A cross-sectional descriptive analysis of portrayal of autism spectrum disorders in YouTube videos: A short report

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What we did: In this study we examined 100 different videos directed to families of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) uploaded to YouTube.

How we did it: We categorized the source of the upload as professional, television-based clip, Internet-based clip, or from a member of the lay public. Next, we categorized the content as signs and symptoms, causes, diagnosis, services, treatment, complementary and alternative treatments, associated disorders, research, resources, or public policy. Finally, we rated the understandability and actionability of the videos using Patient Education Material Assessment Tool-Audiovisual. Understandability means whether or not the information can be understood by the general public. Actionability means whether or not the health information helps individuals identify what they need to do.

Why it is important: The amount of Internet-based information devoted to parents of children with ASD has increased. However, professionals have expressed concerns about the quality of autism-related information available from Internet-based sources. It is critical that professionals evaluate Internet-based materials so that high-quality information can be developed and disseminated. In this study we found that most of the videos were focused on signs and symptoms with less emphasis on diagnosis and treatment management. Poor understandability and actionability scores were reported for all videos regardless of video source. Professionals need to be aware of the limits and benefits of available information. Professionals need to contribute to the 'digital conversation' by generating high-quality information across diverse content for families of children with ASD.