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The Transplantgram Revolution: Instagram’s Influence on the Perception and Promotion of Organ Transplantation

Macey L. Levan, JD, PhD^{1,2}, Samantha B. Klitenic, JD¹, Suhani S. Patel, MPH¹, Jasmine M. Akhtar, BS¹, Denise V. Nemeth, MS¹, Devyn Jones¹, Allan B. Massie, PhD^{1,2}, Dorry L. Segev, MD, PhD^{1,2}

¹Department of Surgery, NYU Grossman School of Medicine, NYU Langone Health, New York, NY

²Department of Population Health, NYU Grossman School of Medicine, New York, NY

To the Editor –

Social media use has increased rapidly over the past decade, revolutionizing the way clinicians and patients exchange health-related information and experiences in real-time. With 2 billion global monthly users,¹ Instagram allows its users to upload, edit, and share photo and video content with followers. The demographic with the highest Instagram use is U.S. adults between the ages of 18–29 (67%). Because Instagram appeals to the demographic with the highest number of medical students and residents, and heavily emphasizes visual content, it has become widely recognized as an educational tool in fields of medicine that rely heavily on visual aids, such as transplantation.²

Instagram, like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, has the potential to transform public education about organ donation and transplantation, raise awareness for organ donation campaigns, build users’ trust in the transplant system, and expand public health outreach worldwide.^{3,4} To characterize, and gain a better understanding of, transplant-related Instagram content, 2 investigators queried 15 medical and nonmedical transplant-related hashtags, and identified the 5 most popular posts for each as of November 10, 2022, (n=75) (Table 1). Duplicate posts, non-English posts, hair transplant posts, and posts unrelated

Correspondence: Macey Leigh Levan, JD, PhD, Associate Professor of Surgery and Population Health, NYU Grossman School of Medicine, Director, Center for Surgical and Transplant Applied Research, Qualitative Core, NYU Langone Health, One Park Avenue, 6th Floor, Room 6-813, New York, NY 10016, 646-987-1360 (tel), macey.levan@nyulangone.org.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work:

MLL, SBK, SSP, ABM

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COMPETING INTERESTS

MLL is the Social Media Editor for *Transplantation*.

to organ transplant were excluded. Thereafter, posts were characterized according to their source, procedure, purpose, and multimedia format, and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Analysis of 75 Instagram posts yielded a total of 64 119 likes and 3799 comments. The sizeable number of likes and shares generated from this small number of posts is consistent with Instagram's high average overall engagement rate of .65% (as compared to Facebook's average overall engagement rate of .07%).⁵ Content creators were primarily transplant recipients (25%), non-profit organizations and academic institutions (ie, hospitals, research universities, organ procurement organizations, advocacy groups) (25%), and friends or families of transplant recipients (19%). The most common purposes for posting were to share family and/or patient testimonials (43%), to raise awareness for organ donation and help find potential donors (23%), to entertain (19%), and to educate the public (16%). The most common transplant-specific procedures featured or referenced were kidney transplant (19%), organ donation (19%), and lung transplant (19%) (Table 1). Of the 75 Instagram posts analyzed, 30 (40%) encouraged organ donation.

This analysis demonstrates that within transplant, Instagram is used mostly by transplant recipients, non-profit organizations and academic institutions, and donor families and friends to exchange personal experiences, encourage and raise awareness for organ donation, and connect with other patients, families, and potential donors.

Results are limited in their generalizability, because all data was collected at a single point in time. Additionally, our analysis excluded all non-English posts. Still, this study fills a gap in the literature by characterizing previously unstudied transplant-specific Instagram content. Further research into the effectiveness of Instagram campaigns in promoting organ donation and other transplant specific behaviors is still needed.

Instagram could be used to disseminate visually rich educational content, exchange experiences and personal narratives, raise awareness for organ donation, and expand existing social media practices for transplant candidates to identify and connect with potential living donors.

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Table 1:

Characteristics of Top Instagram Posts from 15 Transplant-Related Hashtags

Characteristic	No. (%)
<i>Source</i>	
Transplant Recipient	19 (25.3%)
Organization	19 (25.3%)
Transplant Recipient Family Member or Friend	14 (18.7%)
Member of the General Public	6 (8.0%)
Other	6 (8.0%)
Organ Donor	4 (5.3%)
Waitlist Candidate	4 (5.3%)
Medical Professional	3 (4.0%)
<i>Procedure</i>	
Kidney Transplant	14 (18.7%)
Organ Donation	14 (18.7%)
Lung Transplant	14 (18.7%)
Liver Transplant	10 (13.3%)
Heart Transplant	9 (12.0%)
Living Kidney Donation	8 (10.7%)
Other	6 (8.0%)
<i>Purpose</i>	
Family/Patient Testimony	32 (42.7%)
Organ Donation Awareness/Finding an Organ Donor	17 (22.7%)
Entertainment	14 (18.7%)
Educational	12 (16.0%)
<i>Media Format</i>	
Images	67 (89.3%)
Videos	7 (9.3%)
Both	1 (1.3%)

The following transplant-related hashtags were queried--#donatelifelife, #transplant, #organdonation, #kidneytransplant, #giftoflife, #organdonor, #hearttransplant, #livertransplant, #kidneydonor, #lungtransplant, #organtransplant, #doublelungtransplant, #beadonor, #transplantlife, and #kidneydonation