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CLINICAL COMMENTARY

Trends in cosmetic consumer preferences during COVID-19 pandemic: Comparing 2021 to 2020

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Abstract

This commentary evaluates trends in the factors influencing consumer decision-making for cosmetic dermatologic procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. This is a follow-up national survey to one that was published 1 year ago. This study compares the data from Summer 2020 to early Summer 2021, which presents a stark contrast. Our results demonstrate that consumers are now more interested in cosmetic dermatologic procedures compared to 1 year prior. Additionally, they still value the overall safety of the clinic, so physicians should ensure that certain safety measures remain in place despite any decreasing rates of COVID-19 positivity. Our survey sheds more light on current consumer perspectives, which may in turn help physicians adjust their practices to meet current demand. It is important for physicians to be knowledgeable regarding the patterns of consumer decision-making in order to deliver appropriate patient education and provide proper patient outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEYWORDS

business, coronavirus, dermatology, esthetics, medical spas

Since its first known cases, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the world economy and medical community. Early on, many dermatology clinics had to close as patient fear and medical needs drastically shifted care away from the outpatient setting.¹ Hospitals were inundated with waves of sick patients. Although the delivery of care had to shift in every medical specialty, dermatology is particularly unique in that many procedures are considered elective and thereby fall under institutional and local restrictions. The number of cosmetic procedures performed in many offices fell precipitously. Given the effects of COVID-19, we had previously examined consumer perspectives to reveal relevant insights a year ago.² More recently, several COVID-19 vaccines have been introduced, which has been followed by modest vaccination rates across the United States. As of early Summer 2021, rates of COVID-19 positivity, hospitalization, and deaths had generally declined. This study continues

to monitor trends, which can help physicians further adjust their practice.

An online survey was distributed to individual consumers in the United States in June 2021. The survey included demographic data as well as experiences with and attitudes toward cosmetic procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Modified top-box scoring was used to evaluate questions using the Likert scale. Responses were compared to a similar survey in the Summer of 2020.²

A total of 219 respondents completed the survey. The mean age was 41.4 years, and 58.9% were female. Overall, 17.1% were in the Northeast, 19.8% were in the Midwest, 38.2% were in the South, and 24.9% were in the West. Of all respondents, 38.8% had a previous cosmetic procedure. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, 32.9% were currently interested in having a cosmetic procedure performed, while 35.6% were considering it. This is slightly greater

FIGURE 1 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the daily life of respondents in Summer 2020 and Summer 2021

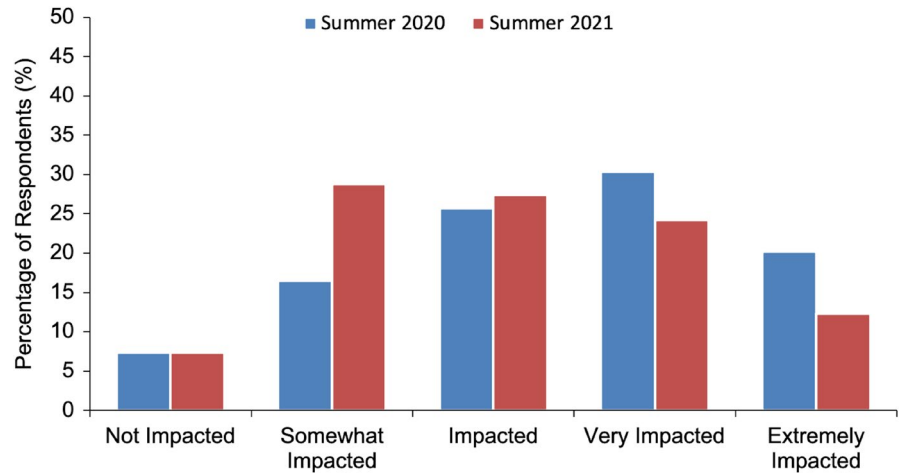
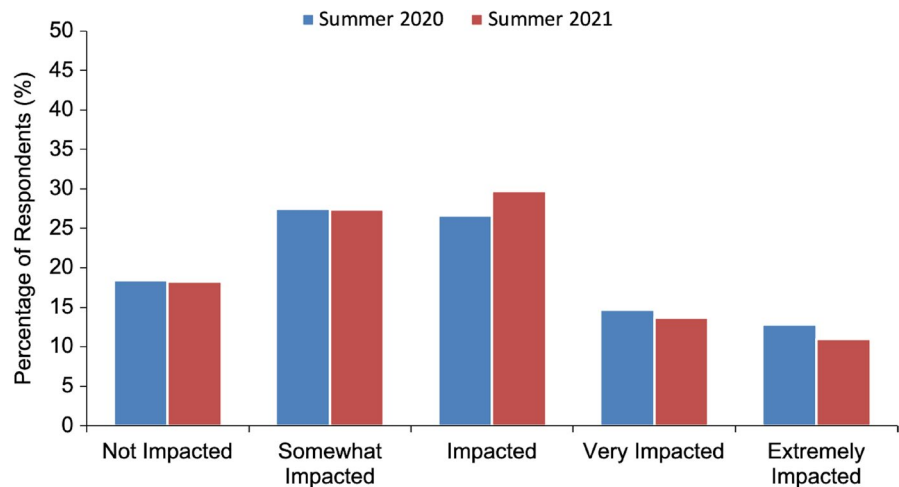


FIGURE 2 Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the household finances of respondents in Summer 2020 and Summer 2021



than the 32.1% and 28.4% who were interested in and considering procedures, respectively, a year ago.

Of those who had interest and were considering a cosmetic procedure, physician practices were more frequently preferred as the facility of choice compared to medical spas (54.5% vs. 26.9%; remaining had no preference). A vast majority of respondents (76.7%) also believed that physician practices were safer than medical spas. This was similar to previous results.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the daily life and household finances of respondents to different extents (Figures 1 and 2). Compared to a year earlier, more respondents felt comfortable leaving their household for elective procedures (63.5% vs. 31.2%), medical appointments (62.6% vs. 36.7%), and other daily activities (59.4% vs. 31.2%). Fewer respondents were less likely to visit a cosmetic dermatologist (43.4% vs. 72.5%), plastic surgeon (40.2% vs. 67.0%), general dermatologist (34.7% vs. 63.3%), and primary care physician (31.1% vs. 55.0%) compared to a year ago due to COVID-19.

Of all respondents, 39.7%, 33.3%, 29.2%, and 25.1% showed current interest in laser treatments, body contouring, soft-tissue fillers, and injectable neurotoxins, respectively. This mirrored the same rank order as a year ago, except with greater numbers. Laser treatment (69.0% vs. 51.4%) and body contouring (58.9% vs. 40.4%) procedures were again perceived to be the safest, followed

by injectable neurotoxins (58.0% vs. 36.7%) and soft-tissue fillers (54.3% vs. 39.5%). Compared to 1 year earlier, fewer respondents were less likely to undergo body contouring (39.3% vs. 50.5%), injectable neurotoxins (36.5% vs. 54.1%), soft-tissue fillers (34.7% vs. 54.1%), and laser treatments (31.5% vs. 50.5%).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, several factors influence whether respondents will undergo a cosmetic procedure. The top 5 factors this year compared to 1 year prior were safety of the facility (57.3% vs. 73.4%), safety of the town/city (43.4% vs. 56.0%), mask-wearing requirement (42.0% vs. 55.0%), cost (38.8% vs. 34.9%), and patient capacity of the facility (32.4% vs. 48.6%) (Figure 3). These were the same top 5 factors as 1 year ago.

Since its start, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the medical field, and cosmetic dermatology has not been spared. Compared to results from 1 year prior, more consumers were now interested in cosmetic procedures, including laser and body contouring treatments and cosmetic injectables. Respondents now felt more comfortable leaving their household for medical appointments and procedures, as well as various daily activities. Additional disposable income from the inability to spend on luxury goods or vacations during the pandemic may also play a role.

In the United States, the current restrictions related to COVID-19 during early Summer 2021 had generally improved from 1 year prior.

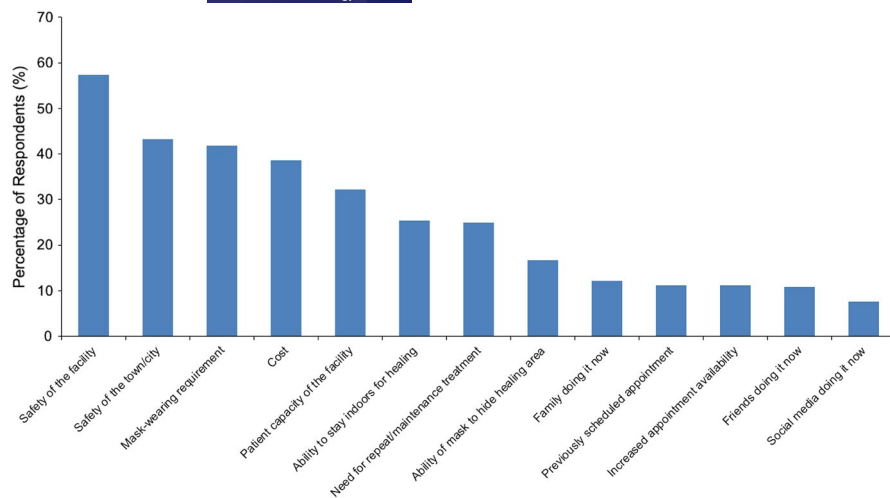


FIGURE 3 Factors that influence whether respondents will participate in cosmetic procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic

This was likely due to the downstream effects of local lockdowns, enhanced personal safety practices, improved public education, and widespread availability of vaccines through national programs. As the economy begins to reopen and recover more, consumer demand will again change. However, questions remain about whether it will return to the previous baseline or if it will shift to an entirely new baseline altogether.

An examination into the factors that influence consumer decisions demonstrated that the top 5 went unchanged from 1 year prior. Despite the improvement in COVID-19 infections at the time, consumers still valued their personal safety in the clinic. Four of the top 5 factors continued to be related to patient safety. Therefore, it is important for physicians to remain vigilant about preventing the spread of COVID-19 in their clinic and implementing satisfactory safety protocols.

Consumers continue to favor physician-based practices over medical spas, as safety concerns remain. This is consistent with consumers rating the safety of their facility as a top influential factor. Over the past few years, there has been more attention on the dangers of medical spas, which have been associated with various adverse events.^{3,4} This may be associated with the increased incidence of providers being non-physicians, including nurses, physician assistants, and estheticians, and their overall lack of qualified physician oversight.⁵ In order to promote patient safety, physicians should be aware of the dangers of medical spas and educate patients and the public accordingly.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to drastically shift how cosmetic physicians provide care. This is an evolving situation, as there are no signs that the COVID-19 pandemic will disappear anytime soon. Further research should continue to examine these trends.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no relevant conflicts of interest to declare.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This is a voluntary, anonymous survey. All ethics were followed.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are not made available.

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