Social media video content for the healthcare industry

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Abstract

This paper describes the role of social media in healthcare and medicine based on the example of how a contract research organisation (CRO) uses video interviews to spread knowledge and expertise among professionals. Considering that in coming years, video content is expected to widely overtake text as the most common type of content on the internet, the article also provides recommendations for creators from the healthcare and medicine industries on how to leverage this channel.

Over the past two decades, social media has evolved to the point of accommodating the tastes of almost all existing cultures and generations across the globe. Previously a form of entertainment for youngsters, today social media is an omnipotent realm of communication and a powerful tool for the flow of information.

Below are some of the key characteristics that distinguish it from other sources of information and communication:

- Instantaneous reach means content can spread around the globe within hours, be it a corporate announcement or a tweet posted by a researcher.
- User-generated content has brought so many issues closer to people, unlike traditional media, where one had to be an organisation to have their voice heard.
- Limitless reach means a single tweet can reach billions of people regardless of where it originates.

The information landscape of healthcare and life sciences, like that of many other industries, has been affected by the surge of social media, which has developed numerous benefits in terms of data and knowledge spread.

On the one hand, healthcare and life sciences involves complex scientific content that tends to be challenging for many non-professionals to fully understand. Therefore, social media channels can be an effective tool to spread basic knowledge of important concepts to a general audience. A study shows that of the 75% of internet users who spend time on social media, 80% browse for health-related information.[1]

On the other hand, professional communities benefit as well (doctors, scientists and researchers, healthcare workers and other industry players), because social media enables them to leverage knowledge and exchange opportunities. For example, a survey by QuantiaMD found that 65% out of 4,000 physicians use social media for professional purposes.[2]

Without doubt, the importance of social media in healthcare has been highlighted in 2020 with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Millions of stand-alone users and thousands of corporate and regulatory accounts (including the FDA and WHO) continually posted vital information about preventive measures, urging people to follow social distancing and wear masks. For instance, analytical sources traced over 20 million mentions of coronavirus on social media on March 11, 2020, alone.[3]

Glossary

- **SEO (search engine optimisation)** is the process of improving the quality and quantity of website traffic to a website from search engines.
- **Website traffic** refers to web users who visit a website. It is measured in visits, which sometimes are called "sessions".
- **Social media algorithm** is the mathematical calculation that social media platforms use to understand user habits and to customise the social experience. As a result, publications can appear in a user's feed based on relevancy instead of publish time.
- **Organic views** are views from visitors who find the video themselves, as opposed to sponsored links.
- **YouTube recommendations or referrals** are part of the YouTube algorithm that helps users discover more videos based on their previous video preferences and searches.

Creation and consumption of social media in healthcare and medicine

By users:

1. *General users*: patients, caregivers, and the general public. Search for data on lifestyle, certain diseases, early detection, treatment, and clinical trials. This information can be found on personal accounts, corporate accounts (pharmaceuticals, content research organisations (CROs), and other vendors) or regulator's accounts (FDA and WHO accounts).

2. *Experts*: doctors, researchers, and pharma employees. Use social media to raise discussion, highlight a certain topic, share tips, and advise on treatment, research breakthroughs, and organise clinical research of drugs and medical devices.

By purpose:

1. *Education*: spreading knowledge on self-care, importance of consulting a physician and seeking professional help. Used by schools,

and regulators, plus stand-alone opinions of leaders.

2. *Marketing*: promoting products (pharmaceuticals and devices) and services (treatment, clinical trial services and recruiting patients). Used by pharma, healthcare institutions and vendors.

3. *Professional networking*: sharing knowledge and initiating discussions within professional communities. Used by corporate players (pharma), healthcare institutions and regulators.

By content types:

There is an ever-increasing number of online social platforms and formats in which content appears. Among the key types of content there are: long reads (blog-type posts usually on Facebook or LinkedIn), short posts (e.g. tweets) with one or more brief points, videos and audio podcasts.

In this article we primarily focus on video as a powerful tool which is used to manage healthcare-related information, based on a real case study.

Pharmaceutical communication via video production and YouTube channels

Undoubtedly, video content has been revolutionising the healthcare sector and pharma industry for the past couple of decades. Unsurprisingly, the following statistics tell the story:

- YouTube is the second-largest search engine in the world with about 1 billion hours watched a day.[4]
- Pharmaceutical companies increase their conversion rate (how often a viewer performs a marketer's desired action, divided by the number of visitors to the site) by 86% when they include a video on their website and social media channels. The pharmaceutical marketing agency BlueNovius[5] also notes that brands can increase their recognition value by up to 139% when they add videos to their marketing activities.

The trend towards video content is clear and in coming years, is widely expected to overtake text as the most common type of content on the internet. Having started several years ago, this trend has been propelled forward by the pandemic. With an ever-growing volume of accessible information, it is getting harder for users to absorb everything at once, and this is where video content is advantageous. For instance, explanatory and product videos are ideal for giving the viewer a 360° perception of a company. Emotion has been proven to resonate a lot better among users. Live streaming events and conferences are also used to keep their communities engaged.

YouTube differs from commercials with upfront marketing messages. Instead, it is a social platform that can be used as a means to start conversations, spread knowledge and expertise, engage viewers, and add brand value.

Case-study:
Building a video channel for a professional community

Industry Voice[6] is a YouTube project launched by OCT Clinical[7], an Eastern European CRO, in October 2019. The channel features focused interviews with leading thinkers in the clinical research and pharma industry, who share their insights into and viewpoints on the most pressing and attention-worthy issues on the global research landscape. By combining current trends,

news, the latest regulatory updates, practical information for everyday practice directly from peers, and discussions with industry leaders from around the world, Industry Voice TV offers its audience an exclusive and advanced knowledge platform. To date, it is a unique project of its kind in terms of content and format.

The Industry Voice's views since its launch in 2019 have already totalled over 10,000. Although the numbers might not seem so impressive at first glance, there are several factors to consider. First, the highly specific content targets a niche audience, mainly pharmaceutical and clinical research experts. Secondly, the average watching time (see Figure 1) compared favorably to hundreds of similar pieces of YouTube content with the same number of views. And the fact that the channel proved an effective tool for driving sales as a result of added brand value, emphatically justifies its existence. The Industry Voice videos continue to circulate, receive comments, and generate discussion among experts. The number of subscribers started showing an upward trend only after the appearance of the interviews, and has increased fivefold in the past year.

The methodology of creating an expert video channel targeting industry professionals

Topic
We began by interviewing our target audience (pharma experts) about the type of professional content that interests them. Survey results from over 100 respondents helped build a content plan for the year ahead. The two most requested topics were "What does the Eurasian Economic Union entail for the pharma world?" and "Patient recruitment tools in Russia". This information has been corroborated by research from other platforms and discussion with our business development experts and clinical department.

Speakers
Our first guest speakers were OCT Clinical's in-house experts. Afterwards, we featured non-employee guests from the pharmaceutical industry, and clinical research experts from different countries.

Location and format
Initially, face-to-face interviews were planned, but with social distancing imposed by COVID-19 restrictions, we swiftly adapted to an online format. We found virtual interviews via online platforms like Zoom proved as effective for delivering video content to the global arena.

Results and analytics
The first issue was about pharma trends in 2020, discussed with an honoured member of the International WHO's WHO of Professionals and former FDA advisory committee member. The interview[8] generated more than 500 organic views in 2 months. In the first month after publication, we received more than 20 website visits as referrals from YouTube. It was an outstanding outcome for a single channel, given general website traffic. To date, this video has brought us over 120 conversions.

Despite the project originating in Russia, the share of views from Russia makes up only about 10% to 15%, due to the wide range of subjects and English as the primary language. YouTube analytics captures quite an impressive geography of views from 17 countries. Among the leaders are the USA, Sweden, Germany, Korea, and Spain. It is worth noting that producing videos with global outreach which eventually might translate into more leads is one of the goals of the channel. This further highlights the benefits of running an online video channel.

The average watch-time for interviews is 5:40 minutes. From this we could conclude that videos longer than three to four minutes are unlikely to be watched to the end. However, it is interesting to note that watch time varies according to the audience age. The average watch time for an audience aged 24-34 is only 28% of the full episode length, while users aged 55 and older tend to watch the channel videos from beginning to end showing impressive 96.8% average watch time.

Topic relevance, especially to current trends, can pay off quite substantially in terms of increased views and subsequent website hits. We witnessed it first-hand with the issues on COVID-19 related topics such as vaccines and virtual trials. The episode on the COVID-19 vaccine case[9] showed record high rates of audience engagement. Watch time in hours (total number of views in hours) was 6.5 times higher

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than the average watch time of other videos on the channel. The graph (Figure 1) shows the difference in the performance of different videos.

YouTube recommendations also drive engagement and increase view numbers. YouTube's algorithm marked the content of the video as valuable and in high demand, and suggested it to people who had watched something on a similar, relevant topic. We found 19.6% of all views on our channel came from YouTube. We found other social media platforms also drove and generated views to the Industry Voice channel by 26.8% (Figure 2) – of which, many came from LinkedIn. This is direct evidence of the value of cross-promotion between different social media platforms.
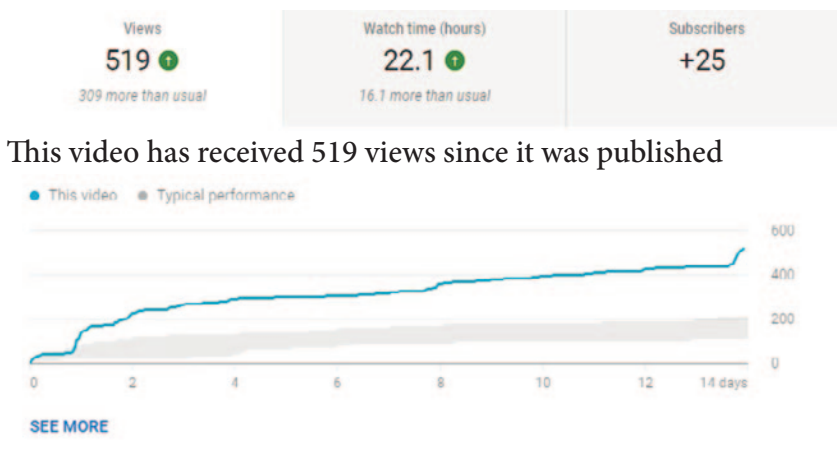
Views	Watch time (hours)	Subscribers
519 🔵	22.1 🔵	+25
309 more than usual	16.1 more than usual	

This video has received 519 views since it was published

SEE MORE

Figure 1. Watch time in hours
This is a computer screen shot taken from the admin panel on YouTube that shows total number of views in hours, as of December 2020, for the Industry Voice episode featured in the case study.
Reference: Analytics from Industry Voice by OCT Clinical https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= QXPc43U0Nfo&list=PLDfc_4URQOxrtZmeu Z0tVB7AFEnedHJ20.

Tips for creators

Strategy
The first step for any company looking to build its presence on social media via videos is content strategy. To build video-based content, ask yourself the following questions: What do you want to focus on? How will you create something unique, valuable, and important? What are the key pain points your clients face? What is happening in the industry? What is trending on social media now (in regard to your industry)? Are there topics or fields in which you have exclusive insights or more experience compared to the competition and other industry players? In short, participate, communicate, optimise, stay active, and scout for an audience.

Traffic source types ▲

Views · Lifetime

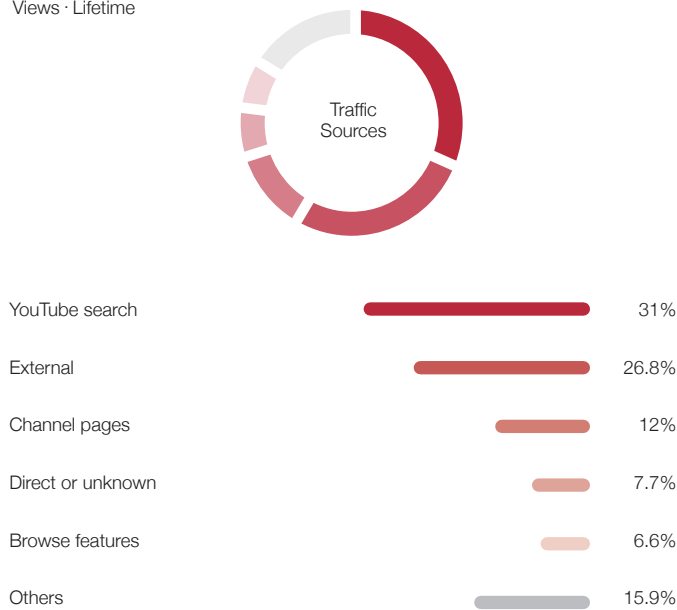|	
YouTube search	31%
External	26.8%
Channel pages	12%
Direct or unknown	7.7%
Browse features	6.6%
Others	15.9%

Figure 2. Traffic source types
This is a computer screen shot taken from the admin panel on YouTube that shows a breakdown of all the inbound traffic sources which all the Industry Voice views came from.
Reference: Analytics from Industry Voice by OCT Clinical https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXPc43U0Nfo&list=PLDfc_4URQOxrtZmeu Z0tVB7AFEnedHJ20

Content plan
Once the strategy is clear, we recommend starting by making a specific content plan. This is a plan of the issues that meet the objectives outlined in your strategy. A content plan includes the list of topics you want to cover with your future publications with potential speakers (or type of speakers) and the expected air dates assigned to each topic. Also, it is important your content is consistent. Remember, two videos are not enough to generate the desired effect. Content for your YouTube strategy should be planned one year ahead. As mentioned above, tools for fine tuning content ideas such as news monitoring, research, and surveys will help you find the most successful topics to focus on.

Frequency
Frequency is an important factor for the YouTube algorithm, which determines the visibility of a published video to general viewers, especially to non-subscribers, and its ranking on the platform's search and suggestions list. The recommended minimal frequency is about one video per month. Then, to grow your audience, you might consider increasing the frequency depending on your audience's response and your internal resources.

Length limit
Video length is a most controversial point. In general, most audiences are reluctant to watch long, extended videos. Yet in recent years, there has been an obvious trend towards longer videos. Videos can be as long as deemed necessary to convey the intended message without disengaging the audience. A low audience retention will have negative impact on your rankings. Interestingly, one remarkable thing we have noticed by looking at the numbers on our channel is that videos with the most views are generally longer than three minutes. But every particular project has its own individual indicators and numbers.

Filming
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and consider all visual and audio aspects. The speakers must be well prepared, which means that they should have the list of all the questions for the forthcoming interview in advance, dedicate some time to revise the answers, rehearse the script, and do some additional research on the given topic, if necessary. If an interview is recorded remotely it will also be helpful to provide a speaker with a checklist on location setup (e.g., how to set up the light, sound and video equipment, background, etc). For all locations, it is important to think about the lighting. (Ideally, it should be natural light coming from a window). If you are considering shooting outdoors, bear in mind factors such as the weather forecast and transport of equipment. Also important is to discuss dress code options with a speaker and ensure that it coordinates with the general tone of the video content you create. In addition, it is important to establish a strong visual style through surroundings and interior layout, for instance using TV screens with a company logo or motto for speakers' background. Regarding script, once you have everything set, check your word count, then start reducing and rewording until it fits the formula – only as long as necessary and as short as possible. Remember that your script should be clear and concise. All questions for interviews should be discussed in advance with guest speakers. Try to practice everything beforehand. Ensure the speakers' gestures and body language look natural on camera. A video looks a lot more organised and shooting runs more smoothly when there is a strong script backing it up.

Consider platform algorithms
Also, consider making the most of platform tools like translated titles, subtitles, and captions, which could help attract global audiences and generate more views. Optimise your video description texts by making sure you use natural language focused on one or two keywords, that also appear in the description and title. Following these simple steps will ensure more effective SEO strategy, drive subscriptions and view counts, and improve your organic reach and ranking in YouTube's "suggested search" function.

Cross-promotion on other social platforms
Other channels like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram are useful tools for cross promotion

and announce the video go-live to your followers. Additionally, consider the effectiveness of collaborating with relevant influencers to share your content, which can increase your exposure to a new audience. Also, teasers for the full-length video or interview are useful to gain optimum engagement on all channels.

Tone of voice, language, and style

With video being more dynamic and independent than traditional media, online social media platforms allow for a more relaxed delivery format, both for the written and spoken word. Although product content is not necessarily entertaining, and is mostly science-related, (compared for example to scientific journals and traditional media) tone of voice can be a little less formal and should be simple with shorter sentences and lighter paragraphs to be delivered in messaging tools (posts, tweets, videos, and audio casts).

Supporting copy

Accompany videos with subtitles and some relevant supporting written highlights which help to deliver complex information and highlight the most important points. This is particularly important as many viewers watch in mute mode, so subtitles can be crucial for retaining viewership.

Sensitive matters

While creating and publishing content it is important to make sure that the information presented does not result in controversy among all the parties involved, and general audience who will view the piece when it is aired. First, when featuring guest speakers all the content should be pre-approved before publication. You should also back it up with informed consent forms signed by the featured guests. We recommend being extra careful with the type of information going out, especially when dealing with such sensitive areas as healthcare, to avoid unnecessary public backlash. Secondly, make sure to communicate to speakers beforehand that their role is to express their own expert opinion and offer food for thought, rather than speculating about third parties not present during the filming, or causing unnecessary controversy by making uneducated guesses outside their field of competence.

Multiple global cases show that video content for social platforms builds brand awareness and an expert image when combined with strong content marketing, concept strategy and channel advertising. Thus, YouTube and other social platforms can be an effective means to connect industry experts and potential clients, train teams, or even educate patients.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors are employed by OCT Clinical, a contract research organisation, that provided the case for this article. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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