Study recognises the value of YouTube for dentists

GÖTTINGEN, Germany: Researchers investigating YouTube have suggested that the potential of the online video-sharing platform and similar social media sites as means of dental education is highly underdeveloped. In a study, they found that it could hold important implications for dental professionals, as well as dental education staff.

Owing to an increasing integration of multimedia sources into professional and academic education, Dr Michael Knišel, an orthodontic specialist, and his team from the University of Göttingen, assessed the value of videos on YouTube related to dentistry. Using different search parameters, they discovered that there is wide variety of material available on YouTube with high educational value.

Two assessors with an academic background evaluated 60 videos in the general category “AE” and 60 videos in the “Education” category. The results were first sorted “by relevance” and later by “most viewed”.

According to the researchers, the informational value of videos in the general category was perceived as generally poor, whereas the most viewed videos in the educational category had the highest educational value. Videos in this category were concerned with oral surgery and implantology, preventive dentistry, general dentistry, as well as aesthetic dentistry and orthodontics. Five videos were considered to be entertaining rather than educating.

Videos in the educational category were mostly uploaded by practitioners but also by academic institutions and dental companies. The majority of videos in the general category, which were aimed at entertainment generally, were mostly posted by patients and laypersons, but there was also a significant percentage of videos with a commercial purpose and posted by dental manufacturers.

The assessors said that videos in the educational category depicted an optimistic view on dentistry, whereas those in the general category tended to be rather negative. They found that between 68 and 93 per cent of the videos represented dentistry accurately, and videos in the general category were inaccurate in this regard.

The researchers recommended that more academic institutions acknowledge YouTube as an effective supplementary medium for education. Currently, there are only a few dental schools that run their own YouTube channels. The University of Michigan’s School of Dentistry, for example, initiated its channel more than three years ago and recently surpassed seven million viewers.

"YouTube and similar social media websites offer new educational possibilities for dentistry, but are currently both underdeveloped and underestimated regarding their potential value. Dentists should also recognize the importance of such websites in relation to the formation of public opinion about their profession,” the researchers stated. "We would therefore like to encourage educators to make greater use of this medium, to work to improve the quality of videos, and to demand that contents are updated on a regular basis."