Social Media Conversations on GLP-1 Therapies for Obesity: Real-World Experiences and Treatment Narratives

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Background

- Obesity is a chronic, progressive disease with significant cardiometabolic risk, often requiring management beyond lifestyle modification[1]
- GLP-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1 RAs) (e.g., semaglutide, tirzepatide) have transformed obesity care, delivering clinically meaningful weight loss. However, gaps persist between clinical efficacy and real-world access, affordability, and long-term sustainability[2]
- Growing social media discourse captures real-world experiences, complementing clinical evidence[3]
- Social media listening (SML) enables systematic analysis of these insights to inform patient-centered management strategies

Objective

To quantify social media volume, sentiment distribution, and thematic patterns related to GLP-1 therapies for obesity, and to identify key drivers of sentiment among individuals discussing these treatments

Methodology

Framework and Sub-Theme Definition

- 15 sub-themes were defined to capture awareness, treatment decision-making, access, tolerability, daily life impact, mental health, and long-term management over 4 themes **(Figure 1)**.
- Boolean queries were iteratively refined for topic and sub-themes.

Social Media Data Capture

- Retrospective social media data was captured using Talkwalker Social Listening & Analytics Platform across public platforms including X, Facebook, YouTube, Reddit, blogs, forums, and news/press sources.
- Global social media posts relating to the topic between January 2025 and January 2026 were identified.
- All publicly available posts on GLP-1 therapies for obesity were included.
- Unrelated content (ads, spam, duplicates, and other unrelated posts) were excluded.
- Only public, de-identified social media data was collected; individual-level data was not collected/linked

Data Analysis

- Descriptive analysis was performed across post volume, platform, geography, and gender distribution.
- Sentiments from social media posts were classified into positive/neutral/negative via AI algorithms and validated on a random sample (n = 200–300) by two reviewers (Cohen's kappa = 0.78 indicating substantial agreement)
- Thematic analysis was performed to identify key narratives, concerns, and sentiment drivers within each theme
- Study was conducted in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Since the study involved collection and analysis of publicly available social media posts, ethics approval was not required (as per BPS 2021 Code of Human Research and AoIR 2019 Ethical Guidelines 3.0)

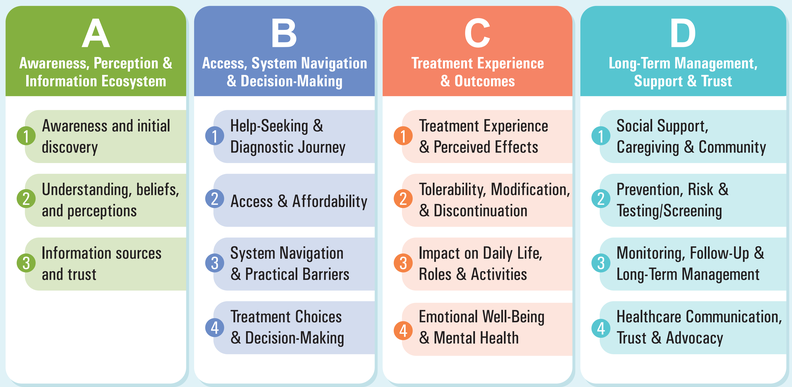
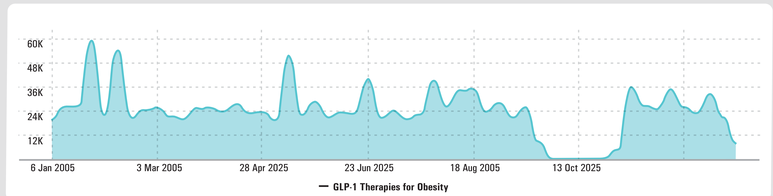


Figure 1: Themes and Sub-Themes Guiding Social Media Data Capture and Analysis

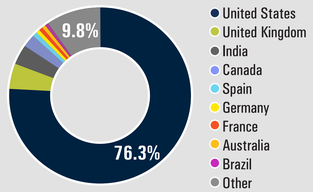
Results

- Over 1.3 million posts were retrieved over the period of 1 year. Posts were predominantly in English (96.5%) and US-based (76.3%); X contributed the largest share (41.7%)
- Discussions on semaglutide and tirzepatide shifted over time from strong initial enthusiasm toward more nuanced conversations around safety, tolerability, access, and long-term sustainability.

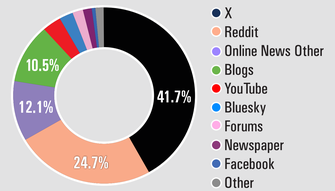
Results over Time



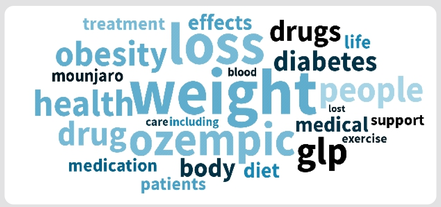
Regional Share of Posts



Share of Media Type



Word Cloud of the Most Frequent Mentions in Social Media Chatter



Overall Sentiment Distribution

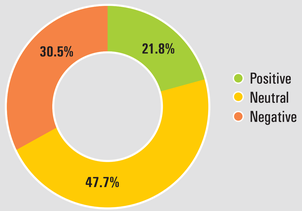


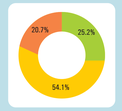
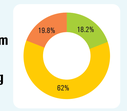
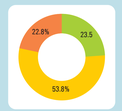
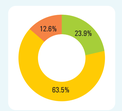
Figure 2: Social media data analysis result

Key Drivers of Positive Sentiment

- Substantial weight loss and improved metabolic health outcomes
- Reduced "food noise" and better appetite control
- Holistic use alongside diet, exercise, and lifestyle modification
- Strong peer/community support and real-world success stories
- Growing optimism around innovation, broader indications, and long-term management

Key Drivers of Negative Sentiment

- Access, affordability, and insurance/Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) barriers
- Concerns around side effects, long-term safety, and muscle loss
- Anxiety regarding weight regain after discontinuation
- Mental health and body-image concerns, including stigma
- Misinformation, influencer misuse, and distrust around compounded/online products

Domains and Sentiment Distribution	Key Drivers of Positive Sentiment	Key Drivers of Negative Sentiment	Representative Verbatims*
1.Awareness, Perception & Information Ecosystem 	• Perceived effectiveness (weight loss, appetite control) • Normalization of pharmacologic management; influence of expert-led/structured programs	• Concerns on long-term safety and weight regain • Misinformation and "quick-fix" skepticism; trust gaps in influencer/commercial content	"Got on a GLP-1, started working out... 160 lbs down, feel so much better" "Was prescribed Zepbound... never thought I'd lose 85 lbs, feels like a miracle"
2.Access, System Navigation & Decision-Making 	• Expanded access (telehealth, digital platforms) • Perceived effectiveness; active patient decision-making	• High out-of-pocket costs, insurance denials; complex access pathways • Legal, policy, and pricing concerns	"Insurance won't cover GLP-1 for weight loss... even with risk factors"
3.Treatment Experience & Outcomes 	• Weight loss, QoL improvements, reduced appetite/"food noise" • Improved confidence and functioning	• Tolerability issues (GI effects, muscle loss), variable response; emotional distress and adherence challenges	"Tried semaglutide for 4 months... too many side effects, barely any weight loss"
4.Long-Term Management, Support & Trust 	• Peer support and community validation • Focus on long-term health benefits; emerging innovation	• Concerns on sustainability, weight regain, and provider trust; stigma and psychological burden	"He's supportive of me losing weight naturally but is extremely against GLP-1s"

Positive Neutral Negative

*Representative verbatims have been paraphrased and de-identified per BPS/AoIR guidelines

Table 1: Domain-specific sentiments, drivers, and representative verbatims

Discussion

- GLP-1 adoption is driven by economic barriers and not clinical skepticism. This suggests that payer engagement and insurance reform are critical
- High share of neutral sentiment reflects informed, deliberative patients. This shows the need for balanced, evidence-based, non-promotional communication
- Concerns about tolerability and discontinuation highlight gaps between trial efficacy and real-world use, indicating a need for long-term adherence support
- High social media volume indicates strong influence of the topic on patient expectations, and translates to the need for a proactive, credible engagement
- **Strengths:** Real-world, unprompted perspectives beyond clinical/survey data
- **Limitations:** Selection bias; English/US skew; inclusion of tangential content (diabetes, general weight loss, celebrity-driven discourse)

Conclusion

GLP-1 receptor agonists such as semaglutide and tirzepatide are widely discussed in global social media for weight loss and metabolic health. While social media posts reported substantial health benefits, challenges relating to adverse effects, access, and sustainability were also frequently reported. Public interest in this segment is rapidly growing, driven by social media and external influences, highlighting the need for informed guidance and equitable access.

References

1. Yanovski SZ, Yanovski JA. JAMA Intern Med. 2024 Jul 1;184(7):818-829.
2. Popoviciu MS et al. Int J Mol Sci. 2023 Jun 21;24(13):10449.
3. Merhi Z et al. PLoS One. 2025 Jul 2;20(7):e0326210.

[Full list available on request]