THE ACCEPTANCE OF COSMETIC SURGERY: A STUDY ON THAI WOMEN IN BANGKOK

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Abstract

The business of cosmetic surgery has now become a very lucrative and fast-paced industry as appearance-enhancing treatments and procedures have become increasingly popular around the world. A number of cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals are now competing against one another to capture a share of the multi-billion dollar cosmetic surgery market. Thailand has been one of the most sought after countries for cosmetic surgery and ranks among the top 20 countries for cosmetic surgery procedures worldwide.

The main aim of this study is to examine the relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal factors which influence the acceptance of cosmetic surgery among Thai women. This research study examined the relationship between psychological characteristics, sociocultural influences, cosmetic surgery experiences, body appearances, body image, demographic variables and respondents’ acceptance of cosmetic surgery. The 437 non-clinical respondents in this study are exclusively Thai women who have undergone cosmetic surgery in the past or who are likely to undergo cosmetic sometime soon. The data was gathered from 13 cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals located in different parts of Bangkok.

Narcissism, appearance orientation and body area satisfaction were significantly related to the acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Respondents with vicarious experiences were more favorable toward accepting cosmetic surgery. The findings showed statistical differences in the demographic variables of age, income, occupation, vicarious experiences with respondents’ perception of body image and their acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Consumers who accept cosmetic surgery show a marked tendency for facial treatments (rhinoplasty, blepharoplasty) rather than surgery related to their bodies.

This exploratory study will help develop new research paradigms in consumer research, international marketing, and managerial practices. Marketers can use this study’s findings to better understand the nature of Thai female consumers and to segment and target those consumers who have favorable attitude toward enhancing their appearance.

Keywords: cosmetic surgery, psychological characteristics, body image, sociocultural influences, cosmetic surgery experiences

บทคัดย่อ

ธุรกิจ kosmetik กลายเป็นสุดยอดธุรกิจที่ทำให้อย่างมากและมีการเติบโตอย่างรวดเร็ว และการทำ kosmetik ด้วยความเจริญเติบโตภูมิใจอย่างมากที่อยู่ในโลก ปัจจุบันกลุ่มในธุรกิจนี้มีการเจริญเติบโตอย่างมากที่รู้จักเป็นอย่างมากเฉพาะสำหรับผู้ที่อยู่ในประเทศ ไทยและประเทศไทยเป็นประเทศที่มีผู้จัดจำหน่ายมากๆที่สุดเนื่องจากมี 20 อันดับสุดท้ายที่มีการทำ kosmetik อยู่ในโลก

วัตถุประสงค์หลักในงานวิจัยนี้เพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างปัจจัยภายในและปัจจัยภายนอกซึ่งมีอิทธิพลต่อการยอมรับในการทำ kosmetik ความพึงพอใจของผู้ซื้อ งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างกลับของตลาดและเพื่อให้ จิตวิทยา อิทธิพลทางสัญลักษณ์ ประสบการณ์ในการทำ kosmetik ความพึงพอใจ รูปปรากฏสภาพกลุ่มรายรูปปรากฏ หน้าตาด้านฝ่ายที่มีหลักทางประชากรและการยอมรับในการทำ kosmetik ความพึงพอใจของผู้ซื้อ ข้อมูล 437
INTRODUCTION

The business of cosmetic surgery has now become a very lucrative and fast-paced industry as appearance-enhancing treatments and procedures have become increasingly popular and acknowledged around the world. A number of cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals are now competing against one another to capture a share of the multi-billion dollar cosmetic surgery market. This study is primarily influenced by the rapid changes in appearance improvement procedures wherein social trends and mass media exposure now link world-wide consumers. Considering the strong social and cultural trends that have pushed this figurative form of consumption, it is clear that aesthetic improvement has great market potential, even if there is ambivalence about the idea of artificially-enhanced beauty. With regular launches in all metropolitan areas, the challenge for cosmetics surgical clinics and hospitals is certainly to better understand consumer’s needs, to propose attractive solutions and to be able to create distinctive services responding to a wider variety of values and lifestyles.

People at present put great emphasis on physical appearance (Grossbart & Sarwer, 1999; Swami, Taylor & Carvalho, 2009b). This can be attested by the large number of appearance-enhancing treatments and surgeries available right now, which are strongly predicted to increase in the coming years (Swami, Chamorro-Premuzic, Bridges & Furnham, 2009a). A great number of cosmetic surgical procedures including rhinoplasty, liposuction, Botox injections (Botulinum Toxin Type A), face lifting, blepharoplasty (eyelid augmentation) and breast enlargement are undertaken nowadays, even among ordinary individuals (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005).

Research Objectives

The main aim of this study is to examine the relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal factors which influence the acceptance of cosmetic surgery among Thai women.

Specifically it aims to:

- Assess the relationship between psychological characteristics of Thai women and their acceptance of cosmetic surgery;
- Explore socio-cultural influences of Thai women and their acceptance of cosmetic
surgery;
- Study cosmetic surgery experiences of Thai women;
- Examine the differences in demographic profiles of female cosmetic surgery consumers;
- Examine body appearances of Thai women seeking cosmetic surgery;
- Investigate body image perception of Thai women.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Narcissism

Lasch (1979) stated that cultural and social change in this current century has established the dominant stream of narcissism. Symbolic consumption, the likelihood to give undue prominence to material interests, devotion to the hedonistic values, striving for acceptance in the society, media internalization, exerting influence for one’s own advantage and keeping up appearances—all play a vital role in the culture of narcissism. Narcissistic personality is a psychological trait that arouses feelings of dissatisfaction, ambiguity and uncertainty. Narcissistic people identify themselves by looking at others. Being good looking, youthful, healthy, and celebrity-like are the main components of this trait. Thus, narcissists reinforce an idealistic beauty through the medicalization or beauty created by doctors. A narcissist is a person who looks upon himself or herself with an elevated feeling of pleasure. Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell and Bushman (2008) and Carver and Scheier (2004) characterized narcissists as those who have false pride, are self-conceited, have tendencies to disregard others, and have an inflated sense of self-importance.

Wink (1991) described a narcissist as someone who deliberately behaves to attract attention. The distinctive traits of narcissism include being self-regulatory, indulging in fantasy, being manipulative, experiencing a feeling of grandeur, egotism, social poise, arrogance, vanity, highly sensitive to criticism, excessive self-importance, extraversion and delusive self (Aiken, 1993; Campbell, Goodie & Foster, 2004; Cervone & Pervin, 2008; Judge, LePine & Rich, 2004; Mullins & Kopelman, 1988; Robbins & Judge, 2007; Robins & Paulhus, 2001; Wink & Gough, 1990; Wink, 1991; Weiten & Lloyd, 2006). Narcissists have a bearing on grandiosity, entitlement and exhibitionism due to their extravagant and conspicuous behavior intended to attract other people’s attention (Carver & Scheier, 2004; Cisek & Hart, 2007; Clair, 2000). They tend to inflate positively their own self-view. Narcissism has a dominant influence on a body-image, beauty and appearance that affect physical attractiveness and self-confidence. Highly narcissistic persons place attention on outward body parts (Davis, Claridge & Cerullo, 1997; Jackson, Ervin & Hodge, 1992).

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is an appraisal towards the value of oneself (Pennington, McLoughlin, Smithson, Robinson & Boswell, 2003). Self-esteem is always linked with the idea of self-concept, which in the process involves the element of self-evaluation (Pennington et al., 2003); the extent to which a person believes in his or her self-worth (Bosson, Lakey, Campbell, Hill, Jordan & Kerns, 2008; Cervone & Pervin, 2008; Pervin & John, 2001; Schultz & Schultz, 2000; Weiten & Lloyd, 2006). Self-esteem is in accordance with self-evaluation that reflects attachment to the self (Besser & Priel, 2009; Weiten & Lloyd, 2006). It is found to exist in the self-concept in terms of how a person regards himself or herself. Individuals with high self-concept center on their personal judgment, social interaction and their role in society (Aiken, 1993; Burger, 2000).

Self-esteem pertaining to self-perception constitutes the important attributes a person should deal with in his social relations. Self-esteem is usually derived from the way public perception is formed through outside appearance and looks. Thus, the value of the person and his level of self-esteem are measured by how he is bonded with his social community and how this organized group shares his interests and concerns (Pervin & John, 2001). Dressing up and buying an apparel of a distinctive style is aimed at appearing particularly
appealing and attractive to others in order to nurture self-esteem (De Mooij, 2003). The development of self-esteem depends on the state of being accepted, adopted and affirmed by the community where the person belongs. Self-esteem is the psychological trait that affects body image dissatisfaction that increases the chances of making the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. As a result, undergoing aesthetically pleasing cosmetic surgery has raised satisfaction with physical appearance, alleviating emotional strain and improving self-esteem (Sarwer, Wadden, Pertschuk & Whitaker, 1998).

**Self-enhancement**

Self-enhancement is a concept that describes an individual who perceives himself excessively in order to raise a dignified view of self-worth. Self-enhancement is marked by positive self-evaluation, optimism and confidence but often accompanied by feeling of neglect towards others (Robins & Paulhus, 2001). Weiten and Lloyd (2006) claimed that self-enhancement is an appraisal whereby individuals make too high an estimate of their value and abilities. Thus, they keep themselves in good condition and think highly of their capabilities. Self-enhancement is a self-serving mechanism that prompts self-enhancers to create illusory ideas of themselves. Self-enhancement individuals usually are self-absorbed (Farwell & Lloyd, 1998; Heine, 2003; Hamamura, Heine & Takemoto, 2007). This is usually marked by having self-delusional behaviors and qualities (Hamamura et al., 2007; Trzesniewski, Donnellan & Robins, 2008). Consequently, they are often out of the context of reality.

Motivations to self-enhancement have been observed to be closely connected with the desire for self-improvement. This desire to improve one self coupled with an individual’s self-evaluation of himself provides streams of information as to the dynamics of his/her behavior. Wayment and Taylor (1995) mentioned that self-evaluative information processing accompanied with self-relevant judgments lead self-enhancement individuals to be more conscious about how they appear to others. Certainly, self-enhancers pay a lot of money to buy designer apparel and dress up in the latest fashion. The act of appearing good in public is the main premise for this particular trait (De Mooij, 2003). Self-enhancement emerges from social interaction and social commitment. Individuals spontaneously seek approval and the acceptance from others in order to avoid being an outcast from society.

Self-enhancement is enlarged by the attractive force of physical appearance particularly the body (Park, Crocker & Vohs, 2006). Being attractive is a significant source of stress especially among women due to peer pressure. Self-esteem is always attached to the idea of attractiveness. A favorable judgment and reception from friends makes a great impact on outward appearance. A satisfactory acceptance contributes to the progress of self-worth. Having the power to attract others contributes meaningfully to the formation of an intimate relationship and puts up a barrier for refusal (Park et al., 2006). The slim image of a fashion model becomes less important among women who feel confident and comfortable with their outside appearance. On the contrary however, women who always get a favorable response from their social group become more conscious of their appearance leading them to consider different ways to maintain, if not enhance, their physical condition. Jarry and Kossert (2007) explained that these self-conscious women consider their pleasant external looks as the primary cue of their self-enhancement or self-worth. Delinsky (2005) stated that people who put emphasis on the importance of their appearance for self-enhancement have a higher tendency to accept cosmetic surgery in a more favorable manner. However, the choice of which cosmetic procedure to follow and the moral acceptance of the procedure are still considered as main issues in the decision to undergo cosmetic operation.

**Sociocultural Attitudes toward Appearance**

In recent years, the sudden increase of cosmetic surgical procedures has been brought about by extensive exposure to different forms of media communication. Mass media, entertainment, articles and advertisements play a vital role in affecting the interest, likelihood and acceptance of cosmetic sur-
surgery among individuals (Delinsky, 2005; Grossbart & Sarwer, 1999; Markey & Markey, 2009; Sarwer, Grossbart & Didie, 2003; Swami, Arteche, Chamorro-Premuzic, Furnham, Stieger, Haubner & Voracek, 2008; Swami et al., 2009b), and also arouse interest in body image (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). Grossbart and Sarwer (1999) stated that media manifest social trends, influence public opinion in their favor and pull the strings behind the scene. Swami et al., (2008) suggested that mass media exposure serves as an intermediary between gender and the cause of vicarious experience of cosmetic surgery. Individuals who are exposed more to the media show more recognition of the benefits of cosmetic surgery. Sociocultural influences are said to have an effect on body image which leads to the consideration of undergoing cosmetic surgery (Sarwer et al., 1998).

Brown, Furnham, Glanville and Swami (2007) argued that solely exposing oneself to media does not affect the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. Media message internalization is more considerable than media exposure in bringing about cosmetic surgery decisions. In a similar manner, Delinsky (2005) indicated that media message is a contributory outcome of going in for a cosmetic surgery process. Delivering information, knowledge, ideas from TV, articles, newspapers, magazines, and the internet are meaningful tools to create awareness and knowledge, increase understanding about cosmetic surgery and results in molding public opinion. Mass media exposure affects the approval for cosmetic surgery by the frequency of media consumption and a wide variety of sources of exposure. Markey and Markey (2009) asserted that a more advanced extent of media message internalization concerns a greater degree of learning and information leading to eagerness to undergo body alteration. Pictorial information obtained from media exposures and advertisements represent an ideal image for people. Media exposure gives a feeling of impulse, of being displeased and dissatisfied with one's current body image that usually boils down to a low-level assessment of individual's physical appearance (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Sarwer et al., 2003).

Interpersonal Relationships

People usually engage first in internal search to remember any previous experience with regard to cosmetic services and brands. External search is then performed by first asking opinions from spouses, family, girlfriends, friends and relatives. Close intimate relationship such as family and friends are the most influential persons that convince one to have faith in cosmetic surgery. Social support, friendship and intimacy through social circles are considered as mentoring for teenagers with specific needs (Delinsky, 2005; Park, Calogero, Harwin & DiRaddo, 2009). Delinsky (2005) stated that a favorable approval of cosmetic surgery emerges from social interaction and from the normative belief about physical appearance established by each culture and society. Brown et al., (2007) on the other hand, revealed that peer pressure and close relationships with friends manipulate women's opinion to undergo cosmetic surgery. Thus, the interrelatedness with others or social contact becomes a source of considerable influence to undergo cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery conforms oneself to correct and improve physical deformities in order to achieve affection and attachment from friends and sense of belonging from others (Grossbart & Sarwer, 1999).

Personal Experience

Previous personal experience with cosmetic surgery affects an individual's decision to continue undergoing cosmetic surgery, the procedures of which are dependent on how he or she evaluates his/her participation in the surgical process. Personal knowledge or information about cosmetic surgery breeds familiarity (Delinsky, 2005; Swami et al., 2008). Thus, this previous personal knowledge of beauty-enhancing cosmetic surgery experience contributes to the person's willingness to undergo cosmetic surgery in the future (Swami et al., 2008). Brown et al., (2007) contended that the number of participants who have personal experience with cosmetic surgery induces them to have greater motivation for cosmetic surgical procedures. Delinsky (2005) found out that personal experience is not the best predictor of whether or
not a certain person will be likely to undergo cosmetic surgery in the future. Despite the strong desire to change their appearance, people are less likely to continue with the procedure due to some conventional misconceptions or the difficulty in accepting the risks related to cosmetic surgery. These misconceptions have been brought about by conflicting messages from society. This might have been caused by some saying that cosmetic surgery is plausible, that it is safe and not dangerous, while others say otherwise. Thus, cosmetic surgery knowledge acquired either through vicarious experience or gained by actual experience is able to reduce this dissonance.

**Vicarious Experience**

Hoyer and MacInnis (2007) defined vicarious exploration or experience as a decision-making process which occurs when consumers collect information about a product, either from reading or talking with others, or putting themselves in a stimulating shopping environment. Delinsky, (2005) on the other hand, referred to a vicarious experience especially in the area of cosmetic surgery as watching a close friend or family member decide to undergo surgery or recover from a surgery. Prospective cosmetic surgery patients are also induced into action by the accumulation of knowledge that is guided by other’s experiences (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). Vicarious experience is embodied in the closeness of social intercourse arising from peers, family and close acquaintances. In this sense, a close relationship and intimacy within their social groups conventionalizes the standard and value of ideal beauty. The effect upon the judgment or feelings of cosmetic surgery acquired from others is an indirect exposure of considerable influence (Brown et al., 2007; Swami et al., 2008). Therefore, as the vicarious experience derived from friends and family increases, the more likely is a person to approve of cosmetic surgery (Delinsky, 2005). Women rely heavily on the expression of approval, support attraction, exemplars and recommendations from friends and family. Individuals seek to reduce negative feedback and teasing expressed by others by undergoing cosmetic surgery is seen as a self-correcting instrument (Markey & Markey, 2009). Delinsky, (2005) stated that nose operations are the most widely accepted form of vicarious experience and has the greatest approval by the general public.

**Demographics**

Demographics are very important determinants which categorize personal characteristics of consumers. A demographic variable is utilized to classify demographic profiles in order to segment consumers into target groups. This, in some ways, signifies if gender, age, education and occupation are crucial factors in understanding consumption behaviors. Aging is a major factor in the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery (Brown, et al., 2007; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). The signs of aging readily affect women. To be nice looking, being attractive and to look young occupies most women’s thoughts. Young women engage their interest in their external appearance, and are excessively concerned about their figure and weight. Young women in poor shape find themselves in great misery (Goodman, 1994). In addition, older women devote more time to facial concerns. Wrinkled and unattractive faces bring them generalized feeling of distress. As a result, they put extra care to their faces, and are more likely to go in for cosmetic surgery (Goodman, 1994). The older people become, the higher the possibility of their favoring cosmetic surgery (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). Older women agree to cosmetic surgery in order for them to look especially beautiful compared to their younger counterparts (Frederick, Lever & Peplau, 2007). Chinsall (1995) reported that female teenagers are concerned more with their appearance, thus they are willing to pay money on everything that will enhance their looks. Mai, Jung, Lantz & Loeb (2003) investigated teenager's social behavior and found that young consumers have the will to be trendsetters for obvious social reasons. They want to belong to their social group that is why they try very hard to be elegant, good in taste, refined in manner, wear stylish dress and use innovative products. Products and services they buy are driven by sensational appeal rather than useful function. It is also important to note that these young students
are born in the domain of materialism that significantly stresses possession of things and maintaining a high standing status. They want to achieve power and superiority (Mai et al., 2003). Furthermore, cosmetic surgery in Thailand has trickled down from high social status, high-income earners including celebrities, well-known stars and singers into lower middle and upper middle income individuals. Moreover, market expansion of cosmetic surgery has grown so rapidly that it has become available to many potential teenage customers. This young target market has already been aware of the advantages of cosmetic surgery (Jinchang, 2010).

Body Appearance

Swami and Tovee (2006) stated that the preferences on body appearance is largely dependent on socio-economic status (SES), values and culture. As an example of a BMI study conducted in Thailand, people who live in rural areas have very different views on physical attractiveness than those who are living in the cities. Thai urban culture projects greater preference on artificial beauty and low weight, and the perception that those whose body mass is heavier are unattractive, infirm and unproductive. In contrast with the rural population, people in the countryside consider women having excessive weight and well-rounded waists as appealing and more acceptable (Swami & Tovee, 2006).

Body Shape and Body Weight or Body Mass Index (BMI)

Individuals perceive body shape from different viewpoints. It may vary depending upon their actual weight, their ideal image and societal standards (Doll, Ball & Willows, 2004). The Body Mass Index (BMI) is the process of determining human body sizes and body fat. The individual’s body weight divided by the square of his or her height is a formula which indicates the category of body condition ranging from being emaciated to obese. Swami and Tovee (2006) contended that BMI is a significant antecedent used in assessing the physical attractiveness of a person. Studies on BMI have often incorporated physical appearance and personality traits in order to offer a comprehensible understanding of body image (Kvalem, Soest, Roald & Skolleborg, 2006). Henderson-King and Henderson-King (2005), Frederick et al., (2007) and Swami et al., (2009b) contended that the state of being obese is not the main reason to undergo cosmetic surgery. However, Markey and Markey (2009) argued that overweight people always feel dissatisfied and are teased oftentimes about their body parts. Overweight people usually experience the feeling of contempt and aversion that results from the unworthy feeling they experience of themselves and the idea that they do not deserve attention. They suffer from severe physical and mental strain which leads them to overeat or engage in binge eating behavior (Goodman, 1994). Frederick et al., (2007) stated that people who have an abundance of flesh and people who are displeased with their weight are more likely to undergo liposuction but not overall cosmetic surgical procedures. It is only as a result of harassment and ridicule that a fat person is more likely to approve of cosmetic surgery (Markey & Markey, 2009; Park et al., 2009).

Body Image

Body image means sensory perception of the body parts which is derived from sociocultural ties (Sarwer et al., 1998). Body image is relevant to a person’s physical appearance (Sarwer & Cash, 2008; Sarwer & Crerand, 2004; Cash & Grasso, 2005; Sarwer et al., 1998). It is the subjective concept that forms in the mind of the person on how he/she evaluates his/her physical appearance based on self-observation and reaction of others. Cash and Grasso (2005) contended that the most common form of body image is how one conceives his/her physical appearance. Thus, body image represents the origin of reception of knowledge that directs social behavior (Sarwer & Crerand, 2004). A person’s self-esteem, beliefs, feelings, and values about appearance contribute much to the decision to undergo body modification or appearance enhancement. In brief, the physical body and psychosocial factors form the body image of an individual (Sarwer & Cash, 2008; Sarwer & Crerand,
von Soest, Kvalem, Roald and Skollebog (2009) claimed that body image is a psychological feature that arouses interest in cosmetic surgery. Hence, body image dissatisfaction induces individuals toward undergoing aesthetic and cosmetic surgical operations (Sarwer & Cash 2008; Sarwer & Crerand, 2004; von Soest et al., 2009).

Body image is a multifaceted measure that emanates from cognitive-behavioral theory (Cash & Grasso, 2005). The three multidimensional constructs include perception, attitude and behavior (Sarwer & Cash, 2008). Substantially, body image is separated into two compositions consisting of body image orientation and body image evaluation.

First, body image orientation is characterized by the effort invested in making the body look good. Sarwer and Crerand, (2004) specified that body image investment places an emphasis on the psychological significance of body image on self-worth or self-esteem (Sarwer & Cash, 2008; von Soest et al., 2009).

Second, body image evaluation is called body image value that indicates the degree of an individuals' satisfaction with his/her physical appearance (Sarwer & Cash, 2008; von Soest et al., 2009). Similarly, Sarwer and Crerand (2004) referred to a persons' perception that may affect how effectively an individual relates to a given body size, body weight, physical features, and appearance.

People want to be aesthetically pleasing. They would like to have attributes that catch the eye and would like to become even more attractive. Interpersonal relationship or social interaction, social comparison, media exposure and physical appearance-related teasing are usually regarded as societal influences on individual's beautifying behavior. Hence, body image is significantly stressed vide social and cultural influences that depend largely on social behavior and interactions (Sarwer & Crerand, 2004).

Motivation for improving body image

Firstly, social relation is a stimulus for body image improvement. A rational motive for this social interaction is that there is a driving force within individuals to ascertain an outward body image by comparing the differences between their physical appearances and that of others. Hence, they have a tendency to seek others’ approval (Cash, Phillips, Santos & Hrabosky, 2004; Rumsey & Harcourt, 2004).

Secondly, exposure to mass media arouses interest in improving people’s body image. The consumption of mass media which includes advertising affects a potential customer in creating a desire for cosmetic surgery. Hence, a desirable physical appearance illustrates the significance of body image (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004).

Thirdly, the evaluation of one’s physical appearance relies on feelings and thoughts. People may place a higher value on what pleases the eyes (Sarwer & Crerand, 2004). Cash, Phillips, Santos and Hrabosky (2004) and Sarwer and Cash (2008) mentioned that staying in shape and maintaining the right body weight is one of the major considerations in undergoing body enhancement. Waistline and belly becomes the principal body parts that are likely to be considered when making the decision to undergo cosmetic procedure. Nose and teeth are the key important points to improve the appearance of the face. Women of larger sizes have greater dissatisfaction with their existing body image than those having small and medium sizes. Women do care about the part of their legs between the hips and the thighs (Cash et al., 2004). In contrast to women, men prefer to possess muscular strength (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Cash et al., 2004).

The Acceptance of Undergoing Cosmetic Surgery

Cosmetic surgery has now become widespread and is easily obtainable by the general public. The issue of cosmetic surgery is particularly critical when several motivations result in the decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. The feeling of being discontented has the greatest influence on people to undergo cosmetic surgery. Issues related to body dissatisfaction are neutralized when monetary function and hedonic value are satisfied simultaneously (Hamilton III, Carithers & Karnell, 2004). The reasons for cosmetic surgery are as follows:
Cosmetic surgery consumers can be everyone, not only the well known, wealthy people (Markey & Markey, 2009). Cosmetic surgery is not limited only to the upper social class but it has now become widely open to the members of the middle and lower classes (Goodman, 1994). The affordable cost of the procedures coupled with advanced surgical instruments and operational techniques are major reasons for the desire to undergo cosmetic surgery among people (Brown et al., 2007; Goodman, 1994; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). Today, there is lower risk of infection and damage and gradual healing of wounds after injury healing rapidly to a satisfactory state compared to surgical procedures in the past. Therefore, the more confidence and trust in cosmetic surgeons and the less painful the experience, the greater the decision to undergo surgery (Brown et al., 2007; Hamilton III et al., 2004; Swami et al., 2008). Goodman (1994) argued that no matter how much physical discomfort, injury or painful experience that come with cosmetic surgery, these effects have less importance than the satisfaction felt by the person conforming to approved standards of beauty or values of the society. Moreover, individuals' disposable incomes have increased drastically. They are capable of spending on discretionary acquisitions and can afford to pay the price of aesthetic surgery (Grossbart & Sarwer, 1999; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005).

People normally prefer to look younger than their actual age (Frederick et al., 2007; Goodman, 1994; Grossbart & Sarwer, 1999; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). Looking old is something many women want to avoid. They always aim for perfection and flawlessness as much as they possibly can. Indeed, they are solicitous to avoid the displeasure of being unattractive or lacking power to arouse the interest of others. This potency has a greater influence than obtaining a greater degree of attractiveness (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). Therefore, individuals who score low in physical attractiveness are more willing to undertake cosmetic surgery (Brown et al., 2007; Swami et al., 2009a).

Attitudes Towards Cosmetic Surgery

Henderson-King & Henderson-King (2005) proposed the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale (ACSS) in order to understand the three elements in a surgery to correct a condition which include: attitudes toward cosmetic surgery; the factors related to these attitudes; and the determination of cosmetic surgery acceptance among the general population.

Attitudes towards the acceptance of cosmetic surgery are different from the likelihood of having cosmetic surgery. People may accept the idea of undergoing cosmetic surgery but they may neither undergo a cosmetic operation nor engage in the behavior of undergoing cosmetic surgery. The attitudes towards cosmetic surgery are influenced by subjective norms, intrapersonal relationship and individuals' expectation. These attitudes are formed by the feelings of being dissatisfied with the body, the dread of lacking beauty or charm, a painful emotion resulting from an awareness of body inadequacy and the commitment of time, money, energy and effort to undergo cosmetic surgery along with the expectation of some worthwhile results. Brown et al., (2007) stated that the uneasiness proceeding cosmetic surgery stems from the expectations that it may not reach a person's imaginary standard of beauty and perfection.

Swami et al., (2009b) and Swami et al., (2009a) adopted the Intrapersonal, Social and Consider constituents of attitude (ACSS scale) that make causal connections with cosmetic surgery. Firstly, Intrapersonal is relevant to a favor conferred that makes improvement to the self. Secondly, Social involves the social process of motivating cosmetic surgery which gives direction to behavior. Thirdly, Consider is dealing with the likelihood of having cosmetic surgery, the features that stimulate interest plays a large part in decision-making (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). The
results show that people who have a favorable attitude towards cosmetic surgery tend to undertake surgery more than others do (Swami et al., 2009a and Swami et al., 2009b).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study explores psychological characteristics, sociocultural influences, demographic profile, body weight and shape, and body image dissatisfaction on the acceptance of cosmetic surgery among Thai female consumers. Specifically, body image is an acquisition of individual differences, subjective norms, social standards, internalization of media messages, the accumulation of an individual’s experience, anticipation of ideal physical appearance, demographic determination and the perception of body weight and shape, which contribute to the acceptance of cosmetic surgery procedures. This network of relationship among the variables is presented as follows:

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<td>- Vicarious Experience</td>
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<th>Body Appearance</th>
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<td>- Body Shape</td>
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<th>Demographic Profile</th>
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METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design is employed. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or a multivariate analysis technique is formulated to examine relationships. The researcher applied the survey research approach to gather the primary data from respondents.

Sample Description

The target respondents in this study are exclusively Thai women who have undergone cosmetic surgery in the past or who are likely to undergo cosmetic sometime soon. The majority are working women and employees. The study excludes females who are less than 18 years of age, as 18 is considered the minimum age for cosmetic surgical procedures without parental consent. Samples were drawn from the list of 13 cosmetic surgery clinics and hospitals in Bangkok. A total of 520 questionnaires were distributed, 40 sets in each of the 13
clinics which were included in the sampling frame. Of this, 437 questionnaires were returned, allowing for a response rate of 84 percent. The researcher excluded cosmetic and plastic surgery clinics/hospitals that offer non-surgical procedures and clinics that conduct only sex-change, transgender surgery.

**Multistage sampling method**

In the first stage, a simple random sampling method is employed to select a sample of clinics/hospitals from the sampling frame of 52, a total of 13 hospitals were selected.

In the second stage, quota sampling technique is used to identify the number of respondents in each clinic/hospital selected. The total sample size of this research is 400. Given that 13 clinics/hospitals are sampling units, the samples to be collected from each place is approximately 31.

In the final stage, judgment sampling is used to select the respondents from the 13 clinics/hospitals selected. This sampling technique is also useful in situations where some respondents are more knowledgeable or more willing to be interviewed. Of 520 questionnaires distributed 437 were returned and was used for the analysis of the study Structural Equation Modelling was used in this study.

**FINDINGS**

The percentage of the majority Thai female respondents reported that they had personal or vicarious experiences with nose reshaping. About 62.9 percent of them said they have seen others who had undergone the procedure, while 24.7 percent said they have undergone such type of surgery themselves. The next common procedure is breast enlargement which accounts for 46.5 percent of those who knew others who had the procedure, while 18.3 of the respondents said that they have undergone the procedure themselves. Other popular procedures for those reporting vicarious experiences are skin color lightening (28.6 percent), acne scarring reduction (26.8 percent), eyelid augmentation known as blepharoplasty (23.6 percent) and teeth whitening (20.1 percent). Among those who have personal experiences of cosmetic surgery, the most common, aside from the ones mentioned above, are for acne scarring reduction (16.7 percent), skin color lightening (13.7 percent), and teeth whitening (11.4 percent).

As per the demographic profiles of the respondents, the following details emerged: the majority of the sampled respondents belong to the age category of 21-25 years and this represents 37.3 percent of the total sample. The next predominant age group belongs to those between 26-30 years, and this represents 21.3 percent. The education profiles of the sampled respondents indicate that 62.2 percent have bachelor degrees and 20.6 percent have master degrees. With regard to relationship status of the sampled respondents, the findings indicate that 70.5 percent are single, while 16.2 percent are married. In addition, 25.9 percent have income below 15,000 Baht, while 17.2 percent have an income between 30,001 to 50,000 baht. Approximately 37 percent were in private employment, while 22 percent of the respondents were students. Statistics of body mass index shows that 60 percent of the sampled respondents were of normal weight.

Narcissism characteristic was significantly related to the acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Theoretically, body image was explained by 3 constructs, i.e., appearance evaluation, appearance orientation and body area satisfaction. However, the data fitted two constructs, namely, appearance orientation and body area satisfaction. Both these were significantly related to the acceptance of cosmetic surgery. In addition, cosmetic surgery experiences were explained by 2 constructs, i.e., personal experiences and vicarious experiences. However, the data fitted only one construct, namely vicarious experience, which was positively related to the acceptance of cosmetic surgery. There are statistical differences in the demographic variables of age, income, occupation, vicarious experiences and respondents' perception of body image. Respondents with vicarious experiences were more favorable toward accepting cosmetic surgery. Statistical analysis of the data showed that body image mediates the relationship between socio-cultural influences and the acceptance of cosmetic surgery. Furthermore, the difference in body image is also due
to differences in the demographic profiles.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Self-esteem characteristic is positively related to Thai women’s Appearance Orientation. The finding of this study is consistent with the previous research finding that self-esteem is linked with self-image and impels women to put more effort in their physical appearance (Delinsky, 2005 and Swami et al., 2009a). The findings show that self-esteem characteristic is also positively related to Thai women’s Appearance Evaluation. Self-esteem has a positive and statistically significant relationship with appearance evaluation. The finding of this study is consistent with the previous research finding in that persons with low self-esteem tend to neglect their physical appearance (Burger, 2000; Sarwer et al., 1998). Socio-cultural Attitude towards Appearance has a positive and statistically significant relationship with appearance orientation. The finding of this study is consistent with the previous research findings. Strong social and cultural forces influence body image (Grossbart & Sarwer, 1999; Sarwer et al., 1998). Socio-cultural attitudes toward appearance deal with the internalization of mass media (TV, billboards, music videos, movies, the Internet, magazines, soap operas, and beauty pageant programs) exposure and convey images of ideal attractiveness, beauty, desired shape and weight. The willingness to improve body image is formulated by information from mass communication (Delinsky, 2005). Women form an ideal image of physical body based on their acquisition of mass media messages.

In this study, the Narcissism characteristic shows a positive and statistically significant relationship with the acceptance of cosmetic surgery. The finding of this study is consistent with the previous research finding. Cosmetic surgery is good for people who care about self (Carver & Scheier, 2004; Cisek & Hart, 2007; Davis et al., 1997; Jackson et al., 1992; Pervin & John, 2001). Narcissistic people are more materialistic and pay a lot of attention to their appearance. Thai Women expend time and money with a view to obtaining ideal beauty in making the body look good. Hancock, Hughes, Jagger, Patterson, Russell, Tulle-Winton & Tyler (2000) argued that it is an advantage to be attractive. A good looking person gains more acceptance from others.

Peer Conditional acceptance based on appearance has a positive and statistically significant relationship with appearance orientation. This study supported the previous research findings on peer’s influence in that friendship and social relations had a great impact on appearance orientation or body image concern. Appearance orientations are closely correlated with women’s connection with peers that bring social support and social acceptance into existence (Gerner & Wilson, 2005). Sociocultural Attitude towards Appearance has a positive and statistically significant relationship with appearance evaluation. The finding of this study is consistent with the previous research findings that appearance evaluation is instantly identified by socio-cultural attitude towards appearance. The issue of socio-cultural attitude towards appearance is particularly critical when mass media internalization move into a desire discourse of socio-cultural ideals of beauty. Women tend to compare themselves with cine artists, celebrities, and models and their physical appearances such as shape, waist, breast and hips as seen in mass media, are potential stimulus for women to be attractive and inadvertently women plot ways and means to groom their body so as to resemble the mass media personalities.

Body Weight has a positive and statistically significant relationship with appearance evaluation. As expected, proportionate with an increase in appearance evaluation, there has been a rise in body weight. Body appearance, related to body size perception of women, plays a central role in defining body image (Kvalem et al., 2006; Magee, 2010; Swami et al., 2008). BMI has essentially been ascertained as a precedent of the personal enhancement process (Swami & Tovee, 2006). The study also found that Body Shape has a positive and statistically significant relationship with Body Area Satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the previous research finding that body shape is an important determinant of body area satisfaction. Mass media portrayal of the model’s figure as seen in the magazine, TV and movies provides the needed stimulus for women to strive for an ideal shape. Women give preference to the attainment of real-
istic, thin, healthy, youthful and curvy look over the media exposure of a very thin body. The thin ideal women figures exhibited in mass media elevates body image dissatisfaction or social pressure and increases the feeling of anxiety about female's physical features (Grogan, 2008).

The acceptance of cosmetic surgery increased proportionately with increasing appearance orientation. There is a vital link between physical appearance, image, attractiveness and self-presentation that reflect on Thai women's motives when making a decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. Sarwer et al., (1998) stated that body image is widely recognized as a core principle for aesthetic cosmetic surgery determination because body image ascertains the physical appearance and body of humans. Cosmetic surgical procedures are the tools to enhance the physical appearance and body image. Frederick et al., (2007); Grossbart and Sarwer (2003); Markey and Markey (2009); Park et al., (2009) and Sarwer et al., (2003) stated that dissatisfied individuals tend to be more willing to modify or enhance their appearance and are more likely to experiment with cosmetic surgery repeatedly.

In terms of demographic factors, Age level has a statistically significant difference with Appearance Orientation as well as Body Image Satisfaction. The finding of this study is consistent with the previous research findings which state that women take the matter of chronological aging into consideration (Brown et al., 2007; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). The signs of aging, particularly on the face, have a significant impact on body image because it can be interpreted as being low in physical ability (Goodman, 1994). Women who cannot preserve their youthful appearance often suffer from depression and dejection (Wink, 1991). The feeling of dissatisfaction among women of older age arises from a comparison of their present actual appearance and their youthful appearance in the past. They have an anxious feeling or fear of being unattractive and signs of wrinkles exacerbate their inadequacy (Magee, 2010). Grogan's (2008) research showed that fashion models and actresses are the most comparative source of body image evaluation for women aged 16-39 years old, whereas family members are role models for women aged 40-49. Income level has a statistically significant difference with Appearance Orientation. The finding of this study is consistent with the previous research finding. Reid (1995) contended that middle and upper income groups tend to spend a lot and freely on recreation consumption. In 1992, Thai people spent 8.8 percent of their annual expenditure on healthcare and 12.7 percent on entertainment and recreation (Reid, 1995). Young Bangkok middle income earners are more likely to disburse a larger portion of income on the pursuit of pleasure and personal grooming. People who live in the metropolitan area with high disposable income tend to be more committed to body enhancement schemes owing to urban normative beliefs and to fit in with societal standards (Mai et al., 2003). There is a significant difference between occupational classification and Thai women's body image.

Occupational classification showed statistically significant differences with Appearance Orientation, Appearance Evaluation and Body Area Satisfaction. The study also found that vicarious experiences have a statistically significant difference in Appearance Orientation, Appearance Evaluation, Body Area Satisfaction, and Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery. These findings are consistent with those of previous research which shows that accumulated knowledge has made a significant contribution to the creation of visionary expectations in terms of possessing an attractive physical appearance (Aglita & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). Cosmetic surgery is perceived as a tool to remedy body image disturbance according to the high exposure acquired from vicarious experience (Delinsky, 2005). Delinsky (2005) and Swami et al. (2008) argued that vicarious experiences with cosmetic surgical procedures make a person familiar with the surgical process and induces them to have greater motivation for cosmetic surgery. Relationship status has a statistically significant difference in Body Area Satisfaction. The finding of this study is consistent with the previous research findings of Magee (2010). Appearance enhancement and body image are highly important among single females seeking a romantic relationship. Women dwell on physical attractiveness with great emphasis in order to sustain their sexual relationships. The final
demographic variable, education level, also showed statistically significant differences with Appearance Orientation. The finding of this study is consistent with the previous research finding that women who have higher education are concerned more on their body image, especially college students, who rely heavily on interpersonal influences (Magee, 2010). Interestingly, Family's Appearance-Related Attitude, in this study, was not significantly related to Appearance Orientation. This finding is not consistent with the previous research study finding by Grogan (2008). This might be because Thai women, especially those who are young and working, may be influenced by media and friends more than family members. They also feel that their friends may have greater knowledge about cosmetic surgery processes and clinics than family and may rely on the former for information related to such surgery. In this study, Body Shape was not significantly related to either Appearance Orientation, Appearance Evaluation, and Body Area Satisfaction. This finding is inconsistent with the previous research study findings by Doll et al. (2004) and Grogan (2008). Thai women who accept cosmetic surgery tend to focus on facial features (rhinoplasty, blepharoplasty, acne scarring reduction, teeth whitening, and mentoplasty) rather than body appearances. Hence, for Thai women, a greater emphasis was placed on having attractive facial features rather than body shape.

**Implications/Recommendations of the Study**

Cosmetic surgery business in Thailand is going through enormous changes, including the entry of the new technology and surgical techniques. A number of cosmetic surgery clinics and the hospitals in Thailand are competing against one another to capture a share of the multi-billion baht cosmetic market. The findings of this study will help develop new research paradigms in consumer research, international marketing, and managerial practices.

Marketers can use this study to better understand consumers and to segment and target those consumers who have favorable attitude toward enhancing their appearance. Marketing managers can apply the findings of this study to create brands that will attract the different types of consumers. Marketers may employ the psychological characteristics of self-esteem and narcissism, body image, body appearance, socio-cultural influences in designing their marketing mix. The relevant demographic factors of age, education, marital status, occupation and income can be employed by doctors and clinics to attract customers, and also to estimate consumer demand for medical services. Marketing strategies relying on the aforementioned factors can be applied to consumption contexts such as attracting new customers, and emphasizing the services offering. Cosmetic surgery providers may enable consumers to select a wide variety of services that expresses their own individuality.

This empirical study has contributed literature that is pertinent to the acceptance of cosmetic surgery with variables relating to psychological characteristics, socio-cultural influences, cosmetic surgery experiences, body appearances and body image. Secondly, this study has an exploratory nature because this is the first time a study of this nature has been conducted with combined variables from the socio-psychological contexts to predict acceptance of cosmetic surgery in Thailand. Most of the previous studies in this field have explored only the psychological variables, whereas, this study explores the cross-disciplinary variables in marketing and consumer behavior. Interestingly, this study’s sample consists of non-clinical respondents (previous cosmetic surgery researches have employed clinical samples).

The adaptation of several scales in this study provided a rigorous cross-cultural validation test that has implications for both academics and practitioners in cross-cultural consumer research and marketing. Increasing consumption of cosmetic surgery has resulted in a multibillion baht market which means physical appearance and body image are crucial determinants for marketers in the beauty business.

Practitioners should give references of vicarious experiences to their clients so as to influence their decision for cosmetic surgery, because the study’s findings indicate that clients who are inclined toward cosmetic surgery need to be reinforced by others who have undergone cosmetic
surgery and such referrals will enhance their motivation toward cosmetic surgery.

This study’s findings indicate that clients who accept cosmetic surgery tend to focus on facial features (rhinoplasty, blepharoplasty, acne scarring reduction, teeth whitening, and mentoplasty) than body appearances. Therefore, clinics in Bangkok who perform cosmetic surgery procedures should invest in technologies and equipment that enhances facial features. They also need to advertise the array of services via traditional and social media networks.

Professionals who work in cosmetic surgery clinics, including doctors, marketers, beauty assistants, and nurses should maintain databases of prospects and existing cosmetic surgery consumers which is the key to capturing sales volume, driving deals, attain the connection with consumers and easy management of cosmetic surgery programs. Follow up calls should be made continuously to prospects as well as previous customers. In addition, marketers may get a wider target market through the use of social networking sites in order to promote their services in the marketing of beauty.

FURTHER STUDY

Consumer behavior is a time-bound characteristic (psychological characteristics, sociocultural influences can be influenced by the media and body image), as such, a longitudinal study would be recommended so as to comprehensively understand this phenomenon. Thai women’s attitudes may change over time according to changes in cultural values.

The second recommendation is that future researchers replicate this study using cross-sectional samples across Thailand and other Asian countries to confirm or refute the findings.

A third recommendation of this study is to replicate this study to different groups of consumers (transgender and male) to compare and contrast the findings.

Fourthly, this study employed self-administered questionnaire, and as such, it may not have reflected the true feeling of the respondents. The recommendation therefore is to have an in-depth qualitative research to reflect the true perspectives of the respondents. Qualitative research aims at an in-depth understanding of an issue, including an exploration of the reasons and context for participants’ beliefs and actions, so interviews, the most common qualitative method research, would be particularly well suited to the collection of data on sensitive topics like undertaking cosmetic surgery. Fifthly, safety and satisfaction dissonances are primary concerns of Thai women and therefore these crucial variables should be added to the model in order to yield more accurate perspectives of women in Thailand, who may intend to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Finally, consumer behavior includes psychological characteristics, subjective norms, consumers’ experiences, and demographic information along with attitudinal data to create a segmentation scheme that can divide the market. Merely studying attitude toward the acceptance of cosmetic surgery may not be able to provide explanations on consumer buying behavior. Future research should bring in socio-economic variables, social class and status for a better understanding of individuals’ behavior towards cosmetic surgery.

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