

## Factors differentiating women's attitudes towards aesthetic services

**Borut Milfelner**

**Tanja Vidergar Kikel**

University of Maribor, Faculty of Economics and Business, Slovenia  
Department of Marketing, Maribor, Slovenia

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### Key words

attitudes towards cosmetic surgery, fear of ageing, importance of appearance, media exposure

### Abstract

*This contribution theoretically and practically analyses the possible factors that can potentially differentiate women's attitudes towards aesthetic services. The main objectives of this study are to investigate the differences of women's attitudes towards aesthetic services according to their demographic characteristics, such as work status and place of living, their evaluation of importance of appearance, their fear of ageing, and their exposure to mass media. The research was implemented on the quota sample of 258 women in Slovenia. The results suggest that factors such as employment status, place of living, women's evaluation of importance of appearance, and their fear of ageing can be an important differentiation factors concerning women's attitudes towards cosmetic services.*

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### 1. Introduction

Modern consumer society gives great importance to the body and physical appearance. Values such as beauty, health and eternal youth are becoming more and more important, as does caring for personal health and appearance. In line with these trends, the development of aesthetic and cosmetic industry is rising, which gives modern women several possibilities to improve their appearance and possibly their overall well-being. A variety of aesthetic procedure services has become more and more affordable, as well as locally accessible. Market for services in cosmetic surgery and other cosmetic procedures in the world is steadily increasing. According to the report of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), the demand for cosmetic surgical and non-surgical procedures in the US rose by 3% in 2014, compared to the previous year. There is a trend in favour of minimally invasive and non-surgical aesthetic procedures, which has grown by 4%, 92% of all cosmetic procedures were performed on women (9.3% of surgical procedures and 90.7% non-surgical procedures), among them the largest share (49%) represents a group of middle-aged women, aged between 40 and 55 years of age, women over 55 years of age represent 26%, women between 30 and 40 years represent 18%, women between 20 and 30, 5%, and women younger than 20 years old, 2%. We can acknowledge that the industry of aesthetic surgery and cosmetic procedures is in rapid ascent (ASPS 2015). The similar trend can also be observed in Slovenia. However, the research in the field of women attitudes and acceptance towards cosmetic surgery in Slovenia is practically non-existent.

Past research has shown that women have a more positive attitude to aesthetic services, if they believe that appearance has a significant impact on their everyday life (Henderson-King & Brooks 2009). In addition, positive attitudes are developed when appearance is important for their self-evaluation (Delinsky 2005), and if they have higher fear of aging (Henderson-Henderson-King & King 2005; Slevic & Tiggemann 2010). Women, who are not satisfied with the appearance of a certain part of their body, also tend to have positive attitudes towards aesthetic services (Didi & Sarwer 2003).

Furthermore, Thornton et al. (2013) note that more hypercompetitive (expressing a neurotic need to be successful in everything she does) women may have more positive attitudes towards aesthetic services. Harrison (2003, p. 255-264) also reports greater exposure to idealized images in the media as an indication of positive attitudes when women are considered. Positive attitudes of

women towards use of make-up are also positively associated with their attitudes towards aesthetic services. Contrary, the research concerning the relationship between the use of cosmetic anti-wrinkle and attitudes towards aesthetic services has shown no positive correlations (Muis & Desmarais 2010).

Despite the fact that several factors influencing the attitudes towards aesthetic services and cosmetic surgery have been considered, a lack of information on how various demographic characteristic of women, such as their work status or place of living, can relate to their attitudes still persist. Second, for Slovenia there have been no reports, how individual factors such as importance of women's appearance, their fear of ageing and their exposure to mass media can contribute in shaping their attitudes towards aesthetic services.

According to the mentioned research gap, the main objectives of this study are to investigate the differences of women's attitudes towards aesthetic services according to (a) their demographic characteristics, such as work status and place of living, (b) their evaluation of importance of appearance, (c) their fear of ageing, and (d) their exposure to mass media. The term aesthetics services in this research is understood as cosmetic procedure with surgical or non-surgical intervention.

## **2. Attitudes towards cosmetic surgery**

Aesthetic services have been known to be more attractive to women than to men, although the interest of men has also been growing lately. Only recently, there has been some scientific studies on attitudes towards such services in the general population. The researchers mostly tried to determine the particular factors, which affect the formation of such attitudes.

Henderson-Henderson-King and King (2005) have highlighted two broad motives in relation to the adoption of aesthetic services. These are mainly social and intrapersonal motives. The first are based on social motivation - an individual wants to be more attractive in the eyes of significant others and consequently, improve his or hers social and career opportunities. The second motives are about the benefits of a more attractive appearance in general (improvement of the individual's body self-image). Both motives are mutually intertwined and are difficult to separate. For example, if an individual appears to be an unattractive partner, this can also affect his or her body image (Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009).

According to this, we can conclude that attitudes towards the aesthetic services consists of three main components: intrapersonal, social, and consider component. Intrapersonal component relates to the psychological benefits of aesthetic services for the individual and to individual attitudes to aesthetic interventions in general. When it comes to the social component, it is the interest of the individual that his appearance would be attractive to the social groups he or she is interacting with, or that possible aesthetic service would help his or her career. The third, consider component, is assessing the degree to which individuals would consider having aesthetic services.

## **3. Factors differentiating attitudes towards cosmetic surgery**

Attitudes can be shaped in several different ways depending on different influences on individual and within the process of learning (Solomon 2004). Basically, attitudes are formed with conditional learning (classical and instrumental conditioning), and with cognitive learning (Hanna & Wozniak 2001). This means that the demographic factors that definitely influence individual learning can have an important influence in shaping the attitudes.

Concerning the attitudes toward aesthetic services we selected two demographic factors that can in our opinion influence women attitudes, namely work status and place of living. Both factors can influence intrapersonal, social as well as consider attitude component. According to that, we hypothesize:

H1 There are differences in women's attitudes towards aesthetic services according to their work status.

H2 There are differences in women's attitudes towards aesthetic services according to their place of living.

Physical attractiveness or beauty is associated with a range of positive social and cognitive characteristics. Many studies show that attractive people are happier, more successful, more confident and more appealing (Kuhar 2004). They also enjoy advantages in the situations where first impressions are important (for example a job interview). Attractiveness and tidiness affect the perception of the characteristics of a person and their social interaction (sociability and popularity).

This so-called outer perception can be associated with inner view or self-image. This is an internal picture of one's own physical appearance (Thompson et al. 1999; Kuhar 2004). Feelings or mental images arising from the evaluation of one's appearance may be positive or negative. Positive body image contributes to higher self-esteem, leading to improved interpersonal or business contacts. Contrary a negative view of an own body may even lead to depression and social isolation of the individual. Since individual assessment of the importance of the appearance can have an influence in shaping of attitudes, one would expect that women who consider the appearance to be an important factor, should have more positive attitudes towards aesthetic services. Hence,

H3: There are differences in women's attitudes towards aesthetic services according to their assessment of the importance of appearance.

Lynch (2000) describes the fear of aging as a combination of human concerns and fears of aging. Such a fear can be measured with the indicators that reflect key concerns related to aging. These include concerns about the declining health and body functions, concerns about the financial situation, concerns about cognitive abilities, and concerns related to the change in appearance and loss of social life.

Barrett and Robinson (2008) report that the fear of ageing is associated with decreasing of individual's attraction. The fear of losing attraction is higher with younger, less educated women, employed women, more financially dependent women, separated women, or women in bad and more stressful relationships. In addition, women with more friends may fear the aging more, since they can receive much more criticism concerning the body aging. According to that, the fear of aging can be the next factor differentiating the women's attitudes towards aesthetic services:

H4 There are differences in women's attitudes towards aesthetic services according to their fear of ageing.

Spitzer, Henderson and Ziviane (1999) have found the disproportion between the ideal media body image and reality. Although the media show more and more slender body ideals, the average weight of people in some countries is increasing. The gap between the average female figure and figures promoted by the media is growing. As a result, their dissatisfaction with their own physical appearance is growing. Some studies have shown that 92 % of women feel a certain pressure to approach this ideal (Murray et al., 1996, Kuhar, 2004). Mass media exposure can also be an important driver of women's attitudes towards aesthetic services.

H5 There are differences in women's attitudes towards aesthetic services according to their exposure to mass media.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Sample selection and characteristics**

The survey was conducted from August 28th until September 30th, 2015 on a quota sample, which followed the representative characteristics of Slovenian female population. Respondents' anonymity was assured. The data were collected with personal interviewing. We received 258 completely fulfilled questionnaires, 21 incomplete were removed. The responsiveness of the questionnaires was about 93 %, which corresponds to the method of data collection and shows that a topic was interesting to the respondents.

In the final sample 22.1% of women were aged between 18 and 30 years, 58.5% between 31 and 55 years and 19.4% of women were more than 56 years old. 7.8% of women had primary school education, 48% secondary school education, and 34.2% graduate and post graduate education. 15.9% of respondents were still studying, 67.8 reported a working status, and 16.3% were retired. 43.8% were living in the city and 56.2% outside the city.

#### 4.2 Measurement instruments

For the measurement of included factors differentiating the attitudes, and for measurement of attitudes towards the aesthetic services we used existing well-established scales, and strictly followed a methodology for their administration. All scales were translated from English to Slovenian following the back translation procedure.

The assessment of the importance of appearance was measured with Cash et al. (2004) 20 item Likert scale (from 1-completely disagree to 5- completely agree). Fear of aging was assessed with the part of appearance assessment scale by Lasher and Faulkner (1993). This 5-point scale included five items where the respondents once again had to express their agreement with single statements.

Women's attitudes towards aesthetics services were assessed with adopted Henderson-King and Henderson-King (2005, p. 137-149 ) scale, consisting of 15 items. 7 point Likert scale from 1-completely disagree to 7-completely agree was used.

#### 4.3 Reliability and validity of the scales

Convergent validity was assessed in this study in order to show that the items used for the measurement of the attitudes towards the aesthetic services were indeed highly correlated. This was done with the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). KMO coefficients and total variance explained are stated in Table 1. Both indicators are inside the suggested thresholds (KMO > .6 and total variance explain > 60%). As can be seen from Table 1, attitudes resulted in three factors which were named according to the theory, namely intrapersonal component, social component and consider component. All factor scores were larger than .6, which indicates convergent validity of the scales.

Cronbach alpha was used for the reliability assessment of the scales. All reliabilities were larger than .8 indicating the high internal consistency of the scales.

	Factor			Cronbach alpha
	Social	Intra-personal	Consider	
I would seriously consider having cosmetic surgery if I thought my partner would find me more attractive.	.868			.869
If a simple cosmetic surgery procedure would make me more attractive to others, I would think about trying it.	.789			
If it would benefit my career I would think about having plastic surgery.	.763			
I would seriously consider having cosmetic surgery if my partner thought it was a good idea.	.738			
I would think about having cosmetic surgery in order to keep looking young.	.667			
If cosmetic surgery can make someone happier with the way they look, then they should try it.		.817		.878
People who are very unhappy with their physical appearance should consider cosmetic surgery as one option.		.782		
Cosmetic surgery is a good thing because it can help people feel better about themselves.		.742		

Cosmetic surgery can be a big benefit to people's self-image.		.735		
It makes sense to have minor cosmetic surgery rather than spending years feeling bad about the way you look.		.722		
If I could have a surgical procedure done for free I would consider trying cosmetic surgery.			.765	.896
In the future, I could end up having some kind of cosmetic surgery.			.756	
If I knew there would be no negative side effects or pain, I would like to try cosmetic surgery.			.748	
I have sometimes thought about having cosmetic surgery.			.731	
I would never have any kind of plastic surgery (R).			.622	
KMO = .912; total variance explained = 69.4%				

Table 1. Results of the factor analysis and reliability analysis

In order to simplify the structure of the three dimensional attitude construct, the factor scores were calculated for the intrapersonal, social and consider factor, resulting in three new variables.

## 5 Results

First, the differences in women's attitudes towards aesthetic services according to their work status were considered. Respondents were divided in three groups, namely students, employed and retired women. Then the differences between the factor scores were calculated with one way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The F values proved to be significant for social ( $F=3.503$ ;  $p<.05$ ) and consider component ( $F=11.304$ ;  $p<.001$ ). In both cases, students had statistically significant more favourable attitudes towards aesthetic services than employed women. According to the results, we can support H1.

Second hypothesis predicted the differences in women's attitudes towards aesthetic services according to their place of living. Women in the sample were therefore divided into two subgroups (the one that live in the city and the one that live outside the city). Independent sample t-test was deployed to assess the possible differences between both groups for all three attitude components. The only difference was establish for the consider component ( $t=2,167$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Women that live in a city would potentially more likely consider the possibility of the aesthetic services, than women living outside the city. Since there were no statistically significant differences for the other two dimensions, we can give only partial support for H2.

In order to test the third hypothesis, the scale for the assessment of the importance of the appearance was used. Respondents were divided into two groups: those who scored from 20 to 61 points on the Cash et al. (2004) scale constituted the group of women with the belief that their appearance is not important in their everyday life. Those who scored 61 points and more constituted a group with the belief that their appearance is quite important. For all three components (intrapersonal:  $t=-3,752$ ;  $p<.001$ ; social:  $t=-4,195$ ;  $p<.001$ ; consider:  $t=-4,642$ ;  $p<.001$ ) t-tests were statistically significant. For all three categories women who think that their appearance is important have significantly more favourable attitudes towards aesthetic services, so we gave support for H3.

Concerning the fear of ageing, respondents were once again divided into two subgroups. Participants who scored from 5 to 14 points on the Lasher and Faulkner (1993) scale were assigned to the group with low fear of ageing, and those who scored more than 14 points into group with a high fear of ageing. The fear of ageing was a differentiating factor only for the social component ( $t=-2,484$ ;  $p<.01$ ). T-tests for other two components resulted as non-significant, therefore H4 was also only partially supported.

Finally the respondents were once again divided into two groups according to their exposure to the mass media (TV and women magazines). For TV there were no statistically significant

differences and for women magazine there were statistically significant differences between the group with high and low exposure only for the social component ( $t=2,020$ ;  $p<.01$ ). According to that,  $H_5$  was rejected.

## 6 Conclusions

The results of our research suggest that there are differences between groups of women with regard to their employment status for social and consider attitude component, but not for intrapersonal. They differ in their social motivation and their possible decisions for aesthetic services in the future. Although all three groups (students, employed, and retired women) in Slovenia on average have negative attitudes towards such services, retired women are the ones with the most negative perspective, followed by employed women and students. For these two groups the most important motivation for aesthetic services is social, mainly to be attractive to their counterparts, not so much for their interpersonal reasons. Although no differences were found between women who live in the city and outside the city regarding their intrapersonal and social attitude component, it is more likely for women that live in the city to decide for the aesthetic services.

Second major finding suggests that on average, women who believe that appearance has a significant impact on their everyday life have more positive attitudes towards aesthetic services. These findings are consistent with the study of Slevic and Tiggemann (2010) implemented on a sample of middle-aged women in Australia. According to them, women who believe that appearance has a significant impact on everyday life invest heavily in their appearance. Belief that appearance is important can therefore be an important trigger for women to engage in aesthetic services in order to feel better and have better self-image, or just to be more appealing to their social group.

This study also reveals that the fear of ageing can be important in shaping attitudes of women towards aesthetic services. Women who have a greater fear of aging are more leaned towards aesthetic services mainly because of social interactions that provide them several advantages, for example concerning the employment, career, dating, etc.

## 7 Limitations

Possible limitations of our study are as follows: (a) since women were possibly aware of the goal of the study, they may have responded with socially desirable answers, as opposed to their actual thinking, (b) instead of measuring differences one might exploit the impact of various factors on attitudes development, (c) there could be quite a difference between women's attitudes towards the surgical and non-surgical procedures, but these were not considered in this study, (d) the study was implemented only in Slovenia, meaning that results could differ in other countries, because of cultural differences which influence norms and values of women.

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