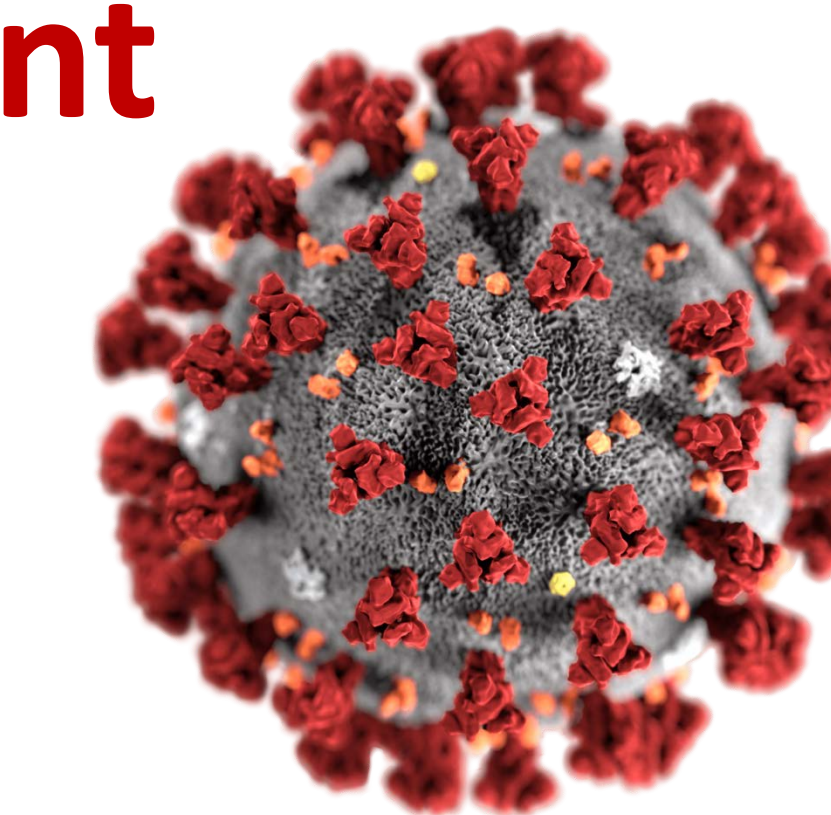




COVID-19 on TikTok: Harnessing an emerging social media platform to convey important public health messages



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BACKGROUND

As of 11/29/20, there have been 62.5 million COVID-19 cases worldwide and 1.46 million deaths, of which cases in the United States accounted for 13.4 Million total deaths and 266K deaths.

- The proliferation of information reached such a high level that it was deemed an “infodemic” by the World Health Organization.
- Social media has been a major source of information throughout the pandemic.
- The purpose of this research was to analyze posts on TikTok, a popular yet under-investigated social media platform to describe content of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.
- TikTok features a 15-second video streaming system, reaching roughly 800 million users worldwide and over 30 million monthly users in the United States specifically.

Methods

- This cross-sectional study was conducted in April 2020.
- The hashtag #Coronavirus was used as a search term which was chosen because it had the largest number of views of any hashtag at 68 billion (the next highest was #COVID-19 at 20 billion).
- The first 100 videos posted were included in this study along with all 17 posts by the World Health Organization (WHO) for a total of (n=117) videos.

Results

- Of the 117 TikTok posts analyzed, 100 (85%) were consumer uploaded, and 17 (14.5%) were uploaded by the WHO.
- Videos were viewed 1,194,081,700 times with approximately 12,000 comments and 1.8 million “likes”.
- Topics most commonly cited included anxiety (14.5%) with more than 190.6 million views and quarantine (10.3%) with 106.6 million views.
- None of the videos uploaded (from either consumers or WHO), discussed death rates, viral incubation, wearing facemasks when caring for the ill, and travel restrictions.
- Fewer than 10% of the videos mentioned viral transmission, symptoms, and prevention.

CONCLUSION

- Videos in the sample were viewed more than one billion times collectively demonstrating their widespread reach.
- Social media platforms such as TikTok are vital for reaching younger audiences with great levels of influence. However, this study revealed that posts under the hashtag #coronavirus, were devoid of useful information particularly that related to transmission and prevention of COVID-19.
- Public health professionals are encouraged to disseminate and convey best practices on social media platforms.