

The Role of Media in Oral Hygiene Awareness

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Introduction

As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic and the rapid, growing use of digital media and smartphones, opportunities for using various digital applications have increased tremendously. Effective communication is a key factor in bridging a link between the patients and professionals, with the basic triad of proliferation of modes, speed of communication and reflexivity of knowledge, which serves as a base for better comprehension.

The success of media is reliant upon the following main goal: message received by target group, allowing for change in the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of people to behave accordingly.

This article will emphasize on the various aspects of media and how much it has influenced the spread of awareness of oral hygiene.

The first few sections of this article will highlight on the evolutionary aspect of media and how it has been useful for the society, additively, adding a few notes on the importance of oral health in today's generation. The further sections will highlight on the recent advances and the view in a futuristic perspective.

History

From the Egyptian era of reading from scrolls, progressing to the period of Franco-Prussian war during which the first pigeon was sent, communication and media have come a long way. If it had not been for the evolution of Internet, pigeons would be still sent back and forth. Moreover, the willingness and possibility to commute from place to place is not entirely possible with both the cases. Conventional paper advertisements came to the rescue! The most sought-after source of media right from the past century to this. The slogans, the figurines and the flashy font were all attractive enough to attract the people to encourage usage of a particular oral hygiene product.

There came the radio, in AM and FM format. It was truly a bliss to hear our favorite Radio Jockeys every day, talking in a peculiar tone about every day's happenings.

Recently during the COVID outbreak, Suryan FM 93.5, a South Indian based Regional FM came up with a mnemonic of SMS -

which is Soap / Sanitize, Mask and Social Distancing. Consciously or subconsciously, this would have been entering into our brain as the radio was running. This is how audio aids of media really helps.

Audio is fine, but Audio-visual is always two steps better. Then came the Television! Anything combined with a visual representation is well retained and more comprehensible than only audio or text. Subsequently, Internet came into play and the line of social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Quora. And the king of all was Google search engine! The main platform where all kinds of questions from all kinds of people were bombarded at a time. And the best part is, Google does not say it does not know!

The World Health Organization recommends that interventions involving oral health education be associated with other health promotional activities, particularly the development of healthy habits. The existing literature suggests various methods for promotion of oral health, education and motivation including direct orientation, leaflets, lectures, puppets, gymkhanas, theatres, music among others.

Oral Health and Systemic Health – A Two-Way Relationship

Oral health refers to the maintenance of a synonymous level of health of the mouth, teeth, jaws and surrounding structures that allows a person to eat and socialize without the barriers of disease, discomfort or embarrassment and thereby facilitating comfortable participation in everyday activities.

Mouth, being the gateway to the body, has a two-way connection with the overall health, where most of the patients consider oral health as a single entity and lead to negligence.

Media's Indispensable Role – Oral Health Awareness Inter-Connection

Just like how mouth is the mirror of our body, media is the mirror to modern society.

Mass media, being the fourth offshoot of the government, plays an indispensable role in the formation of public awareness. As per the study by Eileen Goldberg et al (2022), television was the most frequently adopted mass-reach strategy, and some mass

media campaigns used combinations of radio, prints, billboards, and bus-side advertisements to bring the importance of oral health into limelight [1].

According to the study on oral hygiene products usage, 59.1% of the population started using a particular brand of toothpaste based on advertisements on radio and television. In a survey done by Archana et al. (2010), among the local population of Udaipur, 39.6% of them selected their toothpaste by getting information from the media, whereas in the study done by Dilip et al. (2005), magazines, television and radio were the major sources of information for preference of tooth paste.

Celebrity endorsements influence and stimulate individual's preference for buying certain products [2, 3]. Likewise, the choice of toothpaste is also reliant on the above two factors because in contrary, the choice of toothpaste based on the dental professional's recommendation was lesser, comparatively.

Social Media

Social media - the word that can be collectively listed under #Trending and #MostSearched, currently. Social media has gone a long way from being just a search tool to being the medium for sharing personal life incidents to having serious conversations on health and technology.

Social media's real use was put forth during the Coronavirus pandemic where people all around the world completely relied upon the sources from the Internet for their basic needs - right from getting food, to searching for hospital beds. And the graph of social media usage has shown a steep peak rise post-pandemic. Instagram reels are the trendsetter of today's generation! Right from a toddler to an elder, everyone knows the addictive power of Reels. And reels are not only about dances and memes. In fact, healthcare professionals are nowadays applying their knowledge through reels! Study tips, satisfying restoration / extraction videos, or even basic oral care tips, you name it! A few others have been incorporating it to kick-start their marketing career!

A coin has two sides. And as per the saying, "The grass is always greener on the other side," social media has its own detrimental effects too. If used properly and productively, it is a BOON but if misused, a BANE. Because media nowadays has strongly influenced the youth and it takes a toll on people's perspective. Too much of anything is good for nothing. Similarly, too much intervention of media is a matter of concern.

Awareness Programs

Various associations like Indian Dental Association and societies like Indian Society of Periodontology, conduct awareness programs and a plethora of competitions to instill the awareness through extra-curricular activities. World No Tobacco Day, celebrated on May 31st every year, and National Oral Health Day, celebrated on March 20th every year by the respective dental institutions under the moderation of associations and societies like these will further make the students, professionals as well as the fellow people more aware of the happenings and precautions.

Recent Advances and Futuristic Perspectives

Use of self-care Applications for Maintaining Oral Hygiene Children are at more risk of developing Dental Caries or more precisely, Early Childhood Caries (ECC), which has a multifactorial etiology, mainly dependent on the daily dietary intake and lifestyle habits. Risk intensity is increased due to lack of cooperation, cognitive development and difficulty in performing the oral hygiene habits.

Regarding this, a study conducted by Francesca et al aimed to test the new technologies supporting to improve this issue by encouraging use of technological devices and applications to improve compliance of the children. Two different apps – Time2Brush (developer Bunner Mobile, retailer Bunner Inc. © 2012 GlaxoSmithKline) for patients over 5 years of age and Brusheez- The Little Monsters Toothbrush Timer (developer Shondicon LLC) for children up to 5 years [4]. These applications work based on the concept of a fictional character or a mascot, portraying as a motivator for maintaining oral hygiene and a stopwatch to record the same.

Use of Applications among Healthcare Professionals

Applications are not only used by the common person, but also proved useful among the healthcare specialists as well. A study by Jasti et al (2015) suggested that medical and dental health professionals used smartphone apps for knowledge purpose (58.8%) and patient education purpose (41.4%) as well [5]. This suggests that apps serve as knowledge providers and for spreading awareness through patient education. A study by Jin Xiao et al (2021) formulated a smartphone app named AICaries that allows parents to take photos of their child's oral health status and detect Early Childhood Caries to seek treatment at an early stage [6].

Conclusion

The awareness of oral health is slowly getting accentuated day by day by the gradual, timely evolution of the same. More and more of ideologies have been arising, having its own advantages and disadvantage, in contrast to the traditional, conventional methods. Media, on the other hand, can also provide a detrimental source of information to the society by negatively influencing the mindsets of people. For instance, certain kinds of sensitivity toothpastes are blindly used by people nowadays, with a hope that it is the best solution for their cavities, which are undiagnosed carious lesions leading to pulpitis. On the contrary, the benefits do overweigh the ill effects, thereby proving that media can be a suitable tool in the public health awareness.

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