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Original Article

Evaluating the Influence of Social Media on Public Perception of Dentistry: A Cross-Sectional Survey

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Abstract

Background: Social media has become a widespread tool for distributing health-related information, including dental content. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of social media on the general population's dental health awareness and decision-making processes.

Aims: The primary objective of this cross-sectional survey was to explore how social media influences dental product choices, dental appointments, and overall oral health knowledge among the general population.

Materials and Methods: A structured, self-administered questionnaire with 10 multiple-choice questions was distributed online through Google Forms. The survey targeted individuals aged 18 and older, excluding dental professionals. The questionnaire covered participants' social media usage, interaction with dental content, and the influence of such content on their dental health decisions. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, with results presented in pie charts.

Results: Most participants used social media to seek dental information, but few were influenced by it in making decisions such as choosing products or treatment modalities. Skepticism about the credibility of social media content was prevalent.

Conclusion: Although social media is a common source of dental information, its influence on decision-making is minimal. Professional guidance remains preferred for dental care choices, highlighting the need for reliable online content.

Key words: Dental treatment, Social media, Social media

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, social media has transformed the way dental professionals engage with patients and the broader community. Beyond traditional marketing, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have become powerful tools for sharing dental knowledge, showcasing successful treatments, and building trust with patients.[1] Dentists are now able to demystify oral health procedures, educate the public about preventive care, and foster real-time interactions with both current and potential patients. This article explores how social media is reshaping the landscape of dentistry, enhancing patient relationships, and ultimately contributing to a more informed and connected world of oral health.

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Social media has transformed the way the general population engages with dentistry, leading to both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have made dental care more accessible, raising awareness about oral health and encouraging preventive habits.[2,3] Dental professionals now have a direct channel to share expert advice, demystify treatments, and inspire individuals to prioritize their dental well-being. Esthetic trends, such as teeth whitening and smile makeovers, have also surged in popularity due to social media exposure. However, the rise of misinformation, particularly around do-it-yourself

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(DIY) dental treatments, poses risks for users who may unknowingly adopt harmful practices.[4] Overall, social media has strengthened the relationship between patients and dental care providers by promoting education and engagement, but it requires careful navigation to avoid the pitfalls of inaccurate information.[5]

Therefore, the purpose of this survey on social media-based dentistry is to evaluate how social media influences public awareness, perception, and behavior concerning dental health. The study aims to assess the effectiveness of social platforms in promoting dental hygiene practices, preventive care, and professional education.[6] In addition, it seeks to understand how social media shapes patient decision-making, particularly regarding cosmetic dentistry and treatment choices.[7]

Another key focus is to identify trends in patient behavior influenced by digital content and analyze the spread of misinformation about dental care, which could lead to harmful practices.[8] The survey will also evaluate the effectiveness of social media outreach by dental professionals, examining how well these platforms facilitate communication, build trust, and engage patients.[9] Ultimately, the study aims to gain insight into the evolving relationship between dentistry and social media while identifying both its benefits and challenges for public health.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to assess public opinions regarding social media-based dentistry. The survey was distributed using Google Forms, and responses were collected for 18 weeks.

Study Population

The target population was the general public actively engaged with social media platforms. Participants were recruited through various online channels, including social media platforms, community forums, and email invitations.

Inclusion Criteria

Individuals 18 years and older who have interacted with or consumed dental-related content on social media platforms were included in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

Individuals under 18 or those who do not use social media were excluded from the study.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 1000 participants was targeted based on convenience sampling through online distribution channels. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were offered.

Data Collection Tool

The data were collected using a 10-question multiple-choice questionnaire developed on Google Forms. Some questions allowed for multiple answers to capture a more comprehensive range of opinions.

The survey focused on the following areas:

1. Demographics: Social media usage frequency
2. Social media engagement: Platforms commonly used frequency of exposure to dental-related content.
3. Public opinion on social media-based dentistry:
    - Perception of credibility of dental information on social media
    - Influence of social media on decision-making regarding dental treatments
    - Trust in dental professionals who promote their services or provide advice through social media
    - Preferences for obtaining dental information through traditional versus social media platforms.

Pre-Testing

The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of 10–15 respondents to ensure clarity, usability, and appropriateness of the questions. Based on feedback, adjustments were made to refine the survey.

Data Collection Procedure

The survey was distributed online through:

- Social media posts (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
- Community forums and online groups
- Email lists from relevant organizations.

The survey remained open for 18 weeks and participants were encouraged to share the survey with their networks to maximize reach.

Data Analysis

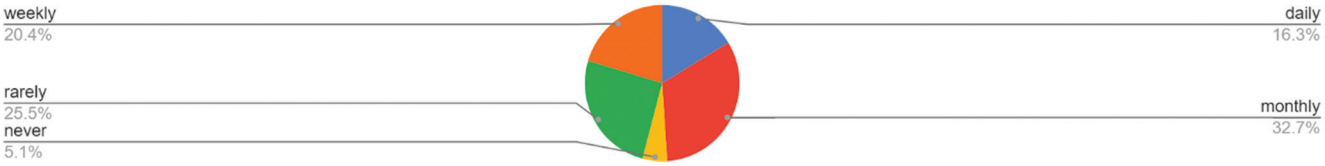
Data collected from the Google Forms survey were exported to Microsoft Excel for analysis. The following methods were used:

- Descriptive statistics: To analyze demographic data and response frequencies for each question
- Multiple response analysis: For questions that allowed multiple answers, frequency counts and percentages were calculated for each option selected.

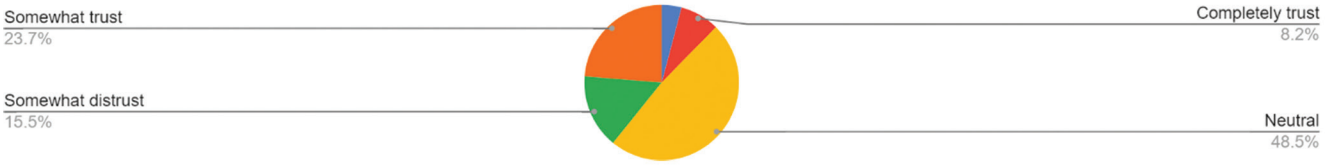
RESULTS

One thousand respondents participated in the survey, providing insights into public perceptions of social media-based dentistry. The findings reveal a strong awareness and engagement with dental content on various social media platforms, with a majority expressing trust in the advice

How often do you encounter dental-related content (e.g., videos, posts, or advertisements) on social media platforms?

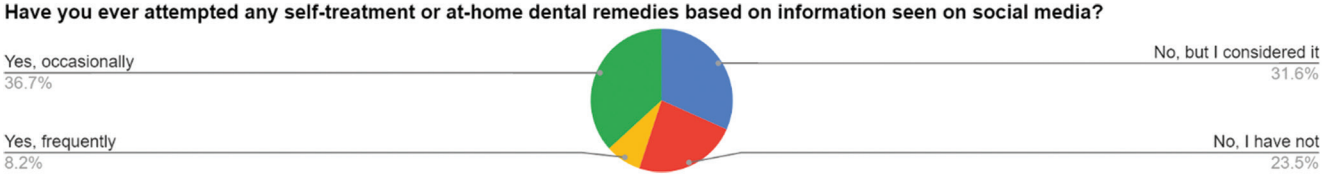


How much do you trust the dental information or advice provided by influencers or dentists on social media?

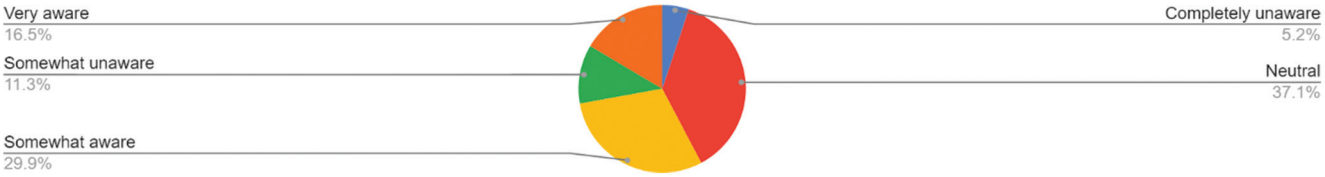


Has seeing dental content on social media influenced you to seek professional dental care or treatments?

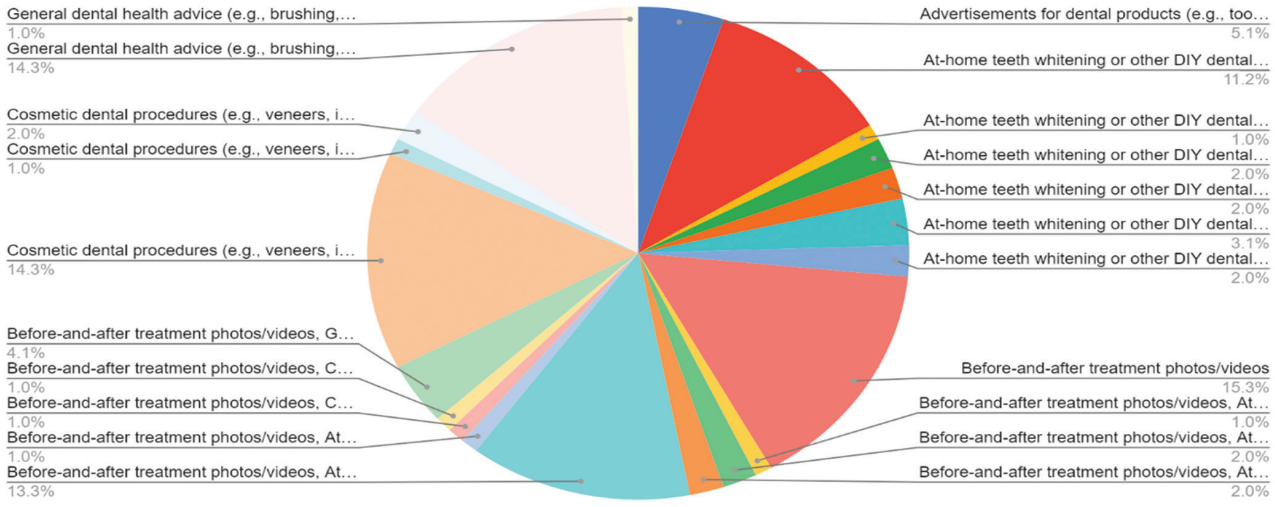
Have you ever attempted any self-treatment or at-home dental remedies based on information seen on social media?

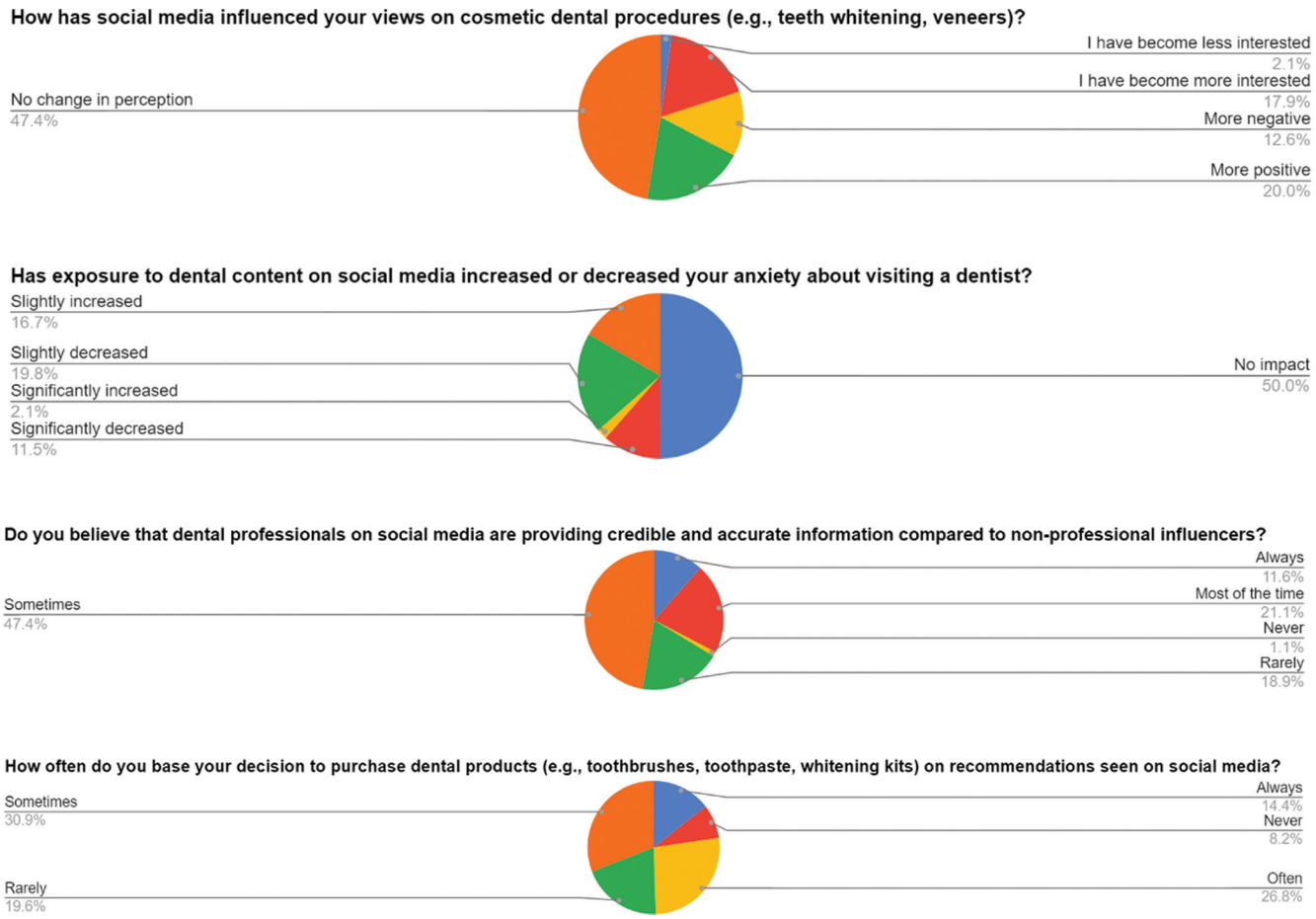


How aware are you of the potential risks associated with following dental advice from social media without consulting a licensed dentist?



What type of dental-related content on social media do you find most engaging? (Select all that apply)





provided by dental professionals online. The results are depicted in the following pie charts.

DISCUSSION

The survey aimed to explore the influence of social media on dental-related perceptions and behaviors, including trust, self-treatment, purchasing decisions, and content engagement. The findings reveal a complex landscape of social media's impact on dental health, highlighting both its potential benefits and limitations.[10] A significant portion of respondents reported encountering dental-related content, with 32% seeing it monthly and 16% daily, which underscores the prevalence of dental posts on social media. However, the lower frequency of engagement for many, with only 20% encountering such content weekly, suggests that while dental information is widespread, it does not consistently reach all users.

When it comes to trust in dental information from social media, opinions were highly varied. While 31% of respondents either completely or somewhat trust the dental information they encounter online, a notable 48% remained neutral, and 15% expressed disbelief. This variation in trust highlights a critical issue-social media's ability to disseminate dental information is substantial, but its credibility is frequently questioned.[11,12] This underscores the need for better vetting and verification processes to ensure that trustworthy information reaches audiences.

Social media's influence on seeking dental care is similarly mixed. Although 19% of respondents were motivated to seek professional care after encountering dental-related posts, a significant 44% considered it but did not follow through, and 31% were unaffected. This demonstrates that while social media can inspire interest in dental care, it often does not lead to tangible behavioral change, possibly due to barriers such as cost, accessibility, or skepticism and awareness of the significance of maintaining good oral health. On the other hand, 44% of respondents reported attempting self-treatment based on advice from social media. While this shows proactive engagement with their dental health, it also raises concerns about the risks of following inaccurate or misleading information. Interestingly, 31% considered self-treatment but did not proceed, reflecting a cautious approach among some users who recognize the potential dangers of unverified online advice.[13,14]

In terms of awareness of risks, 29% of respondents were at least somewhat aware of the potential dangers of following social media dental advice without consulting a licensed professional, while 16% were very aware.[15] However, 16% remained neutral, and 5% were completely unaware of these risks, indicating a need for enhanced educational efforts to improve public understanding of the hazards associated with self-treatment.[16]

The types of dental-related content that respondents found most engaging included before-and-after treatment photos (20%), cosmetic dental procedures, (14%), and general dental health advice (14%). This preference for visually-driven, procedural content suggests that these types of posts resonate most with social media users. Conversely, content related to at-home teeth whitening and DIY dental tips generated relatively lower engagement (11%), which could inform content creators to focus more on the types of posts that captivate audiences and reevaluate less popular content.[17-19]

The influence of social media on views about cosmetic procedures was also varied. While 19% of respondents reported becoming more interested in cosmetic dental procedures and 17% viewed them more positively, 12% reported a more negative perception, and 2% became less interested. However, 45% indicated that their views remained unchanged. These findings suggest that while social media can shift perceptions, it does not uniformly affect everyone, and existing attitudes play a significant role in how such content is received.

Regarding the impact on dental anxiety, 48% of respondents reported that social media had no effect on their anxiety levels. However, 19% experienced a slight decrease in anxiety, and 16% experienced a slight increase. Only a small percentage (2%) reported a significant increase in anxiety. This mixed impact indicates that while some individuals may find support and reassurance in social media content, others may find it exacerbates their fears, underscoring the importance of balanced and mindful content creation that addresses both the positive and negative aspects of dental health.

The credibility of dental information on social media, particularly when comparing professionals versus non-professionals, was also explored. Respondents showed a clear preference for information from dental professionals, with 31% trusting them most or all of the time. However, 45% believed professionals were only sometimes credible, reflecting lingering skepticism even toward qualified sources. This skepticism points to the need for greater transparency and consistency in the information shared by professionals online to improve public confidence.[20,21]

Finally, the influence of social media recommendations on purchasing decisions was notable, with 70% of respondents reporting that they are at least sometimes influenced by these recommendations. Specifically, 14% always, 26% often, and 30% sometimes base their purchasing decisions on social media advice, while 19% rarely and 8% never do. These statistics show that while social media has a considerable impact on consumer behavior, it does not sway everyone. Marketers and dental product companies can leverage this influence, but they must also acknowledge that a substantial portion of the population remains hesitant or unaffected by social media recommendations.[22,23]

In summary, this survey provides a comprehensive view of the multifaceted impact of social media on dental health. While social media is an influential platform for disseminating information, the varying levels of trust, awareness of risks, and engagement with content suggest that there are still challenges to be addressed. Efforts to improve the credibility of information, encourage professional consultation, and educate the public on the risks of self-treatment could help maximize the benefits of social media in promoting better dental health while minimizing its limitations.[24,25]

Limitations

- Sampling bias: Since the survey was distributed online, the sample may be biased toward individuals who are more active on social media
- Self-reported data: The accuracy of responses depends on the participant's self-reporting, which may be subject to recall bias or social desirability bias
- Generalizability: Results may not be representative of the general population, especially those who do not engage with social media.

CONCLUSION

The survey shows that while social media is an increasingly engaging source of dental information, trust of the general population in its content is not substantial. It shapes dental behaviors but also risks spreading misinformation. Both users and professionals must critically assess content to ensure accuracy and improve dental health outcomes.

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