

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING ON PATIENT PREFERENCE FOR ALIGNERS VERSUS CONVENTIONAL BRACKETS – AN ANALYTICAL CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Social media has become a major source of information influencing patients' perception and health care decisions. The present study assessed the impact of social media marketing on patients' preference for clear aligners over conventional orthodontic brackets.

Methodology: An analytical cross-sectional study was conducted on 101 persons who were undergoing or considering an orthodontic treatment or had recently undergone such treatment. Data collection was conducted using a validated online questionnaire on demographics, social media use, orthodontic marketing exposure, perceptions, and preferences for treatment. Descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were performed using SPSS version 21. Statistical significance was defined as $p < 0.05$.

Results: Most participants were in the age group of 18-25 years (58.4%) and female (70.3%). YouTube (77.2%) was the most frequently used platform to obtain information on orthodontics. Nearly half (48.5%) said their choice of aligners was impacted by social media, mainly due to the esthetic benefits. 51.5% of the patients would prefer clear aligners if treatment was started immediately and 38.6% would prefer to decide after consulting with a dentist. The main reasons for the preference of treatment were Esthetics (43.6%) and comfort and convenience (39.6%). However, 71.3% of the respondents trusted information from certified orthodontists and 84.2% intended to consult orthodontist before making a treatment decision. 85.1% of participants felt that social media sets unrealistic expectations for the results of orthodontic treatment.

Conclusion: Social media marketing is effective in shaping perceptions and preferences for clear aligners, especially when the content is related to esthetics and convenience. However, patients still need professional advice, which emphasizes the need for orthodontists to provide accurate information based on evidence and to clarify unrealistic expectations triggered by social media.

KEYWORDS: Clear aligners; Orthodontic treatment; Patient preference; Social media.

INTRODUCTION

The field of orthodontics has advanced considerably over the past few decades, and there has been a transition from functional therapy alone to include cosmetic and patient-oriented care. Traditional orthodontic appliances, also known as brackets or braces, have been in use for decades now and are regarded as the gold standard in treating malocclusion and dentofacial deformities. [1] They provide precise control over tooth position and movement and are regarded as being highly effective for most orthodontic problems. With the increased patient expectations for aesthetics, especially in younger people, other treatment approaches have been devised, which are gaining popularity, including clear aligners. Clear aligners are regarded as more aesthetic and comfortable than traditional braces. [2]

Advancements in technology within digital dentistry such as 3D imaging, computer-aided design, and digital treatment plans have made great contributions to the widespread use of clear aligner treatments. This is because the advancements mentioned can help with the customization of orthodontic treatment plans and the simulation of treatment results; hence, they improve the perception of the treatment among patients. Nevertheless, traditional brackets still hold their place in orthodontic treatment, particularly in complex cases where the control of tooth movements is needed. As a result, the selection between the two treatments will be guided by treatment requirements and patient perceptions. [3,4]

In recent years, social media has been seen as a source of health information. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Reddit provide users with a wealth of information pertaining to orthodontic procedures. According to empirical studies, comparisons between braces and transparent aligners are often found to be a part of social media platforms, indicating a growing interest in orthodontic treatment options among people. These platforms are a source of information for both medical practitioners and ordinary people, which ultimately influences their views of orthodontic care services. Clear aligner therapy is found to be a major part of social media discourse pertaining to orthodontic care.

[6,7] Research studies of social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok suggest that there is a growing emphasis on the use of clear aligners due to their esthetic appeal, comfort, and ease of use. Research studies of YouTube videos pertaining to orthodontic care suggest that there is a significant amount of content pertaining to the advantages and disadvantages of aligner therapy, but the reliability of such content varies greatly. [8]

There have been issues expressed regarding the quality and authenticity of the information disseminated on social media regarding orthodontic treatment. A comprehensive assessment of the available information on various social media platforms regarding orthodontic treatment has shown that a large amount of this information is not based on scientific validation and is more likely to reflect biased and incomplete views regarding treatment alternatives. [1] Moreover, it has also exhibited inconsistencies in the accuracy of the available information related to clear aligners on Instagram. [9]

To overcome these problems regarding the communication of information through social media in relation to orthodontic treatment, professional bodies have stressed the importance of responsible communication through social media. The World Federation of Orthodontists has brought out guidelines regarding accurate and responsible communication on social media. The guidelines have emphasized the importance of accuracy, transparency, and ethical issues in the dissemination of information regarding orthodontic treatment on social media. The importance of these guidelines is to provide better education to patients and to avoid the dissemination of incorrect information regarding treatment through digital media. [10]

Social media marketing strategies often involve using effective and persuasive content and methods to influence patients' perceptions regarding specific treatment options. The use of empathic language and patient narratives has shown considerable potential in engaging patients and influencing their perceptions regarding treatment efficacy. Hence, it is likely to influence patients' perceptions and interests regarding treatment, which might increase interest in seeking treatment options such as clear aligners. [11,12]

While there has been an increase in the presence of orthodontic information shared via social media marketing, there has been little research done to evaluate the effect of social media marketing on patients' preferences between clear aligners and conventional brackets. This is important, considering the role of patients' perceptions in influencing their satisfaction with the treatment. This analytical study seeks to evaluate the effect of social media marketing on patients' preference between clear aligners and conventional brackets.

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Design

A single armed, analytical cross-sectional study was conducted among individuals currently undergoing orthodontic treatment or those who have previously undergone orthodontic treatment, to assess the influence of social media marketing on patient preferences for orthodontic treatment options—specifically, aligners versus conventional brackets. Ethical approval for this study with the reference number: XXX was obtained from the Scientific and Ethical committee. The study was reported based on Joanna Briggs Institute Reviewer's Manual's checklist for analytical cross-sectional studies. [13]

2.2 Study Population

The study population included individuals who are either currently undergoing orthodontic treatment or are prospective orthodontic patients who have been exposed to orthodontic-related content on social media platforms.

2.2.1 Inclusion criteria

Adults aged 18–45 years (or specify range relevant to your clinic population).

Residents who can read and understand the language of the questionnaire.

Individuals who are aware of or exposed to social media (use at least one platform in last 12 months).

Patients currently seeking or considering orthodontic treatment OR who have received orthodontic treatment (aligners or fixed appliances) within past 2 years.

Willing to provide informed consent.

2.2.2 Exclusion criteria

Dental professionals or marketing professionals (to avoid professional bias).

Patients with cognitive impairment or severe psychiatric illness preventing informed consent or reliable responses.

Previous orthognathic surgery (if it is strongly likely to skew appliance preference).

Orthodontic treatment was completed more than 2 years ago (recall bias).

2.3 Sampling Technique and sample size estimation

A convenience non-probability sampling method was applied depending on the set inclusion criteria. Survey distribution was conducted through online social media and professional networks in order to ensure that diverse respondents of various ages and locations were involved. Sample size determination was performed by means of online software, and the power and confidence interval of the study were set at 80% and 95%, respectively.

2.4 Questionnaire Development

A questionnaire was created using Google forms. The questionnaire consisted of the following sections:

Demographic information (age, gender, education, occupation).

Social media usage pattern (platforms used, how long and how frequently they use social media).

Awareness and perceptions of orthodontics treatment options (aligners vs. brackets).

Impact of social media marketing on decisions regarding treatment.

2.5 Questionnaire Validation

2.5.1 Item Generation: The initial pool of questions was developed after an extensive review of relevant literature and consultation with orthodontic specialists and public health experts.

2.5.2 Face Validation: The draft questionnaire underwent face validation by a panel of five subject experts (three orthodontists and two public health dentists) to assess clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness.

2.6 Data collection

The final validated Google Form was circulated via email, WhatsApp, and social media channels (Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram). Those participants who were willing to participate in the study, received a brief explanation of the study purpose and were guided about the consent statement at the beginning of the form, which was designed in such a way that if not marked in the assertive, the form would remain inaccessible.

The responses of the participants who gave consent, were automatically recorded in a secure, password-protected Google Sheet accessible only to the investigators. The data collection was continued until the desired sample size is achieved.

Incomplete responses on the online questionnaire with the predefined threshold, of, more than 20% missing data were excluded. Total of 101 participants completed the questionnaire.

2.7 Statistical analysis

The collected data was exported into Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS version 21 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) was used to summarize demographic data. Chi-square test was applied to determine associations between social media exposure and treatment preference (aligners vs. brackets). The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

All 101 participants (100%) consented to participate in the study. With respect to age distribution, the majority of participants belonged to the 18–25 years age group (58.4%), followed by 26–35 years (35.6%), 36–45 years (5.0%), and less than 18 years (1.0%), while none were above 45 years. A highly statistically significant difference was observed in the distribution of age groups ($\chi^2 = 89.218$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that the sample consisted mainly of young adults.

As for gender distribution, women were the majority (70.3%) compared to men (29.7%), and none of the participants preferred to remain anonymous. A statistically significant difference was found in gender distribution ($\chi^2 = 16.644$, $p < 0.001$), implying that the female part of the sample was significantly overrepresented.

Finally, when it comes to previous orthodontic treatment, 40.6% reported they had never been under any orthodontic treatment and were not planning to receive one, 25.7% of the participants had braces, 10.9% had aligners, while 22.8% had never been under orthodontic treatment yet were thinking about it. The distribution was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 18.089$, $p < 0.001$). (Table 1)

Table 1: Demographic details

		Frequency	Percentage	Chi Square Value	p Value
Do you consent to participate in the present study	Yes	101	100.0%		
	No	0	0.0%		
	Maybe	0	0.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
What is your age group?	<18 years	1	1.0%	89.218	<0.001
	18–25 years	59	58.4%		
	26–35 years	36	35.6%		
	36–45 years	5	5.0%		
	>45 years	0	0.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Gender	Male	30	29.7%	16.644	<0.001
	Female	71	70.3%		
	Prefer Not to Say	0	0.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Have you ever received orthodontic treatment before?	Yes, with braces	26	25.7%	18.089	<0.001
	Yes, with aligners	11	10.9%		
	No, but considering it	23	22.8%		
	No, not considering it	41	40.6%		
	Total	101	100.0%		

More than one-third (48.5%) of the subjects reported social media use for 30 minutes to 2 hours a day, while 43.6% were found to use it from 2 to 4 hours, 6.9% for less than 30 minutes, and only 1.0% did not use social media at all. This frequency was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 72.743$, $p < 0.001$).

YouTube emerged as the most commonly used platform to watch videos on orthodontic-related topics (77.2%), followed by Instagram (15.8%), Other (5.9%), and Facebook (1.0%). Platform choice was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 151.554$, $p < 0.001$), and showed an overwhelming preference for YouTube as a social media platform for orthodontics information seeking.

The majority of individuals (47.5%) said that in the last 6 months they had occasionally seen commercials about aligners or braces, while 34.7% saw them very often, 12.9% saw them weekly, and only 5.0% have never seen those commercials before. The distribution was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 46.446$, $p < 0.001$). Promotions were recalled the most frequently (41.6%), followed by dentists (25.7%), social media influencers (20.8%), and celebrities (11.9%). There was a significant difference in this distribution ($\chi^2 = 18.802$, $p < 0.001$), which means that paid advertising is the key factor that makes aligners visible. (Table 2)

Table 2: Social Media Exposure

		Frequency	Percentage	Chi Square Value	P Value
How often do you use social media?	Less than 30 minutes a day	7	6.9%	72.743	<0.001
	30 minutes–2 hours a day	49	48.5%		
	2–4 hours	44	43.6%		
	I do not use social media	1	1.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Which social media platform do you most often use for dental or smile-related content?	YouTube	78	77.2%	151.554	<0.001
	Instagram	16	15.8%		
	Facebook	1	1.0%		
	Other	6	5.9%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
In the past 6 months, how often have you seen advertisements or posts promoting clear aligners/braces?	Never	5	5.0%	46.446	<0.001
	Occasionally	48	47.5%		
	Frequently	35	34.7%		
	Weekly	13	12.9%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Who do you most recall promoting aligners on social media?	Dental professionals	26	25.7%	18.802	<0.001
	Social media influencers	21	20.8%		
	Celebrities	12	11.9%		
	Paid promotions	42	41.6%		
	Total	101	100.0%		

The most trusted source for orthodontic information is that provided by orthodontists who have been certified (71.3%), followed by friends/relatives (23.8%), influencers (3.0%) and paid advertisements (2.0%). This distribution is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 127.634$, $p < 0.001$).

As far as confidence in orthodontic information received via social media, 44.6% of the participants felt unconfident, 23.8% didn't use social media at all, 22.8% were unsure, and 8.9% of the participants were very confident. The difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 26.168$, $p < 0.001$). It can be concluded that the participants have a skeptical attitude towards orthodontic information available via social media.

As far as the effect of social media on preference for either aligners or braces, 48.5% of the participants stated that social media made them more likely to choose aligners because of aesthetic issues, 26.7% weren't sure about that, 17.8% remained unchanged in their preference and 6.9% favored braces. The difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 37.733$, $p < 0.0$).

The vast majority either agreed (61.4%) or strongly agreed (34.7%) that social media marketing made aligners seem more comfortable or contemporary than braces. This result showed high significance ($\chi^2 = 50.040$, $p < 0.001$), which suggests a strong perception bias toward aligners as a result of marketing.

As for the change in priorities of the treatment choice due to social media, there was no agreement on this question ($\chi^2 = 14.446$, $p < 0.001$). However, 51.5% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 48.5% did not agree. (Table 3)

Table 3: Trust & Perception

		Frequency	Percentage	Chi Square Value	P Value
Which type of post do you find more trustworthy for orthodontic information?	Posts from certified orthodontists	72	71.3%	127.634	<0.001
	Posts from social media influencers	3	3.0%		
	Paid brand advertisements	2	2.0%		
	Friends/family sharing experiences	24	23.8%		

	Total	101	100.0%		
How confident are you in the accuracy of orthodontic information shared on social media?	Very confident	9	8.9%	26.168	<0.001
	Not confident	45	44.6%		
	Do not rely on social media for such information	24	23.8%		
	Not sure	23	22.8%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Have social media posts ever changed your opinion about which treatment (braces or aligners) looks better?	Yes, I prefer aligners	49	48.5%	37.733	<0.001
	Yes, I prefer braces	7	6.9%		
	No, my opinion has not changed	18	17.8%		
	Not sure	27	26.7%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Do you believe social media marketing makes aligners appear more comfortable or modern than braces?	Strongly agree	35	34.7%	50.040	<0.001
	Agree	62	61.4%		
	Disagree	4	4.0%		
	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Has social media changed what you consider most important when choosing between aligners and braces?	Strongly agree	31	30.7%	14.446	<0.001
	Agree	21	20.8%		
	Disagree	12	11.9%		
	Strongly disagree	37	36.6%		
	Total	101	100.0%		

In case of initiation of orthodontic treatment right now, 51.5% would choose clear aligners, 38.6% would make up their minds based on the dentist consultation, and a minority would prefer metal braces (6.9%) and ceramic braces (3.0%). Such difference is highly statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 68.624$, $p < 0.001$).

Major motivation was appearance (43.6%) and comfort/ convenience (39.6%), whereas minor motivation was social media influence (12.9%) and cost (4.0%). Not one participant chose dentist recommendation as the major motivating factor. Such difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 46.366$, $p < 0.001$).

On the other hand, when it comes to searching for additional information following social media exposure, there was no statistically significant difference between the groups ($\chi^2 = 1.059$, $p = 0.787$).

Orthodontists were seen to have the biggest impact (67.3%) on decisions about treatment compared to friends/family (12.9%), social media posts (9.9%), or even cost (9.9%). This finding was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 96.743$, $p < 0.001$).

The majority agreed (57.4%) or strongly agreed (34.7%) that aligner ads give an unrealistic promise of results, a statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 82.723$, $p < 0.001$) finding suggesting that participants noticed the exaggeration in marketing.

In the same vein, 65.3% said they would only trust professionals, not influencers, and this result was highly statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 98.248$, $p < 0.001$).

More than half (56.4%) said that before-and-after photos made it more likely for them to use aligners, a statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 27.168$, $p < 0.001$) finding showing the impact of visual testimonies.

Notably, 84.2% said that they would definitely go to the orthodontist before deciding anything, regardless of the effect of social media. This was a highly statistically significant finding ($\chi^2 = 190.446$, $p < 0.001$).

Among the respondents who had seen negative reviews, 57.4% would still be wary but intrigued, and 13.9% would be strongly dissuaded. The results were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 57.139$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that even though the content affects their perceptions, it does not always dissuade them from treatments.

Finally, 85.1% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media gives an unrealistic view of orthodontic outcomes. The results were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 16.475$, $p < 0.001$). (Table 4)

Table 4: Treatment Preference

If you had to start orthodontic treatment today, which would you prefer?	Clear aligners	52	51.5%	68.624	<0.001
	Conventional metal braces	7	6.9%		
	Ceramic braces	3	3.0%		
	I would decide after consulting a dentist	39	38.6%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
	Aesthetics/appearance	44	43.6%	46.366	

What is the main reason for this preference?	Comfort or convenience	40	39.6%		<0.001
	Cost	4	4.0%		
	Social media influence	13	12.9%		
	Dentist recommendation	0	0.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Have you ever searched for more information after watching social media posts about aligners?	Yes, multiple times	26	25.7%	1.059	0.787
	Yes, once	29	28.7%		
	No, but intended to	24	23.8%		
	No, never	22	21.8%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Who do you think influences your treatment choices the most?	Orthodontists	68	67.3%	96.743	<0.001
	Social media posts	10	9.9%		
	Friends/family	13	12.9%		
	Cost and affordability	10	9.9%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Do you think aligner advertisements overpromise results (such as 'perfect smile in a few months')?	Strongly agree	35	34.7%	82.723	<0.001
	Agree	58	57.4%		
	Disagree	7	6.9%		
	Strongly disagree	1	1.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Would you trust an influencer's post recommending aligners if they are not a dental professional?	Yes, completely	5	5.0%	98.248	<0.001
	Depends on the content	25	24.8%		
	No, I only trust professionals	66	65.3%		
	Not sure	5	5.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Do you feel that seeing successful before-after photos of aligners makes you more likely to choose them?	Yes, definitely	57	56.4%	27.168	<0.001
	Not at all	15	14.9%		
	Not sure	29	28.7%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Before making a treatment decision, would you consult your orthodontist, even if social media influenced you?	Definitely yes	85	84.2%	190.446	<0.001
	Probably yes	11	10.9%		
	Definitely not	2	2.0%		
	Probably not	3	3.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
After watching negative reviews about aligners/braces on social media, how would that affect your opinion?	Strongly discourages me from treatment	14	13.9%	57.139	<0.001
	Cautious but still interested	58	57.4%		
	Would not affect my opinion	17	16.8%		
	Not sure	12	11.9%		
	Total	101	100.0%		
Do you think social media creates unrealistic expectations about orthodontic treatment outcomes?	Strongly agree	39	38.6%	16.475	<0.001
	Agree	47	46.5%		
	Disagree	15	14.9%		
	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%		
	Total	101	100.0%		

DISCUSSION

This analytical cross-sectional study aims to determine the impact of social media marketing on the patient's preference for clear aligners over traditional brackets. The results revealed that patients are influenced by social media marketing and that it has a substantial impact on patients' perceptions and preferences for orthodontic treatment. A significant number of patients are more inclined toward clear aligners. This is because patients are increasingly influenced by digital media in decision-making regarding healthcare. This is also supported by recent research on the role of digital media in creating awareness about orthodontic treatments and generating demand for such treatments.

This increase in the propensity for clear aligners is also supported by the research conducted by Jedliński et al., [14] which revealed that there is a rising demand for aligner treatment among young patients in Europe and South America. The research used the survey method and revealed that patients are more inclined toward aligners because they are more aesthetically acceptable and lifestyle-friendly. The results also revealed that patients are more likely to be influenced by social media marketing and are more inclined toward aligners because they are more aesthetically acceptable and lifestyle-friendly.

Social media sites often display orthodontic results that are aesthetically pleasing, in conjunction with patient testimonials, and this significantly influences perceptions of orthodontic treatment. Meira et al. [15] showed that orthodontists' photographs on social media significantly impact perceptions of orthodontists' legitimacy and increase the propensity of individuals to seek orthodontic treatment. This is consistent with the current study's findings that showed a higher propensity of participants exposed to orthodontic treatment on social media to prefer aligner treatment. The aesthetic appeal of orthodontic treatment and aligners' association with being a contemporary and non-invasive treatment option may influence patient perceptions and preferences.

Patient testimonials and experiences of orthodontic treatment also significantly impact orthodontic treatment decisions. Hunsaker et al. [16] investigated patient testimonials on YouTube regarding braces and aligner treatment and showed that orthodontic treatment videos regarding aligner treatment had a higher propensity to present positive experiences compared to videos regarding braces treatment. Such patient experiences may create a positive perception of aligner treatment in patients seeking orthodontic treatment and may be a tool to create positive perceptions of orthodontic treatment in general. The current study's findings showed that social media content regarding orthodontic treatment may increase patients' interest in aligner treatment.

Recent studies have shown the impact of social media on the decision-making process. Patil et al. [17] found in their study that social media has a significant impact on the decision of patients regarding aligner therapy, particularly among the younger age group, as they tend to search for information on health and medicine on the internet. This finding supports the results of the present study, which found that patients who tend to use social media for information on orthodontic therapy prefer aligners over conventional braces.

The discussion on digital media and the perceptions of patients on aligner therapy also supports the results of the present study, which found that patients tend to prefer aligners over conventional braces because of their aesthetic and convenient use. Adobes-Martin et al. [18] did a content analysis on Twitter to assess the perceptions of patients on the use of Invisalign therapy, and they found many tweets emphasizing the advantages of the therapy, such as its aesthetic appeal, comfort, and convenience, which are significant advantages of aligners over conventional braces.

Although there are positive perceptions of aligner therapy on social media, there are documented concerns about the accuracy and reliability of information available on social media regarding orthodontics in general. Alsulaimani et al. [19] documented inconsistencies in the quality of information available online regarding clear aligner therapy, indicating that some sources contained incomplete and misleading information. Such inconsistencies may create unrealistic expectations in patients and emphasize the responsibility of orthodontists to provide precise information to patients. Qureshi et al. also documented that although social media can increase patient knowledge regarding orthodontic treatment, it may also spread misinformation if not critically evaluated. [20]

Patient knowledge of aligner therapy also seems to affect patient preferences. Paim et al. [21] documented that patients with higher knowledge of aligner therapy were more likely to express interest in this treatment option. In addition to the current study, it is also evident from the Paim et al. study that aesthetic appeal plays a very important role in making patients choose one type of appliance over others. At the same time, it is equally important to understand clinical suitability of aligner therapy because not all patients are clinically suited for such type of treatment.

It is important from the clinical perspective to be able to reconcile expectations of the patient due to social media influence and scientific methods for treatment. Even though there are numerous benefits that come with the use of fixed appliances, they are quite efficient and useful in certain clinical situations. According to a study conducted by Borda et al. [22], clear aligners and fixed appliances showed similar outcomes among adolescent patients who had minor malocclusions. It was noted that treatment outcomes were significantly affected by the treatment method and patient cooperation.

The results of the present research demonstrate how the use of social media affects the preferences of patients during orthodontic treatment. While social media can be regarded as a valuable instrument for engagement of patients in the process, it can affect patients' attitudes due to the marketing and advertising practices used rather than the clinical results obtained. Patients had a tendency to value aesthetics when making choices about the treatment and had a predisposition towards aligners rather than braces, hence the necessity to inform patients.

It should be noted that the current research has some limitations, which cannot be ignored. The greatest advantage of the current research is the fact that it involves patients who have already had orthodontic treatment and thus gained experience in this area. Further research in terms of the long-term effects of the marketing of social media on the knowledge of patients and their expectations will be valuable in further investigation of the role of social media.

CONCLUSION

The cross-sectional analysis leads to a conclusion that social media marketing plays an instrumental role in patients' choice of orthodontic treatments, whereby there is a significant preference for clear aligners over the conventional bracket system. The presence of information, patient reviews, and marketing material through social media websites play an essential part in shaping the perceptions of patients about clear aligners in terms of aesthetics and comfort. It is, however, necessary to recognize the fact that information obtained from social media sites does not necessarily reflect appropriate evidence-based clinical treatment. Therefore, it is vital for orthodontists to help patients in this process by providing accurate information.

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