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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### DENTAL MARKETING: YAY OR NAY? – A SURVEY.

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##### Key words:-

Dentists, marketing, opportunity.

#### Abstract

**Aim:** To investigate the effects of dental marketing on a dentist's career

**Objective:** To evaluate the importance of dental marketing done within the guideline

**Background:** Dental marketing is a way to attracting new patients but it needs to be done in an appropriate way by following the guidelines provided. Dentists have different opinions regarding this issue as some dentists think that they should hold themselves to a higher ethical code instead of acting like a salesperson while other dentists view it as a great opportunity to actively market their practices in order to maintain themselves in the business, especially with the growing interests towards dental health from the public.

**Materials and Method:** A questionnaire survey was conducted among 200 practicing dentists in Chennai. All participants were provided with a list of 12 questions related to dental marketing with answers given for each question. The participants were told to choose only one answer based on their personal opinion.

**Result:** The results from the study indicate the importance of dental marketing to a dentist's career provided that it is done within the guidelines given by the dental council.

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#### Introduction:-

In today's world, the competition between dental practitioners has increased tremendously, which causes them to seek marketing alternatives to survive and prosper in this challenging field.<sup>[1]</sup> Dentists all around the world have started showing their interests in dental marketing as their view and perception on the subject has changed throughout the years, leading to the great evolution in dental marketing.

Nowadays, dentists have begin to realize that they cannot depend solely on the quality and reputation of their practice to gain and maintain their patients' interest and trust, instead they should also focus on creating an image and brand for themselves. A good reputation is important for a dentist to be successful and it can be achieved by focusing on how to make their practice big enough to earn such reputation. In order to attain a good reputation, a dentist should be able to market themselves well in the community. Since dental care is considered as a part of business like any other sector, dentists should apply the same principal and strategies to achieve a profitable business.<sup>[1]</sup>

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It is very important for dentists to be well-prepared with the information about their practices in order to provide a clear and consistent communication that can make them stand out in the sea of sameness.<sup>[2]</sup> Planning of dental marketing normally involves market data, marketing budget, budget allocation, priority promotion medium, deployment strategies for each medium, line item costs and a period of when to implement each component within the plan.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### **Unique Value Proposition (UVP):-**

UVP refers to a clear statement that explains what a dentist has to offer, how they provide the patients' needs and what makes them different from the other dentists. It is also known as unique selling proposition (USP).<sup>[4]</sup> The UVP of a dentist should be easy to understand, concise and appealing, solving the patients' problems, communicate specific value that is unlike primary alternatives and better than alternatives to the patients.<sup>[2]</sup> UVP helps dentists to stand out by clarifying how they are different from their competitors in a way that matters to their target patients. By knowing their target patients, dentists can better understand their patients' needs and able to meet their expectations in a distinctive, relevant and remarkable way.

People normally perceive that all dentists offer the same thing, which makes them less interested in knowing more about the profession.<sup>[2]</sup> This is actually a great opportunity for dentists to introduce their practices to the people and convince them on why they are better than their dental competitors in solving their patients' problems. UVP is a form of dental marketing that enables dentists to attract possible patients especially those living in the market area surrounding the dental practice. Planning a UVP requires an effort, in which a dentist needs to know their business, target patients, competitors and strategy to fulfill the specific market need. In order to create an effective UVP, a dentist should be able to identify who, where, what, why and when as part of their dental marketing plan.

#### **Materials and Method:-**

A questionnaire-based study was done among dentists with various years of practice. A total of 200 practicing dentists in Chennai participated in the survey. All the participants were provided with a list of 12 questions related to dental marketing with answers given for each question. The participants were told to choose only one answer based on their personal opinion.

#### **Dental marketing, yay or nay?—a survey:-**

1. Do you have patients who visit you on a regular basis?
  - Yes
  - No
  
2. How often do your patients come for regular check-ups?
  - Every 6 months
  - Once a year
  - Every 2 years
  - Occasionally
  - Other: .....
  
3. How did your patients find out about you?
  - Referral by family member / friend / neighbor
  - Referral by another dentist
  - Referral by acquaintance
  - Phone book
  - Saw sign / location
  - Advertisement
  - Other: .....
  
4. Do you notify your patients when it is time for a check-up?
  - Yes
  - No

- 5. How do you notify your patients for a check-up?
  - Phone call
  - Text message
  - Email
  - None of the above
  - Other: .....
  
- 6. Do you have any form of social media (ex: Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to promote your dental practices?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- 7. Do you often communicate with your patients (ex: out-of-office referrals, events, email, etc.)?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- 8. Do you provide special offers or discount coupons for your patients?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- 9. Do you have a clear plan for your dental marketing activities?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- 10. Do you spend a lot on dental marketing (ex: more than 10 lakhs)?
  - Yes
  - No
  
- 11. Do you think dental marketing is important for your career as a dentist?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
  
- 12. What type of dental marketing do you prefer?
  - Advertisement
  - Social media
  - Special offers, discount coupons, etc.
  - Other: .....

**Results:-**

**Table 1:-** “Do you have patients who visit you on a regular basis?”

Question 1	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Yes	168	84
No	32	16

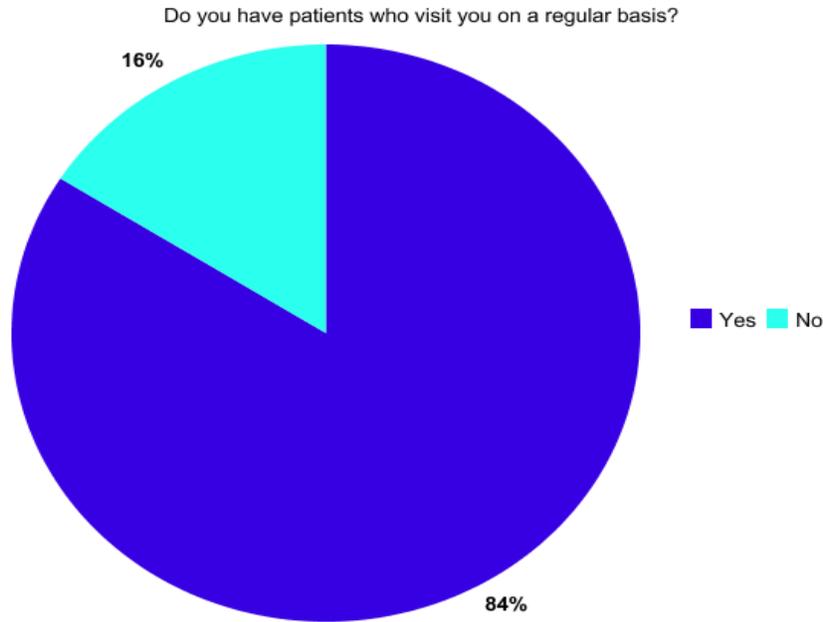


Figure 1:- “Do you have patients who visit you on a regular basis?”

Table 2:- “How often do your patients come for regular check-ups?”

Question 2	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Every 6 months	110	55
Once a year	50	25
Every 2 years	0	0
Occasionally	38	19
Other	2	1

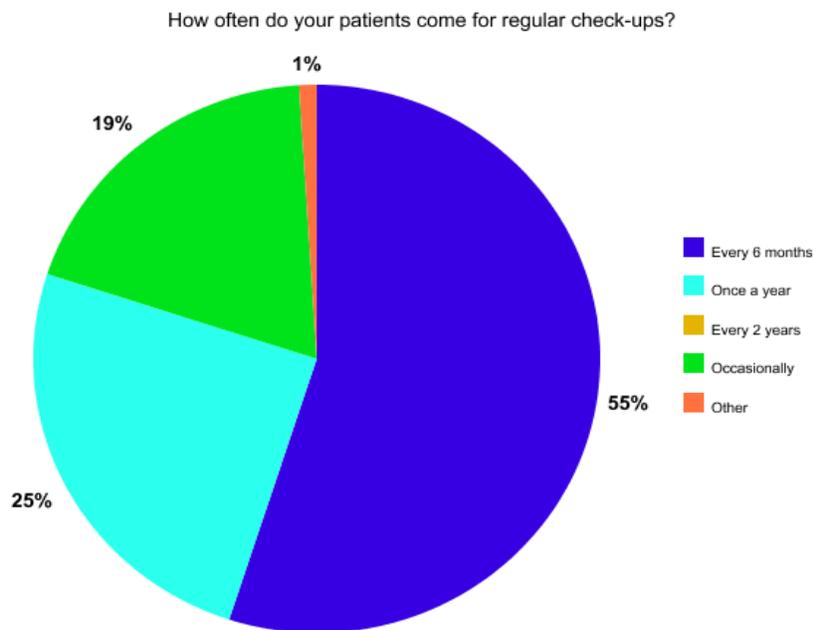
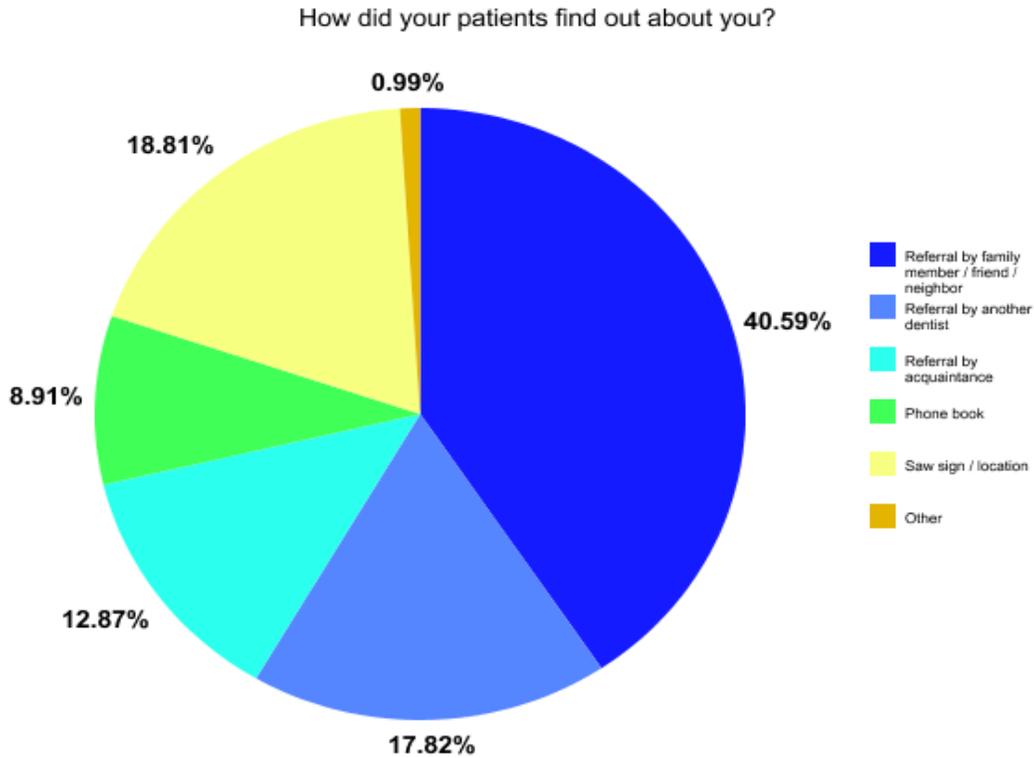


Figure 2:- “How often do your patients come for regular check-ups?”

**Table 3:-** “How did your patients find out about you?”

Question 3	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Referral by family member / friend / neighbor	81	40.59
Referral by another dentist	36	17.82
Referral by acquaintance	26	12.87
Phone book	18	8.91
Saw sign / location	37	18.81
Other	2	0.99



**Figure 3:-** “How did your patients find out about you?”

**Table 4:-** “Do you notify your patients when it is time for a check-up?”

Question 4	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Yes	168	84
No	32	16

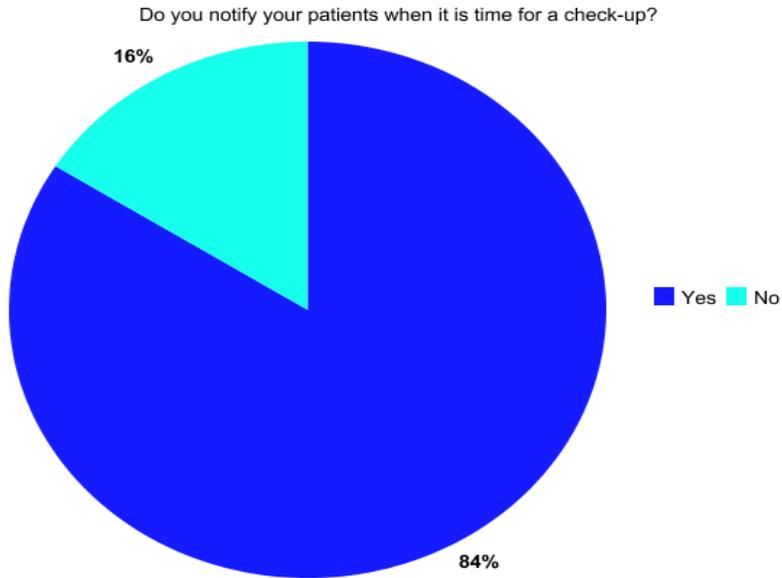


Figure 4:- “Do you notify your patients when it is time for a check-up?”

Table 5:- “How do you notify your patients for a check-up?”

Question 5	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Phone call	79	39.42
Text message	77	38.46
Email	13	6.73
None of the above	31	15.38
Other	0	0.00

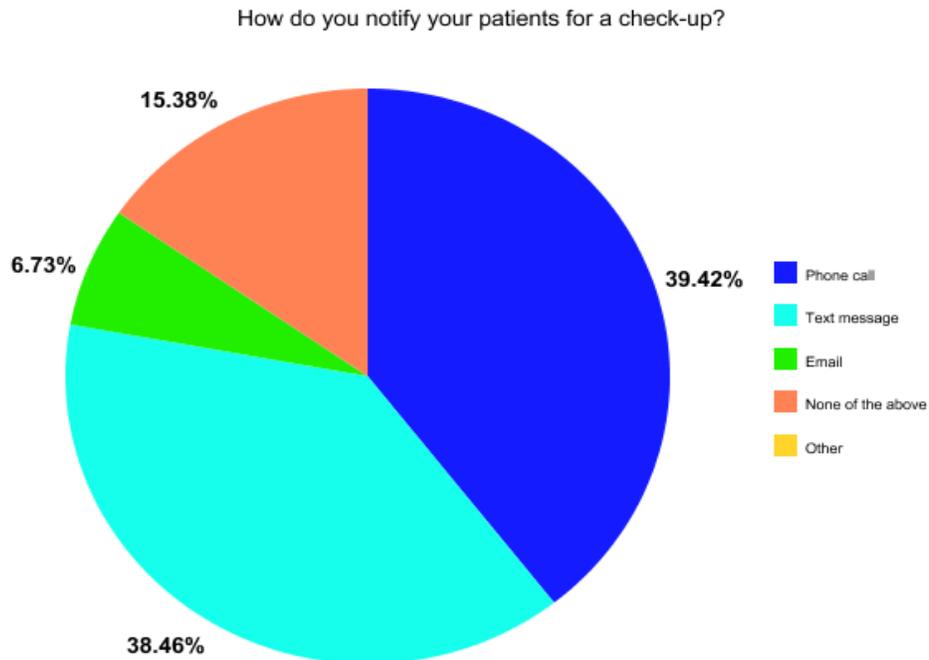
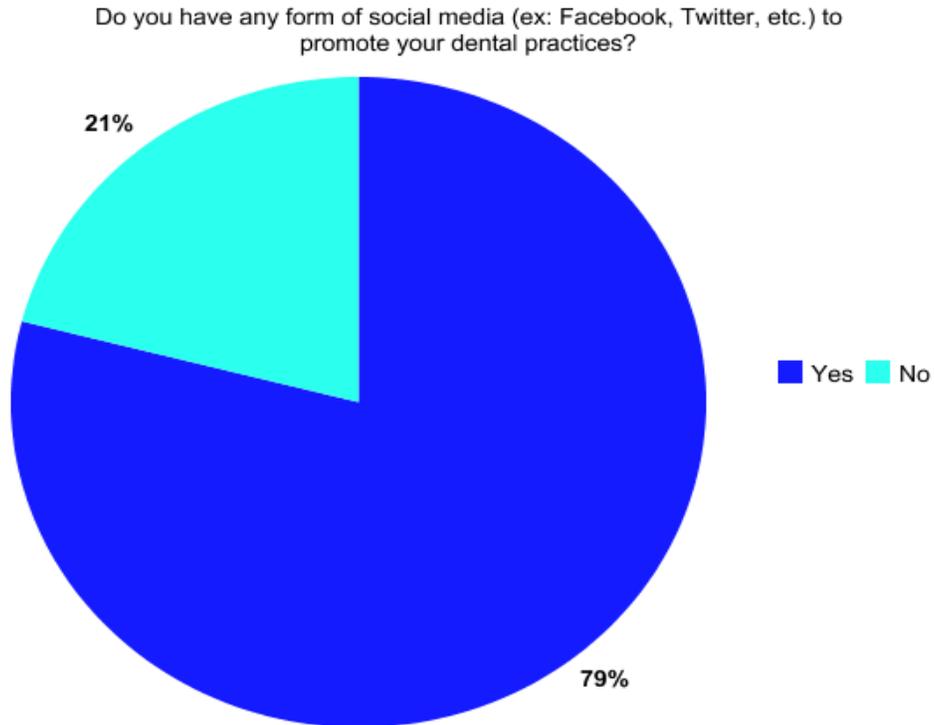


Figure 5:- “How do you notify your patients for a check-up?”

**Table 6:-** “Do you have any form of social media (ex: Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to promote your dental practices?”

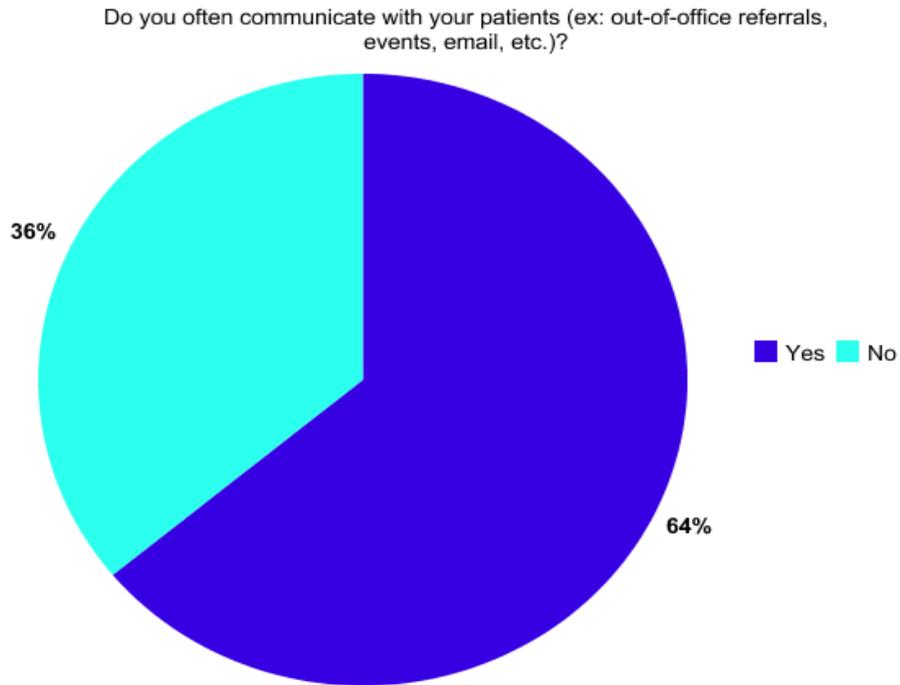
Question 6	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Yes	158	79
No	42	21



**Figure 6:-** “Do you have any form of social media (ex: Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to promote your dental practices?”

**Table 7:-** “Do you often communicate with your patients (ex: out-of-office referrals, events, email, etc.)?”

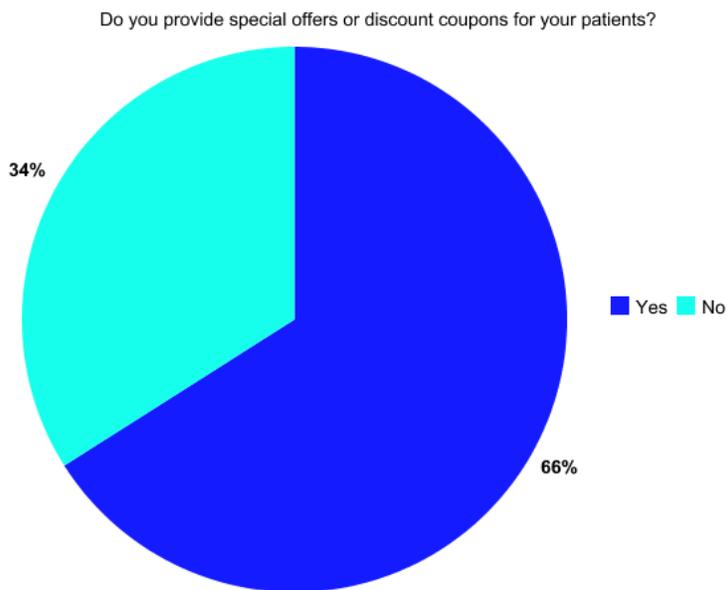
Question 7	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Yes	128	64
No	72	36



**Figure 7:-** “Do you often communicate with your patients (ex: out-of-office referrals, events, email, etc.)?”

**Table 8:-** “Do you provide special offers or discount coupons for your patients?”

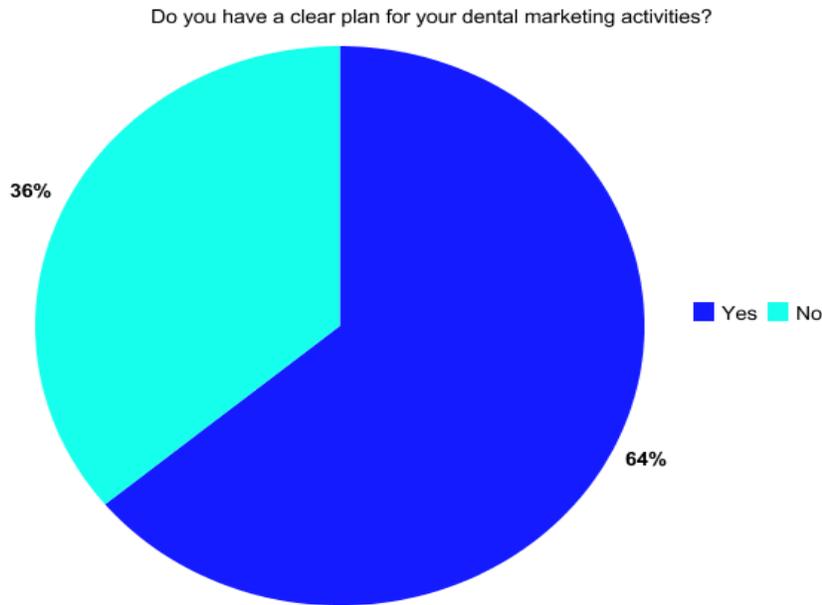
Question 8	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Yes	132	66
No	68	34



**Figure 8:-** “Do you provide special offers or discount coupons for your patients?”

**Table 9:-** “Do you have a clear plan for your dental marketing activities?”

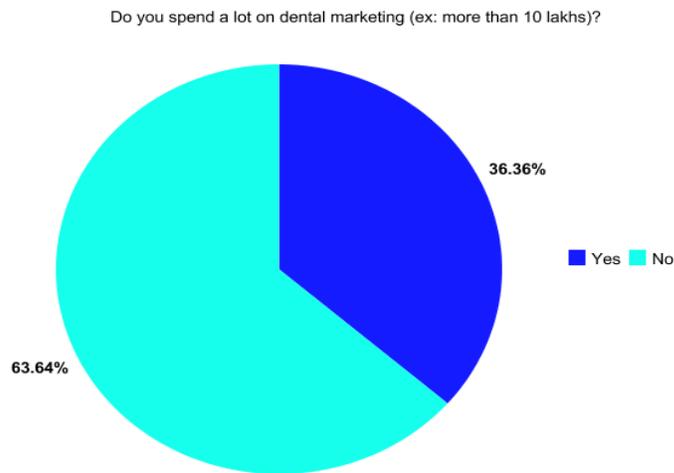
Question 9	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Yes	128	64
No	72	36



**Figure 9:-** “Do you have a clear plan for your dental marketing activities?”

**Table 10:-** “Do you spend a lot on dental marketing (ex: more than 10 lakhs)?”

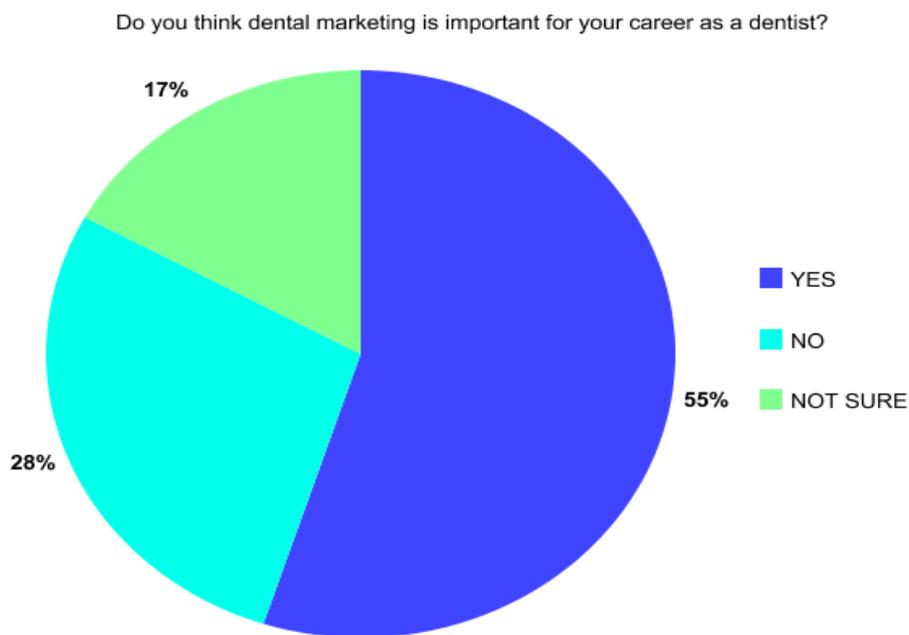
Question 10	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Yes	73	36.36
No	127	63.64



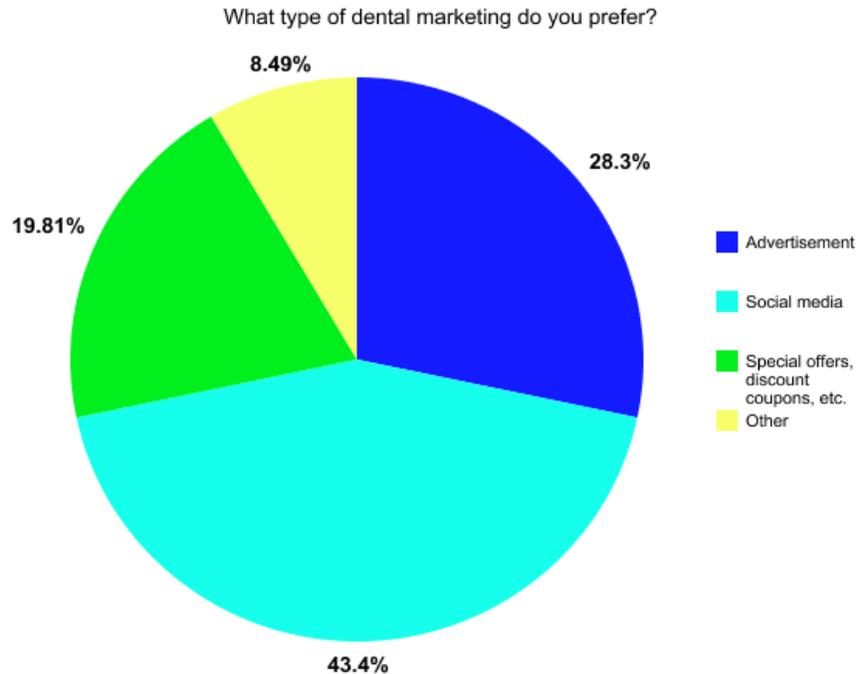
**Figure 10:-** “Do you spend a lot on dental marketing (ex: more than 10 lakhs)?”

**Table 11:-** “Do you think dental marketing is important for your career as a dentist?”

Question 11	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Yes	110	55
No	56	28
Not Sure	34	17

**Figure 11:-** “Do you think dental marketing is important for your career as a dentist?”**Table 12:-** “What type of dental marketing do you prefer?”

Question 12	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Individuals (%)
Advertisement	57	28.30
Social media	87	43.40
Special offers, discount, coupons, etc.	39	19.81
Other	17	8.49



**Figure 12:-** “What type of dental marketing do you prefer?”

#### **Discussion:-**

According to Figure 1, a total of 168 participants in the survey have patients who visit them on a regular basis while the remaining 32 participants have patients visiting them once in a while. The larger number of participants is represented by 84% and the remaining 16% represents the smaller group of participants.

The result obtained from Figure 2 indicates about 55% of the participants have patients who visit them every 6 months for regular check-ups, which is equivalent to 110 of the total number of participants in the survey. 25% of them have patients coming for treatments once a year, 19% with occasional patients and the rest 1% had chosen “other” as the answer without specifically stating how often their patients visit them. None of the participants have patients who visit them every 2 years.

Based on Figure 3, 81 or 40.59% of the participants have patients who found out about them through a family member, friend or neighbor. 17.82% or 36 have patients coming to them by referral from another dentist and 12.87% or 26 of them were recommended by their patients’ acquaintance. The result also indicates that 8.91% and 18.81% of the participants were recognized by their patients through phone book and saw sign or location respectively. Only 0.99% of them showed different opinion from the given answers in the survey.

When asked if they notify their patients prior to a check-up, 84% of the participants answered “Yes”, which is equivalent to 168 dentists. The remaining 16% or 32 of them answered the opposite.

The participants were further asked on how they notify their patients for a check-up, in which 39.42% or 79 of them prefer phone call and 38.46% or 77 normally use text message as a method to notify their patients. Email notification was chosen by 6.73% or 13 participants and the rest 15.38% or 31 of them usually do not notify their patients prior to a check-up.

It can be seen that most of the participants have a basic knowledge on dental marketing with 158 or 79% of them having a form of social media to promote their dental practices while the remaining 21% represents the smaller group of participants who do not promote their practices through social media.

According to Figure 7, 64% of the participants often communicate with their patients in various occasions such as out-of-office referrals and events while 36% of them only communicate with the patients during their visits to the dental clinic.

It can be said that most of the participants have interests towards dental marketing as 66% of them provide special offers or discount coupons to their patients, which is similar to 132 of the total participants in the survey. 68 participants answered the opposite indicating that 34% of them do not provide any special offer or discount coupon to their patients.

Figure 9 shows that 64% of the participants have a clear plan for their dental marketing activities indicating their awareness and knowledge on the subject. However, planning of dental marketing still remains ambiguous for the remaining 36% of the participants.

Based on Figure 10, 73 or 36.36% of the participants are willing to spend a lot on marketing their dental practices, which is lesser than the remaining 127 or 63.64% of them who disagree with the idea of spending more than 10 lakhs for dental marketing.

The result obtained from Figure 11 indicates that 55% of the participants in the survey view dental marketing as a way to boost their career as a dentist, while 28% disagree with the idea and the remaining 17% are not sure whether dental marketing affects their career in any way.

Based on their basic knowledge on dental marketing, 43.40% of the participants had chosen social media as a great platform for them to promote their dental practices, followed by 28.30% for advertisement and 19.81% of them preferred special offers, discount, coupons, etc. as a medium for dental marketing. The remaining 8.49% or 17 of them had chosen other form of dental marketing without clearly stating them.

### **Conclusion:-**

Dental marketing has both its advantages and disadvantages on a dentist's career. Previously, dentists engaged in marketing and advertising their dental practices were constantly criticized for being unprofessional and dental marketing campaigns were often ridiculed and even taken to court. As time goes by, a lot of dentists have started to realize that a form of marketing plan is required in order for them to maintain themselves in this competitive field. Although dental marketing can be very helpful to a dentist, it must be done within specific guidelines to prevent them from false or misleading advertising. According to a guideline provided by the American Dental Association (ADA), "a dentist's marketing materials must not contain a material, objective representation, whether express or implied, that the advertised services are superior in quality to those of other dentists, if that representation is not subject to reasonable substantiation."<sup>[5]</sup>

Comparing the results obtained from this study to a similar survey done by Jim Du Molin in 2007, it can be seen that dentists have different opinions on dental marketing throughout the years. Based on his study, previous dentists had split opinions regarding the issue as 54% of the participants in the survey disliked the idea of marketing their dental practices claiming that dentists should always hold themselves to a higher ethical code instead of acting like a salesperson. The remaining 46% of them believed that dental marketing can actually help dentists to survive in this competitive world without being negatively judged by the public.<sup>[6]</sup>

In today's world, dental marketing has become an important role in the dental industry that dentists who do not take part in marketing their dental practices risk falling behind those who use dental marketing as a medium to reach out to their patients. A California dentist mentioned that, "It costs so much to market, it's hard to tell if it's working, and we all have to do it to keep up with the other dentists who have started advertising."<sup>[7]</sup> There are also some dentists who showed their concerns regarding this issue as seen from a statement by a North Carolina dentist, "Heavy advertising reduces dentistry to a commodity rather than a professional service," and "We are cheapening our profession," said a Washington general dentist. As opposed to that, more dentists have come together to show their support for dental marketing, "Today's consumers rely on advertising to make their choices. People used to rely on neighbors to recommend dentists. Now you are lucky if you meet your neighbor within five years. I have increased my advertising over the past 18 months, and it has been very rewarding financially," said a New Hampshire dentist.<sup>[7]</sup>

Despite the different opinions among dentists, dental marketing has continuously proven itself to be one of the effective ways for dentists to attract new patients provided that it is done within the guidelines given by the dental council. According to Jim Du Molin who is the founder of The Wealthy Dentist and the Internet Dental Alliance,

"Sooner or later, all dentists will realize that if they don't market their dental practices, they're going to go out of business."<sup>[7]</sup>

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