



Instagram Dentistry: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly!

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Abstract

Social media, particularly Instagram, plays an integral role in contemporary dentistry. It has significantly transformed the dental field by facilitating visual communication, marketing strategies, peer networking, patient education, and clinical training. However, significant risks exist, including violations of patient confidentiality, dissemination of inaccurate dental information, potential promotion of unnecessary cosmetic dental procedures, and increased psychological stress among practitioners due to unrealistic treatment expectations. Additionally, issues such as plagiarism of clinical content further compromise professional integrity. To address these challenges, establishing a dental-specific regulatory body to monitor Instagram content is recommended, ensuring accuracy, ethical standards, and safeguarding the interests of both dental professionals and patients.

Keywords: Social media, Dentists, Health communication, Patient harm

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In this age of technology, as the number of internet users has increased over the past few years (1), social media has turned into an inseparable part of people's lives. With around 5 billion users worldwide in 2022, social media are defined as means of communication that allow cohorts with similar interests to create, like, share, and comment on user-generated contents (2–4). Among the top 5 most popular social media platforms, Instagram (IG) had approximately a billion monthly users globally in 2020, most of whom were younger than 34 years of age (3).

In the dental field, social media has become a cornerstone to pass on information to laypeople as well as professionals (3). Since dentistry is a visual-based field, the popularity of IG in this area is rapidly-growing due to its many visual features. These key attributes make IG an ideal platform for digital marketing and advertising in dentistry (5). In addition to that, it can also be used for networking and to professionally collaborate with peers. What is more, some even use IG as a method of dental training, as well as patient education and health promotion (2). When considering all of its advantages, one must not be blinded by its glory and neglect the many dangers that IG can have regarding dentistry. Among the most important concerns are breaching the patient confidentiality and legal issues (2,6). In this regard, the General Dental Council of the United Kingdom has given a guideline on social media that supervises the online activities of its members (2). It has been reported that public display of patients' images has negative impacts on their lives, such as, bad publicity, social stigmatization, and emotional/psychological damage (1); which can in turn, limit the patients' access to oral health care services, cause dentists to

avoid providing care for them, and contribute to poor oral health (7).

Another problem is that due to the lack of a peer review process, the quality and validity of the presented contents are hardly regulated. It is estimated that among the dental contents presented on IG, only 17% contain accurate information. As a result, incomplete, inaccurate, and misleading information can spread among the public audience that can bring about predicaments such as drug overdose or unneeded cosmetic dental procedures (5,6,8). Additionally, the edited enhanced IG contents that are focused on the appearance have been shown to affect the levels of satisfaction (or rather dissatisfaction) individuals have with their dentofacial appearance and increase the public desire to undergo cosmetic dental treatments (9). Of note these procedures have been linked to some adverse sequels such as, but not limited to, pain, pulpal devitalization, dental abscess, and sepsis (10). Much to one's dismay, some dentists (or those pretending to be one) may plagiarize the work of their peers. Furthermore, because digital images and videos can be easily edited and manipulated to cover the imperfections, IG posts can negatively impact the attitude of dentists toward their own work leading to unhealthy levels of perfectionism and anxiety (5). This much sham given freely to public can pose a threat for the audience whether they be professional oral health providers or non-experts. Because oral (and dental) health, is a critical subject, and due to the reasons mentioned above, it is suggested that there be a supervisory authority which regulates and controls the contents of oral-health-related IG accounts and hashtags.

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