

“Evaluating the Effect of Social Media on Oral Health Knowledge and Practices in Young Adults.”

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ABSTRACT

Objective : To assess the influence of social media on oral health knowledge, attitudes, and practices among young adults. It involves completing a short questionnaire .

Materials and Methods: A population based cross-sectional study was conducted among 201 young adults aged 18-35 years using a structured, self-administered online questionnaire. Data regarding social media usage, exposure to oral health content, perceived credibility of information sources, and oral hygiene practices were collected. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to assess associations.

Results: Most participants were aged 31-35 years(36.8%) with nearly equal gender distribution. A majority (88.1%) were exposed to oral health content on social media. Social media influenced oral hygiene practices in 70.6% of participants. About 65.7% practiced twice-daily brushing and 70.6% had visited a dentist in the past year. Interest in verified professional oral health content was expressed by 65.2% of respondents.

Conclusion : Social media plays a significant role in shaping oral health knowledge and practices among young adults. Although it contributes to improvement in oral health awareness and positive behavioural changes, the need for reliable, evidence-based professional guidance is crucial to avoid misinformation.

INTRODUCTION

Oral health is an integral constituent of general health and plays an important role in quality of life.⁵Poor oral hygiene often leads to dental caries, periodontal disease, and systemic health complications.⁵Conventionally, oral health education was imparted by dental professionals; however, the emergence of social media has transformed the way health information is accessed and shared.¹With millions of users engaging with platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Youtube etc, social media holds the power to shape perceptions and behaviours of our life including aspects related to dental care.^{1,2}

These platforms host a wide range of oral health content, including preventive measures, cosmetic dentistry trends, home remedies, and product promotions.³ Although such information is easily accessible, concerns remain regarding its credibility and scientific validity.^{4,6}

Understanding the influence of social media on oral health knowledge and practices is essential for guiding public health strategies and encouraging professional engagement online.^{5,7}Hence, this study was conducted to evaluate the effect of social media on oral health knowledge and practices among young adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted among young adults aged 18- 35 years. The participants in the study were chosen based on convenience. The study population consisted of 201 young adults, who consented to participate. The participants were provided a questionnaire which was circulated online through google forms. The Eligible individuals were given a clear explanation of the study's purpose, and any questions they had about the research were addressed. They were assured that their participation was completely voluntary, their answers would remain anonymous. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Krishna Vishwa Vidyapeeth, Karad. A structured, pretested, and validated closed-ended questionnaire was used as the primary tool for data collection. The questionnaire was specifically designed to address the knowledge gap by investigating the role of social media as a communication

channel for oral health promotion among young adults. Assistance was provided by the investigator when required to ensure that participants clearly understood the questions. The first section of the questionnaire focused on collecting sociodemographic information from each participant. This included the participant’s age, education level, gender, and their occupation. These variables were collected to provide a comprehensive profile of each participant and to facilitate the analysis of their possible influence on oral health awareness. The second section of the questionnaire focused on social media usage patterns and exposure to oral health-related content. This section assessed the frequency of social media use, commonly accessed platforms, exposure to oral health information, and whether participants followed dental professionals or oral health influencers online.

The final section of the questionnaire evaluated oral health knowledge, attitudes, and practices influenced by social media. Questions explored brushing frequency, dental visit history, perceived influence of social media on oral hygiene practices, trust in online oral health information, and interest in receiving content from verified dental professionals. The responses provided insight into how social media content translated into actual oral health behaviours and attitudes among young adults.

After completion of data collection, all responses were scanned for completeness and consistency. Only fully completed questionnaires were included in the analysis. The data were coded systematically and entered into Microsoft Excel for statistical processing. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyze the data, and results were expressed as frequencies and percentages. The findings were presented in tabular and graphical formats, including tables and pie charts, to facilitate clear interpretation.

RESULTS

A total of 201 responses were recorded and analyzed.

Table No.1. Age-wise distribution of participants

No.	Age group(years)	Frequency	Percentage
1.	18-21	37	18.4
2.	22-25	37	18.4
3.	26-30	50	24.9
4.	31-35	74	36.8

The majority of participants belonged to the 31-35 years age group, indicating higher participation of late young adults in the study. This age group is more likely to be active on social media and make independent health-related decisions. The inclusion of multiple age groups allows better understanding of social media influence across young adulthood.

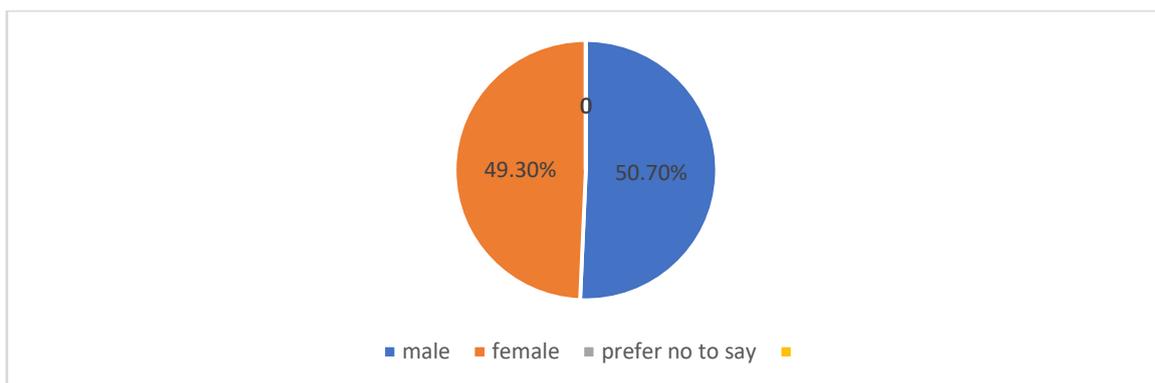


Fig 1: Gender-wise distribution of participants

The study showed a nearly equal distribution of male and female participants (Fig 1).

Most respondents were graduates or postgraduates. Higher educational levels may contribute to better understanding and interpretation of oral health information available on social media, as well as increased awareness of preventive oral care practices (Fig 2).

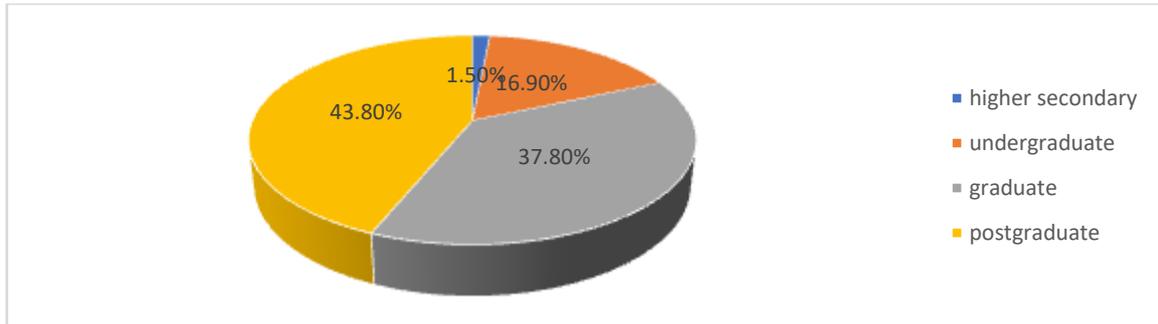


Fig 2: Educational status

A significant number of participants were Instagram users(61.2%) followed by Youtube(52.2%), Facebook(46.3%), and X (formerly Twitter- 22.9%). This highlights the importance of image and video- based content in disseminating oral health information and influencing user engagement (Fig 3).

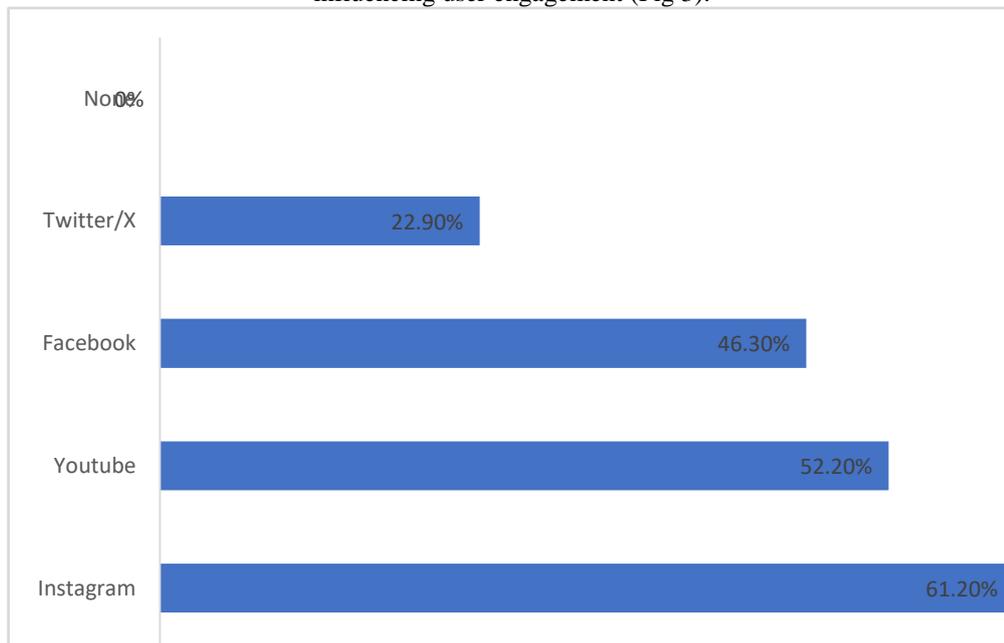


Fig 3: Social media platforms used regularly

A large majority of participants reported occasional(47.8) or frequent(40.3%) exposure to oral health-related content. This finding indicates that oral health information is widely circulated on social media and readily accessible to young adults (Fig 4).

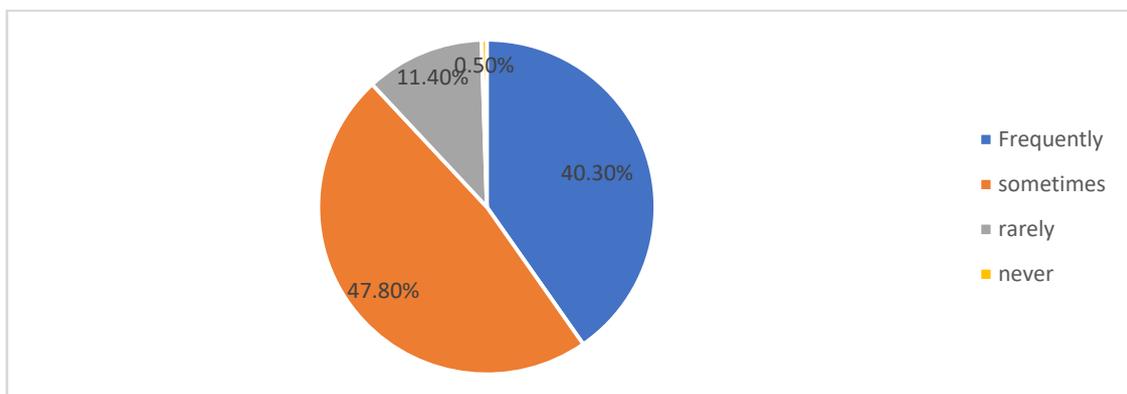


Fig 4: Exposure to oral health content on social media

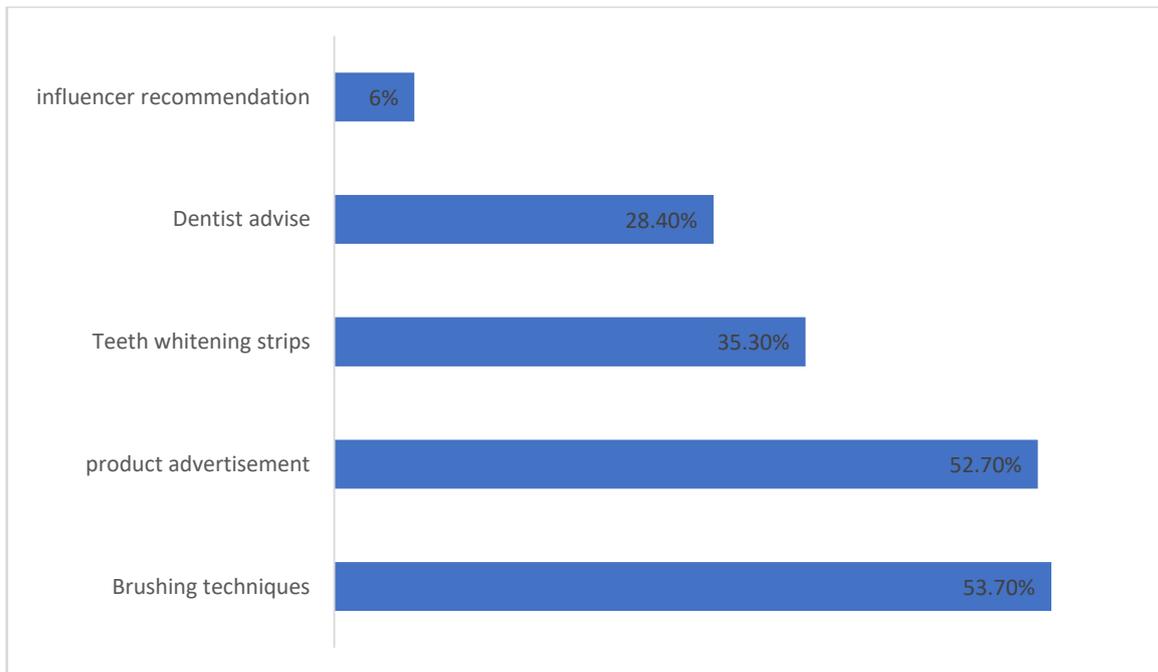


Fig 5: Type of oral content seen online:

Majority of participants watched content related to brushing techniques and product advertisements (Fig 5).

Participants showed varying levels of trust toward oral health information on social media, with many expressing greater trust in content shared by dental professionals (95%). This reflects awareness regarding the need for credible and scientifically accurate information (Fig 6).

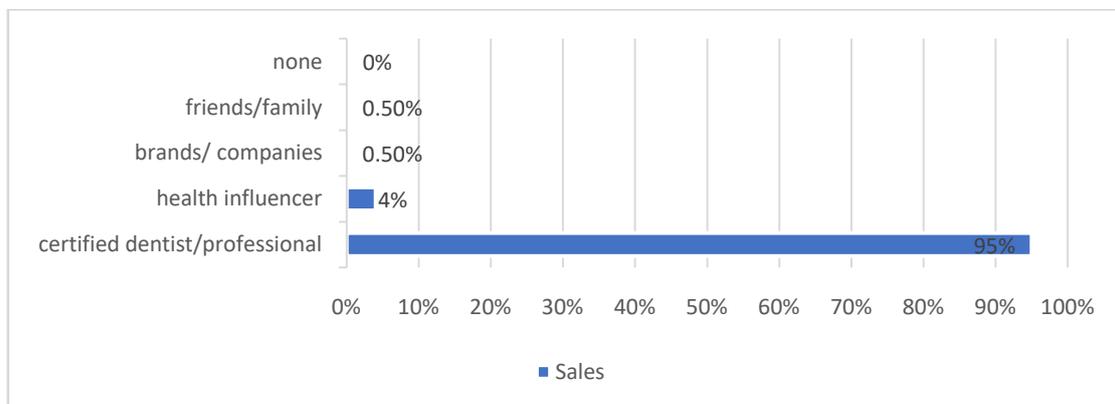


Fig 6: Trust in online oral health information:

More than two-thirds(70.6%) of respondents reported that social media influenced their oral hygiene practices (Fig 7).

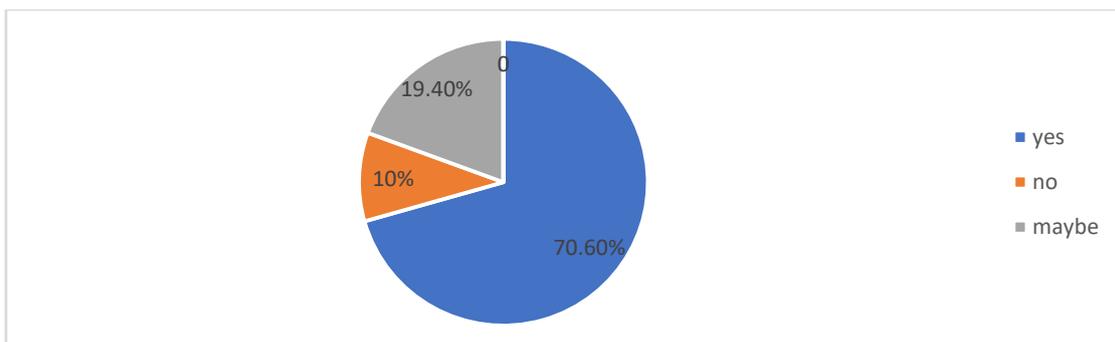


Fig 7: Influence of social media on oral hygiene practices

A considerable number of participants followed dental professionals or oral health influencers(40.3%). This indicates increasing interest in professional guidance through digital platforms and highlights the potential role of dentists in online health promotion (Fig 8).

Many respondents felt that social media had improved their understanding of oral health(70.1%). This suggests that digital content can serve as an effective tool when information is clearly presented and frequently encountered. (Fig 9)

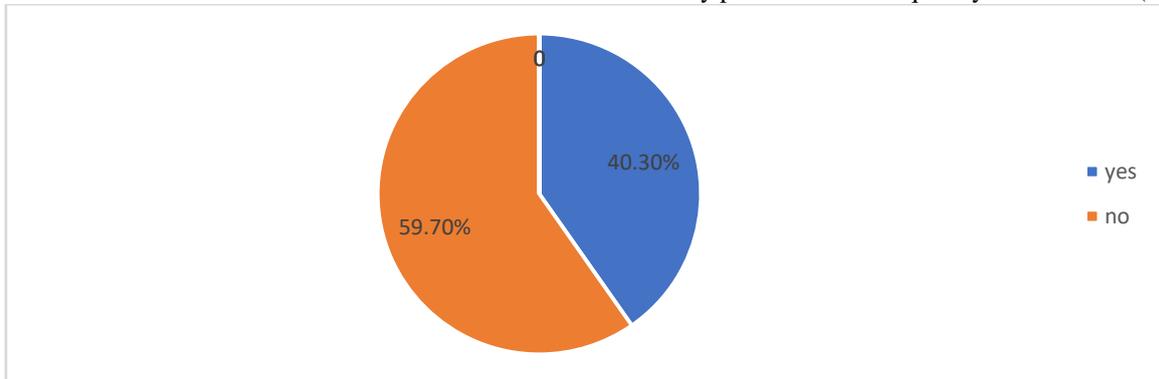


Fig 8: Do you Follow dental professionals or influencers online

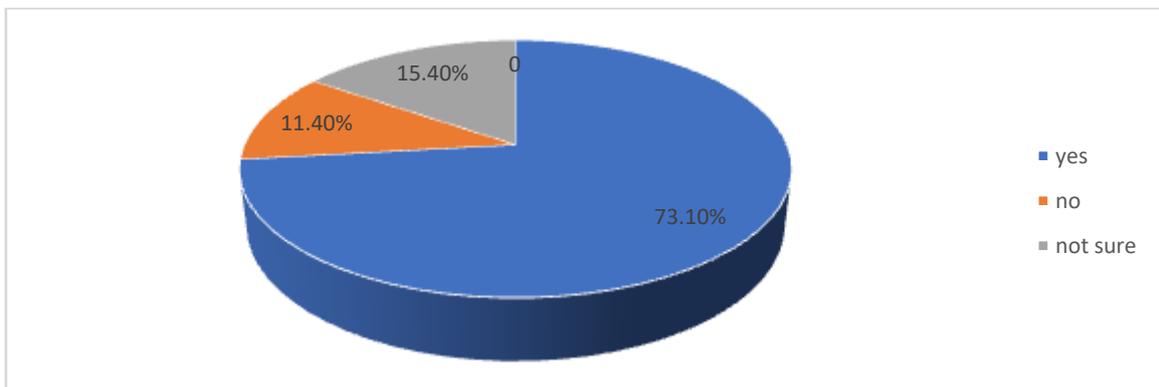


Fig 9: Perceived increase in oral health knowledge

A significant proportion of participants reported purchasing oral care products based on social media reviews or promotions(69.2%). This finding shows that online recommendations significantly influence consumer decisions related to oral health. (fig 10)

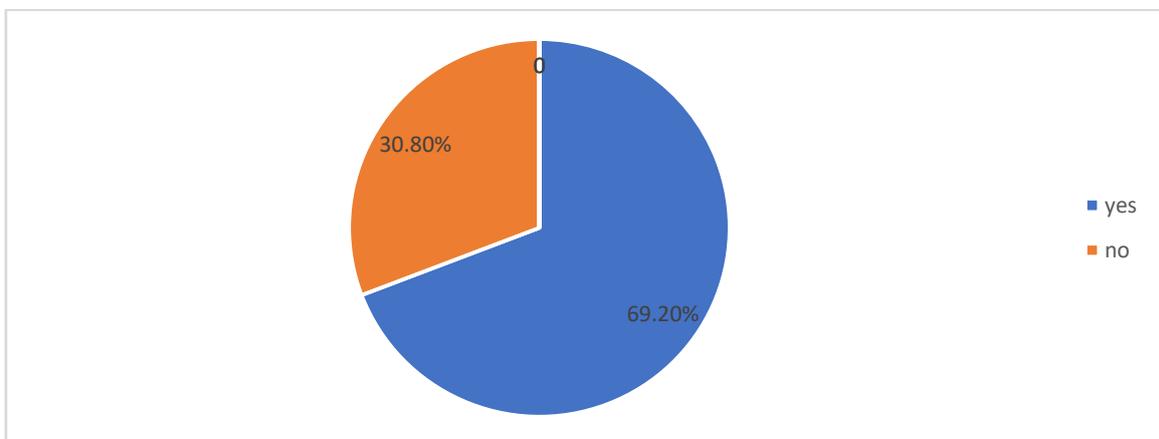


Fig 10: Do you Purchase oral care products based on online content

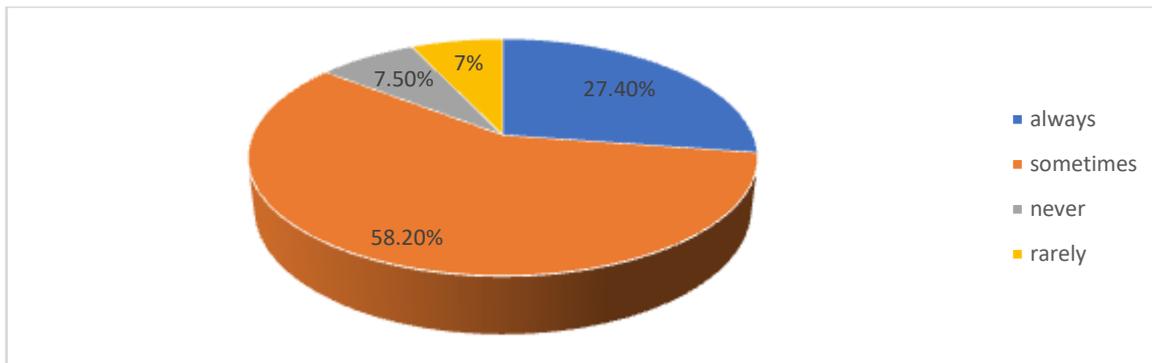


Fig 11: Do you cross verify online information

While some participants reported verifying information before applying it (27.4%), others did not do so regularly. This highlights a potential risk of misinformation and underscores the importance of promoting critical evaluation of online health content. (fig 11)

Several respondents indicated using specific oral care products based on social media advice (60.7%). This demonstrates a direct transition of information into daily oral hygiene practices.

The majority of participants reported brushing twice daily (65.7%), which aligns with recommended oral hygiene practices. This reflects satisfactory awareness and positive oral health behaviour among adults.

A substantial proportion of respondents reported visiting a dentist within the past year (70.6%). This indicates a positive attitude toward preventive dental care, possibly reinforced by awareness gained through social media.

Most participants expressed interest in receiving oral health information from verified dental professionals (65.20%). This highlights a strong demand for credible, evidence-based content on social media platforms.

The results collectively demonstrate that social media plays a significant role in shaping oral health knowledge, attitudes, and practices among young adults. While exposure and influence are high, the need for reliable professional guidance remains essential.

DISCUSSION

The present study highlights the significant role of social media in shaping oral health knowledge and practices among young adults.^{1,2} With growing digital engagement, social media has become a readily accessible platform for information related to oral health.³ The high level of exposure to oral health content observed in this study suggests that young adults frequently come across preventive and educational information, which attributed to improved awareness of oral hygiene practices.

The influence of social media on oral hygiene behaviour reported by a majority of participants indicates that online content can serve as a motivating factor for behavioural modification.^{3,6} Demonstrations of brushing techniques, information on oral hygiene products, and educational videos may encourage users to implement healthier oral health practices.^{3,6} Visual and interactive formats generally used on social media may further improve understanding and retention of oral health information.

Many participants in our current study followed dental professionals or oral health-related accounts underscoring the growing demand for credible and authoritative information online.^{4,8} Professional involvement in digital platforms can help counteract misinformation and promote evidence-based oral health practices.^{4,8} The preference for verified sources observed in this study reflects increasing awareness among young adults regarding the importance of reliable health information.

The generally positive oral hygiene practices reported, including regular brushing and dental visits may be associated with increased awareness facilitated by social media exposure.^{5,7} By normalizing preventive dental care and emphasizing its importance, social media may decrease apprehension towards dental treatment and encourage timely consultation with a dentist.^{1,5} However, it is important to distinguish that online information should complement, rather than replace, professional dental advice.

Despite its advantages, social media also presents potential limitations as a source of oral health information.^{4,6} The unregulated nature of digital content allows the circulation of inaccurate or exaggerated claims, which may mislead

users.^{4,6} This emphasizes the need for critical evaluation of online information and highlights the responsibility of dental professionals to guide users toward accurate and safe practices.⁸

Additionally, individual differences in level of education, digital literacy, and personal interest may influence how social media content is interpreted and applied.⁷ Not all users may have the ability to differentiate scientifically valid information from non-evidence-based content. Therefore, targeted educational strategies and clear communication by professionals are essential to maximize the positive impact of social media on oral health.

Overall, the findings of this study imply the potential of social media as an effective adjunct to traditional oral health education.^{3,5} When used responsibly and supported by professional involvement, digital platforms can enhance oral health awareness, promote preventive practices, and contribute to improved oral health among young adults.^{3,7}

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dental professionals should actively use social media platforms to share accurate and evidence-based oral health information in order to reduce misinformation. Promoting digital health literacy is essential so that individuals can critically evaluate online oral health content and see professional advice when required. Future studies with larger sample sizes and analytical designs are recommended to further assess the long-term impact of social media on oral health behaviours.

LIMITATIONS

The present study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting the results. As the study employed a cross-sectional design, causal relationships between social media exposure and oral health practices could not be established. Data were collected using a self-reported questionnaire, which may be subject to recall bias and socially desirable responses. The use of convenience sampling and an online survey limits the generalizability of the findings to the wider population. Additionally, the study did not assess the accuracy or quality of specific oral health content encountered on social media platforms.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that social media plays a significant role in influencing oral health knowledge and hygiene practices among young adults. Increased exposure to oral health-related content through digital platforms contributes to improved awareness and positive oral health behaviors. However, the reliability of information available on social media remains a concern. Active involvement of dental professionals in digital media is essential to ensure the dissemination of accurate and evidence-based oral health information.

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