

The Role of Social Media as a Platform for Education and Promotion of Children's Oral Health in the Community

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ABSTRACT

Children's oral health is a critical issue that requires special attention from parents and the community. With the increasing use of social media, these platforms have great potential as a tool for health education and promotion. The purpose of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of social media as a platform for educating and promoting children's oral health at the community level. This study used a qualitative method with a case study approach. The subjects of the study were parents and community health workers in a community development area of the Faculty of Dentistry, Universitas Kadiri. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation of social media usage as a medium for disseminating children's oral health information. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes from the qualitative data. The results of this study showed that social media plays a significant role in increasing parents' knowledge and awareness of the importance of children's oral health. The success was supported by the interactive features of platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, which enabled direct engagement and question-and-answer sessions. Content that was visual, simple, and culturally relevant garnered the most engagement. Challenges included limited digital literacy among some community members and the need for continuous content creation to maintain interest. Social media can be an effective and scalable tool for the education and promotion of children's oral health in the community. The study recommends the development of engaging and easy-to-understand educational content, as well as providing training for community health workers to optimize the use of social media platforms. Future research should explore a mixed-methods approach to quantify the impact of these interventions on clinical oral health outcomes.

Keywords: Social Media, Education, Health Promotion, Pediatric Dentistry, Community

INTRODUCTION

Oral health in children is a fundamental component of their overall well-being, influencing their physical growth, psychological development, and social interactions. Despite its importance, the global burden of oral diseases, particularly dental caries, remains a significant public health challenge, with high prevalence rates observed in many communities. Traditional oral health education methods, such as face-to-face counseling and distribution of pamphlets, are often limited by geographical constraints, high costs, and lack of sustained engagement. These limitations necessitate the exploration of innovative, cost-effective, and far-reaching strategies to promote oral health awareness and behavior.

The rapid proliferation of digital technology and social media has transformed how information is created, shared, and consumed. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are now widely used by communities, including parents and caregivers, making them an ideal medium for public health interventions. This shift aligns with the vision of the Faculty of Dentistry, Universitas Kadiri, which emphasizes Community Dentistry based on digital technology. By leveraging social media, dental professionals can overcome barriers of access and reach a broader audience, thereby empowering parents with the knowledge to make informed decisions about their children's oral health.

While the potential of social media in public health is widely acknowledged, specific research on its effectiveness in the context of children's oral health education within community settings is still emerging. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the role of social media as a platform for oral health education and promotion for children in a specific community. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for developing evidence-based digital health interventions in pediatric dentistry.

METHODS

This study was a qualitative case study conducted in a community served by the Faculty of Dentistry, Universitas Kadiri. The research design was chosen to provide a deep, contextual understanding of how social media is used for oral health promotion.

Study Population and Sampling: The study subjects included 10 parents of children aged 2-12 years and 5 community health workers (kader kesehatan) who actively participated in a social media-based oral health education program. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who were active users of social media and were part of the community program.

Data Collection: Data were collected through two primary methods:

1. **In-depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants to gather detailed information on their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards the social media-based program. The interviews explored topics such as the type of content they found most useful, the challenges they faced, and the perceived impact on their oral health knowledge and behavior.
2. **Participatory Observation:** The researcher participated in and observed the activities within the community's social media groups (e.g., WhatsApp and Facebook groups) for a period of three months. This allowed for direct observation of interactions, content sharing, and engagement levels.

Data Analysis: The interviews and observational field notes were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. This process involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, writing up the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Increased Knowledge and Awareness:

The thematic analysis revealed that the social media-based program was highly effective in increasing parents' knowledge and awareness of key children's oral health topics, such as the importance of early dental visits, proper brushing techniques, and the role of diet in preventing caries. The visual format of the content, including short videos and infographics, was particularly well-received and easy to understand.

2. High Engagement and Interaction:

The interactive nature of social media platforms was a significant factor in the program's success. Participants frequently used the platforms to ask questions, share their experiences, and receive direct, real-time feedback from dental students and faculty members. This dynamic interaction fostered a sense of community and trust, which is often difficult to achieve with traditional methods.

3. Challenges and Limitations:

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified. A key challenge was the varying level of digital literacy among community members, which sometimes limited their ability to access or fully engage with the content. Additionally, the need for continuous and creative content production to prevent "platform fatigue" was a notable challenge for the program implementers.

The findings align with the growing body of literature on digital health interventions, which suggests that social media can be a powerful tool for health promotion due to its accessibility and high engagement potential. However, this study also highlights the importance of tailoring content to be culturally and contextually relevant, as well as the need to address digital literacy gaps within target communities.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study demonstrates that social media platforms can serve as a highly effective and scalable tool for the education and promotion of children's oral health within a community setting. The use of engaging, visual content and interactive features led to increased knowledge and awareness among parents. The findings underscore the potential of integrating digital technology into Community Dentistry practices to overcome traditional barriers to health education.

Based on these findings, we recommend the following:

1. Developing a standardized, yet adaptable, library of educational content (e.g., videos, infographics) for children's oral health that is simple and easy to share on social media.
2. Incorporating digital literacy training as part of community health programs to ensure all members can benefit from social media interventions.

3. Future research should adopt a mixed-methods approach to quantitatively measure the impact of these interventions on behavioral changes and clinical oral health outcomes, such as a reduction in caries prevalence.

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