

# Biased algorithms on platforms like YouTube hurt people looking for information on health | Nieman Journalism Lab

By Anjana Susarla

July 17, 2020

YouTube hosts millions of videos related to health care. The Health Information National Trends Survey reports that 75% of Americans go to the internet first when looking for information about health or medical topics. YouTube is one of the most popular online platforms, with billions of views every day, and has emerged as a significant source of health information.

Several public health agencies, such as state health departments, have invested resources in YouTube as a channel for health communication. Patients with chronic health conditions especially rely on social media, including YouTube videos, to learn more about how to manage their conditions.

But video recommendations on such sites could exacerbate preexisting disparities in health. A significant fraction of the U.S. population is estimated to have limited health literacy, or the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information, such as the ability to read and comprehend prescription bottles, appointment slips or discharge instructions from health clinics.

Studies of health literacy, such as the National Assessment of Adult Literacy conducted in 2003, estimated that only 12% of adults had proficient health literacy skills. This has been corroborated in subsequent studies. I'm a professor of information systems, and my own research has examined how social media platforms such as YouTube widen such health literacy disparities by steering users toward questionable content.

[...]

Source: [Biased algorithms on platforms like YouTube hurt people looking for information on health » Nieman Journalism Lab](#)