisual production such as digital series, virtual programs, and virtual tours that continue.

In this sense, the phenomenon of creation of audiovisual products related to nature tourism is shown as an interesting trend that needs further analysis and this article, as well as the case presented, the series "Voices of the Forest" can serve as input for further audiovisual projects or research.

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