



## Consumer attitude towards Dental service Advertising...a Survey

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Twenty years ago, Hite, Bellizzi, and Andrus (1988) examined the attitudes of dentists and consumers toward advertising. This study re-examines those attitudes to see if significant differences still exist.

**Material and methods:** Data for the study were gathered through Internet surveys. Mailing addresses were gathered for a national random sample of dentists using a commercial bulk mail service. The consumer data were gathered from a consumer panel set up by the researchers for the purpose of doing periodic Internet surveys. Dentists were sent a letter and consumer panel members were sent an e-mail asking them to cooperate in the study by clicking on a link that took them directly to a survey. The two survey questionnaires were similar in terms of the topics but worded slightly different to account for audience differences. A total of 312 mail surveys were sent to a randomly selected sample of dentists. From this sample, 130 responded, yielding a 41.6% response rate. A total of 225 e-mails were sent to the consumer panel, all were delivered and 180 responded yielding a response rate of 80%.

**Results:** Most of the individuals belonged to the age group of 20-24 years (23.5%). Out of 550 subjects, 331 were men and 219 were women.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, this study has indicated some changes in the attitudes of dentists and consumers since the original study 20 years ago. Dentists' attitude toward advertising is not as negative, but views of dentists and consumers are still wide apart on a number of issues. Perhaps more importantly, while dentists have started using marketing tools, the ones that are being used are not consistent with consumer views and should be altered. Advertising can be a powerful tool in recruiting future patients and re-assuring current patients. But to be effective, dentists must utilize traditional media and traditional advertising methodologies.

**KEYWORDS:** Advertising attitudes, dentists, patients, healthcare marketing

### Introduction

Recent studies have indicated that the attitude toward advertising of medical professionals, such as dentists and doctors, has become more positive (Yavas and Riecken<sup>1</sup>, 2001; Hite, Bellizzi, and Andrus<sup>2</sup>, 1988). This change has been gradual and has been seen with younger professionals more than with older professionals and with females more than with males (Yavas and Riecken, 2001). Past research has also found that the attitude of consumers of professional services tends to be more positive than that of the service provider (Yavas and Riecken, 2001; Hite, Bellizzi, and Andrus, 1988). In the 1980s, Hite, Bellizzi, and Andrus (1988) examined the attitude of consumers and dentists toward dental service advertising. 26 of 29 statements measured indicated significant differences between the

attitude of dentists and the attitude of consumers. Consumers indicated they believed advertising of dental services can be done tastefully and that dentists should advertise their services. Further, they believed that advertising would not lower the dignity, credibility, or public image of the dentist. However, dentists did not feel the same. Their responses indicated they felt that advertising would lower their credibility and image of the profession.

The purpose of this study is to re-examine these attitudes and to see if there is still a significant difference between the attitude of dentists and the attitude of dental patients (consumers) toward the advertising of dental services.

### Material and methods

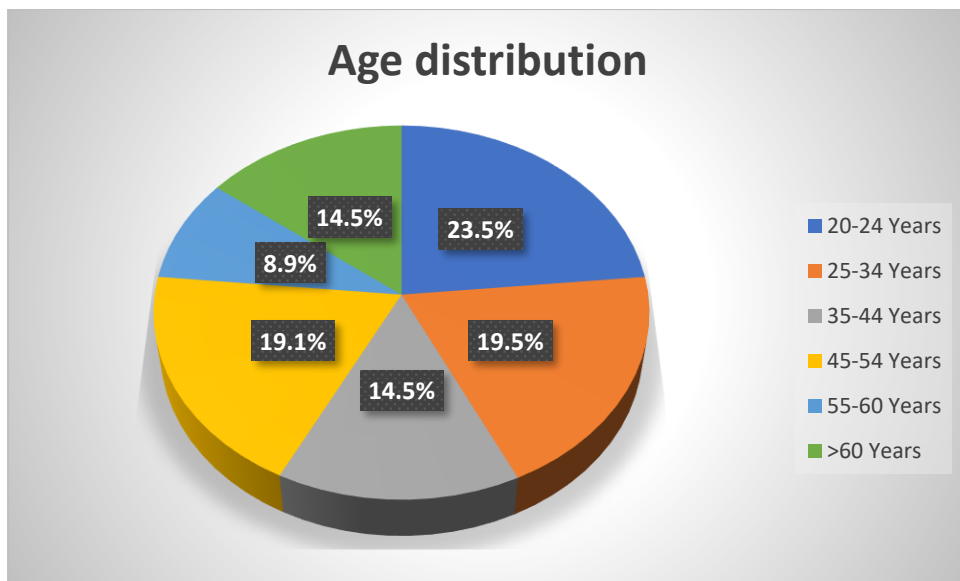
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### Results

Most of the individuals belonged to the age group of 20-24 years (23.5%).

**Table 1- Age distribution.**

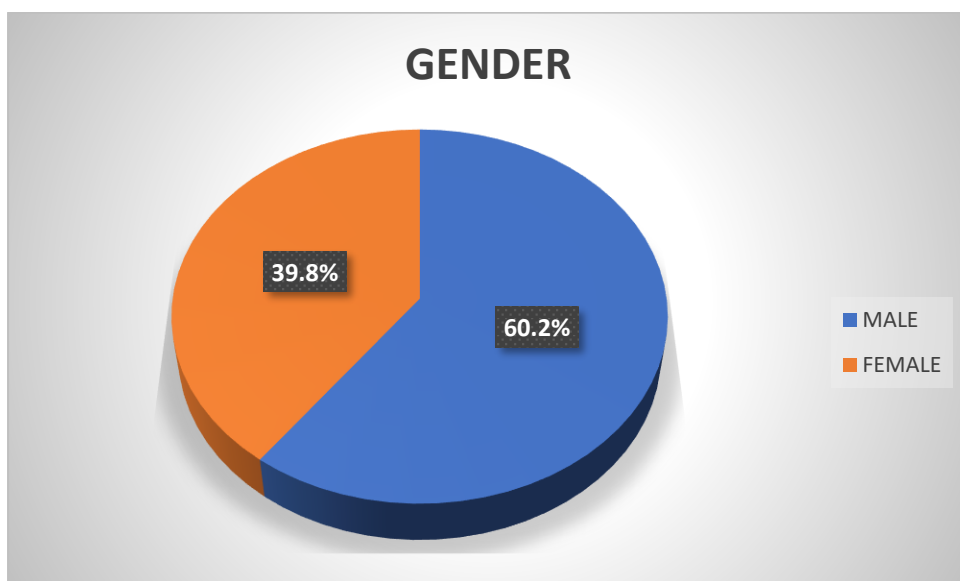
Age Group in years	Frequency	Percentage%
20-24	129	23.5
25-34	107	19.5
35-44	80	14.5
45-54	105	19.1
55-60	49	8.9
>60	80	14.5
Total	550	100.0



**Table 2-Gender distribution.**

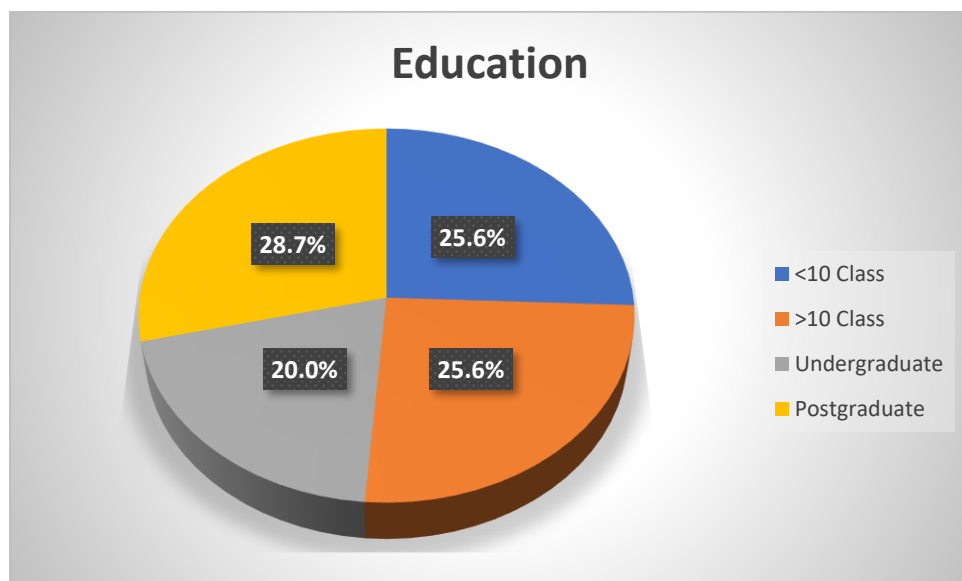
Out of 550 subjects, 331 were men and 219 were women.

GENDER	Frequency	Percentage%
MALE	331	60.2
FEMALE	219	39.8
Total	550	100.0



**Table 3- Education distribution.**

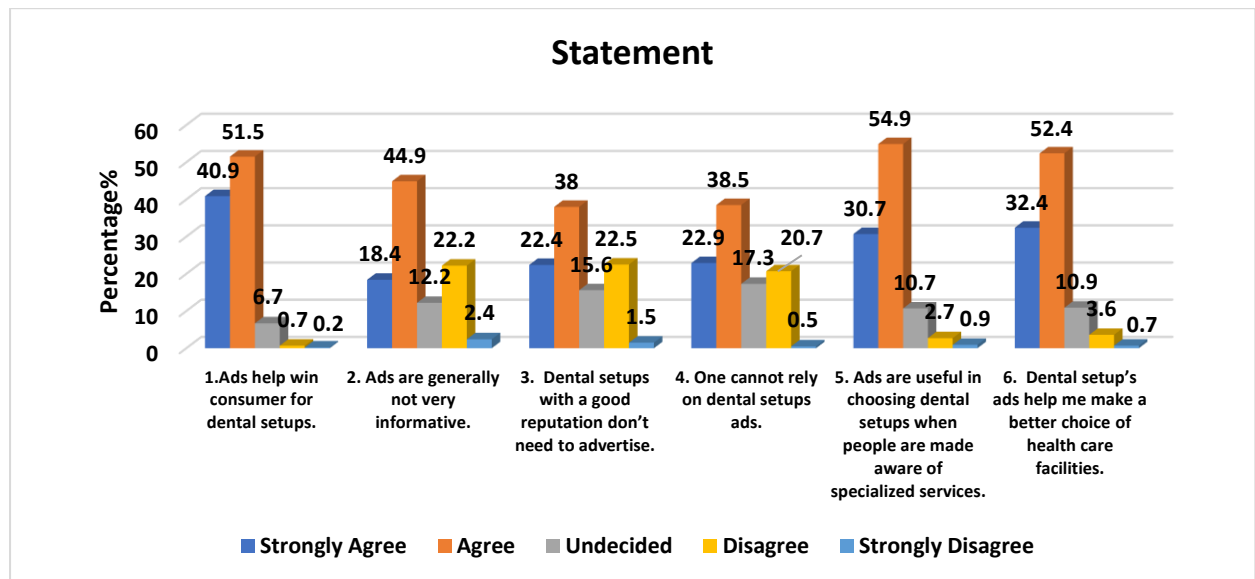
Education	Frequency	Percentage%
<10 Class	141	25.6
>10 Class	141	25.6
Undergraduate	110	20.0
Postgraduate	158	28.7
Total	550	100.0



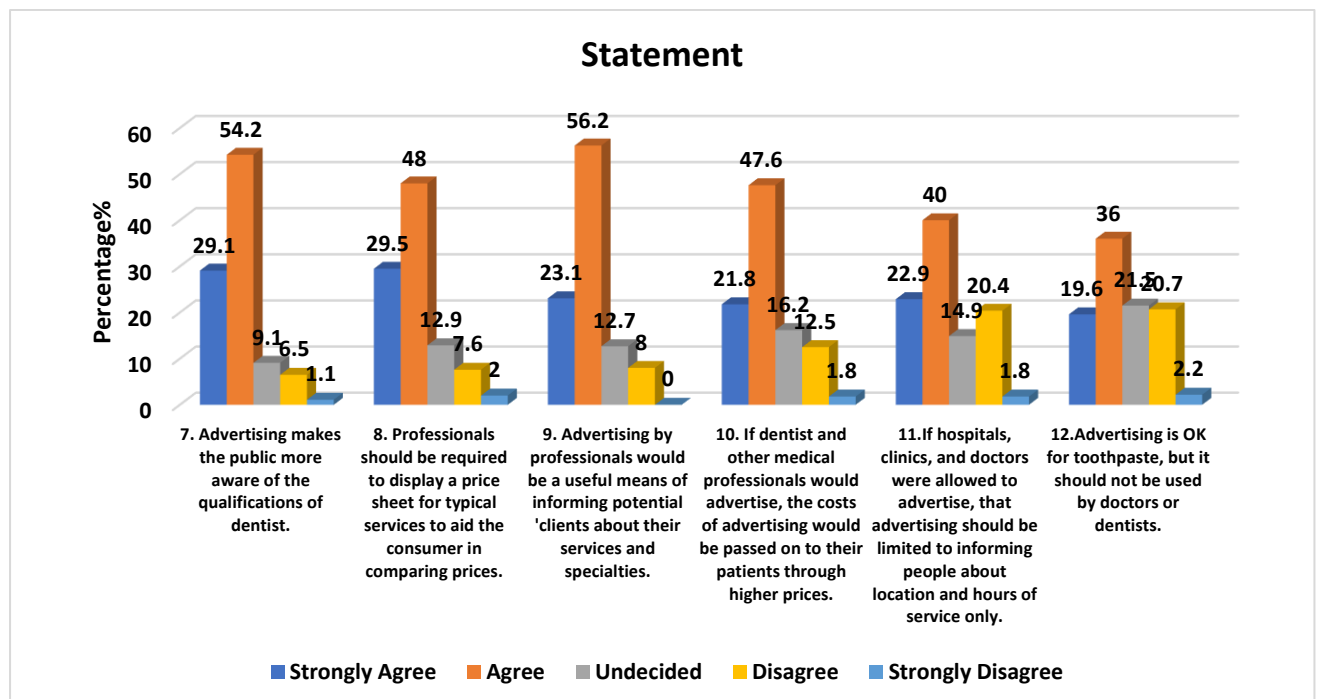
**Table 4: Perceptions about dental advertising among general population**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Number(%)</b>	<b>Number(%)</b>	<b>Number(%)</b>	<b>Number(%)</b>	<b>Number(%)</b>
1. Ads help win consumer for dental setups.	225(40.9)	283(51.5)	37(6.7)	4(0.7)	1(0.2)
2. Ads are generally not very informative.	101(18.4)	247(44.9)	67(12.2)	122(22.2)	13(2.4)
3. Dental setups with a good reputation don't need to advertise.	123(22.4)	209(38)	86(15.6)	124(22.5)	8(1.5)
4. One cannot rely on dental setups ads.	126(22.9)	212(38.5)	95(17.3)	114(20.7)	3(0.5)
5. Ads are useful in choosing dental setups when people are made aware of specialized services.	169(30.7)	302(54.9)	59(10.7)	15(2.7)	5(0.9)
6. Dental setup's ads help me make a better choice of health care facilities.	178(32.4)	288(52.4)	60(10.9)	20(3.6)	4(0.7)
7. Advertising makes the public more aware of the qualifications of dentist.	160(29.1)	298(54.2)	50(9.1)	36(6.5)	6(1.1)
8. Professionals should be required to display a price sheet for typical services to aid the consumer in comparing prices.	162(29.5)	264(48)	71(12.9)	42(7.6)	11(2)
9. Advertising by professionals would be a useful means of informing potential 'clients about their services and specialties.	127(23.1)	309(56.2)	70(12.7)	44(8)	0(0)
10. If dentist and other medical professionals would advertise, the costs of advertising would be passed on to their patients through higher prices.	120(21.8)	262(47.6)	89(16.2)	69(12.5)	10(1.8)
11. If hospitals, clinics, and doctors were allowed to advertise, that advertising should be limited to informing people about location and hours of service only.	126(22.9)	220(40)	82(14.9)	112(20.4)	10(1.8)
12. Advertising is OK for toothpaste, but it should not be used by doctors or dentists.	108(19.6)	198(36)	118(21.5)	114(20.7)	12(2.2)
13. Advertising by dentist will increase people's awareness.	172(31.3)	255(46.4)	71(12.9)	36(6.5)	16(2.9)
14. Advertising by health professionals will increase competition among themselves.	139(25.3)	277(50.4)	78(14.2)	49(8.9)	7(1.3)
15. Advertising by dentist will give me the opportunity to make a better selection of my dentist.	189(34.4)	246(44.7)	75(13.6)	28(5.1)	12(2.2)
16. Advertising by other dentist will not influence my choice of dentist.	110(20)	224(40.7)	96(17.5)	113(20.5)	7(1.3)
17. Advertising by dentist will be truthful.	134(24.4)	205(37.3)	142(25.8)	56(10.2)	13(2.4)

**Graph : Perceptions about dental advertising among general population( q1to q6)**



**Graph : Perceptions about dental advertising among general population(q7 to q12)**



**Graph : Perceptions about dental advertising among general population(q13 to q17)**

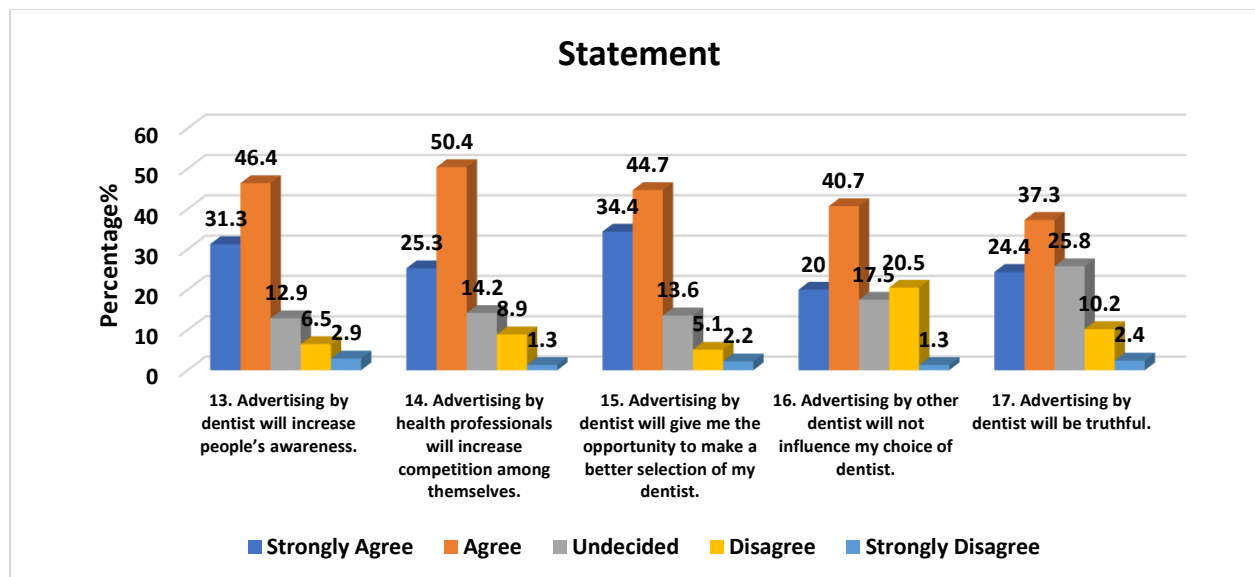
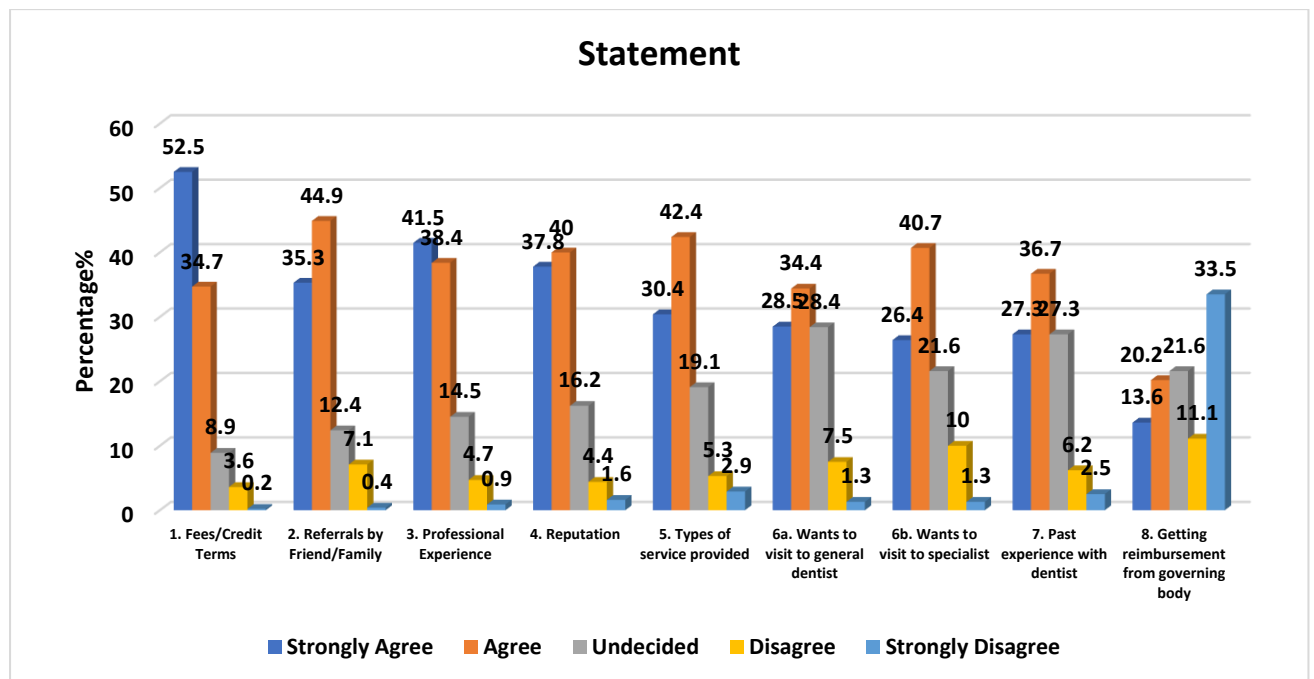


Table 5-: Choice criteria in selecting dental care provider

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	Number(%)	Number(%)	Number(%)	Number(%)	Number(%)
<b>1. Fees/Credit Terms</b>	289(52.5)	191(34.7)	49(8.9)	20(3.6)	1(0.2)
<b>2. Referrals by Friend/Family</b>	194(35.3)	247(44.9)	68(12.4)	39(7.1)	2(0.4)
<b>3. Professional Experience</b>	228(41.5)	211(38.4)	80(14.5)	26(4.7)	5(0.9)
<b>4. Reputation</b>	208(37.8)	220(40)	89(16.2)	24(4.4)	9(1.6)
<b>5. Types of service provided</b>	167(30.4)	233(42.4)	105(19.1)	29(5.3)	16(2.9)
<b>6a. Wants to visit to general dentist</b>	157(28.5)	189(34.4)	156(28.4)	41(7.5)	7(1.3)
<b>6b. Wants to visit to specialist</b>	145(26.4)	224(40.7)	119(21.6)	55(10)	7(1.3)
<b>7. Past experience with dentist</b>	150(27.3)	202(36.7)	150(27.3)	34(6.2)	14(2.5)
<b>8. Getting reimbursement from governing body</b>	75(13.6)	111(20.2)	119(21.6)	61(11.1)	184(33.5)

**Graph:- Choice criteria in selecting dental care provider**

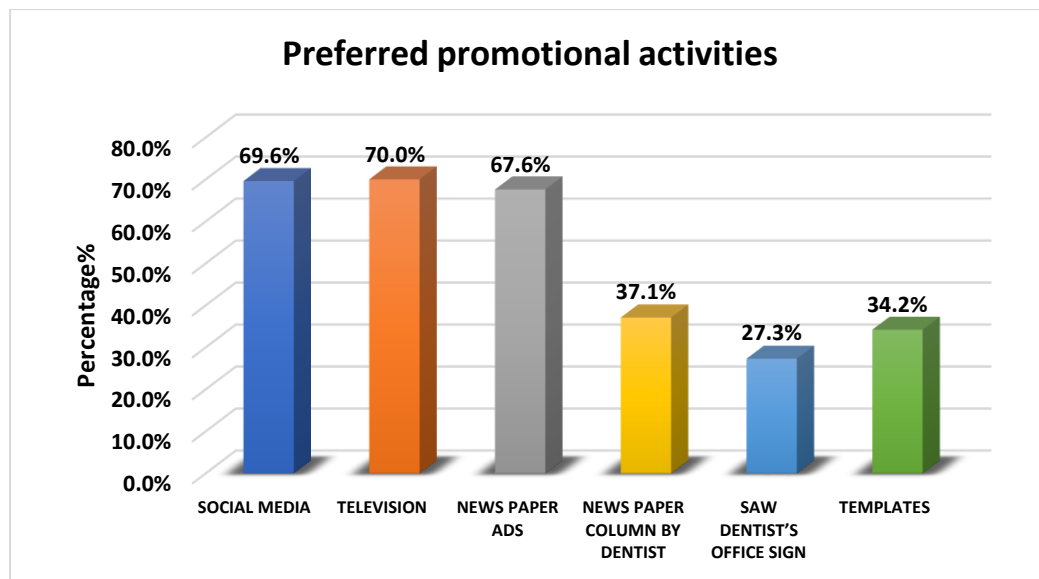


**Table 6: Preferred promotional activities for selecting dental care provider**

Preferred promotional activities	Number	Percentage(%)
SOCIAL MEDIA	383	69.60%
TELEVISION	385	70.00%
NEWSPAPER ADS	372	67.60%
NEWSPAPER COLUMN BY DENTIST	204	37.10%
SAW DENTIST'S OFFICE SIGN	150	27.30%
TEMPLATES	188	34.20%

**Graph: Preferred promotional activities for selecting dental care provider**





## Discussion

After twenty years, there is still a chasm between the attitude of dentists and the attitude of dental patients toward advertising. In general, consumers are more positive about advertising of dental services than are dentists. What has changed, however, is that dentists no longer have a strong negative feeling about advertising's negative impact on dentistry and its image with the public. As a result, dentists have increased their usage of marketing tools. Philosophically, consumers believe the relationship with dentists is unique and personal and should not be established as a result of advertising. They also feel that existing information is sufficient to guide their decision in the selection of a dentist. The strongest differences between dentists and consumers are found in the area of economic issues. In terms of serving a public good, consumers had a stronger belief than dentists that advertising would assist the public in knowing which dentist to choose for particular dental problems. They also indicated a stronger feeling that as a result of knowledge gained through advertising, the consumers could make more informed decisions about which dentist to use. This survey indicated that both consumers and dentists are concerned if advertising was widely used, it would degenerate into misleading and deceptive ads. Dentists felt much stronger about this potential negative impact than did consumers. As a result, both groups believed that regulations would have to be imposed to control advertising and to prevent deceptive and misleading advertising. Discrepancies were found between the marketing tools used by dentists and what is viewed by consumers.

The most striking differences in terms of usage were with websites, brochures, seminars, television, and billboards. Over 70% of the dentists use websites to market and advertise their services, but only 11.7% of consumers have seen a dentist's website. Seminars and brochures were similar, but not as drastic. Almost 60% of the dentists in the sample developed brochures to advertise their practice, but only 22.8% of the consumers had seen a brochure. For seminars, almost 25% of the dentists in the sample used seminars, but less than 1% of the consumers in the sample had attended a seminar. It appears that dentists are investing too much marketing money into websites, brochures, and seminars. On the other side of the marketing tools equation, dentists seldom use television and billboards, but consumers reported seeing ads in these two media.

Rajani et al<sup>3</sup> examined the attitudes of Indian dentists to the issue of advertising. It also aimed to explore whether advertising could have positive benefits (to increase the community's awareness of dental health care, encourage better quality dental services, decrease unemployment in the industry, and help consumers choose a dentist), or, on the contrary, whether advertising could have a negative impact by undermining the reputation of the industry, in particular the definition of dentistry as a medical profession. Of 1500 eligible participants, 423 dentists (28.2%) participated in the study. The questionnaire, comprising 14 questions, was provided to the respondents. The data was collected and analyzed by applying the "Chi-squared test" of association and the "Z test" of difference between two proportions at 5% and 1% levels of significance (ie,  $P = 0.05$  and  $P = 0.01$ ). A majority of 56.02% of the respondents were in favor of dentists advertising their services. The majority of dentists in favor of advertising were in the youngest age group (22–30 years, 75.86%). The older age groups were more likely to agree and comply with the government ban on advertising by dentists.

Al-Khalifa et al<sup>4</sup> investigated the dentists' opinions towards social media (SM) use in daily practice and the expected limitations from its use in Saudi Arabia. An electronic survey was carried out throughout May–June 2020 among a sample of dentists in Saudi Arabia. The survey covered three parts: the first part covered professional and demographic information, the second part covered the use of mobile phones and SM in dental practice, while the third part assessed dentists' opinion on SM use. Descriptive statistics included frequency distributions and percentages and independent t test/ANOVA test for the relationship between the mean of dentists' opinion towards SM and demographic variables. A p value of 0.05 or less was considered statistically significant. The majority of respondents (80%) believe that SM plays an active role in patients' decisions regarding the selection of a healthcare provider. The mean dentists' opinion scores on the use of SM were significantly lower among participants working more than 50 h per week compared with other participants ( $p = 0.014$ ). The majority of sampled dentists believed that SM played an active role in patients' decisions regarding the healthcare provider's selection. It was concluded that directed campaigns could help dentists optimize the use of SM for both professional and personal purposes.

Policies and regulations relating to Dental Advertising (DA) vary greatly among countries. DA is prohibited in some countries, while in other countries the DA regulations range from being strict to being very lenient. In the absence of consistent DA regulations, the public risks being misled by false and spurious advertising claims. This is of particular concern today, as DA messages can be freely communicated to the public via websites, mass emailing and various forms of social media. DA has the potential to impact on all dentists and on patients' perception of dentistry as a profession. The dental profession enjoys a special position of trust and respect within society. In return, the profession makes a commitment to adhere to high ethical standards. In this respect, ethical DA means providing the patient with accurate information, placing patient's interests first and promoting reciprocal respect among members of the dental profession.<sup>5</sup>

Graskemper<sup>6</sup> determined that advertising in dentistry has steadily increased since the 1970s to become a leading choice of many dentists to promote their practices. The manner in which advertising progresses within the profession affects all dentists and how patients perceive dentistry as a profession. He concluded that ethical advertising is easily achieved by promoting patient education while not placing the dentist's self-interests ahead of the patient's. With this approach, dentistry may continue to be one of the most trusted professions.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has indicated some changes in the attitudes of dentists and consumers since the original study 20 years ago. Dentists' attitude toward advertising is not as negative, but views of

dentists and consumers are still wide apart on a number of issues. Perhaps more importantly, while dentists have started using marketing tools, the ones that are being used are not consistent with consumer views and should be altered. Advertising can be a powerful tool in recruiting future patients and re-assuring current patients. But to be effective, dentists must utilize traditional media and traditional advertising methodologies.

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