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Quality and Accuracy of Atopic Dermatitis Treatment Content on TikTok: A Cross-Sectional Analysis

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Introduction

Social media is a significant source of health information, with over 80% of US internet users searching online for health-related content [1]. TikTok, a platform for uploading videos, has gained popularity with 2 billion users [2]. Its algorithm-driven videos are popular among younger audiences, making it a powerful medium for shaping health perceptions and behaviors.

Dermatologic content attracts substantial attention, with atopic dermatitis (AD) among the most viewed conditions [3]. However, limited data exist on the accuracy and quality of AD treatment information on TikTok. This study aims to provide an updated review of AD treatment information on TikTok, focusing on assessing quality of content and viewer engagement.

Methods

In March 2025, we conducted a cross-sectional TikTok search using '#eczema' and '#eczematreatment.' The top 110 English-language treatment-related videos were analyzed; promotional content was excluded.

Engagement was calculated as (comments + likes + shares)/views. The DISCERN tool was used, to rate quality of content from 1 (serious shortcomings) to 5 (minimal shortcomings) [4].

Independent raters (N.B., M.C.) achieved strong inter-rater reliability ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$). Independent t-tests compared DISCERN and engagement scores between physician and non-physician creators. Treatment recommendations were evaluated for adherence to American Academy of Dermatology guidelines [5].

Results

The analyzed videos had 66,373,549 views, 2,302,762 likes, and 263,917 comments. 77.2% were created by non-physicians and 21.8% by physicians. An overview of video characteristics is shown in Table 1.

Physician videos demonstrated a higher mean DISCERN score (2.83 ± 0.63) than non-physician videos (2.59 ± 0.54), though not statistically significant (p=0.10). Viewer engagement ratios were similar for videos created by physicians (0.040 ± 0.047) and non-physicians (0.042 ± 0.074).

Among the videos, 32% were classified as misleading while 68% aligned with AAD guidelines. Misinformation involved recommending non-evidence-based remedies like castor oil, beef tallow, and probiotics. Guideline-adherent videos emphasized moisturizers, topical corticosteroids, and barrier repair.

Discussion

Most videos were anecdotal and produced by non-physicians. While personal stories can offer relatability, they risk spreading unverified or inaccurate advice. These videos received high levels of interaction, meaning entertainment value or personal relatability may outweigh credibility in influencing viewer behavior.

Average DISCERN scores were low across all videos, with most scoring 'low' or 'moderate,' indicating serious shortcomings [4]. Weaknesses included lack of credible sources, limited discussion of treatment risks/benefits, and little emphasis on individualized care or shared decision-making.

One limitation is the small number of physician creators, reducing statistical power. Moreover, the cross-sectional design offers only a snapshot, and TikTok's dynamic algorithm means video rankings vary across users and over time.

Despite these limitations, TikTok offers an opportunity to expand dermatologic education and bridge gaps between clinicians and the public, particularly youngfcer and underserved groups. With active engagement, medical professionals can counter misinformation and provide accurate, engaging content that fosters health literacy.

Table 1. Characteristics of top atopic dermatitis (AD) content on TikTok.

	No. of Videos (%)	Mean No. of Views	Mean No. of Likes	Mean No. of Comments	Mean Viewer Engagement Ratio	Mean DISCERN
Content Creator Type						
Non-Physician	85 (77.2)	523,659	16,327	2,972	0.042 ± 0.074	2.59 ± 0.54
Physician	24 (21.8)	910,846	38,122	469	0.040 ± 0.047	2.83 ± 0.63
Private Company	1 (0.91)	2,275	55	4	0.026 ± N/A	1.92 ± N/A
Physician Specialty						
Dermatology	17 (70.8)	1,208,441	51,992	596	0.046 ± 0.055	2.73 ± 0.59
Pediatrics	2 (8.3)	229,950	6,187	349	0.031 ± 0.003	3.92 ± 0.30
Internal Medicine	3 (12.5)	128,100	4,481	91	0.003 ± 0.017	2.86 ± 0.62
Emergency Medicine	1 (4.17)	461,300	5,106	151	0.014 ± N/A	2.5 ± N/A
Family Medicine	1 (4.17)	11,300	154	3	0.016 ± N/A	2.67 ± N/A
Gender						
Female	101 (91.8)	568,503	18,410	2,525	0.041 ± 0.071	2.64 ± 0.52
Male	9 (8.12)	994,972	49,259	992	0.045 ± 0.019	2.61 ± 0.98

Conclusion

These findings underscore the need for greater physician engagement on social media. Future efforts should prioritize media training for clinicians and patient education initiatives to enhance the quality and credibility of dermatologic content online.

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