

Role of Social Media in the Decision to Undergo Aesthetic Surgery Among Iraqi College Students

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Abstract: Background: Over the past 20 years, with development of many social networking sites and the fast development of the internet around the world, many people, especially young adults, and college students turn to these platforms for a variety of reasons which include staying close with friends, entertainment, and business. Many medical clinics, especially those that are specialized in cosmetic operations and surgery used social media to market their operations and get possible customers. Objective: The Objective of this study is to assess whether the use of social media was influential in the decision-making of Iraqi undergraduate students from both sexes in undergoing these operations. Materials and Methods: A cross-sectional study and uses online questionnaire targeting undergraduate students around Iraq. The result showed that among the 183 participants, two-thirds of those who had surgery (69%) and nearly three-quarters of those planning to have surgery (73%) said social media was influential in their decision. Results : The results of the study were tested by Chi-squared test and a p-value of 0.000271031% (less than 5%) was obtained thus showing the results were statistically significant. Conclusion This study concludes that viewing cosmetic surgery-related advertisement on social media, following models, and having negative self-views when viewing social media are associated with an increased likelihood of considering undergoing aesthetic operations. Future studies using a validated questionnaire that assesses the likelihood of being influenced by social media to undergo cosmetic treatments are encouraged.

Keywords: Social Media, Aesthetic Surgery, Undergraduate students.

INTRODUCTION

An article from the Australian Journal of Plastic Surgery defines cosmetic surgery as any invasive procedure where the main goal is to give the patient a perception of a more attractive appearance and where the procedure involves alterations to bodily features that appear normal when presented to the doctor (Australian Journal of Plastic Surgery, 2021). Breast augmentations and rhinoplasty are examples of surgical cosmetic procedures. Non-surgical cosmetic procedures include botulinum toxin and fillers (Australian Journal of Plastic Surgery, 2021).

A growing number of people are using social media to advertise for cosmetic procedures. Iraq, which has one of the most engaged social media populations, has incorporated social media into many facets of daily life (Kemp, S. 2022). It is important to determine the role of these platforms in influencing the patient's decision to undergo an aesthetic procedure.

The use of social media platforms for promotion, education, entertainment, and lifestyle topics like diet, style, and particularly beauty is widespread. The majority of advertisements for beauty now come from social media influencers, as opposed to the nearly exclusive use of television programs and commercials in the past (Casaló, L. V. *et al.*, 2018). According to a Forbes article, a social media review from a reputable influencer is

comparable to a word-of-mouth referral (Weiss, E. 2019). In general, there are not enough studies conducted to determine what factors patients consider when deciding whether to undergo cosmetic surgery after viewing these advertisements (De Vries, D. A. *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, the authors are aware of no validated questionnaire that could assess this effect. Time spent on social media and body dissatisfaction may be related, according to studies in the past. Due to the close proximity of the cameras, face distortion is sometimes linked to this relationship and is most noticeable in "selfies" (Wardle, J., and Bindemann, M. 2020). We concentrate on social media in this study and how it affects the promotion of aesthetic procedures. Advertising is done either directly or indirectly through clinic self-promotion and influencer-driven promotion, respectively (Casaló, L. V. *et al.*, 2018; De Vries, D. A. *et al.*, 2016). In recent decades, there has been a spike in the number of aesthetic procedures, particularly among young adults (American Society of Plastic Surgeons. 2024).

The purpose of such procedures was varied but centered mainly on cosmetic improvement or medical corrections. Although cosmetic surgery has always been popular among the older population, one study suggests that its popularity is particularly rising among adolescents and young

adults in Iraq (Al-Mukhtar, L., and Hasan, A. A. 2022). However, there is limited scientific literature examining whether the rise of social media use in the last two decades has influenced the rise of aesthetic procedures among Iraqi college students from both genders. Thus, the aim of this study is to analyze whether the increase in procedures has a relation with the use of social media, as well as whether there are any additional associated factors that make Iraqi college students consider this type of procedure. The results of such analysis would be helpful to identify which demographic group of students is most influenced and to provide general education to the student population about the results and complications of such procedures to help them make informed decisions.

Objectives

- To assess whether social media, through following beauty models, using it as a source of information, or viewing advertisements on its platforms, has an influential or decisive role on the decision to undergo or not undergo an aesthetic procedure among Iraqi college students.
- To gain insight into the attitudes and personal views of college students toward aesthetic procedures.
- To inquire about the sources of information used by college students to obtain information about those procedures and whether social media was a major source.
- To identify the most common procedures and the prevalence of such procedures among Iraqi college students.

Variables

In this study, we will assess how the use of social media plays a role or has influence on the decision to undergo or plan to undergo an aesthetic procedure. Participants can state whether their use of social media was a decisive or influential factor in their decision (independent variable) and whether the outcome of such belief was undergoing/planning for an aesthetic procedure or not (dependent variable). Other confounding or intervening variables include the use of social media as a source of information, viewing advertisements on social media, or being influenced by a model seen on social media. Background variables include age, sex, course of study, personal attitudes toward aesthetic procedures, and/or personal knowledge about those procedures.

Study Hypothesis

During the last two decades, with the rapid spread and use of the internet, many young adults and college students have turned to social media for communication, entertainment, education, and marketing (2,3). This has produced pressure on young adults and especially college students to have an appealing appearance and to avoid being criticized. Subsequently, many cosmetic clinics use these platforms to market and advertise their services, which has attracted many young adults from both genders to undergo or consider undergoing an aesthetic procedure (3,4). In other words, using social media can play an influential role in the decision-making process of many college students and young adults regarding undergoing or planning to undergo a procedure. Thus, college students who believe that social media is an influential factor in their life decisions are more likely to consider aesthetic procedures (Arab, K. *et al.*, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

We conducted a quantitative observational cross-sectional study. We used convenience sampling. The study population consisted of college students (both genders) in universities and colleges across Iraq. The inclusion criteria for the participants were as follows: male and female undergraduate college students studying in Iraq. The exclusion criteria were as follows: previous or graduated college students. A final sample size of 183 students was obtained. The questionnaire was constructed using Google Forms and distributed online among the target population via email, Instagram, and other social media platforms over a period of 10 days. Entries were collected and data were extracted for statistical analysis in Microsoft Excel 2016 (Redmond, WA; Microsoft Corp). The respondents were fully informed about the goals and purposes of the study, participated voluntarily, and were able to withdraw from the study at any time.

After extensive review of the literature related to the topic, a questionnaire consisting of 42 question items was developed, and the questions were allocated differently depending on whether the respondent had undergone a previous aesthetic procedure, was planning to undergo an aesthetic procedure, or did not wish to undergo such a procedure. The questionnaire captured the demographic characteristics of the participants, previous history of aesthetic treatment, whether social media had an influence on the decision, how

social media influenced the decision, previous knowledge of the procedure or complications, place of undergoing or planning to undergo the aesthetic procedure, and whether factors such as self-esteem, cost, religion, and social norms played a role in the decision.

STUDY RESULTS

Below are group of charts & tables that

demonstrate the results of the questionnaire. Such results are grouped into categories:

PERSONAL & DEMOGRAPHICAL DATA

Question Item Number of Respondents (n) Percentage of Respondents (%)

Table 7.1.1: Personal & Demographic Information of Respondents.

Sex	Male (58)	31.7%
	Female (125)	68.3%
Age	18-19 (3)	1.7%
	20-21 (82)	44.8%
	22-23 (78)	42.6%
	24 & Above (20)	10.9%
Course of Study	Medicine (108)	59.0%
	Dentistry (22)	12.0%
	Pharmacy (19)	10.4%
	Nursing (6)	3.3%
	Engineering & Tech (5)	2.7%
	Science (4)	2.2%
	Humanities (10)	5.5%
	Other (9)	4.9%
Personal View on Aesthetic Operations	Positive (55)	30.1%
	Negative (23)	12.6%
	Neutral (105)	57.3%
Personal Knowledge about Aesthetic Operations	Expert (37)	20.2%
	Advanced (18)	9.8%
History of Undergoing Aesthetic Operations	Moderate (83)	34.4%
	Basic (31)	16.9%
	Minimal or none (34)	18.6%
History of Undergoing Aesthetic Operations	Had a previous operation (13)	7.1%
	Planning to have one (56)	30.6%
	Didn't have or will not have (114)	62.3%

Role of Social Media in Previous Aesthetic Procedures

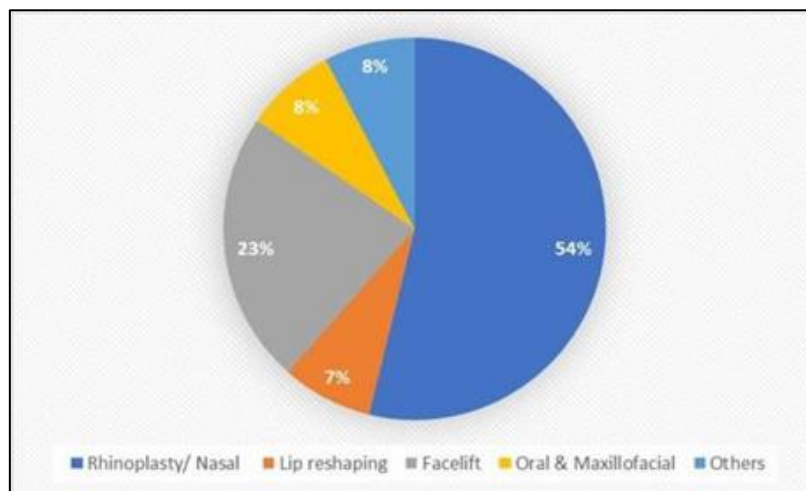


Chart 7.2.1: Previous Operations Performed Among Respondents.

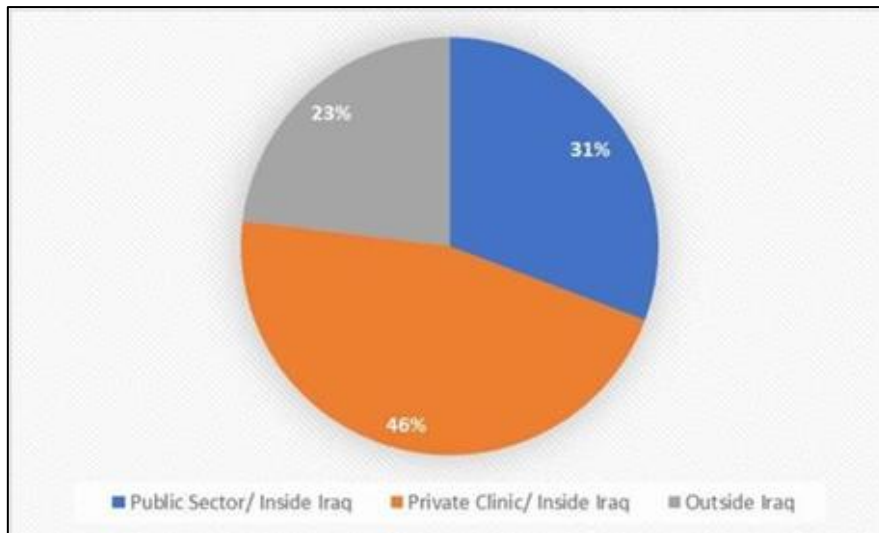


Chart 7.2.2: Place where respondents underwent the procedure.

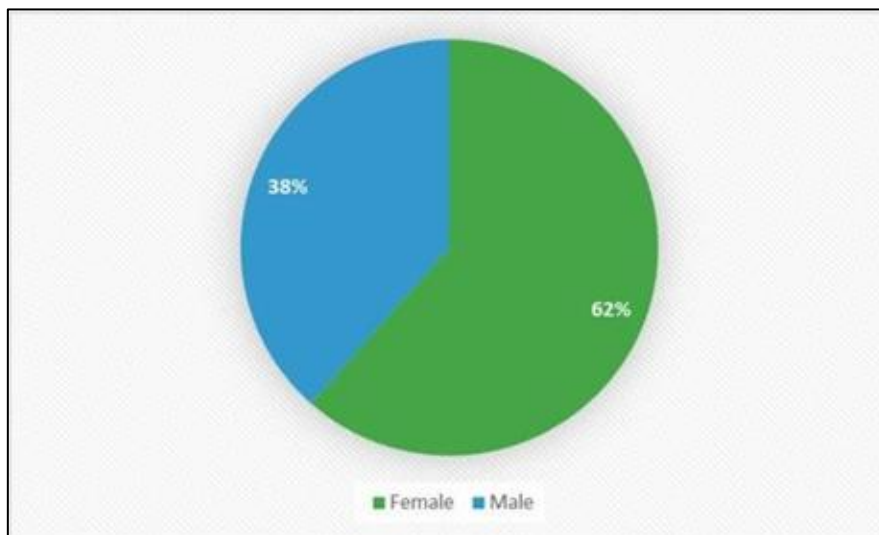


Chart 7.2.3: Gender Classification of Respondents who underwent aesthetic procedure

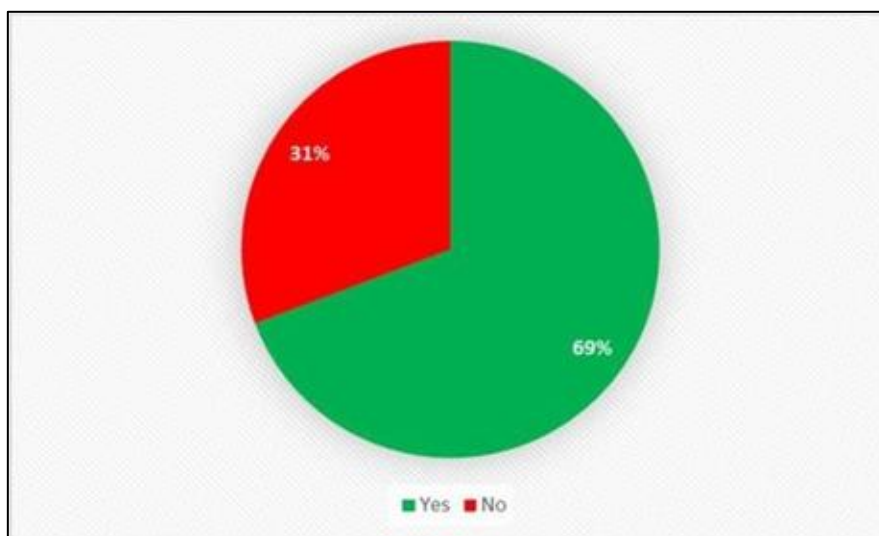


Chart 7.2.4: The role of social media on the decision to undergo aesthetic procedure

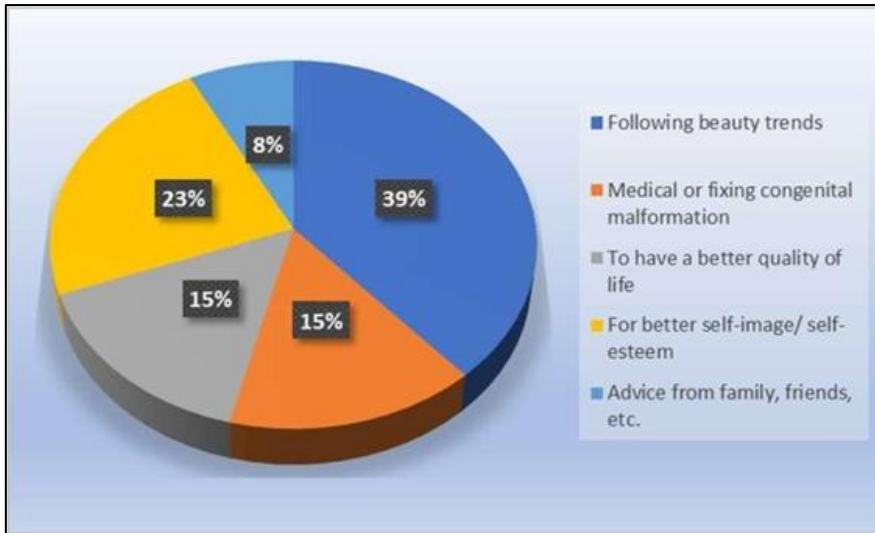


Chart 7.2.5: Reasons for undergoing the procedure according to respondents

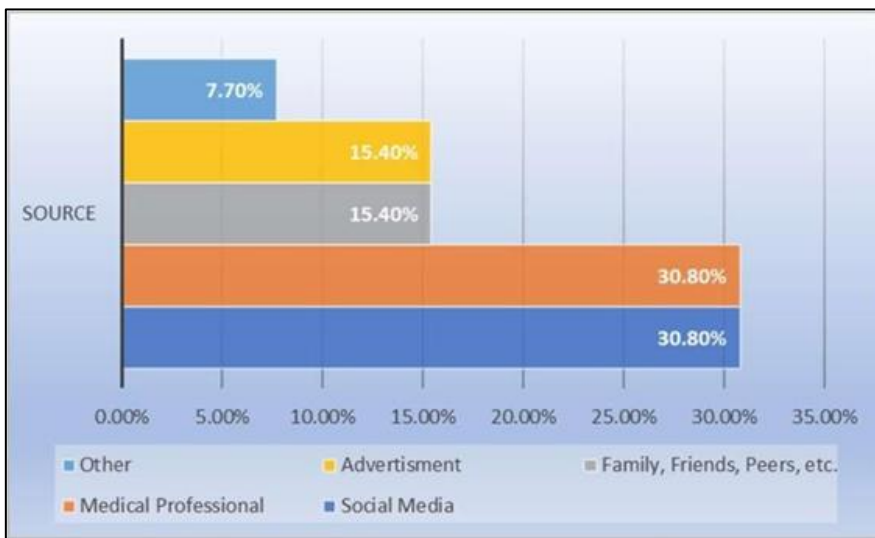


Chart 7.2.6: Source of information about the procedure

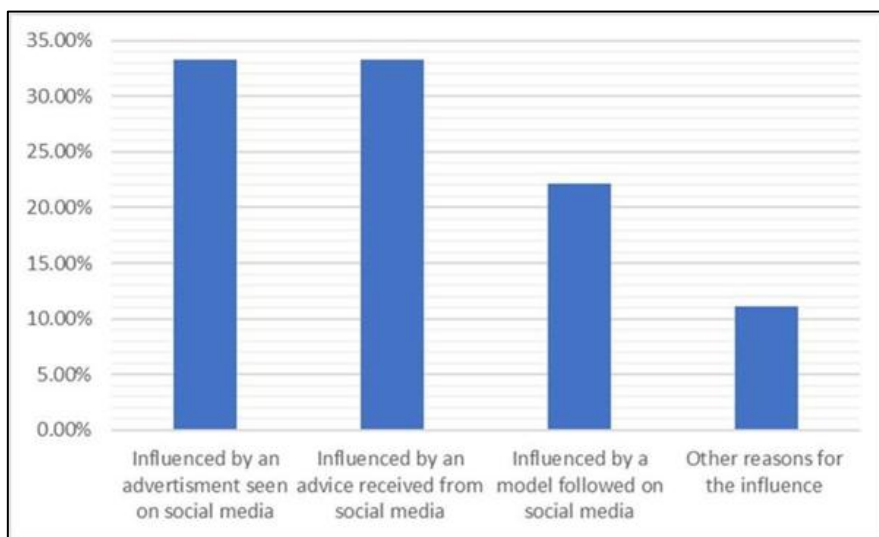


Chart 7.2.7: Different ways in which social media influenced respondents to undergo the procedure

Influence of Social Media on Planned Aesthetic Procedures

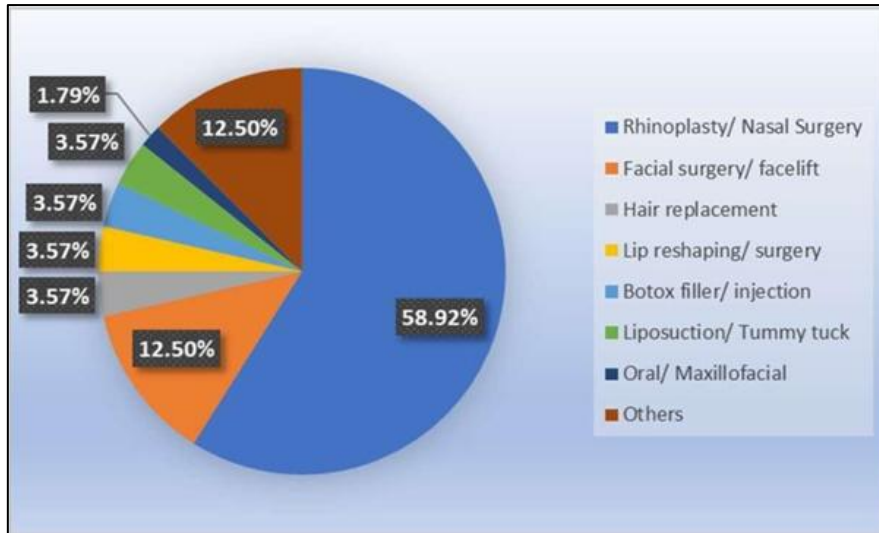


Chart 7.3.1: Planned Procedures Among Respondents.

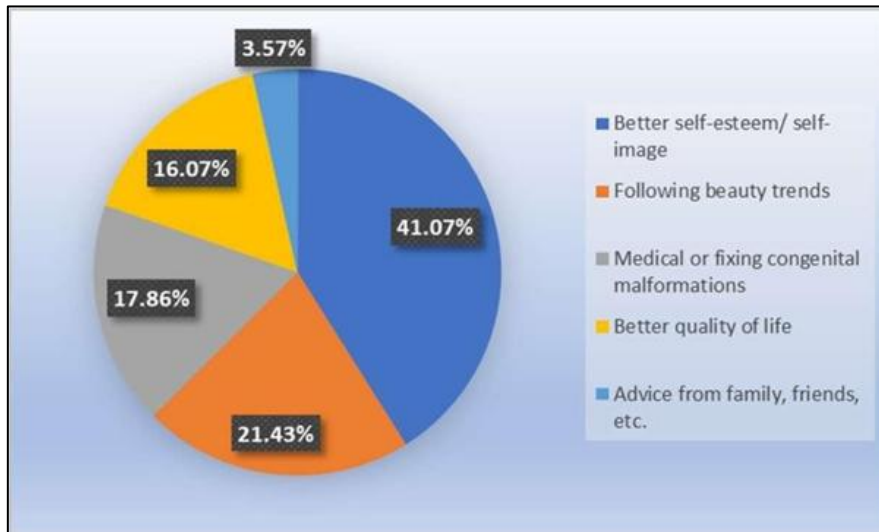


Chart 7.3.2: Reasons for undergoing the procedure according to respondents

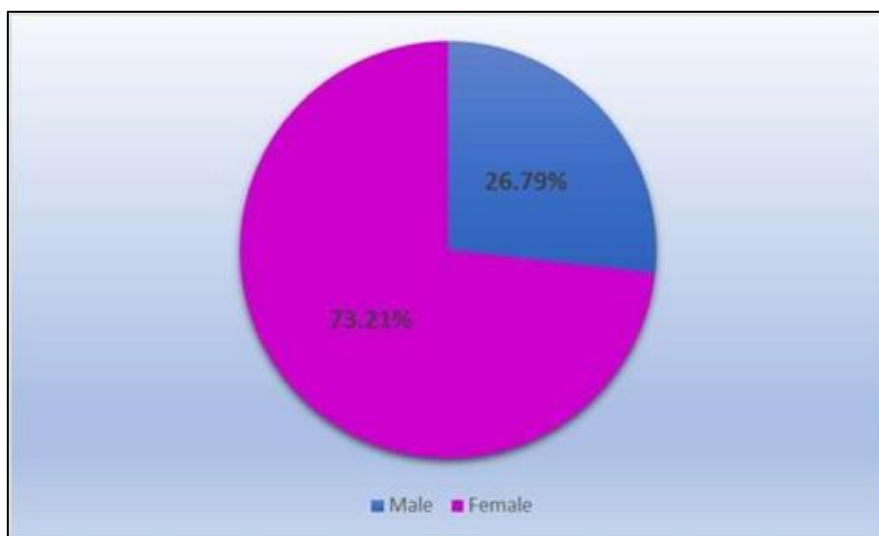


Chart 7.3.3: Gender Classification of Respondents who are planning to undergo aesthetic procedure

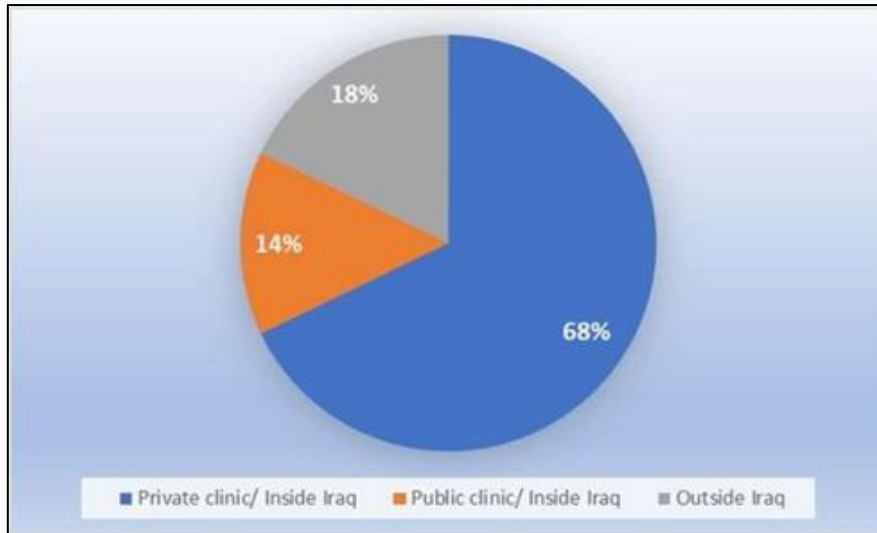


Chart 7.3.4: Place where respondents plan to undergo the procedure

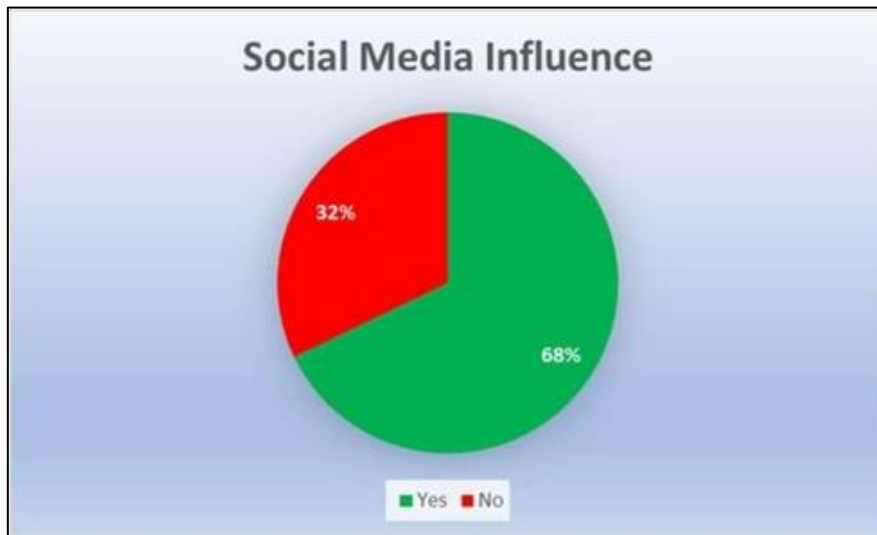


Chart 7.3.5: Whether social media had an influence on the decision to plan for the procedure

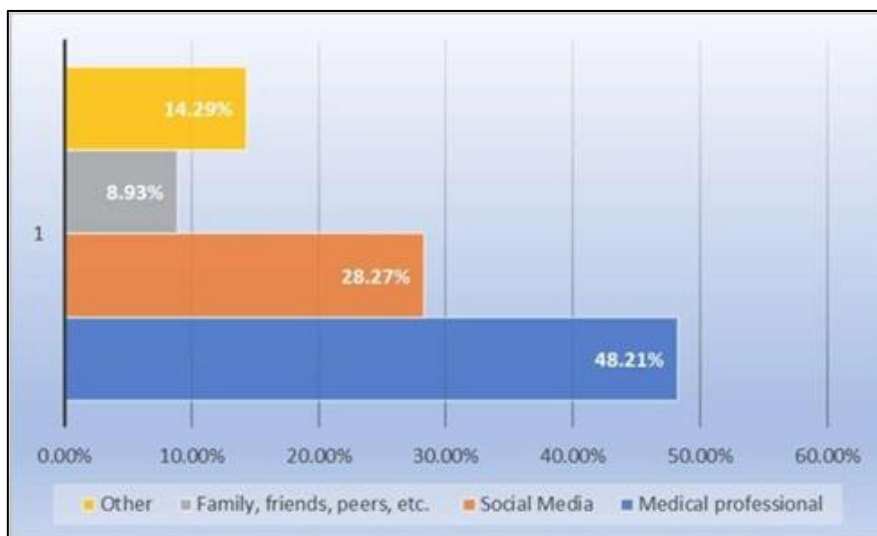


Chart 7.3.6: Source of information used for obtaining information about the planned procedure

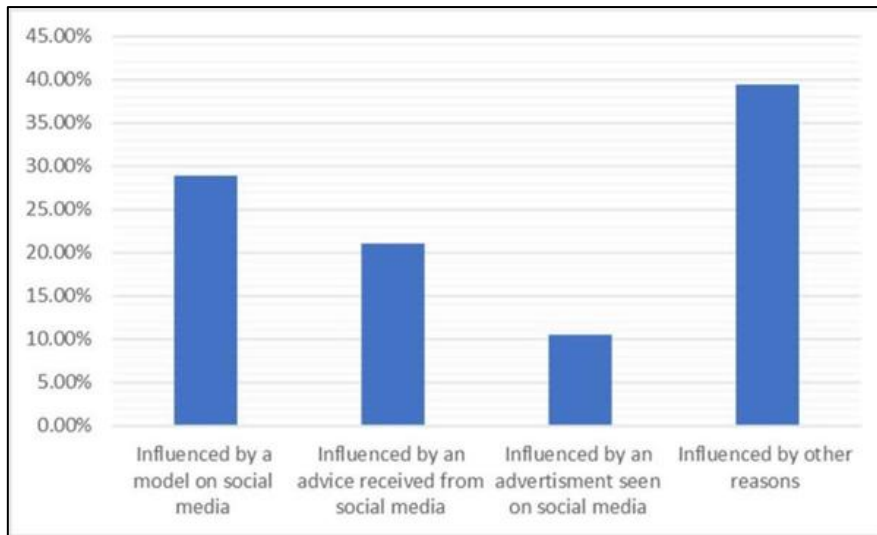


Chart 7.3.7: Different ways in which social media influenced respondents to plan for the procedure

Social Media & Respondents who did not undergo or will not undergo the procedure

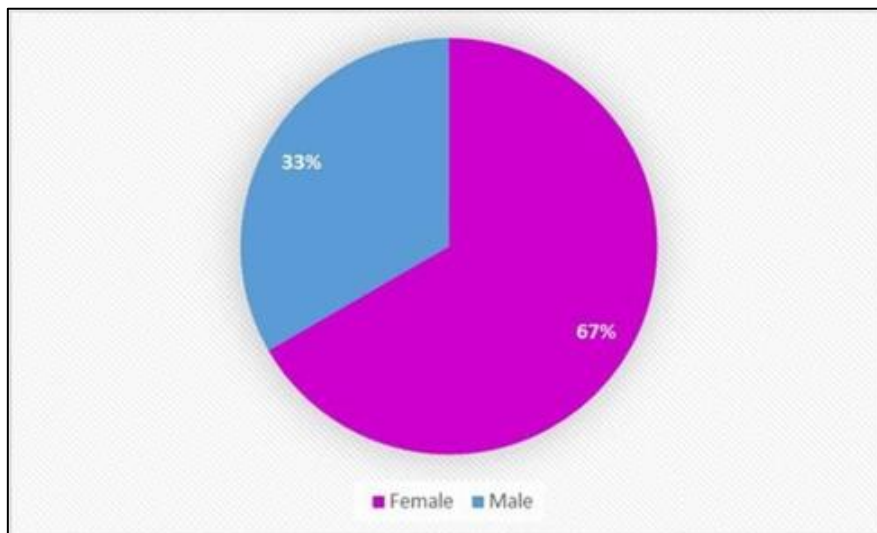


Chart 7.4.1: Gender Classification of Respondents who did not undergo a procedure or are not planning to

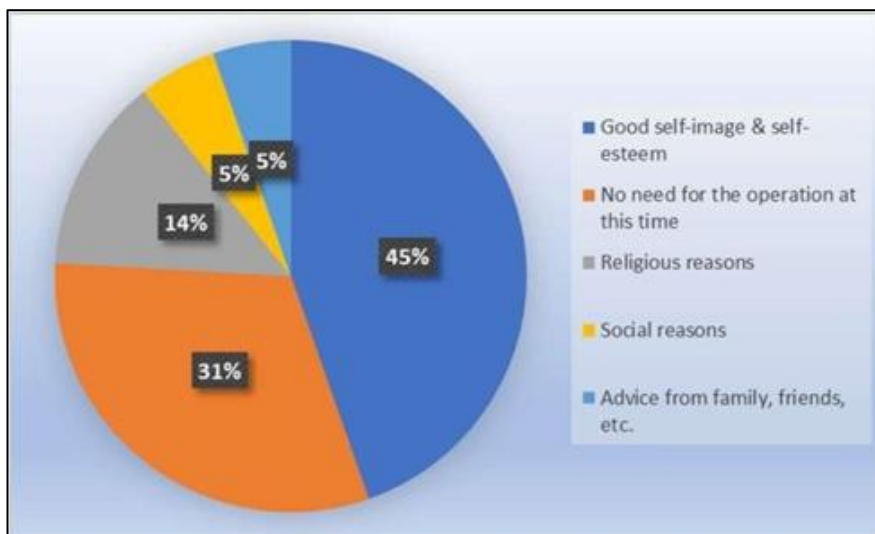


Chart 7.4.2: Reasons for not undergoing or not planning to undergo a procedure

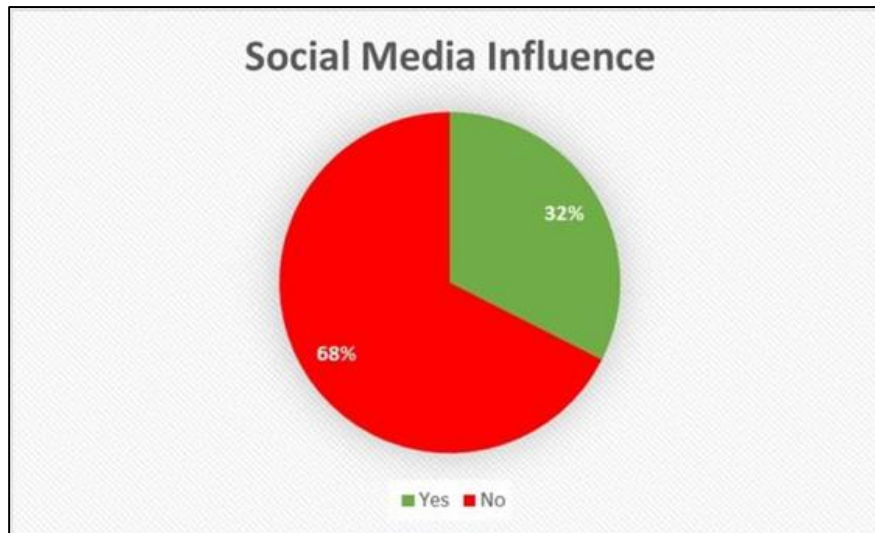


Chart 7.4.3: Whether social media had an influence on their decision not to undergo the procedure

Summary & Analysis of the charts & tables above:

In this study, 183 college student participants from both genders completed the online survey. About two-thirds of them were female (68.3%) and the average age of participants was 21.54 years. Approximately 81.4% of the participants were students in medical specialties (59.0% Medicine, 12.0% Dentistry, and 10.4% Pharmacy).

A small percentage of participants (7.1%) had undergone a previous procedure, of whom two-thirds (62%) were female. The most common procedure was rhinoplasty and/or nasal surgery (54%). The top reason among respondents for undergoing the procedure was following beauty trends and styles (39%), followed by to have better self-esteem/self-image (23%). Over two-thirds (69%) of those who had undergone a previous procedure stated that social media was an influential or decisive factor in their decision to undergo the procedure. Of those, 66.7% stated that they were influenced by an advertisement or advice seen on social media, while approximately 23% were influenced by a model they follow on social media. When asked about the source of information about the procedure, the top response was social media (30.80%).

Approximately one-third of respondents (30.6%) stated that they were planning to undergo a procedure in the future. A large number of them (73.21%) were female. The most common planned procedure was rhinoplasty/nasal surgery (58.92%), which is similar to the first group of participants. When asked about the reason for the procedure, the most common reason was to have better self-esteem or self-image (41.07%), followed by

following beauty trends (21.43%). Two-thirds (68%) stated that social media was an influential or decisive factor in their decision. Over a quarter of those (29%) stated they were influenced by a model they follow on social media. The most common source of information was a medical professional (48.21%).

The majority of participants in this study (62.3%) stated that they had not undergone a procedure in the past or would not undergo one in the future. Again, two-thirds of them (67%) were female, and the most common reason for not undergoing the procedure was good self-esteem and self-image (45%), followed by not needing the procedure at this time (31%). Two-thirds of the respondents (68%) in this category stated that social media was not an influential factor in their decision.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, a total of 183 undergraduate college students in Iraq from both sexes completed a survey assessing the role and influence of social media on their decisions to undergo or not undergo aesthetic procedures. A complete summary of the results and associations in detail is presented under Section VII. Study Results (Item 5) above. Sixty-nine percent of participants who had undergone a procedure or were planning to undergo a procedure believed that social media influenced their decision. On the other hand, 32.5% of participants who did not undergo the procedure believed that social media influenced their decision.

For the purposes of this study, a p-value of less than 5% or 0.05 is considered statistically significant. To establish the statistical significance of this study, a Chi-squared test was performed

between the variables and the outcomes, and the p-value was calculated. The null hypothesis is that there is no association between use of social media

and undergoing aesthetic procedures. The calculation and result of the Chi-squared test are shown below:

Table 8.1: Results & Calculations of Chi-Squared test and p-value to measure significance. (Excel 2016).

Observed (O)				Expected (E)			
	B1	B2	Total		B1	B2	Total
A1	47	37	84	A1	31.67213	52.32787	84
A2	22	77	99	A2	37.32787	61.67213	99
Total	69	114	183	Total	69	114	183
KEY:							
A1: Believes social media is an influential factor in making decisions.							
A2: Doesn't believe social media is an influential factor in making decisions.							
B1: Had or planning to have an aesthetic operation.							
B2: Didn't have or will not have an aesthetic operation.							
(O-E)²/E							
	B1	B2		χ^2	22.01143711		
A1	7.41799	4.489836		df	1		
A2	6.294052	3.809558		p-value	2.71031E-06		
				p-value %	0.000271031 %		

The p-value obtained from the Chi-squared test is 0.000271031% which is less than 5% indicating that the results were statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, the original or alternate hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSIONS

There are multiple pieces of literature that try to study the association between social media and aesthetic surgery. One such proposal is titled “Influence of Social Media on the Decision to Undergo a Cosmetic Procedure” by Khalid Arab et al published in PRS Global Open journal on Aug 8, 2019. This proposal tries to establish whether the use of social media among female college students in Saudi Arabia is associated with a more favorable decision to undergo cosmetic surgery. The results of that proposal found that out of 816 completed questionnaires, 48.5% reported being influenced by social media to consider undergoing cosmetic procedures. Respondents (51.4%) follow plastic surgeons on social media (P < 0.001). The most common reported number of hours of social media use per day was >5 hours per day (53.2%; P < 0.026). Statistical significance was considered in relation to reporting being influenced by social media to consider undergoing cosmetic procedures in the future (Arab, K. *et al.*, 2019).

Our proposal is similar in context to the proposal stated previously in that we are studying student populations and studying similar independent & dependent variables. Our study found that 69% of

participants who had an operation or were planning to have an operation believed that social media influenced them to make their decision. In addition, viewing advertisements and following models on social media were important factors on the influence of social media on the decision to have such operations. Moreover, the top source of information for participants who underwent aesthetic operation was social media (30.80%). The results of the study were statistically significant by having a p-value of less than 5%.

Recommendations

- Further studies with randomized sampling methods are needed to establish more accurate results and conclusions regarding the association between social media and aesthetic procedures.
- Social media pages and advertisements of surgery clinics should provide accurate and comprehensive information about the procedure and its complications.
- College students should seek medical professional advice before planning for any aesthetic procedure.
- Counseling programs should be made available to help college students and young adults develop better self-image and improve their self-esteem.
- College students should not use social media as their sole source of information when deciding to undergo an aesthetic procedure.
- Individuals should avoid negative critique and bullying based on physical appearance, and

emotional support groups and psychological counseling should be available for victims of bullying.

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Source of support: Nil; **Conflict of interest:** Nil.

Cite this article as:

Hussein, H. K. "Role of Social Media in the Decision to Undergo Aesthetic Surgery Among Iraqi College Students" *Sarcouncil Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 5.2 (2026): pp 10-20.