



The legality of digital marketing of dental surgeons in alto Paranaíba-MG

A legalidade do marketing digital dos cirurgiões dentistas do alto Paranaíba-MG

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ABSTRACT

The legality of marketing has been a subject that is much discussed nowadays, since not all dental surgeons (DCs) follow or know the protocols required according to the laws of the Code of Ethics for this professional. The present work aims to verify the knowledge of professionals in relation to the rules of the Regional Council of Dentistry (CRO), applied within digital marketing in CDs in Alto Paranaíba, MG. followed; carry out a data survey; carry out a possible public policy aimed at raising awareness and knowledge of the code of ethics. The methodology used is based on research with a qualitative and quantitative approach, which used the survey method through the application of a questionnaire for dental professionals. It is concluded that most of the research participants are aware of the standards proposed by the CRO as well as apply them.

Keywords: Marketing, Digital marketing, Digital marketing in dentistry, Dental code of ethics, CRO.

1 INTRODUCTION

Marketing is a word of English origin equivalent to "mercadologia" in the Portuguese language and means "[...] set of studies and measures that strategically provide the launch and support of a product or service in the consumer market, ensuring the good commercial success of the initiative". (FERREIRA, 1986).

Similarly, there is little understanding and doubt when discussing marketing in the health area. Its application has already been seen as a way to commercialize the profession and carried



doubts about the ethical and legal side of its effectiveness. Currently there is a different point of view, especially speaking of its performance within dentistry, it is gradually seen that it can help both the dentist and the patient (MOTTA *et al.*, 2021).

From this perspective the Marketing is nothing more than a grouping of planning and actions that provide the evolution debut and structure of some product or service within the consumer market. In dentistry, its function is to make adversity into something opportune, helping the dentist to attract, maintain and stand out among his patients (VIOLA, 2011).

Marketing has a lot of relevance when it comes to rivalry within the dental class, but often the way dentists apply it can generate losses, since there are rules to be followed (PARANHOS *et al.*, 2011).

Art. 1 of the Code of Dental Ethics regulates the rights and duties of the dental surgeon, technical and auxiliary professionals, and legal entities that carry out activities in the area of Dentistry, in the public and/or private sphere, with the obligation to register with the Dental Councils, according to their specific attributions (CRO, 2012).

Since more and more dental surgeons (DCs) have used marketing to promote their work, as well as social media and other means of dissemination, it can often be observed that these professionals break ethical protocols, in most cases due to lack of knowledge of the rules that are offered by the Regional Council of Dentistry (CRO).

With this in mind, the choice of the theme was focused on marketing in dentistry, in order to collect data regarding the knowledge of the norms proposed by the CRO in the Alto Paranaíba-MG region. It has as social relevance, given the legal aspects involved, to examine the process of disclosure of work of dental surgeons. In addition, make a survey on the correct application of these standards and also if the dentist is able to offer good conditions of patient care, within the legalities.

In this sense, the problem to be worked on is defined in the following problem question: are dental surgeons promoting their marketing respecting the CRO standards? To this end, the general objective of this research is defined as: To verify whether dentists (DCs) in Alto Paranaíba, MG are aware of the CRO standards for effective application in digital marketing. And specifically: to know the rules of regulation of digital marketing for dental surgeons; verify how the CRO rules are being applied in digital marketing by dental surgeons; contribute to the improvement of the performance of dental surgeons about digital marketing.

The present research is justified by the need to know the ability of the DC to carry out marketing in accordance with the proposed legalities and whether the professional is aware of



current standards. In addition to the importance of this knowledge on the part of the DC, one can reflect on how much it meets what the CRO proposes.

The methodology used is based on a qualitative-quantitative approach research, which was used the survey method by applying a questionnaire to dental professionals.

The work is structured as follows: initially the introduction was made, followed by the description of the materials and methods used for data collection and analysis. After these, the presentation and discussion of the results is made followed by the conclusions of the research.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 NATURE OF THE STUDY

This is a qualitative-quantitative research, which used the *survey* method to produce the description and reflection about the inquiries about knowledge and application of CRO (2012) standards aimed at digital marketing in the office, for dental professionals.

However, there is currently an action to favor the desire for alternatives in the model of "doing" research, which are also adapted to the practices of different groups inserted in different contexts of cities and different modes of interaction due to their particularities of the work environment. Hence the need for an investigation that approaches the reality experienced by those subjects investigated in the study (dental surgeons), from the relations with the norms within a care environment (DIAS; GAMA, 2014).

The *survey* research method refers to a type of quantitative research, which should be understood as a way of collecting data and information from the characteristics of a group of people who represent the population to be studied, and can be extrapolated to the entire universe under study through an instrument of a structured questionnaire (PARANHOS *et al.*, 2014).

The first specific objective was to know the rules for regulating digital marketing for dental surgeons. With the research, it can be seen that the standards imposed are not difficult to follow, having as main objectives: to safeguard the ethical integrity of the professional, the identity of the patient and the blocking of possible reproductions of procedures by the lay public. The second specific objective was to verify how CRO regulations are being applied in digital marketing by DCs. It was possible to conclude that most of them follow the imposed rules. The third specific objective was to contribute to the improvement of the performance of dental surgeons about digital marketing. It is concluded that this work contributed to the reflection on what is being done by the DCs that do not strictly follow the CRO guidelines, aiming at the enrichment, change and applicability of what was shown to these DCs. In view of this, it was believed that a considerable



part of the accredited dental surgeons do not always know all the rules and partially comply with them, but the result surprised us, showing that most have knowledge, but a part still has no knowledge or does not put such action into practice. Since this was a snowball survey, there is a risk that the answers are not authentic.

The purpose of this type of research is: description, which aims to discover the distribution of certain traits and attributes of the population studied. The researcher's concern in this case is not why the distribution exists, but what it is; explanation, which aims to explain the observed distribution. In this case, the researcher is concerned with why the distribution exists; and exploration, which aims to function as an exploratory mechanism, applied in a situation of initial investigation of some theme, seeking not to let critical elements go unidentified, presenting new possibilities that can later be worked on in a more controlled *survey* (BABBIE, 1999).

The study was conducted with dentists of different ages over 18 (eighteen) years old who are currently working in their respective areas in the interior of Minas Gerais, in the Alto Paranaíba region, Brazil.

The research sample is a non-probabilistic sample, constituted intentionally and for convenience through WhatsApp, using the snowball technique. It is constituted so that the researcher, by virtual means, sends a questionnaire to the active DCs so that it can be answered and computed. Prior contact was made in order to stimulate the invitation to respond to the survey, so that each participant contacted should recommend another participant and / or assist in disseminating the research link, thus stimulating other possible participants, so that the sample grows at a linear pace. This type of sampling procedure is also considered non-probabilistic and is often used to access low-incidence populations and less accessible individuals (HANDCOCK; GILE, 2011; VINUTO, 2014).

For this, the sample survey took place in a specific period of 60 (sixty) days, in which the researchers sent the invitations with the provision of the link to access and answer the survey, until reaching the minimum number of 20 (twenty) professionals. The inclusion criteria for participation in the research corresponded to being dental professionals and being over 18 (eighteen) years old. The exclusion criteria for participation in the research were those professionals who failed to complete the questionnaire responses.

Data collection was carried out through the mobilization of the researchers responsible and identified in this project. As this is a research that used the *survey method*, the research instrument consisted of a *questionnaire* (Appendix-B) prepared from the study Sisto (2007), Vaz Serra (2000) and Lourenço (2012) which was made available to participants through the Google Forms Platform



through the link <https://forms.gle/>, to access the research and respond.

First, professional dentists were identified in WhatsApp groups in order to obtain the contact of potential disseminators of the research. Having possession of these records, the researchers made the first contact presenting the proposal and requesting the possibility of answering the survey. Having the guest accepted to answer the survey, he started the steps according to the structure of the sections, at the first moment the participant read the ICF and thus agreeing, proceeded to the later sections until the finalization.

The questionnaire is entitled "The Legality of Digital Marketing of Dentists in Alto Paranaíba-MG", composed of 4 questions divided into 3 (three) sections that correspond to the research structure according to table 1.

Table 1- Structure of the Research Questionnaire "The Legality of Digital Marketing of dentists in Alto Paranaíba-MG"

Section No.	Section	Corresponding research questions
1st Section	RCT	-
2nd Section	Participant profile	Questions 1 and 2
3rd Section	Question on digital marketing in dentistry	Questions 3 to 9

Source: Own authorship, 2022

2.2 DATA ANALYSIS

For data analysis, we relied on spreadsheets from the *Microsoft Excel for Windows* program in relation to the tabulated data extracted from the *Google Forms* platform. For the qualitative-quantitative data analysis, the Content Analysis Theory (BARDIN, 2016) was used, which was carried out in 03 (three) distinct and fundamental phases for data analysis. The first phase represents the stage of the organization itself, called pre-analysis, subdivided into the following steps: floating reading; choice of documents; formulation of hypotheses and objectives; elaboration of indicators and preparation of the material. The second phase, called exploration of the material, represents the phase of systematic application of the decisions taken. The third phase deals with the treatment of results, inference and interpretation.

In this phase, coding, categorization and inference were applied. Coding represents a process of dismemberment of the text into units, which are cut out, selected from counting rules, enumerated, and, finally, classification and aggregation for the election of categories. Categorization is an operationalization of the classification of constituent elements of a set by differentiation and regrouping according to previously defined genres and criteria. And then, inference, which consists of carrying out analyses and conclusions (interpretation) from the logical process of the previously categorized and regrouped data.

3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The present work made use of "The legality of digital marketing of dental surgeons in Alto Paranaíba - MG" as a point of orientation of the present research, having as main point the question: how are dental surgeons in Alto Paranaíba - MG publicizing and performing their services in the face of the great impact of digital marketing in their area?

In order to have answers about this problem, a field research was carried out in the months of December 2022 to January 2023, with 22 dental surgeons (DCs) working in this profession in Alto Paranaíba - MG, using a structured questionnaire, composed of the following questions:

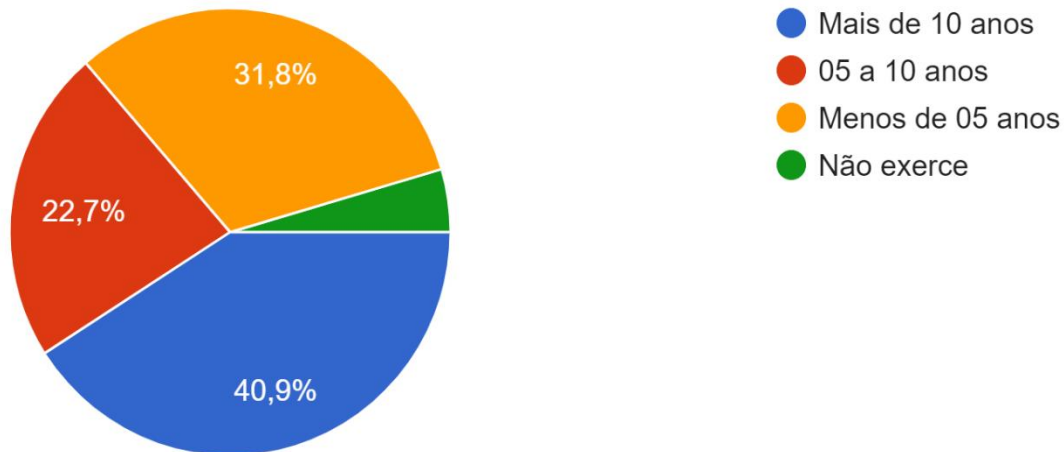
Table 02 - List of Questionnaire Questions and Graphs of Results

Related section	Question Questionnaire	Graphs of Results	Table of justification results
2nd Section	Length of service	Graph 01	-
	Gender	Graph 02	-
3rd Section	Are you, as a dental surgeon, aware of the current CRO regulations?	Graph 03	Table 03
	Do you offer the Club payment option? That is: he pays the procedure for a year, example: (harmonization club) and then contacts you to perform the procedure?	Graph 04	Table 04
	Do you as a dental surgeon often do giveaways or procedures on Instagram?	Graph 05	Table 05
	Do you often share before and after images or videos of your patients on your social media (behind the scenes, clinical environment, procedures, treatments)?	Graph 06	Table 06
	Do you share with your followers the course of the surgical procedures?	Graph 07	-
	Do you often post values of your procedures on social media?	Graph 08	-
	Do you share photos or videos of biological tissue, tooth structure, blood and fluids on your social media?	Graph 09	Table 07

Source: Own authorship, 2023

The first question refers to the time of professional performance of the Dentists of Alto Paranaíba - MG, obtaining the following answer: 40.9% work for more than 10 years, 31.8% less than 05 years, 22.7% 05 to 10 years, 4.6% does not work, according to the graph.

Graph 01 - Length of time DCs have been working

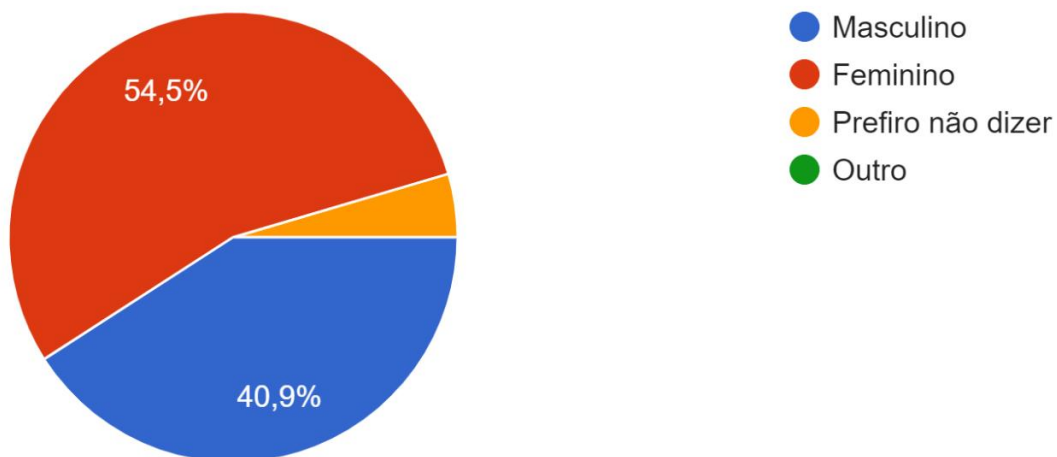


Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

It can be noted that the majority (40.9%) has been working in the profession for more than 10 (ten) years, followed by those who work less than 5 and 5 to 10 years. A study by Araújo and Mello (2010) addressed the working time of CDs active in the market, resulting in 54 CDs working from 02-05 years and 54 CDs working from 06-10 years. It can be concluded that the compared studies have controversy in their results.

The second question refers to the gender of the professionals. It was clear in the questionnaire that the female gender portrays more than 54.5% of the professionals who were part of this research, male 40.9% and only 4.5% prefer not to say.

Graph 02 - Gender

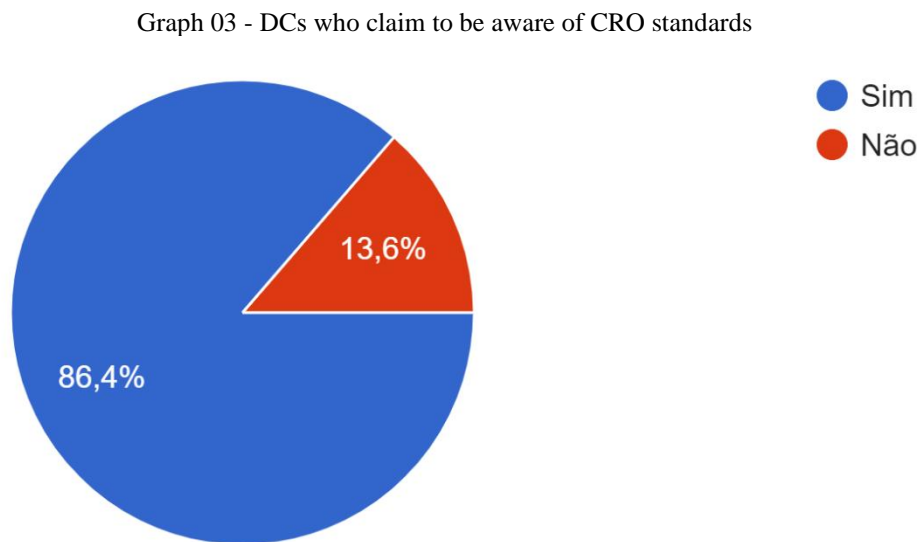


Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

The previous graph highlights that the majority of respondents are women, corresponding to 54.5%, and 40.9% are men. Based on the results obtained, a parallel can be drawn with a study

carried out by Costa, Durães and Abreu (2010) in which, in the undergraduate course in dentistry at the State University of Montes Claros, a higher percentage of women entering (52.43%) and graduates (61.40%) has been observed, as well as the demand for the course (65.16%) in relation to men (COSTA *et al.*, 2010). Based on this, it can be concluded that there is agreement between the present studies, reinforcing the idea that the female sex has been occupying space in dentistry. Women dominate the dental market, compared to men and those who prefer not to say.

The third question asks about their knowledge of current CRO standards. 86.4% of DCs said they were aware of the standards, a high number compared to those who said they were not aware, 13.6%. See the graph below which highlights this correlation.



Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

According to the previous graph, it can be highlighted that most DCs claim to know the CRO rules (86.4%), while 13.6% claim not to know. Oliveira *et al.* (2008) obtained the result that DCs, especially those working in offices or clinics, are not prepared to face the ethical dilemmas that arise in their professional practice, pointing to the need for better dissemination of the Dental Code of Ethics (OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2008). Previously, it was believed that a considerable part of dental surgeons would not know all the rules and partially comply with them, however, the result of this graph showed the opposite.

In addition to the information, respondents were asked to justify their responses, obtaining the following information:

Table 03 - Justify the answer of Graph 03 - Knowledge of CRO standards

I have no knowledge
I am not aware of all the rules due to my lack of interest in council matters.
I serve as a member of the Ethics Committee.
In parts!
I follow new updates regularly.
Yes. I believe I know all the main standards
I am always up to date on CRO laws.
Always updating me through the portals
Consultation of the code of ethics
I update the rules and exchange information with colleagues.
I follow the advice
I have
I always try to stay updated, through the social media of CRO MG. Publications of the CRO MG and CFO.
Yes, I keep it updated
I have knowledge.
From the website
I keep up to date
I try to keep up to date
I am aware of
I know the rules
I know

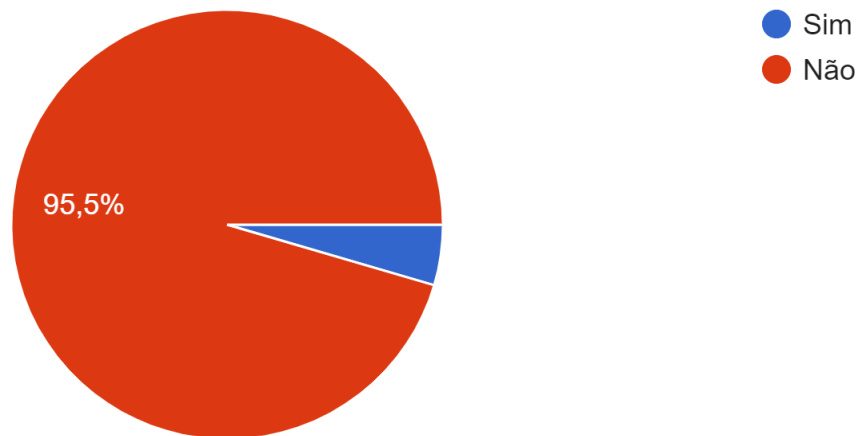
Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

It should be noted that the respondents have an interest in information about the CRO's rules, which demonstrates interest in their regulation process regarding the ethical conditions of the profession.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a controversy between the results obtained and the study by Oliveira *et al.* (2008) together with the assumption made at the beginning of this work. This aspect shows that from the year of the research by Oliveira *et al.* (2008) to the present year more than 15 (fifteen) years have passed, which demonstrates an evolution of knowledge by the CRO standards by professionals. It can be considered that this performance occurs by being implemented in the Universities knowledge about the standards or even a greater performance of the professional ethics body itself in order to guide its professionals, in view of the consistent answers in Table 03.

The fourth question concerns the provision of "payment club" to patients.

Graph 04 - Provide "Payment Club" method



Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

What stands out in the graph is the fact that the majority have indicated that they do not offer the payment club option, corresponding to 95.5%, but there is still a small percentage that includes this option (0.5%). It can be seen that almost 100% do not offer this type of payment. Seeking to complement the information, respondents were asked to justify their responses, obtaining the following information:

Table 04 - Justify the answer of Graph 04 - Do you provide "Payment Club" method?

I do not know
I serve a public with more purchasing power. So I don't have that option for my patient
is not correct.
Where I work the patient has to pay little by little as he goes to do such procedures, the exact amount of each or install the entire treatment plan!
I do not.
Neither club nor convention. I prefer to lower the price of the procedure and not have to do any of this
I do not offer this option.
Facilitates patient payment
I do not have
It is not allowed
I do more basic dentistry, with low-income patients.
do not know
Patient grooming.
I do not carry out such procedures and do not find this practice of drawing lots advantageous
I do not offer this option.
I do not exercise
I don't think it's ethical
I did not know about this option
I do not like this method
I don't know

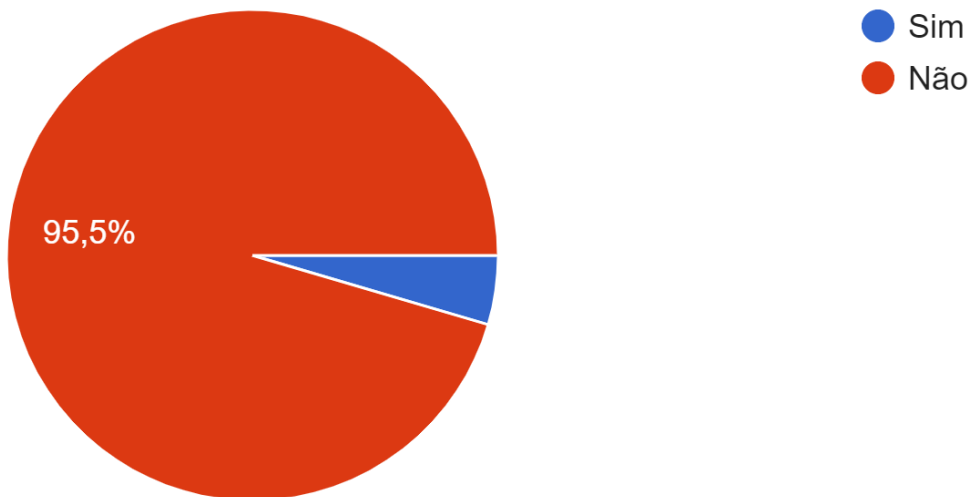
Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

It appears that the vast majority of respondents do not even know this method of payment and those who know recognize that they cannot perform this type of method, because it is enticing patients, which demonstrates knowledge on the part of professionals about the rules of the CRO.

The professionals' responses are in line with the Code of Ethics of Dentistry, after all, in doing so, professionals will violate art. 44, V, which considers it unethical to offer advice, diagnosis or prescription of treatment by any means of mass communication (CRO, 2012).

The fifth question raises the issue of providing gifts or procedures through raffles. Of them, 95.5% report not doing giveaways and procedures on Instagram, which is almost total understanding by the DCs who were part of this research, but 0.5% claim to carry out giveaways or procedures (MELO *et al.*, 2012).

Graph 05 - Drawing of gifts or procedures



Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

What stands out in the previous graph is the majority do not carry out draws via social networks, with 0.5% claiming to make draws and 95.5% do not. In addition to the information, respondents were asked to justify their responses, obtaining the following information:

Table 05 - Justify the answer of Graph 05 - Drawings of gifts or procedures

No
I see no need
I don't like that kind of marketing
Idem.
I don't have a professional Instagram account, only a personal one!
Prohibition of the council.
No. I don't post anything work-related on social media. I'm not good at it
It is not allowed by law.
Not practical
It is not allowed

I don't have social media. Only Wsts App.
Not justification for attraction
By the Code of Dental Ethics (2012) ethical infraction .
This kind of attitude can lead to problems
I don't think it's ethical,
I do not exercise
Being an orthodontist
I find the proposal interesting
I do not think it is necessary
I don't think it's right

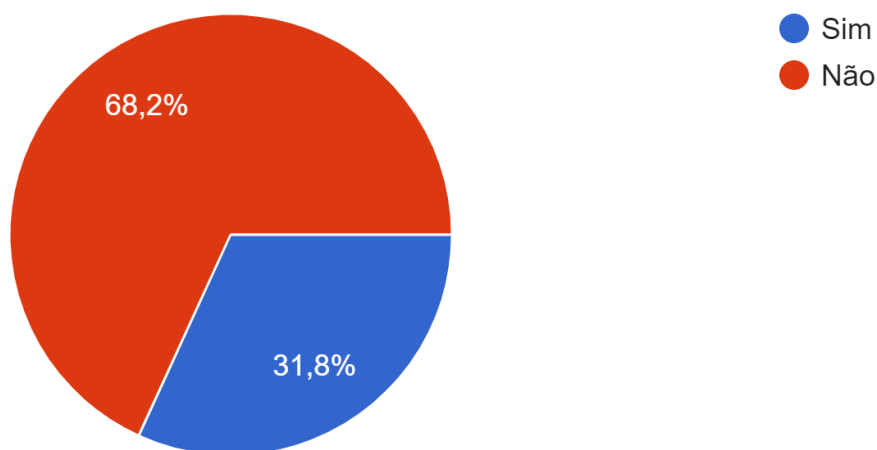
Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

It is observed that the vast majority of respondents do not find it ethical to carry out such activities, which can impact problems with the CRO. However, there was one respondent who answered "I find the proposal interesting", which shows that there is not a totality of professionals who are aware of the rules about the prohibition of raffles or procedures, according to the rules of the CRO.

This result is similar to the research conducted by Silva (2018) in which 17.4% of the DCs make some kind of gift and/or raffle (SILVA, 2018). It can be concluded that there is consonance between the studies, both obtained the minority performing these actions.

The sixth question referred to before and after publications of the results obtained. 68.2% of dentists say they do not share before and after images, while 31.8% share with their followers.

Graph 06 - They publish before and after images of patients



Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

The biggest highlight in the graph presented is due to the fact that most do not publish before and after, with 31.8% publishing and 68.2% not publishing. In order to complement the information, respondents were asked to justify their responses, obtaining the following information:

Chart 06 - Please justify your answer to Graph 06 - Do you publish before and after pictures of patients?

Because it is released
Idem.
No, I think it's tacky, I keep the images just for my own appreciation!
Whenever possible.
No. Zero patience and it is also prohibited by the CRO
I only show in office
I think dentistry with the before and after is necessary
Restorative treatments, rehabilitations
No
I simply warn about the change of look. Especially with full dentures.
I see no need
Only in specific cases
Ethical infringement. Despite the resolution 196 of the CFO allows photos of the diagnosis beginning and end of treatment and can not the course of treatment, with the TCLE signed by the patient or his legal representative. And also not put due to professional responsibility. We can not be held responsible for obligation of result.
It is not allowed and the Instagram platform does not look kindly on this practice
I don't think it's ethical.
I do not exercise
I am not instagrammable
I show before and after but not during
Before and after is released, the course does not
Under authorization of the patient
The council is prohibited from
I do not

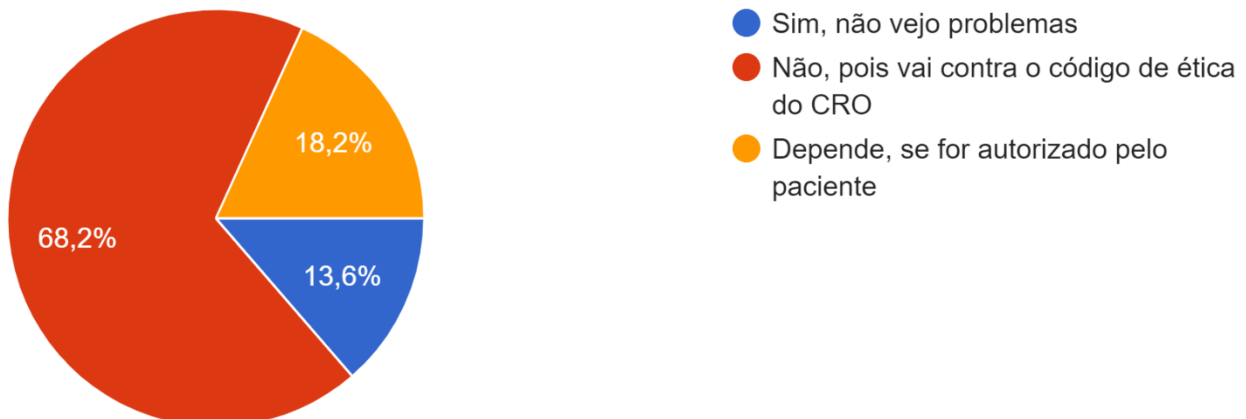
Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

The results can be compared to the observation seen in the article by Reis (2021), concluding that for a long time the display of "before and after" images has been said to be unethical and is extremely prohibited by the vigilant bodies (CRO / CFO) for generating expectations that are often unattainable for some patients, thus occurring the due legal process.

The fact is that the recent CFO-196/2019 resolution expanded the communication channels on social networks and allowed the sharing of self-portraits and images related to diagnoses and results of dental procedures. However, the display of elapsed time was prohibited, and the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF) was required. Thus, it is concluded that most are not updated (REIS, 2021), not in accordance with the new CFO-196/2019 resolution.

The seventh question refers to posting the course of procedures on social networks. A small portion of 13.6% people share the course of the procedures, 18.2% say they see no problems with sharing if authorized by the patient. More than half (68.2%) do not share this content, that is, the minority of respondents go against the established rules, which impose a ban on publications of surgical procedures.

Graph 07 - Publication of the course of surgical procedures



Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

What stands out in the graph is the majority say they do not publish the surgical course, with 18.2% publishing if the patient authorizes, 13.6% publish regardless of the answer and 68.2% do not publish. It can be concluded that most do not share the course of the procedures. The use of social networks has grown exponentially in the last decade and, as such, they are responsible for creating a new, more direct, decentralized and assertive mode of communication. Notwithstanding the benefits of a potentially greater reach, and even for this reason, it is essential that professionals who promote their brands, products and services are aware of some important technical and mainly ethical issues in publications (MARTINS, 2020). With this, it is seen that the studies have agreement.

The eighth question asks whether DCs share values openly to their followers. 100% of DCs do not share procedural values on social media.

Graph 08 - Disclosure of procedure values on social networks

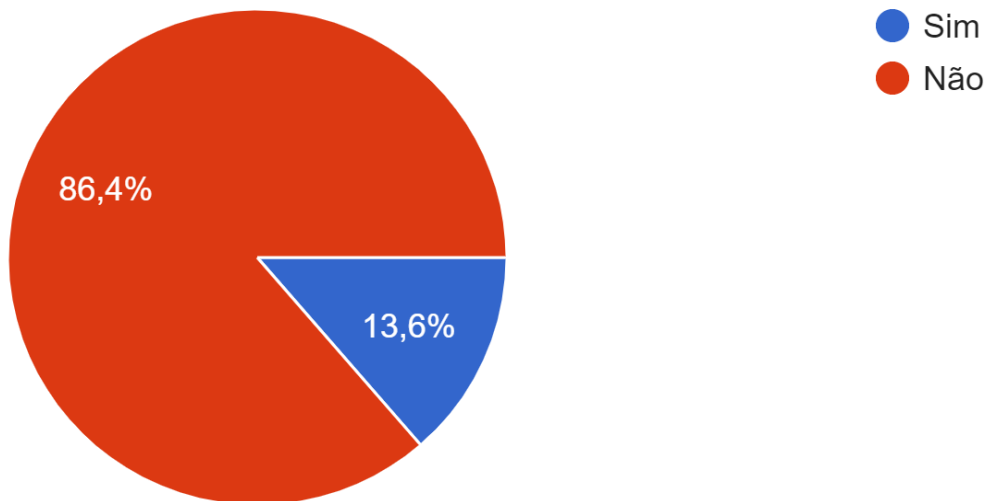


Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

It can be noted that the professionals approached claim not to share procedure values (100%), which is something positive. According to Reis (2021), the maintenance of the prohibition of disclosure of values and forms of payment characterizes self-promotion, unfair competition and commercialization of dentistry (REIS, 2021), concluding that the articles have agreement with each other.

The ninth question asks about the provision of images of biological tissues, dental structures, blood and/or fluids. While 13.6% say they share images of fluids, 86.4% say they do not. See graph below:

Graph 9 - Disclosure of biological tissue, dental structures, blood and/or fluids



Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

The previous graph highlights that the majority does not share images or videos of tissues, blood, fluids and dental structures, with a smaller portion sharing (13.6%) and 86.4% not sharing. To complement the information, respondents were asked to justify their answers, obtaining the following information:

Table 07 - Justify the answer to Graph 9 - Disclosure of biological tissue, dental structures, blood and/or fluids

No
I post sometimes, as long as the surgery is clean and I post in black and white
It follows the same reasoning as the previous answers.
I don't use social media for work!
These types of posts are not allowed.
No. I believe that the patient is not interested in that. And it only serves to increase their fear
I don't find it pleasant.
Yes
I don't have a social network.
I do not use social media
Unnecessary
CFO Resolution 196



It is not allowed by the code of ethics
I don't think the public is interested,
I do not exercise
I don't like it
Against the code of ethics
Prohibited
In order to impart knowledge
I don't like it
We cannot

Source: Survey data, 2022-2023

It is observed that many of these professionals are concerned with following what the Code of Ethics determines, but three of the responses claim to disseminate this content, one of them with the justification of transmitting knowledge, the other with only 'yes' and the third makes posts with a black and white filter to minimize the impact generated by the materials presented.

According to the Federal Council of Dentistry (CFO) (196/2019), it is considered forbidden to share videos of clinical or surgical procedures that show biological tissues - a tooth, a piece of gum, a bloody gauze, among other parts - instruments and equipment.

Finally, it can be concluded that the study and the determination required by the CFO are partly in agreement, because, although most are following their recommendations, there is still a small portion that does not comply with what is imposed.

4 CONCLUSION

The present work aimed to analyze how the CD uses digital marketing to its advantage, taking care to follow what the CRO proposes in standards.

The first specific objective was to know the rules of regulation of digital marketing for dental surgeons. With the research, it can be seen that the rules imposed are not difficult to follow, having as main objectives: to safeguard the ethical integrity of the professional, the identity of the patient and the blocking of possible reproductions of procedures by the lay public.

The second specific objective was to verify how the CRO regulations are being applied in digital marketing by DCs. It was possible to conclude that most of them claim to follow the imposed rules, according to what was answered in graphs 03 to 09, however, taking into account the possibility of false results.

The third specific objective was to contribute to the improvement of the performance of dental surgeons about digital marketing. It is concluded that the present work provided an analysis of what is being done by DCs who do not faithfully respect the CRO standards, in view of the enrichment, change and applicability of the information that was provided to the CDS. It was believed that a large portion of those studied would not know the standards as a whole and followed



them partially, but the result surprised us, showing that most of these professionals have a good knowledge, although a portion still has no knowledge or does not put them into practice. As this was a "snowball" survey, there is a risk that the answers obtained are not authentic.

In order not to run the risk of violating the rules, it is important that the DC is kept up to date and informed about the rules, since they keep the ethics of the professional preserved. Regarding the problem, it is concluded that the DCs studied are promoting their marketing respecting the rules of the CRO, in theory.

The sample of this survey was small, but sufficient to inform about what the DC currently knows about the standards. Nevertheless, this is one of the limitations of this work, which cannot have its conclusions generalized, and for that a much broader sample would be necessary.

As a suggestion for future studies, we can suggest a continuation of this work with a larger number of CDs and conducting questions in person, in order to obtain 100% authenticity in the collection and dissemination of the results.



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