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Cosmetic surgery in China: An exploration of motivation and perception

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by

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to explore the perceptions and motivation of Chinese consumers regarding cosmetic surgery. China is home to a large and rapidly growing middle and upper middle-class demographic. This recent and dramatic economic growth in China presents both new commercial opportunities and opportunities for researchers in previously under explored areas. Variables include age, gender, level of education and occupation. Of particular interest for exploration is the interest of males in cosmetic surgery. The findings of this study are based on the results of over 400 online surveys completed by Chinese middle and upper middle-class consumer. The results are subjected to rigorous statistical analysis to quantify variation between variable. The results of this study include some theoretical and practical contributions to the beauty and elective surgery industries in China. Insight into differences between different demographics may also contribute to focus on different plastic surgery technology and techniques. Some Entrepreneurs, practitioners and researchers in related fields may find this research to be interest.

Key words: *Cosmetic surgery, Chinese, Gender, Age, Market Opportunity, Beauty Industry Promotion*

INTRODUCTION

China is home to a large and rapidly growing middle and upper middle-class demographic. This recent and dramatic economic growth in China presents both new commercial opportunities and opportunities for researchers in previously under explored areas. Based on the background, entrepreneurs, practitioners and researchers are seeking for a business opportunity to help them to obtain more market share.

Nowadays, Chinese people attach more importance on their appearance, they are willing to pay for a new and beautiful outward appearance. Cosmetic surgery industry in China really grew rapidly in recent years (Hua, 2013). For most women, social motivates of sexual objectification and body shame uniquely predicted push them to quickly step into cosmetic surgery market (Calogero, 2010). However, nowadays, not only female, but also men tend to be curious about cosmetic products and cosmetic surgery, a most effective approach to achieve the dream of becoming a beauty. One of the particular interest for exploration is to investigate interest of males in cosmetic surgery. At the same time, variables include age, level of education and occupation will also show different results that affect the motivations and willingness of Chinese people.

LITERATURE REVIEW – BACKGROUND

Psychological issues

In the past 15 years, the universal reason for patients who choose to undergo cosmetic surgery is normal psychological health profiles (Thorpe, Ahmed, & Steer, 2004). That's to say, the initial action of cosmetic surgery is somewhat inactive. Thorpe also provided some data to show the connection between normal psychological health problems with cosmetic surgery. "A research that suggests that as many as 6% to 15% of people requesting elective cosmetic surgery have BDD, while 2% to 15% have schizophrenia." Some physical reasons such as congenital malformation, age suitability and physical integrity are also popular factors that motivate people to undergo cosmetic surgery. These

three factors will affect people lose confidence and be passive towards the whole life. Steffanie Sperry also stated the relationship between cosmetic surgery and psychological reasons “Psychological outcomes of cosmetic surgery suggest that individuals may experience improvements in body image and self-esteem (Sperry, 2007).” That’s to say, there are a bunch of people choose to use cosmetic surgery as a mean to overcome psychological problems and got satisfying solutions.

Similar to Sperry’s finding, self-improvement was the most effective factor that drives the most population to undergo cosmetic surgery. “Because human beings have always sought self-fulfillment through self-improvement, plastic surgery improvement and restoring form and function may be one of the world's oldest healing art for an increase in self-esteem and confidence (Salehahmadi & Rafie, 2012).” Every person will more or less fell self-defects in certain condition, under this circumstance, change to a beautiful, satisfying and gorgeous look will indeed improve self-satisfaction. Moreover, the finding from Luo’s research also indicated that though painful and struggling, women are willing to endure the pain of cosmetic surgery to achieve the dream of obtaining a new social identity (Luo, 2013). That’s to say, change for a new environment and condition to improve their life quality.

External factors

To explore the motivations of Chinese people changing appearance by undergoing cosmetic surgery, the researchers called Hamermesh and Biddle wrote a book to claim the connections between appearance and labor market in 1993. They simply tracked employment rate about three years and found that candidates with beautiful appearance are more likely to get satisfied jobs. At the same time, salaries of these two groups are obviously different (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1993).

Moreover, with the rapid development of social technology, social media also can influence general person’s emotion to let them generate the idea of undergoing cosmetic surgery. According to Etcoff’s research, Images of stars as have been thought to affect the self-images of consumers for years (Etcoff, 1999). More and more teenagers want to be as fashionable as their stars, so they choose to undergo cosmetic surgery because of internal drive for excellence. It is the fact that the social media has a substantial impact on self-perceptions, the increasing number of individuals attaining procedures maybe affected by the recent wave of reality cosmetic makeover (Sperry, 2007).

Educational Differences

The level of education also plays an important role in affecting the motivations of undergoing cosmetic surgery. According to an associate professor and Edward Hohfeld chair in sociology Hunter, he argued that educated Africa, Asia, and Latin America are more willing to take a try. When they enter the global job market, they are poised to spend more money on their appearances, especially expensive skin-lightening products (Hunter, 2011).

However, the results are totally different based on the research of Salehahmadi and Rafie. After collecting questionnaires, they found 54.45% of people who are willing to undergo cosmetic surgery is in an educational level less than a bachelor degree, whereas 22.77% had a bachelor degree, only 16.83% of people in a master educational level showed a positive attitude toward cosmetic surgery (Salehahmadi & Rafie, 2012).

According to Barone's observation, there are significant differences in the expected improvement of quality of life after surgery based on patient's educational background. People with a lower educational level hold higher expectations than other samples ($P=0.020$). They are thirsty for a better living condition, but among these lower educational background people, most of whom didn't get an adequate and proper information before undergoing cosmetic surgery, which means they even didn't judge how much risk they can take before gambling, sometimes cosmetic surgery can become a huge trap (Barone, 2015).

Gender Differences/ Similarities

Actually, it is a universal phenomenon for women in China to undergo cosmetic surgery, while men seem to take no interest in it. However, in 2007, after analyzing questionnaires, scholars concluded that both male and female generally show their affection for cosmetic surgery (Kamburoğlu & Özgür, 2007).

After ten years, a similar perspective was pointed out by Ghotbi and Khalili again. They expanded the scope of research, putting together data from three countries to show gender differences about cosmetic surgery, to claim that gender is not an element that affects students' attitude of undergoing cosmetic surgery (Ghotbi & Khalili, 2017).

However, Salehahmadi and Rafie hold the opposite view. They discovered that there are more women population than men tend to undergo cosmetic surgery in Bushehr, Southern Iran. Socio-cultural pressure and incorporate ideals of physical and sexual attractiveness are two factors that researchers try to support their argument (Salehahmadi & Rafie, 2012).

Negative Components Towards Cosmetic Surgery

Chinese, not only old generation, but also young residents learn the knowledge of confucianism from their childhood which somewhat highlight respect for nature and filial piety to parents. When Ghotbi and Khalili did their research in 2017, they found that there indeed some connection between traditional value with refuse to undergo cosmetic surgery. “Main value cited by most Chinese students supporting their negative attitude towards cosmetic surgery was the damage it would cause to parental respect and the rights of parents to the individual features inherited from them (Ghotbi & Khalili, 2017).” Therefore, it is not hard to understand that many people will resist the practice of cosmetic surgery. Similarly, several scholars found that openness to experience is the most essential negative factor of undergoing cosmetic surgery (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, Bridges, & Furnham, 2009).

Generally, cosmetic surgery is not only can change the face, but also on other parts of body. For women, cosmetic breast surgery is a popular choice. However, customers who choose to undergo it should to undergo additional surgery to maintain the result. These numerous continuing surgery will decrease women's ability to breastfeed their babies, especially affects those in old ages (Nommsen-Rivers, 2003).

STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

For several reasons, the internal factors and external knowledge are path-dependent, they affect a typical event together (Antonelli, Crespi, & Scellato, 2013). In this research, internal factors that will affect the motivation of cosmetic surgery are the inside components, most of which are natural born or choose, such as gender, congenital issues. On the contrary, external

factors comes from society, which is exposure by people that attract them to obtain, such as job hunting advantage or the willingness to improve self-confidence.

Based on the existing body of knowledge reported above, the following hypotheses are derived.

Research Question (RQ): What is the motivation and perception that affect Chinese to undergo cosmetic surgery?

H1: Regarding internal factors

1a - No gender difference on the attitude towards undergoing cosmetic surgery.

1b - Congenital illnesses, such as harelip, drive people to undergo it.

H2: Regarding external factors

2a - Job hunting opportunities is one of the most important motivations.

2b - To become more confident also plays an important role.

METHODOLOGY

Instrumentation Design (Quantitative Method)

Online questionnaire can allow researchers collect massive data in a really short period, and it can both save time and money (Picincu, 2018). There are 414 online surveys completed by Chinese middle and upper middle-class consumers were analyzed to find out the biggest factor that influence Chinese people most. "Single choice questions are a great way of leading your participants through a survey efficiently from a quality and quantity standpoint (Kondziella, 2017)." In total, nine simple single choice question and Yes/No questions were asked to get a rapid answer from participates,

By gathered the data and frequency, the author also got the general idea about the attitude of cosmetic surgery of men, in this way, then combining the results of internal factors

(gender, age, occupation, educational level) using SPSS, certain groups of people can be found out which could improve the existing corporations to do some promotions. Meanwhile, the question of the possibility of creating or expanding male cosmetic market can be answered.

1. Survey Question on the internal factors of willingness to change appearance

Based on the frequency of repeated responses in the Pilot Study, three alternatives were provided to measure the factor of Type of Content.

- I don't want to change my appearance at all.
- I want to be more beautiful via cosmetic surgery right now.
- If all concerns (risk, money, traditional notion...) are deleted, I want to undergo.

By firstly recognizing the willingness of Chinese people to undergo cosmetic surgery and analyze the results with gender, general willingness of male and female can be figured out. Under this circumstance, the argument of both male and female general shows the similar affection of cosmetic surgery can be tested (Kamburoğlu & Özgür, 2007).

2. Survey Question on the external factors of undergoing cosmetic surgery

five options were presented as possible responses for the question

- I want to become more confident.
- I have difficulty in finding a lover.
- A better job can be obtained through changing into a better appearance.
- Others ()

Self-fulfillment can be obtained through improving self-improvement or self-confident (Salehahmadi, Z., & Rafie, S. R., 2012). Beautiful appearance can get a job easier, the salary is supposed to be higher (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1993). To compare the importance of these external factors with gender and also the internal factors, such as educational level and occupation, the specific market plan can be designed to help promotion.

3. Survey Question on the negative external motivations

five options were presented as possible responses for the question

- There is some hidden danger, I don't want to take high risk.

- Surgical expenses really cost me a lot.
- My family don't allow me to do it.
- Undergoing cosmetic surgery is painful.
- Others ()

Parental respect is always take charges of previous family education in China (Ghotbi & Khalili, 2017). Several young generation afraid to stand in an opposite position with their parents so they refuse to undergo cosmetic surgery. After knowing the negative external motivations, and then connect results with age, some problems of specific cosmetic surgery towards different age groups can be notified. Under this circumstance, existing corporations can correct the problems aim to certain negative external motivation.

4. Survey Question on the internal factors regards gender

YES/NO were provided to measure the factor of Type of Content:

- I think more men will undergo cosmetic surgery in the future
- Men have equal priorities as women to undergo cosmetic surgery

By collecting the general idea about the people's notification about cosmetic surgery for male, and then compare it with the male information occupation and age group, the results of certain groups of male who hold positive ideas towards undergo cosmetic can be obtained.

ANALYSIS / RESULTS

A total of 414 online survey questionnaire results were collected online. The basic information about the gender and willingness to change appearance is presented on the Table 1. The number of male and female who response the questionnaire is similar, which increase the credibility of whole investigation (*Male N=205, Female N=209*). Among these 414 people, the most people (36.5%) agree that if all concerns (risk, money, traditional notion...) are deleted, they will choose to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Binomial Test

	Level	Count	Total	Proportion	p
Gender	Male	205	414	0.495	0.883
	Female	209	414	0.505	0.883
Willingness towards cosmetic surgery	I don't want to undergo cosmetic surgery.	139	414	0.336	2.162e-11
	I want to undergo it right now.	124	414	0.300	2.008e-16
	If all concerns are deleted, I will take it.	151	414	0.365	4.070e -8

Note. H_0 is proportion = 0.5

Table 1 *General information of gender and willingness*

On the first research question regarding the relationship between inside factors and willingness. Further analysis of the data, shown in Table 3, indicates that the gender isn't the component that affect people's attitude towards cosmetic surgery. Age group ($p < .001$), Educational level ($p < .01$) and occupation ($p < .001$) have strong connection with attitude.

Correlation Matrix

	Gender	Attitude towards cosmetic surgery	Age group	Educational Level	Job
Gender	—				
Attitude towards cosmetic surgery	-0.110*	—			
Age group	0.022	-0.274***	—		
Educational Level	-0.057	0.158**	0.210***	—	
Job	0.015	-0.163***	0.496***	0.129**	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2 *Correlation between inside components and willingness*

Specifically, students are a group of people who shows strong willingness to undergo cosmetic surgery right now among all groups of occupation (N=66, with 53.2%), while all beautician more or less want to take it. On the contrary, the majority of police and programmer rejects to change appearance.

Contingency Tables

Job		Willingness to change appearance			Total
		I don't want to undergo cosmetic surgery	I want to undergo it right now.	If all concerns are deleted, I want to take it.	
Student	Count	12	66	40	118
	% within column	8.6%	53.2%	26.5%	
Professor/ Teacher	Count	8	5	7	20
	% within column	5.8%	4.0%	4.6%	
Businessman	Count	17	6	17	40
	% within column	12.2%	4.8%	11.3%	
Doctor	Count	5	2	6	13
	% within column	3.6%	1.6%	4.0%	
Programmer	Count	27	2	7	36
	% within column	19.4%	1.6%	4.6%	
Beautician	Count	0	15	22	37
	% within column	0.0%	12.1%	14.6%	
Bankers	Count	21	16	21	58
	% within column	15.1%	12.9%	13.9%	
Designer	Count	3	6	16	25
	% within column	2.2%	4.8%	10.6%	
Police	Count	27	3	4	34
	% within column	19.4%	2.4%	2.6%	
Architect	Count	13	3	6	22
	% within column	9.4%	2.4%	4.0%	
Other	Count	6	0	5	11
	% within column	4.3%	0.0%	3.3%	
Total	Count	139	124	151	414
	% within column	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 3 *Correlation between age groups and willingness*

Table 4 indicates the relationship of age group and the choice of high risk as its discourage component. Most people regard high risks of cosmetic surgery as the major components that prevent they undergo cosmetic surgery. For age group above 50, the majority of which select the high risk (N=20, with 71.4%).

Contingency Tables

Age		High risk			Total
		-3	0	1	
Below 18	Observed	66	0	0	66
	% within row	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
18~25	Observed	90	3	34	127
	% within row	70.9%	2.4%	26.8%	
26~33	Observed	59	4	24	87
	% within row	67.8%	4.6%	27.6%	
33~40	Observed	36	2	28	66
	% within row	54.5%	3.0%	42.4%	
41~50	Observed	21	2	17	40
	% within row	52.5%	5.0%	42.5%	
Above 50	Observed	3	5	20	28
	% within row	10.7%	17.9%	71.4%	
Total	Observed	275	16	123	414
	% within row	66.4%	3.9%	29.7%	

Table 4 *Correlation between age groups and high risk*

On the second and third research question regarding the relationship between external factors that affect people's motivations. Table 5 shows the scale reliability statistics. Both table reflect high credibility (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.99$ and 0.955).

Scale Reliability Statistics		Scale Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's α		Cronbach's α	
scale	0.990	scale	0.955
[3]		[3]	
Item Reliability Statistics		Item Reliability Statistics	
if item dropped		if item dropped	
Cronbach's α		Cronbach's α	
Job Hunting	0.987	Gender	0.994
Sex Attraction	0.987	High risk	0.932
Become confident	0.986	High cost	0.932
Congenital Cause	0.987	Family Opposition	0.933
Others (2)	0.988	Painful	0.932
		Others	0.934

Table 5 *The scale reliability statistics of external factors.*

Table 6 presents the proportion of people who have motivations to undergo cosmetic surgery. Job hunting (38.9%) and reason of becoming more confident (33.0%) are the general reasons for those people. Congenital Cause accounts for only approximately 1.5% according to the report with $\chi^2=169$, which shows high correlation.

Proportions - Motivate factors						
Level		Count	Proportion			
Job hunting	Observed	105	0.3889			
	Expected	54.0	0.200			
Sex attraction	Observed	69	0.2556			
	Expected	54.0	0.200			
Become confident	Observed	89	0.3296			
	Expected	54.0	0.200			
Congenital Cause	Observed	4	0.0148			
	Expected	54.0	0.200			
Others	Observed	3	0.0111			
	Expected	54.0	0.200			
				χ^2 Goodness of Fit		
				χ^2	df	p
				169	4	1.351e-35

Table 6 *The proportion of external motivation factors*

Similarly, as Table 7 indicates, when exposure to the factors prevent most people to undergo cosmetic surgery, we find there's a significant relationship with high risk (34.7%), while the reasons of high cost and family opposition takes similar amount (26.4% to 25.0%).

Level	Count	Proportion
High risk	50	0.3472
High cost	38	0.2639
Family Oposition	36	0.2500
Painful	17	0.1181
Others	3	0.0208

Table 7 *The proportion of external motivation factors*

Table 8 shows the gender factors towards the attitudes of male to undergo cosmetic surgery. On the fourth research question, the research finds that both gender show positive attitude towards male cosmetic surgery market, for E=0.12 and 0.04.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Intercept	-0.1899	0.416	-0.457	0.648
I think more men will undergo cosmetic surgery in the future.E	0.1182	0.205	0.576	0.564
Men have equal priorities as women to undergo cosmetic surgery.	0.0350	0.202	0.173	0.863

Note. Estimates represent the log odds of "Gender = Female" vs. "Gender = Male"

Table 8 *Gender factors towards the attitudes of male to undergo cosmetic surgery*

CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In conclusion, some field related entrepreneurs, practitioners and researchers can make use of this findings to promote their cosmetic surgery plan for the Chinese market. For instance, the most crucial reason that discourage potential consumers to undergo cosmetic surgery is high risk, so that company can appropriate funds into product development to decrease the risk of surgery especially towards people who above 50. Moreover, advertisement should focus on praising the self-confidence cultivation of plastic surgery in the group of students to attract

more consumers. The specific and professional cosmetic surgery procedure for men is quite needed, because both gender show positive attitudes towards this new industry.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study shows the contemporary middle class or upper middle class Chinese people's interest in cosmetic surgery, there are some limitations. The respondents hold biased opinions because of other different elements, such as regional differences, family background differences, further research should take them into account. Moreover, the future research can presentation form accurately and on a larger scale related to this field, the appropriate cosmetic cost that most customers are willing to accept and how can beauty industry do some propaganda to attract potential male consumers are questions that are worthy of further consideration.

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APPENDIX

1. What's your gender?

- A. Male
- B. Female

2. What's your age group?

- A. Below 18
- B. 18~25
- C. 26~33
- D. 33~40
- E. 41~50
- F. Above 50

3. What's your job?

- A. Student
- B. Professor/ Teacher
- C. Businessman
- D. Doctor
- E. Programmer
- F. Beautician
- G. Bankers
- H. Designer
- I. Police
- J. Architect
- K. Other

4. What is your educational level?

- A. Middle/High School Diploma
- B. Associate degree
- C. Bachelor degree
- D. Master's degree
- E. Master degree or above

5. I think more men will undergo cosmetic surgery in the future.

A. Yes.

B. No.

6. Men have equal priorities as women to undergo cosmetic surgery.

A. Yes.

B. No.

7. Survey Question on the willingness to change appearance.

A. I don't want to change my appearance at all.

B. I want to be more beautiful via cosmetic surgery right now.

C. If all concerns (risk, money, traditional notion...) are deleted, I want to undergo.

8. What is the biggest factor that prevents me from cosmetic surgery?

A. There is some hidden danger, I don't want to take high risk.

B. Surgical expenses really cost me a lot.

C. My family don't allow me to do it.

D. Undergoing cosmetic surgery is painful.

E. Other reasons

9. What is the element that might drive you most to undergo cosmetic surgery?

A. A better job can be obtained through changing into a better appearance.

B. I have difficulty in finding a lover.

C. I want to become more confident.

D. Some congenital cause always confuses me.

E. Other reasons