



INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON INCREASED ALIGNER USAGE

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ABSTRACT

Social media in today's time, has become the primary source for consumption of knowledge in the form of content. It has proven to be a powerful tool for promoting and amplifying the reach of a number of products and services provided by various companies and brands. This trend has steadily made its way into the healthcare industry.

This correlates to recent rise in the clear aligners industry, their commercialization and widespread advertising they put forward on various platforms. This article aims to highlight the relationship between the growth of the aligner industry and the increased display of these products on social media platforms.

KEYWORDS: Aligners, Dentistry, Orthodontics, social media

INTRODUCTION

Social media has paved a new way for virtual interactions among people. It can be described as an online platform where people can share their opinions and experiences.¹

These websites and social platforms create opportunities for people to be in constant contact with their family and friends. As a result, the most widely known social media platforms, Facebook, has grown into a community of more than 1 billion users globally since its introduction in 2004.²

However, in recent times businesses and companies have come to realize the power and reach of social media and have effectively turned it into a marketplace to advertise their products and services and to interact with potential and current customers. Over

the years, people have started spending more time shopping online, thus making social media an effective, cost efficient and more accessible means for gaining popularity with a wide global audience.³

In the healthcare scenario, majority of young patients have started relying on social interactions, ratings and reviews they see online before trusting newer products and technologies.⁴ This has had a significant impact on the clear aligner market that has been on a rise in the recent years. Big brand names in the aligner industry have started heavily advertising on social media, using celebrities and influencers to promote their products and highlight their benefits. However, the direct-to-consumer approach most of these brands follow can have potential consequences that go unnoticed.

DISCUSSION

Invisalign was invented by Zia Chishti who at the time, was undergoing orthodontic treatment and tried a set of thermoplastic retainers; she then developed Align Technology in partnership with Kelsey Wirth in the year 1997. The sales for the seemingly revolutionary product began in 1999 after its FDA approval in 1998.⁵ Boyd published the first case report of a space closure case for mild anterior crowding by Invisalign in 2000.⁶

Since then, the aligner market had been on a very steady but slow rise, gaining popularity over the years. However, in the recent times, the visibility and knowledge regarding the appliance has increased exponentially among the masses, a logical reasoning for which can be the heavy advertising and presence on social media of big brand names in the aligners industry. The aligner giant, Invisalign has treated over 14 million patients till date.⁷

Advertising on different social media platforms, targets different age groups, which the companies use to their advantage to design specified promotional material. Instagram and Snapchat, two major platforms are found to be the most popular among patients that they reported use to search and review information about orthodontic procedures including aligner treatment. Both platforms have a similar format where in the user uploads short videos, mostly less than 1 minute in duration, which highlight benefits of the product and capture the audience.⁸

However, with so many brands competing with the same product, the focus of these companies is supposedly always to increase sales and demand of their product, which can lead to ethical challenges in the field of marketing for these appliances to the layperson. The advertisements, most of the times, do not mention the limitations or shortcoming of their product, and also fail to focus on the necessity of a treatment plan, that needs to be individually designed by a trained professional dental practitioner. They rely heavily on celebrity influence and the reach of big influencers to promote their products and fall short on educating the audience properly. The younger generation becomes fixated on the aesthetic component of the treatment as that is all they see highlighted on these platforms.

Thus, it becomes a necessity to provide education on the functional and structural stability component of orthodontic treatment that is possible only through trained personnel.

CONCLUSION

Social media and aligners are both evidently here to stay and are a part of digitalization and advancements in the field of dentistry that can prove to be advantageous to both the patients and the dental practitioners when used judiciously. Guidelines and rules are a necessity for the ethical implications these can bring forward. Nonetheless, it becomes the responsibility of the dentists to guide everyone around to the best of their abilities and to themselves not fall prey to the pompous and show of the social media world. This will aid in bringing forth the best possible

outcomes for all parties involved.

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