



Applications of Social Media to Indian Orthodontic Scenario

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ABSTRACT

The buzzword today is 'social media'. The growth of social media has enveloped the healthcare sector as well, and an online presence has today become mandatory for growth of an individual and the profession as well. This article therefore defines, classifies and explains social media, its importance, trends and use in our country. The article further explains the value and applications of the social media to the orthodontists and to the Indian Orthodontic Society at large. It explains how the orthodontic practitioners and the Indian Orthodontic Society today use social media and the effects it has on the orthodontic profession and on the orthodontic scenario in the country. It also attempts to understand the trends and etiquettes for using the social media as professionals and the advantages and risks it carries with it.

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INTRODUCTION

The present society is steadily being converted into an 'e-society'. In this social media plays a pivotal role and has a pervasive, rapidly evolving and an ever increasing effect in the healthcare landscape as well. Being a part of the orthodontic profession, orthodontists are influenced and affected by the transforming faces of this social media and are expected to be a part of this network. Social media is so much integrated in our daily routine that there is no question of excluding it out from our profession—be it the private practice or the functioning of the society. Hence, the time has come to step up and have an in depth understanding of the social media, its power and its applications.

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What is Social Media?

Social media has various definitions, the simplest one being—'content of the people, for the people put up by the people.' A more authentic explanation would be to say—Social media refers to interaction among people in which they create, share and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.¹ It is a group of internet based applications that are build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow creation and exchange of user generated content.²

Social media is not just an extension of a website but it is an interaction and discussion and not just online presence. Two or three decades ago, the Internet was basically a collection of information which could be assessed to get the required information. The essential change that became a possibility after the advent of Web 2.0 is the advent of variety of web applications which facilitated collaboration between users. These interactions can be in the form of reviews, posts, content sharing, etc.

Power of Social Media

The true power of a network is never the original device, but could be possible with the use of the network. With the addition of each new member the overall value of the network increases significantly. Metcalfe's law explains this concept very well.³ The underlying concept is that the value increases in proportion to the square of each new member. So, the value of network with one person is 0, a network with five people increases its value to 10, and a network with seven people has a value of 21. Even in these small numbers you can see significant growth. Hence in a nutshell, this is why the social media and the digital tools providing them become powerful tools of communication, in all industries. The healthcare service industry, is no exception!

But, this tool sometimes is believed to be like a 'double-edged sword'. Some doctors believe that healthcare providers must have 'online professionalism' which encompasses avoidance of negative online behavior as they may have unintended negative consequences for us and our profession at large.⁴ Some also warn us regarding the legal and medicolegal risks of the rampant use of popular social media sites like the Facebook and Twitter.⁵ All in all one must comprehend the basics of using the social media as a professional.

Today not only most of the orthodontists are rampantly using popular social media tools for professional use, but the Indian Orthodontic Society also uses it to communicate with its life members. But as a society, there are no professional guidelines for the use or the content management on the social media pages. Hence, it is necessary to be aware of all the risks and advantages involved, of all the applications it has and as to how maximum benefit can be obtained, with due respect to uphold the integrity of the profession.

Social Media Usage, Statistics and Trends in India

According to media reports the Indian organizations, including the healthcare sector, use social media much more than the global average and their counterparts in emerging economies.⁶ An extremely insightful study was conducted by The Nielsen Company in collaboration with AbsolutData to understand the social media trends and statistics for the Indian users.^{7,8} Some of the key highlights of the study are as follows:

- Nearly 30 million Indians are members of the online social networking sites.
- About two thirds of these spend time on social networking sites daily.
- Just 8% spend between an hour and 3 hours on personal email, 20% spend between an hour and three hours on social media sites.
- The study estimated that over the next 6 months, forty five thousand online users intend to join the social networking sites each day.
- A small but growing number claim to follow brands on these platforms.
- Nearly 40 million (67% of online Indian web users) Indians are using online reviews to inform purchase decisions.
- Sixty percent Indians who are social media users are open to being approached by brands.

Hence, the time has come to become aware and use the various applications of social media to empower our profession.

Classification of Social Media

Using the set theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social process (self presentation, self disclosure), six different types of social media can be classified as follows:²

- Collaborative projects, e.g. Wikipedia
- Blogs and microblogs, e.g. Twitter

- Social news networking sites, e.g. Digg, Leakernet
- Content communities, e.g. YouTube, Dailymotion
- Social networking sites, e.g. Facebook
- Virtual game worlds, e.g. World of Warcraft
- Virtual social worlds, e.g. Second Life

However, the demarcation between various types has been diluted. For example Twitter is considered as a combination of broadcasting service and social network, hence can be classified as a new type, i.e. 'social broadcasting technology'.^{9,10}

Mobile Social Media

It is the social media used on mobile phones. Mobile social media applications can be differentiated among following types:¹¹

- Space-timers (location and time sensitive) e.g. Facebook places.
- Space-locators (only location sensitive), e.g. Yelp, Qype.
- Quick-timers (only time sensitive), e.g. posting Facebook status updates.
- Slow-timers (neither location, nor time sensitive) e.g. watching YouTube video or reading a Wikipedia entry.

Applications to Orthodontics

Apart from the very obvious applications of the social media, i.e. maintaining contact with one another, sending wishes on special occasions, virtual celebrations of festivals, etc. following are some of the more evolved applications of social media:

Marketing

This is the most common use of the social media, as done by individuals, groups and companies. This is an era of 'inbound marketing', focussing on providing any and all information to the buyers who want it. As developing an online presence requires time and effort, so one should use those social media tools which give maximum returns to the invested time. Jorgensen has aptly listed the five social media sites and the methods to use them to increase ones practice.¹²

Marketing on such social media portals are done not only in regards to private practice enhancement but also can be done by orthodontic companies, to list their products, give lucrative offers to orthodontists, introduce new range of products, etc. Such marketing methods can also be adopted by groups of corporate dental clinics or chain of orthodontic clinics to increase their 'brand value'. All these can be accomplished by using most of the above mentioned type of social media, from creating a Facebook page of one's clinic or company to creating a personalized mobile application

suited the need of individual private practice. Literature is full of citations in regards to use of social media as a tool for marketing.¹³⁻¹⁶

The Indian Orthodontic Society (IOS) also has its presence on the social media platform by means of a closed community on Facebook. The present Hon Secretary of the society is the moderator of the community and allows all the life members of the society to be a part of the community.¹⁷

Creation of Public Awareness

Public awareness creation regarding orthodontics and orthodontists is one of the primary agendas of the Indian Orthodontic Society for the year 2013 to 2014.¹⁸ The society is concentrating all its efforts in a bid to create awareness regarding the science, the possibilities in the realm of the subject and the service providers. It is leaving no page unturned for spreading the 'brand' of orthodontics to the common man, who is the end user of orthodontic services. This includes good and clever use of social media as well. The IOS also plans to launch a website called 'braces specialists', solely for the purpose of creation of public awareness.¹⁹ The IOS also has posters regarding creation of public awareness on its website, which can be downloaded and put up by its members on their respective social media pages or blogs and in their clinics as well.

One of the most effective methods of creating public awareness is by using the audiovisual method, *viz* use of patient education videos. An ideal example of this is the channel created on YouTube called 'Braces Takes U Places'.²⁰ Three patient education videos are created and uploaded on this channel per week. These videos cover a broad area on all the aspects of orthodontics, its importance and the value of an orthodontist, who is the caregiver and service provider. These videos are an exemplary attempt to answer the most commonly asked questions by patients and the most common doubts peaking up in the minds of a common man, who is not necessarily an orthodontic patient, regarding orthodontics. All the members of IOS, student and life members are only expected to share these videos so that they can further be seen by a wide spectrum of people on Facebook and YouTube. Apart from this channel, there are several other channels owned by private companies which have patient education videos, along with videos of various product ranges available in orthodontics. All these videos are made so that they are easily understood by an orthodontic patient, who then comprehends about the treatment plan, the appliance used and the expectation of results.

Creation of Professional Awareness

The most important and valuable thing for an orthodontist, as a professional, is to have knowledge about the updates

in the field of orthodontics, about how orthodontics is being practiced in other parts of the country, about the latest developments in the subject. An awareness regarding all these factors affects the way orthodontics is practised and encourages better quality of orthodontic care to the patients. Most important and a stupendous role in this regard, is played by the IOS via its Facebook community.¹⁷ An IOS life member who is a part of this closed group gets updates regarding all that is happening in orthodontics in this country, which is being uploaded. The following is the gist of the effects of the social media, mainly the IOS Facebook page, on Indian orthodontics, as of today.

Updates on latest developments: The ease of accessibility of social media has made it extremely easy for all the orthodontists to have an update about all the essential things and the latest developments in orthodontics and in IOS.

For example: The declaration of annual awards, notifications regarding conferences, CDE programs, and declaration of important and landmark events like the release of IOS postal stamp, blacklisting of a popular aligner company, etc.

Proclamation of research work: Official social media pages or blogs can be used for proclamation of work either of the self or of any journal. This may include putting up of abstracts of one's own articles to uploading an index page of a journal. Easy sharing and viewing of research papers, clinical cases and innovations can be facilitated via the social media.

There are sometimes fallouts in this though. Recently on the IOS Facebook page, work of a professor and head of department in a DCI recognized postgraduate institute was disgraced as work of a nonorthodontist quack. He had done an innovation by using the commonly available 'safety pin' to hold the band whilst contouring it to prevent it from slipping and being aspirated.²¹ It was only after the author himself came forward and gave an authentication of his work and identity on the same Facebook page, that the misconception (of this innovation being done by a nonorthodontist) was scrapped.

Clinical discussions and problem solving: There are various forums and groups created across the social media for this purpose. The main purpose is 'idea-sharing' and 'idea-generation' from a pool of equally qualified professionals. Here records of patients are shared and solutions for planning and discussions of treatment are sought. But the question of ethical, medicolegal and cyber law considerations in sharing patients' personal information, albeit in closed groups, is yet open to debate.

Awareness against 'short-term orthodontic courses': Due to the prevalent use of social media, more and more of the

courses who claim to teach orthodontics in a 'short term', usually over a few weekends, have come to light. Some of these courses even claim to teach orthodontics 'online'! Exposure of such courses is important so that the entire orthodontic society can unite and fight a crusade against such courses, which threaten the dignity of the profession. Some of these 'academies' conducting such courses, claim to have some members of the IOS on their 'faculty' board. In some instances, some of these members later refuse the claim to be conducting such courses via the social media.

Platform for opinions and debates: Opinions are cited and topics of common and greater interests are debated via blogs, microblogs and posts. To cite a few examples about the topics debated:

- Regarding online voting for electing the executive committee members of the IOS.
- Regarding the right to not vote in the IOS elections.
- Regarding the conduction of online debate between the Presidential candidates in the IOS.
- Regarding if orthodontic CDE programs not affiliated to the IOS can be endorsed on its page.
- If a nonorthodontist dentist who is in practice of orthodontics can do justice to his orthodontic patients.

Social Media Etiquettes

Social networks are like a notice board, the content you put there can be seen by a lot of people so it is important to take that into consideration when writing your thoughts on certain subject matter.

On an online social network any comment you post is clearly linked to you and your profile. If you are using social networks, you need to take care what you put up there and be mindful of other people's feelings. In law, the terms that relate to are 'libel' and 'defamation'. Libel is defined as 'defamation by written or printed words, pictures, or in any form other than by spoken words or gestures'. Defamation law was created to protect individuals or organizations from unwarranted, mistaken or untruthful attacks on their reputation.²²

Hence, some things should be remembered before posting anything on individual accounts or as a professional on the page of society or when taking part in a debate or discussion on social media:²³

- The printed word, even if it is written and distributed via the Internet, is 'discoverable', meaning it can be retrieved and used as evidence in lawsuits.
- Do not assume that you can post any opinion you want citing 'freedom of speech'. More and more headlines are reporting defamation suits filed as the result of those postings.

- Even if you are posting to your personal web sites, MySpace, Facebook and Twitter accounts; remember that nothing is really personal on the Internet. People have a way of accessing the information, forwarding, copying and pasting and possibly distorting what you have written.
- Remember that once a thought, idea, claim, or suggestion has been distributed via social media, it takes on a life of its own. Think twice when writing anything. Ask yourself if you would want your comments to appear on the front page of the morning paper or as a lead item on the television news.

CONCLUSION

In view of the wide and varied aspects of the social media, more of which are only to be explored and utilized. Discussed above are only some of the important and widely used applications of social media and the effects that it is having today on Indian orthodontics. A very broad classification of such applications is given above. One should fine tune and learn all the intricacies of each aspect of the social media that one intends to use. The study of this social media science, urges one to have his presence in this social media network, as an individual, as a group or company, as a society and make maximum use of this network.

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