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How social media can help dental professionals

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Abstract

Social media is computer mediated technology that allows people to share information with each other and it involves whole community rather than an individual. Everyone has busy routine and people primarily communicate with each other through electronic social media. As social media is so much integrated in daily routine of people, so it cannot be excluded from our professions. Therefore it is time to understand power and applications of social media. In this article we will discuss about social media which is new approach to reach patients by dental clinicians.

Keywords: Facebook, Google, dental tourism, Instagram.

Introduction

Social media is also called as “web 2.0” or social networking.^{1,2} Social media comprises a variety of internet applications that permit users to generate content and interact with each other. The interaction can occur in different forms, and some common types include:

- Sharing links of interesting content created by third parties.
- Profile update to public, regarding information on present activities and even location data.
- Sharing of photos, videos and posts.
- Giving complements and Comments on the photos, posts, profile updates videos and links shared by others.

According to General Dental Council UK, social media incorporates a number of internet based tools which allow people to make and share content. Social media includes e-communities, hosted image and video services, wikis, RSS feed, internet forums, web applications, folksonomies, blogs, social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, Pinterest and Instagram.^{3,4} Using these applications one can read news or any other type of content and also interact with other people regarding that news or other read content. In recent years, attitude of public towards social media has changed as social media became more popular and available.^{5,6,7} Millions of people are using social media sites such as twitter, instagram and YouTube. In year 2013, 44% adults were using social media sites, in year 2014, 52% and 61% in 2015. Thus every year the number of

users is increasing. There is also generational difference in social media users. Younger people are using social media sites more. 88% of 16-24 years old used social media daily while only 60% of 65 years old used social media in year 2015.^{8,9} In today's time, the computer technology shifts the communication and information collecting methods from paper to internet. Each individual found to be logged –in online and connected to other people as much as their daily schedules allow.¹⁰

Some common websites

Facebook: It is a popular, free social networking site that permits registered users to make profiles, photos and videos uploading, message sending and stay in contact with friends, family and colleagues. Nielsen group found that internet users in United States spend more of their time on Facebook than any other website.¹¹ Facebook has many groups for dental professionals, including, for dentists, by dentists and various pages for associations such as Faculty of General Dental Practice UK and British Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. In both of these, there is facility to sign up for membership which permit for networking, links for searching new materials, courses and forums.^{12,13}

Instagram: It has 500 million active users. It is primarily a mobile app which allows its users to capture photos or small videos and they can share these with others. Regarding dentistry, on instagram there is bloodytoothguy which is concentrated on oral surgery videos and dentistrymyworld which is related to educational videos and photographs of complicated multidisciplinary cases.^{14,15} Instagram is very fast and easiest ways for a clinician to get attention of patients.

Twitter: It is a microblog that permits users to post messages or tweet which can be read by other users. It has been proven that twitter is a large database where photos, videos and discussions are presented.^{15,16}

Pinterest: This pin board style website is becoming popular now days. 11 million people are using it, can be used on pc or on mobile as a mobile app. A study conducted by Guidry revealed that people spent more time on Pinterest as compared to other social media sites. In search tabs, it was found that dental and oral surgery was searched. Also various images related to dental instruments and patient education were accessed from Pinterest.^{15,17,18}

YouTube: it is another website used by people to view, post, share and comment on media content without any cost. Research has found that there was a broad database of educational videos on different topics, patient communication tools which are easily accessible to people at no cost.^{1,2,15}

LinkedIn: This social media is more concentrated on professional audience and self promotion. After subscribing, one can upload his/her personal profile for professional networking and employment opportunities, and it also identifies mutual friends or colleagues. It also provides contact details for colleagues and clinicians in same profession.^{15, 19,20}

Social media and dental profession

Social media networks provide amazing marketing option for dentists who are searching for different ways to promote their individual practices. Social media is integral part of most of patient's life, both younger and old age. This increasing popularity of social network inspires the growing businesses and professions including dental profession, to consider dominance of power of social media in marketing of professions. Zoomerang, an online survey firm conducted a study including 1180 small and medium businesses and 500 customers to know the influential impact of social media on marketing. This study revealed that: there is more visibility to a large number of people, personalized communication with clients and self-promotion.²¹

How social media can help dental practice

Building trust and relationships: Trust is most important way to convert new patients into lifelong patients. Provide high quality services to patients and join conversation on social media, listen to patients and answer their questions. All this help in developing a trustworthy relationship with patients and they will continue to choose your treatment over any other dentist.

Marketing of dental practice: It is most effective type of marketing for dental practice. All of us trust our friends and family members. Everyone prefers to get treatment from where other people known to him/her have been before. When patients see that some of their friends like a dental clinic page, then they will be much more interested in that clinic. This is the power of social influence.

Professional connections: Joining communities and making new connections with other expert dental professionals can give new ideas and information regarding dentistry. From social media connections, one can know about recent innovations in field and can learn them.²² New social media connections can lead to speaking opportunities, invitations for conferences and symposium, finding sponsors and organizers for community events.

Monthly e-newsletter: A clinician can stay in contact with patients by sending out a monthly e-newsletter containing dental tips, and new advancements in dentistry. These e-newsletters also act as reminder to patients for their appointments.

Managing patient reviews and testimonials: Reviews of previous patients are very much important as new patients do online search to select a dentist.

Online visibility: Most people use internet while searching for healthcare professionals. To select a dentist, people go to dentist's website and reference Google, facebook and check online reviews of patients treated by that dentist. Patient's decision making process is influenced by many factors such as dentist's website, photos and videos of dental clinic, photographs of treated patients, online reviews and relevant activity of dentist on social media.

Communication and strong relations: Social media provide another line of communication with patients. It gives greater feeling of availability of dentist to patients. Patients probably do not visit their dentist, if they do not have any dental problem. But they probably do check facebook, instagram or online website of dentist, showing their strengthened relationship to dentist. Therefore attention should be given to the way patients react to your social media activity to maximize its benefits.²³

Overcoming anxiety of patients: Communication with patients on social media can help in eliminating anxiety of patients related to dental treatment. It can be possible by giving tried and true tips to patients and make assure them that they will be safe and comfortable in the dental clinic. Uploading previous patient's photos before and after treatment helps new patients to see the outcome of treatment, and reinforce them to get treatment.

Dental tourism: Dental treatment in some countries such as Canada, Australia, and United states etc is very expensive, so many people are unable to get

dental treatment they need. The solution to their problem is dental tourism that is traveling to abroad for affordable dental care and various type of dental treatment procedures which are costly in their own country.

Through social media more and more people become familiar to dental tourism. People attend forums, visit blogs, websites and various search engines on dental tourism, collect information and see the views of other people who received such type of dental care.²⁴ Patients can search various hospitals online, see details of dentists, their qualification and where they trained and also can check reviews of natives of that place regarding that hospital.

Online consultations: Nowadays patients can consult health care professionals from different parts of world through online consultation system. After creating an account online, patient can confirm dental appointment and make payments. 'Patient Portal for Dental Patients' is new system, creates personal account of each patient which allows patients to access their dental records from anywhere in the world.²⁵

Guidelines regarding use of Social media

Dental professionals should behave professionally both online and offline. Dental professionals should never post inappropriate or harmful material which can destroy reputation of whole profession. Patient's consent is very much necessary when posting any patient related information on social media and patient identifiable information should not be shared via social media. Patient information should be anonymised. Communication with patients on social media must maintain appropriate professional boundaries as online discussion with patients may create legal complications and lawsuits, especially if unsuitable comments are made during any discussion. Always keep personal and professional networks separate. Any type of information posted on social media must be correct, evidence based and also respect copyright issues.^{26,27} Any activity of a dentist on social media must maintain confidence of patients in dentist and dental profession.²⁸

A correct and effective social media marketing strategy can make amazing change in dental practice and it is also economical if used under proper guidelines. In today's digital world even patients expect their dentist to be on social media, so if you are not, you are missing out opportunities to grow in your field. Therefore dental professionals who have not yet

used social media must realize the power of social media for building relationships, getting information regarding latest developments in dentistry and also good tool for enhancing their practice. Framing a strong social media reputation does not happen overnight, yet getting started is as easy as posting one photo or two.

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