

MID [Marketing in Dentistry]: A Cross Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.

Aim: To examine the attitudes of dental practitioners on the issue of marketing strategies in Nagpur, Maharashtra India.

Materials and methods: A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among 100 dental practitioners in Nagpur city. Chi-square test was used to determine the association of independent variables with each of the main outcome of interest.

Results: The results of the current study depict that majority of the dentist believe in concept of marketing and the dentist with practice below 3 years favoured marketing as a tool which was found to be statistically significant $p=0.0005$ and $p=0.0001$ respectively.

Conclusion: Nearly equal number of practitioners agreed and disagreed on issue of whether marketing may make dentistry seem more like a trade than health care service.

Keywords: Marketing strategies, dental practice, digital marketing

INTRODUCTION

The definition of advertising has always been mystified. The most reasonable definition gives that “Advertising includes those activities by which visual or oral messages are addressed to public for the purposes of informing them and influencing them either to buy merchandise or services or to act or be inclined favourably toward ideas, institutions, or person’s features.” The purpose of advertising, then, is to sell goods, ideas, or services, with the objective of causing action and attitude change on the part of the consumer. Moreover, among dentists and other health care professionals, “advertising” has become a very controversial topic that focuses on what are the attitudes toward advertising among

practicing dentists and how are these attitudes changing in recent times. ^[1]

Dentists are health care providers who play a vital role in society; taking care of one's smile, dental function and aesthetics. The dentist makes a commitment to the society that he will uphold the realms of the dental profession, follow and adhere to high ethical standards of care and conduct, will be service - oriented and work towards a goal of providing dental care with equity. This continued service creates a sense of trust in the population over a period of time ^[2]

The knowledge and skills that dentists must meet, have significantly changed. The commercialization of health is substantially affecting the way treatment options are selected by patients. Dentists

must be much more than a good practitioner, and exhibit entrepreneurial skills, financial management knowledge and innovative marketing ideas [3]

Dentists have to compete with their colleagues for each patient and at the same time, there is an ongoing shift towards a more patient-centric approach, where patient satisfaction determines the quality offered and its achievement has become an important target for the dentist [4,5]

As per the WHO, the dentist: population ratio is 1:7500. [6] Though it is apparently fulfilled in India, there is severe misdistribution of dentists in this country. [7] The number of dental clinics is more in urban areas and very less in rural areas. There is a tendency for the dentists to settle in metropolitan cities. This could be attributed to the high investment toward the dental education and dental practice, relatively increased paying capacity toward the dental treatment, and increased dental awareness among the general public. Crowding of dentists in metropolitan cities leads to unhealthy competition and commercialization.

The key question is whether dentists know and apply marketing tools to help their business survive in an environment of intense competition and economic crisis.

Dental practitioners practice marketing knowingly or unknowingly. Even having a visiting card is in itself the first line of marketing. In order to get started many dental practitioners practice marketing strategies like newsletters, having a tagline/logo of their clinic, having their clinic on various search engines, digital marketing by having their clinic website, SEO, cross referral alliances, offering payment discounts/ EMI, arranging dental camps in school, villages and many more.

So the main aim of this study was to determine the scenario of practicing dentist on marketing strategies which they use for their clinic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among 100 dental

practitioners in Nagpur city. The study objectives and questionnaire were briefly explained. The distributed questionnaires were collected back at the end of the day or on consecutive days. The questionnaire was developed based on the study objectives, taking guidance from previous literature. Study tool consisted of two sections. The first part consisted of five questions on the respondents' personal and professional background, such as age, gender, qualification, years of practice, and practice type. Second part consisted of 15 closed ended questions on dentists attitudes/opinions on advertising.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data collected were analysed. Statistical significance was set at 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$). Chisquare test was used to determine association of each of the independent variables (gender and qualification) with each of the main outcome of interest.

RESULTS

Of the 100 practicing dentists, 60% were males and 40% were females; 6% were graduates and 94% were specialists. Most of them were practicing for less than 3 years (44%), followed by 24% practicing for 3 to 8 years, 24% practicing for 8-15 years and 8% for more than 15 years of practice. Around half of them had solo type of practice (46%), followed by 34% consultants and 20% were doing group practice.

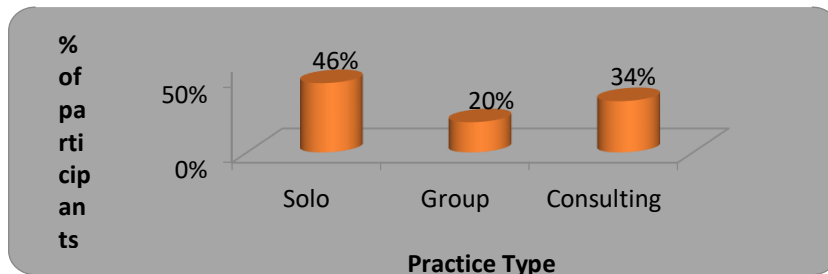
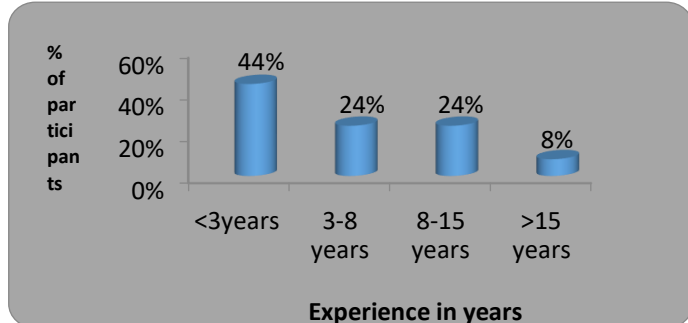
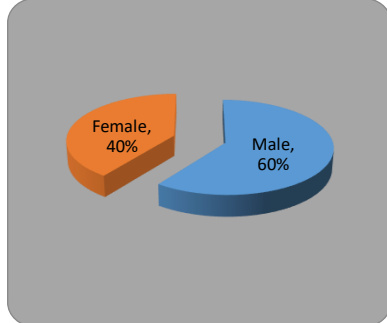
Nearly three quarters of practitioners (74%) believed in concept of Marketing and (72%) believe that Marketing is associated with dentistry. Almost (68%) practitioners agreed that marketing is not only relatable to new practitioners but also to old practitioners. Majority of dental practitioners (68%) arranged free oral check ups or camps as their marketing strategies.

Dentist with practice below 3 years favoured marketing as a tool which was found to be statistically significant ($p=0.0001$). Amongst them (26%) dental practitioners with experience below 3 years

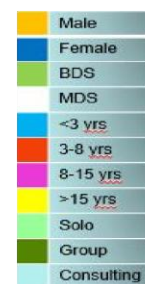
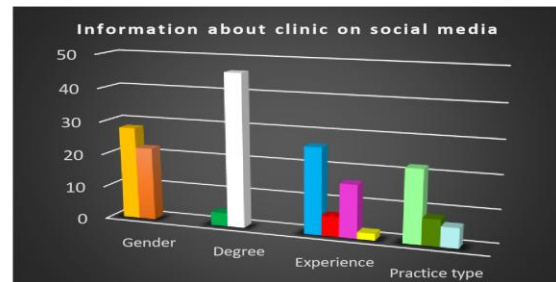
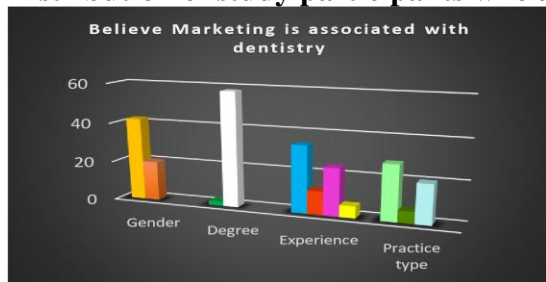
had their clinic on social media, (30%) had a tagline/logo of their clinic and almost (30%) offered discounts / EMI on treatment payments as their marketing strategy.

Almost three quarter of dental practitioner (72%) believed that practicing marketing strategies in dentistry is economically beneficial.

Distribution of study participants according to sociodemographic details



Distribution of study participants who agreed



Frequency distribution of study participants according to responses to advertising-related questions

Question	Response			Yes																			
	Y	N	χ^2 -value	Male	Female	χ^2 -value	B DS	M DS	χ^2 -value	So lo	χ^2 -value	Gro up	χ^2 -value	Consul ting	χ^2 -value	<3y rs	χ^2 -value	3- 8y rs	χ^2 -value	8- 15y rs	χ^2 -value	>15 yrs	χ^2 -value
Do you believe in concept of Marketing?	7 4	2 6	12.22 P=0.00 05,S	42	22	0.004 P=0.94 ,NS	2	62	0.23 P=0.62 ,NS	30	2.56 P=0.10 ,NS	6	6.87 P=0.00 3,S	20	3.63 P=0.05 ,NS	30	22.95 P=0.00 01,S	16	3.02 P=0.08 ,NS	20	0.00 P=1.00, NS	4	1.06 p=0.30, NS
Do you believe Marketing is associated with dentistry	7 2	2 8	10.17 P=0.00 14,S	42	20	0.08 P=0.77 ,NS	2	58	0.17 P=0.67 ,NS	28	2.10 P=0.14 ,NS	6	6.87 P=0.00 3,S	20	3.63 P=0.05 ,NS	34	22.95 P=0.00 01,S	12	1.46 P=0.22 ,NS	24	6.38 P=0.011 ,S	6	0.00 P=1.00 ,NS
Have you ever practiced any marketing strategy at your clinic?	4 0	6 0	2.02 P=0.15, NS	26	10	0.45 P=0.49 ,NS	2	34	0.01 P=0.91 ,NS	22	0.00 P=1.00 ,NS	4	11.11 P=0.00 9,S	6	5.48 P=0.01 9,S	18	3.35 P=0.06, NS	10	0.00 P=1.00 ,NS	12	0.33 P=0.56, NS	0	9.60 P=0.00 1,S
Is marketing reliable only for newer practitioner?	3 2	6 8	6.69 P=0.00 9,S	12	10	0.65 P=0.41 ,NS	0	22	1.13 P=0.28 ,NS	14	3.37 P=0.06 ,NS	2	16.20 P=0.00 01,S	8	3.02 P=0.08 ,NS	10	0.00 P=1.00, NS	10	0.00 P=1.00 ,NS	5	2.42 P=0.11, NS	3	2.28 P=0.13 ,NS
Is your clinic associated with any search engine?	4 4	5 6	0.72 P=0.39, NS	26	18	0.31 P=0.57 ,NS	4	40	0.52 P=0.46 ,NS	26	0.90 P=0.34 ,NS	5	9.08 P=0.00 2,S	6	5.48 P=0.01 9,S	16	1.95 P=0.16, NS	8	0.35 P=0.55 ,NS	18	5.48 P=0.018 ,NS	2	4 P=0.04 5,S
Do you have any information about your clinic on social media?	5 0	5 0	0.00 P=1.00, NS	28	22	0.75 P=0.38 ,NS	4	46	0.32 P=0.57 ,NS	22	0.00 P=1.00 ,NS	8	4.20 P=0.04 0,S	6	5.48 P=0.01 9,S	26	12.03 P=0.00 05,S	6	1.50 P=0.22 ,NS	16	3.02 P=0.08, NS	2	4 P=0.04 5,S
Do you	5	4	1.28	36	22	0.08	6	52	0.90	28	2.10	10	2.00	8	3.02	30	18.33	10	0.00	14	1.33	4	1.06

have any tagline/logo of your clinic?	8	2	P=0.25, NS			P=0.76 ,NS			P=0.34 ,NS		P=0.14 ,NS		P=0.15, NS		P=0.08 ,NS		P=0.00 01,S		P=1.00 ,NS		P=0.24, NS		P=0.30 ,NS
Have you ever made any newsletter for your clinic?	26	74	12.22 P=0.00 05,S	46	12	2.48 P=0.11 ,NS	2	24	0.20 P=0.65 ,NS	10	7.77 P=0.00 5,S	6	7.20 P=0.00 7,S	4	8.89 P=0.00 2,S	16	1.96 P=0.16, NS	6	1.50 P=0.22 ,NS	2	7.11 P=0.077 ,S	2	4 P=0.04 5,S
Have you ever offered discounts/EMI on treatment payments ?	54	46	0.32 P=0.57, NS	24	22	1.44 P=0.22 ,NS	4	42	0.45 P=0.50 ,NS	24	0.22 P=0.63 ,NS	5	9.02 P=0.00 2,S	12	0.33 P=0.56 ,NS	30	18.33 P=0.00 01,S	10	0.00 P=1.00 ,NS	10	0.00 P=1.00, NS	3	2.28 P=0.13 ,NS
Have you ever arranged free oral checkups or camps?	68	32	6.69 P=0.00 9,S	34	28	1.03 P=0.30 ,NS	6	56	0.73 P=0.39 ,NS	17	1.31 P=0.25 ,NS	12	0.55 P=0.45, NS	22	7.11 P=0.00 7,S	30	18.33 P=0.00 01,S	16	3.02 P=0.08 ,NS	18	5.48 P=0.019 ,S	4	1.06 P=0.30 ,NS
Do you think, practicing marketing strategies in dentistry is economically beneficial ?	72	28	10.17 P=0.00 14,S	34	28	1.03 P=0.30 ,NS	2	60	0.20 P=0.65 ,NS	26	0.90 P=0.34 ,NS	7	5.60 P=0.01 8,S	22	7.11 P=0.00 7,S	38	35.93 P=0.00 01,S	16	3.02 P=0.08 ,NS	16	3.02 P=0.08, NS	5	0.29 P=0.58 ,NS
Have you ever marketed Pediatric Dentistry as your speciality at clinic?	32	68	6.69 P=0.00 9,S	14	12	0.82 P=0.36 ,NS	0	26	1.34 P=0.24 ,NS	12	5.32 P=0.02 1,S	2	16.20 P=0.00 01,S	8	3.02 P=0.08 ,NS	18	3.35 P=0.06, NS	3	5.16 P=0.02 3,S	5	2.42 P=0.11, NS	2	4 P=0.04 5,S
Are dental practition	42	58	1.28 P=0.25, NS	10	12	2.22 P=0.13 ,NS	0	22	1.13 P=0.28 ,NS	8	10.79 P=0.00 1,S	5	9.02 P=0.00 2,S	10	1.33 P=0.24 ,NS	22	7.07 P=0.00 7,S	6	1.50 P=0.22 ,NS	8	0.35 P=0.55, NS	1	6.34 P=0.01 1,S

ers who do not market at a disadvant age?																							
Do you believe marketing may make dentistry, seem more like trade, than health care service and this could be hazardous to reputation of dental profession?	60	40	2.02 P=0.15, NS	28	12	0.22 P=0.63 ,NS	4	36	0.72 P=0.39 ,NS	30	3.89 P=0.04 8,S	10	2.00 P=0.15, NS	18	1.50 P=0.22 ,NS	19	-	10	-	18	5.48 P=0.019 ,S	6	0.00 P=1.00 ,NS
Do you agree with Indian Governm ent's restriction on advertisin g by health care professio nals?	50	50	-	26	14	-	2	38	-	22	-	14	-	14	-	10		10	6	20	-	6	-

DISCUSSION

The revised Dentists (code of ethics) Act, 2014 gives that: "... A dentist or a group of dentists may advertise provided that they maintain decorum, keeping in mind the high moral obligations and the value that the society places on the important nature of their work and the moral character and integrity expected of them." Accordingly, in the present study, more than half of the dentists were in favour of advertising.

Cosmetic dentistry has evolved to such an extent that it is a key expectation of most patients and a standard of dental care. Positive results may be derived by offering flexibility, especially in economic matters, in times of economic crisis, to compensate the reduction of patients' income, value-added services, for example by providing free screening, teeth whitening, payment in installments and other conveniences. [8]

Almost three quarter of the population believe in concept of Marketing and believe that Marketing is associated with dentistry among which significant results were observed with MDS and dental practitioners with experience <3 years and 8-15 years ($p=0.001$, $p=0.11$ respectively). The interesting part is that the phenomenon is no longer restricted to the young. Even the over-50 population is joining social networking in staggering numbers. [9]

The social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, and LinkedIn present an extraordinary marketing opportunity for dentists who are looking to promote their independent practices. Potential patients are increasingly embracing social networks as an integral part of their everyday lives. [9]

More than half of the population had never practice any marketing strategy at their clinic. Significant results were observed with dental practitioners practicing for more than 15 years ($p=0.001$) wherein no marketing strategy was used. This may be because since decades, dentists relied almost exclusively on reputation and word-of-mouth marketing to help them build their

practice. Owing to current day practice, our target audience is on social media. Yellow Pages have turned into Facebook pages where people are now searching, business and advertising. [10]

Majority of the dentist population opined ($p=0.009$) that marketing is not relatable only for newer practitioner irrespective of the years and type of practice. This may be because crowding of dentists in metropolitan cities have led to unhealthy competition and commercialization.

The promotional tools usually are categorized as being external and internal. Advertising and promotions in magazines, newspapers, yellow pages, TV, radio, internet, and public lectures and speeches, fall in the external marketing tactics. However, in some countries some of these tactics are against the code of conduct in dentistry.

The improvement of dental practice's image, patient's welcome strategies, internal distribution of brochures and business cards, clarifications on the provided services, maintaining an internet website, sending by post or email greeting cards and follow-up telephone contacts to patients asking about the course of treatment are examples of internal marketing tactics. Of significant assistance is the use of digital (e) marketing, which involves participation in social media and website development, allowing for online appointments, payments, updating prices and information on dental procedures. This type of online material can be updated more easily and enables interactive communication with patients. Internal marketing tactics are usually the most economical, effective and widely used methods in dental practice [8]

Almost half of the dentist didn't have their clinic associated with any search engine though not statistically significant. A significant number of younger dentists with experience <3 years had a tagline and logo of the clinic ($p=0.0001$) as dentists traditionally advertised in newspapers, phone books, radio shows, and television.

Because of that, many dentists are more familiar and comfortable with these traditional advertising strategies. [11]

Dr. Rawlings mentioned things like the small reception area and inadequate parking are the types of things you can't control, there are others you can "I think the real challenges of marketing are not external [newspaper ads, radio spots, and so on, aimed at attracting new patients] but internal," he said. "It's much easier to go out and paint a rosy picture in someone's mind of what they can expect, but it's something else to provide it consistently." External marketing is the "icing on the cake," Dr. Rawlings. It is only effective when supported by a competent staff with effective social skills, people who know what they are doing and whom they are there to serve. "Without a good staff you might as well not bother to market externally, because you're probably going to make people hostile. If they come in and expect to be served in a courteous and efficient manner and they get in to something entirely different, you've not only turned them off, you've probably also created an enemy." [12]

A dentist should pay particular attention to communication skills in order to respond effectively to the evolving relationship with the patient in the process of care. Therefore they should develop capabilities such as empathy, cooperation, active listening and other. In addition, the meticulous physical appearance of the dentist encompasses an element of professionalism, which is related to the willingness of the patient to reveal disease symptoms to the doctor

Discounts and EMI options, are frequently offered to the patients by dentist with experience below 3 years ($p=0.0001$). They also believed that marketing strategies in dentistry is economically beneficial ($p=0.0001$)

Free oral checkup and camp was the most frequent marketing strategy adopted irrespective of experience and practice type which was found to statistically significant

($p=0.009$) with below 3 years of experience $p=0.0001$ and 8-15 years of experience $p=0.019$

Ms. Linda Miles - "I think dentists are about 15 years ahead of other health professionals, because they realized a long time ago that patients have a choice, that they have many dentists to choose from," Linda Miles has found that dentists interested in increasing their appeal to patients needn't go beyond their offices—starting with the decor. "The orange plastic chair on the avocado green shag carpet just doesn't fly anymore," she said. "I would rather that dentists spend their marketing money on making the office look modern and attractive than on other things. To me, that's the best marketing money in the world to spend." [12]

The American Dental Association (ADA) states that 70%-80% of new patients in a typical dental practice come from the recommendations of existing patients [8]

LEGAL ISSUES RELATED TO ADVERTISING

In most of the countries, advertising by dental professionals has been made legal, with certain guidelines and regulations instilled on them. [13-15]

In India, Dentists (Code of Ethics) Regulations Act, 1976 has specified certain rules on advertising by dental practitioners. [16]

The act specifies, any formal announcement in the press by dentists should be limited to advertisements on starting practice, change of type of practice, a change of address, on temporary absence from duty for a prolonged period of time, resumption of practice after a break or after a long time, on moving to another practice, or about the availability of a new equipment or services. Insertion in telephone directories or yellow pages or maintenance of websites of dentists or dental clinics where all information is factual will not be construed as unethical practice. Advertising otherwise is considered unethical as it may lower the dignity and honour bestowed on the profession, and furthermore, patients

(and their families) experiencing health problems are often particularly vulnerable to persuasive influences, such as via unprofessional advertising.

In 2014, revised Dentists (Code of Ethics) Regulations Act was passed with relaxation given to certain rules like size of the signboard. [17]

CONCLUSION

Nearly three quarters of practitioners agreed that there is a need for some form of advertising. Nearly equal numbers of practitioners agreed and disagreed on the issue of whether advertising may make dentistry seem more like a trade than a health care service. Hence, there is a need to advertise, provided they do not bring any dishonour to the profession.

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