

Norwegian Friluftsliv Organizations and Social Media

Equity, Representation, and Influence

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Social media increasingly mediates how friluftsliv—Norwegian outdoor life—is represented and practiced, yet concerns remain about equity and inclusivity in these portrayals. This study critically examined how five major Norwegian friluftsliv organizations use Instagram to represent women; Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC); and people with disabilities. Using a netnographic and visual case study approach, 1,344 images from 2023-2024 were analyzed. Findings reveal relatively strong representation of

women (approx. 32% of posts with images), yet BIPOC individuals (5%) and people with disabilities (<1%) remain severely underrepresented. These omissions reinforce narrow ideals of Norwegian outdoor identity tied to whiteness, health, and physical fitness. The study highlights the power of organizational social media to either perpetuate exclusion or promote diversity, and urges friluftsliv organizations to adopt more inclusive digital practices that reflect the full diversity of Norwegian society.

Introduction and overview

The intersection of digital technology and outdoor recreation in Norway—particularly through social media platforms—shapes how friluftsliv¹ is represented, perceived, and practiced. Social media (SoMe), with its capacity for user-generated content and algorithmically mediated visibility, serves as both a mirror and a mold for societal norms and aspirations. At the heart of the digital society that defines our era (Low et al., 2022, p. 27) lie these normalized online spaces for social interaction. SoMe platforms such as Instagram and TikTok stand as fields of expression where people can present curated versions of themselves. Leaning on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, these practices can be seen as a form of impression management, where the audience (SoMe followers) are party only to the performer's 'front stage', which has been carefully prepared 'backstage'. SoMe outlets thus provide channels for individuals and organization to promote a certain identity in very public and far-reaching ways (Dupont, 2020, p. 616).

Radmann and colleagues (2021) claim that SoMe influencers “wield considerable power over the economy, impact, and development of the contemporary sports landscape” (p. 11), and there is every reason to believe that the same can be said of Norwegian friluftsliv culture. This inquiry explores how large Norwegian friluftsliv organizations use Instagram to shape public conceptions of outdoor life, particularly regarding social inclusion and the representation of minority populations. Analyzing the public faces presented by organizations that ‘drive’ this outdoor culture in arguably very normative ways, will allow us to identify and examine the implicit messages contained within what is presumably a rigorous process of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). By employing a netnographic and visual case study methodology, the study critically interrogates 528 Instagram posts and 1344 images from five influential organizations. It addresses two central questions: To what extent are these digital portrayals of Norwegian friluftsliv inclusive? And what are their implications for social equity in Norwegian outdoor recreation, education and tourism?

1 The 2016 white paper from the Norwegian government views friluftsliv as outdoor activities that are a vibrant and central part of Norwegian cultural heritage and national identity, and an important source of higher quality of life and better health for all. (Stortingsmelding 18, 2016, p. 7)

Background, rationale, and aims

The growth of social media has expanded the traditional social spaces of friluftsliv through creating new platforms where identities, lifestyles, and values associated with nature and recreation are performed and contested. Scholars such as Abidin (2015) and Sloan and Quan-Haase (2017) highlight how influencers and digital content can shape perceptions of authenticity, belonging, and norms in various domains, including outdoor recreation.

In the last five years alone, the academic literature in this area has grown significantly, with articles explicating how people are shaping their public outdoor identity through SoMe. These include, for example, Beames, Andkjær and Radmann's (2021) work "Alone with Goffman" (based on the TV series, *Alone*); Bratrud's (2024) inquiry "Identity transformation through nature activity and social media in Norway"; and Andkjær & Larsen's (2024) study "Danish friluftsliv Facebook groups." Other notable contributions to the field include Low et al.'s (2022) paper "Women's outdoor adventure experiences on Instagram" and Stanley's (2020) excellent study "Unlikely hikers," which highlights how women with diverse backgrounds, skin colours, sexual orientation are, through SoMe, challenging the stereotypes of what a 'hiker' looks like and does. This links closely to Beames & Adams (2024) book chapter "Equity, social media and the outdoors." Beames and Reed (2023) have examined the power of adventure sports social media influencers to promote environmental activism, Hutton and Rantala (2024) discuss how, again through SoMe, tourists present very limited views of the inherent risks associated with wilderness travel in Finnish national parks.

What is notable about this emerging corpus of SoMe and the outdoors literature is that it focuses primarily on individual influencers, as opposed to large organizational influencers. Despite the expansive reach of these organizations, the question of who is visibly represented—and who is not—remains critical. Minority groups, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) populations, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and those who deviate from the slim, fit ideal, often remain underrepresented in the digital narratives of outdoor life. These exclusions risk reinforcing narrow norms of Norwegianness and outdoor legitimacy (Anderson, 2024), thereby marginalizing alternative experiences and identities.

Following Stanley's (2020) work on 'unlikely hikers', the selective portrayal of particular people engaged in outdoor activities in social media

posts by major friluftsliv organizations have the power to shape who feels welcome in friluftsliv spaces – whether these be indoor, outdoor or online – and who does not. Social media offers both the potential for cultural resistance and the perpetuation of dominant, inequitable social norms. As such, there is a pressing need to interrogate the visual politics of these platforms (Beames & Adams, 2024).

This inquiry aims to critically examine the Instagram posts of five major Norwegian friluftsliv organizations, with a special focus on how minority groups are represented. First, it attempts to capture the frequency and nature of representation of BIPOC individuals, women, and people with visible disabilities. Second, it will consider the degree to which these representations contribute to inclusive social norms. And third, it will provide recommendations for more equitable visual practices in organizational social media use.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, interpretivist approach, drawing on netnography (Kozinets, 2019) and visual methodologies (Rose, 2016) to analyze Instagram posts as digital artifacts of cultural meaning. The case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014) enables a focused examination of specific organizations deemed influential in the Norwegian outdoor sphere. The choice of Instagram accounts was based on three inclusion criteria. First, the organizations had to be Norwegian. Second, they must promote or offer outdoor activities. And finally, they should have a significant national influence. Purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011) was used to select five organizations based on their Instagram follower count:

- Den Norske Turistforening (DNT) (the Norwegian Trekking Association) – 385k followers
- Norsk Friluftsliv (Friluftsliv Norway) – 98.3k
- Norges Jeger- og Fiskerforbund (the Norwegian Hunting and Fishing Association) – 41.2k
- Norsk Fjellsportforum (the Norwegian Mountainsport Forum) – 508
- NIH Friluftsliv (Friluftsliv programs at the Norwegian School for Sport Sciences) – 1016

A total of 436 posts made between November 1st, 2023, and October 31st, 2024, were captured through 1344 images. A coding schema with predetermined themes was employed for the initial analysis (Stake, 1995; Creswell & Poth, 2018). These themes were based on a pilot study conducted two years previously (Beames, 2021) and enabled us to concentrate our examination on the representation of three factors among the collected images: BIPOC; 100% women and/or girls; people with mental and/or physical disabilities. Data extraction was mainly based on the images posted, but a reading of the comments allowed us to identify and confirm references to these factors. Although the number of photos and videos could vary between publications, each post was considered as a meaningful unit that comprised a number of images and a comment. We attempted to distinguish posts with obvious humans from those that were landscapes and recipes. Images where an object, such as a cup of soup, being held by two hands were not included as 'humans'. Thus, after removing photos without humans, we were left with a total of 789 posts for the analysis.

The inquiry has four main limitations. First, the visual focus may overlook marginalization not apparent in imagery, such as non-visible disabilities. Second, the reliance on Instagram excludes other platforms where alternative forms of engagement may occur. Third, the handling of 'carousel' posts risks over- or under-representing diversity if only one image within a set is inclusive. Investigator triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) between the two authors afforded a kind of reflexive questioning and wearing of different lenses to consider alternate findings that might not have seemed immediately obvious (see Maxwell, 2005). And fourth, the analysis remains an imprecise process; it is challenging to decide if, for example, a person in the far distance of a landscape shot is male or female. As researcher we use as much care and rigour as possible and ask the reader for their trust in this endeavour (Stake, 1995).

Principal findings

The majority of the images centered around scenic landscapes, outdoor safety guidelines, beginner tips, sustainability, and health benefits of friluftsliv. While these themes are important, they were often communicated through imagery that upheld what could be considered to be normative ideals of Norwegian outdoor identity.

Table 1. *Representative minority posts by organization*

Posts with humans	DNT (n=326) Total posts (n=576)	NIH Fri- luftsliv (n=37) Total posts (n = 39)	Norges Jeger og Fiskerfor- bund (n=100) Total posts (n=155)	Norsk Fjell- sports- forum (n=28) Total posts (n=38)	Norsk Friluftsliv (n=289) Total posts (n = 545)	Total (n=789) Total posts (n=1344)
Women/ girls only	138 (42%)	7 (18%)	12 (12%)	6 (21%)	91 (31%)	255 (32%)
BIPOC	13 (4%)	2 (5%)	5 (5%)	0	23 (8%)	43 (5%)
Disability	4 (1%)	0	1 (1%)	0	2 (0.7%)	7 (0.9%)

The analysis revealed two major findings. First, there is varied representation of women and girls across these platforms, with an average of 32.3% of the posts across the five accounts. DNT, in particular, stood out with 42% of its posts with humans featuring women or girls. The results should be interpreted with caution, however, as there is significant variability between the accounts in the percentage of women only posts. As such, the underrepresentation of women and girls in some accounts is obscured by their strong representation in others.

Second, while the overall representation of women appears to be a relative strength, the same cannot be said for the portrayal of other marginalized groups. The data indicated minimal visibility of people from BIPOC backgrounds and individuals with mental or physical disabilities. While some content highlighted immigrant stories thriving in outdoor life, BIPOC individuals appear in just over 5% of the posts with humans, with Norsk Friluftsliv leading the way in this category. Overall, Indigenous populations received tokenistic attention, mainly in connection with specific minority rights events such as Sami National Day.

Finally, the results are similar for individuals with physical or mental disabilities. This minority group appears in less than 1% of the posts, which is significantly less than the estimated figure of over 8% for the Norwegian population aged between 15 and 66 (Statistik sentralbyrå, 2025).

Overall, the findings show that women are relatively well represented in our sample, despite disparities between accounts. In contrast, BIPOC individuals and people with disabilities all remain underrepresented—and in some cases, nearly invisible (particularly people with disabilities).

On a more speculative note, other minority groups, such as those in the LGBTQ+ community could also claim a certain invisibility in these social media spaces. Similarly, there was near-total absence of people who fall outside the stereotypical ‘slim, fit, active’ outdoor ideal.

Discussion

The gendered history of outdoor practices deeply shapes current activities. This is not to say that women were absent from the history of outdoor activities, but rather that they were made less visible (Hall & Miller, 2023; Moraldo, 2013). Gender studies have highlighted persistent inequalities in outdoor practices (Hall & Miller, 2023, p. 2), and from this perspective, the relatively strong presence of women on friluftsliv-themed Instagram accounts breaks with this dominant masculine tradition. The fact that almost one third of the posts feature only women suggests that a deliberate effort is being made by some of these organizations to portray themselves as somewhat egalitarian and inclusive. It is difficult to gauge the positive influence of these images on the organizations’ followers and impossible to know how this laudable representation of women is reflected these organizations’ more general, day-to-day practices.

Other minority groups, such as those with darker skin colours and those with visible disabilities, appear much less frequently on these Instagram accounts. This chronic underrepresentation renders these groups less valuable within friluftsliv culture. In Bourdieu’s (1989) terms, one could say that minority groups simply have less cultural and symbolic capital in the social field of friluftsliv. Through their influential actions, these organizations indirectly dictate which identity groups are deemed worthy enough to belong to a putative friluftsliv culture. Our findings suggest that Norwegian friluftsliv culture is tailored to white, healthy individuals who conform to certain beauty standards by being slim, fit, and active. This finding resonates strongly with Stanley’s (2020) work, which explains how the discourses of outdoor media “tend to erase and/or limit the agency and visibility [of] non-traditional outdoorspeople” (p. 253).

Although many organizations claim an inclusive policy towards minorities (BIPOC, disabled people, and the LGBTQ+ community), this ambition seems compromised on social networks. Our findings point towards two factors that may limit the ways that friluftsliv organizations can promote inclusive norms. First, certain identity traits do not appear in the posts.

For example, part of the explanation for the absence of the LGBTQ+ community is simply because one cannot conclude if a person is LGBTQ+ or not from an image alone. The same observation can be made with the Sami people or those with certain less obvious disabilities. This analytical process is made more difficult as very often the posts do not deal with these identity groups, but rather with the friluftsliv activity. One solution for organizations who wish to increase their representation of minority groups who are not easily identifiable from images alone is to make better use of text, symbols and logos, while lifting up notable work by individuals and organizations working in these marginalized spaces.

A second limiting factor is the low proportion of individuals belonging to these certain minority groups within the Norwegian population. According to the Statistics Norway², 21.4% of the Norwegian population are immigrants or Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. While this category is not synonymous with BIPOC, there is a significant overlap, as a large share of the immigrant population in Norway identifies as BIPOC. In this context, the 5.4% representation of BIPOC individuals remains low compared to their estimated demographic share. This underrepresentation mainly results from patterns of exclusion and a lack of visibility within friluftsliv-related social media, but it also reflects broader demographic disparities in the Norwegian population. This dynamic of underrepresentation is reinforced by the way social media content is produced and consumed, as user-generated content focuses primarily on the visible aspects of the posts, rather than the invisible (Casagrande, 2022). By showing only thin, light skinned men and women, friluftsliv Instagram accounts contribute to the construction of a specific ideal of nature users. In particular, by excluding BIPOC individuals and people with visible disabilities, these influential Instagram accounts can serve—perhaps unwittingly—to sustain an idealized, narrow and exclusionary definition of who is welcome in green spaces and who is not.

Conclusions and implications for practice

This study underscores the role of large friluftsliv organizations in constructing and disseminating powerful narratives about who belongs in the Norwegian outdoors. While there are positive strides in gender represen-

² <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/innvandrere/statistikk/innvandrere-og-norskfodte-med-innvandrerforeldre> (March 7, 2025)

tation and occasional inclusion of individuals with darker skin colours, other marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, and the Sami remain largely invisible. Stanley (2020) encourages Instagram influencers to broaden the representation of minority groups on their posts, as means of “nudging at social imaginaries of what a hiker looks like” (p. 253). The findings suggest that friluftsliv organizations can ask themselves four questions regarding their social media practices.

1. To what extent do outdoor organizations’ images and text messages include some people, while excluding others?
2. Which audiences are not seeing themselves in the text and images?
3. To what degree are these images constraining and normative, as opposed to championing diversity?
4. How can individuals and organizations be more deliberate about including all members of society in their SoMe posts?

As Rose (2016) reminds us, images of all kinds shape what we see as normal, desirable, and possible. In the realm of friluftsliv, where participation is often tied to national identity, it is essential to critically reflect on who is included in our digital landscapes as well as our physical ones—and who remains on the margins.

Declaration of author contribution

Simon Beames conceived and managed the project. Edgar Le Guyader collected the data. Both authors drafted sections of the manuscript and analysed the data, and both approved the final version of the manuscript.

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