Study of the Relationship between External and Internal Factors that Influence Surgery Consumption Behavior

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Abstract. This study also shows that women experience a positive change in attitude during the process of appearance-oriented pursuits, but they sometimes fell into repetitive consumption behavior. Additionally, after the surgery, there was no change in self-esteem for those women who had initial negative opinions about plastic surgery because they blamed the failure of surgery on side effect or external factors.

Keywords: Plastic Surgery, External Factor, Internal Factor, In-Depth Interviews, Appearance Management Consumption Behavior

1 Introduction

Currently, appearance means everything. It has been reported that those who have a charming appearance received preferential social treatment in situations such as education, employment, medical practice, legal proceedings, and selection of spouse (Bull & Rumsey, 1988; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986).

There are generally two motives for plastic surgery. One is external stimulation (sociocultural factors) and the other is independent decision related to psychological conflict (personal factors). More often, these factors have a complex influence on the decision to have plastic surgery rather than only one of them having influence. Motivation from outside happens when people around the patient recommend the surgery, or they receive plastic surgery information from the mass media.

Mass media, such as women's magazines, advertisements, movies, and drama boosts the appearance-related market. As a result, the beauty and plastic surgery industries were formed and continue to develop. Furthermore, mass media emphasizes appearance's social and commercial value and exaggerates its justification and effectiveness (Bloch & Richins, 1992).

Meanwhile, the reason why actions like appearance management behavior are now popular can be found in the social trends that prefer beautiful appearance or motivate people to improve their self-esteem in this way (Kaiser, 1990).
Many studies have been conducted on this phenomenon, but no study has understood the overall factors and made reference to the relationships between them. Most of those who have had plastic surgery pretend they did not; this presents some difficulty in selecting study subjects and can complicate the interview process, making it difficult to conduct a study. This study added the psychological motives of those who had plastic surgery by conducting interviews. This study aims to understand the relationship between consumers’ external and internal motives for having plastic surgery through qualitative research.

2 Theoretical Backgrounds

2.1 Motive for appearance-oriented pursuit

Sociocultural and personal factors influence consumer sentiment regarding appearance and affect consumption behavior. In modern society, which has become an era of “lookism,” standards are usually spread through mass media, such as TV, movies, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. Media is changing how body image is personally perceived (Stice et al., 1994; Harrison & Cantor, 1997).

**Social and cultural factors**

Perception of one's appearance, developmental influence during growth, sociocultural influence, and self-esteem affect attitudes towards body image. Among these four variables, sociocultural factors, such as mass media, have the biggest influence. Through sociocultural factors, we perceive the social ideal for physical appearance, and we observe our appearance through the lens of mass media (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). Sociocultural information that is conveyed through mass media suggests that the thin body is beautiful, healthy, and appropriate, and that it is the ideal woman’s body. This message makes women experience inconsistency with their body image (Stice et al., 1994).

There are other sociocultural factors. Some jobs and the social environment reinforce people's ways of thinking about appearance. It has been shown that beautiful women have more opportunities to move up the social ladder by meeting men with good qualifications; they are popular among friends and co-workers, receive less legal punishments, and can receive more help from others (Synnott, 1990). This halo effect of appearance and the cultural influence of mass media further motivate people to pursue improved appearance in our society.

**Personal Factors**

Another factor that affects awareness of appearance is the personal factor. Objectified body consciousness means examining one's own body from an observer's perspective. This can involve direct observation and obsessiveness about controlling one’s appearance by internalizing the ideal body standard. Based on this awareness, one evaluates the degree of satisfaction with one's own body—the higher the level of
dissatisfaction with the body, the higher the degree of anxiety in interpersonal relationships (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1992).

If the level of dissatisfaction with body image is high and a negative evaluation of the body continues, the general self-concept changes. Rather than being satisfied with their present appearance, some people begin to pursue the ideal appearance that others demand (Atwater, 1992). In other words, personal factors, such as appearance dissatisfaction, consciousness or self-consciousness, and objectified body consciousness, can be seen as the motive for appearance-oriented pursuits.

2.2 Research Method

This study applied qualitative research by using in-depth interviews. The interview method allowed information providers to voice their opinions on plastic surgery freely, and it enabled them to select their focus during the interview. Each interview for the pretest was 30-minutes long and was conducted over several days. The main study was conducted approximately five months after completing the pretest.

Analogous to aims of this study, the researcher asked the research targets to evaluate the beauty of their appearances and observed their motive for seeking beauty through plastic surgery, the psychological results, and the psychological changes before and after the surgery. The qualitative research interviewed eleven people. Their occupations were diverse; they included office workers, students, and housewives. Age was evenly distributed from 20 to 60.

2.3 Research Results

Based on the data collected in the first step, the general experiences of plastic surgery were investigated. At the second stage, the interview data were summarized and hypothesized and generalized results were deduced.

The findings show that the external (sociocultural) motive is one of the motives for appearance-oriented pursuits that influence plastic surgery behavior. Second, the internal (personal) motive is one of the motives for appearance-oriented pursuits that influence plastic surgery behavior. Third, the external (sociocultural) motive had a bigger influence than the internal (personal) motive. Fourth, the external (sociocultural) motive influences the internal (personal) motive.

I saw many of my friends or school seniors [are] having plastic surgeries. I was convinced that having plastic surgery would help me build my career. So … when I agreed to have a jaw plastic surgery with the hospital, I trusted my decision. I imagined myself after the change, and I really liked it. Everyone would have imagined their ideal self. Just because I [had] surgery, that doesn't mean my before-self is insignificant. Now, my look of smiling naturally seems more familiar than the previous look. I think it helped my … career. (Ms. A)

I was usually satisfied with getting Botox … so I think my daughter decided to have a plastic surgery. I also worried a lot. But … after looking at the pictures before and after the surgery, the current jaw looks much better than the wider one. (Mrs. B, Ms. A's mother)
The motive for having a plastic surgery here derived from a personal factor being influenced by an external factor instead of just being an internal and personal factor, namely, dissatisfaction with body. This is often seen in people who have plastic surgery.

The roles of TV, magazines, and the Internet as external stimulations cannot be overlooked. Currently, people are exposed to programs or advertisements that recommend people invest time and money in their bodies. Mass media sets the standard for the ideal appearance and causes people to compare themselves to the standard. Through this, society comes to value beauty and uses this as the standard for judging women. In order to avoid being disadvantaged in employment or marriage, many women become obsessed with the idea that they must satisfy the standard of beauty that society and mass media suggest. Thus, it could be seen that mass media plays a moderating role in forming judgments and influencing self-satisfaction regarding body image and self-esteem.

Nowadays, the entire nation wants beautiful women [with a] more voluptuous bosom, clear eye line, and wrinkle-free skin. I think that women [on] TV are the same humans as me. But why is that the celebrity who [is rumored to have] plastic surgery look[s] better? I think many times that I want to look like models [on] women's magazine covers. (Ms. C)

This case confirms that a motive for having plastic surgery is due to external factors, such as TV. It also shows that the internal motive or desire to have plastic surgery is created by this external stimulation.

There are many cases when people decide to have plastic surgery by themselves. Women decide to have plastic surgery when physical flaws can’t be concealed by cosmetics or clothes or when dissatisfaction reaches a peak before or after a big personal event, such as giving birth or getting a job. For women, when their appearances improve, their confidence is enhanced, and they become more dignified and feel superior.

I had Botox shots around the eyes and forehead. I am thinking of using it around my neck. I changed my lips and cheeks to be fuller. I will do anything to look younger regardless of my age. My children are all married, and now I want to do what I want to do. I even regret not having the plastic surgery earlier. (Mrs. D)

In this case, the motive for having plastic surgery was an internal one prompted by a desire for a better appearance rather than being prompted by external factors, such as TV. The next case is that of a person who was going to have a plastic surgery based on others' recommendations but did not, meaning she was not influenced by an external motive.

I was worried to death. All I could think of was, "Can I trust it?" My husband still thinks badly of plastic surgery. After looking at my picture, he always says, "Your lips are too prominent. People will only look at your lips instead of listening to you," and tell me to do something about my lips. It is true that my expression changed after making my face tighter and augmenting my lips, but I like myself right now. Only, I worry about how I would feel [if] I meet someone similar to my look after the surgery. (Mrs. E)

Plastic surgery might seem a bit excessive and extravagant, but women are prepared to pay any price for it. Women decide to have plastic surgery as a way of loving themselves, so they tend to think that cost does not matter. Sometimes, they
decide to have surgery without hesitating, as if they were shopping for necessary goods, until they feel satisfied as a human being.

3 General Discussion and Implications

As motive for having plastic surgery, sociocultural influences through others’ recommendation or mass media had a bigger influence on the decision to have plastic surgery than making decision by oneself. This indicates that external influences work more strongly than internal influences when assessing one’s perceived physical shortcomings.

Women who had a negative opinion of plastic surgery after having one, tended to blame side effects or external factors. This factor influences the desire for plastic surgery, and it is related to the fact that external factors have a bigger influence than internal factors.

Through in-depth interviews, the motive for women to take appearance management actions and have plastic surgery could be seen as the desire to seek beauty, show off, improve self-esteem, and gain social recognition and favor. Consumption behaviors, such as women’s appearance management behavior and plastic surgery, positively influence their satisfaction and confidence levels and decrease stress. In case of young women, the group that had already taken action to manage their appearance and had plastic surgery had a positive attitude regarding repeated consumption. However, women who did not take action to manage their appearance and did not have plastic surgery perceived surgery negatively.

In modern society, people invest much time and money in taking care of their appearance. Improvements in satisfaction and self-esteem are increasing as a result, and the tendency to show images of the body is significantly increasing. These influences are exacerbated by sociocultural factors like mass media. As the influence of mass media gradually increases, it causes greater consumer dissatisfaction with appearance and increases consumption of appearance management behaviors.

This study discovered that the reason why consumers lose confidence in their appearances and desire plastic surgery is influenced by the sociocultural environment; in other words, this effect is learned from mass communication. Friends’ recommendation played a bigger role than the individual’s own motive. This confirms that sociocultural motives influence individual motives.

Typically, women recognize the gap between their current appearance and the one they wish to have and pay attention to the plastic surgery that enables them to overcome it. That is the stage of recognizing there is a problem. Celebrities on TV, print media, advertisements, and Internet provoke the desire for surgery.
During this research, there was a tendency to rely on the information providers’ self-reports, meaning their subjective evaluation of plastic surgery could also be learned. Unfortunately, additional literature using this research method is not extant. An evaluation and review from an objective stance is necessary. Therefore, research on study subjects before and after surgery and including continuous follow-up would produce a more significant result.

References