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Assessing the informational quality of TikTok videos on refractive surgery: a comparative study

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ABSTRACT

Aims: Evaluate the quality and reliability of TikTok videos on refractive surgery (LASIK, PRK, SMILE), comparing content from healthcare professionals and patients, and assess TikTok's role in disseminating ophthalmological information.

Methods: Analyzed 200 TikTok videos (98 by physicians, 102 by patients) using DISCERN, JAMA, and Global Quality Score (GQS). Recorded and compared view count, likes, comments, and video length. Examined correlations between these metrics and quality scores.

Results: Mean DISCERN, JAMA, and GQS scores for all videos were 44±13.2, 2.27±0.94, and 2.86±1.22, indicating moderate quality. Physician-uploaded videos scored higher on all measures. Strong positive correlation between video length and quality scores. Strong negative correlation between engagement metrics (views, likes, comments) and DISCERN scores. Physician videos had higher view counts, longer durations, and more comments, while patient videos received more likes.

Conclusion: TikTok videos on refractive surgery generally show moderate quality and reliability. Content from healthcare professionals is superior in quality and informativeness. However, higher engagement does not equate to better information quality. These findings underscore the necessity for patients to critically evaluate social media content when seeking information on refractive surgery. Larger, comprehensive studies are needed for more definitive insights. The results guide patients in making informed decisions and help healthcare professionals develop effective social media strategies for disseminating accurate ophthalmological information.

Keywords: Refractive surgery, TikTok, health information quality

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms are playing an increasingly important role in the dissemination of health information.[1] Short video-sharing platforms such as TikTok have become popular sources for users seeking information on various health topics.[2] In the field of ophthalmology, both patients and healthcare professionals are using these platforms to share and obtain information.

Techniques such as laser-assisted in situ keratomileusis (LASIK), photorefractive keratectomy (PRK), and small incision lenticule extraction (SMILE) are widely used in refractive surgery and are attracting significant interest from patients.[3] Access to accurate and reliable information about these procedures is crucial if patients are to make informed decisions.

Recent years have seen an increase in research focusing on the quality and reliability of health-related content on social media platforms.[4] However, studies specifically evaluating the content related to refractive surgery on TikTok are limited. In order to address this gap, this study set out to evaluate the quality and reliability of TikTok videos related to refractive surgery.

This research examined videos shared on TikTok using popular hashtags such as #lasik, #prk, and #smile. It involved a comparative analysis of videos uploaded by physicians and patients, evaluating factors such as content quality, number of views, likes, and comments. Additionally, the quality of information in these videos was assessed using standard evaluation systems such as DISCERN, the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) score, and the Global Quality Score (GQS).

The objective of this study was to assess the quality and reliability of information about refractive surgery on TikTok, to highlight the differences between content shared by healthcare professionals and patients, and to elucidate the role of this platform in the dissemination of ophthalmological information. The findings will provide valuable insights that

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can help patients make more informed decisions and guide healthcare professionals in their social media strategies.

METHODS

The videos were evaluated and scored in a double-blind manner by two experienced ophthalmologists (A.H.R and M.E). This study did not require ethical approval as it did not involve any human subjects or animal experiments. All procedures were carried out in accordance with the ethical rules and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

This study evaluated excimer laser surgery videos on TikTok. The videos were identified using popular hashtags including #refractivesurgery and #lasereyesurgery. Additional content was located through searches of common terms such as 'LASIK,' 'PRK,' and 'SMILE LASER.' The videos were uploaded on 1 March 2024. In order to prevent new videos from appearing in the hashtag, all data collection was performed according to the downloaded videos.

Only videos in English were included in the study. Videos shorter than 15 seconds and duplicates were eliminated. The 200 videos with the highest view counts were selected. The video sources were categorized into two main groups based on the characteristics of the content creators: patient-generated and physician-authored videos. The number of views, video length, number of likes, number of comments, time since upload (age), and viewing rate (view count/day) were recorded for each video.

All videos were scored using DISCERN, JAMA, and GQS. DISCERN is a scoring system which consists of 16 questions in three parts developed by Oxford University and that measures the informative quality and reliability of videos (Table 1).[5] DISCERN system scores range from 15 to 75 and are classified as excellent (63-75 points), good (51-62 points), reasonable (39-50 points), poor (27-38 points), or very poor (15-26 points). The JAMA scoring system evaluates the quality of information in health-related videos. As shown in Table 2, it contains four criteria, each scored 0 or 1, with 4 points indicating high quality.[6] GQS is a scoring system which evaluates the general quality of videos (Table 2).[7] The scoring range is between 1 and 5 points, with 1 indicating the lowest quality and 5 indicating the highest.

The patient education materials assessment tool for audiovisual materials (PEMAT-A/V) is a validated tool used to assess the understandability and actionability of audiovisual patient education materials, such as TikTok videos involving refractive surgery. It consists of 13 binary criteria, 10 of which evaluate understandability and three actionability, yielding a total score that reflects the video's educational quality (Table 3). Higher scores indicate more effective communication of key messages and actionable information to viewers.[8,9]

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted on SPSS version 21.0 software (statistical packages for social sciences; SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Compliance with normal distribution was evaluated using the Shapiro Wilk test. Measurable data which met parametric conditions were expressed as mean ±standard deviation. For measurable data which did not meet parametric conditions, the distribution was expressed

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the analyzed videos (n=200)

Variables	Value
View count (n)[a]	151250 (2300-32400000)
Video length (sec)[a]	43 (15-278)
Like (n)[a]	4527 (94-6100000)
Comment (n)[a]	114 (3-22600)
View rate[a]	585 (10-937500)
Age (day)[b]	428 (±330)
Source of the video, n (%)	
Doctor	98 (49)
Patient	102 (51)
Keyword, n (%)	
LASIK	92 (46)
PRK	67 (33.5)
Smile	41 (20.5)
DISCERN[b]	
Reliability	23.8 (±6.8)
Treatment choices	20.1 (±6.74)
Overall quality score	2.35 (±1.05)
Total score	44 (±13.2)
PEMAT-AV score[b]	
Understandability (%)	72.8 (±22)
Actionability (%)	55.8 (±30.8)
JAMA total score[b]	2.27 (±0.944)
GQS total score[b]	2.86 (± 1.22)

DISCERN: Quality criteria for consumer health information, GQS: Global quality score, JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association, PEMAT: Patient education materials assessment tool, Not normally distributed data is given as median (range), Normally distributed data are given as mean (±standard deviation)

Table 2. Comparison of the data between groups with and without a doctor as the video source

Variables	Physicians (n=98)	Patient (n=102)	p
View count (n)[a]	110600 (2300-11500000)	220350 (12800-32400000)	0.091
Video length (sec)[a]	47 (15-278)	37 (15-145)	0.005
Like (n)[a]	2296 (94-1400000)	8803 (209-6100000)	0.005
Comment (n)[a]	84 (3-15900)	156 (3-22600)	0.018
View rate[a]	495 (10-200000)	608 (18-937500)	0.326
Age (day)[b]	379.14 (±271.476)	475.3 (±373.474)	0.230
DISCERN[b]			
Reliability	27.34 (±5.818)	20.47 (±5.933)	<.001
Treatment choices	23.70 (±6.163)	16.69 (±5.347)	<.001
Overall quality score	2.88 (±1.038)	1.83 (±0.772)	<.001
Total score	51.04 (±11.686)	37.16 (±10.910)	<.001
PEMAT-AV score[b]			
Understandability	82.76 (±19.427)	63.20 (±20.083)	<.001
Actionability	71.09 (±28.824)	41.09 (±25.074)	<.001
JAMA total score[b]	2.76 (±0.813)	1.80 (±0.821)	<.001
GQS total score[b]	3.47 (±1.142)	2.27 (±0.997)	<.001

DISCERN: Quality criteria for consumer health information, GQS: Global quality score, JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association, PEMAT: Patient education materials assessment tool, Not normally distributed data are given as median (range), Normally distributed data are given as mean (± standard deviation), The independent-samples t-test was used for the data that met the parametric condition, and the Mann-Whitney U test was used for those meeting the non-parametric condition in the comparison of the data between two groups

Table 3. Correlation between, PEMAT-AV score, DISCERN, GQS, JAMA, view rate, view count, video age, video lenght, number of likes and comment

	View count	Video length	Like	Comment	View rate	Age
DISCERN						
Reliability	r=-0.241, p<0.001	r=0.393, p<0.001	r=-0.239, p<0.001	r=-0.224, p=0.001	r=-0.123 p=0.082	r=-0.184, p=0.009
Treatment choices	r=-0.301, p<0.001	r=0.366, p<0.001	r=-0.306, p<0.001	r=-0.278, p<0.001	r=-0.188, p=0.008	r=-0.189, p=0.007
Overall quality score	r=-0.039, p=0.585	r=0.334, p<0.001	r=-0.045, p=0.525	r=-0.010, p=0.893	r=0.056, p=0.434	r=-0.204, p=0.004
Total score	r=-0.278, p<0.001	r=0.384, p<0.001	r=-0.281, p<0.001	r=-0.260, p<0.001	r=-0.162, p=0.022	r=-0.189, p=0.007
PEMAT-AV score						
Understandability	r=-0.126, p=0.076	r=0.344, p<0.001	r=-0.135, p=0.057	r=-0.134, p=0.059	r=0.014, p=0.846	r=-0.252, p<0.001
Actionability	r=-0.103, p=0.145	r=0.285, p<0.001	r=-0.121, p=0.088	r=-0.133, p=0.060	r=0.041, p=0.568	r=-0.303, p<0.001
JAMA total score	r=-0.118, p=0.097	r=0.212, p=0.003	r=-0.156, p=0.027	r=-0.117, p=0.098	r=0.001, p=0.985	r=-0.296, p<0.001
GQS total score	r=-0.115, p=0.105	r=0.380, p<0.001	r=-0.123, p=0.083	r=-0.113, p=0.111	r=0.003, p=0.962	r=-0.220, p=0.002

PEMAT: Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool, DISCERN: Quality criteria for consumer health information, GQS: Global Quality Score, JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association, r: correlation value according to Spearman's correlation test, bold p values indicate statistically significant, Spearman's correlation test was used to evaluate the correlation of data with each other

as median (min-max). Categorical variables are expressed as number (%). In the comparison of data between the two groups, the independent samples T test was used for data that met parametric conditions and the Mann-Whitney U test was used for those that met non-parametric conditions. Spearman's correlation test was applied to determine the correlations between the data. A p value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

two hundred videos were evaluated, revealing that 50.62% were related to LASIK, 30.45% were associated with PRK, and 18.93% pertained to SMILELASER. Of these, 98 videos (49%) were uploaded by physicians, and 102 videos (51%) were uploaded by patients. Descriptive characteristics of all videos are shown in Table 1. Ninety-two (46%) videos were LASIK, 67 (33.5%) were PRK, and 41 (20.5%) were SMILE. The mean DISCERN, JAMA and GQS scores of all 200 videos were 44±13.2, 2.27±0.94, and 2.86±1.22 respectively. The PEMAT-AV scores indicate that the material has a moderate level of understandability, with a mean score of 72.8 (±22), However, the actionability score is lower, at 55.8 (±30.8),

Analysis of video metrics revealed that patient-created content, compared to physician-created content, was characterized by significantly shorter durations (37 vs 47 seconds, p=0.005), higher median likes (8.803 vs 2.296, p=0.005), and more comments (156 vs 84, p=0.018), while the difference in view counts (220,350 vs 110,600) approached but did not reach statistical significance (p = 0.091).There was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of view rate or age (p=0.326 and p=0.230, respectively). The mean DISCERN values of videos uploaded by physicians and patients were 51.04±11.68 and 37.16±10.91, the mean JAMA values were 2.76±0.81 and 1.80±0.82, and the mean GCS values were 3.47±1.14 and 2.27±0.99, respectively, and all were significantly higher in the physician videos (p<0.001 for all). PEMAT-AV scores revealed that physician-created videos had significantly higher understandability (82.76±19.427) and actionability (71.09±28.824) compared to patient-created videos, which scored 63.20±20.083 and 41.09±25.074, respectively, with both differences being statistically significant (p<.001). A comparison of data between the two groups is shown in Table 2.

A strong positive correlation was determined between video length and DISCERN, JAMA, and GQS values (r=0.384, p<0.001; r=0.212, p=0.003; and r=0.380, p<0.001, respectively). A strong negative correlation was observed between the numbers of views, likes, and comments and DISCERN scores (r=-0.278, p<0.001; r=0.384, p<0.001; r=-0.281, p<0.001; and r=-0.260, p<0.001, respectively). The correlations between DISCERN, JAMA, and GQS and the number of views, video length, number of likes, number of comments, viewing rate, and age are shown in Table 3.

The analysis of TikTok videos related to refractive surgery, as evaluated by the DISCERN scoring system, reveals a diverse range of quality, with 13.0% classified as very poor, 22.0% as poor, 30.5% as reasonable, 27.0% as good, and 7.5% as excellent the physician-generated videos demonstrated a notably superior quality distribution: a significant proportion were categorized as "good" (43.9%) or "reasonable" (29.6%), with an impressive 13.3% achieving the "excellent" designation. Conversely, patient-generated videos exhibited a markedly different profile: a substantial portion fell into the "poor" category (36.3%), with another significant segment classified as "reasonable" (31.4%) (Figure).

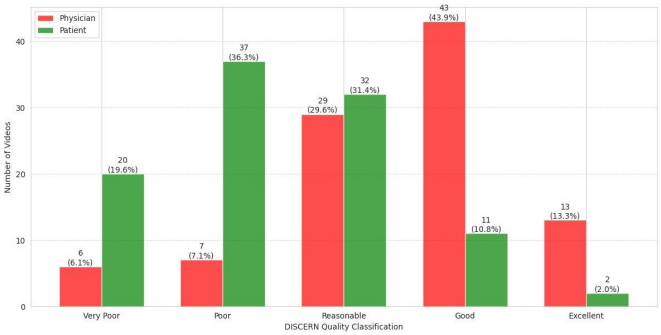

Figure. Comparison of DISCERN quality classification ratings for TikTok videos on refractive surgery by physicians and patients

DISCUSSION

Individuals across the world frequently use the internet to obtain information about health issues and the treatment thereof. Popular video-sharing internet sites such as TikTok are frequently employed for that purpose. Excimer laser is the general term used for laser surgery methods for correcting refractive errors. The most commonly used refractive

surgeries are LASIK, PRK, and SMILE. Patients with refractive errors and who wish to undergo excimer treatment can watch excimer laser videos on TikTok, which is the easiest and most economical way to obtain information concerning these. TikTok videos can be uploaded by both physicians and non-physicians, although this can result in the transmission of misinformation, which may lead to confusion for patients.

DISCERN is a scale that measures the informative quality and reliability of videos. In the present study, the mean DISCERN score of all 200 videos was 44±13.2, and reliability and informative quality were moderate. The DISCERN score (information quality and reliability) of the videos uploaded by physicians was at a good level and was significantly higher than the DISCERN score of those uploaded by patients. Since healthcare professionals, especially physicians, possess greater knowledge and experience of excimer laser surgery than patients, the quality and reliability of physician videos will also be high. Similarly, in their study of the content of LASIK videos on TikTok, Haddad et al.[10] reported that videos from health professionals were of higher quality than those from non-physicians. Siegal et al.[11] also reported that videos from health professionals were of higher quality in their study investigating the quality of TikTok videos in the context of varicocele. Villa-Ruiz et al.[12] reported that videos uploaded by health professionals were more reliable than other videos in their study investigating the reliability of the most viewed dermatological content on TikTok. In contrast to the present research, some studies have reported that health-related TikTok videos are inadequate in terms of informational quality and reliability.[13,14]

The mean JAMA score used to determine the quality of information in health-related videos in this study was 2.27±0.94 (partially sufficient). The videos uploaded by physicians achieved a significantly higher JAMA score, and their quality of the information was notably higher. In their study investigating the quality of videos concerning heart failure, Gong et al.[15] also stated that videos uploaded by healthcare professionals achieved a higher JAMA score. The higher information quality of videos uploaded by physicians, who possess more comprehensive information about the surgical procedure, may be regarded as an expected finding. The mean GQS score of all 200 videos in the present study was 2.86±1.22 (low quality), the GQS of the videos uploaded by physicians being significantly higher than that of the videos from patients. Similarly, Dimitroyannis et al.[16] considered the quality of TikTok videos about sinusitis and reported a significantly higher GQS score for videos uploaded by healthcare professionals than for those videos uploaded by non-physicians. Haddad et al.[10] observed low JAMA and GQS scores for TikTok videos related to LASIK and described both the informational quality and video quality as poor.

In the current study, a strong positive correlation was observed between video length and DISCERN, JAMA, and GQS scores. This indicates that the quality and reliability of the content increase in line with the video length. Similarly, Haddad et al.[10] and Chen et al.[17] reported a moderate positive correlation between video length and DISCERN and GQS scores. In a study investigating TikTok videos related to Helicobacter pylori in China, Du et al.[18] also reported a positive correlation between video length and DISCERN and GQS scores. Gong et al.[15] reported a strong positive correlation between GQS and video length, and a moderate negative correlation between GQS and video age. Interestingly, in the current study, DISCERN scores were strongly negatively correlated with the number of views, viewing rate, likes, and comments. TikTok viewers tend to watch and like more engaging videos rather than those of higher quality in the context of refractive surgery.

The PEMAT-AV assessment revealed a relatively high understandability score of 72.8 (±22), indicating that patient education materials are generally comprehensible to a broad audience. However, the lower actionability score of 55.8 (±30.8) suggests that patients may struggle to translate their understanding into practical actions. Similarly, Sampige et al.[9] reported an average understandability score of 88.1% and an actionability score of 50.6% for TikTok educational videos, reinforcing the findings of our study. These results collectively underscore the critical need for developing educational materials that not only convey information clearly but also provide actionable guidance to enhance patient engagement and decision-making. Consistent with previous research, this study, utilizing the PEMAT-AV assessment, demonstrated that content developed by healthcare professionals exhibited superior comprehensibility among the target audience compared to materials sourced from non-professional entities.[8,19] Physician-sourced videos exhibited higher understandability and actionability scores, highlighting the value of professional expertise in creating effective educational content for social media. However, healthcare professionals may need training in digital content creation and social media utilization to fully realize this potential. Additionally, patient-sourced videos also achieved a certain level of understandability and actionability, emphasizing the importance of patients sharing their experiences.

The analysis of TikTok videos on refractive surgery reveals a wide range of quality based on the DISCERN assessment. While many videos fall in the Reasonable to Excellent range, a sizable portion are rated as poor or very poor. These findings highlight the variability in health content quality on social media and the need to develop strategies to improve the overall quality of information available to users.

Physician-created videos exhibit higher quality and reliability, with a substantial proportion classified as "good" or "reasonable" and some achieving "excellent" ratings, as determined by the DISCERN scoring system. In contrast, patient-generated videos are predominantly in the "poor" and "reasonable" categories, with few reaching "excellent," according to the same scoring criteria. This disparity, highlighted by the DISCERN classification, raises concerns about misinformation and the challenges patients face in evaluating online health information. These findings underscore the need for patients to critically assess the credibility of online sources and the opportunity for healthcare providers to leverage social media for patient education by producing high-quality, engaging content to counter misinformation.

Videos uploaded by physicians attracted significantly higher view counts, longer durations, compared to those uploaded by patients. We would suggest that TikTok viewers show greater interest and engage more with physician videos due to their higher quality and reliability, resulting in increased viewership and comment activity. In contrast, in their study investigating TikTok videos related to acute otitis media,

Dimitroyannis et al.[20] reported that videos uploaded by non-healthcare professionals attracted significantly higher view counts compared to those uploaded by healthcare professionals. Viewers tend to trust and engage more with TikTok content from healthcare professionals, likely because these creators are seen as credible sources of information, and the platform's algorithms may further amplify their reach by prioritizing verified accounts.

Interestingly, videos uploaded by patients garnered significantly more likes and more comments than those uploaded by physicians. This increased engagement may perhaps be attributed to patient videos focusing more on personal experiences with the treatment or featuring interesting content curated from other sources, rather than purely informational content. This content strategy potentially resonates more with the general TikTok audience, leading to higher like counts.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the restriction to English-language videos, its cross-sectional design, and the evaluation of only 200 videos. Furthermore, another significant limitation was the lack of assessment regarding whether clinicians adequately described corneal topography evaluation and the specific criteria utilized in determining appropriate refractive surgery options in their videos.

CONCLUSION

TikTok videos related to excimer laser surgery are of moderate quality and reliability in terms of informational content but are of low quality overall. Videos uploaded by physicians are of higher quality, more reliable, and more informative compared to those uploaded by patients. Comprehensive studies evaluating a larger number of videos are now needed for more objective findings.

ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

Ethics Committee Approval

This study did not require ethical approval as it did not involve any human subjects or animal experiments.

Informed Consent

This study did not require informed consent as it did not involve human participants.

Referee Evaluation Process

Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Financial Disclosure

The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

Author Contributions

All of the authors declare that they have all participated in the design, execution, and analysis of the paper, and that they have approved the final version.

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