

Bird Flu on TikTok: How TikTok Is Helping to Spread the Word

Researchers at the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources (PIE Center) evaluated how TikTok was used to communicate during the most recent outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), also known as bird flu. The analyses used videos posted from February 2023 to July 2024, coinciding with two bird flu outbreaks that have occurred since March 2022. To find the videos, several hashtags were strategically selected, including #HPAI, #BirdFlu, and #H5N1. The study time frame allowed for 66 videos to fit within the search parameters.

What is Bird Flu and How Is It Being Communicated on TikTok?

Bird flu is a Type A virus that primarily affects bird species, including chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese. Bird flu threatens the U.S. agricultural industry by causing steep declines in national broiler and turkey flocks, volatility in egg prices and challenges for lactating dairy cattle.

The study used a qualitative content analysis to determine who was delivering messages about bird flu, the types of accounts that posted videos and emergent themes. Video creators included content-specific scientists (epidemiologists, microbiologists, veterinarians, physicians), news outlets and concerned citizens. Themes related to video messaging included poking fun at the topic, news segments, general information and assessing concerns.

Content-specific experts focused on health effects and intricacies of the virus, while concerned citizens focused on how the outbreak would impact pets, family members, and daily activities. The common thread was that both groups focused on the dangers of bird flu.

Major Themes Used Across TikTok to Communicate Aspects of Bird Flu

Affected Groups	Public Health
Wildlife	Disease Conditions
Domestic Animals	Relevant
Communications	Occupations
Bird Flu	Interventions
Disease Detection	Response
Agriculture Products	

Themes listed above are not in order of importance and are not connected to each other.

Top 5 Visual Techniques Use

1. Moving Photographs
2. Still Photographs
3. Composite Graphics
4. Graphs
5. Illustrated Pictures

The top visual elements included in the videos are listed above from the most used to the least used technique. Some videos included multiple themes.

Current Communication Strategies

While traditional media sources are important consumer-facing communication methods, the role social media plays in how people receive information is increasing. In a post-pandemic world, social media platforms, such as TikTok, are powerful tools for providing effective science communication and keeping exposures low during disease outbreaks that impact both humans and animals.

The videos in the sample had limited representation from agricultural and health organizations such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as traditional news media outlets.

UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources



piecenter.com | Data collected in
September 2024