

Role of Social Media Use Among Pediatric Dentists

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BACKGROUND

As of 2020, there are 112 million Instagram users in the United States and 200 million on Facebook. Recently, with the increased popularity of TikTok (80 Million users), online trends continue to “go viral” sometimes involving advice for dental care or “hacks” to avoid seeking dental care whether for financial reasons or dental associated anxieties. Being aware of the information that is reaching millions of users is critical in educating our patients and their parents.

A brief communication in the May/June 2018 issue of the Journal of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, members of the AAPD were classified based on their birth year into the categories of “digital natives” meaning Millennials/Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1997) and Generation Z (born between 1998 and 2016), and “digital immigrants” meaning Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), and the Silent Generation (born between 1925 and 1945). In 2018, there were 10,048 members of the AAPD with 40% falling into the digital native category and 60% falling into the digital immigrant category.

Currently, the AAPD Instagram page has 11.1K followers, with the majority being pediatric dentists. The highest followed board certified pediatric dentist found on Instagram at the time of study has 242K followers on their dental related page.

With the infinite amount of information readily available on the internet and the widespread use of social media, our pre-teen and adolescent patients are susceptible to and often influenced by popular trends or advice. While it is an effective way to circulate information quickly, social media can also be the source of often harmful misinformation. It is imperative as health care providers to be aware of what our patients and their parents are commonly seeing and resharing on social media to be able to address issues and properly care for our patients.

OBJECTIVE

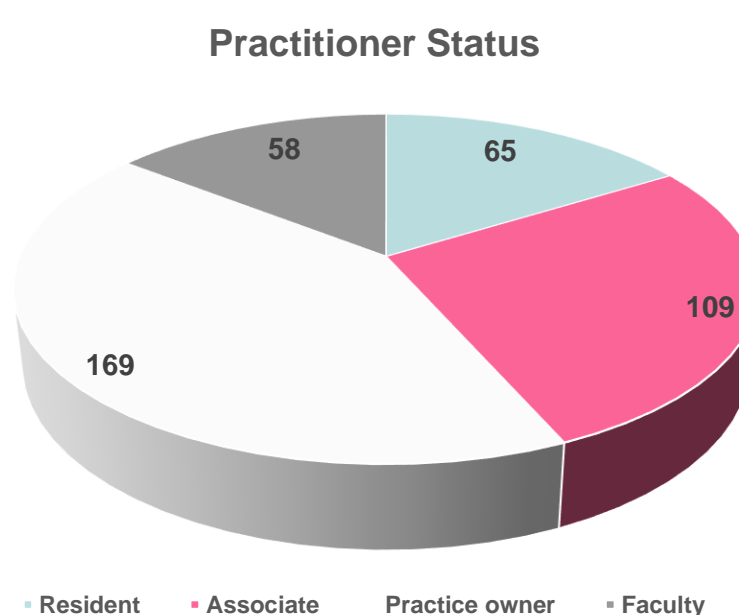
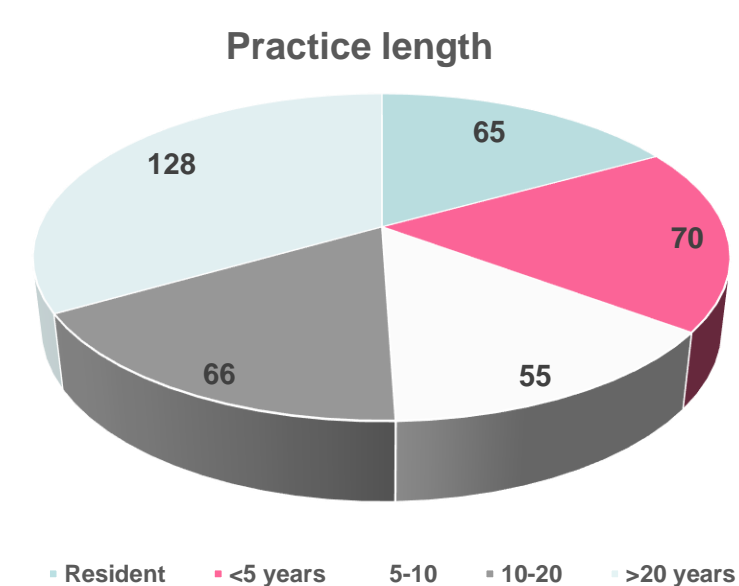
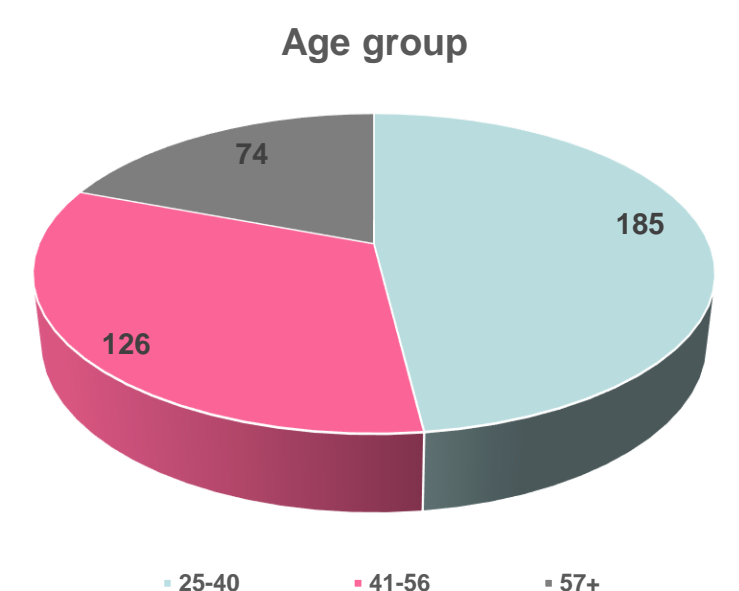
This study investigated the social media practices of pediatric dentists in the US, their preferred platforms, and knowledge of current “viral trends” to address importance of using social media to properly disseminate evidence-based information to patients.

MATERIALS & METHODS

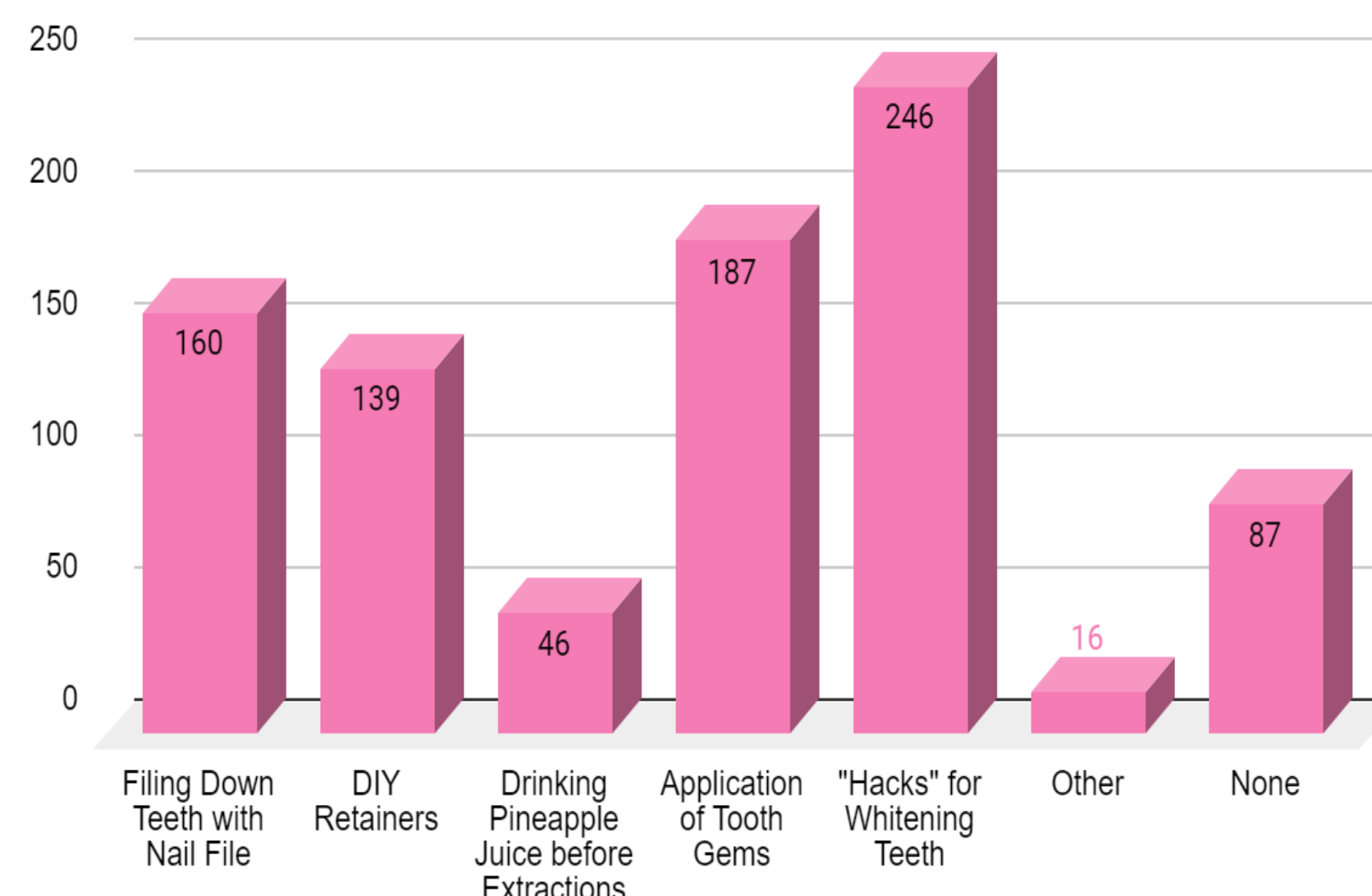
A data gathering survey was conducted via Qualtrics and emailed to all currently registered members of the American Academy Of Pediatric Dentistry. Data collection was conducted from March 22, 2022 to April 12, 2022.

Invited participants were questioned about their social media practices, their preferred platforms, and knowledge of current “viral trends”.

RESULTS



"Viral" Trends in Dentistry



RESULTS CONTINUED

- 389 responses (66 residents, 109 associates, 169 practice owners)
- The majority of respondents have been practicing pediatric dentistry for over 20 years
- 91.4 % of respondents state they have a personal social media page, however only 23% have a personal social media page related to dentistry
- Facebook was the most used platform amongst respondents with 45%, Instagram being the next most commonly used at 35%
- The majority of respondents had heard of the listed “trends” with only 10% having never heard of any of them. Other trends most reported included: oil pulling, glue-on homemade veneers, and vaping.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to raise awareness of the power of social media and encourage the AAPD and its members to play an increasing role in dissemination of evidence-based information through social media. Most respondents currently have a personal social media page or pages primarily used for socializing and reported checking their social media pages multiple times a day. Only about a quarter also have a personal page for dental purposes, however, most belong to a practice with at least one form of social media with Facebook being the most common, followed by Instagram.

DISCUSSION CONTINUED

Results of this survey also highlighted the presence of “viral trends” relating to dentistry and ones most seen by users. Although most practitioners surveyed have had to address misinformation regarding dental health as a result of a patient receiving information via social media, only 23% of respondents had actually encountered a patient whom had attempted one of the mentioned or another social media trend.

The results of this study could encourage the potential of working with heavily followed influencers and/or celebrities in debunking dangerous “trends” relating to dental care and provide accurate information relating to dental health such as tools for caries prevention, dental injury prevention, and dental trauma management to their millions of followers. As society’s use of social media increases, use of social media amongst dental professionals is also on the rise. While being able to provide evidence-based information to our patients and the general public is the intent, it is important to note that potential consequences of social media use in our profession include possibly HIPAA violations and/or public perception of online professionalism. As dental schools look to revise curriculums in the future, it is worth considering courses or training in social media professionalism and patient confidentiality.

REFERENCES

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