

# ARE WE CONTROLLING OUR NARRATIVE? ANALYSIS OF CONTENT ABOUT PHARMACISTS FROM INSTAGRAM AND TIKTOK



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## Introduction

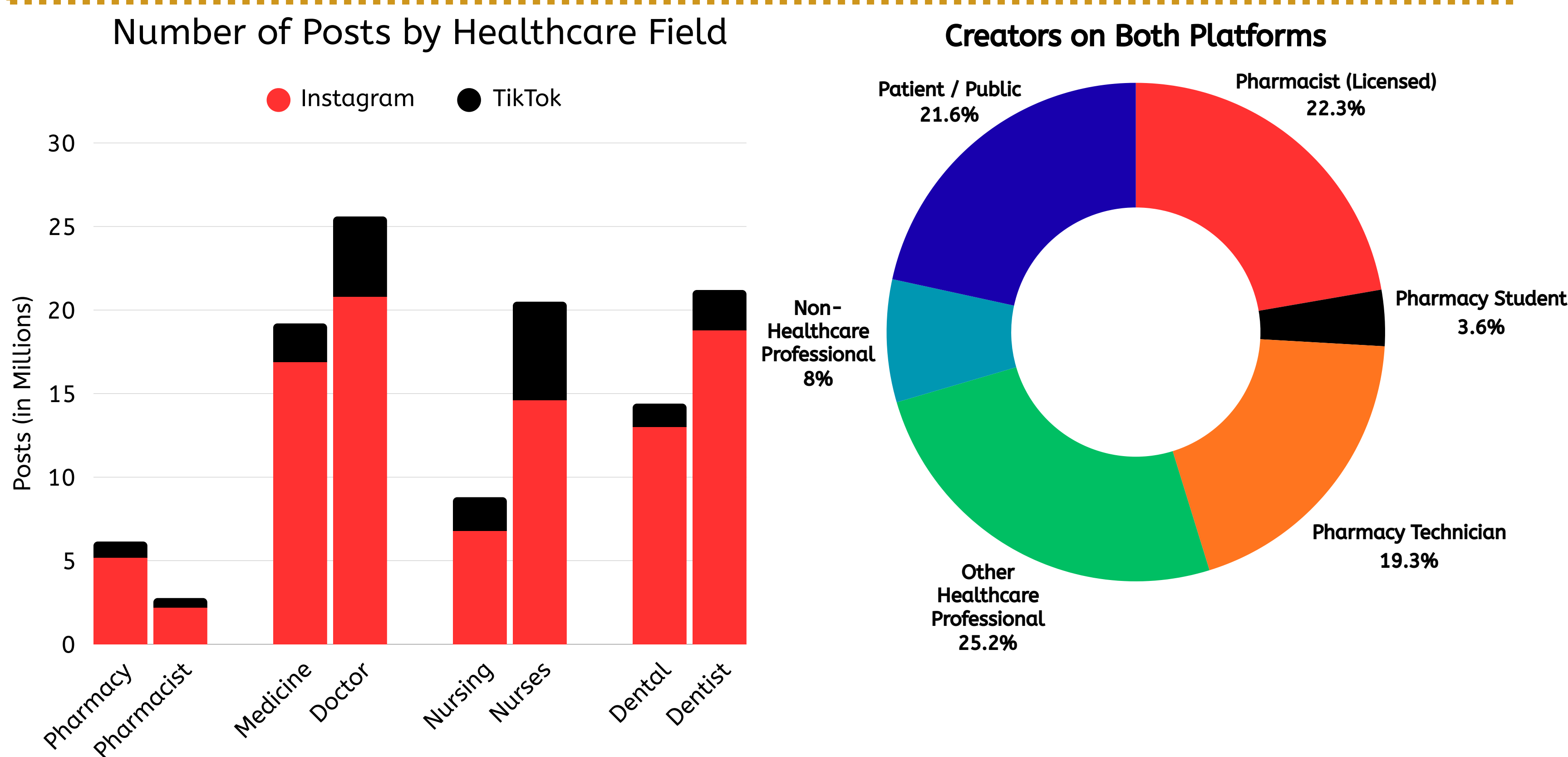
Social media shapes healthcare perceptions, especially for Generation Z who spend 4.5 hours daily on platforms.<sup>1</sup>

### Key Stats:

- 90% of college students use social media as an academic resource<sup>2</sup>
- 38% of Gen Z trust social media for health (vs 22% older generations)<sup>3</sup>
- Pharmacist trust: 57% in 2024 → 53% in 2025<sup>4,5</sup>
- Pharmaceutical industry distrust: 60%<sup>6</sup>

**The Gap:** #doctor: 4.7M TikTok posts #nurse: 5.8M posts #dentist: 2.3M posts #pharmacist: 553K posts

**Problem:** Pharmacists are viewed as "pill counters" rather than clinical experts. With limited social media presence comes a missed opportunity for advocacy and education while leaving a vacuum for potential interest in the future career.



## Objective

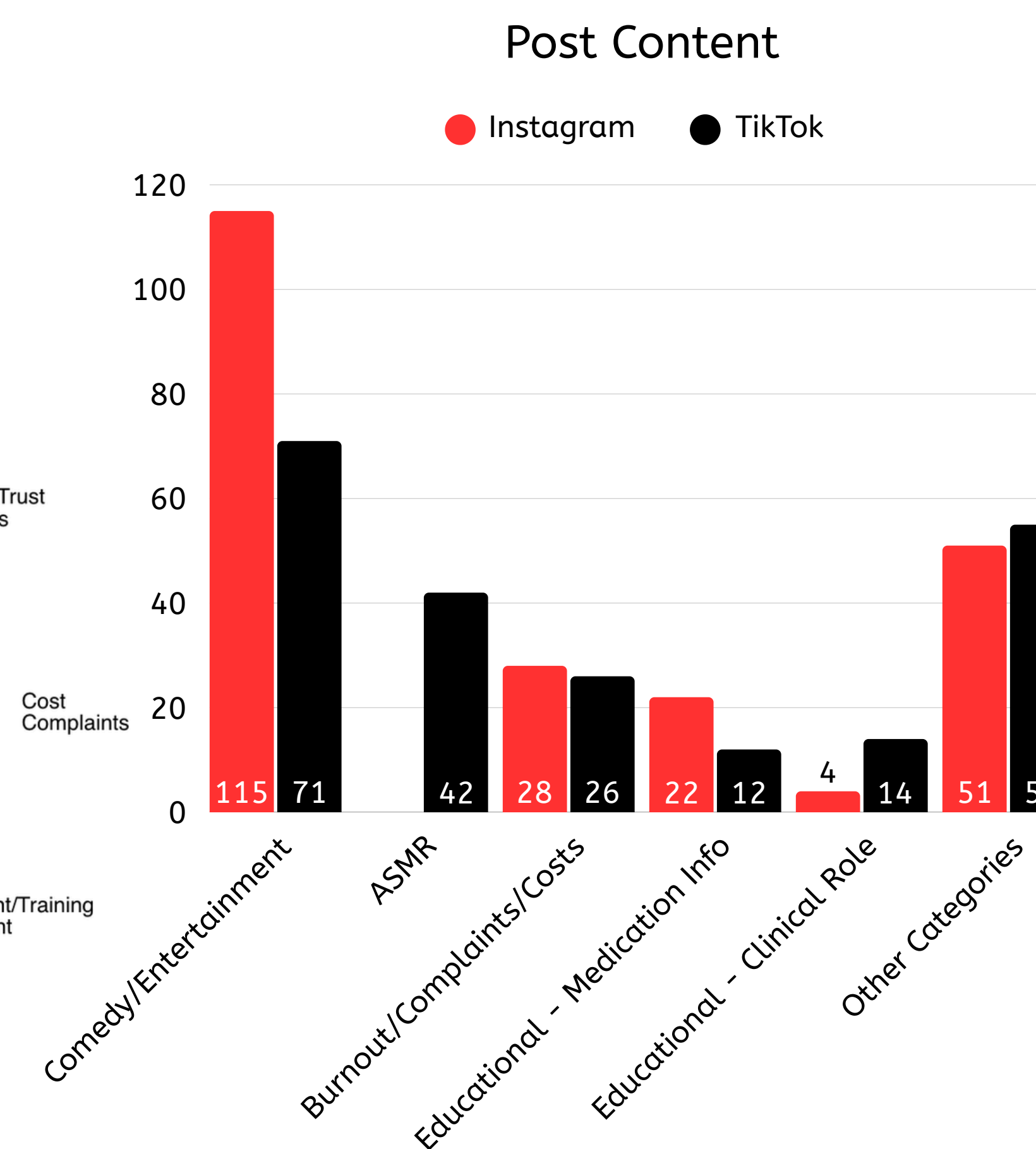
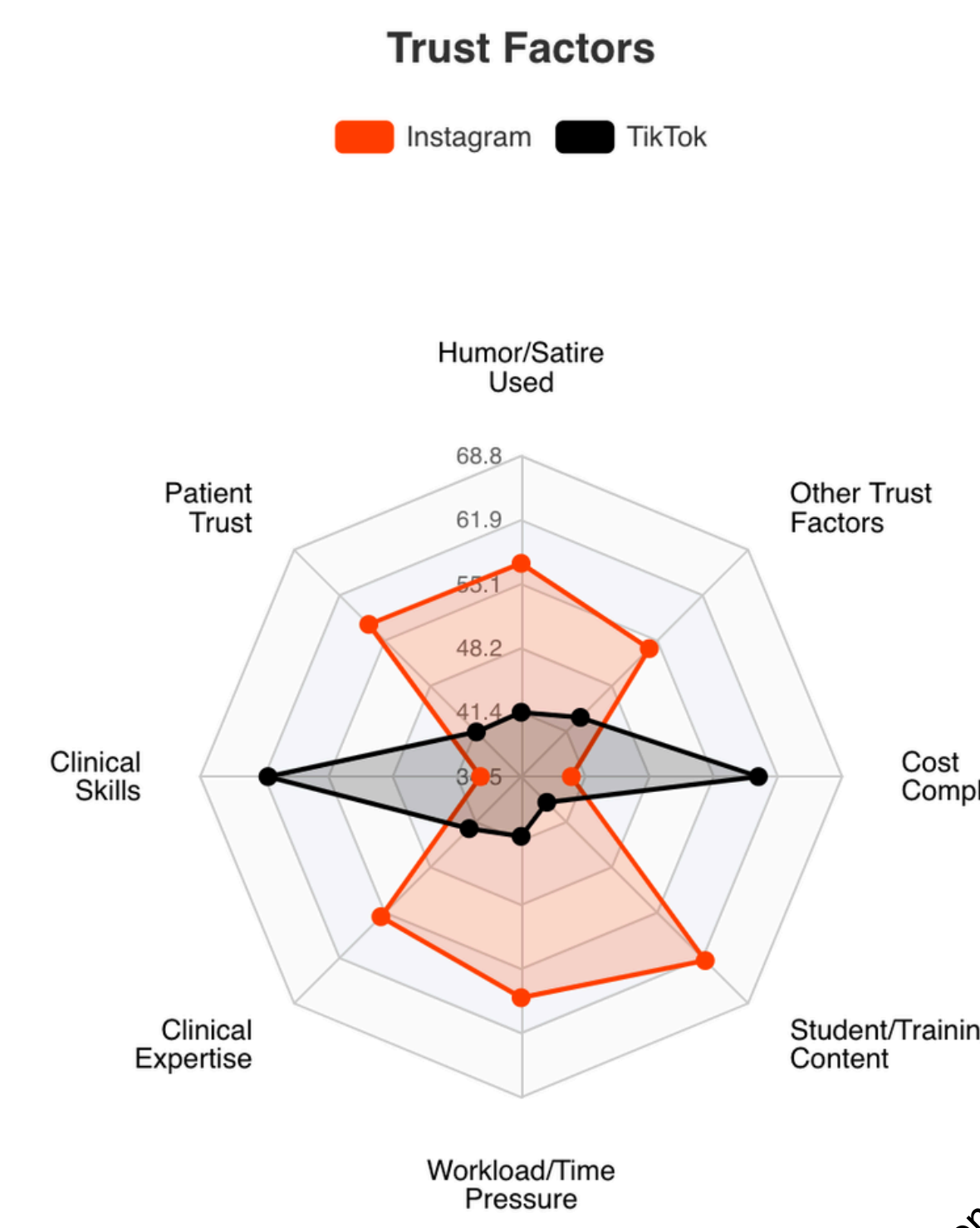
Characterize the public perception of pharmacists, especially amongst college-aged people, as formed by social media short form content.

## Methods

- Systematic content analysis of 440 high-engagement posts
- 440 high engagement posts analyzed (220 per platform) from 5.2M+ total posts across 14 pharmacy-related keywords
  - Assessed: creator type, content themes, trust factors, role clarity, tone, engagement metrics
  - Cross-platform comparisons with medicine, nursing, dentistry

## Results

Role Clarity	Instagram n (%)	TikTok n (%)	Total n (%)
Not Addressed	114 (51.8%)	56 (25.5%)	170 (38.6%)
Unclear	79 (35.9%)	114 (51.8%)	193 (43.9%)
Somewhat Clear	15 (6.8%)	20 (9.1%)	35 (8.0%)
Very Clear	3 (1.4%)	7 (3.2%)	10 (2.3%)
Negative	9 (4.1%)	23 (10.5%)	32 (7.3%)



### Key Statistics

- 49.3% Humorous vs 17.5% Professional Tone
- Technician 13.3M Views vs Pharmacist 4.4M Views
- 10.3% of posts clearly communicated the pharmacist's professional role
- 78% of high-engagement content was created by non-pharmacists

### Qualitative Results

- Entertainment and comedy dominated pharmacy content, often with posts unrelated to the searched topic.
- The top four pharmacy posts on TikTok garnered 24M Likes and persisted across all keywords, all of whom consisted of pharmacy technicians filling meds utilizing ASMR.
- Satirical content from other healthcare professionals or the public frequently portrayed pharmacists in a negative or conflict-driven light.
- Pharmacy student posts mainly emphasized academic stress over clinical competence.
- High engagement content rarely showcased clinical reasoning, reinforcing the "pill counter" stereotype over clinical expertise.

## Discussion

This first systematic analysis reveals pharmacists create only 22% of top pharmacy content while external voices control 78%: other HCPs (25%), patients (22%), pharmacy techs (19%).

**Why These Results?** Social learning and agenda-setting theory explain the consequence: repeated exposure to dispensing tasks and frustrations – not clinical expertise – shapes what Generation Z considers representative of pharmacy.<sup>7</sup>

**Trust Factor Patterns:** Humor dominates (49.3%) while clinical expertise is rare (15.9%). Content shows tasks (25% clinical skills) without context i.e. TikTok ASMR reinforcing "pill counter" stereotype through pharmacy technicians filling meds.

### For Generation Z:

- As future patients: 38% trust social media for health info. They do not see pharmacists as clinicians based on social media.<sup>3</sup>
- As prospective students utilizing social media for career help: 50% are influenced by TikTok, 46% by Instagram.<sup>8</sup> The public sees burnout rather than clinical impact. This may contribute to the decline in pharmacy applications<sup>9</sup> despite 5% increase in total workforce by 2034 workforce demand growth<sup>10,11</sup>.

## Limitations

- Temporal: Jan-Feb 2026 snapshot; does not reflect evolving trends
- Algorithmic: Platform algorithms have likely influenced results
- Sampling: Sampled by engagement, not exhaustive; U.S. English content only

**Future Research:** Link content to public/college knowledge surveys; assess interprofessional relationships; measure impact of strategic interventions; expand to YouTube and Twitter; track how the perception of pharmacy changes over time.

## Conclusion

### Are We Controlling Our Narrative? NO!

Pharmacists are not controlling their professional narrative. External voices tell pharmacy's story through entertainment, workplace complaints, and hierarchical jokes—reinforcing the "pill counter" stereotype when Gen Z spends 4.5 hours daily forming perceptions digitally. College-aged people form understanding through entertainment (42%), not education (12%).

### They see:

- Technical tasks without clinical reasoning
- Workplace frustration over patient impact
- External voices over pharmacist perspectives

**The Gap:** 82.5% unclear role messaging, 4% demonstrated clinical expertise, 78% non-pharmacist creators

**The Choice:** Strategic social media presence is essential professional infrastructure, not optional marketing. Pharmacists must act before external narratives become reality.

## Acknowledgements

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## Link to Paper

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