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## **SOCIO-CULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND COSMETIC SURGERY ACCEPTANCE: BASIS FOR STRATEGIC BUSINESS MODEL**

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### Abstract

This study probed how socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance and cosmetic surgery acceptance may help cosmetic surgical clinics in sustaining their business.

Data were gathered from interviews with nine patients who underwent different cosmetic surgical procedures, and four cosmetic surgical clinic personnel. With the data coding process and procedures, five major themes emerged: (1) societal and interpersonal ideals of physical appearance (2) self-oriented benefits and social motivations of cosmetic surgery (3) proactive approach to mitigate the risks in cosmetic surgery (4) life-enhancing benefits of cosmetic surgery and (5) comprehensive, patient-centered business strategies.

After establishing the connections of the codes, the categories and the themes, the researcher proposed a strategic business model for cosmetic surgery. The model showed how undergoing cosmetic surgery is the byproduct of socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance; as such, cosmetic surgery enterprises generate considerable revenues in the medical field. Implications of this study were carefully discussed along with recommendations calculated to help cosmetic surgical clinics sustain and improve their business: (1) improve psychological assessment of patient (2) adopt new marketing strategies (3) promote excellent care (4) implement comprehensive, patient-centered business strategies and (5) improve patients' overall experience. The newly-developed model will set standards for cosmetic surgery providers to sustain the business, build a differentiated brand, and gain a higher profile in the wider cosmetic surgery community.

### Introduction

The Philippines is proud of its enormous potential to become Asia's "Beauty Capital." The largest healthcare industry players have been investing in the latest medical procedures, specialized medical services, and qualified personnel (Alumno and Gulle, 2012). In the wake of the growing number of medical tourists at that time, former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo

recognized the potential of medical tourism. In 2004, she founded the Philippine Medical Tourism Program (PMTP) within the Department of Tourism (DOT). It is a public-private partnership that promotes medical tourism as well as health and wellness programs. This aids some large hospitals in upgrading their services, ensuring compliance with international standards, and pursuing international accreditation (International Trade Centre, 2014).

With the cooperation of the Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Health (DOH), and Bureau of Health Facilities and Services (BHFS), the Philippines continues to establish a large medical tourism market for elective surgical care (cosmetic surgical procedure). Cosmetic surgery has provided new revenue sources to the medical industry. In 2006, the Department of Tourism (DOT) developed a framework to regulate the accreditation of ambulatory surgical clinics in order to raise national standards as mandated by Executive Order No. 120 of January 30, 1987. In addition, the Department of Health issued an Administrative Order to ensure public safety and health by developing and enforcing basic licensure and regulatory requirements for certain clinics and services (Administrative Order No. 183, 2004).

Cosmetic surgery is a rapidly changing industry in the Philippines. It is backed up by a growth rate of 7.01 percent over three years (2016-2018). According to the Department of Health, the number of ambulatory clinics rose from 55 in 2016 to 61 in 2018. This demonstrates that the Philippines is one of the countries that genuinely believe in the power of 'retoke'; cosmetic surgery, which involves the use of needles and devices to achieve attractiveness, has become a popular procedure. Liposuction and rhinoplasty are the most common cosmetic surgical procedures in the Philippines (Digitalmoz, 2011).

Society's fascination with youth and appearance caused cosmetic surgery's evolution from a genuine medical practice in the past years to a mere commercial commodity. In other words, beauty is tagged with a price and is sold in the market, with patients as consumers and doctors as service providers. This trend has a strong impact on how people think about their bodies and identities today. Increased ways of body altering mean that the body has the ability to adjust indefinitely and that selfhood is now shaped predominantly by an individual's capacity and taste for material consumption (Gimlin, 2000).

As cosmetic surgery represents an important profit center in health care, cosmetic surgery providers now wish to position their practice in the current business climate. As a result, cosmetic surgery providers and surgeons are confronted with a serious ethical quandary: the surgeon's position as a healer. Some cosmetic surgery providers lose sight of their patients' true needs in catering to a culture that values vanity, youth, and personal achievement above all considerations. They choose to specialize in cosmetic surgery to become wealthy and support their medical practices through clever marketing strategies (Atiyeh, et al, 2008).

With the rise in popularity, accessibility and evolution of cosmetic surgery, it has become increasingly relevant to look into the factors that contribute to the success of cosmetic surgery business in the Philippines. Through the presentation and analysis of the experiences of cosmetic surgery patients and cosmetic surgical clinic management practices, the current study attempts to describe how socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance and cosmetic surgery acceptance can aid cosmetic surgical clinics in sustaining their company as a legitimate business enterprise. The study was guided by the research question narrowed down to six foreshadowed questions: (1) what is the socio-cultural attitude of cosmetic surgery patients towards physical appearance? (2) what are the reasons for undergoing cosmetic surgery? (3) how do cosmetic surgery patients deal with the risks in cosmetic surgery? (4) how does cosmetic surgery contribute to a person's quality of life? (5) how are cosmetic surgical clinics in the Philippines run and managed? and (6) based on the findings of the study, what business strategies may be proposed to cosmetic surgery providers?; to prove the study's research statement: undergoing cosmetic surgery is the byproduct of socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance; as such, cosmetic surgery enterprises generate considerable revenues in the medical field.

## Methods

The researcher chose to present this study in a qualitative form because it was deemed circumspect to describe and examine the patients' experiences and emotions considering that the study involved certain sensitive issues. Qualitative research is known for being exploratory, fluid, and adaptable, as well as data-driven and context-sensitive in nature (Mason, 2002). Through the qualitative method, the researcher enters into the lives of informants and allows their experiences to unfold from an insider's perspective by giving attention to rich detail, meaningful social contexts and experiences.

Specifically, this qualitative research employed a phenomenological approach to investigate the behavior, perspectives, feelings, and experiences of cosmetic surgery patients. Its main goal was to describe rather than explain and to begin with no preconceived notions. Creswell (2013) acknowledged the importance and essence of phenomenological approach. He asserted in the works of Alase (2017) that any qualitative research study has the capacity to investigate, interpret, and comprehend problematic issues. He further stated that "we conduct qualitative research because there is a problem or issue that needs to be investigated" and the most appropriate tradition to use in determining the root cause of the phenomenon is the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, according to Lester (1999), phenomenological research is concerned with studying the individuals' experiences from their own perspective, unraveling insights into people's actions and motivations.

*Informants of the Study.* In terms of research population and sample size, the sample size in a phenomenological study can range from two to twenty-five. These informants should be homogenous (Alase, 2017). Also, Creswell (2013) stated that “it is essential that all informants have similar lived experience of the phenomenon being studied.” Thus, the researcher selected homogenous informants to better gauge and understand the overall perceptions of the informants’ “lived experiences.”

The researcher used the criterion-based or purposive sampling as the most important kind of non-probability sampling to identify the primary informants of the study. She chose the sample based on her judgment and the objective of the study, looking for those who “have personal experience with the phenomena under investigation” (Kruger, 1988, cited in Groenewald, 2004). Since the researcher is currently employed at Belo Medical Group, she used this as an advantage to identify individuals who have undergone cosmetic surgery and select cosmetic surgical personnel who have rich experiences in management practices.

The nine patients underwent different cosmetic surgical procedures: three rhinoplasty, four liposuction, one blepharoplasty, and one chin augmentation. The four cosmetic surgical clinic personnel—(area manager, surgical officer, patient experience relationship manager and talent acquisition manager) were identified because they have particular features or characteristics which would enable a detailed exploration and understanding of the research objective.

*Data Collection.* In order to obtain complete data and proceed with data collection unhindered, the researcher utilized published articles, literatures and studies and in-depth interviews with the informants. The convergence of these data collection methods provided a structure for data analysis and contextualization of findings.

The first sources of information were published articles, literature and studies gathered mainly from the Internet. The materials paved the way to a clearer objective of this study with abundant knowledge toward a holistic and balanced understanding of the research topic. They helped the researcher to develop a structured written interview guide questionnaire. The interview guide questions were generally flexible and open-ended to answer the foreshadowed problem of the study. The developed interview guide questionnaire was checked, approved and validated by the researcher’s adviser, critic and expert colleagues to meet the requirements of the objective of the study.

The second and the most significant source of primary information for this research were the interviews with informants. Nine patients who underwent different cosmetic surgical procedures and four cosmetic surgical clinic personnel were interviewed. The researcher sought the approval of Belo Medical Group’s management before conducting the interview. All interviews were done in written form to accommodate the informants’ schedules. The

researcher maximized the use of technology like e-mail and messaging applications such as Google Hangouts and Facebook Messenger to make sure that the lines of communication between her and the informants were open especially when follow-up questions and/or clarifications were needed. She also appreciated the help of her colleagues in sending and retrieving the questionnaires from the informants. After a month, the researcher gathered a 90% complete answered interview questionnaire out of the target 100% return rate. The researcher transcribed the responses and translated them in English. A Master of Arts in English Language checked all the transcriptions to be credible and faithful to the principles of translation. The responses were kept and filed in Microsoft Office Word 2007 with proper file names. All responses were properly labeled and kept confidential.

*Data Analysis.* The researcher employed the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the general method of analyzing data collected. As ‘informant-oriented’ approach, interpretative phenomenological analysis allows informants to articulate their ‘lived experiences’ as they see fit, without distortion or indictment (Alase, 2017). Thus, it affords the researcher the best opportunity to understand in-depth lived experiences of informants. Additionally, it utilizes theoretical knowledge in inductively analyzing the data. This was centrally exercised through a hermeneutic turn between the theories and the data collected from the informants. This incremental approach gave time for a preliminary analysis of the data before proceeding to the detailed analysis. During this stage, the researcher took notes and made comments while transcribing interview responses, and she arranged supplementary documentary data to be connected to the related interview data. This pre-analysis helped the data coding process and procedures.

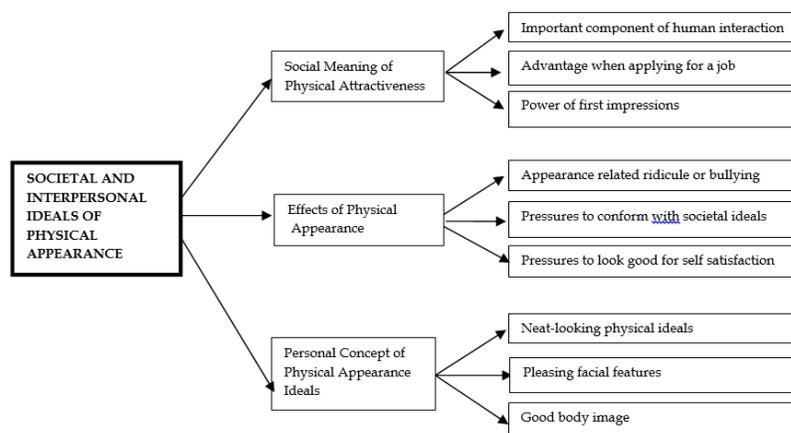
Each of the interview transcripts was analyzed by the researcher through data coding process. Data coding is one of the main essential elements of qualitative research process. Coding is very helpful in extracting concepts from raw data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) cited in Glaser & Laudel (2013), “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes are typically attached to ‘chunks’ of varying sizes—words, phrases, sentences, or entire paragraphs—that are either linked to or unconnected to a particular environment. They can be as simple as a category label.” The researcher adopted the coding process of Alase (2017) who explained that data coding process requires three generic cycles: coding, condensed coding and categorizing. After this cycle, data analysis continued in identifying emergent themes. The themes that characterized each section of the transcripts were identified and labeled. The function of these theme labels was to capture something about the “essential quality of what is represented by the text.” (Willig, 2001, p.55 cited in Jeong & Othman, 2016) At this stage, the researcher

searched for the connections across emergent themes and engaged in story telling from the data.

## Results and Discussion

The current study aimed to explore how socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance and acceptance of cosmetic surgery in society may help cosmetic surgical clinics in sustaining their business. After deeply studying the data, the researcher came up with five major themes to summarize the findings of the study. These identified themes were consistently discussed by informants.

*Societal and Interpersonal Ideals of Physical Appearance.* The informants' socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance are described by the emergent theme: societal and interpersonal ideals of physical appearance. This is the byproduct of three identified categories from the 42 related codes that emerged from the informants: 1.) social meaning of physical attractiveness 2.) effects of physical appearance and 3.) personal concept of physical appearance ideals. The socio-cultural attitudes of cosmetic surgery patients toward physical appearance are best described by what society and individuals hold as ideal physical appearance. This emergent theme pertains to how cosmetic surgery patients viewed physical appearance before they had their cosmetic surgery. Figure I presents how the codes and categories are connected with the identified theme indicating socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance.



**Figure I. Presentation of Theme, Categories and Codes Indicating Socio-cultural Attitudes Towards Physical Appearance**

The first category is social meaning of physical attractiveness. This category shows how important physical attractiveness is. Informants agreed that aesthetically pleasing or beautiful

physical features of a person yield many social benefits: physically attractive is an important component of human interaction, being physically attractive can be an advantage when applying for a job, and physical attractiveness can make a strong first impression.

The second category deals with effects of physical appearance. This category explains how people view someone else's physical appearance, how people are persuaded to conform with societal ideals of attractiveness and how people value their inner self. Negative comments about someone's physical appearance may influence the person's views of himself. These usually produce reduced perception of attractiveness. It can make someone feel inadequate and develop body dissatisfaction. Majority of the informants experienced criticisms from other people about what is wrong with their physical appearance. People are exposed to many images and messages which link 'good looks' to success, emphasizing physical 'perfection.' There is some sort of pressure to conform to society's idea of physical beauty; it is prevalent and inevitable. People have an innate desire to assess themselves in comparison with others. They have a tendency to compare themselves with others in society, whether with celebrities idolized in media or simply with their family and friends. As they glamorize images in media and start to form opinions, they compare themselves with others and eventually make unflattering self-judgments. This can be associated with an increase in emotional distress and a decrease in self-esteem since majority of images found in beauty magazines are unattainable and unrealistic. On the other hand, some informants give value to their inner self. They are not pressured to conform with society's standard of beauty; rather they are more pressured to look good for themselves. This internal pressure sets the ideal physical appearance based on their inner motive and self-satisfaction. When these standards of beauty are not met, they develop negative body image.

The last category concerns personal concept of physical appearance ideals. Informants prefer neat looks. Looking presentable, being neat and tidy expresses positive traits. It is like how well individuals treat themselves reflected by how neat and clean they are. Concern for aesthetics starts with caring for health as beauty is intertwined with health and wellness. Moreover, informants described the physical attributes that give great pleasure: good facial features and body image.

*Self-oriented Benefits and Social Motivations of Cosmetic Surgery.* Cosmetic surgery comes in many shapes and forms, from beauty treatments and facials to more extensive cosmetic surgery. The reasons people consider cosmetic surgeries vary widely, too. But informants agreed that personal benefits and social motivations of cosmetic surgery are the main reasons why they accept the idea of cosmetic surgery. They come to believe strongly that cosmetic surgery can help them improve their physical appearance. This emergent theme was the byproduct of the three identified categories from 60 related codes. The three categories were:

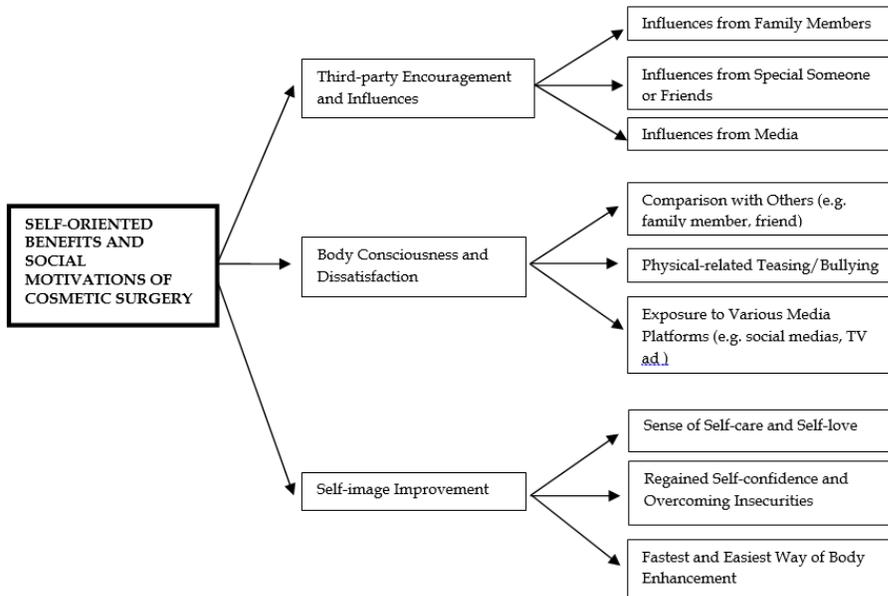
1.) third-party encouragement and influences 2.) body consciousness and dissatisfaction 3.) self-image improvement.

The first category is third-party encouragement and influences. These are social motivations of having cosmetic surgery such as relations between family members, someone special and friends. More so, advertisements of cosmetic surgery clinics may tilt people's perspective as to accept cosmetic surgery. The informants seemed to value what people think and believe about their appearance. Meanwhile, pleasant experiences and positive results conveyed by cosmetic surgery patients encouraged people to go through cosmetic surgeries. Informants also recognized the efforts of cosmetic surgery providers to educate the people about cosmetic surgeries. But they would like to remind would-be patients to conduct a diligent research about the procedure, the surgeon and the clinic, to make sure that they are in good hands.

The second category is body consciousness and dissatisfaction. It is the result of different societal factors that influence the way people views their bodies. Informants bravely stated how, prior to their cosmetic surgeries, people viewed their physical appearance. Negative comments from the people around them led to their body consciousness and dissatisfaction. Worse, some turned to ridicule or bullying which led to the development of their body insecurities. In the same light, exposure to various media platforms such as social media (facebook), TV advertisements, billboards and the like will give rise to social comparison. Once people judge themselves as inferior to others, they will develop dissatisfaction about themselves which will lead to maladjustments if not checked in time. Apparently, the informants are frequent users of various media platforms, which probably encourage them to increase their investment on appearance.

The third and last category is improvement of self-image. Informants believe that cosmetic surgery is a common and accepted form of self-improvement: it equates to the essence of self-care and self-love, it regains and increase self confidence and it is the fastest and easiest way to improve self-image.

As cosmetic surgical procedures are known to meet the needs of clients, the decision to seek cosmetic surgery is a welcome option. Figure II presents the relationship of the codes, categories and theme indicating cosmetic surgery acceptance.



**Figure II. Presentation of Theme, Categories and Codes Indicating**

### **Cosmetic Surgery Acceptance**

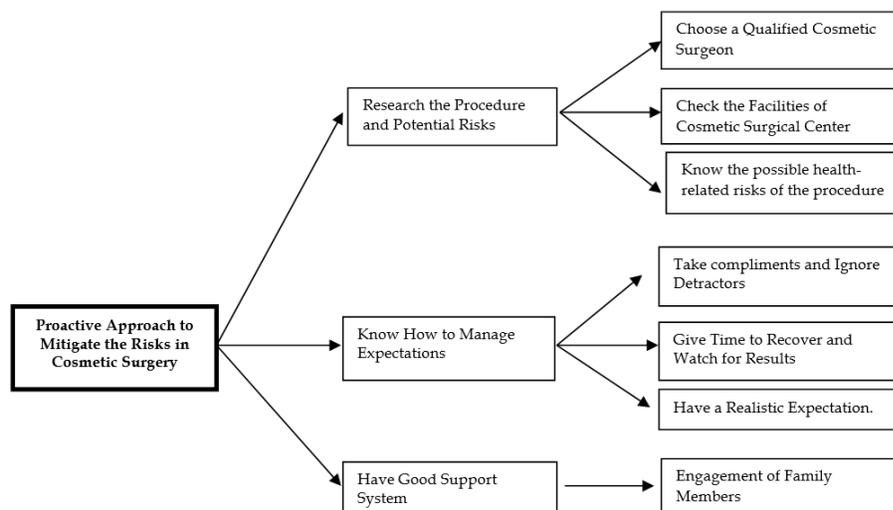
*Proactive Approach to Mitigate the Risks in Cosmetic Surgery.* Cosmetic surgical procedures pose undeniable risks which can either be related to physical health or psychological health. Informants of the study intimated how to deal with those risks. Twenty related codes emerged from the informants and three categories were developed from those codes: 1.) research the procedure and potential risks 2.) know how to manage expectations and 3.) have a good support system.

The first category in dealing with risks in cosmetic surgery is research the procedure and potential risks. Cosmetic surgery can bring lasting and dramatic changes to someone's life. It is important to understand how these changes may affect the patient in many ways. Evidently, informants know how to deal with risks in having cosmetic surgery. The first category in dealing with risks calls for researching the procedure and potential risks which all of the informants agreed to. In fact, they were not afraid of the possible health-related implications of the surgery because they had gone to reliable and credible surgeons who explained the procedure comprehensively and they had subjected themselves to laboratory examinations to see if they were fit for the surgery. Indeed, risks can be mitigated by doing intensive research and coming out a very informed patient. Some of the surgical complications during the procedure may arise depending on cleanliness of the facility and experience of the surgeon. This implies choosing a qualified and reputable surgeon and checking his credentials and references.

The second category is knowing how to manage expectations. The informants had understood the psychological and social risks of undergoing cosmetic surgery. No matter how successful the outcome of the procedure, people will still criticize and subject the patient to gossip among the social circle. The informants seemed to be emotionally prepared for this. Most of them didn't mind when they got wind of negative comments from people around them. They also gave themselves time to recover and see the final results. The results of cosmetic surgery were instant but the swelling and bruises masked the final result. More so, informants realized that while cosmetic surgery can yield rewards, it will not quickly fix all the problems. It is important to have realistic expectations and understand that there is no such thing as physical perfection.

Lastly, the third category is having a good support system. In many cases, the best support system comes from the family. They help the patient adjust emotionally and physically. Lack of emotional support from family could give rise to feelings of not being valued. Sometimes, cosmetic surgery patients may not fully realize the emotional impact a new look can have on them until the surgery is complete. It is better to let their family know about their decision to have cosmetic surgery so they can show their love and support. Full support from family is important to help the patient gain courage to undergo cosmetic surgery amidst all the hesitations and uncertainties that go with it.

The responses of informants showed how well-prepared and well-informed they were about the risks of cosmetic surgery. Thus, their decision to undergo the procedure was not difficult. The potential risks associated with cosmetic surgery have not hindered the proliferation of this business in the country. Figure III presents the theme, categories and codes indicating how cosmetic surgery patients deal with the risks in cosmetic surgery.



**Figure III. Presentation of Theme, Categories and Codes Indicating**

## How Cosmetic Surgery Patients Deal with Risks in Cosmetic Surgery

*Life-enhancing Benefits of Cosmetic Surgery.* The responses to the: “How does cosmetic surgery contribute to a person’s quality of life?” produced 63 related codes that emerged from the informants and from those codes, four categories were developed: 1.) high level of happiness and life satisfaction 2.) increased self-confidence and improved social life 3.) embraced positive perspective in life and 4.) improved physical health.

The first category is high level of happiness and life satisfaction. The results of the study revealed that the informants were generally happy and satisfied with the outcome of their respective cosmetic surgeries. As cosmetic surgery is positively associated with improved self-image, higher confidence and healthy self-esteem, it also brings increased happiness and life satisfaction. Truly, happiness is real when shared. Sharing good things that happened to oneself can bring more happiness. Evidently, satisfied cosmetic surgery patients will spread the word as living testimonies of cosmetic surgery’s wonders. They became an instrument to inspire other people to meet their needs and desires.

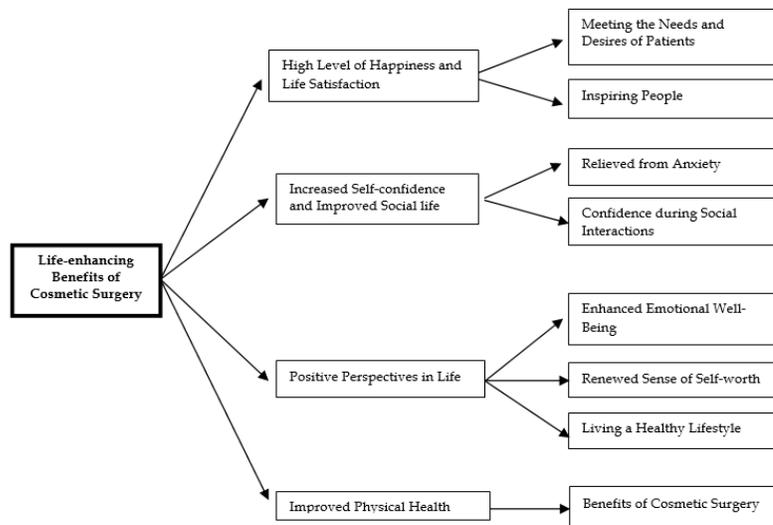
The second category is increased self-confidence and improved social life. One vital reason why patients choose to undergo cosmetic surgical procedure is an unsavory aspect of their bodies or faces that is hurting their self-esteem. When a person is self-conscious about his physical appearance, he tends to be less sociable. It is tough for him to have a thriving social life. This category covers a person’s confidence in social interaction and having the new self-image and renewed self-confidence. Cosmetic surgery helped the informants feel good about themselves especially when interacting with other people. Also, cosmetic surgery gave them the feeling of power, walking around confident about their physical appearance. They are now relieved from anxiety about their physical appearance. When people feel young again after feeling old, they feel confident and comfortable about their bodies. The informants’ responses showed that having self-confidence promotes active social life, which is a crucial part of a positive life. Without it, a person may feel isolationist and pessimistic, which equates to a lower quality of life.

The third category is about embracing positive perspectives in life. When people feel good about the way they look, they are often more willing to try new things, take risks and take charge of their lives in new ways. Some informants loved their bodies more than ever after the surgery. They wanted to keep it that way.

The fourth and last category is improved physical health. In most cases, the ultimate goal of cosmetic surgery is to enhance a person’s physical appearance and attendant feelings. But some surgeons perform cosmetic surgery to help improve the patient’s health and resolve health problems. It is noteworthy that this study covered patients’ experience of resolving health

problem alongside with cosmetic surgery. One of the informant shared that she was surprisingly relieved from her allergic rhinitis after her rhinoplasty surgery. She believed that cosmetic surgery would not only improve her physical appearance but also fix health problems.

A cosmetic surgery business aims to make people happier by making them feel like their most beautiful selves. Improved body image and quality of life are the strongest outcomes of cosmetic surgery. Figure 1V presents the theme, categories and codes indicating the life-enhancing benefits of cosmetic surgery.



**Figure IV. Presentation of Theme, Categories and Codes Indicating**

### **Life-enhancing Benefits of Cosmetic Surgery**

*Comprehensive, Patient-centered Business Strategies.* Informants presented an overview of how cosmetic surgical clinics are run and managed by discussing the following terms: 1) providing out-patient care 2) choosing personnel 3) managing challenges 4) knowing current market trends and 5) recognizing business opportunities.

Providing out-patient care should be the top priority of cosmetic surgical clinics. They should be able to meet their patients' needs in the safest all-inclusive environment. In line with this, three categories were developed from the responses of informants: 1) exemplary personal care 2) after sales care and 3) adherence to standards of safety and providing comprehensive facilities. In this, Filipino providers of cosmetic surgery services meet the grade. Filipinos are undeniably one of the hard working health care professionals around the world. They can assess the needs of diverse patients and provide personal care to them. Second, is after-sales care. Since risks and complications are inherent in any cosmetic or aesthetic surgical procedure, it is important to monitor the results and to keep an open communication with the patient to immediately

address whatever circumstances may arise. And lastly, adherence to standards of safety and providing comprehensive facilities. Cosmetic surgery providers must adhere to the regulations of different government agencies that control and monitor such business to avoid malpractice issues. Cosmetic surgeons must be knowledgeable about safe out-patient procedures. They must be certified as fully trained surgeons to perform the surgery. More so, the cosmetic surgical clinic must be fully-equipped and accredited as such by the Department of Health.

Choosing human resources is vital in any business. In choosing personnel, the cosmetics surgical clinic considers the standards set by the hiring manager, the credentials of the talent, and gender preference of patient.

Having the right people on board makes a difference. In this business, it is a challenge to hire technical people since the industry is small and the pool of skilled resources is quite limited. But there are different strategies to attract applicants such as social media activation, campus recruitment or mall job fairs, recruitment job portals and employee referrals. Moreover, like other businesses, the cosmetic surgery industry sets qualifications in screening: (1) For in-house physician: He/She must have at least diplomate in general surgery, be a licensed medical doctor with at least two years experience as a general surgeon. (2) For visiting doctor with specialization in surgery: diplomate in general surgery, licensed medical doctor, known and with good credentials. (3) For non-medical post: college graduate with pleasing personality and relevant experience. and, (4) For medical post: professional with IV training, advanced life support training and pleasing personality. Remarkably, cosmetic surgical clinics prefer female applicants with pleasing personality. It is part of their marketing strategy and patient preference, but it does not mean that they are against gender equality in employment.

The third term on how cosmetic surgical clinics in the Philippines are run and managed is “managing challenges.” Four challenges were highlighted: 1) competitive market 2) insensitive patients 3) various complaints and 4) unfavorable government action. The cosmetic surgery business in the country is very competitive because of the demand for youth and beauty. It is alarming that some cosmetic surgical clinics aggressively ride on the competition. They position their marketing strategies claiming that they are capable to do the surgery at cheaper cost. Many prospective patients bite, not knowing the certification, experience and knowledge of the surgeon. Given that reality, interested patients must do careful research about their surgeon’s professional background, considering the fact that incidents of cosmetic surgery complications and deaths have been reported. These malpractice issues definitely reduce the lure of cheap but dangerous fly-by-night clinics. Insensitive patients mar the business. It is well known that this business caters to well-off individuals who are used to special treatment and demand it. But if it is clearly the client’s fault, the attending personnel should know how to handle the situation politely. Handling various complaints is just so stressful. Attending personnel should categorize

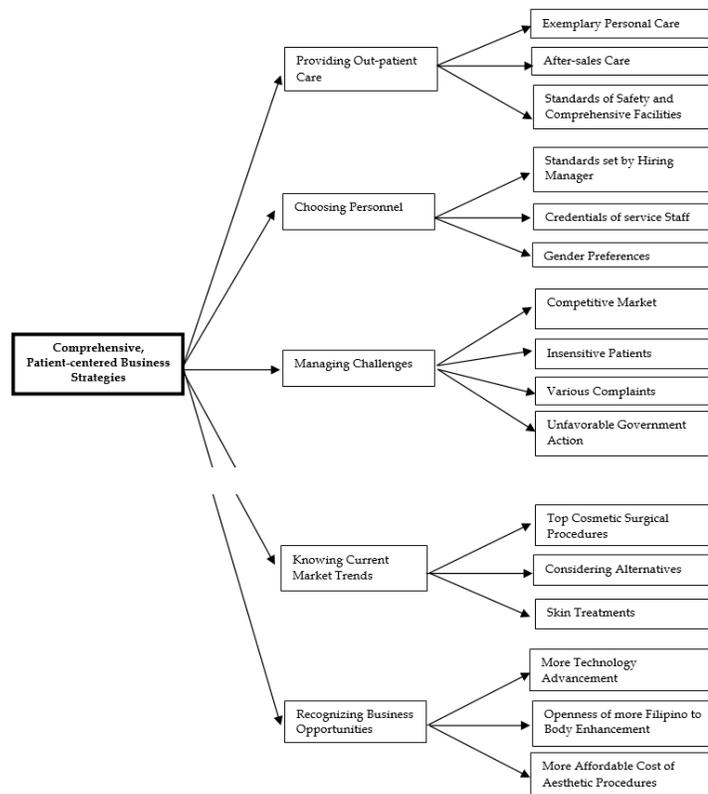
the complaint correctly so they can properly refer it to the concerned unit. With this, they can avoid further complains because the problem will be immediately handled by the right unit. Aside from that, unfavorable government action poses a big challenge to the industry. Instead of being concerned with the safety of individuals who undergo a surgery, legislators have imposed excise tax, under the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion Act (TRAIN), on cosmetic treatments and body enhancement surgeries undertaken for aesthetic reasons. This new tax law does not help the situation; rather, imposing high tax on legitimate cosmetic surgery may push some to seek the black market.

The fourth term related to cosmetic surgical clinic operations and management in the Philippines is knowing current market trends. Keeping pace with market trends is never easy but it is a must in the business. It is important to acknowledge that the industry is ever changing and in order to stay on top of the game, some businesses create trends while other businesses follow the trends. The informants seemed to be updated on what is happening in their market. They report that their patients are currently interested in: 1) top cosmetic surgical procedures 2) alternatives and 3) skin treatments. According to Ms. Kay, rhinoplasty and liposuction have been the common surgical procedures until now. Ms. Rosa, on the other hand, recognized the increasing demand for alternative, non-invasive procedures. Non-invasive procedures are the product of research and development of business partners who are continuously studying and developing a machine that produces the same results as surgical procedures. Meanwhile, the common skin issues among Filipinos are very dark complexion, uneven skin tone, and acne or pimples. Ms. Claribel confirmed: “We Filipinos have brown complexion and some are not happy with it. Most of those who walk in inquire about whitening products and procedures. The young ones who inquire are usually concerned about pimples and acne.” Skin treatments especially whitening products are doing well in the market. It is rooted to the idea that light skin complexion equates to beauty. Acne or pimples are a very common skin condition among Filipinos especially adolescents. Acne occurs because of excessive oil production, clogging pores, and proliferation of bacteria and inflammation.

The fifth and last term regarding operations and management of cosmetic surgical clinics in the Philippines is recognizing business opportunities. It is exciting to know that opportunities abound in the cosmetic surgery business. Three business opportunities come out in the responses: 1) advance in technology 2) openness of more Filipinos to body enhancement, and 3) more affordable prices of aesthetic procedures. As the industry aims to offer the fastest, safest and efficiently sustainable treatments to patients, cosmetic surgery providers look forward to the latest cosmetic surgery trends and latest technology available in the market to keep the patronage of their valued clients while pulling in new patients. Ms. Kay attested: “We look forward to more clients availing themselves of our wide services. We look forward to

advances in the cosmetic industry and extend this progress to clients.” Ms. Claribel seconded: “We look forward to more technologies that will alleviate the insecurities of clients.” Ms. Rosa shared the same thoughts, hoping for “advancements in technology where results are significant and evident.” But even with the modernization of the present generation, some Filipinos are undeniably opposed to idea of body enhancement as observed by Ms. Claribel. According to experts, this can be traced back to the influence of religion which holds that the human body is sacred and must not be tampered, to conservatism, and many Filipinos’ financial inability to afford such surgeries. Given these facts, Ms. Claribel hoped that someday more Filipinos will be more open to body enhancement. Acknowledging that cosmetic surgery is quite expensive, she believed that lowering the cost of aesthetic procedures will be good for business as many patients will be able to afford them. She stated: “We hope that the price of beautification procedures will be lessened so more clients will be able to afford our services.”

Indeed, cosmetic surgery business operates on a large scale. But not all cosmetic surgical clinics are the same; they differ on their practices. The more successful clinics invest in comprehensive patient-centered strategies the more it will increase profits and gain a higher profile in the field of cosmetic surgery. Figure V presents the ways theme, categories and codes are connected to indicate how cosmetic surgical clinic in the Philippines is run and managed.



## Figure V. Presentation of Theme, Categories and Codes Indicating How Cosmetic Surgical Clinics in the Philippines are Run and Managed

*Proposed Strategic Business Model.* By presenting and discussing the results of interviews with informants, the researcher deeply engaged with the data and developed five major themes to summarize the findings of the study. These are: (1) societal and interpersonal ideals of physical appearance (2) self-oriented benefits and social motivations of cosmetic surgery (3) proactive approach to mitigate the risks in cosmetic surgery (4) life-enhancing benefits of cosmetic surgery and (5) comprehensive, patient-centered business strategies. These themes helped in developing a strategic business model that may be proposed to cosmetic surgery providers to help them sustain and improve their business. The newly proposed strategic business model based on in-depth interviews is illustrated in Figure VI.

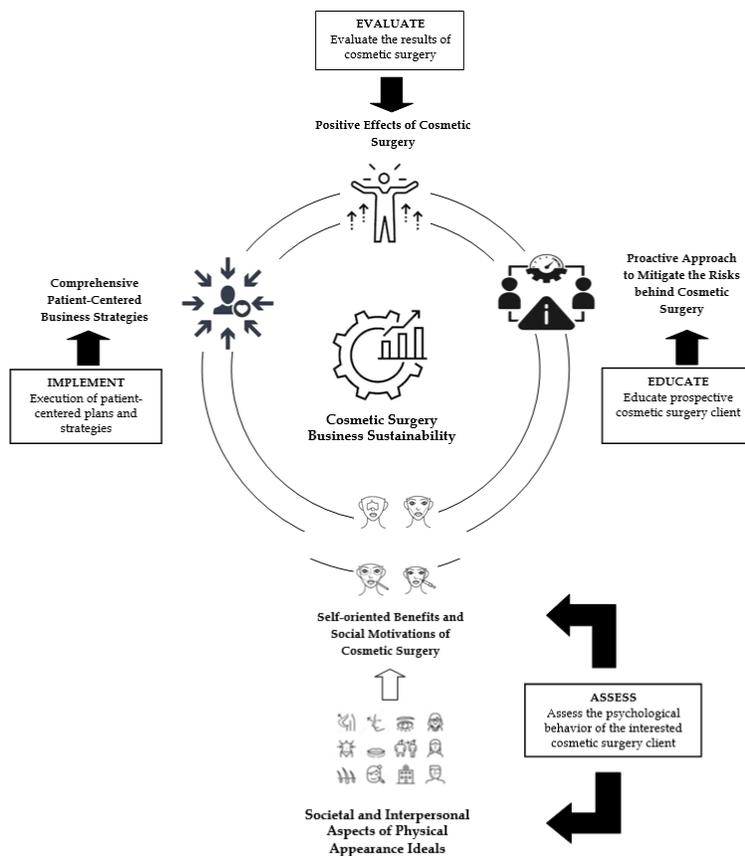


Figure 6. Proposed Strategic Business Model

## Figure 6. Proposed Strategic Business Model

The proposed strategic business model is built on the fundamentals of cosmetic surgery business sustainability. Cosmetic surgery providers must work on the following:

*Psychological Assessment.* The informants agreed that socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance greatly influenced their decision to have cosmetic surgery. Because informants place a premium on physical appearance, they become understandably conscious and anxious about their looks. Thus, cosmetic surgery providers must identify their patients' interests, needs and desires and align strategies to needs of prospective patients. Also, cosmetic surgery providers must be cautious about patients' psychological behavior to avoid predicaments and ensure quality care unhampered by tension of any kind.

More so, cosmetic surgery providers must clearly identify the self-oriented benefits and social motivations of the patient. It will help them to set standards according to norm. They will be able to promote their practice and explore different aesthetic procedures and technologies. Finally, they will remain motivated to render the best, the safest and the most effective services in the market.

*Promotion of Excellent Care.* Cosmetic surgery providers should educate the public and prospective patients about the potential risks associated with cosmetic surgery. Risks can be minimized with proper education. Also, cosmetic surgery providers must help clients identify the particular provider who can safely perform the procedure especially today that the industry is booming and facial care clinics and salons are sprouting like mushrooms to address the demand of beautification. Clients must be on guard against enterprising but unscrupulous individuals who exploit this demand with little concern for patient's well-being.

*Implementation of Comprehensive, Patient-centered Business Strategies.* Successful cosmetic surgery businesses invest in comprehensive patient-centered business strategies to increase profits and gain a higher profile in the field. When patients feel valued, appreciated, and genuinely cared for, their satisfaction reaches other prospective patients by word of mouth. This is a good opportunity that should be explored and seriously considered to keep loyal patients while attracting new ones through referral.

*Results Evaluation.* Be that as it may, results should always be evaluated. Evaluation will critically investigate to what extent the current process, services and products are achieving their objectives. This involves systematic collection of information that management can use in making decisions and judgment to enhance its effectiveness.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

The results of the study highlight a number of interesting findings and extend previous works on the sustainability of cosmetic surgery business. Primary among these was the finding that the experiences of cosmetic surgery patients and cosmetic surgical clinic management practices

can describe how socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance and cosmetic surgery acceptance can aid cosmetic surgical clinics in sustaining their company as a legitimate business enterprise. Although it is important to note that this is a preliminary attempt, a number of conclusions are worthy of further comment and future investigations.

First, the results showed that the socio-cultural attitudes of cosmetic surgery patients toward physical appearance are best described by what society and individuals hold as ideal physical appearance. These significantly affirmed how important physical appearance is, such that it drives people to pursue body image ideals. The importance of physical appearance influences attitudes; individuals who believe that their physical appearance has significant impact on their everyday life invest heavily in their appearance and are thus predisposed to cosmetic surgeries if needed. Their perspectives about physical appearance ideals may be influenced by what physical attractiveness means, how they are affected by the effects of physical appearance, and how they value their personal concept of physical appearance ideals. These findings are in accordance with work done by Kuhar, (2004) as cited in Milfelner & Kikel (2016), who found that attractive people are happier, more successful, more confident and more appealing. Individual assessment of the importance of appearance can influence shaping of attitudes. One would expect that individuals who consider appearance as significant in everyday life would invest heavily in their appearance and be disposed to cosmetic surgeries if the need arises. On the other hand, the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky, when applied to body image context, explained that dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance conveyed by society could lead to intense investments akin to dieting, exercise and weight control practices (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004). Thompson, Schaefer, and Menzel (2012) cited in Schaefer, L. et. al, (2015) further explained that individuals are pressured by powerful social agents (i.e., peers, family, and the media) to adhere to culturally sanctioned appearance ideals, which emphasize thinness for women and muscularity for men. These social pressures lead individuals to internalize relevant appearance ideals (i.e., to set the ideal as one's own personal standard of attractiveness.) Internalization of the often unattainable ideal is thought to lead to body dissatisfaction, which is an established risk factor for unhealthy weight control practices including extreme dieting. The present study suggests that the psychological assessment of patient may be improved through the: (1) conduct psychological screening measures (2) identification of patient's needs and wants (3) building a good relationship with patient. These may help cosmetic surgery providers to identify the growing expectations, the pressing needs, and the controversial issues and challenges arising from doing the business to ensure the promotion of quality care and business sustainability.

The results also suggest that undergoing cosmetic surgery is justified described by self-oriented benefits and social motivations of cosmetic surgery. Self-oriented benefits are interpersonal

factors or feelings about the way informants look at themselves that can make them accept the procedures, while the social motivations are societal factors such as ethnicity, social class, societal culture, family, and peer norms and pressures that may influence the way people view their bodies. Various reasons why people consider modifying a specific physical feature of their bodies are: third-party encouragement and influences, body consciousness and dissatisfaction, and self-image improvement. With these concepts in mind, people get to believe that cosmetic surgery can help improve their physical appearance. These findings somehow mirrored the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale (ACSS) designed by Henderson-King and Henderson-King (2005) to measure three distinct elements of cosmetic surgery attitudes: the degree to which an individual would consider having cosmetic surgery; cosmetic surgery acceptance based on social motivation; and, cosmetic surgery acceptance based on intrapersonal motivation (representing attitudes related to the self-oriented benefits of cosmetic surgery). The present study suggests that adopting new marketing strategies may be considered by cosmetic surgery providers to: (1) sustain media presence by integrating cutting-edge marketing strategies (2) develop a roster of effective brand ambassadors (3) nurture customer loyalty with retention marketing. If cosmetic surgery is well accepted by society, it will inspire cosmetic surgery businesses to serve their patients quickly, safely and efficiently with the most sustainable treatments.

The present study also revealed how well-prepared and well-informed the informants were about the risks of cosmetic surgery. Thus, their decision to undergo the procedure was not difficult. The study suggested that a proactive mindset will mitigate the risks of cosmetic surgery. There are undeniable risks of undergoing cosmetic surgical procedure, either to physical health or psychological well-being. It is important to realize that a little bit of research and precaution prior to the surgery can oftentimes reduce risk a great deal. The best way to reduce the risk of unwanted results is to choose the surgeon who will perform the procedure competently, discuss with him/her the procedure, and follow pre- and post-operation instructions. The potential adverse psychological and social effects of cosmetic surgery have a lot to do with a patient's expectations and emotional state prior to the operation. It is also best to have a good support system that will help the patient cope well. It seems likely that this result stems from available information about cosmetic surgery. Jennifer Whitlock (2020) informed of various risks of cosmetic surgery. However, she emphasized that all risks can be reduced if cosmetic surgery patients do their homework: be informed, choose the right surgeon, check credentials and references, and ask the questions on your mind before taking the plunge. The present study suggest that excellent care may be promoted though (1) raising public safety awareness campaign (2) conducting pre-operative counseling, physical health evaluation and expectation management (3) monitoring of pre-operative and post-operative procedures and medications of patients (4) building open communication with patient.

This study will enlighten prospective cosmetic surgery patients about their role and responsibilities in going through cosmetic surgery. Their interests, needs and wants drive every cosmetic surgery provider to invest in the best medical practices, advanced medical facilities and quality professionals. The study implies that prospective cosmetic surgery patients stand to benefit the most when cosmetic surgery business performs its best. It is not surprising that the results of this study showed many life-enhancing benefits of cosmetic surgery. Cosmetic surgery aims to make people happier by making them feel like their most beautiful selves. Cosmetic surgery patients believe that by enhancing their physical appearance, they will love the way they look and feel better about themselves. When people feel good about themselves, their attitudes in life will also change for the better. This makes cosmetic surgery businesses relevant and meaningful. Likewise, other works reported that cosmetic surgery can have a positive impact on both social and personal life. When individuals look good, they feel good and that ultimately positively affects their whole life. Their choices of clothes, life vision, and personality improve (Humxxa1, 2014). A related study conducted by Margraft, Meyer, and Lavallo (2013) showed a number of positive outcomes from cosmetic surgery across various fields such as relief of anxiety, social phobia, and depression; body dysmorphia, goal attainment, improved quality of life, life satisfaction, attractiveness, mental and physical health, well-being, self-efficacy and self-esteem. Similarly, Dr. Yuly Gorodisky (2017) averred that cosmetic surgery can do much more than improve one's appearance; it can actually lead to added health benefits which improve patient's quality of life. For example, rhinoplasty can increase oxygen flow, fix a deviated septum, and improve breathing. Structurally, it can correct physical issues that lead to congestion. It means better sleep because it drastically reduces snoring. The present study suggest that the patients' overall experience may be improved in order to (1) ensure that the company core values are properly communicated within the organization and outside (2) invest in high-quality support team through in-depth training (3) create management strategies, practices and technologies toward patient care of highest quality.

Results of the present study should be considered in relation to cosmetic surgery business management in terms of providing out-patient care, choosing personnel, managing challenges, knowing current market trends, and recognizing business opportunities. Cosmetic surgical clinics are managed through comprehensive, patient-centered business strategies. The results showed how cosmetic surgery is efficiently and effectively run and managed in different aspects. In the market that offers the same services, it is important to build a brand to differentiate a clinic from the rest. Providing excellent out-patient care is strategically building a brand. Nothing is more important than the patient's pleasant experience. The clinic's name should be synonymous with experience, skills and results. Brand recognition is one of the biggest reasons patients choose a specific clinic. The personnel are also important because they serve as brand ambassadors. The way they treat patients goes a long way in defining their

cosmetic surgery experience as pleasurable and stress-free. For all the success and popularity of this business, it definitely faces many challenges. As these challenges arise, new methods and techniques in handling difficult situation must be employed to sustain the business, and success in this depends on how accurately the management appraises market trends and how it uses this information to customize marketing efforts. It is also important to keep on top of developing technology and procedures. In enhancing business opportunities, it is a good strategy to promote the clinic as one that values innovation and leads the way in offering the best new cosmetic surgical technology to prospective clients. Having this know-how is the key to success. Dra. Vicki Belo, the most renowned and trusted doctor in the field of cosmetic dermatology and surgery, shared three tips on promoting the business sharply: (1) create brand awareness (2) tap brand ambassadors and (3) develop brand loyalty (Yap, 2014). The present study suggest that a comprehensive, patient-centered business strategies may be implemented in order to: (1) seek local and international accreditations to boost acceptability (2) keep abreast of new technology and procedures by attending symposiums in the country and abroad (3) expand networks through affiliations with medical organizations in other countries (4) improve clinic ambiance and facilities where patients can feel taken care of and comfortable (5) offer lower cost of cosmetic procedures to be affordable to more patients and (6) invest in competent and caring health professionals and foster a working environment where employees are valued and appreciated.

Finally, the overall result of the study is the newly-proposed strategic business model. The proposed model shows the fundamentals of cosmetic surgery sustainability as a business. The informants agreed that their socio-cultural attitude towards physical appearance influence them to consider having cosmetic surgery. The self-oriented benefits and social motivations of cosmetic surgery must be assessed by cosmetic surgery providers. The psychological behavior of the prospective patient is important to determine whether the needs of the patient are met or not. Cosmetic surgery providers should adopt a proactive approach to mitigate the risks in cosmetic surgeries. Risks can be limited if proper education is in place. As the business is concerned with patients, cosmetic surgery providers should implement comprehensive, patient-centered business strategies to provide life-enhancing benefits to their patients and thereby sustain the business. More so, results of every surgery should always be evaluated. Evaluation will critically investigate to what extent the current process, services and products are achieving their objectives. It involves systematic collection of information that the management can use in making decisions and judgment to enhance its effectiveness. Indeed, the present results of the study support, validate and accept the research assumption of the study that undergoing cosmetic surgery is the byproduct of socio-cultural attitudes towards physical appearance. Thus, the medical field is getting hefty revenues from the cosmetic surgery business.

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