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Consumer Behavior

Changes and Alterations After Plastic Surgery

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Dissertação

apresentada(o) como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Data-Driven Marketing

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CHANGES AND ALTERATIONS AFTER PLASTIC SURGERY

por

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Dissertação apresentado como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Data-Driven Marketing, com especialização em Marketing Research and CRM.

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis was done with the goal of better understanding the relationship between Cosmetic Surgery and the changes/effects this would have on the consumer's behavior in their day-to-day life. The methodology used was that of a Focus Group with various members of a Clinic followed by a series of In-Depth Interviews. The resulting data allowed me to correlate the outside view of a medical professional with that of the consumer/individual that went through the surgery. The conclusion of this research leads me to believe that we have confirmation that the individuals will buy products that align with the type of surgery they have had. This however leads to further questions that should be investigated further on a larger scale. The study does have some implications on the marketing world, such as opening new avenues of research regarding a potentially unexplored market that could lead to better segmentation and consumer understanding thanks to the relationship between life changing processes and the consumers psychological needs derived from this.

KEYWORDS

Marketing Research; Consumer Behavior; Cosmetic Surgery; Plastic Surgery

Objetivos do Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS):



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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Royal College of Surgeons of England, plastic surgery, or cosmetic surgery, can be defined as a procedure where an individual chooses to have an operation or invasive procedure in order to change their exterior appearance with no medical reasoning behind it. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (Alyahya et al., 2022) has pointed out that between 2000 and 2020 there was a general increase of procedures performed of 22%. These two facts lead to the topic of this paper, given the presence of plastic surgery, and its increased search over the last two decades, what are these procedures effects on consumer behavior?

The consumer, through the many interactions it has, forms its own set of behaviors and even identity, through cultural, social, and personal factors (Jisana T. K, 2014; Reed et al., 2012). We know that previous experiences can influence future interactions the consumer has, as such the objective of this study is to try and understand how the consumer's behavior changes after cosmetic/plastic surgery. As such this study bridges the gap in the plastic surgery consumer research, between the wide application of general consumer behavior studies and the Cosmetic Industry.

Recent research shows that there is a pattern to plastic surgery related online search which peaks during summer for rhinoplasty, but mostly during winter and spring (Eggerstedt et al., 2021; Ward et al., 2018) this could suggest a cyclical or even seasonal nature to the consumer habits after the surgery. Other factors that require consideration during the research process are predictors behind cosmetic surgery, such as epidemiological factors, market trends, social networks, and psychological characteristics, as these have been shown to influence individuals positively and negatively (Milothridis et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2014), and if these same factors have an influence on the consumers habits, be that they alter them or reinforce preexisting habits. Given that both personal and psychological characteristics have been shown as important (Jisana, 2014; Milothridis et al., 2016) it is important to take into account that plastic surgery has long-term effects on variables relating to how the consumer perceives themselves (i.e. they find themselves happier with their own body or appearance), and how

preexisting psychological conditions will affect the satisfaction the consumer experiences post-surgery (von Soest et al., 2011), this in turn can help us understand if behavior changes came due to a positive or negative influence and distinguish consumer habits created by each type. Due to the nature of consumer behavior and its accompanying research methods the study will have a heavy focus on primary data and primary research (Chrysochou, 2017). Given this context my research questions are as follows:

- Does the cosmetic surgery influence consumers' habits?
- Do the predictors behind cosmetic surgery predict the consumer's behavior after the fact?
- Does the seasonal nature of cosmetic surgery online search show an equivalent cycle in the consumer's behavior?
- Do the behavior changes, if any, experienced by the consumer represent a positive or a negative influence in the consumer?

The expected results are that in fact some manner of change has happened in the consumer: what type of products they now buy, what services do they look for, and if these changes affected other areas of their life. I expect to contribute to the world of marketing, and marketers in such a way that will allow them to better target this under-researched demographic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CONSUMER

In order to properly study the consumer behavior, we need to understand the factors that affect it, being that a consumer's purchase is influenced immensely by the cultural, social, personal and psychological factors that surround them (Jisana T. K, 2014; Malick et al., 2008). Beyond these we have predicting factors that will point to a consumer's interests, such as, social networks, and psychological characteristics (Milothridis et al., 2016). Right here we can see some overlap happening with social and psychological factors, while other research delves deeper into the personal factors and separates them into the economic situation, lifestyle, personality and spending pattern (Muniady et al., 2014).

The study by Schouten, (Schouten, 1991), illustrates the importance of behavior that leads the consumer to correct, according to their conception of reality, unsatisfactory self-concept. It explains as well the process some take in order grow during what Schouten classifies as a major role transitions. His study directly relates to the topic at hand, that being plastic surgery, but is said that it does not depend on it, and as such his findings could be applied to other areas of the consumer experience. The study conclusions also point at the fact that during transitions consumers will also look towards other goods and services, such as, cars, clothing items, houses and others. So here a possible takeaway would be that while plastic surgery, or other aesthetic procedures, are an option for consumers during these so-called transition phases, they are not the only option. With this in mind it is important to try and understand in what period of their life did consumers focus on plastic surgery and if the plastic surgery was the inciting factor in an evolving behavior or if it simply an effect of a larger, life altering, event for the consumer.

A study of relevance here is that of Askegaard, (Askegaard et al., 2002), who due to concerns regarding the sensitive nature of the topic, something that we can still see in today's society, opted to use in-depth interviews with 15 participants. A common trait among these participants, and one expected

within this study, is that most commented that the reasoning behind the cosmetic surgery was self-deterministic in nature and was, in a sense, for no one else. The author goes into some detail as to how the reasoning behind it could be derived from some need to please one's romantic partner, however, given that the study's aim is to understand the relationship with the consumers behavior and purchasing habits and not with other individuals directly, this section wasn't delved into. One key takeaway here however pertains to the self-esteem, and the paradoxical nature of taking one action for yourself when that action is related so intrinsically with how others will perceive you. This points to the importance of psychological factors and ones' self-identity for the study. The author delves into the social context, and how it presents itself differently than peer pressure, that is directly linked to the consumerism aspect of our day-to-day life, specifically it is linked to the fashion industry and the standards it imposes. Further into the study we see mentions of factors such as age, and the emotional involvement (or psychological factors).

Within the studies (Consiglio & van Osselaer, 2022) the authors go over eight processes on how consumption affects self-esteem. Given the current studies objectives I've decided to focus on the following concepts: Self-discrepancy, Self-congruency, and Self-enhancement. While I believe these three to be the most relevant, all other concepts discussed can be used to analyze the consumer through different lenses. The first process mentioned, Self-discrepancy, as pointed by the author is the most studied category, it boils down to the effect adverts, mass media, marketing, and other consumer focused communications disrupt the consumers self-esteem due to the unattainable life standards showcased. The second concept, Self-congruency, hinges in a comparison created by the consumer between themselves and an ideal-self, which is created a comparison between what others have and the consumer has as well as a self they wish to portray to others, with this there is a strong relation between the self and a product's image and how this affects, and changes, the perception of the self. Finally, the third concept of focus, Self-enhancement, points to the consumers goal of fulfilling their self-determined goals via the purchase of products or experiences that allow them to assert and show a self with which they associate their own self-worth (Gawronski et al., 2007). Within all these concepts

we see the framework of an actual and an ideal self, and the effects of exterior factors, mostly attributed to social media and mass media, on the individuals' choices.

While going in-depth on the personal factor's one other sub-variable could be considered, suitability. It must be noted that a study regarding the effect of age on consumer behavior found that while there are differences between the age-groups studied, all placed added importance on the suitability a product had in relation to the individual (Helm & Landschulze, 2013; Hervé & Mullet, 2009).

Going back specifically to the psychological factors, it must be taken into account what recent researched has set in stone, plastic surgery has positive effects on the appearance-related variables, but, the pre-op psychological state of the patient can compromise the satisfaction experienced (von Soest et al., 2009, 2011). Given this the patients mental state before surgery must be, if possible, analyzed as to understand the relation to the behavior changes experienced after the fact. Some sub-factors that have been previously considered within the psychological category were: Motivation, Perception, and Learning (Durmaz, 2014).

Some research suggests that there could be a cyclical nature to plastic surgery type procedures, where the interest peaks for most during the early months of the year, while rhinoplasty peaks in summer (Eggerstedt et al., 2021). Thus, exploring this relation, between all variables mentioned above and the time of interest, could be vital to fully understand the consumer and its habits/behavior.

Given the widespread study of Consumer Behavior in multiple areas it becomes imperative to properly plan out how we'll proceed with our research. Starting with the research objective, which we've previously established, it's then time to proceed onto the research design, where the decision of what methods will be used, to properly answer the research question's set-in place (Chrysochou, 2017). Given the topic of this research we'll be conducting qualitative research in order to provide an in-depth understanding of how the consumer behavior is affected by surgical procedure. ASPS reports, from 2000 to 2020 there was an overall 22% increase of procedures performed. With this and all other

studies highlighted here, it is safe to say that the variables to be studied are: Cultural, Social, Personal, Psychological. With a special emphasis on social, personal, and psychological factors.

3. METODOLOGY

Given that the topic until now expressed here has very little to no previous research, likely due to its sensitive nature, I have decided to approach it in an attempt to uncover something new with some exciting possibilities. This, by definition, would mean that I am embarking in exploratory research, which according to (Swedberg, 2020) it is “risky by definition, since it is not possible to know in advance if something novel will come out of the whole thing.”. However, given that there is a general lack of understanding regarding the topic, and there is a need to deepen this understanding, the study can be nothing else than exploratory. For the study I have decided to focus mainly on interviews as a data source, firstly due to some complications with the clinic I will be conducting the study with. Some concerns arose where member of their team did not feel comfortable with sharing a questionnaire with hundreds or thousands of their previous customers, due to privacy concerns the clinic holds, and rightfully so. Secondly due to the nature of the study, an exploratory approach was always in mind from the conception of the thesis, as such, and after a lengthy conversation with the clinic we came to the agreement of dividing the data collection process in two parts:

1. **Focus Group:** In the focus group I interviewed and recorded a semi-structured interview with members of the clinics staff that have had contact with the consumer in multiple occasions through the process leading up to and after the cosmetic surgery. One of the main driving factors for having semi-structured interview comes from the historical precedent, as these are some of the most commonly used interviews for qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The goal with these interviews is to have a good understanding of the consumer prior to making contact with them, here the objective is to grasp how the consumer thinks, behaves, and changes through the process via an external observer. Later in the study it will serve as a basis of comparison against the one-on-one data gathered from the individuals that went through the procedures.

2. **Individual In-depth Interviews:** Continuing with (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), we look now at the individual in-depth interviews. In the paper the authors make mention of it being a method used widely within the medical field, a field which often times set aside from, still holds within it the field of cosmetic or plastic surgery. One main take-away here is that the questions for the participants must be focused, this in order to guarantee an equal amount of knowledge of a certain experience without alienating anyone. Based on further comments made by the author, the questions asked will be set in a manner as to open the conversation but not to hold the individual hostage to a specific follow-up question. Instead, the goal is to open a discussion that can flow easily between interviewer and interviewee that will give sufficient, and adaptive, insight on a given topic, in my case that of how their behavior changed as a consumer due to the plastic surgery they underwent. The guiding questions for the In-depth Interviews will be developed after looking at the results obtained from the focus group and taking into account any advice given or new factors that may arise.

4. EMPIRICAL STUDY

As previously mentioned in the methodology we'll start with a focus group involving members of the staff. As stated, this, along with the in-depth interviews, will mostly be done in a semi-structured, where open ended questions will be used to generate a dialog between the interviewer and the interviewees. The starter questions will be based on the factors previously mentioned (social, personal, and psychological factors).

4.1. FOCUS GROUP:

- Social:
 - Have consumers mentioned a friend or person that voiced their support for them to go through this procedure?
 - Do consumers often say that the service was recommended to them by others? If so, close acquaintances or just by people in general?
 - Has social media been mentioned often as a driving force behind the decision of going through the procedure?
 - Generally, do you believe social factors, such as those previously mentioned, are one of the main driving forces behind the consumer's decision?
- Personal:
 - While being a deeply personal experience, do you believe consumers would be willing to share this experience with us?
 - Do you often see these procedures as something that rewards the consumer with what they envision as their ideal self?
 - When thinking of the daily life of the consumer, through your experiences with them, have you seen the procedure as something that changes how they feel, act out their habits, or go about their daily life?

- Generally, do you believe personal factors, such as those previously mentioned, are one of the main driving forces behind the consumer's decision?
- Psychological:
 - When thinking on a personal experience such as this, do you often see psychological changes in the consumer through and after the process? Do they seem happier, realized, or nervous about what other individuals will think?
 - Often times consumers have doubts about the products and services they choose. Do you think the psychological state of an individual prior to the surgery impacts if they will go through it or how they will feel about it after?
 - Do you believe the procedure changes their focus into services and products that would align with the procedure they went through, such as other cosmetic services or products?
 - Generally, do you believe psychological factors, such as those previously mentioned, are one of the main driving forces behind the consumer's decision?

4.2. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS:

1. Could you tell me a bit about how you as an individual understand the concept of being a consumer?
2. When talking about certain groups, we often times refer to them as the consumer, in marketing our job can be to try and understand why the consumer wants things or how they changed over time. Could you tell me about a time you've changed your perception regarding a product or a service?
3. Relating the two previous questions to the general topic of this research, that being Plastic Surgery and Consumer behavior, how would you describe yourself as a consumer today?

4. Prior to the procedure, were there any products you looked for that afterwards you stopped buying? Or inversely, say, now after the procedure did you become more aware of certain products?
5. Instead of looking at specifics, how would you describe your evolution, from a consumer standpoint, prior to the procedure to today?
6. Focusing now on the procedure itself, what steps led you to it? Was it something you've wanted for a long time or was it a gradual development in interest?
7. Would you say this process is a social one? Did you share this experience with friends and family while going through it?
 - a. If so, did anyone advise you regarding this choice?
 - b. When thinking of "social", in today's day and age we think of social media. Do you believe it played a role in your choice?
8. On a more personal level, many would say this is a deeply personal experience unique to everyone. Could you give me your point of view on this?
 - a. Would you say that the procedure was a reward for yourself?
 - i. If so, would you describe it as being a goal for yourself? Achieving your vision of yourself?
 - b. Given its personal impact, did you see any changes in your behavior, attitude or habits day-to-day after the procedure?
9. Could you describe your emotions after the procedure?
 - a. How did you feel prior to the procedure? Would you say it affected your overall experience?
 - b. Afterwards, did you see yourself buying products or services that aligned with your procedure?
10. Overall, is there anything you'd like to say regarding something I asked, or any comments you'd like to make?

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. FOCUS GROUP

The focus group, held on May 19th 2023, was comprised of an in-person discussion with 5 interviewees, and one interviewer, this session took place within the clinic's office space. The interviewees were members of the staff at the LMR Clinic, in Lisbon, all with different lines of work, from nurses to PR management. It lasted roughly one hour, with this hour-long discussion being divided into three main areas of interest and using four questions each to get the participants talking. As mentioned previously in the methodology the three areas of interest were Social, Personal, and Psychological, with an impromptu discussion regarding approach recommendations for the in-depth interviews.

Starting with the Social section, the interviewees remarked that the consumer oftentimes has a supporting force behind them, this being a partner or family member. It was remarked, upon questioning, that the clients usually have friends or family members that have gone through similar procedures as the ones the client is considering and thus recommends it based on experience. There was a brief mention of the effect social media can have as well, where the client goes to find inspiration and even show the staff members what results they would wish to have, often times the clinics online presence has been a motivator in searching for the procedures, as they see the results previous clients have had and thus look for the clinic specifically, or even the same surgeon. There was a passing comment regarding the importance of word-of-mouth for the business, as a vocal client is one of the greatest drivers for new individuals, an important side-note however as a comment regarding stigma relating to plastic surgery, where this vocal minority of clients is a primary driver to reduce the negative effects, stigma still has on this market. Given the nature of these comments they directly, and enthusiastically, answered the next question with an affirmative. Social media is thus confirmed to play a vital role in this field by allowing them to showcase the results of previous clients and connecting the ever present online day-to-day to the client's ultimate decision of going forward with the surgery.

Ultimately, they confirmed that social factors, ranging from those relating to family and friends to those closely related to social media as of great importance on the client's decision-making process.

Following up with the personal line of questioning we start with a question regarding the client's willingness to speak about their experience and its effects on their day-to-day. The interviewees unanimously agreed that there is a split among clients, some are extremely happy with their surgery and thus will enthusiastically share their experience, while some will prefer to keep it as a private matter due to societal expectations and judgement, one example given being that of the blame received by clients from those surrounding them in case the surgery was botched or didn't go according to plan. I'd like to note that this can be linked to the consumers psychological/mental state as well, and this effect could come from pre-surgery mentality that carried over after the fact, as stated by Soest (von Soest et al., 2011). Continuing with the commentary provided by the interviewees we come to a sideline regarding influencers, and how these affect young consumers, the fact that most of these influencers is vocal regarding their own experience with plastic surgery is seen by the interviewees as a driving force behind the normalization of the whole process. In conclusion, while some may proudly talk about it at lengths not all will do so. The next question, regarding a reward response from the client shows an interesting answer, where the interviewees remark that more often than not this sort of response is seen with the older generations, with the example given pointing to those around the 60-year-old figure. The comments in general pointed to the financial stability this demographic has as being a strong driving factor to having surgeries at a later date. Despite this focus, they confirmed that as a whole people do see plastic surgery as a reward, either something they look at as a goal for their savings or a reward given to themselves due to life changes or even as a status symbol. This relates to previous literature on the subject, such as with Askegaard (2002), Consiglio (2022) and Schouten (1991). Speaking of the changes felt by the consumer in their day-to-day life we first have a comment on the mental state, where in some not so extreme cases the client will cry of happiness and in other cases, such as in breast-reductions, we see an improve in the quality of life of the consumer and even on their health. Regarding their consumer habits, we do see a comment where

the interviewees point out that the client will start to engage in activities other would take for granted, such as going to the beach and other social events, while this does not directly correlate to a specific product or purchase habit, it does show a shift in what the consumer looks forward to after a surgery such as this. Finalizing this stage, the consensus from the interviewees is that the personal factors have a huge impact on the consumer.

Finalizing the three subdivisions we have the psychological section. Regarding overall psychological changes in the consumer the interviewees started, unprompted, by explaining the process the clinic has regarding the psychological evaluation of the client through the entire surgery process. Mainly this process serves to discourage the consumer from taking extreme choices, such as an extreme breast augmentation or other surgeries. They avoid the consumers misinformed requests and explain the surgical process to them and advise as to what would be best. Overall, they remarked that there were changes in the client, such as a boost in happiness after the fact, however due to the huge effect the whole process can have on an individual they take precautions to guarantee the client long-term benefit. Going on over the second question, the interviewees make note that the mental state of the client after the surgery comes from expectations, they themselves set, and overall worries they held. They commented that some clients want to see immediate results post-op, despite the impossibility this presents. These few clients tend to be slightly irrational, wanting to see the results while disregarding or not fully understanding the lengthy healing process required. This correlates to previous research regarding the consumer psychological state, such as (von Soest et al., 2011), and how it effects the post-procedure mentality they hold. This is, as noted by the interviewees, a case-by-case notion however, some people do a better job at setting expectations for themselves, some come out feeling just as nervous as they did prior and some come out extremely happy and excited, however it was noted once again that the clinic takes care to manage these expectations. Regarding now the consumer habits specifically, the interviewees made note that the consumers often times go out of their way to purchase or partake in new products or activities that will complement the surgery they had. Two examples of this were people talking about what bikinis or swimwear they are looking

forward to buying or even the case of one client that was getting their bandages removed sometime after the surgery and was, during this process, on their phone doing some online shopping for new dresses. Some more experience-oriented examples would be people that talk actively about going in that “once in a lifetime” trip abroad or buying new lingerie’s. It was commented on by the interviewees, after prodding, that most delve deeper into cosmetic and beauty care products.

One extra, spontaneous, question was asked of the participants. Here I asked for advice approaching the individuals that have had surgery during a one-on-one interview. The general consensus was that I should avoid prodding at the reason behind the surgery, as this may come from a place of insecurity, and to start with general questions. Above all else it was recommended that I reassure the individuals of the privacy of the study. The approach will be done in partnership with the clinic as they will reach out and select a number of individuals that they believe will be willing to speak with me on this matter. The questions for the individuals will be focused on their habits as a consumer and how they changed after the surgery.

5.2. INDIVIDUAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The analysis of the in-depth interviews will be done question by question with a global view of the overall answers, singling out individual answers when these deviate from the norm or provide an insightful remark on the subject's views. The in-depth interviews took place over the course of 3 months, during which I was able to interview 10 individuals selected and provided by the clinic much like the individuals who participated on the Focus Group. Of these 10 individuals 2 were men and the remaining 8 were women, the age ranges were from late 20s to early 50s, and no individual clarified what procedure they had the constant being that they all had had plastic surgery at some point in their life. Interview time averaged at around 20min with the longest interview taking 40min.

Could you tell me a bit about how you as an individual understand the concept of being a consumer?

Overall, we get a set of answers that fall in line with the expected usual view of what a consumer is. All seem to agree that it is the name given when someone who uses or buys a product, or the wish of acquiring a product. One answer does fall outside of the expected norm, here one individual describes that its two sides of an individual, they say that a consumer can be someone who wants basic needs or someone who wants luxuries. This answer goes to show that these individuals should have the understanding of what is a need and what is a wish, being that a need has higher base importance than a wish, this plays with the answers to the question 8.a.i where most if not all individuals identified that the procedure was a goal they held for a long time, or as I'd put it, a wish. The most important part is that these interviewees understand that a consumer is who consumes a product or service, which allows us to validate answers to questions such as "How would you describe yourself as a consumer?".

When talking about certain groups, we often times refer to them as the consumer, in marketing our job can be to try and understand why the consumer wants things or how they changed over time.

Could you tell me about a time you've changed your perception regarding a product or a service?

Every single individual identified that once they reached adulthood or started earning their own money their tastes had a drastic change. Oftentimes they cite the higher independence they gained as the inciting factor that drove them to change. One individual pointed out instead that they had previously had a bad experience with a service, which they did not name, but that they ended up going back to it and reformed their opinion of it. Another individual noted that: "When I was younger, in my twenties, I actually preferred a bigger chest, but now I prefer a smaller bust size". This shows two interesting points: individuals hold the capacity to understand when and what lead them to change their opinions, as well as being able to reevaluate their experiences and have new takeaways once provided with further insight.

Relating the two previous questions to the general topic of this research, that being Plastic Surgery and Consumer behavior, how would you describe yourself as a consumer today?

Here we find the most differences between all individuals, some believe themselves to be impulsive and will buy without rhyme or reason, others believe to only indulge in a rare splurge. Two answers were more in-depth however: In one the individual explained how they believed to be ever changing, where they had once been extremely impulsive in their purchases and now are more cautious with how they spend their money. The other interviewee of note related this to plastic surgery, stating that as someone who works in the area, they see themselves to be an insightful consumer, they pride themselves on knowing the fine details of a procedure before committing to it and that they'll only ever do a surgery that they see as beneficial and not merely for aesthetical purposes. It's interesting to see that consumers will pride themselves of the knowledge they have regarding a service or product, it was clear that this would guide the way they buy products/services, possibly even more so in an area such as this that evokes personal and physical risk to some degree.

**Prior to the procedure, were there any products you looked for that afterwards you stopped buying?
Or inversely, say, now after the procedure did you become more aware of certain products?**

Across all interviews we see a common denominator, they purchased more products than before, often times related to their surgery. The most commonplace answer was that the individual bought more/better lingerie followed closely by overall better clothing. All individuals mentioned they also participated more in social outings which led to more money being spent on food and drinks with friends and others. One individual commented that the surgery didn't bring new needs so much as gave her an excuse to buy things that would accentuate the results more. Surprisingly only one individual said they don't recall any change taking place in what they bought after surgery.

Instead of looking at specifics, how would you describe your evolution, from a consumer standpoint, prior to the procedure to today?

Here we once again have several different answers across the multiple interviewees, while everyone commented that they in a sense ended up buying more products that aligned with the surgery some explained that it was a passing change that settled back on how they were before. One other answer we saw among a couple of individuals was that before they would be shy and buy clothing that would be concealing of their figure while now, they bought more products and products that would highlight the changes, an example being: "Well obviously I bought tops with some cleavage, which I used to avoid. Oh! Backless dresses too!". Some state that yes, they bought different products now but that they were still the same type of consumer. One comment was that they bought much more often into social settings. While another mentioned they were now a happier consumer as they bought things without concern if it would suit them. Overall, it seems individuals have less anxieties in purchasing products after the surgery while before they would second guess themselves and that all purchased things that would elevate or relate to the procedure they had.

Focusing now on the procedure itself, what steps led you to it? Was it something you've wanted for a long time or was it a gradual development in interest?

Here we see two groups of answers: people who wanted the procedure they had since they were young, and others who developed the want as adults. Within the first group we see that they, often,

had wanted to go through with the procedure since they were in their mid to late teens, here the individuals in all cases went through with it as soon as they saw a chance, this camp also comments that they had a lot of input and following from their parents due to their young age, one individual said: "I pestered my parents about it for years, since I was around fourteen or fifteen I think.". The other group, which has developed this want through the years site things such as going through body weight fluctuations as an adult when they settled into a more sedentary lifestyle or as it being an interest they had while young but that only grew and fully manifested later in life.

Would you say this process is a social one? Did you share this experience with friends and family while going through it?

Everyone without exception agreed that the whole process is social, having shared the experience with their family (mostly parents) and with their close friends. Some explained that they had a broader group but most stated that it stayed on topic mostly with a small circle of individuals, this circle expanded after the respective procedures, stated by some as it being due to the fact that the results were hard to miss. One individual that was underage when they had the procedure commented: "Well I had to tell my parents. Actually, I had told them a few years before I wanted this and sort of prepared them for it. Of course, they tried to make sure this was the right thing for me, and I had to assure them time and time again."

a. If so, did anyone advise you regarding this choice?

Overall people explained that their family, more often than not, advised them in the sense that they wanted them to be sure prior to taking this life changing procedure. Some commented that while it could be said that their closed ones gave advise they did criticize them or try to dissuade them by saying that they looked great or didn't need this change.

b. When thinking of "social", in today's day and age we think of social media. Do you believe it played a role in your choice?

Given the age of most participants, they for the most part commented first and foremost that they were not influenced by social media but they agreed that it could and must play a big role in today's world when it comes to make a decision on this. One participant in particular mentioned that it played a role in the clinic they chose to go with for the procedure but not the procedure itself. Finally, another individual went on to state a deeper opinion regarding social media, here they explained how it plays a huge role in today's world and how it influences people on all aspects of life, going so far as exemplifying that they themselves base what they do based on what they see their friends do.

On a more personal level, many would say this is a deeply personal experience unique to everyone.

Could you give me your point of view on this?

The agreement was general in that it is a deeply personal process, while one element making mention that it is personal but weirdly so due to needing help afterwards to recover. Another individual, with experience in this area, mentioned that from seeing individuals go through with this she understands that each and every single person has varying reasons behind wanting it and varying reactions to the whole process. Another element made a statement, this regarding the view some individuals hold towards the process having a negative connotation while they believe that it can be a healing process, not only on a physical level, but on an emotional one by providing solutions to things such as body dysmorphias which they believe can lead to a happier outlook on life.

a. Would you say that the procedure was a reward for yourself?

i. If so, would you describe it as being a goal for yourself? Achieving your vision of yourself?

While all individuals agree that the surgery was indeed a goal, few say it was something they saw as a reward. One particular individual said that "Anything we do to feel good with our body and mind is always a reward". In this sense we deviate from the literature, where we saw it described as something people did to reward themselves for a specific time in their lives.

a. Given its personal impact, did you see any changes in your behavior, attitude or habits day-to-day after the procedure?

A common thread found here is individuals mentioning that they did see a change specially in social situations. Changes mentioned ranged from going to the beach to wearing more form fitting clothing. Now these changes are particular and likely linked to the surgery type each person had but we do see a consensus that they did go through changes in their attitude towards certain activities and their habits day-to-day.

Could you describe your emotions after the procedure?

All individuals reported as being happy and realized after the procedure, one did comment in regards to the pain and discomfort but said they were happy about how everything went. One regarded the following comment: "Well, outside of the pain and discomfort, I was glad I did it and that the results looked so good." It is relevant to mention that the results here weren't healed.

a. How did you feel prior to the procedure? Would you say it affected your overall experience?

Most didn't have much input here, they commented on being nervous but excited, one however stated "Personally I worked nearly until the surgery. I think I worked until 30mins prior.". That said they mentioned that having good relationship with the staff and being calm reflected on a positive outcome, and it's important to mention that they work at the clinic.

b. Afterwards, did you see yourself buying products or services that aligned with your procedure?

Overall, and through the previous questions answers. The interviewees all confirmed this, some going as far as not fully answering and just commenting that they had previously mentioned this.

Overall, is there anything you'd like to say regarding something I asked, or any comments you'd like to make?

Unfortunately, most decided to decline to make further comments, however of the couple that did, their comments could be boiled down to thinking that the topic of plastic surgery should be made to be less taboo and to be seen less of a luxury and unnecessary procedure and as something that can help people be themselves, one other comment was that it should be more easily available.

5.3. FOCUS GROUP & IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS: AN ANALYSIS

This section will work to bridge both interview sections, here the goal is to understand the common ground and the differences that exist between both groups. Once again it is important to make it clear that the Focus Group consisted of one interview with five individuals, all of which worked for the clinic in various capacities, while the in-depth interviews occurred over a three-month period with ten individuals, one of which works in the clinic. Both groups requested to be anonymous and received guarantees that not only no names would be kept but no recordings of the interviews.

Both stages followed the established three categories of Social, Personal and Psychological lines of questioning. Within the social line of questioning, we find that the focus group provides insight that the consumer, usually, has a supporting figure behind the choice they've made, this is not only confirmed in the in-depth interviews but expanded upon by an individual who had their procedure done while still relatively young. In their specific case they mentioned that their parents were not only a source of help but a guide of sorts, despite not having gone through the procedure before. It is also a common point commented on by many of the subjects, where their family members ended up giving, oftentimes, unsolicited advice but advice nonetheless. Social media is also a topic of focus here, and while the interviewed individuals didn't use it much in their case, the focus group still pointed to its importance. We do have one comment regarding this that aligns with the importance placed upon it by the focus group, here the individual commented that it played a vital role in choosing what clinic to go for, cementing the importance of social media in the decision-making process, something that should be further investigated. When moving into the personal line of questions, the focus group highlighted one special issue, that of people feeling shame or blame due to others comments. This came to light when individuals explained the nature of their family, or closed ones, unwanted comments where they tried to dissuade the individual from going through with the procedure. It's clear this is an issue the plagues all individuals who go through with the process, some commented on the stigma that is still felt to this day. While not brought up during the in-depth interviews one point I

also believed is worth looking further into is the influence that influencers exert over their viewers when it related to the topic of Plastic Surgery, as it was brought up that this could help with the normalization of the industry and choice of an individual to go through with the process if the so wish. Continuing with the similarities, or in this case dissimilarities between both groups, we see that while the focus group believes that there is a reward effect at play, similar to what the literature tells us, we do not see this answer from the individual interviews. Rather, we see the individuals proudly claim that it was a goal, as something to work towards. Interestingly, both the focus group and the in-depth interviews lead us to the conclusion that financial stability was a driver. The interviews deepen this by exploring that some saved up to this, while others only went for it after years working and once, they reached a high stability point in their life, thus this becomes somewhat of a common denominator, that no matter the age the financial side must be figured out. Finalizing this comparison section, we enter the psychological line of questioning. The focus group lead us to the emotional statement that, more often than not the individual will be happy after the surgery. This is backed by the interview section, while some made the distinction of the immediate happiness and other the long-term happiness all seemed to be pleased, going as far as saying that despite the pain and suffering involved, they were, at the end of the day, happy. Regarding the habits, something that will be of more interest for future research, we notice that both data collection stages provide us with clear indication that individuals suffer changes in their purchasing habits, not only of products but of services as well. People claim to be more outgoing, be that to the beach or to the bar, and as a whole seem to have a higher drive to buy things that they didn't before. The majority of participants mentioned lingerie and swimwear, some did comment that as a whole they bought more, but an interesting comment regarded that this was a temporary high volume purchasing spree that eventually stabilized. The main takeaway would be that individuals do in fact buy things that highlight their surgery.

Finalizing we can easily understand that the generalization of the behavior is difficult and that would require further research on the topic, likely in a larger scale. However, we can takeaway a few notes on the subject, those being: those who go through plastic surgery do indeed buy products that align

with the surgery they had; individuals understand that social media plays a role in the process even when they themselves didn't use it; while financial stability plays a role in who decides to have surgery the testimonies suggest that individuals will wait until they can afford it; and finally, that individuals still feel some manner of discomfort depending on the type of commentary made regarding their choice pointing towards further need to normalize the industry of plastic surgery.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Through this thesis and research, I have come to the primary conclusion that further investigation, preferably in a larger scale is needed. Starting with the Focus-Group it is clear that individuals are varied, something the interviewees later cement. While most of the individuals showed that they bought products that aligned with their surgery few relations between the surgery/procedure and the type of product have been made. It is clear that those who had breast augmentation/implants were keener on having lingerie, bikinis, and dresses that complimented their body, however this leaves a large unknown in the other procedures. One important thing, and highly relevant, is the psychological aspect, overall, these consumers seemed happier after the surgery than before, which coupled with the desire to buy products that go hand-in-hand with their procedures could lead to a higher chance of impulse purchasing. This could lead to unnoticed changes in the consumer habits and lowering their price sensitivity, what is clear however is that these individuals were happy to buy products, services and experiences that they previously would not have purchased.

The research conducted had some severe limitation, and this is an important factor to take into account as I conclude it. Firstly, the lack of easily accessible subjects to interview and collect data from. It was only through a request put in place with a clinic that this research was able to find its footing, and even then, various delays occurred while the clinic searched for individuals comfortable enough to sharing their experience. Secondly, the timeline of the study. In order to have better and more relevant results the study should occur in various stages, where we accompany the individuals prior, immediately after, and a few months up to a year after the procedure. Here we had to opt to interview individuals that had gone through Cosmetic Surgery many years ago and whose experiences were not as fresh in their mind.

Regarding the correlation between my findings and the literature is of extreme importance, for one thing it is clear that analyzing these consumers within the Personal, Social, and psychological lenses was extremely beneficial in approaching them in a more in-depth manner. Unfortunately, it becomes

difficult to relate with all the relevant literature, for one, the cyclical nature of Cosmetic Surgery expressed by a few authors, or comments regarding need one has to please their partner. However, some propositions were found within this small study, such as the self-enhancement comment by (Consiglio & van Osselaer, 2022), where it is said that the consumer's goal of self-determination can be fulfilled via the purchase of services that they associate with their own self-worth, in this case the betterment of one's body through surgery being done to accomplish a better version of one's "self". In truth the testimonies all point to a self-driven need for these surgeries, not a need to appease others but that to appease ourselves.

Finalizing with what future research should be conducted and the relevancy of this, and others, studies to marketing I'd like to start by explaining that research done into this industry should be done on a larger scale, possibly with multiple rounds of interviews throughout the process. It is clear to me that while some conclusions have been made here, they are far from ideal and that this subject continues to be understudied due to its sensitive nature, however, from the comments made by the participants it is clear that Cosmetic Surgery should not be a taboo and that demystifying it may lead new marketing segmentation opportunities and a better understanding of the consumers psychology as a whole. Furthermore, the continued study of this industry and its consumers will lend itself to new targeting practices or understanding of the ever-changing nature of consumers.

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