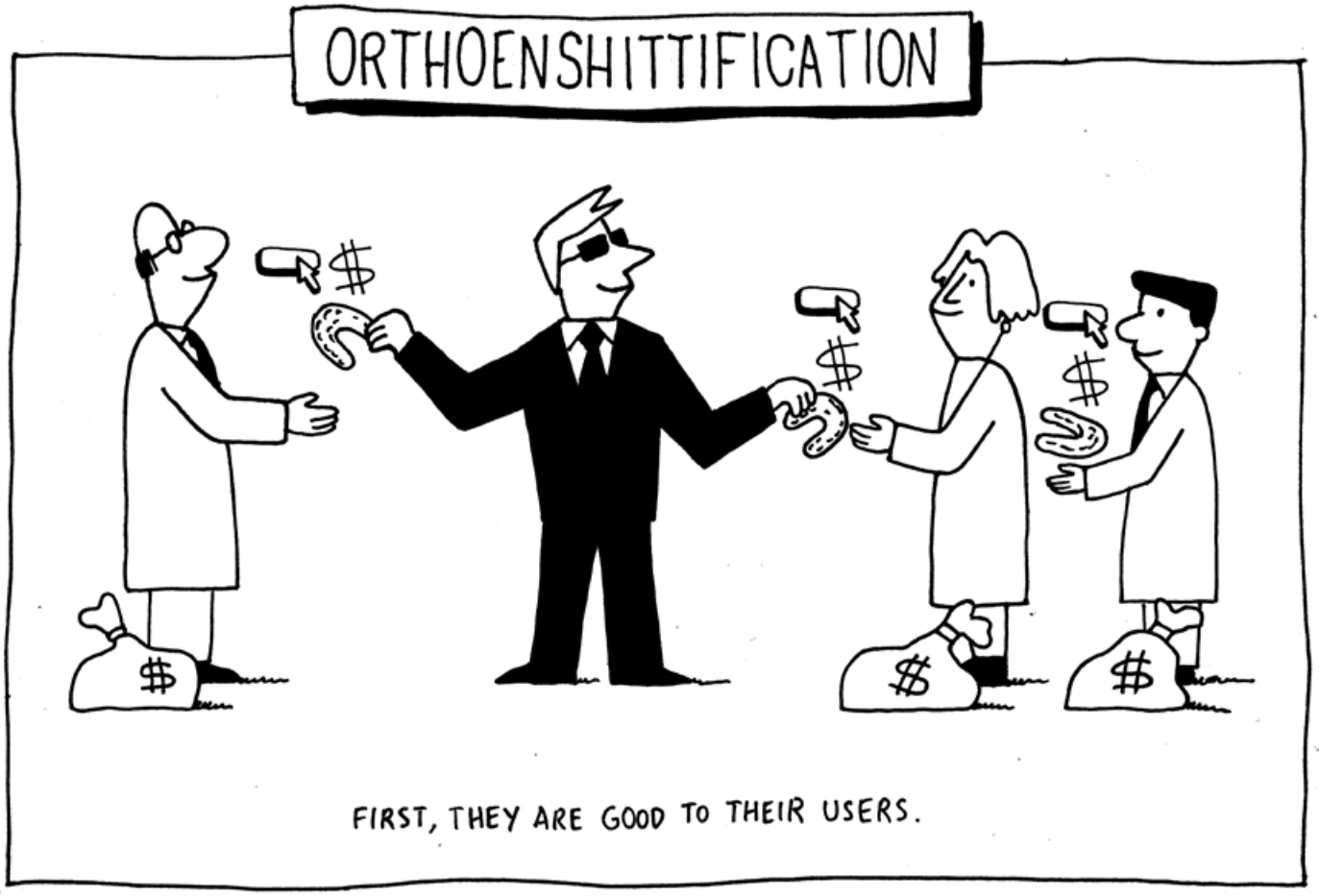
WZ:DM NEWSLETTER

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WZDM DNA

Every orthodontic product and service that WZDM creates is designed to serve patients with uncompromising care.

We believe that technology empowers us in many ways and can be an incredibly useful multifunctional tool. However, it is just a tool, and it needs a professional to wield it effectively.

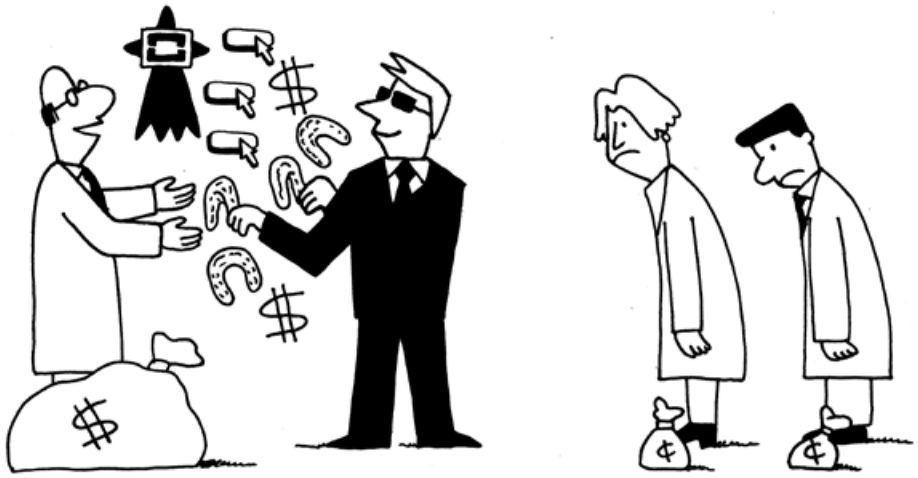
Deep insights and relevant perspectives come from the covenant of trust and bond cultivated between a caring doctor and patient.

We need to take a moment and step back to remind ourselves that we serve humans and not technology, and that patients are at the heart of it all.

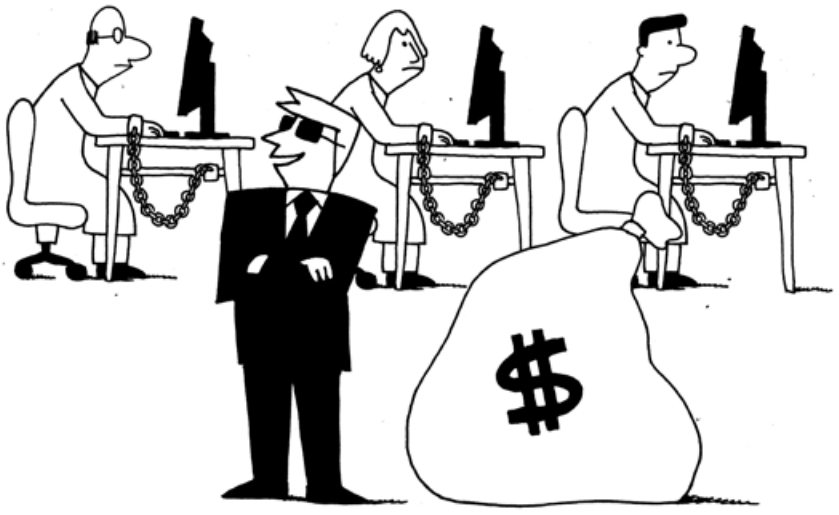
ORTHOENSHITTIFICATION



FIRST, THEY ARE GOOD TO THEIR USERS.



THEN THEY ABUSE THEIR USERS TO MAKE THINGS BETTER FOR THEIR BUSINESS CUSTOMERS.



FINALLY, THEY ABUSE THOSE BUSINESS CUSTOMERS TO CLAW BACK ALL THE VALUE FOR THEMSELVES.

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THEN THEY DIE.

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The Orthoenshittification of Orthodontics: Parallels to Digital Platforms

Rohit C. Sachdeva, Michele Bettio

Cory Doctorow, a well-known author, journalist, and technology activist, often discusses the concept of enshittification in the context of how digital platforms deteriorate over time. The term itself is not an official term but a colloquial one that Doctorow uses to describe a specific kind of decline that occurs in online platforms. Enshittification refers to the process by which online platforms, which initially offer high value and user-friendly experiences, gradually become worse for their users as they prioritize different objectives, typically profit maximization.

This decline can manifest in various ways, such as:

1. **Monetization Priorities**: Platforms may start by focusing on attracting users with great content and services. Once they achieve a substantial user base, they begin to prioritize revenue generation, often at the expense of the user experience. This can include more intrusive ads, paywalls, and pushing sponsored content.

2. **Algorithm Changes**: To maximize engagement and revenue, platforms might tweak their algorithms in ways that favor content that generates more ad clicks, even if it means promoting lower-quality or misleading content.

3. **Privacy Erosion**: Platforms often begin by assuring users of their privacy and data security. Over time, however, they may start to exploit user data more aggressively to serve personalized ads and sell data to third parties.

4. **Feature Bloat**: As platforms try to do everything for everyone, they may add an excessive number of features that complicate the user interface and reduce the overall usability of the platform.

5. **Lock-In and Reduced Interoperability**: Companies may initially support open standards and interoperability to attract users, but once they have a dominant position, they often move towards creating walled gardens to lock in users and prevent them from easily switching to competitors.

Doctorow's essays often focus on these dynamics to critique the behavior of large tech companies and to advocate for policies and practices that promote a healthier digital ecosystem. His writing highlights the need for more user-centric approaches and better regulatory frameworks to prevent the enshittification of online platforms and to ensure that they remain beneficial for society as a whole.

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Initial High Value: Orthodontics and Digital Platforms

In the early stages of both orthodontics and digital platforms, the focus is on delivering high value to attract and retain users or patients. In orthodontics, this period is characterized by innovations and advancements in treatment methods aimed at improving patient outcomes. Early adopters of new technologies and techniques, such as clear aligners, benefited from precise, personalized treatment plans that were less invasive and more aesthetically pleasing than traditional methods. The emphasis was on patient satisfaction and successful outcomes through customized products that catered specifically to individual needs.

Similarly, digital platforms like TikTok initially offered exceptional user experiences to build a large user base. TikTok's powerful recommendation algorithms provided users with highly relevant content, fostering engagement and rapid growth. Amazon, in its early days, attracted customers with low prices and vast selections, prioritizing user convenience and satisfaction .

Intermediate Compromise: Shifting Priorities

As both orthodontics and digital platforms mature, they begin to shift their priorities towards monetization, often compromising the quality of service. In orthodontics, this shift can be seen in the increasing commercialization of treatment options. The rise of direct-to-consumer orthodontic services illustrates this trend. These services promise cost-effective and convenient solutions but often at the expense of comprehensive, personalized care. Critics argue that without regular professional supervision, these treatments can lead to suboptimal results or even complications, highlighting a compromise in the standard of care for the sake of accessibility and profit .

Digital platforms undergo a similar shift. TikTok, for instance, began manipulating its algorithm to favor content that would drive higher engagement and revenue, sometimes at the expense of genuine user interest. Amazon started prioritizing paid advertisements and promoted listings, making it harder for organic search results to be visible, thereby compromising the user experience for increased advertising revenue .

Final Stage: Degradation of Experience

In the final stage of enshittification, both orthodontics and digital platforms experience a significant degradation in the quality of service as profit maximization becomes the overriding goal. In orthodontics, this is evident in the increasing prevalence of high-volume, low-cost clinics that prioritize quantity over quality. These clinics often employ aggressive marketing tactics and upsell additional services, sometimes leading to unnecessary treatments and inflated costs for patients.

Digital platforms at this stage exhibit blatant prioritization of revenue over user experience. Amazon's search results become cluttered with paid place-

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ments, and TikTok's feed is increasingly filled with sponsored content and ads, detracting from the organic user experience. The platforms exploit their user bases, knowing they have few alternatives, thereby maximizing their profits at the expense of user satisfaction .

Impact on Patients and Orthodontists

The orthoenshittification of orthodontics impacts both patients and orthodontists, making them victims of this degrading process—whom we can refer to as "orthoenshittification victims." For patients, the shift towards profit-driven practices can lead to substandard care. Direct-to-consumer services often lack the professional oversight necessary for effective treatment, leading to potential complications and dissatisfaction. Patients are lured by the promise of convenience and lower costs, only to find that the quality of care suffers, sometimes necessitating corrective treatments that could have been avoided with proper initial care .

Orthodontists, on the other hand, face increasing pressure to conform to commercial practices that may compromise their professional integrity. The rise of high-volume, low-cost clinics can drive independent practitioners out of business, forcing them to adopt similar practices to stay competitive. This can lead to a decline in the quality of care they provide, as they must see more patients in less time to maintain profitability. Moreover, the emphasis on upselling and additional services can strain the patient-orthodontist relationship, as financial incentives overshadow the primary goal of patient health and well-being. These orthodontists, driven by greed and compromised standards, can be termed "orthoenshittifiers."

Solutions and Proactive Measures

To counteract orthoenshittification, orthodontists and the broader industry must emphasize maintaining high standards of care and professional integrity. This involves several strategies:

1. **Emphasize Professional Oversight**: Ensure that all treatments, especially direct-to-consumer options, involve regular professional supervision to maintain high standards of care.

2. **Transparent Practices**: Promote transparency in pricing and treatment plans to build trust with patients and avoid unnecessary upselling.

3. **Education and Training**: Continuously educate orthodontists on the latest advancements and ethical practices to ensure they provide the best possible care.

4. **Regulatory Oversight**: Advocate for stronger regulatory frameworks to oversee orthodontic practices and protect patients from substandard care.

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By adopting these measures, orthodontists can protect the integrity of their profession and ensure that patient care remains the top priority, preventing the detrimental effects of orthoenshittification.

Broader Implications and Lessons

The enshittification of both orthodontics and digital platforms underscores a critical tension between user-centric values and corporate profit motives. In both fields, initial success is driven by a commitment to high-quality service and user satisfaction. However, as the entities mature, the drive for profit leads to compromises and eventual degradation of the user or patient experience.

Doctorow's analysis provides a framework for understanding these dynamics, emphasizing the need for vigilance and regulatory oversight to prevent the excessive commodification of services that are essential to well-being. In orthodontics, maintaining high standards of care and professional oversight is crucial to ensuring patient health and satisfaction. For digital platforms, fostering transparency and prioritizing genuine user engagement over manipulative monetization practices are key to sustaining long-term value .

Conclusion

The parallels between the enshittification of orthodontics and digital platforms reveal a common trajectory driven by the tension between initial high value and eventual profit-driven degradation. Understanding these patterns can help stakeholders in both fields recognize the signs of enshittification and take proactive steps to mitigate its effects, ensuring that both patients and users receive the quality and care they deserve.

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