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USE AND QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF YOUTUBE VIDEOS ON THE MOST COMMON DERMATOLOGIC DISORDEERS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This systematically conducted narrative review explores the quality and reliability of dermatology-related information available on YouTube. A comprehensive literature search of PubMed and Scopus (up to November 2024) identified 8,521 records, of which 25 studies met the inclusion criteria addressing six major dermatologic topics: hidradenitis suppurativa, acne vulgaris, atopic dermatitis, psoriasis, skin cancer, and Mohs micrographic surgery. Across conditions, YouTube was found to be a popular platform for health information seeking, yet most videos were created by non-medical individuals and exhibited low educational quality based on validated instruments such as DISCERN, JAMA, and the Global Quality Scale. Common issues included incomplete, misleading, or unreferenced information, with misleading content often attracting higher engagement than professional materials. While videos produced by healthcare professionals were generally more accurate, they represented a minority and achieved limited visibility. Despite YouTube's potential for public health education, current dermatology-related content often fails to meet evidence-based standards. These findings highlight the urgent need for dermatologists and professional organizations to create and promote high-quality, comprehensible, and reliable video content to improve public understanding, counter misinformation, and support informed patient decision-making.

KEYWORDS

Dermatology, Social Media, YouTube, Skin Cancer, Psoriasis, Atopic Dermatitis

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1. Introduction

Social media has ingrained itself into the lives of billions of people around the world. Over the last ten years, these platforms have grown in popularity, with approximately 60% of people worldwide or 4.7 billion people using them.(Wojtara, 2023) Founded in 2005, Youtube is among the most popular ones. A platform dedicated to sharing videos, Youtube is being used by people not only to watch content, but also to get answers to their health-related queries, ask for support from people with similar health concerns, and even research upcoming medical treatments.(Naslund et al., 2014) One study revealed that between 66.7% to 91.7% of (American) teens use social media as a source of health-related knowledge.(Plaisime et al., 2020) Additionally, approximately 80% of adult Internet users are believed to look up health-related information online.

These findings demonstrate the significant role of social media in shaping our understanding of health. However, the accuracy and quality of the information available on these platforms is crucial, as misinformation can lead to misconceptions and harmful decisions.

In dermatology, the impact of such information is particularly evident among teenagers, who can be more prone to false information on social media, hence the importance of creating high quality, evidence-based content.

In this review we have summarized the most commonly mentioned dermatological diseases and procedures in Youtube videos, which have been described in previous publications. We further examined how these studies evaluated the quality and credibility of dermatology related Youtube content, providing an overview of the most recent evidence on the accuracy of information available on this platform.

2. Methodology

This work is a systematically conducted narrative review analyzing research publications addressing the use of YouTube as a source of medical information related to major dermatological conditions, including hidradenitis suppurativa, atopic dermatitis, psoriasis, skin cancer, dermatologic surgery, and acne vulgaris. Systematic searches were performed in the PubMed and Scopus databases for publications available up to November 2024 using the following query: “YouTube” AND (“Hidradenitis Suppurativa” OR “Atopic Dermatitis” OR “Psoriasis” OR “Skin cancer” OR “Surgery” OR “Acne Vulgaris”). The search yielded 7641 records from Scopus and 880 records from PubMed, resulting in a total of 8521 articles. Inclusion criteria were: (1) studies primarily investigating the educational or informational role of YouTube in dermatology; (2) analysis of dermatology-related content corresponding to at least one of the predefined disease categories; (3) availability of full text in English; and (4) inclusion of at least three independent studies addressing each specific dermatological condition to ensure adequate representation and comparability across disease categories. We excluded duplicates across databases, publications not focused on YouTube-based content, studies unrelated to dermatology, conference abstracts, non-English articles, and papers lacking extractable methodological details. The deduplication procedure was performed in Zotero, resulting in the removal of 1739 duplicate records and leaving 6782 unique articles for initial screening. Subsequently, title and abstract screening was conducted by one reviewer (A.K.), followed by full-text evaluation performed independently by two reviewers (A.K.; J.K.). After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 25 studies were ultimately included in the qualitative synthesis. Any discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion, ensuring transparency and reproducibility of the selection process.

3. Discussion

3.1 Hidradenitis Suppurativa

Hidradenitis suppurativa (HS) is a chronic, recurrent, and debilitating inflammatory disorder of the skin, manifested by the presence of painful nodules, abscesses, and fistulas, predominantly located in intertriginous regions.(Nguyen et al., 2021) (Saunte et al., 2015) Owing to its profound impact on patients’ quality of life and the frequent delay in initiating appropriate therapy, studies indicate that individuals affected by HS often seek information beyond medical consultations, particularly from online sources such as YouTube. (Bujnowska-Fedak et al., 2019) (Hämeen-Anttila et al., 2018) (Vance et al., 2009) In the literature, four studies have been identified that evaluate YouTube content related to hidradenitis suppurativa. All of the studies assessed the source of the uploaded videos. Due to differences in study design and inclusion criteria, their findings varied considerably. In the study by Wendy Li, which employed the least restrictive inclusion criteria and analyzed 284 videos, the majority of the content was created by patients. In contrast, Lewandowski et al. and Lukac D., who evaluated only videos related to the treatment of hidradenitis suppurativa and applied narrower inclusion criteria, reported that the predominant sources were health care professionals 21 out of 34

videos in Lewandowski's study and 22 out of 30 in that of Lukac. In the study by Daniel P. Raime, the authors did not distinguish between medical and non-medical sources but indicated that 30 videos were created by board-certified professionals, whereas 70 were produced by non-board-certified individuals. The average view counts reported in these studies were 528,989, 42,631, and 145,546 for Lewandowski, Lukac, and Raime, respectively, highlighting the substantial public interest in the topic. The authors of the three aforementioned studies utilized the DISCERN instrument to evaluate the quality of the analyzed videos. In the studies conducted by Lewandowski and Daniel P. Raime, the mean DISCERN scores ranged between 2.32 and 2.52, classifying the assessed videos as poor-quality educational materials. Moreover, the studies indicated a greater viewer interest in videos presenting surgical treatment approaches compared to those focusing on other therapeutic modalities. The presented analyses demonstrate a high level of public interest in hidradenitis suppurativa-related content on YouTube; however, they also emphasize the poor overall quality of the disseminated information. Methodological discrepancies among the studies hinder a direct comparison of findings, underscoring the need for future research employing standardized and unified methodological frameworks in this area. (Li et al., 2021) (Lewandowski et al., 2022) (Raime et al., 2023) (Lukac et al., 2022)

3.2 Mohs Micrographic surgery

Mohs micrographic surgery (MMS) is a highly precise and tissue-conserving technique for removing skin cancers such as basal and squamous cell carcinomas. Its key benefit lies in providing complete microscopic control of tumor margins while preserving as much healthy tissue as possible. (Prickett & Ramsey, 2023)Two recent studies have evaluated the quality of YouTube content on MMS. A study by Iglesias-Puzas et al. (Iglesias-Puzas et al., 2022) conducted a cross-sectional analysis of 180 high-view English videos using the keyword "Mohs surgery," categorizing them by source type and assessing quality with the DISCERN tool alongside sentiment analysis of viewer comments. In contrast, Huang et al. (Huang et al., 2021)examined the top 40 videos from searches for "Mohs surgery" and "Mohs micrographic surgery," classifying them by content and presenter type, and assessing usability, reliability, and popularity using JAMA, DISCERN, MSS-specific scores, and the Video Power Index. They also incorporated statistical analyses to compare categorical and continuous variables. Both studies found that most YouTube videos were produced by medical professionals, yet their overall quality was poor. In the first study, 68% of videos were created by healthcare providers, yet the mean DISCERN score (30.83) indicated low-quality information, mainly due to missing source citations, lack of discussion of alternative treatments, and limited guidance for additional resources. Sentiment analysis revealed a mix of positive and negative viewer reactions, with generally mild emotional tones. Similarly, the second study reported that 90% of videos were educational, with dermatologist-created videos achieving slightly higher JAMA scores than non-dermatologist ones (1.89 vs. 1.36, $p = 0.00015$), though DISCERN, MSS, and popularity scores did not differ significantly. Overall, these findings highlight that while YouTube enhances patient engagement and accessibility, the majority of MMS-related content remains unreliable and of limited educational value.

3.3 Acne

With both inflammatory and non-inflammatory lesions linked to Cutibacterium acnes, acne vulgaris is a chronic inflammatory disorder of the pilosebaceous unit that frequently manifests throughout adolescence under the influence of dehydroepiandrosterone. (Sutaria et al., 2023)

In a cross-sectional review conducted in December 2020, YouTube was searched in private browsing mode using the keyword "how to get rid of acne." The top 100 English-language videos relevant to facial acne treatment were recorded, with duplicates and non-English videos excluded, yielding 96 videos for analysis. Each video was categorized by speaker type and the treatments recommended were classified according to the 2016 American Academy of Dermatology guidelines (grades A–C), with natural or home remedies placed in a separate unrated category. Of the 96 analyzed videos, most were created by patients or bloggers (65.6%), followed by dermatologists (14.6%) and other medical or media professionals. Over one-third (34.4%) contained class A recommendations, while most included class B (63.5%), a few contained class C (2.1%), and over a third promoted ungraded natural or home remedies. A notable emphasis was placed on easily accessible household treatments including toothpaste, aloe vera, honey or tea tree oil, as well as lifestyle modifications such as reducing both dairy intake as well as glycemic index. The most commonly recommended active ingredients were salicylic acid and benzoyl peroxide. Approximately one-fifth of video titles highlighted "fast," "overnight," or "quick" results, reflecting a focus on rapid improvement. (Nickles et al., 2022)

A different study demonstrated that among 358 surveyed adult women with acne, 60% used YouTube to seek information about acne treatments, making it one of the most frequently consulted online platforms alongside Google and Instagram. (Ertekin et al., 2024)

While YouTube provides accessible and engaging content, prior research has shown that many acne-related videos contain inaccurate or low-quality information, which may mislead viewers. (Borba et al., 2020)This influence was shown in the willingness of some respondents (20.9%) to modify doctor-prescribed treatment in response to suggestions from social media, including YouTube. (Ertekin et al., 2024)

Comparable issues with content quality and dependability were also found in a Korean study evaluating YouTube videos about isotretinoin therapy. After analyzing 164 films using the DISCERN tool and additional scientific accuracy criteria, researchers discovered that the videos' overall mean quality score was low (2.24 out of 5), with significant topics including indications, necessary blood tests, and possible drug interactions receiving particularly little attention. Although videos uploaded by medical professionals demonstrated slightly higher quality than those from non-medical sources, there was no significant difference between dermatologists and other healthcare providers. Furthermore, the study revealed no correlation between popularity and video quality, indicating that false or insufficient information could spread on YouTube regardless of its accuracy. (Ko & Haw, 2022)

These findings highlight YouTube's significant yet concerning role in shaping treatment decisions, emphasizing the need for dermatologists to create and promote evidence-based content on the platform to counter misinformation and support informed patient care

3.4 Atopic dermatitis

Atopic dermatitis (AD) is a chronic, inflammatory skin disorder characterized by recurrent episodes of pruritic eczematous lesions.

Beyond the physical manifestations, patients often face social stigma due to the visible nature of the condition.

As AD predominantly affects children, the burden extends to family members - particularly parents - who are deeply impacted by the disease.

Consequently, the condition is associated with a substantially reduced health-related quality of life for both patients and their families. (Flohr & Mann, 2014) (Nutten, 2015)

Given that a large proportion of individuals with skin diseases actively engage in online health-related searches, patients with atopic dermatitis may be particularly inclined to seek information about their condition through the Internet. (*Comparing Burden of Dermatologic Disease to Search Interest on Google Trends - PubMed*, n.d.)

To date, three studies have been identified in the literature that analyze YouTube content related to atopic dermatitis.

Two of the published studies (Freemyer and Mueller) encompassed all videos related to atopic dermatitis, whereas the third (Pithadia) was limited to those addressing dupilumab treatment. Despite differences in inclusion criteria, all studies consistently found that the majority of content was produced by patients. Furthermore, videos created by patients sharing their personal experiences demonstrated higher engagement and like ratios, although the overall quality of these materials remained limited.

Freemyer and Mueller categorized the videos as either "useful" or "misleading," depending on their consistency with scientific evidence.

In Freemyer's study, the majority of videos were classified as useful, with 32.8% categorized as useful and 33% as useful personal experience, whereas smaller proportions were considered misleading, including 17.2% misleading and 17% misleading personal experience.

Additionally, the study highlighted that no misleading videos were uploaded by universities or professional organizations, government and news agencies, or individual users who were health providers.

In contrast, in Mueller's study, 32% of videos were classified as useful, whereas 48% were considered misleading, 20% were classified as neither nor.

The lower percentage of misleading videos in Freemyer's publication may be attributable to differences in the search terms employed to locate the videos.

Only the study by Mueller employed standardized tools to assess the quality of information presented in the uploaded videos. The authors utilized the DISCERN instrument and the Global Quality Scale (GQS), demonstrating that the number of video views did not correlate with content quality, and that high-quality materials accounted for only 11 - 13% of the analyzed videos.

Despite differences in the instruments employed and the methods of data analysis, each study emphasized the need for content creation by healthcare professionals, which could potentially provide patients with resources of higher data quality. (Mueller et al., 2020) (Pithadia et al., 2022) (Freemyer et al., 2018)

3.5 Psoriasis

Psoriasis is a chronic, systemic, immune-mediated disorder characterized by well-demarcated, erythematous, and scaly plaques that are frequently pruritic and painful. The disease and its associated comorbidities can be severe in some patients, and the effectiveness of available treatments varies between individuals. Together, these factors contribute to a substantial daily impact on patients' quality of life. Consequently, individuals affected by psoriasis actively engage with social media platforms, such as YouTube, to acquire information about their disease. (Zhang & Wu, 2018) (Idriss et al., 2009) Currently, five studies in the scientific literature have systematically examined the content of videos addressing psoriasis. Of these, only two studies (Mueller and Qi) included videos covering all aspects of psoriasis, whereas the remaining three focused exclusively on videos related to various treatment modalities. Lenczawski included videos covering all forms of treatment, whereas Pithadia summarized information on videos related to psoriasis treatment with phototherapy and excimer laser in one study, and focused on topical treatments in a second study. Consequently, the main conclusions drawn from these studies differ, reflecting the variations in the types of content included. In the studies by Mueller and Qi, dedicated tools were employed to assess the quality of videos. Mueller used both the DISCERN instrument and the Global Quality Scale (GQS), whereas Qi applied only the GQS. Both studies reported a predominance of low-quality videos, particularly when the content was uploaded by individuals not affiliated with healthcare professionals; however, videos uploaded by patients, despite their generally lower quality, received more views and likes compared to content considered useful and presented by healthcare professionals. Pithadia, in the study analyzing videos related to the use of phototherapy and laser treatments, observed that as many as 54.8% of the videos were generated by manufacturers, which intended to advertise their products to potential buyers. Moreover, these promotional videos were more likely to contain low-quality content compared to those created by healthcare professionals. In the remaining studies, most of the videos were created by private individuals without medical education. Despite numerous differences in the analyzed data, all studies consistently noted that videos of low informational value predominated. These findings underscore the need for the development of high-quality videos produced by healthcare professionals to ensure accurate and reliable information for patients.

(*Psoriasis and the Digital Landscape: YouTube as an Information Source for Patients and Medical Professionals - PubMed*, n.d.) (Mueller et al., 2019) (*Misinformation Is Prevalent in Psoriasis-Related YouTube Videos - PubMed*, n.d.) (Pithadia et al., 2020b) (Pithadia et al., 2020a)

3.6 Skin cancers

Skin cancer is among the most commonly diagnosed malignancies globally. Early identification of suspicious skin lesions is pivotal for effective secondary prevention, complementing primary prevention strategies aimed at reducing ultraviolet radiation exposure through sun-protective measures. In parallel, the growing reliance of patients on social media and online platforms for health-related information presents an emerging opportunity to enhance preventive efforts and promote public awareness. (Leiter et al., 2017) (Joly-Chevrier et al., 2022)

Among the published literature, four studies specifically investigated the portrayal of skin cancers on YouTube. They assessed the quality, clarity, and accessibility of the information provided, offering valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges of using social media as a tool for public health education.

The findings of the four studies differ, likely due to variations in the populations examined and the thematic focus of the videos.

Two of the studies were conducted by Reinhardt and included only videos in German; one focused on skin cancer screening, while the other addressed only cutaneous squamous cell carcinoma. In contrast, the studies by Joly-Chevrier and Basch examined skin cancer more broadly, including all videos identified using the keyword "skin cancer." The studies also differed in the number of videos analyzed: Reinhardt included 16 and 38 videos, respectively, whereas Joly-Chevrier and Basch examined 297 and 140 videos.

In three of the studies - including both by Reinhardt and the one by Joly-Chevrier - the majority of videos were produced by healthcare professionals or institutions, whereas Basch reported that most videos were created by consumers.

In most of the studies, dedicated tools were employed to assess the quality, accuracy, and clarity of the videos. In the study by Joly-Chevrier, both the quality of the videos and the credibility of the medical information sources were assessed using the DISCERN and JAMA criteria.The authors concluded that skin cancer - related videos on YouTube were generally of low quality and often lacked references to validated medical sources, suggesting that such content should not be considered a reliable source of patient education.

Reinhardt, in both of her studies, also used the DISCERN scale to assess video quality and additionally applied the Global Quality Scale (GQS). In both analyses, the overall quality of the videos was rated as mediocre. Furthermore, Reinhardt employed the JAMA criteria to evaluate the reliability of the information and the Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool (PEMAT) to assess understandability and actionability. Basch was the only author who did not employ validated instruments to assess video quality. However, he emphasized that videos created by consumers primarily focused on home-based treatments for skin cancer, particularly the use of black salve as a method for treating or removing skin lesions.

Taken together, the reviewed studies reveal both the educational potential and the significant limitations of YouTube as a source of information on skin cancer, emphasizing the importance of promoting evidence-based and professionally curated content.

(Reinhardt et al., 2023) (Reinhardt et al., 2022) (Joly-Chevrier et al., 2023) (Basch et al., 2015)

4. Conclusion

YouTube has become an increasingly influential platform for disseminating health-related information, including dermatological content. The findings of this review demonstrate that, although YouTube serves as a widely accessible and engaging medium for patient education, the overall quality and reliability of dermatology-related videos remain suboptimal. Across most disease categories, such as acne vulgaris, atopic dermatitis, psoriasis, hidradenitis suppurativa, skin cancers, and Mohs micrographic surgery, the majority of analyzed videos were created by non-medical individuals, frequently containing incomplete, misleading, or scientifically inaccurate information. Moreover, high-quality educational content produced by healthcare professionals represented only a small fraction of available material and did not consistently achieve higher visibility or engagement. These findings underscore the urgent need for dermatologists, professional societies, and healthcare institutions to actively participate in the creation and promotion of evidence-based, comprehensible, and ethically sound YouTube content. Strengthening the presence of credible medical voices on this platform could significantly enhance public understanding of dermatologic diseases, counter misinformation, and ultimately support more informed health-related decision-making among patients.

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