

Who Is the Aesthetic Consumer?

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These days there seems to be so much time, effort, and attention spent on marketing aesthetic services to the “aesthetic consumer” that I seemingly cannot escape from a few recurring questions: Who is the aesthetic consumer? Who defines the aesthetic consumer? How is the term applied? When does the aesthetic consumer actually become an aesthetic consumer? Why do we have this label? Who is considered a future aesthetic consumer?

The aesthetic consumer definitely is a consumer. He/she purchases goods or services based on a value equation that is unique to every individual. Aesthetic consumers value their purchases because they perceive them as beneficial in meeting a goal that may be physical, social, emotional, societal, or even spiritual. Suffice it to say, their purchases have a meaning and count for something important; however, aesthetic consumers simply are consumers of wants as opposed to needs (ie, food, water, shelter).

Look no further than the automobile industry to find a parallel market. Car buyers have basic transportation needs, such as commuting to work, taking the kids to appointments, or performing basic chores (eg, deliveries, meetings, school). Beyond these needs, automobiles move into the realm of wants. For example, do you need a 3-ton, 400-horsepower sport-utility vehicle (SUV) to drive 5 miles to work by yourself on smooth paved roads in nice sunny weather? Probably not, but it sure is a nice ride with the leather self-heating and self-cooling seats, digital connectivity, and symphonic sound system. The admiring smiles you get along the way do not hurt either. In most instances, your needs could just as easily be met with a small basic hybrid vehicle; however, consumers possess the desire to make purchases based on a personal value system. After all, we are a reflection of how we dress, where we live, what we drive, and even what aesthetic services we purchase.

The spectrum is vast, beginning with personal hygiene and grooming. Do we choose a home haircut or the couture salon? Do we use basic soap or expensive perfumed body-washes? Do we trim our own nails or go for weekly manicures and pedicures? Each one is a need that can extend into a want based on our personal value system.

The same is true with regard to aesthetic procedures and consumers thereof. The basic regimen is as follows: there are

needs (eg, basic skin care, cleansers, moisturizers, sunscreen, hair care) and then there are wants (eg, toxins, fillers, laser hair removal, rejuvenation products and procedures, cosmetic surgery). The latter are the luxury sedans, the high-performance sports cars, and the awesome SUVs of the aesthetic consumer. They are wants, not needs.

So then, who defines the aesthetic consumer? We do: the cosmetic dermatologists who treat them and defined the category. We design cosmetic services, products, and procedures and wrap them into compelling advertising marketed toward a segmented portion of our buying audience, including our current and future patients, using neat terms such as *parentheses*, *Paris lips*, and *bunny and wolf lines*. We shape the aesthetic consumer's mind-set, sending him/her into a buying frenzy and selling a procedure not as a benefit but as a solution to a problem. In the automobile industry consumers are classified by stereotypical buying types such as brand loyalist, status seeker, negotiator, comparison shopper, and more. These classifications even apply to aesthetic consumers.

The aesthetic consumer is our own creation, though he/she has been waiting in the wings of high fashion, designer shoes, custom jewelry, and SUVs. We have simply created goods and services that meet wants, which extend beyond needs. It is a part of the march of progress for society, technology, and medicine. The next stop on the itinerary is gene manipulation; find the genes you want or do not want expressed, and not so far into the future you may be able to do something about them.

So who is the aesthetic consumer? We all are, as the desire for aesthetic medicine has entered mainstream American culture. Each year, millions of Americans purchase these wants (cosmetic services), and we will continue to do so because we believe we need these treatments. I remember that not so long ago the world's most popular cosmetic treatment was coined “wrinkle poison.” Now the mantra chanted by the aesthetic consumer is, “Why can't it last longer, and why does it have to hurt?”

The aesthetic consumer becomes an aesthetic consumer when we suggest cosmetic services to him/her, either directly or indirectly. As cosmetic dermatologists, it is what we do; we offer treatments to patients that we believe in from a scientific perspective. We do not pontificate a lifestyle or value system. Sometimes we respond to their demands; other times we suggest a treatment, diagnose a condition, or prescribe a cure. In the end, cosmetic dermatologists treat wants as well as needs. ■

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