

Original Research Article

Media influence on cosmetic surgery decision making among Chinese women

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Abstract: Today, it's common for cosmetic surgery to be promoted through media, but how media content influences Chinese women's decisions on cosmetic surgery remains unclear. This study aims to explore this by focusing on double eyelid surgery as an example. An online in-depth interview was conducted with 34 randomly selected women aged 20 to 32 from mainland China. The analysis of their responses, presented as percentages, suggests that understanding the neutral and social aspects of cosmetic surgery can enhance readers' ability to discern media messages.

Keywords: Media contents; Double eyelid surgery; Decision making; Satisfaction of surgery

1. Introduction

In recent years, cosmetic surgery has become popular among Chinese women, especially for facial procedures like double eyelid surgery. Data from 2014 showed over 7 million young females underwent such surgeries, and by 2019, China's cosmetic surgery market reached 400 billion yuan, making it the third-largest globally. This industry has evolved from being banned in 2001 to being regulated with formal certifications and government oversight, though some unregulated "underground" services persist.

Cosmetic surgery is now seen more as a consumer product than a medical procedure, driven by aggressive marketing and media influence. The media, including Korean pop culture, shapes beauty standards, promoting the idea that altering appearance leads to success and happiness. This has fueled the demand for cosmetic surgery in China.

2. Research methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing in-depth interviews to explore the influence of media content on Chinese women's decision to undergo double eyelid surgery. The target population for this study was women aged between 21 and 35, a demographic that constitutes a significant portion of cosmetic surgery patients in China. A total of 34 participants were interviewed, all of whom had previously undergone double eyelid surgery.

The interview process was designed to gather comprehensive insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions. The interview questions were carefully crafted to cover various aspects, including the types of media through which participants obtained information about double eyelid surgery, the impact of media information on their decision-making process, their understanding and acceptance of media information, and their feelings before and after the surgery. This approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of the complex interplay between media content and individual decision-making in the context of cosmetic surgery.

3. Key findings

3.1. Media exposure and presentation

The study indicates that 47% of participants primarily learn about double eyelid surgery through social

media, followed by online news at 26%. The majority of participants (65%) first become aware of double eyelid surgery through social media and online news, highlighting the extensive influence of digital media in shaping perceptions of cosmetic surgery.

Among the various elements of media information, promotions and prices are the most attractive to participants, capturing 44% of their attention. The affordability and accessibility of cosmetic procedures serve as a strong motivator for many individuals. Additionally, before-and-after photos are considered highly influential, with 30% of participants citing them as the most compelling part of the media content. These visual representations provide tangible evidence of the potential outcomes of the surgery, thereby enhancing its perceived benefits and effectiveness.

The appearance of endorsers for the surgery also attracts 24% of participants' attention. The credibility and attractiveness of these endorsers can significantly enhance the persuasive power of media messages, influencing potential customers' perceptions and decisions.

3.2. Understanding of media information

A majority of the participants (79%) agreed with the media's portrayal of double eyelid surgery, believing it to be a simple, safe, and effective procedure. This consensus reflects the power of media in shaping public perceptions and expectations. However, it is important to note that 76% of the participants felt that the information provided by the media was insufficient for them to make an informed decision about undergoing the surgery. They expressed a desire for more detailed information regarding the surgical process, costs, and potential risks.

This discrepancy between the participants' agreement with media messages and their perceived need for additional information underscores the complexity of decision-making in the context of cosmetic surgery. While media content can provide a general understanding of the procedure, it may not always offer the comprehensive details necessary for individuals to fully comprehend the implications of their decision.

3.3. Acceptance of media information

Personal factors like improving appearance and boosting confidence were the main reasons (70%) for participants to undergo double eyelid surgery, reflecting societal pressures and beauty standards. Price and promotions also played a role, influencing 26% of decisions due to the affordability and competitive market. The clinic's reputation was important for 21%, providing trust and assurance of quality. Patient feedback and before-and-after photos influenced 18%, offering evidence of outcomes and satisfaction.

3.4. Retention of information

After deciding to undergo the surgery, the most remembered information by participants was the price, which accounted for 32% of the responses. This highlights the significance of financial considerations in the decision-making process. Advertising copy, which often contains persuasive messages and slogans, was remembered by 24% of the participants. These memorable phrases can have a lasting impact on individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards cosmetic surgery.

Before-and-after photos were retained by 15% of the participants, emphasizing the power of visual evidence in reinforcing the perceived benefits and outcomes of the surgery. However, it is noteworthy that 29% of the participants did not remember any specific information after making their decision. This suggests that while media content can be influential, the retention of specific details may vary among individuals, influenced by factors such

as personal interests, priorities, and the complexity of the information presented.

4. Action and results

During the surgery, 53% of the participants felt unconfident, while 35% felt confident. This range of emotions reflects the diverse experiences and expectations associated with undergoing cosmetic surgery. The level of confidence can be influenced by various factors, including the individual's personality, the support system in place, and the perceived risks and benefits of the procedure.

Post-surgery, 79% of the participants were satisfied with the results, reporting that the surgery made their eyes bigger and more natural, thereby enhancing their overall appearance and boosting their confidence. This high satisfaction rate underscores the perceived success of the procedure in meeting the participants' expectations and goals. However, it is important to acknowledge that 21% of the participants were dissatisfied with the results, citing issues such as the surgery not meeting their expectations or the presence of scarring. These cases highlight the potential risks and complications associated with cosmetic surgery, emphasizing the importance of thorough research and consideration before making such a decision.

5. Significance and recommendations of the study

This study provides valuable insights into the influence of media content on Chinese women's decision-making process regarding double eyelid surgery. It highlights the significant role that promotional messages, before-and-after photos, and advertising copy play in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards cosmetic procedures. By understanding these influences, efforts can be made to enhance the media literacy of Chinese women, enabling them to critically analyze and evaluate media information. This can help reduce the likelihood of making decisions based on misconceptions or incomplete information, ultimately promoting more informed and thoughtful choices regarding cosmetic surgery.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the sample size and investigate the impact of media content on Chinese women across different age groups. This broader perspective can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the specific influencing factors of media content on decisions regarding cosmetic surgery. Additionally, further exploration of the long-term effects of cosmetic surgery on individuals' psychological well-being and social interactions could offer valuable insights into the broader implications of these procedures.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the complex interplay between media content and individual decision-making in the context of cosmetic surgery. By recognizing the influential role of media and promoting media literacy, individuals can make more informed choices that align with their personal values and goals.

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