



Original Research Article

# Digital marketing and social media in today's orthodontic practice — Bridging the gap

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim:** To assess and determine the various aspects of the interrelationship between social and digital media and orthodontics from the patient's as well as orthodontist's perspective.

**Objectives:** Determining where the patient looks for Orthodontist's information online and where the orthodontist is posting or promoting their practice 2. Differentiating between patient interests on web page/social media and orthodontic posts 3. Comfort level of patients to visit an orthodontist based on digital media popularity/reviews

**Materials and Methods:** In our 2-part survey, 2 separate google forms were created to assess the various aspects of practice promotion and sent to Orthodontists and patients separately. Demographic data and informed consent was taken.

The survey comprises of two groups: A) Orthodontists (212 participants) B) Patients (200 participants)

**Results:** From the orthodontist's perspective, patients visit them based on internet popularity. They promote their practice using their own website which is available on Google. Social media is used commonly to promote themselves by posting photos of patients and clinic. Facebook was most used. Orthodontists believe that 15-20% visit them based on internet popularity.

From the patients perspective, they choose orthodontists based on popularity on internet with google search being the most used. They review orthodontists on social media on popular sites such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter.

**Conclusion:** Word of mouth referrals was the most preferred old school method of finding orthodontists based on experience. With vast improvement in digital technology, youngsters prefer to review orthodontists based on digital media reviews as well. The largest discrepancy found between social media sites used by the patients/ parents and orthodontists was with Facebook and Instagram. This opportunity is being vastly ignored by most orthodontic practices and should be considered as a potential marketing tool for current and prospective patients.

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## 1. Introduction

The introduction of social media has revolutionized the way people interact through the social web.<sup>1</sup> Social media is defined as online technologies and practices that people use to share opinions, experiences and perspectives with each

other.<sup>2</sup> Although digital and social media networks were originally created for personal use, they are now effectively used by businesses of all sizes to promote their products or services and to communicate with current and prospective consumers.<sup>3</sup> Compared with traditional advertising, social media marketing is an interactive, cost-effective and more efficient solution for promoting services and products,

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especially because more customers are spending time online. The benefits of digital marketing are currently seen in the field of health care, and social media a major tactic in dental marketing. Social media marketing is a cost-effective means to reach hundreds of potential new patients who seek a practitioner's expertise and services.<sup>4-6</sup> Social and digital media is also emerging as an important and powerful reputation management tool.

## 2. Aims

To assess and determine the various aspects of the interrelationship between social and digital media and orthodontics from the patient's perspective as well as orthodontists' perspective.

## 3. Materials and Methods

A google form was created to evaluate the various aspects of practice promotion, use and preferences of social and digital media. Another part of the questionnaire was made to assess the patient expectations as well as patient preference on social media and digital media to review orthodontists as well as their clinic before visiting them. The study comprises of approximately 400 subjects, 200 in each category. The patients were aged between 15 years and 40 years while the orthodontists had more than 2 years of clinical experience after post-graduation. An e-mail was sent out to all orthodontists who were registered with Indian Orthodontic Society and was sent to each office that agreed to participate. The surveys were distributed by each office to their patients and parents of patients. The participants could take the survey at any convenient time.

The following were the 2 categories with 200 participants each:

1. Part A: Questionnaire to Orthodontists
2. Part B: Questionnaire to Patients

The survey included a definition of social media and digital media along with many examples of social media websites. Demographic information was gathered for all participants, and the survey consisted of questions related to the participant's usage habits and perceptions of social media usage in the orthodontic practice. For example, patients/parents were asked, "Do you use social media," and orthodontists were asked, "Do you use social media as a marketing tool in your practice."

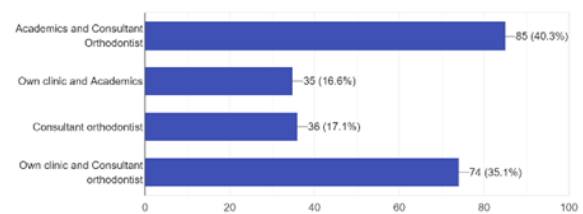
### 3.1. Data collection

For data collection, the questionnaire link was distributed to 200 patients randomly via social media as well as another questionnaire was sent to all India Orthodontic WhatsApp groups and Orthodontists were requested to fill out the questionnaire.

## 4. Results

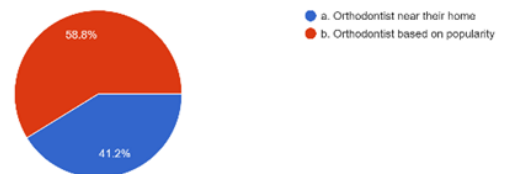
A total of 200 orthodontists and 200 patients/parents from private practices responded to surveys. Results from the Orthodontists' survey showed 40.3% of the orthodontists who took the survey were into Academics as well as a consultant orthodontist, 16.6% were into academics+ have their own private practice, 17.1% were consultant orthodontists and 35.1% were consultant orthodontists along with their own private practice as shown in graph 1.58. 8% of the orthodontists believe that patients prefer orthodontists based on popularity as seen in Graph 2.

1. How would you like to describe your area of work?  
211 responses



Graph 1: Depicts the area of work of orthodontist

2. Which one do you think the patients prefer?  
211 responses



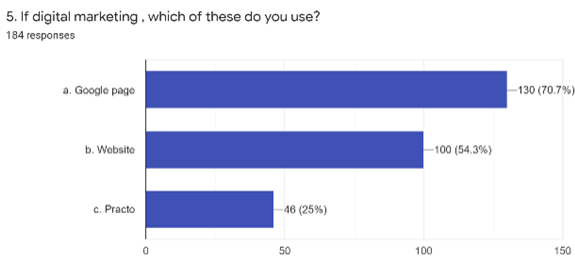
Graph 2: Depicts the preference of orthodontists

A whopping 81.4% of the orthodontic population believe that word of mouth is the best marketing strategy, followed by digital marketing/ social media, posters and promotional messages as shown in Graph 3. In case of digital marketing, Google page was the most used followed by own website and Practo as seen in Graph 4. Looking into the social media, 83.2% of Orthodontists used social media for practice promotion- WhatsApp being the most popular with 55.5%, followed by Facebook at 50.7%, Instagram at 41.7% and twitter at 3.3% as depicted in Graphs 5 and 6.

49.7% of the Orthodontists believe that 1-15% of their patients visits them based on digital / social media presence. 75.8% of the Orthodontists believe that patients prefer to see patient reviews and experience on social media. Overall, 82.9% of the Orthodontists consider Digital media as a boon. Results from the patient questionnaire showed that 60% of patients prefer word of mouth referrals more



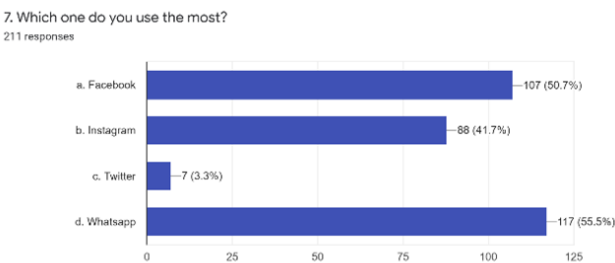
Graph 3: Marketing strategies



Graph 4: Preferred form of digital marketing

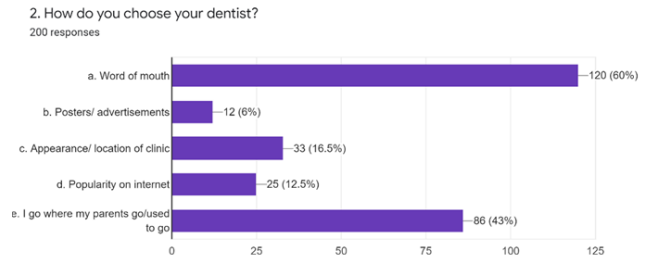


Graph 5: Social media usage orthodontist



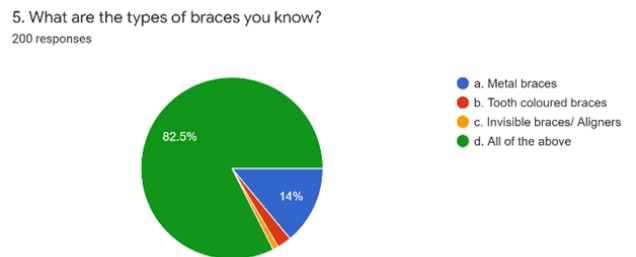
Graph 6: Preferred social media platform for by orthodontists

reliable, followed by 43% who visit the same orthodontist as their parents, 16.5% look for the appearance and location of clinic, 12.5% look for popularity on the internet and 6% look at posters/ advertisements as seen in Graph 7.



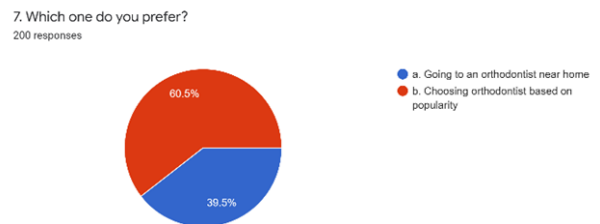
Graph 7: Preference of patients to choose an orthodontist

The survey revealed that 82.5% of the patients are aware of all types of braces and their approximate treatment cost as depicted in Graph 8.



Graph 8: Depicts the knowledge of patients about different types of braces

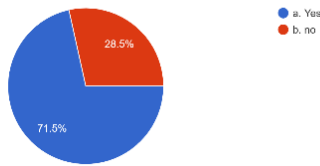
60.5% of patients choose orthodontists based on popularity as seen in graph 9. 71.5% of all patients search the internet about treatment before getting a particular type of treatment. 58% of them check all kinds of digital and social media for reviews of Orthodontist.



Graph 9: Depiction of preference

64.5% of the patients used google page to check reviews, 23% use the clinic website, 12.5% use Practo as seen in Graph 11. Coming to social media, 42.2% of the patient

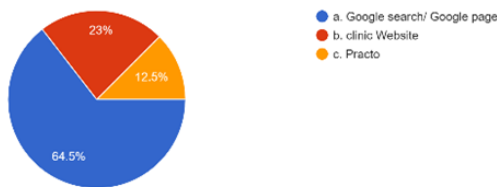
8. Do you search the internet about treatment before getting it done?  
200 responses



Graph 10: % of patients searching the choose Orthodontist internet before getting treatment done

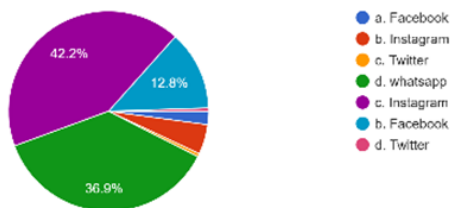
population used Instagram the most, 36.9% trust social media, 12.8% use Facebook. 54% of the patients prefer orthodontists who are popular on digital media as seen in Graph 12. On social and digital media 91.9% of the patients also prefer to see patient reviews and experiences with the Orthodontist, followed by photos of clinic.

10. Do you use any of the below options to search about an orthodontist?  
200 responses



Graph 11: Popularity of digital platforms

12. If Social media, which one do you use the most?  
187 responses



Graph 12: Popularity of social media

## 5. Discussion

In the recent years, digital media has taken a significant role in health care as reported in numerous studies. Digital marketing in dentistry is nothing but practice promotion to connect with potential patients using the internet and other forms of digital communication. As it is a known fact, digital marketing has been used extensively by dentists

and orthodontists to boost their clinical practice. The results of our study suggest that 62.9% of the orthodontists use digital marketing to promote practice. 70.7% Orthodontists use Google page as their most common form of digital promotion, followed by their own clinic website (54.3%) and Practo (25%). Patients are at power when it comes to the same as 58.8% of patients consider google page as the most reliable source of information followed by Practo reviews at 17.5%. The above data suggests that orthodontists and patients are at power when it comes to putting out the information of their clinical practice/getting information about orthodontists respectively, as the platform both are looking at is the same (for example, google page).

A recent report found that 73% of online adults use social networking sites and that 79% of female adults use social media compared with 69% of male adults. The authors also found that 89% of adults between 18- and 29-years old use social media and that usage decreased steadily with age.<sup>7</sup> The results from our study are consistent with these findings, as they indicated that most patients/parents and orthodontists used social media. Marketing research has revealed that Facebook is the most popular site as two-thirds of online adults say that they are Facebook users.<sup>8</sup> The results from our study support similar trends, as WhatsApp and Facebook were the most used social media platform among orthodontists and Instagram among patients/parents. The largest discrepancy found between social media sites used by the patients/ parents and orthodontists was for Facebook and Instagram. This is an opportunity being ignored by most orthodontic practices and should be considered as a potential marketing tool for current and prospective patients.

Researchers in the dental field suggest that dental practices will not survive without a strong online presence.<sup>4-6</sup> The results of our study support these suggestions as they showed that most orthodontists use social media sites and a practice website to market to their prospective patients. Orthodontists who used social media and a practice website had newer patient starts per year than those who did not. A previous study found a correlation between a social media presence and new patient visits in hospitals.<sup>9</sup> Keim et al.<sup>10</sup> found that social media use in an orthodontic practice was effective as a practice-building method.<sup>10</sup> The results may also be interpreted to mean that the more successful practices are also more active on social media and other marketing techniques. Social media has proven to be an important reputation management tool.<sup>11</sup> As documented in previous studies, the choice of an orthodontist is largely based on his or her reputation.<sup>12</sup>

Patients and orthodontists were at power when it came to interests of what was being put out on clinic websites social media as majority of both groups believed that patient reviews and experiences were most important followed by clinic photos. The results of this study showed that

social media was used by most of patients/parents and orthodontists surveyed and that social media may be an effective marketing tool in an orthodontic practice.

## 6. Conclusion

Most orthodontists and patients/parents used digital and social media. This may be an effective marketing and communication tool in an orthodontic practice to enhance patient inflow. From the orthodontist perspective, patients visit them based on internet popularity. They promote their practice using own website which is available on Google. Social media is used commonly to promote themselves by posting photos of patients and clinic, WhatsApp and Facebook were the most used. Orthodontists believe that 15-20% visit them based on internet popularity.

As per the patient perspective, they choose orthodontists based on popularity on internet with google search being the most used. They review orthodontists on social media, most popular among them being Instagram followed by WhatsApp groups, Facebook. In all age groups patients visited a dentist only if a problem arises and mostly by word of mouth referrals. The treatment cost as well plays a vital role in choosing an orthodontist as they are aware of all types of braces and their respective costs. The largest discrepancy found between social media sites used by the patients/ parents and orthodontists was for Facebook and Instagram. This is an opportunity being ignored by most orthodontic practices and should be considered as a potential marketing tool for current and prospective patients.

## 7. Source of Funding

None.

## 8. Conflict of Interest

None.

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