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Evaluating the Quality and Impact of TikTok Videos on Autologous Breast Reconstruction with Deep Inferior Epigastric Perforator Artery Flaps

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Background: With the rising influence of social media on healthcare perceptions, this study investigates TikTok's role in educating the public about autologous breast reconstruction, specifically focusing on deep inferior epigastric perforator flaps.
Methods: We conducted a systematic analysis of 152 TikTok videos related to deep inferior epigastric perforator flap procedures, evaluating the accuracy of the content, viewer engagement metrics, and the influence of content creator characteristics on viewer interactions.
Results: Our analysis identified a wide variance in the quality of information, with many videos lacking in-depth educational content, thereby posing a risk of misinformation. Despite the presence of high-quality educational videos, there was a discrepancy between the educational value provided and viewer engagement levels. Thematic analysis highlighted common concerns among patients, providing insights for healthcare professionals to better tailor their social media content.
Conclusions: The study underscores the significant impact of platforms like TikTok on patient education and emphasizes the need for healthcare professionals to guide the narrative on social media and ensure the dissemination of accurate and helpful information, ultimately aiding patients in making informed decisions about their healthcare. *(Plast Reconstr Surg Glob Open 2024; 12:e6056; doi: 10.1097/GOX.0000000000006056; Published online 16 August 2024.)*

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamically evolving landscape of healthcare communication, social media platforms like TikTok (Culver City, Calif.) have emerged as pivotal conduits for disseminating medical information to a broad audience. Amongst the plethora of topics gaining traction on these platforms, plastic surgery, and more specifically, the technique of deep inferior epigastric perforator artery (DIEP) flaps stands out. DIEP flaps represent a sophisticated approach in reconstructive surgery, involving the transfer of skin and fat from the lower abdomen to the breast, minimizing rectus abdominus muscle loss, and thus ensuring decreased postoperative abdominal donor site morbidity and shorter recovery times.

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The ascent of TikTok as a formidable source of health information is indisputable. With its rapidly expanding user base, TikTok has transcended its original role as a platform for entertainment, becoming a notorious medium for sharing and acquiring healthcare knowledge.[1] A 2023 study reports a steady increase in TikTok's influence on the awareness of plastic surgery matters (eg, male plastic surgery), highlighting its role in shaping public perception and knowledge of the plastics field.[2] An additional 2023 study echoes this sentiment, further illuminating TikTok's growing impact on the field of plastic surgery.[3]

With a surge in social media–driven health information, it becomes imperative for plastic surgeons to maintain a thorough understanding of the content being disseminated to the public, as it influences patient health-related perspectives and decisions. This issue is particularly concerning regarding advanced and invasive surgical procedures (eg, DIEP flaps). An analysis in 2022 delineates how social media platforms

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have revolutionized the conveyance of medical knowledge, stressing the demand for medical professionals to remain vigilant of these evolving communication dynamics.[4] Integration of TikTok into healthcare conversations introduces a paradigm shift, inviting an opportunity for widespread patient engagement, while also spawning a dilemma related to the accuracy of information accessible to the public.

Our study examines TikTok's influence on patient education and decision-making in reconstructive breast surgery, particularly DIEP flaps. Our study aimed to assess the quality of information available on TikTok regarding DIEP flap breast reconstruction and to explore the role of plastic surgeons in patient education within this digital landscape.

Takeaways

Question: Can TikTok effectively educate the public on autologous breast reconstruction with deep inferior epigastric perforator flaps?

Findings: A review of 152 TikTok videos revealed a disparity in content quality, with many lacking in-depth educational substance. Despite this, certain high-quality videos demonstrated the potential of TikTok as an effective educational platform when used by healthcare professionals.

Meaning: This study highlights the need for medical professionals to actively participate in social media to ensure the dissemination of accurate and reliable breast reconstruction information.

METHODS

A search of the TikTok platform was conducted on November 2, 2023. Video identification used a comprehensive search approach with a range of relevant keywords and hashtags, including #DIEPflap, #DIEPSurgery, #DIEPFLAPReconstruction, and #AutologousReconstruction, ensuring a comprehensive dataset targeting autologous reconstructive procedures, shown in Figure 1.

The top 200 clips from all hashtags were screened to fulfill the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. While the algorithm and search process for the platform is not publicly available information, the top videos generated by any search on the platform are deemed to be based on search engine optimization methods used by

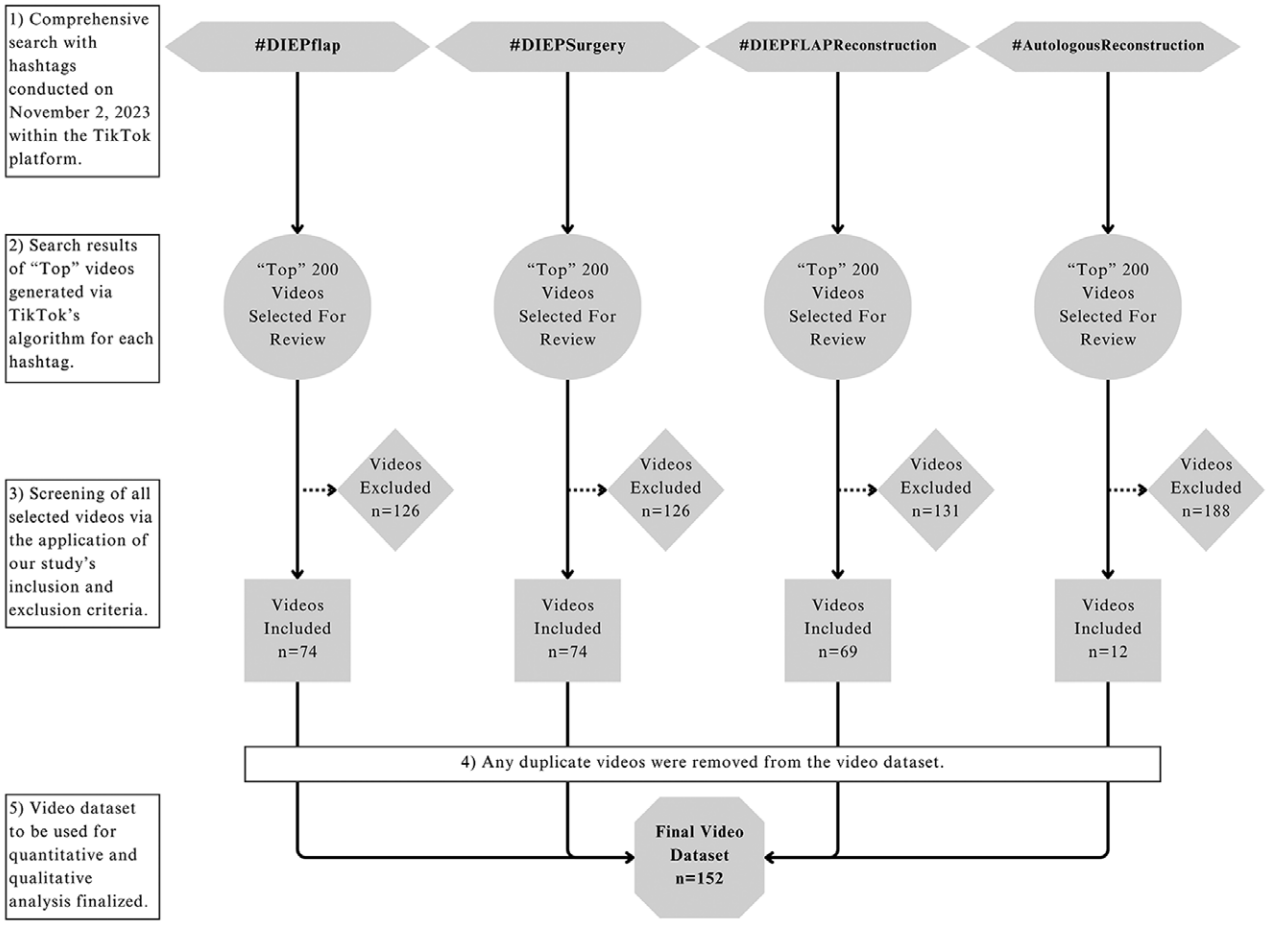

Fig. 1. A flowchart depicting the comprehensive search and screening process used to compile the final dataset of videos publicly posted on the TikTok platform and related to DIEP flap breast reconstruction.

other search engines along with engagement metrics such as views, likes and comments, causing possible variability in search results. In total, 152 videos posted between 2020 and 2023 on the TikTok platform were systematically identified as containing narrative or visual information related to DIEP flap breast reconstruction.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

Videos in English, directly or indirectly related to DIEP flap breast reconstruction.

Exclusion Criteria

Non-English videos, content unrelated to DIEP flap breast reconstruction, and videos removed or made inaccessible due to content deletion, privacy changes, or account removal on TikTok.

Video Curation and Annotation

Three independent reviewers (W.S.H, K.J, and Y. C.W) evaluated each video to determine relevance and tag salient attributes like creator category and cancer survivorship status using a standardized classification schema. Cancer survivorship in the context of the study pertains to TikTok videos discussing breast reconstruction using DIEP flaps from the perspective of individuals who have undergone breast cancer treatment and are navigating life as cancer survivors. Interrater reliability was confirmed through Cohen Kappa coefficient.

Content Scoring

Video content was rated for accuracy and reliability via the validated modified DISCERN (mDISCERN) scale by two reviewers initially (Y.C.W. and K.E.J). Followed by an independent third reviewer (J.A.) when there were discordances between initial reviews. The DISCERN score is used to quantify the overall quality and trustworthiness of health-related media. The DISCERN score is a 16-item questionnaire that was designed to measure the quality of health-related information with each question scored on a five-point Likert scale with ranges from no to yes. A score of 5 shows the quality criterion was met whereas, a score of 1 showed that the quality criterion was unmet.[5] The mDISCERN score is a modified version of the original questionnaire that contains five "yes or no" questions, which assess the reliability of the health information in question. Questions with a "yes" answer are allotted a score of 1 and questions with "no" are allotted a score of 0.

Metadata Extraction

Engagement metrics encompassing view count, likes, comments, shares, video duration source affiliation, creator's qualifications and creator's profession were extracted from the TikTok platform's interface, along with video posting date and creator handle details. A randomized subset of the 10 top comments by "likes" underwent qualitative coding using an inductive scoping framework to capture emergent themes, experiences, and attitudes.

Sentiment Polarity Scoring

We analyzed video transcripts for sentiment using TextBlob, a tool that assesses emotional content based on a lexicon trained on emotional speech datasets. The process involved natural language processing techniques like tokenization, removing stopwords, and applying natural language processing transforms such as stemming and lemmatization. The sentiment scores ranged from −1 (negative) to 1 (positive), allowing for comparison across videos. This method provided a standardized way to gauge the overall emotional tone of the content. Video transcripts were analyzed for frequently occurring unigrams and bigrams to quantify salient themes and terminology. Text frequencies were normalized by document length to prevent bias.

Relationships among engagement, creator attributes, content scoring, and themes were assessed via statistical methods encompassing correlation, regression, and comparative analyses. Pearson R was used to quantify linear correlations. Analysis of variance and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to compare group means. Multiple linear regressions were used to model predictors of engagement.

RESULTS

Video Dataset Overview

The final video dataset analyzed encompassed 152 videos discussing DIEP flap breast reconstruction procedures on TikTok ranging from 2020 to 2023. The average video duration was 145 seconds (SD 72 seconds). Over two-thirds (68%) of videos originated from individual patient accounts, with the remainder from board-certified plastic surgeons (26%) and a minority from other sources (6%). Approximately half of the videos (56%) disclosed the creator's cancer survivorship status. Of note, no plastic surgeon source affiliation in the dataset seemed to be in an academic setting based on represented logos, bios, and infographics.

Content Accuracy and Source Reliability Assessment

The overall mean mDISCERN score for video content regarding DIEP flap breast reconstruction was 2.02 out of 5 (SD 1.08). Scores did not significantly differ based on creators' cancer survivorship status. Of note, videos created by plastic surgeons had a mean mDISCERN score of 2.00 (SD 1.08). Videos created by non–plastic surgeons had a mean mDISCERN score of 2.02 (SD 1.11).

A multiple linear regression model found plastic surgeon authorship and lower word count to predict higher DISCERN score independently ($P < 0.05$). Content accuracy negatively correlated with number of likes (Pearson $r = -0.24$, $P = 0.018$) but did not correlate significantly with other engagement signals including views, comments, or shares.

Viewership and Engagement Metrics

Total view count was 4,759,740, with an average of 26,400 per video (median 2755; min 0, max 2,700,000).

View metrics were positively skewed (skew 7.9) with 5% of top videos driving 63% of total viewership.

Total number of video likes observed was 153,127, with a mean of 417 likes per video (median 139; min 0; max 43,700). A total of 10,340 video comments were registered, averaging 44 per video (median 6; min 0; max 4529). Total number of video shares was 10,418, with a mean of nine shares per video. Engagement metrics demonstrated substantial variability. The SD for the average number of likes per video was 1027, and for the average number of comments per video was 138.

One-way analysis of variance tests found higher interaction for videos created by plastic surgeons versus content created by patients across all engagement signals (likes: $P = 0.011$; comments: $P = 0.032$). Differences based on cancer survivorship status were nonsignificant.

Multiple linear regression highlighted view counts as the strongest driver predicting likes ($\beta = 0.69$, $P < 0.001$) and comments ($\beta = 0.57$, $P < 0.001$). Number of words negatively predicted likes ($\beta = -0.084$, $P = 0.043$) but did not significantly impact comments.

Emergent Themes and Content Emphasis

Prominent Keywords by Theme

- Surgery details
  - "DIEP flap" (198 mentions), "reconstruction" (148), "surgery" (354), "implant" (108)
- Recovery process
  - "Recovery" (51), "healing" (36), "pain" (99)
- Emotions and outcomes
  - "Happy" (50), "anxiety" (1), "risk" (15), "benefit" (12),
- Medical issues
  - "Complication" (6)

Sentiment Polarity Scoring and Regression Modeling

The sentiment polarity of videos was analyzed. The average polarity score was 0.14 (SD = 0.096, range = – 0.08 to 0.47). An estimated 27% of videos scored between 0 and 0.09; 40% scored 0.1–0.19; 23% scored 0.2–0.29; 3% scored above 0.3. Five percent of videos had scores indicating mild negativity (–0.1 to 0). This distribution shows that most videos had mildly positive polarity scores, with a small portion expressing mild negativity.

Sentiment polarity scores demonstrated negligible correlation with all engagement metrics across all videos: views (Pearson r = – 0.011, $P = 0.896$); likes (Pearson r = 0.002, $P = 0.983$); comments (Pearson r = – 0.015, $P = 0.864$), and shares (Pearson r = 0.029, $P = 0.735$). These precise correlation coefficients and P values show that creator attributes and viewership activity exhibit no significant relationships with sentiment.

A multiple ordinary least squares regression model found that lower word count ($\beta = -0.063$, $P = 0.042$) and higher mDISCERN score ($\beta = 0.52$, $P = 0.061$) predict more positive polarity at marginal significance. However, these predictors only explained 2.8% of sentiment variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.028$) indicating complex, multifactorial drivers.

Table 1. Video Transcript Word Analysis for the Frequency of Emergent Themes

Theme	Frequency (%)
Surgical details	42.5%
Recovery process	28.9%
Emotions/outcomes	19.7%
Complications	9.5%
Long-term outcomes	6.4%

DISCUSSION

This study conducted a systematic analysis of a dataset derived from 152 TikTok videos with direct and indirect thematic content pertaining to DIEP flap breast reconstruction procedures.

Content Accuracy and Source Reliability

A key finding of this analysis was the assessment of content reliability using the mDISCERN score. The low score suggested minimal reliability (mean ± SD, 2.02 ± 1.08) in the overall quality of information presented in the TikTok videos about DIEP flap breast reconstruction procedures.

Intriguingly, no significant difference in mDISCERN scores was observed in content reliability between videos created by plastic surgeons (mean = 2.00) and non–plastic surgeons (mean = 2.02). This raises concerns about misinformation and emphasizes the need for healthcare professionals to contribute high-quality, accurate, and reliable content.

Emergent Themes and Content Emphasis

The thematic analysis revealed several prominent keywords and themes within the videos. Notably, surgical details were heavily emphasized, with frequent mentions of "DIEP flap," "reconstruction," and "surgery." The recovery process was another significant theme, with keywords such as "recovery," "healing," and "pain" frequently appearing. Emotions and outcomes were discussed, with a focus on "happiness" and "risk."

Although these themes provide an overview of the topics covered in the videos, it is essential to acknowledge that some critical aspects of DIEP flap breast reconstruction, such as potential complications and long-term outcomes, were less frequently addressed (Table 1).

Viewership and Engagement Metrics

The viewership and engagement metrics provided valuable insights into the reach and impact of these TikTok videos. The total view count of 4,759,740 indicated a substantial audience interested in DIEP flap breast reconstruction content on the platform.

However, the distribution of views was highly skewed, with a small percentage of videos driving the majority of viewership. The top 10% of videos, for instance, accounted for 82% of the total views. This skewed distribution is statistically significant (Mann-Whitney U = 548, $P < 0.001$), emphasizing the need for content creators to focus on optimizing their top-performing videos for even broader impact.

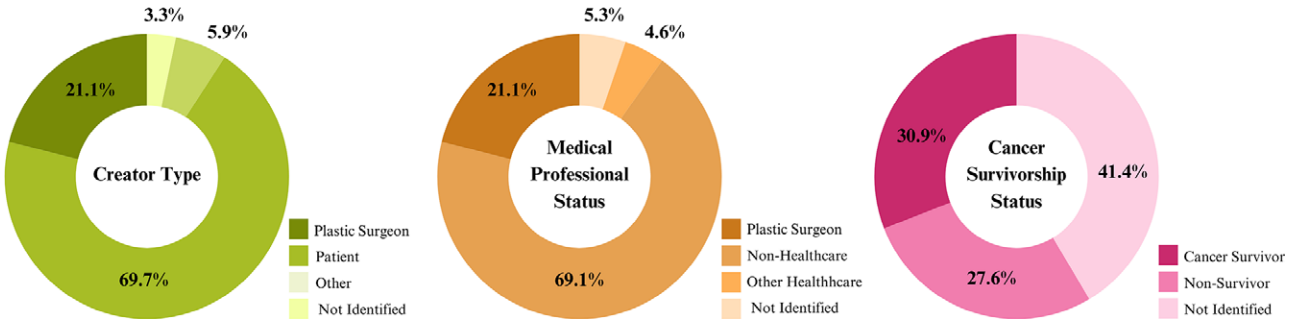

Fig. 2. A pie chart illustrating the content creator attribute analysis of the final video dataset by creator type, medical professional status, and cancer survivorship status.

Table 2. Video Content Creator Attribute Analysis by Creator Type (Plastic Surgeon or Patient)

	Views			Likes			Comments			Shares		
Group	Mean	*r*	*P*	Mean	*r*	*P*	Mean	*r*	*P*	Mean	*r*	*P*
Plastic surgeon	18,300	0.33	0.002	1540	0.28	0.005	250	0.21	0.03	86	0.17	0.09
Patient	7540	0.18	0.07	335	0.17	0.10	40	0.14	0.16	16	0.03	0.78

Table 3. Video Content Creator Attribute Analysis by Cancer Survivorship Status (Cancer Survivor, Nonsurvivor)

	Views			Likes			Comments			Shares		
Group	Mean	*r*	*P*	Mean	*r*	*P*	Mean	*r*	*P*	Mean	*r*	*P*
Cancer Survivor	8900	0.09	0.38	390	0.07	0.51	45	0.03	0.78	15	0.01	0.95
Nonsurvivor	5600	−0.11	0.29	260	−0.12	0.24	35	−0.06	0.55	12	−0.09	0.38

Likes, comments, and shares served as important engagement metrics. Videos received an average of 417 likes (mean ± SD, 417 ± 312), 44 comments (mean ± SD, 44 ± 49), and nine shares (mean ± SD, 9 ± 10). The strong positive correlation between likes and views (r = 0.82, $P < 0.001$) highlighted the role of viewer appreciation in driving visibility.

Creator Type, Medical Profession, and Cancer Survivor Analysis

The analysis of creator attributes revealed interesting patterns (Fig. 2). Videos created by plastic surgeons garnered significantly higher views, likes, comments, and shares compared with those produced by patients. This difference was statistically significant (Table 2), suggesting that viewers may place a higher degree of trust in content generated by medical professionals, reinforcing the importance of authoritative voices in healthcare communication on social media. There is a clear opportunity for medical professionals, including academic plastic surgeons, to engage more actively on TikTok to provide accurate, high-quality information.[1,6,7]

Interestingly, the cancer survivorship status of creators did not have a significant impact on engagement metrics, suggesting that viewers were interested in a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to DIEP flap breast reconstruction (Table 3).

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis provided valuable insights into the relationship between various factors. Video duration demonstrated a positive correlation with views (r = 0.46, $P < 0.001$), indicating that longer videos were more likely to attract a larger audience. Additionally, likes (r = 0.82, $P < 0.001$), comments (r = 0.64, $P < 0.001$), and shares (r = 0.53, $P < 0.001$) all exhibited positive correlations with views, suggesting that viewer engagement positively influenced the visibility of the videos. The strong correlation between likes and views underscores the importance of viewer appreciation in promoting video visibility. Content creators should strive to create content that resonates with their audience to maximize its reach.

Significance of Content Quality on TikTok for DIEP Flap Breast Reconstruction

The proliferation of social media platforms has transformed how individuals seek information on various topics, including medical procedures. Social media analytics indicate that many younger age groups turn to TikTok for information.[8]

Our observations regarding the diverse quality of DIEP flap content aligns with the variability observed in educational content across different fields of healthcare, as highlighted in the literature in urogynecology and oral and maxillofacial surgery.[9,10] Notably, certain specialties, such as hepatology, have demonstrated more consistent and comprehensive content quality on social media platforms like Bilibili and TikTok.[11] Conversely, when comparing educational videos produced by academic institutions on YouTube, we found a mix of reliability. For instance,

fields like pediatrics and physical medicine and rehabilitation reported a presence of reliable videos, whereas others, such as oncology, exhibited lower reliability levels.[12–14] This variability underscores the importance of critically evaluating the quality and reliability of medical content across various platforms and specialties to ensure the dissemination of accurate and informative information to the public.

Evaluating Content Quality for Informed Decision-making

One of the key findings of this study is the evaluation of content quality through the mDISCERN score. The overall mean score of 2.02 suggests that there is room for improvement in the quality and accuracy of information available to patients on TikTok. Patients often turn to social media platforms like TikTok for insights into medical procedures, making it crucial for plastic surgeons to curate and create high-quality, accurate content that aids informed decision-making.

The unexpectedly low mDISCERN scores for videos produced by plastic surgeons prompted an in-depth examination of the content's educational intent and quality. It became apparent that a significant portion of these videos seemed to prioritize promotional aims over educational depth, often using concise formats and engaging strategies that, while not misleading, offered a limited perspective on the DIEP procedure. This trend toward brevity and promotional content likely contributed to the diminished educational scores observed. (**See appendix, Supplemental Digital Content 1**, which shows direct transcripts of TikTok videos from the dataset. **http://links.lww.com/PRSGO/D424**) In contrast, videos from patients and other healthcare workers, who might engage more deeply with their health decisions and share their experiences from a place of advocacy and support, often provided richer, more informative content. This distinction underscores the complex interplay between a creator's objectives—whether commercial or supportive—and the educational value of health-related content on social media platforms.

Leveraging Influencer and Patient Accounts

The findings highlight the potential for plastic surgeons to collaborate with patient influencers and actively engage in patient education efforts on TikTok (Table 4). By doing so, plastic surgeons can help disseminate accurate information and address common misconceptions, contributing to improved patient understanding and decision-making.

Identifying Areas for Improved Communication

The analysis of prominent keywords by theme in the TikTok videos reveals specific topics of interest to patients (Table 1). Keywords such as "recovery," "pain," and "emotional" underscore the importance of addressing these aspects in patient consultations and educational materials (Table 1). Plastic surgeons can use this data to tailor their communication strategies to address concerns that matter most to patients.

Engagement Metrics and Evidence-based Information

The Influence of Engagement Metrics

The data indicate that videos from plastic surgeons received higher interaction metrics, such as likes and comments, compared with those from patient creators (Table 2). This suggests that plastic surgeons' content is more likely to engage the audience (Tables 2 and 4). Plastic surgeons can use these engagement metrics as a measure of the impact of their educational content and adapt their strategies based on audience feedback.

It is essential to prioritize evidence-based information dissemination. This may present challenges in balancing engagement and accuracy, but plastic surgeons should continue to present information in an engaging yet evidence-based manner.[15]

The influence of TikTok on patient education and perception cannot be understated. Studies have demonstrated that despite the popularity of health-related videos, there is a significant gap in the quality of this content.[16,17]

Transformative Insights

Leveraging the data-driven insights from this study, as well as observed sentiment trends (Fig. 3), plastic surgeons can enhance patient education, foster informed decision-making, and ultimately provide higher quality care for patients undergoing DIEP flap breast reconstruction.

Limitations

While our study sheds light on TikTok content related to DIEP flap breast reconstruction, several limitations must be noted. Firstly, our analysis focused solely on TikTok videos, potentially neglecting other social media platforms that may also impact patient education. Additionally, the mDISCERN tool, initially designed for educational videos, may not fully capture the nuances of social media-based medical content, raising concerns about its reliability. Moreover, our study only examined English-language content, limiting the representation of TikTok's global diversity. The dynamic nature of social media poses challenges in comprehensive data analysis, as content availability and

Table 4. Video Content Creator Attribute Analysis by Medical Professional Status (Plastic Surgeon, Other Healthcare, or Nonhealthcare)

	Views			Likes			Comments			Shares		
Group	Mean	*r*	*P*	Mean	*r*	*P*	Mean	*r*	*P*	Mean	*r*	*P*
Plastic surgeon	22,300	0.21	0.04	1810	0.19	0.06	310	0.17	0.09	110	0.14	0.17
Other healthcare	2100	–0.09	0.38	114	–0.07	0.51	15	–0.03	0.76	4	0.01	0.93
Nonhealthcare	3800	–0.14	0.19	210	–0.12	0.25	28	–0.08	0.44	10	–0.06	0.58

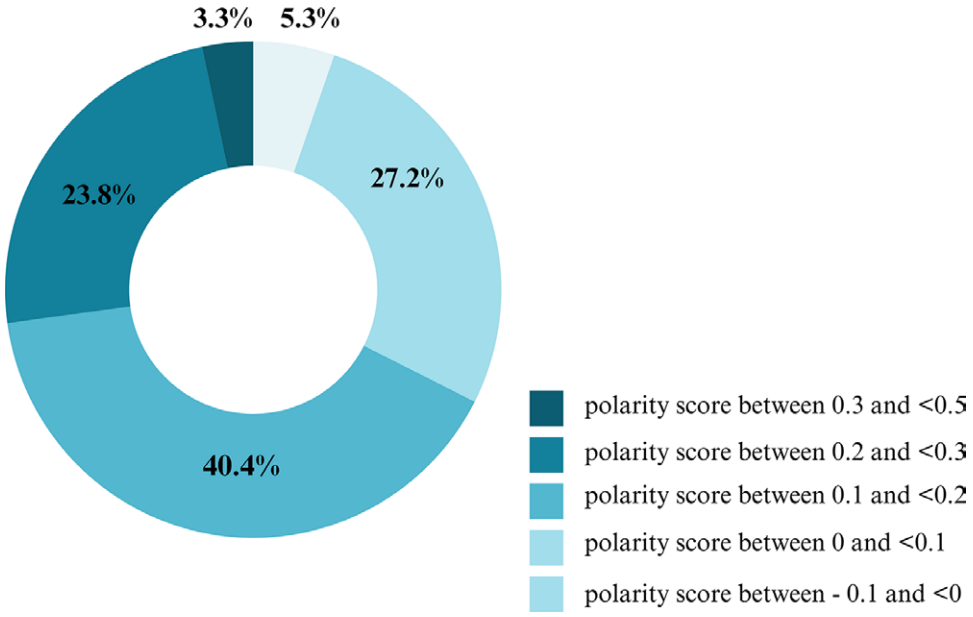

Fig. 3. A pie chart illustrating the video sentiment analysis performed by evaluating textual video transcripts against the TextBlob sentiment lexicon to determine polarity scoring, ranging from – 1 (negative sentiment) to 1 (positive sentiment), based on conventional emotive usage. In this figure, we show the percentage of videos falling within each range.

user engagement can fluctuate over time. We acknowledge the limitations in generalizability due to TikTok's user demographics, primarily younger individuals who may have varying interests. Furthermore, ethical considerations regarding patient privacy and consent were not extensively addressed, warranting further exploration in future research. Despite these limitations, our study offers insights into TikTok's role in patient education, emphasizing the importance of critically evaluating social media content in healthcare contexts.

Future Research

Performing patient surveys on what social media platforms, if any, they resorted to before proceeding with DIEP reconstruction and if any of the information presented in the videos influenced their decisions to pursue autologous reconstruction could be the future direction of research on this topic. We recommend investigating how TikTok and other social media content evolve over time and assessing whether educational initiatives enhance the quality of medical information. Comparative studies across various social media platforms and geographic regions can provide valuable insights into their impact on patient education. Additionally, plastic surgeons can benefit from exploring optimal strategies for creating educational content on platforms like TikTok. Exploring videos beyond autologous reconstruction in the context of breast cancer can offer further understanding of content accuracy and reliability across different social media platforms.

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings reveal a significant variation in the quality of information presented on this social media platform. While some content creators deliver high-quality, reliable information, a notable portion of the videos lack in-depth educational value, raising concerns about misinformation in patient education. The findings call for a proactive approach from the medical community to engage with these platforms. By contributing high-quality, accurate, and accessible educational content, plastic surgeons can leverage this powerful tool to enhance patient education, ensuring that patients receive reliable information to make informed decisions about their healthcare.

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DISCLOSURE

The authors have no financial interest to declare in relation to the content of this article.

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