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THE EVOLUTION OF MARKETING IN THE COSMETIC SURGERY INDUSTRY

EVOLUȚIA MARKETINGULUI ÎN INDUSTRIA CHIRURGIEI ESTETICE

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Abstract: *In the contemporary aesthetic medicine industry, marketing acts as a significant and powerful socio-economic mechanism that not only shapes consumer preferences but also perceptions of beauty standards and norms. This article explores the transformation of modern marketing practices in the context of European cosmetic surgery sector, focusing on the interaction between digital technologies, consumer psychology, and regulatory structures. Through comparative analysis across different national contexts, the paper demonstrates how legal structures play a decisive role in the ethical boundaries of marketing in healthcare. Furthermore, although commercialisation has increased access and globalised demand for cosmetic procedures, it has also amplified ethical concerns surrounding influence on patient perception and the normalisation of procedures carrying significant risk.*
Keywords: Marketing evolution, Cosmetic surgery industry, Medical tourism, Healthcare marketing, Consumer behaviour.
JEL CLASSIFICATION: M31, I11, D12, F23.

INTRODUCTION:

In the today economic framework, marketing has evolved far beyond its traditional functions of promoting only products and services. Once primarily focused on pragmatic utility and functionality, modern principles of marketing operate with a multidimensional system defined by technology, cultural forces, and psychology. Particularly since 2000s, the rapid expansion of digital platforms and advertising campaigns have reshaped the way companies engage with consumers, changing the focus from what is being sold to the manner in which is experienced and perceived.

One of the most eloquent examples of this transformation can be observed in the cosmetic surgery and beauty sector. In its early form these surgeries were used as medical necessity and reconstructive procedures, but nowadays the field transformed into global, highly competitive market influenced by aesthetic ideals and lifestyle preferences. The integration of medical practices with marketing strategies has reshaped totally the way in which beauty consumed and conceptualised.

MAIN CONTENT:

Aesthetic surgery represents a significant part of plastic surgery, which focuses on reconstruction and improving patient's physical appearance. Many practicing plastic surgeons focus on aesthetic procedures, such as rhinoplasty or breast augmentation, while continuing to perform reconstructive interventions. This division of time depends on market factor, professional interests, and unpredictable trends that can appear in the media.

The analysis of the following table shows an inverse correlation between price and patient volume. Western European states such as Germany and France maintain higher service cost, because of the safety and quality. On the other hand, countries in Central and Eastern Europe, such as Poland and Hungary attract costumers with lower prices and accessibility. Turkey stands out from the rest of the Europe demonstrating high patient volume. The countries success in domain is not driven only by the surgery itself, but the large amount of offerings they have, for example accommodation, transportations, and postoperative care.

Tabel 1. Medical Tourism and Cosmetic Surgery in Europe: Patient Numbers, Popular Procedures, and Average Prices (2024)

Country	Medical Tourism Patients/Year	Dominant Cosmetic Procedures	Average Prices (€)
Czech Republic	~20 000	Blepharoplasty, Facelift, Liposuction	1 500–4 600
Hungary	~45 000	Breast Augmentation, Liposuction, Abdominoplasty	2 000–4 500
Poland	~100 000	Rhinoplasty, Breast Augmentation, Facelift	2 800–4 800
Spain	~120 000	Liposuction, Blepharoplasty, Abdominoplasty	4 000–7 000
France	~120 000	Facelift, Rhinoplasty, Breast Lift, Lip fillers	5 000–8 000
Germany	~200 000	Rhinoplasty, Breast Augmentation, Reconstructive Surgery	6 000–9 000
Turkey	>1 000 000	Rhinoplasty, Breast Augmentation, Liposuction, BBL	2 000–4 500

Author's own elaboration based on ISAPS, Statista and industry reports (2024).

While Table 1 outlines the economic and procedural framework of cosmetic surgery across Europe, moreover it significantly prompts a deeper understanding of how marketing stories shape patient decision making in this competitive fields. Within this context, advertising narratives tend to build an illusion of procedural certainty, safe and effortless transformation, minimising the possibly of complications or unpredictable clinical trajectories.

A notable case of the risks linked to digital marketing cosmetic surgery is the case of 26-year-old British woman who travel to Istanbul, Turkey on 8 January 2025 to take a Brazilian butt lift procedure. Influenced by the social media promotions from a private clinic, she underwent the intervention without totally informed consent and tragically died three days later due to a fat embolism, caused by the surgery and inadequate postoperative care. *(BBC News, 2025)*

This instance demonstrates how digital promotions strategies in international medical care can influence patient's interpretations and decision-making processes. Clinics and intermediaries adopt a combination of psychological techniques and financial mechanisms to influence potential clients. Social medial campaigns implement idealised pre- and post-procedure results, utilizing visual aspirational signals and social proof, such as paid recommendations by influencers with extensive digital reach and carefully selected patient reviews. Marketing strategies including algorithmic retargeting, targeted ads, and search of optimization maintain insurance that high-risk interventions are visible to individuals who have interest in cosmetic surgery, thereby providing a sense of acceptance and normalisations of them.

Whereas a number of countries actively embrace cosmetic surgery practices and provide institutional conditions and societal support for their development, other regions take a different approach, adopting legal restrictions to discourage the same interventions.

Germany for example, has established strict limits and laws controlling in this way the advertisements of surgical cosmetic procedures, reducing the coercive power of digital marketing.

The Therapeutic Products Advertising Act (Heilmittelwerbegesetz, HWG), together with the Act Against Unfair Competition (Gesetz gegen den unlauteren Wettbewerb, UWG), represents the legal system that controls the public and commercial communication of medical procedures in Germany. Article 3 of the Therapeutic Products Advertising Act states that promotion is forbidden if it offers false information or generate misrepresentations relating to safety and effectiveness of given interventions. *(Federal Republic of Germany, n.d.)*

This regulation is directly related to cosmetic procedures such as Botox injections. Medical and aesthetic practices are restricted from claiming guaranteed outcomes or diminishing potential side effects, such as swelling, bruising, or temporary muscle weakness. Furthermore, the use of comparative "before-and-after" images are forbidden, because they can foster credibility for the company or unrealistic expectations.

A specific example of Germany's application of advertising restrictions involves the company Aesthetify, run by 2 physicians "Rick & Nick" on social media. Using the slogan "Today we're doing a little update on you again.", with casual joking remarks, the doctors present themselves on camera when injecting patients with hyaluronic acid and other fillers. *(Welt, 2024)*

Since Aesthetify GmbH did not cease this form of advertising, the Verbraucherzentrale NRW took legal action. Therefore in its judgment of August 29, 2024, the court clarified that a surgical plastic procedure does not require a scalpel or knife – a syringe is sufficient, so advertising with before-and-after images is not allowed. (Case No.: 4 UKl 2/24)

Compared with the German model, the aesthetic medicine sector in the Republic of Moldova is substantially different and expanded extensively, due to large amount of clinics specialized in aesthetic surgical interventions.

Digital platforms, including websites, social media channels such as TikTok and Instagram, online reviews function as main communication platforms, accentuating the variety of professional qualifications, client satisfaction, and available procedures. Visual content, testimonials, videos, and reviews shared by popular Moldovan influencers play a critical role in forming public opinion and bolstering credibility about these clinics.

In this context, Botox injections have become a highly leading procedure, because it is chosen by clients who seek low-risk surgical interventions that provide rapid and natural-looking results. An eloquent example from Republic of Moldova which provides these services is Estetic Sana, operating and accredited since 2005. The company rely on digital engagement and developed clinic-centered promotional practices, including monthly promotional packages, innovative medical technologies, personalized treatment strategies as a central branding mechanism. The botulinum toxin injections represent the main element of their injectable portfolio, applied in areas like glabellar region, forehead, lips, and periorbital lines. Comparing to more rigorous jurisdictions in Germany, the administration and marketing of botulinum toxin interventions in the Republic of Moldova function in a flexible legal framework, where these procedures are executed in accordance to the law and included in commercial and promotional activities.

CONCLUSION:

The findings suggest that modern aesthetic surgery operates with a structurally commercialised system in which marketing is no longer a communication tool, but play a central role influencing demand formation and clinical decision processes of consumers in this field. The cross-national approach also shows that national regulatory environments have a decisive impact on how cosmetic procedures are advertised and chosen by patients. In countries where regulatory oversight is strict, promotions are more tightly controlled and potential clients are better protected from exaggerated or misleading claims, while in more flexible regimes the industry tends to grow faster with assertive promotional campaigns.

The results point to the need for more stronger regulation across countries, stricter control of promotional content, and enhanced public awareness to ensure that cosmetic surgery marketing is

transparent, ethically responsible, and does not compromise patient safety. An ethical and sustainable model of aesthetic medicine should foster the recognition of individual body diversity, encouraging individuals to value their natural features rather than conforming to socially imposed beauty standards.

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