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What Can We Learn From Diabetes-Related YouTube Videos?

Running Head: Diabetes YouTube Videos

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Key Messages:

- 1) Health organizations should focus on producing YouTube videos with the age group in mind.
- 2) Health organizations should identify ways to address the cultural and language barriers to improve the quality of YouTube videos.

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To the Editor:

Leong et al investigated the quality and popularity of YouTube videos focused on type 2 diabetes (1). Their study found that misleading videos were more popular than useful videos. Also, culturally-tailored videos were not more likely to be misleading than non-culturally tailored videos. Among the 71 videos studied, the median video length was 6 min. I have the following comments.

First, the authors showed that all videos produced by universities and health organizations contained scientifically sound information and were useful. However, misleading videos were more popular than such useful videos. Previous studies have demonstrated that health organizations could produce appealing health videos by taking into consideration of the age group at risk for developing certain diseases (2,3). Given health promotion is necessary to engage individuals to lead healthy lifestyles to prevent type 2 diabetes, health organizations should focus on producing YouTube videos for at-risk individuals and patients with type 2 diabetes with the intended age group in mind.

Second, the authors found that culturally-tailored videos were not more likely to be misleading than non-culturally tailored videos for patients with type 2 diabetes on YouTube. However, the study documented lower technical quality in culturally-tailored videos in comparison with non-culturally tailored videos. Previous research has highlighted the quality of online information obtained from Asian languages were lower than those obtained from searches using the English language (4). Therefore, health organizations should identify ways to increase the quality of YouTube videos for patients with type 2 diabetes by addressing the cultural and language barriers.

Finally, without access to YouTube Analytics data of these 71 videos, the authors had no way of knowing audience retention (e.g. average view duration). Thus, it is crucial for researchers and health organizations to analyze viewer data for further understanding of viewer engagement with the YouTube platform. The study reported that the median video length was 6 min, which coincides with the reported actual average view duration of 6 minutes found in other studies on YouTube health videos with variable lengths (2,5). As YouTube become the mainstream method of health information seeking, health organizations should consider YouTube viewers' attention span while producing useful health educational videos.

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