Slice me nice

A study exploring Swedish young women`s views and responses to marketing of Aesthetic Surgery in social media

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**Title**
Slice me nice: A study exploring how Swedish young women’s views and response to marketing of Aesthetic Surgery in social media

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**Abstract**
With an increased number aesthetic surgeries performed in Sweden combined with social media used as a marketing tool, potential clients are exposed for persuasive marketing messages. The harder competition has led to a pressure on prices and the requirements of marketers’ creativity have increased. We predicted that this industry faces ethical challenges which makes it worth investigating.

The purpose of the study was to explore how young women view and respond to marketing by aesthetic surgery clinics in social media. In order to fulfill the purpose a qualitative approach was conducted through the use of two different focus group interviews. Twenty screenshots were discussed by eight young Swedish women where two of them have undertaken aesthetic procedures.

The conclusions of the study shows how different marketing messages can be viewed and how clients respond to them. The respondents perceived a normalization of aesthetic procedures due to social media marketing. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that there is a difference in how young women who undertook aesthetic procedures view and respond to the marketing compared to the unexperienced women. Marketing that communicates professionalism is likely to be more positively viewed by clients. This study further confirms our predictions regarding an ethical tension between the marketing messages and the recipients.

The implications of the study are an increased awareness of how this type of marketing is viewed from young women’s perspective. Furthermore, future research could focus on if surgeons are persuasive during consolations and how this is revealed.

**Keywords**
Aesthetic Surgery, Social Media, Persuasive Communication, eWOM, Normalization, Ethics
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, we would like to thank our supervisor Marina Jogmark, for being a great source of inspiration and providing an exceptional support through the whole research process. We would also like to thank Jane Mattisson for her help with the linguistics.

Lastly this research would not be possible without our participants who were willing to take their time to help us fulfill our research purpose. We would therefore, like to give a special ‘thank you’ to all of the participants.

Kristianstad, May 26th 2016

Monika Kubiak

Annie Lindberg
## Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 6
   1.1 Background .............................................................................................................................................. 6
   1.2 Problem statement ................................................................................................................................. 8
   1.3 Research purpose ................................................................................................................................. 10
   1.4 Research question ............................................................................................................................... 11
   1.5 Outline .................................................................................................................................................. 11

2. Theoretical framework ................................................................................................................................. 12
   2.1 Digital marketing communication ....................................................................................................... 12
   2.2 Social media marketing ....................................................................................................................... 13
   2.3 Persuasive communication .................................................................................................................. 14
   2.4 The nature of aesthetic surgery ........................................................................................................... 19
   2.5 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) ..................................................................................................... 21
   2.6 Opinion leaders in social media marketing ........................................................................................ 23

3. Method ......................................................................................................................................................... 25
   3.1 Selection of empirical context .............................................................................................................. 25
   Facebook .................................................................................................................................................... 25
   Instagram .................................................................................................................................................... 26
   3.2 Collection of empirical data and analysis methods ............................................................................. 26
   3.3 Participant selection and delimitation .................................................................................................. 27
   3.4 Focus group strategy ............................................................................................................................ 28
   3.5 Processing and analysing the empirical data ....................................................................................... 29
   3.6 Research design .................................................................................................................................... 30
   3.7 Validity, reliability and generalizability .............................................................................................. 31
   3.8 Ethical considerations .......................................................................................................................... 31

4. Empirical findings and analysis .................................................................................................................. 32
5. Conclusions and discussion........................................................................................................48
  5.1 Conclusions ............................................................................................................................48
  5.2 Discussion .............................................................................................................................49
  5.3 Limitations and practical implications .....................................................................................52
  5.4 Future research .......................................................................................................................53
References ........................................................................................................................................54
APPENDIX 1 - False marketing ....................................................................................................62
APPENDIX 2 – Competitions..........................................................................................................64
APPENDIX 3 - Influencers ...............................................................................................................66
APPENDIX 4 – Credible and professional .....................................................................................67
APPENDIX 5 - Ethical .....................................................................................................................69
APPENDIX 6 – Quotes ....................................................................................................................71
1. Introduction

*This thesis will start with our own reflections considering the marketing of aesthetic procedures in social media. Beyond that, a problem statement, research purpose, research question and outline will be described.*

1.1 Background

*Mirror mirror on the wall who is the prettiest of them. Malin, Malin would be that person if she only get an injection*

This statement was posted on the Facebook wall of Swedish aesthetic surgery clinic (Appendix 2). The clinic arranged a competition which gave the possibility to win an optional injection. Every person who wanted participate was asked to send an individual statement describing why they were the right person to win the contest. The statement above was created by a girl who was presented as the winner by the clinic on Facebook.

As students, young women and potential clients, we are an important target group for the marketers within the beauty industry. More often certain aesthetic clinics started to follow our private Instagram accounts and also the accounts of people in our social sphere. The curiosity about what kind of images these clinics are posting was evident. We took a closer look on the accounts and perceived a frequently used marketing message including statements as “Look the way you feel” and “Invest in yourself”. Furthermore, we also observed that this type of Instagram accounts contained pictures of professional doctors, beautiful women and pre-/after pictures. All of this content evoked positive emotions in our mind since the beauty procedures offered were all presented in a way nearly inviting for a “spa-weekend”.

According to the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS) the number of aesthetic procedures performed in 2014 was estimated to 20.236.901 worldwide were USA was the biggest contributor. Moreover, in USA there has been reported an increase of aesthetic surgery with 104 per cent between 2000 and 2013 (ISAPS, 2016). Consequently, several researchers have noted a shift in attitude concerning the acceptance of aesthetic surgery (Brooks, 2004; Heyes, 2007). Brooks (2004) argues that there has been a normalization of aesthetic surgery and that people nowadays have more favourable attitude towards it. Similar in Sweden, the beauty industry is growing tremendously fast where the number of companies offering beauty treatments increased with almost 50 per cent since 2008. Consequently,
there are also less serious actors operating at the market (Sverigesradio, 2016). In Sweden, the aesthetic surgery industry remains poorly regulated and it is difficult to find reliable statistics regarding the number of people that undergo aesthetic surgery (Regeringen, 2016).

Last year SVT News in cooperation with Sifo, Swedish Institute of Public Opinion Research, estimated the number of companies selling different types of aesthetic body treatments to nearly 14,000 (Sifo/SVT, 2012). In a survey performed by Sifo in 2012 almost one in five women would consider doing a beauty treatment, an increase of nearly 40 per cent in two years (Sifo/SVT, 2012). Moreover, the Swedish Consumer Agency estimated a growth of 20 per cent a year and the National Board of Health has concluded that there are approximately 64,000 treatments per year. These numbers could be misleading since many beauty procedures are done without being brought to public attention (Lennen Merckx, 2015A). However, minimal invasive procedures are growing rapidly at the Swedish market, especially botox and fillers, which are a type of facial implant (ISAPS, 2016).

The term aesthetic surgery covers a broad range of surgeries that alter appearance. Included in the term is a wide range of reconstructive surgeries, which attempt to replace or repair congenitally malformed, damaged, or amputated areas of the body. The term aesthetic surgery, on the other hand, refers to surgery chosen primarily for aesthetic reasons or in hopes that one will become more socially acceptable (Sterodimas, Radwanski, & Pitanguy, 2011). Moreover, there are different types of aesthetic surgery treatments such as: breast augmentation, face-lifts, facial implants, and fat reduction. Aesthetic surgery includes both surgical and minimal procedures such as botox and filler injections (Grumbein & Robyn, 2015). This term aesthetic surgery is therefore, the one used in this thesis since it focus on beauty treatments which are non-reconstructive.

Furthermore, options of different aesthetic treatments have significantly increased with the aim to help individuals achieve tougher standards of beauty. Various marketing strategies influence people by presenting idealized beauty. An example is marketing of aesthetic procedures that aim to encourage people to be proactive by using anti-aging products to retain youthfulness, to increase personal wellness and self-esteem (Merianos, Vidourek, & King, 2013). Additionally, aesthetic surgery is nowadays not only a practice of traditional medicine that only focuses on improving the patient’s health, it also improves the physical appearance according to the individual’s desire (Atiyeh S., Rubeiz T., & Hayek N., 2008).
Sarwer and Crerand (2004) define the mentioned characteristics above as typical advertisements for cosmetic treatments. They also argue that this kind of advertisements do not differ from the ones seen in fashion and beauty magazines. Such magazines normally contain good looking models who are often undressed. This tactic usually aims to show post-operative results that are in turn, promising improved self-confidence, appearance and “new you” (Sarwer & Crerand, 2004).

To continue, aesthetic surgery has today become an important profit center in the health care industry. The increased requirements on appearance through marketing and the growing number of non-plastic surgeons have led to a harder competition and price cuts within the industry. This in turn, has established a skepticism that competition could have a negative effect on medical ethics, quality, increased patient risk and a poor patient selection (Atiyeh S., Rubeiz T., & Hayek N., 2008). Although, profit creation is the primary goal for most enterprises and therefore, strategies to identify and acquire new customers are crucial to gain profit. To acquire new customers firms need to understand customer needs, psychological states and offer different options (Chen, Liu, & Chen, 2016).

As mentioned above, aesthetic surgery clinics are nowadays moving towards a more profit oriented business. Customer acquisition is therefore, becoming essential to meet the competition at the market. Ang and Buttle (2006) discuss the importance of customer acquisition. They argue that customer retention and development is impossible without an effective and focused customer acquisition strategy. Since aesthetic surgery is growing as a business, greater depth of research is needed in order to understand what emotions are created in the minds of clients and potential clients as they are exposed to this type of marketing.

1.2 Problem statement

Internet has lately became one of the most influential marketing tools. An increased number of aesthetic surgeons use the web to advertise their services (Grumbein & Robyn, 2015). Sperry, Thompson, Sarwer and Cash (2009) have found a relationship between the increasing popularity of aesthetic surgery and the increased media exposure. Menzel et al. (2011) argues that aesthetic surgery acceptance among young adult women is strongly affected by sociocultural factors like media and peers.

Previous studies regarding marketers adopting social media as a part of their marketing strategy identified that it is a beneficial marketing tool (Shen & Bissell, 2013). Instagram and Facebook
are two different types of communities were its users are connected to one single platform. Instagram is such a community with more than 300 million users. This social media platform allow people to capture and share images which tell the story of an individual’s life (Instagram, 2016A). This tremendous popular platform encouraged a number of users to take the opportunity to market brand, products, services or themselves. Consequently, Instagram has become a more prominent platform for advertising and marketing. Many marketers are choosing to advertise through a well-known “Instagram Profile” (Eldin, 2016). Facebook is another social media platform that has grown rapidly and have more than 1,5 billion active users (Statista, 2016A). This has made the platform become one of the most popular and important communities. The platform is also growing as a marketing place for companies trying to promote their products, services and brands (Shen & Bissell, 2013). One of the objectives of this study is to analyze how aesthetic clinics use Instagram and Facebook to promote their services and engage their clients.

Social media is also growing as a source for medical information and it facilitates in finding information concerning aesthetic surgery. In the context of aesthetic surgery, a survey was performed in 2015 by Otte, Porcnik, Hedén and Montemurro in which five hundred patients of a clinic completed a questionnaire before their planned consultation with an aesthetic surgeon. The study revealed that almost 95 per cent of all patients had used internet as a source of information. Furthermore, 46 per cent of all patients had used social media and among these 40 per cent were strongly influenced by its content while choosing a clinic or a surgeon. Similarly, surgeons complied that social media have a positive impact on their practice, especially in improving their marketing processes to eventually increase patient volume (Otte, Porcnik, Hedén, & Montemurro, 2015). Consequently, it can be stated that clients’ involvement appear to be highly present in the aesthetic surgery industry. These increased number of clients’ interest and involvement in aesthetic surgery implies that clients’ are nowadays more informed. This is something that companies need to take into consideration when they design their marketing since an informed client’ is more likely to question the credibility of the information provided.

Furthermore, while examining a patient that will undergo an aesthetic procedure the physical aspect is ignored. Instead, the plastic surgeon use the patient’s bodily-aesthetic features as resource for evaluation. The surgeon can according to this evaluation suggest how a specific part of the body could be improved (Mirivel, 2008). Atiyeh, Runeiz and Hayek (2008) describe that cosmetic surgery is passing through an identity crisis as well as an ethical dilemma.
Aesthetic surgery clinics make profit from the established ideology about a society that put importance on vanity, beauty and youthfulness. This fact make some researchers raise the question if surgeons always act in the client’s best interest (Mousavi, 2010). Furthermore, previous research regarding aesthetic surgery has been especially focused on ethical aspects regarding aesthetic interventions. Aesthetic surgery has always had a complex relationship to psychology, since it cannot be justified on the basis of physical medical need, it must be justified in relation to the client’s own desire. This makes it easier for surgeons to justify an intervention on the basis of psychological needs (Heyes & Jones, 2009). Based on these facts, we assume that this industry is facing several ethical challenges. Both Facebook and Instagram connect a great amount of users and are used for marketing purpose. Furthermore, since we assume that this industry is ethical sensitive, there could potentially be a tension between the marketer and the recipient of the marketing message. We do not know how the recipients of the marketing messages are responding to them and why they respond in a specific way.

Consequently there is little done at the Swedish market when it comes to the marketing of aesthetic surgery clinics. While the beauty industry continues to increase, new marketing tools such as social media enables companies to reach out to potential clients. As we are exposed for posts on Facebook and Instagram with content related to aesthetic surgery procedures in our everyday life, we perceived this content to be highly persuasive. For that reason, a question came to our minds; how does this type of services manage to evoke positive emotions in the minds of potential clients, while they include pain, needles, discomfort and many times health risks? And to be even more specific, how is marketing able to cover this type of negative aspects linked to aesthetic surgery. These reflections lead to the actual core of this study which is specifies in the research purpose.

1.3 Research purpose

Our research purpose is to explore how young women view and respond to marketing executed by aesthetic surgery clinics in social media at the Swedish market. We are interested in exploring what kind of perceptions are evoked in the minds of young women towards the symbols, attributes and messages which are applied by aesthetic surgery clinics in their daily posts on Facebook and Instagram. It is also of great interest to explore why young women view and respond to the marketing as they do.
### 1.4 Research question

How do young women in Sweden view and respond to marketing executed by aesthetic surgery clinics in social media?

### 1.5 Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 1</td>
<td>To begin with, the first section presents the background and the problem statement leading to the research purpose and question. The section ends with a description of the outline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2</td>
<td>The second section constitutes out of marketing concepts that are crucial in order to understand the empirical findings. Firstly digital marketing communication is explained, beyond this: social media marketing, persuasive communication, the nature aesthetic surgery, electronic word of mouth and finally opinion leaders in social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>The third section presents the methodology of this study by arguing for the research design and strategy. Thereafter the validity, reliability and the ethical considerations are presented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4</td>
<td>The forth section presents the empirical findings combined with an analysis of both focus group interviews. This section is structured according to the themes discussed by all respondents. The themes are following: False marketing, competitions, influencers, credible and professional, increased normalization and accessibility, ethics, slice me nice and finally pushing service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 5</td>
<td>The fifth section of this thesis presents the conclusions and a discussion including a comparison of the two focus groups. Finally, the limitations and practical implications and suggestions for future research are presented.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Theoretical framework

In order to understand how young women view and respond to the marketing in social media executed by aesthetic surgery clinics, some fundamental marketing concepts need to be described. Furthermore, previous research that is relevant for this study is presented in order to shed light on our empirical findings. This section is structured as following: digital marketing communication, social media marketing, persuasive communication, the nature of aesthetic surgery, electronic word of mouth and finally opinion leaders in social media.

2.1 Digital marketing communication

Marketing communication has for a long time been associated with a one-way strategy where a business is sending a message to its potential customers through different types of marketing channels/media. This message is usually associated to the products or services offered by a business. According to Miles (2013), previous research in marketing communication have observed a shift from one-way marketing communication which is characterized as monological to a more dialogical oriented communication. This shift, in other words, means that marketing communication has become a two-way strategy where customers are seen as the source of feedback about a company’s product or service. Consumers have nowadays, more than ever, a voice that they want to be heard and tend to be less responsive to one-way communication (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011).

In addition, Karjaluoto, Mustonenand and Pauliina Ulkuniemi (2015) have discussed that since internet has allowed people to share their opinions, people have started to trust friends more than organizations. Marketers need to take this into consideration due to the fact that a marketer’s role has evolved from being a communicator to being an aggregator who collect essential content and, thus, allows participation in communities. Due to this shift in marketing communication, a marketer’s task includes creation of online communities and collaboration with customers which allows better understanding of their needs (Karjaluoto, Mustonenand, & Ulkuniemi, 2015). The shift from one-way communication to two-way communication is based on the fact that marketers are nowadays communicating through online media more often (Shankar & Batra, 2009). Businesses have seen the movement of marketing communication online as a new opportunity to reach their potential customers and internet is the main channel of reach (Carlson & Lee, 2015).
Worth pointing out is the importance of the online medium as a marketing communication tool. Consumers are nowadays spending less time watching television and less time on other legacy media, they are instead moving online (Shankar & Batra, 2009). Winer (2009) sheds further light on the online marketing communication by claiming that internet advertising offer an entirely new set of communication tools replacing the ones used for fifty to hundred years; radio, television, newspaper and along with others. There are several factors that are moving marketing communication towards the use of new media. Winer (2009) has identified four reasons that might answer this pattern (without any particular order); firstly, the new improved technology that has enabled a usage both at home and in the workplace. Secondly, marketers are today focusing on the creation of “experiences” for their customers in order to set apart their products or services from the competitors. This is less achievable with the one-way communication, seller to buyer. For that reason marketers are regularly looking for an interaction with their customers and in turn, enable an interaction back as well. Thirdly, marketers are still talking about 18-34-year old demographic as a popular target audience. On the other hand, there are significant differences in use of media and how the information is processed when an 18-years old person is compared to a 30-year old person. A general conclusion drawn from this fact is that traditional demographic breakdowns of the markets are becoming useless. Fourthly, what marketers often find most important is the behavioral targeting which means that the focus is on development of personalized messages. Marketers create these messages by tracking people’s habits on the Internet or by tracking where these potential consumers are (Winer, 2009).

2.2 Social media marketing

We have so far discussed different researchers’ point of view on the development of marketing communication. The next step is to understand the nature of social media which is a crucial phenomenon in this study.

Social media is often described as an extension of Web 2.0 technology and have been a huge revolution in the way people are communicating in the twenty-first century. To continue, social media are online platforms which facilitates the communication process and sharing among users at global level. This revolution is playing an important role for not only private persons but for businesses as well. Social media platforms allow businesses to establish the two-way communication as well as create value for their customers (Carlson & Lee, 2015). Different
social media channels and marketing activities have been integrated and therefore, reshaped the beauty industry among others. Teng, Khong and Goh (2015) argue that businesses have multiple options to choose from when communicating with their customers through social media. Some companies choose to create public profiles on Facebook, some offer online service for customers and others are looking for the best possible ways to maximize marketing efforts in the sea of social media (Teng, Khong, & Goh, 2015). Previous research has especially highlighted the benefit of consumers spreading positive recommendations (see eWOM below) which contributes to effective brand management and product promotions (Shen & Bissell, 2013).

Another benefit that is worth adding is that social media is also a marketing tool that is able to uncover customer connections and in turn, facilitate the planning and understanding of a company’s target markets (Carlson & Lee, 2015). Moreover, Shen and Bissell (2013) also discuss the benefits by highlighting the importance of a balanced distribution of a company’s products and services through social media. This tactic helps to gain more potential customers due to the fact that every individual likes different type of social media (Shen & Bissell, 2013).

Despite the fact that social media is gaining popularity as a marketing tool, there is also a negative side that need to be considered when a business adopts social media into the marketing communication plan. According to Arnaboldi and Coget (2016), social media can provoke a mob mentality which leads to public lynching. An example of such situation is if a person who represents a company publishes a post on social media with an inappropriate content. This can lead to devastating consequences for the brand being represented.

Another negative aspect of social media is that the two-way collective communication is exposed to manipulation. Mass media have for many years been manipulated by intelligence agencies for instance. The opportunities offered by social media makes it even easier for both individuals and groups to affect a brand negatively through false rumors and information (Arnaboldi & Coget, 2016).

2.3 Persuasive communication

Past research has described social media as a powerful tool for marketing purpose and a new effective way to communicate, but it does not end on these facts. An additional point of view is needed in order to understand that the way of communicating might differ depending on
different nuances in the communication process. One way of communicating to potential clients is to persuade them. According to Perloff (2010) persuasion is basically everything that includes shaping and changing of attitudes. Persuasion could be understood like a change of an attitude by influencing an individual’s mind (Perloff, 2010).

Miller (1980) on the other hand, claims that responses and not attitudes could be a better alternative to use in relation to persuasion, since all persuasive efforts do not change individuals attitudes. By using the term responses instead makes it possible to include other types of persuasive outcomes such as: changing, strengthening, and shaping emotions, perceptions and behaviors. Furthermore, he argues that persuasive marketing aims for three different outcomes: changing, strengthen and shaping responses of individuals (Miller, 2002).

**Personalized marketing messages**

Marketers do not only have interest in integrating social media in their marketing communication plan, they also seek to get to know an individual’s preferences and the way this person do judgements. This is becoming vitally important in order for a marketer to success within the evolving marketing field (Teng, Khong, & Goh, 2015). Vashishtaa and Balajib (2012) claim that customers are more involved and engaged when processing information that fits their requirements. For that reason, they are also more easily persuaded if the marketing message fits their individual goals (Vashishtaa & Balaji, 2012). Persuasive messages that are tailored to fit the customer’s individual preferences can be formed in two optional ways. On the one hand, the persuasive message can focus on promoting gains like for instance “product X will build healthy teeth”. On the other hand, the persuasive message can focus on preventing losses like for instance “product X will prevent cavities” (Higgins, 2000).

In a survey conducted in 2012 by Hirsh, Kang and Bodenhausen, it was found that if persuasive messages are adapted to the personal traits of a customer, they are processed more fluently. Another beneficial effect that was found is that a customer might evaluate the persuasive message more positively. This leads to an assumption that the more congruent a marketing message is with a recipient’s personal traits, the more effective is the message (Hirsh, Kang, & Bodenhausen, 2012).
Attractiveness and sex appeals

Since marketers use social media to spread persuasive marketing messages widely, Perloff (2014) argues that focus lies on presenting attractive people and thin models which might have an effect an individual’s body-image. Goodman, Morris and Sutherland (2008) discuss that women judge and compare themselves to models in advertising which influences their emotional responses and how they act in the social sphere. Since social media is an influencing power that highlights beauty as a guide to social acceptance, many women are ready to buy products to achieve that look (Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008).

Furthermore, Till and Busler (2000) found that attractive endorsers are likely to generate better brand reputation and an increased desire to perform a purchase. Endorsers are advocates for a brand in the context of advertising where celebrities and experts are commonly used endorsers. Experts are individuals with exclusive knowledge about a given product based on their own experience, training or study. Celebrities on the other hand, are individuals who are known for their achievements; actors, entertainers, singers or sports figures (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). In addition, it is useful to match attractive celebrities with products since it provides an obvious link for consumers. If there is such a link, a consumer might experience an attractive celebrity as an “expert” more than an unattractive one (Till & Busler, 2000). Another way of persuading clients to desire improvements of their appearance is when female celebrities are reducing their wrinkles through aesthetic surgery. This could raise the bar for ordinary women by an establishment of increased requirements on the standards of the aging body (Bordo, 1993).

Lin and Yeh (2009) shed further light on the use of beauty in advertising. They argue that attractive endorsers have the tendency to be automatically liked by consumers. For that reason marketers put a lot of effort in connecting various products and services to idealized parts of the endorser’s body. Some examples are clothing, cosmetics and hair accessories that often use body-shaping imagery with the aim to create full attraction (Lin & Yeh, 2009). Goodman, Morris and Sutherland (2008) claim that there is sufficient evidence on that attractive people are more effective persuaders in marketing communication.

Another act of persuasion is the use of sex appeals in advertising. Sex appeals have been popular elements that marketers have used for more than fifty years. Marketing and media specialists have been especially interested in the content and effects that comes from sex in advertising (Hennink-Kaminski & Reichert, 2001). To continue, sexual appeals are generally associated with nudity and sexual explicitness. Nudity is described in terms of the amount and style of
clothing that is worn by the endorser in an advertisement. On the other hand, sexual explicitness is associated to the provocative language with nuances referring to sex (Reichert, 2003).

Furthermore, marketing messages including sex can be generally defined as persuasive messages about products and services (Hennink-Kaminski & Reichert, 2001). Till and Busler (2002) argue that sex appeals make consumers excited and draw their attention more easily to the associated product imagery. However, it is important to note that the effects of using sex appeals in advertising might depend on different factors; the connection between the product and the sexual appeals, specific target audience characteristic and the context in which the advertisement is presented (Vézina & Paul, 1997). Moreover, sexual appeals or nudity could be considered as provocative when it is incorporated in the context of an advertisement because its viewers can be significantly shocked (Vézina & Paul, 1997). Goodman, Morris and Sutherland (2008) found that sexual appeals can also evoke negative emotions in the minds of women. They argue that women are more often tired of being objectified and sexualized in the context of advertising, especially when such appeals are used on images that promote a given product that has no obvious association or need to this type of imagery.

**The negative side of persuasion**

Despite the fact that persuasion is vital in the work of marketers, it is important to note that in practice it is difficult to set persuasion apart from manipulation. The advertising industry is setting higher requirements on creativity (Epure, Eisenstat, & Dinu, 2014). However, creativity have the tendency to generate both good and bad marketing messages which in turn, can be ethical or unethical. Despite this fact, the essence in creating creative messages is to generate emotions and in particular, actions. Consequently, creativity as an act of persuasion and can be the reason why persuasion and manipulation are hard to keep apart (Epure, Eisenstat, & Dinu, 2014).

Epure, Eisenstat and Dinu (2014) shed further light on the complexity in separation persuasion from manipulation. If persuasion is linked to manipulation in people’s minds, it evokes a feeling of being attacked by the marketing message. On the other hand, if there is a clear distinction between persuasion and manipulation, persuasion has positive impact in marketing communication. Marketing campaigns aiming to improve people’s lives are examples of the positive outcome in the usage of persuasion. Moreover, marketing messages that manage to
persuade people without their awareness are defined as *subliminal messages* (Epure, Eisenstat, & Dinu, 2014).

**Credibility**

Due to the fact that people are nowadays spending the majority of their time using internet and social media platforms, evidence have been found that people are avoiding advertisements more often. This fact has concerned marketers because the process of persuading potential clients is tougher. What is, thus, vitally important in the context of marketing is credibility. Clients will only give a positive response to the advertisements if they are experienced as credible and informative (Ketelaar, Konig, Smit, & Thorbjørnsen, 2015). Trust is a crucial factor in order to influence a client’s decision making regarding a purchase. Since potential clients are information-seekers, Shareef, Archer, Fong, Rahman and Mann (2013) found that if an online medium is experienced as credible, it is possible to form a client’s buying behavior. Potential clients are not able to have a direct interaction with the representatives of a given product or service and cannot confirm if the quality is satisfying or not. Information-seekers online will, therefore, view, read and understand all of the information related to the product or service (Shareef, Archer, Fong, Rahman, & Mann, 2013).

Moreover, since previous research has revealed that celebrity endorsement is an effective marketing strategy, the credibility aspect cannot be excluded. The endorser need to be perceived as credible in order to convince clients to purchase a product or service. However, it is a challenge for companies to employ the right celebrity endorser (Li, Lee, & Lien, 2012). Additionally, it is also important to point out that physical attractiveness has a positive effect on a client’s perceived credibility in social media as well. Messages from highly attractive endorsers are fairly more credible to the potential clients (Chin, Lu, & Kao, 2014).

To continue, Kharouf, Lund and Sekhon (2014) found that competence will have a positive effect on the trustworthiness of the company providing a service. They further refer to Xie and Peng’s (2009) findings that if clients perceive a company’s competence, it will alleviate the degree of perceived risk, as clients are assured that the service provider can perform reliably (Kharouf, Lund, & Sekhon, 2014). Medical professionals enjoy certain right and privileges that are approved by the society (Brennan & Monson, 2014). In various professions, trust and professionalism have always had a strong connection to each other (Evett, 2006). Two general ideas regarding professionals are: the belief that certain work is so specialized that it is
impossible to perform without required training and experience and the belief that certain work cannot be standardized (Friedson, 2001). For physicians a degree of self-regulation and the attainment and maintenance of certification is included. In return people expect the physician to always put the needs of patients ahead of all other considerations. Patients with high trust for physicians are more likely to seek their services. Moreover, the patient’s loyalty could also improve the reputation of a physician through word-of-mouth recommendations (see eWOM below). Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding how profit motivations could have a negative effect on a physician’s desire to serve in the patient best interest (Brennan & Monson, 2014). A final aspect that is worth highlighting is the importance of dress codes in professions. Dress codes occur in professions to communicate professionalism not only within the organization but also to external stakeholders (Bazin & Aubert-Tarby, 2013).

2.4 The nature of aesthetic surgery

We have so far described how marketing communication has evolved through the past years, what persuasion means in the context of marketing and the importance of internet, for both marketers and clients. What is also important to add into this discussion is how aesthetic surgery became an offered service by a clinic rather than healthcare.

Since it has been an increase in volume and frequency of media coverage and advertising for aesthetic surgery, people get more used to it. In the beginning 1990s public relations, marketing and advertising has expanded extremely in the United States. As businesses need to counter different market forces such as competition and pricing pressure, providers of aesthetic surgery have come to recognize the value of advertising their services. This has raised ethical concerns (Lopez-Moriarty, 2015). Additionally, advocates for cosmetic surgery promote it as an accessible, rational and useful tool that can help to improve both the physical and mental health. Furthermore, Lett (2008) argues that the marketing of aesthetic surgery aims to convince people that this type of treatments are simple and risk free.

Brooks (2004) analyzed a large number of articles concerning aesthetic surgery and perceived that most of the articles portrayed the interventions in a very favorable light. She identified two promoting factors that encourage the acceptance and approval of aesthetic surgery. The first factor is the description of aesthetic surgery described as a new technology and the second factor are the reviews from individuals that have undertaken aesthetic surgery. The articles that
she characterized as favorable did not mention the side effects or the health risks. Articles that describe aesthetic surgery as a new technology highpoints easy procedures and accessibility. Botox is described as a simple aesthetic procedure which does not take more than ten minutes to perform. This new casual and unthreatening approach of aesthetic surgeries is highly evident through arranged events, so called plastic surgery parties. Groups of women are gathered to enjoy a pleasurable party with “gossip-talks” and botox treatments. A growing number of aesthetic surgery clinics are also offer botox injections and fillers on a casual “walk-in-basis” (Brooks, 2004).

Gimlin (2013) has explained the development of aesthetic surgery by discussing that is no longer a bizarre indulgence only for the famous or narcissistic, but treatments for ordinary people. Furthermore, the marketing efforts of surgeons play a great role in order to establish the idea of aesthetic surgery as an accepted lifestyle (Gimlin, 2013).

Aesthetic surgery is increasingly represented and experienced as a procedure not only to attain beauty, but also a true identity. To specify, this type of procedures are marketed by appealing to an individual’s feelings in becoming the “true-self” or having a body that represent the person one feels like inside. The aim is to convince individuals that they undertake aesthetic surgery to express their self-image or that they take control of their life without being motivated by beauty norms (Heyes, 2007). In certain aspects aesthetic surgery promotes an individual’s image as a site of creative self-formation and that the individual is a malleable object where new identities can be created. People often experience their aesthetically altered bodies as an expression of their “true-self” and feel more comfortable in their changed bodies (Brooks, 2004).

On the contrary, the marketing of cosmetic surgery often ignores the bodily responses such as pain, blood, scars and bruising that often accompany with the surgery. Aesthetic surgery engender a growing mistrust of bodily signals and challenges the view of the body as a legitimate, innate, source of knowledge and may undermine the capacity to serve as a self-informer and protector (Gimlin, 2013).

As medicine is turning more towards commercial and consumer orientation, some surgeons are becoming entrepreneurs and use marketing strategies to maximize profit (Mirivel, 2008). Faced with competitive markets and financial responsibilities, physicians must secure and maintain a consistently growing clientele (Zabava Ford & Snyder, 2000). Ethical concerns has been raised regarding how aesthetic surgery focus on the performance of medically unnecessary surgeries
on healthy individuals. It is hard to evaluate what is elective and what is medically necessary (Cain, Iglesia, Dickens, & Montgomery, 2013). Acting ethically in an aesthetic surgery context means above all to act in the best interest of the patient. To do this any aesthetic procedure should have the purpose to improve the patients’ quality of life to be acceptable (Ferreira, 2005). Aesthetic surgeons that operate in a profit oriented market risk to lose the view of the patients’ true needs and will eventually only focus on selling services and not helping people. The value of an individual cannot be identified only through its appearance and medicine should help people to get at a more realistic attitude towards themselves. If aesthetic surgery ignores this it can lose its identity as medicine (Maio, 2007).

Furthermore, aesthetic surgeons evaluate the clients’ bodily-aesthetic features as interpretive resources to promote different surgical interventions. The body becomes an object that is exposed for a surgeon’s evaluation and suggestions about how it is improvable. This makes the clients bodily dissatisfaction to a medical issue which contributes not only to make a surgery desirable but also promote it as a medical solution (Mirivel, 2008). Mirivel (2008) claims that consultation is one of the most persuasive moments in the decision-making of a client. By recommending a treatment, the aesthetic surgeon implies that it is medically necessary. Additionally, the surgeon use arguments that legitimize the given treatment by highlighting the desirable results without directly selling a service (Mirivel, 2008).

2.5 Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) is a marketing strategy that encourages and facilitates for clients to talk about a product or service in various social media platforms. It is a natural way for clients to spread messages to their friends and other social media followers (Yang, 2013). Social networking sites offer companies an opportunity to spread positive eWOM and increase their opportunities to build awareness and acquiring new customers (Moran & Muzellec, 2014). The traditional perspective of Word of Mouth (WOM) is that WOM is a communication between a receiver and a communicator were the receiver do not perceive the communication as commercial. This perspective of WOM remains relevant in social media context and it is more likely to be called eWOM (Toder-Alona, Brunelbl, & Fournierb, 2014). The emergence of social media has increased the possibility for consumers to share information concerning brands, special offers and experiences (Moran & Muzellec, 2014).
Furthermore, a significant part of all eWOM can be assumed to come from consumers own desire to share information. Henning-Thurau et al. (2004) describes eWOM as any positive or negative statement made by potential, existing or previous consumers about a product or company, which is made available to people online. As a result, eWOM is nowadays considered to be an essential part of the consumer’s decision-making journey (Moran & Muzellec, 2014). Consumers communicate to support or criticize products, services or brands they have used. eWOM should therefore, offer truthful balanced evaluations from the perspective of the user (Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009). However, eWOM as a result of firms’ actions has increased as a strategy and it can be difficult to differentiate between true eWOM and created eWOM (Abendroth & Heyman, 2013). Toder-Alona, Brunelbl & Fournierb (2014) argue that eWOM is more than an instrument to exchange relevant information about a brand, product or service, it is a social act that has the power to influence actions. Nevertheless, eWOM marketing is considered to be an efficient and credible marketing strategy that has unlimited influence on consumer’s brand awareness, purchase intention and decision making (Yang, 2013).

Earlier studies described how the content of a message affects the receiver. Schindler and Bickart (2012) explained that effective messages should be in a moderate length, contain positive product statements and non-evaluative information concerning the product and finally information about the reviewer or entertaining content. Furthermore, previous marketing scholars have investigated some important factors that predict consumers’ participations as spreaders of eWOM related to a product, service or company. These factors include social benefits, self-enhancement, and economic incentives among others (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004).

To continue, with increased use of social networking, eWOM is becoming a crucial strategy in social influence and marketing purpose. It is essential in marketing to reach out to a large group potential customers and eWOM facilitates this via social interactions. Through eWOM distribution information is spread fast, easily and widely among social networks. Nowadays appropriate marketing promotions performed on social networks can generate an increase in sales and reduce the cost for campaigns. Furthermore, weblogs provide more trustworthy and open communication opportunities were people can read, commentate, socialize and make new connections. Blogging is considered to be a significant driving factor to eWOM since the blogosphere has become a platform for marketers to promote their products or services. By targeting influential individuals online companies can promote new products and hope for a diffusing of the product and further recommendations (Liu, o.a., 2015).
2.6 Opinion leaders in social media marketing

An opinion leader could be viewed as someone who influences attitudes and behavior of others through information networks (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). In online environments opinion leaders are characterized by a high level of knowledge in a specific market, innovative behavior and involvement (Lyons & Henderson, 2005). Opinions leaders that has a tendency to share information and influence others online have been recognized in different areas (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). Due to the fact that opinion leaders in social media has a large number of followers, news that are spread through them are spread wider and reach out to more people (Ma, Sian Lee, & Hoe-Lian Goh, 2014).

The traditional view of opinion leaders assume that they belong to the better educated group in the society. Previous research regarding opinion leaders have been mainly focused on how elites influence mass opinion about politics. However, an opinion leaders do not necessary need to be elites, but simply are the ones who actually move, shape or affect the public opinion. By looking at popular media opinion leaders they are those who provides their followers with new information, ideas and opinions. The social media revolution in marketing communication has provided the actors with power in order to influence their followers (Gökçe, Hatipoğlu, Göktürk, Luetgert, & Saygin, 2014).

An opinion leader’s influence could be divided into informational and normative influence (Deutsch & Gerrard, 1995). Informational influence refers to a tendency to accept and trust information shared from others. An opinion leader can for example influence other consumers by recommending products or services. On the other hand, normative influence refers to a consumers’ tendency to adapt to others expectations (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1994). In addition a majority of people aim to create and maintain meaningful social relationships which often results in adaptation of proper behaviors to be approved by others. An example of such behavior could be to adopt a product in order to be belong a specific group (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

Previous research has revealed a significant difference between networks that contained opinion leaders and those networks that did not. It was also noticed that information was spread faster and products were adopted in a larger range if opinion leaders were active in a social network (Van Eck, Jager, & Leeflang, 2011). Furthermore, empirical findings suggest that consumers that perceived self-congruity with bloggers are more susceptible towards informational
influence. The more a reader has in common with the blogger, the more influenced he/she becomes by the information provided by the blogger (Wang, Hsu, Huang, & Chen, 2015). The blogosphere has become an efficient platform for marketers to promote new products and it can also help customers to find product comments and purchasing suggestions (Liu, o.a., 2015).

Finally this confirms that opinion leaders are especially attractive to businesses because of their potential to spread eWOM and influence people. However, the opinions regarding who actually is an opinion leader differ. In this study opinion leaders are considered to be individuals who show a strong urge to share and spread eWOM, who also has the ability to affect other client’s opinion and who have a continuous presence in social media.
3. Method

This section presents and argues for the research design and strategy, the selection of empirical context, the collection of empirical data and analysis method. Finally we discuss the validity, reliability and ethical considerations of this thesis.

Since the purpose of this thesis is “to explore how young women view and respond to marketing by aesthetic surgery clinics in social media”, the implication of “views” in this thesis must be explained. Views are in this case reflected in whether or not clients find the marketing message appealing, i.e. positive or negative views, which are likely to be based upon if they see any specific issues with the marketing message or not. These issues might emerge due to that consumers may think that the marketing strategy used is unjustified or misleading. Clients’ views therefore imply the same as consumers’ thoughts, perceptions and judgments.

3.1 Selection of empirical context

Firstly we started with a creation of a Facebook and an Instagram account for the purpose to collect data and understand how the marketing is presented in social media. Secondly, we searched for aesthetic surgery clinics on a Swedish website which provided us with a database including aesthetic surgery clinics, currently operating at the Swedish market. Thirdly, we conducted a list over all clinics using Facebook and Instagram. In order to include a given clinic, it needed to be an active user of both Facebook and Instagram. The pictures have furthermore been collected during a time period of two weeks when we actively followed several clinics on Instagram and Facebook. During this period we took so called screen-shots of the pictures that we found relevant for our research. A screenshot is an image taken by a person to record the visible items displayed on the monitor, television, or other visual output device in use (Techterms, 2016). The choice of pictures collected from Facebook and Instagram were based on how we experienced them ourselves. Since we wanted to have as wide material as possible the chosen pictures were considered to be “light”, “medium” and “extreme” types of posts.

Facebook

Facebook is a social media platform that permits other social media platforms to be included in a so called Facebook profile. Furthermore, the site offers several opportunities’ for
communication with other members. Users can interact by sending private messages or post public messages on each other walls (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). A wall is a space on the profile where the user or friends can write messages, add photographs or share links and other posts. Communication also occurs in groups where members can both create and join groups. The so called news feed provides a user’s friends with information about certain Facebook activities and also gives further information regarding activities of his/hers friends (West, Lewis, & Currie, 2009).

**Instagram**

Instagram is an application developed worldwide for smartphones and other mobile devices, where the users share their photos. The application makes it easy to capture, customize and share photos and videos with a number of people called “followers”. The user can also add a short description to the photo before posting it online. These description often includes so called “Hashtags” which allows users to make their photo available in a wider community (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Photos published on Instagram can also be shared across other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter among others (Gibbs, Meese, & Nansen, 2015).

In February 2015, Instagram had over 150 million active users and 55 million pictures were shared daily (Eldin, 2016). In Sweden Instagram continues to grow in rapidly among all ages. During 2015, 40 per cent of the Swedish internet users used Instagram and over 20 per cent used Instagram daily (Ilbring, 2016).

**3.2 Collection of empirical data and analysis methods**

In order to explore how consumers experience aesthetic surgery clinic’s marketing in social media our intention was to capture this mainly through our own observations that constitute the source of knowledge.

Focus groups are a form of group interviews with the aim to observe the communication between the respondents in order to generate data for research purpose. It is a form of qualitative research where the respondents are asked about their opinion, perception and attitude towards a product, service, and advertisement among others (Kitzinger, 1995). The respondent are encouraged to talk to each other, ask questions, comment on each other and share experiences in the group. This method is particularly useful when exploring people’s knowledge and
experience. Additionally, it reveals not only what people think but also how they think and why they think in that way (Kitzinger, 1995). For instance, in marketing research it is possible to get an immediate and vivid picture of how people react to different kind of products, services or commercials (Wibeck, 2010). It is not a suitable method if the respondents do not have anything in common to share and discuss (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015).

To sum up, one key assumption is that the method can create awareness concerning aspects that the respondents have not reflected upon before. By listening to other participants’ opinions a respondent can get influenced and change his/her way of thinking. Focus groups are also a research strategy that is considered to be effective when the investigated topic is sensitive (Wibeck, 2010). For instance, more outspoken members of the group can break the ice by sharing their own experiences first and, in turn, encourage the shyer ones to do the same thing (Kitzinger, 1995).

### 3.3 Participant selection and delimitation

The selection and delimitation of participants in this study have been highly affected by different factors that we needed to reflect upon. What we first needed to consider was to choose respondents with some kind of knowledge about the subject which has been investigated (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). The sample was primarily collected on the basis of our circle of acquaintances. The process of choosing participants based upon their accessibility is referred to as convenience sampling, which is a non-probability technique of obtaining a sample (Wibeck, 2010). Furthermore, we have decided to choose a group of women that already knew each other and that we believe can bring valuable knowledge regarding the subject. This is beneficial since focus groups are based on common ideas and shared experiences. More compatible groups are also proven to perform their tasks more efficiently than less compatible groups because it takes less energy to maintain the group identity (Wibeck, 2010). Moreover, it allows a relaxed atmosphere which encourages the respondents to share their opinions spontaneously. However, there are researchers who believe that the participants should not know each other from before because it can affect the group climate negatively (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). Despite this, our belief is that it will be more beneficial to let the participants know each other since this study deals with ethical challenges and the subject cannot be seen as widely accepted. The focus group interviews were performed at one of the participant’s home with the aim to create a tolerant and non-judgmental environment.
To continue, it is also important to consider that different attitudes may occur (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). In order to be able to capture these differences we have decided to conduct two different focus groups. In the first group two of four respondents have undertaken aesthetic surgery procedures and in the second focus group none of the respondents have undergone any procedures, but are familiar with this type of beauty treatments. In the first focus group the respondents were between 22 and 29 years old and have different occupations, were two have full time jobs and two are university students. In the second focus group the respondents were between 21 and 26 years old and all of them are students. The selection concerning age is a strategic one because we wanted the respondents to be active users of social media and to have basic knowledge regarding aesthetic surgery procedures.

Moreover, what we also reflected upon in the selection process was the restricted time period and lack of resources. Due to these crucial factors, we decided to perform two focus groups in order to be able to handle all empirical data. Another choice of selection was to focus only on young women since this industry mainly focuses on women.

3.4 Focus group strategy

We decided to perform an unstructured focus group because we wanted to encourage the respondents to discuss freely. This made it possible for us to identify theoretical marketing concepts from the discussion that we believe can be helpful to get a better understanding for the empirical findings. An unstructured focus group interview encourages the respondents to have a more open discussion without a moderator controlling it. The goal was a free discussion were the moderator can observe the interaction and argumentation in the group to capture spontaneous ideas. An advantage with this strategy is that it is the group members and not the moderator that bring controversial aspects into the discussion (Wibeck, 2010). When it comes to how the different aspects in the discussion are captured, this method does not require specific questions that should be answered. The objective is instead to listen to the participants and let them discuss the aspects which they consider important (Wibeck, 2010). In order to be sure that important aspects that have been discussed should not be missed, we recorded both focus group interviews.

We did not have a starting point in a number of specific questions, instead we had some prepared areas that we wanted to be covered by the discussion. Additionally, to be able to create a fruitful discussion we presented a so called stimulus material. This material can constitute of
articles, pictures, videos or something that has a connection to the subject that will be discussed (Wibeck, 2010). The moderator started the discussion by letting the respondents imaging themselves seeing the content of twenty screenshots in the feed of their own Facebook and Instagram accounts. They were also asked to discuss what kind of message they believed the picture was supposed to communicate. All of the screen-shots were disorganized and presented for the respondents simultaneously. The reason why the material was presented in that way was because we wanted to analyse the respondent’s views and responses with as low involvement as possible from the moderator. Furthermore, we only interrupted the discussion if there was a risk that some of the areas were missed. Additionally, in order to create a connection and affinity between the respondents we started with some opening questions. These questions were more focused on facts rather than attitudes and opinions with the intention to achieve a more relaxed group environment.

Since we are interested in how consumers experience the marketing of aesthetic surgery procedures in social media, it was of great importance to capture the ideas that came up spontaneously during the discussion. In addition, it was also of interest to see into what extent these ideas differed between the women who undertook aesthetic surgery and women who did not. When we started to notice that the discussion was coming to an end we asked if there were anyone who wanted to add something in order to allow every respondent to reflect upon new aspects that have not been mentioned.

3.5 Processing and analysing the empirical data

Before the focus group interviews were performed, different roles between us were assigned. One of us was the moderator, the one to introduce the subject and to intervene in the discussion in order to guide the respondents in the desired direction. The other one of us had the assignment to record, observe the group dynamics and body language of the respondents. Moreover, both of us took part in both focus group interviews which facilitated the compilation of the results. Moreover, all transliteration was performed within twenty-four hours after the focus group interviews to ensure that we remembered everything freshly.

When it comes to the analysis, we started by going back to the purpose of this study because the research question controls both the data collection and the choice of method of analysis. The analysis is about encoding material, dividing it into units and looking for trends and patterns that emerged during the discussion in the focus groups (Wibeck, 2010). All different aspects
that were brought into the discussion were later grouped into several overall themes named with different codes. The empirical data was therefore, fundamental for a creation of the different themes. To be even more specific, all aspects that were similar or had something in common, were selected under one theme. Starrin (1994) explains how a theory can arise from empirical findings. He states that it is not about a selection of great amount of data, but rather a selection of ideas generated from these data (Starrin & Svensson, 1994). In this study we have mainly focused on capturing these ideas by asking young women about their views’ and, therefore, we have an inductive reasoning.

3.6 Research design
It is commonly claimed that qualitative methods fit well when investing a phenomenon with the aim to create a better understanding regarding the subject. In contrast to quantitative research that attempts to prove significant causal relationship and measurable frequencies, qualitative studies are designed to both develop new theories and discover the unexpected (Mann & Schweiger, 2009). This research approach offers a range of methods were group interviews are a potential action of data collection. Unlike the deductive reasoning that has the starting point in a theory, this study deals with subjective experiences created in the society. The phenomenological attitude requires openness to what is actually experienced and the empirical data is fundamental for the choice of theories to clarify the findings (Giorgi, 2002). The philosophy focus often on unique and specific perceptions and experiences rather than on general patterns within a larger population. It is therefore, the researcher’s task encourage individuals to express their perceptions in words (Justesen, Mik-Meyer, & Nanna, 2011).

The objective of the present study is not to make any standardised statements, but to focus on the specific characteristics of marketing. We thus argue that a hermeneutic approach is suitable because it allows interpretation of how hidden marketing meanings in symbols, attributes and messages applied by aesthetic surgery clinics in Sweden are viewed by clients. We assume that this hidden pattern is deeply rooted in the minds of clients and can be revealed through observations of how they express their perceptions spontaneously. As a consequence, a qualitative approach has been chosen.
3.7 Validity, reliability and generalizability

Validity has to do with the interpretation of the observed phenomenon. Furthermore, it is about to call things by their true name and study what you are supposed to study (Wibeck, 2010). A risk with focus group studies is that the respondents hesitate to express their thoughts due to group pressure or fear to embarrass the other members with sensitive comments (Wibeck, 2010). As mentioned earlier, we took this into consideration when we constructed the focus groups.

Moreover, what is meant by reliability is that different researchers will come up with the same results when studying the material independent of time (Wibeck, 2010). To promote the reliability, both of us analyzed the empirical material separately to have the possibility to compare and later discuss. Furthermore, both of us also coded the empirical material independently to see how boundaries are drawn between different categories.

Finally, what is important to mention here is that the purpose with focus groups is not to make empirical statements, but to achieve an analytical understanding for people’s interpretation regarding a specific subject (Wibeck, 2010). Since the study concerns young women that were not randomly selected and their experience regarding the marketing performed by aesthetic surgery clinics operating in Sweden, the result is not empirical generalizable.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Some researchers believe that a focus group strategy is more ethical because the respondents are allowed to express themselves on their own conditions. A person can abstain from making any statement regarding a sensitive topic (Wibeck, 2010). It is also important that the respondents are well informed regarding the purpose of the study and how their contribution will be used (Halkier, 2010). Furthermore, to respect privacy all names of the respondents have been changed. This have been made in the transcription as well and other information that could potentially disclose the identity of the respondents. Additionally, all clinics are anonymized in the appendices.

In the first focus group we have decided to rename the respondents with the names; Elsa, Hilda, Bonnie and Gunn. Bonnie and Gunn have undertaken aesthetic surgery and Elsa and Hilda have not. In the second focus group we renamed the respondents with the names; Klara, Nilla, Teja and Elena where none of the respondent have undertaken any aesthetic procedures.
4. Empirical findings and analysis

This section of the thesis will present our findings from the focus groups and an analysis. The empirical findings are combined from both focus groups and are thereafter analyzed. Moreover, the analysis is linked to the marketing concepts described in section two. The section below is structured according to the themes discussed by all respondents.

False marketing

Since the purpose of the study was to explore what young women think about marketing of aesthetic surgery in social media, it was also of great interest to capture how they respond to it why they respond in that way.

The discussion in both focus groups was started by the respondents’ overall reflection regarding pictures that contained beautiful women or fit female bodies (Appendix 1). There was a general agreement on that this type of pictures did not have anything in common with aesthetic surgery. One of the respondents expressed that she viewed some of the pictures as false marketing. She pointed out that there was absolutely no connection between the images of good looking skinny girls and the treatments that were promoted by the clinic. Another respondent reflected upon that the girls in the pictures had probably not even performed any surgery, but are all natural. In the first focus group the respondents continued to discuss about that this could lead young girls to believe that a surgery could make them look like the girls in the pictures. Moreover, Elsa pointed out that it is irritating that the clinics are the ones to decide what is attractive and what is not.

Furthermore, the participants also believed that the clinics posting these type of pictures were referring to sex. The discussion revolved around that the pictures were supposed to create feelings of coveted dignity and that they had a tempting effect on the person being exposed for them. Hilda contributed to the discussion by expressing “Of course, I would also like to have breast like this” while the other respondents smiled and agreed. An aspect that was of interest was that these pictures were considered unrealistic because no one can attain a “perfect body” by buying injections or botox.

To continue, the respondents discussed the pictures that promote fat-reduction (Appendix 5). According to them, these pictures showed a desired result but were not credible. This evoked negative feelings in the first group and especially for Elsa. She thinks that the pictures are
“fake”. Additionally, Hilda agreed and added that the pictures look more like art than promotion of aesthetic surgery. All respondents were in agreement that it would be more appealing to show before and after pictures of “ordinary people” and referred to these pictures once again as false commercial. Gunn added that promoting aesthetic surgery by showing beautiful girls and sexy bodies is more a motivating factor to make other girls want to look that way and for that reason undergo a surgery. Bonnie shed further light on this discussion and said that images of sexy bodies was something that she think might have motivated her to perform her breast augmentation. On the other hand, Teja from the second focus group said that she viewed these pictures negatively because they do all not belong to the clinics which are sharing them on their Instagram and Facebook accounts (Appendix 1). Furthermore, she stated:

*I don’t think I would be motivated by this picture at all if it was posted by a clinic. It would feel extremely false that the clinic use supermodels in it’s promotion, it makes me feel that the clinic doesn’t have any real cases from it’s own practices. I would be more motivated by a pre-and after picture of a previous patient.\]

After this admission, Nilla claimed that if she would ever consider to undergo an aesthetic procedure she would become very irritated if she found pictures on girls with “perfect bodies” on a clinic’s social media account. Moreover, there were similar opinions regarding pre-and after pictures in the first focus group. Bonnie expressed:

*I think clinics are playing on the idea people have of their own appearance. Here, an individual can actually relate to the person in the picture and in the same way they can recognize the problem that is presented. Simultaneously, a solution is offered on how people can get rid of their problem and how the solution is tailored especially for me.\]

In marketing context, marketers can use persuasive messages in order to make a potential client desire the gains provided by a service (Higgins, 2000). The both focus groups discussed that this type of pictures showing attractive women could be a way to persuade potential clients to undertake a surgery in order to achieve the same appearance as the models in the pictures. Hirsch, Kang and Bodenhausen (2012) studied the effects of perzonilised messages and found that by forming messages which appeal to a consumers’ preferences such are processed more fluently and tend to be evaluated more positively. Perloff (2014) claims that attractive endorsers can affect the way women see themselves. Furthermore, women have the tendency to judge and compare themselves to the beautiful models who are advertised. For that reason, some women are ready purchase a given service that promote a positive result. One of the experienced respondents admitted that this type of pictures influenced her and could have been the
persuasive motivators to make her desire a breast augmentation. Additionally, attractive people are also considered to be more persuasive compared to the unattractive ones (Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008).

The respondents identified sex appeals in the pictures and some were provoked because there was a lack of connection between the picture and the offered treatment. As Vézina and Paul (1997) point out, the effectiveness of sex appeals in marketing depend on the level of association between the service and the marketing message. The fact that some respondents became irritated can be supported by Goodman, Morris and Sutherland (2008) findings that sexual appeals in advertisements can evoke negative feelings. They argue that women do not like to be objectified and sexualized in the context of marketing and especially if the promoted product has no evident association or need of sex appeals (Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008). Moreover, one respondent underlined that the pictures posted by a given clinic did not belong to the clinic itself. She was suspicious because the pictures contained “supermodels” and therefore, she viewed them as false. Her response to the pictures can be linked to the negative side of persuasion in marketing. If the recipient of a persuasive message perceive the message as manipulative, he/she can also feel attacked by it (Epure, Eisenstat, & Dinu, 2014).

**Competitions**

When screenshots of different competitions and discounts were brought to the respondents’ attention, one of the posts from a clinic’s Facebook account evoked strong reactions in the both focus groups. It was a girl’s justification that made her win an injection in a competition (Appendix 2). Elsa commented this and said “*this is not okay, this one is sick, truly sick*”. Bonnie added that according to her it is “crazy” that the clinic posted the justification on their Facebook. The responses were similar in the second focus group. Elena started that for her, an injection was overall a very strange price to win in a competition. On the other hand, Teja believed that a clinic is not able to control the creativeness of the participants of a competition, but she still thought that it was extremely unmoral of a clinic to hold a competition. According to Nilla, aesthetic surgery is becoming even more normalized through this type of competitions. The more people who participates and undergo beauty procedures the more it feels acceptable. Klara said that from her point of view, the clinics try to make us believe that beauty treatments are an ordinary thing to do, but the fact is that it is still a serious decision. Another aspect that was highlighted in the discussion was Teja’s reflections about competitions overall. She said that the clinics are able to reach more people when the competitions encourage clients to “share”
and “like” a clinic’s post on Facebook (Appendix 2). Furthermore, she also added that this way of engaging customers into the clinic’s activities, might influence people to choose one specific clinic over another.

Gunn and Hilda thought that it is wrong to even offer injections as winning prices in a competition. When the moderator asked why they thought it was wrong, they answered that this strategy could persuade more girls who otherwise would not be interested. This in turn, could lead to an addiction. As Elsa expressed it:

\[
\text{You get used to see another altered self and when the lip goes back to its normal size, you don’t like it because this was the part of yourself that you chose to correct.}
\]

Elsa enlarge her lips frequently with fillers to maintain the size she desires. Coming back to the discussion Bonnie added that if you believe that you will look better by doing an injection and the result is satisfying, this could be a trigger. Hilda continued and reasoned that once you take the first step to undergo such treatments it would probably be easier to make other improvements of yourself.

The discussion moved on and the underlying reasons to why competitions are used by clinics were brought up. The first thing that came to Gunn’s mind was that competitions increase the recognition of a clinic and contribute to reach more potential customers. If someone is sharing an activity undertaken by a clinic all of this person’s friends and acquaint can see the activity which they maybe would never get in contact with otherwise. Hilda also said that if she would get an injection for free she could easily “share” the competition try fillers just for fun. Gunn flicked in that it is a good way to encourage people to do it more spontaneously.

When it comes to competitions it can be related to the eWOM strategy that encourages people to spread messages to their friends in a natural way. Additionally, by arranging competitions a marketer can facilitate for potential clients to talk about a product and in this case a service (Yang, 2013). eWOM can increase brand awareness which in turn, helps a company to acquire new customers (Moran & Muzellec, 2014; Yang, 2013). Additionally, there were also reflections regarding that competitions increase the awareness of a specific clinic. Teng, Khong and Goh (2015) state that marketers search for the best options to maximize their efforts in the sea of different social media. Furthermore, Shen and Bissell (2013) believe that if people are spreading positive recommendations this might result in an effective brand management. It was observed that the respondents in the first group considered competitions to be a motivator.
to undergo a surgery. One respondent reasoned that the first step is crucial in order to consider additional surgeries. As defined by Moran and Muzellec (2014), eWOM is an important part of the decision-making journey for an individual.

Another aspect is that individuals are more motivated to spread eWOM if they can gain social benefits, self-enhancement or economic incentives for instance (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). This is in line with one of the respondent’s response to the pictures presenting competitions. She claimed that a free injection could encourage her to engage in the competition by spreading the requested information on her private social media accounts.

To continue, both groups reflected upon that competitions are an effective way to reach out to potential clients. Social media is a powerful tool which facilitates the accessibility of information and speed up the spreading process (Liu, o.a., 2015). Although competitions can be an effective way for the purpose of engaging clients in a clinic’s activities, some of the respondents viewed competitions negatively. They did not like the idea of an injection being the winning price in a competition. Competitions can in this case be considered as a creative way for aesthetic surgery clinics to reach their potential clients, especially by inviting them to write a justification explaining why they should be the winner. Moreover, one of them added that it is impossible for a clinic to control the creativeness of the participants in a competition. Epsure, Eisenstat and Dinu (2014) claim that the advertising industry is setting higher requirements on marketers’ creativity. They further discuss that creativeness tend to create both good and bad marketing messages. This can be the reason why a free injection is viewed as a strange winning price.

**Influencers**

As the respondents recognized famous Swedish bloggers in the screenshots (Appendix 3), the respondents started to discuss how they believed that the bloggers could affect young girls. Hilda pointed out that the clinics are clever by using bloggers since they have the possibility to reach out to a wide target audience. Teja argued that she viewed this type of pictures as highly influencing. She said that if a person is a true fan of a blogger for instance, the blogger becomes successively a friend of that person. She also added that she normally consider friends as a credible source of information. On the contrary, Klara and Nilla viewed the influencers in the pictures negatively. Nilla said that celebrities do not influence her because if she would consider
an aesthetic surgery she would rather trust recommendations from her family and friends. Teja flicked in by commenting Nilla’s view:

*Think, you would never end up on a clinic’s Instagram account without finding it through Paow’s blog if you was a fan.*

Furthermore, Teja also mentioned that it is risky for a clinic to be associated with a blogger in case a scandal would occur. Klara added that it is extremely important to choose the right influencer, otherwise she would perceive a clinic unserious in its practices.

Even though Nilla viewed bloggers and other influencers as useless in her case, she brought up a story concerning her sister’s breast augmentation in the discussion. She pointed out that people like her sister who is reading blogs daily and who is fascinated by how celebrities look, are highly motivated by influencers in social media. Moreover, she claimed that her sister might have been motivated to undergo breast augmentation due to influencers. To continue, Gunn contributed to the discussion by expressing her strong opinions regarding influencers:

*I think that it is pretty sick. Especially this two bloggers who have super young followers and the fact that they undergo such surgeries influences young girls to do the same thing.*

All of the respondents in the first focus group agreed and claimed that people might be affected to a great extent. They continued to talk about how influential bloggers and well known Instagram Profiles are in the society today. They referred to easy marketing and said that they view a blogger as a friend who is recommending something. Respondents in both focus groups pointed out that when a blogger makes a post regarding a product or service it is not seen as commercial, but as something they have used and enjoyed and are therefore, recommending it.

When the respondents saw pictures of famous female bloggers undertaking aesthetic treatments, there was an overall agreement that bloggers are highly influential. An opinion leader has the tendency to influence other individuals by recommending specific products and services which can lead the individual to a purchase (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1994). Deutsch and Gerrard (1995) described this as informational influence which refers to a client’s tendency to accept and trust the information by an opinion leader. Moreover, one respondent reflected upon how important the relationship between a follower and a blogger is. The more these individuals have in common the more trustworthy becomes the information provided by the blogger (Wang, Hsu, Huang, & Chen, 2015). Since there are clients who view bloggers as highly attractive and see them buying specific aesthetic treatments, a client can see an obvious
link between a blogger’s attractiveness and the treatment. For that reason the blogger can be perceived as an “expert” and can therefore, be considered as trustworthy (Till & Busler, 2000).

In addition, Liu et.al (2015) highlighted that bloggers are significant driving factors to eWOM. The respondents discussed this aspect and pointed out that it is more likely that a person ends up on an aesthetic surgery clinic’s Instagram account through a blogger’s recommendation. Furthermore, two of the respondents in the second focus group viewed the bloggers as negative influencers and one of them believed that it is risky to link a brand to a famous endorser. This confirms Li, Lee and Lien (2012) findings regarding that it is important to choose the right endorser for an advertisement. Also, it is crucial to consider who is representing a given brand in social media because if the chosen endorser makes a post with inappropriate content it could lead to devastating consequences for a company (Arnaboldi & Coget, 2016).

**Credible and professional**

When the respondents noticed the pictures containing doctors, nurses and various certificates (Appendix 4), they responded similiarly. Both Elena and Teja said that they would surely read the information provided by the clinic in social media. In addition, one clinic posted a picture of the place where all its patients rested after surgery. Nilla expressed that the house on the picture looked very inviting but she could not understand what exactly it was (Appendix 4). Elena and Klara said that they viewed the picture as an invitation to a spa. According to Teja these pictures influenced her more positively than the ones perceived as false marketing. She stated:

> Let’s say that you would consider a surgery and would see the picture we saw before and the ones we see now. I would personally be much more motivated by these pictures that actually contain professional people.

Klara agreed on what Teja expressed by adding that she also perceived the pictures more credible and that she actually could see how the treatments were performed in the picture. We also noticed that a commonly used term by the respondents was “professional”. For instance, when Nilla commented one picture she said that the employees looked professional which indicates that the clinic is professional. However, Teja added that she did not became influenced by information that a clinic is certified. According to her, a certificate does not tell anything about the surgeons. Also, if there would emerge any complications after a surgery, these people would not be able to do anything anyway. On the contrary, the other respondents had a different
opinion and claimed that a certificate signal credibility and professionalism. Moreover, all of the respondents mentioned that these pictures were not offensive or provocative. Bonnie who has done a breast augmentation explained what she valued when she chose a clinic for the surgery. She described the process as following:

Something that was crucial when I chose the clinic was the recommendations I got from friends who had been at the same clinic. Also comments and ratings on Facebook were important since people can express themselves more freely there. I also believe that the fact that all employees were wearing medical clothes on pictures affected me. They looked professional so my thought was that this clinic know what they are doing. Furthermore, I choose to wait for one surgeon one month just because he was a specialist.

After Bonnies retelling, all respondents in the first focus group agreed on that this was probably the most appropriate way to choose the right clinic. Overall, all respondents described that these pictures mediated feelings of professionalism and also some kind of “spa-feeling”.

When the respondents discussed the process of collecting information online they underlined the importance of recommendations on social media. One respondent described how her process of collecting information looked like before she decided which clinic to choose. A client will only response positively to an advertisement if it is perceived as credible and informative (Ketelaar, Konig, Smit, & Thorbjørnsen, 2015). Moreover, a client does not have a direct contact with the service provider and cannot estimate the quality of the service. One respondent reflected upon a picture presenting employees wearing medical clothes. Bazin and Aubert-Tarby (2013) explain that dress codes in certain professions aim to communicate professionalism. Clients are therefore, considered to be information-seekers who will view, read and understand all information that is provided by a clinic in this case (Shareef, Archer, Fong, Rahman, & Mann, 2013). A finding by Otte, Porcnik, Hedén and Montemurro (2015) support the information seeking process through social media. They found that 46 per cent of a clinic’s patients sought information regarding the clinic in social media.

Additionally, a respondent also highlighted that it was important for her that the surgeon was a specialist and that the clinic was trustworthy. This fact can be linked to Kharouf, Lund and Sekhon’s (2014) discussion that competence have a positive effect on how trustworthy an offered service is since the client will be assured that the service provider performs dependably.

Since “professional” was a term that was used by the respondents in both focus groups, this were considered to be of great importance when choosing a surgeon. Furthermore, professionalism is proven to be associated with trust (Evetts, 2006). If a client perceive a
surgeon as credible and qualified, it is more likely that this person turns to this specific surgeon. Also, if this client will be satisfied with the result, it is possible that a positive eWOM will be spread (Brennan & Monson, 2014). This was highly evident when one respondent claimed that she waited one month only to let a specific specialist perform her breast augmentation. Furthermore, medical professionals have certain privileges and rights like for instance certifications which are approved by the society (Brennan & Monson, 2014). Friedson (2001) argues that certain work has a high level of specialization that it would be impossible to perform it without education and training. Additionally, in general the respondents expected that medical professionals have the required competence.

**Increased normalization and accessibility**

All of the discussed aspects in both groups lead to the conclusion that a majority of the respondents perceive a normalization of aesthetic surgery. They all agreed on that social media was a contributing factor due to the fact that many young girls spend their time using it. Bonnie described her view of the normalisation as following:

> Even if you get provoked and feel that it is totally wrong you get more and more used to it. Then maybe it will take 1000 pictures before it feels normal but suddenly you will not react anymore. Maybe you will start to consider an injection or plastic surgery without even reflecting upon it, because this is normal for you now.

With this statement Bonnie introduced a new topic to the discussion. The topic concerned the perception of how normal aesthetic surgery felt nowadays compared to when the respondents were younger. Elsa perceived beauty treatments as normal and above all that they are easily accessible. For instance the respondents started to discuss that hair salons are more often offering beauty interventions such as botox and fillers. This accessibility transforms this type of treatments to an “everyday-thing” and it also makes is easier to do them more spontaneously. Furthermore, Hilda told the others that she has acquaints that are visiting special events arranged by different clinics where free injections are offered.

Brooks (2004) pointed out a number of reasons why there has been a normalization of aesthetic surgery. She claims that the more people are exposed to media and advertising of aesthetic surgery, the more people get used to it. Similarly, Shankar and Batra (2009) argue that consumers are nowadays spending more time online instead of watching television or using other legacy media. Both focus group pointed out that young girls are spending more time on
social media. Shen and Bissell (2013) underlined that it is crucial for a company to distribute its services through different types of social media due to an individual’s different preferences.

To continue, Brooks (2004) also states that botox became an aesthetic procedure that does not take more than ten minutes. These facts are strongly in line with the discussion that was held regarding that this type of treatments are becoming an “everyday-thing”. Another aspect that Brooks (2004) has emphasized is that advocates of aesthetic surgery promote it as an accessible and useful tool which is able to improve the physical appearance and the mental health. Furthermore, one respondent mentioned that some people might be encouraged to purchase an aesthetic treatment without a prior reflection. This type of marketing messages are called *subliminal messages* and able to persuade people without their awareness (Epure, Eisenstat, & Dinu, 2014).

**Ethics**

Ethical aspects were highlighted multiple times during the discussion in the second focus group. The first time when the respondents started to reflect upon unethical behavior in the marketing of aesthetic surgery was when they discovered the pictures concerning competitions and discounts (Appendix 2 and Appendix 5). Klara experienced competitions as unappropriated in promoting aesthetic surgery, she stated:

*The whole thing about a competition in order to win an injection is literally sick. It’s like “Oh! maybe if I write a cool justification I win an injection, damn so nice!” I really think it’s wrong.*

When the discussion went on in the second focus group, Klara was astonished over the discounts offered by various clinics. Once Klara expressed her negative astonishment about the discounts, rest of the respondents engaged in the discussion. Teja convinced the other girls by saying that she perceive the offered discounts as dangerous. Nilla commented this by saying that it feels bizarre to have the possibility to buy discounted breasts. She continued that discounts are signaling low quality of the treatments.
Teja contributed to the discussion and reflected further upon the consequences of discount offerings:

*Many of these treatments are very costly. Imagine that you are a student or have recently lost your job and you feel bad about your life in general, but you have some savings. Well, it is a very bad way of spending them, but it is still about this... It is all about a psychological game, that you need to be a better version of yourself. So if you end up in a depression it is easier to turn to this type of treatments that give you something positive about yourself.*

Moreover, Teja highlighted a promotion from Instagram where the clinic offered ten per cent discount (Appendix 2). She said that it was probably for people having anxiety about exposing themselves in bikini during the summertime. Elena flicked in and said that a surgery would not solve that problem because no one want to have wounds or scars either.

When a picture containing a pre-and after result was noticed in the focus group (Appendix 5), Elena reacted and said that that outcome was physically not achievable. Klara was irritated about that the picture was not presenting the outcome of the same woman. All of the respondents continued the discussion by saying that even though the heavily built woman looked unhealthy, it was not okay to present her as the unpleasant body image.

Many times during the first focus group discussion the women thought it is “crazy” that different clinics publishes certain pictures. Comments as “this is not okay” and “this is so sick” occurred frequently. The participants also believed that aesthetic surgery still is taboo and the two women that has done different treatments admitted that it was not something that they bragged about. When Elsa told the other respondents about how some clinics tried to convince her to do more injections, they were shocked and upset. Gunn thought that it was relatively scary and Bonnie said that it would provoke her. The group were in agreement regarding how it does not feel right to encourage individuals to perform other interventions than the ones they decided to do by themselves.

The term “ethics” was repeated multiple times in both focus groups, but especially in the second one where some respondents felt provoked. What was also observed, was that there seemed to be a tension between the marketing messages in the screenshots and the respondents. According to Ferreira (2005) it is crucial that a surgeon always acts in the best interest of a patient in order to act ethically. The reflections about discounts and competitions made some respondents concerned. Lopez-Moriarty (2015) discussed that surgeons have identified the value of advertising their services. She argues that the reasons why surgeons rely heavily on marketing, are the market forces: competition and pricing pressure. Moreover, Lett (2008) states that the
purpose of advertising in the context of aesthetic surgery is mainly about convincing people that aesthetic treatments can be performed easily and risk free. One of the respondents expressed that it is all about a psychological game, that people have to be a better version of themselves. Maio (2007) claims that medical professionals should help people to view themselves more realistic. If aesthetic surgery does not include this part, it can eventually lose its identity as medicine.

Slice me nice

There have been many different perspectives of how the respondents viewed the screenshots and especially how they responded to them. An essential part of aesthetic surgery that is often covered by marketing is the unpleasant truth concerning undesired side-effects. This part was particularly emphasized in the first group which included Elsa and Bonnie who experienced aesthetic surgery themselves. For that reason, this theme was not created by the respondents, but instead based on the researchers’ observations. Bonnie was the one who introduced the negative side of aesthetic surgery and started to describe how she experienced anxiety:

I have my whole life wanted to enlarge my breasts so it was a deliberated decision. Nevertheless I got awful anxiety. I called friends in the middle of the night and cried because I was so unsatisfied. I think I got this anxiety because I actually made it but I regretted it so much. It was not even that big difference but it was still something in my body that was not my own. This continued for three days, I just cried and could not stop how I felt. My parents were completely destroyed when they saw how I felt and could not do anything to make me feel better. I believe I got this strong feelings because it was such a big transformation. Suddenly I woke up with big breasts compared to before, when I was completely flat. Although, it was a positive transformation. I believe I was not prepared to get all these feelings, nobody has warned me for this. I was only aware of the physical pain that I would experience after the surgery.

After Bonnie’s story the discussion continued about that nothing in the marketing of aesthetic surgery describes these feelings that can occur after a surgery. Some pictures showed how an actual lip-injection is performed by a nurse in medical clothes (Appendix 4), but there was no indication in the pictures or in the belonging texts that side-effects could occur. Furthermore, the respondents in the first focus group were surprised when Bonnie talked about how she hates needles and syringes because she is terrified of it. She continued that despite her fear, she decided to perform a breast augmentation which is a serious aesthetic procedure.

In addition, the respondents discussed that there was an overall lack of pictures showing the “down-side” of the interventions. Elsa flicked in that she was not prepared to get small stick marks on her lips after filling them. Hilda pointed out a picture that was portraying a famous Swedish blogger’s lips before- and after having lip fillers. She claimed that the girl was wearing
lip-gloss in the after picture and that the picture is not showing the whole truth (Appendix 3). All respondents agreed and talked about that it is wrong to present a refined result. Gunn made a short reflection and stated:

I believe that this normalization makes people forget that the procedures are actually serious operations and that they are scary. You will hurt your own body and you are risking your health to achieve attractiveness.

The other nodded and Hilda started to talk about that no one knows how people’s bodies will respond to these injections in the future. She also added that this type of treatments are new technology and it is always coming more advanced and better alternatives; the best alterative right now could be condemned in a couple of years. Furthermore, a discussion regarding how much people spend on their appearance started in the first focus group. When the respondents reflected upon how much they actually spend, Gunn expressed that it is “crazy” and the rest agreed.

In the first focus group it was of great interest to discuss the “down-side” of aesthetic surgery. Gimlin (2013) pointed out that marketing often hides the side-effects that the experienced respondents have discussed. Brooks (2004) has a similar view since she revealed that a majority of articles concerning aesthetic surgery are presenting this type treatments in a favourable way. Gimlin (2013) shed further light on this issue by describing that individuals are ignoring their natural bodilyreposes by undertaking a surgery that includes pain and discomfort. However, individuals know that aesthesia can eliminate this pain. What one of the experienced respondents was not ready to face was the anxiety and the mental pain that cannot be eliminated in the same way.

Quotes

When the respondents started to discuss how they viewed pictures containing different quotes as motivating marketing messages in the second focus group, Teja explained how she viewed the quote “Invest in yourself” (Appendix 6). She experienced both the picture and the belonging text as funny. Nilla paid more attention to the quote “Look the way you feel” (Appendix 6). She experienced it as content that grabbed her attention and that she would be interested in reading it on Instagram. She also believed that this type of quotes evoke curiosity about what is meant by the message. In addition, Teja shed further light on the discussion and tried to see the quotes from different perspectives. One quote stated that botox can give happiness
Teja experienced that this type of quotes might appeal to people who undertook a botox treatment. If such clients would put a “like” on this type of quotes, it would give a credible signal to other recipients of the message since it would indicate that people who “liked” the post are also satisfied with the treatment. Elena contributed to the discussion and said that these quotes would probably not influence her, but if her peers supported it, she would be more affected.

Klara brought the quote “invest in yourself” back to the discussion in the second focus group. She claimed that if she had undertaken an aesthetic surgery, she would probably consider it as an investment in herself. This quote was also discussed in the first focus group where Elsa said that a filler-treatment is rather a way of “indulging” herself and compared it to the temporary satisfaction of shopping. Furthermore, she claimed that the reason why she is enlarging her lips is her own decision, not influenced by media exposure. Bonnie explained that she viewed her breast augmentation as an investment. She had the opportunity to make a permanent correction which made her feel more comfortable and feminine. Although, it was a serious surgery, she is now satisfied with the result, she feels more attractive and can finally be herself without having to be embarrassed walking around naked.

When the discussion came to an end, Nilla added that it is all about what kind of attitude each individual has and according to her, quotes are not persuasive. In addition, Gunn explained that she thinks that texts and quotes have the purpose to make aesthetic surgery to an “every-day thing” and not a “big deal”. No one in both focus groups thought that they would be convinced to undergo a surgery by reading a quote, but “Invest in yourself” was considered to be a motivating factor.

Heyes (2007) described the aspects discussed by the respondents above that aesthetic surgery represents how individuals can achieve their true identity. She further stated that the marketing underlines that individuals can become their “true-self” by undertaking certain aesthetic treatments. Some of the respondents said that the quote “Look the way you feel” appealed to them. This complies with what Heyes (2007) stated about how an individual’s feelings inside should agree with their appearance.

When it further comes to the quote “Invest in yourself” the respondent who made a breast augmentation admitted that for her it was an investment. She claimed that the surgery made her feel more confident and comfortable in the long-term. Furthermore, Brooks (2004) explained
how people often feel more comfortable in their “new” bodies. In addition, Vashishtaa and Balaji (2012) argue that marketing messages are more persuasive if they fit people’s goals.

**Pushing service**

A theme which was not directly connected with social media, but was intensively discussed by the respondents in both focus groups, was how clinics actually treat their clients on consultations and during the procedures. This type of reflections were important because they might have affected the way some respondents responded and viewed the different screenshots in the way they did.

Furthermore, when Elsa described some of her visitations at clinics in order to refill her lips, she described how one nurse and one surgeon tried to convince her to do more injections. She recounted that one surgeon started to touch her nose and asked if she had an injury there. Her answer was that she had not done anything and that she was born like that. The surgeon then, suggested that he could correct it for her. At another clinic a nurse actually injected the last millilitres of the substance in her chin which was from the beginning intended for the lips. Elsa describes it herself as:

*She was really zealous with the correction of my chin, even though I said that I did not care about the fold, she would not give up and basically just injected it whiteout my approval.*

The nurse had told her that it was many girls who suffered from having this fold and that she always corrected it simultaneously as she performed other interventions. The discussion continued regarding how this could have a negative effect on insecure young girls and that it would probably promote an addiction. Bonnie added that when she was going for her first consolation with the surgeon before her breast augmentation, the doctor recommended her to enlarge her breast even more than she had planned. His argument was that many girls were dissatisfied with a smaller size and came back to enlarge the breasts again.

To continue, no one of the respondents in the second focus group had undertaken any beauty treatments linked to aesthetic surgery. However, Nilla contributed to the discussion by telling a story about her sister. She described that her sister did not have a primary consultation with the surgeon, but only a final consultation before the planned breast augmentation. She said that her sister planned a given size of her breast implants before the consultation. When she finally met the surgeon he was surprised about her choice of implants and also he suggested bigger
ones by arguing that previous patients were dissatisfied with the smaller ones. Nilla ended the story by saying that her sister agreed on surgeon’s suggestion because she found him professional. Teja flicked in and said that from her point of view people are likely to be influenced by surgeons because we all believe that they are credible since they have performed such surgeries before. Nilla also pointed out that if a surgeon acts that way in a meeting with a patient, he creates a desire to improve something that actually does not need to be improved.

Mirivel (2008) has discussed that aesthetic surgeons are becoming entrepreneurs instead of only being medical professionals who aim to improve an individual’s health. Two respondents experienced how surgeons had a desire to sell more. One of the respondents added that she had been in two situations where a surgeon identified new “flaws” that he considered could be improved. Maio (2007) highlights that there is a risk that a surgeon puts a patient’s true needs aside in order to sell more treatments. Since surgeons are medical professionals, clients trust their recommendations to a greater extent (Evetts, 2006). Also Mirivel (2008) has underlined this aspect by pointing out that a patient’s body becomes an object which a surgeon can make improvements of. When a medical professional identifies a flaw, it becomes a medical issue, although it was only a client’s bodily dissatisfaction from the beginning. These facts raise an ethical concern regarding what kind of flaws are medical issues and what are unnecessary improvements (Mirivel, 2008).
5. Conclusions and discussion

This section starts with a presentation of the conclusions which are thereafter discussed in light of previous research. The discussion further includes our observations of the group dynamics that might have affected the findings. Finally, the limitations and practical implications are described and the section ends with suggestions for future research.

5.1 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore how young women view and respond to marketing by aesthetic surgery clinics in social media. The research question was motivated by increased number of aesthetic surgery performed in Sweden and young women being exposed to this type of marketing in social media. In addition, the wide use of advertising combined with a growing number of non-plastic surgeons performing aesthetic interventions have led to a hard competition and pricing pressure at the market. For that reason marketing has become essential for the clinics in order to survive. Based on this we predicted that there might be a tension between the marketing of aesthetic services and the recipients viewing it.

By reconnecting to the research question, the findings of this study suggest how different marketing messages can be viewed. The respondents sorted the empirical material based on how they viewed it. It turned out that the respondents perceived a normalization due to the marketing of aesthetic procedures in social media. They all argued that the more they are exposed to this type of marketing messages, the more it feels normal. What is worth pointing out is that our finding regarding the new aesthetic technology, reveals that the respondents view it more as a weakness than a strength. Another finding is that it is a difference in how the marketing is viewed and how the respondents reasoned regarding their views. The respondents that have undertaken aesthetic surgery are more tolerant towards the marketing and associate to the marketing messages to a greater extent. Furthermore, both bloggers and eWOM were valued as a credible source of information. However, bloggers could also provoke negative responses. Clients’ recommendations at social media platforms were considered to be even more trustworthy than bloggers. Attributes and symbols that communicated professionalism and credibility turned out to be highly effective and gave positive responses. The reason for this was that a medical professional is viewed as highly competent. Quotes were viewed as an appealing factor that can create association in a client’s mind. Additionally, quotes could be
motivating but not fully persuasive. To continue, if marketing messages are clear and easily associated by the clients, they are more likely to be viewed positively. Furthermore, it also need to be a clear connection between the content of a picture and the marketing message. From the discussions overall, it turned out that there is a tension between the marketing messages being posted in social media and the recipients. This tension emerges especially when clinics are promoting their services through discounts, competitions and showing beautiful people with no connection to the aesthetic treatment being offered.

5.2 Discussion
This study contributes to the scarce field of literature on the responses and views of young women towards the marketing of aesthetic surgery in social media. Our empirical findings suggest that there are some differences in how the marketing of aesthetic surgery clinics is perceived by women that have undertaken surgery and women who have not undertaken surgery. When comparing the empirical result in both focus groups it was clear that some aspects of the marketing engaged the participants more than others.

To begin with, all respondents were in agreement regarding how it feels wrong to promote models and beautiful girls as achievable appearance and as a motivator to undergo aesthetic surgery. One respondent especially expressed that it is not up to aesthetic clinics to decide what is attractive and what is not. Although, all the respondents admitted that this is an influential factor that creates a desire to improve their appearance. This supports what previous research has highlighted regarding that highly attractive people in advertisements are an effective way to communicate a desirable appearance (Goodman, Morris, & Sutherland, 2008).

In the first group the two experienced respondents underlined the importance of other people’s reviews. They described how valuable recent clients’ opinions were and that social media facilitated the accessibility of this information. Furthermore, they argued that these recommendations were more credible and trustworthy compared to the information provided by aesthetic surgery clinics themselves at their own homepage. They argued this way because they found that people are free to express their own opinions in social media without their comments being censured. Earlier reviews were also considered to be more trustworthy since they are based on people’s own desire to share their experiences. The respondents also pointed out that these recommendations were more credible compared to the ones provided by bloggers since there are no economic incentives involved. This, once again, speaks in favour of the
arguments presented by Moran & Muzellec (2014) who claim that eWOM should be an essential part of a consumer’s decision-making journey. According to the respondents, competetions create brand awarness. This supports the arguments provided by Yang (2013) that eWOM marketing is efficent in creating brand awarness. Furthermore, research performed by Henning-Thurau et al. (2004) complies with our findings beacuse they argue that incentives motivate consumers to spread eWOM. This was evident when a respondent said that a free injection would motivate her to participate in a competition. However, something that our respondents did not reflect upon was that eWOM could be created by a company for marketing purposes. Here our findings show that consumers have a tendency to trust recommendations without further reflections regarding how these recommendations are created. To explain this, Abendroth and Heyman (2013) state that it is difficult to separate true eWOM from created eWOM.

To continue, both focus groups underlined the importance of bloggers and influencers in marketing. They considered that influencers are highly influential if they were presented in the right context. Furthermore, one respondent pointed out that she would be motivated by information provided by a blogger that she admires and have a lot in common with. The recommendations from bloggers were viewed as recommendations from a friend and this complies with past research regarding that bloggers are influential (Wang, Hsu, Huang, & Chen, 2015). Although, there were some respondents in the second focus group that did not believe that they would get affected by the specific bloggers. However, they still considered bloggers or celebrities to be highly influential. Likely to arguments presented from both Wang, Hsu, Huang, & Chen (2015) and Liu, o.a (2015) the effectiveness of bloggers tend to be a motivating factor for purchases. The findings of this study point in the same direction since both focus groups underlined bloggers’ and influencers’ persuasivness.

Furthermore, both focus groups were in agreement regarding how the accessibility of social media contributes to a normalization of aesthetic surgery. The respondents pointed out that since more people get in contact with this industry on daily basis through social media it increases the awareness regarding the clinics and different treatments offered. If an individual then, becomes dissatisfied with something in his/her appearance, potential solutions are already familiar. An interesting aspect is that articles regarding the normalization of aesthetic surgery often point out that technology is a contributing factor because interventions are becoming safer and easier to perform. The respondents were in agreement regarding that the accessibility contributes to a normalization but they were not convinced that new technology made it safer.
In contrast, they actually viewed it negatively since some substances that are used in aesthetic procedures are entirely new. It is therefore, impossible to know what physical reactions can occur in the future. Although, the respondents perceived a normalization of aesthetic surgery in Sweden, all of them viewed the topic slightly as taboo.

Moreover, we could also observe that the respondents viewed and responded differently to the screenshots in both focus groups. An example is that the pictures which were considered to communicate professionalism, were strongly appealing to the women who have undertaken aesthetic procedures. They reasoned that their choice of clinic was strongly affected by this type of pictures. They were also influenced by the surgeon’s opinion and viewed him/her as a credible source of information. Additionally, in the second focus group the respondents concluded that communicating professionalism is a trustworthy way to market this type of services because they includes serious surgical procedures. However, to market a surgeon as professional had also a positive impact on the respondents in both focus groups and was not considered to be provocative in any way. This shows that this type of marketing is valuable and of great importance for the clinics when acquiring potential clients.

When it comes to quotes in marketing, there were also different opinions about how different quotes might appeal to different clients. The two experienced women could strongly associate to the feelings described in the quotes compared to some of the unexperienced respondents who did not view the quotes as appealing at all. However, none of the respondents viewed this type of marketing as persuasive. The fact that clinics are appealing to an individual’s emotions support previous research regarding how marketing aims to push on feelings on individuals in order to become their “true-self” and take control over their life’s (Heyes, 2007). In addition, an interesting point that was discussed by Heyes (2007) was that marketing manipulates individuals to believe that they undertake aesthetic surgery for their own sake without being motivated by beauty norms. The respondent that frequently enlarge the size of her lips claimed she was not motivated by any beauty norms instead this was her own decision. On the other hand, the respondent that had undertaken breast augmentation admitted that she was influenced by media’s exposure of beautiful models representing an ideal body image.

Something that was also noticed during the observations of both focus group interviews was the different group dynamics that emerged. In the first focus group when the two women that had undertaken aesthetic procedures told the others about their views, the other respondents could recognize themselves with their way of reasoning. This is turn, led to another understanding and association for the marketing in the first focus group. In the second focus group
group the ethical side of aesthetic surgery was discussed more intensively. One respondent viewed discounts as an unethical strategy and she claimed that it was bizarre to be able to buy discounted breasts since it also signalize low quality. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents agreed upon that an injection was an inappropriate winning price in a competition. This could be explained by the fact that no one in this group had undertaken any surgeries and therefore, did not have to adjust their thoughts to avoid upsetting someone.

From our findings we can conclude that this is a sensitive subject that engaged all of the respondents. Although, they sometimes had a hard time to describe their views in words, they all agreed upon that there are ethical challenges in this industry. Several times in both focus groups the respondents pointed out that they viewed the marketing as unethical. An aspect that created strong emotions especially in the first focus group was how surgeons tried to push on more services during the interventions. As discussed in the introduction we assumed that it could be an ethical dilemma regarding that surgeons are operating in a profit oriented market and at the same time should put the patients’ needs in the first place. The strong emotions described above confirm that there is an ethical dilemma and that it created negative responses. All of the respondents in both focus groups agreed that it was inappropriate to mark flaws and suggest improvements. They believed that this created a greater desire for aesthetic surgery and promoted bodily dissatisfaction, which was considered to be highly unethical. This is clearly in line with previous research (Gimlin, 2013; Maio, 2007). However, this was not the purpose of the study but we considered it to be an important aspect because it might have affected the participants’ point of view.

5.3 Limitations and practical implications

Although, this study contributes to the growing knowledge of how the marketing of aesthetic surgery is viewed, there are limitations that emerged during our research process. There was generally scare research about aesthetic surgery of marketing in the Swedish context. Furthermore, it would have facilitated our prior understanding of the Swedish market if there were valid and updated statistics over all aesthetic procedures. Also, due to limited research period, we did not have the opportunity to achieve theoretical saturation.

The contribution of this thesis to the research field will be additional insight into how marketing is viewed and responded by young women in Sweden. The findings suggest what aesthetic surgery clinics should consider in order to positively appeal to clients and what should be
avoided in their marketing in social media. Due to the fact that a tension was observed in this study when the respondents viewed the screenshots, it is important for aesthetic surgery clinics to have this aspect in mind. Consequently, marketers who search to maximize their marketing efforts in the sea of social media, can benefit from this study since it provides an understanding of how clients and potential clients respond to it and why they do so. The findings do also contribute to an increased awareness of the unethical aspects that are perceived by clients.

5.4 Future research

As discussed in the introduction, aesthetic surgery is gaining a worldwide popularity and scare research, especially outside the United States, has been done on how people respond to this type of marketing. To the best of our knowledge, it is a lack of research investigating the interactions between plastic surgeons and clients in Sweden. To be specific, what can be interesting to explore is how plastic surgeons work in a profit oriented market at the same time as they try to uphold their patients’ best interests. It is also of interest to see how surgeons are potentially trying to persuade clients to undergo surgery during consolations.

Finally, since the respondents’ age ranged from 22 to 29 in our study. Another option, would be to investigate how the views and responses to this type of marketing differ between different ages. It could also be interesting to include Swedish men in this type of research to explore if there is a contrast taking gender into consideration.
References


APPENDIX 1 - False marketing
Nu längtar vi till sommaren, kom ihåg att det är dags att bota med laserhårborttagning och kär. Från Måndag öppnar vi kliniken som vanligt kl 09.00-18.00 välkomna❤️

lediga tider för Fillers och Botox till
Moll info #botox
#restylane #perlane #laser #zoskinhealth

Lägg till kommentar...
APPENDIX 2 – Competitions

Vi har en vinnare av vår injektionstävling. Ett stort grattis till Malin Dinah Nah 😊. Hon vann med följande motivation:

"Spegel spegel på väggen där, säg vem som vackrast i landet är.
Malin, Malin skulle kunna vara denna person, Om hon bara fick sig en
injektion". ... Visa mer
Sista chansen för dig som är intesserad av att tävla om en injektionsbehandling eller få en rabatt -

Delta i vår undersökning, var med och tävla och få rabatt!

Under hösten kan du boka in dig för att få 10% rabatt på injektionsbehandlingar eller 15% rabatt per person om du kommer med en vän. Erbjudandet gäller under förutsättning att behandlingarna sker innan årsskiftet.

Genom att gilla och dela inlägget samt tagga en vän så har du också möjligheten att få din behandling för gratis. Visa mer
APPENDIX 3 - Influencers
APPENDIX 4 – Credible and professional
23 gilla-markeringar

Kliniken delar i Academia, för oss är utveckling och säkra behandlingar viktigt.
#academia #utbildning #fyller #botox
#injektionsklotter #certifieradklinik
#juvaderm #estetiskbeauty
#beauty #naturalbeauty #investinyou
#plastikkirurg

Inspiring!

Lagga till kommentar...

38 gilla-markeringar

Kliniken önskar er en skön helg! Där
Glöm inte att vi har öppet även på lördagar i

#hudterapeut #injektionsklotter
#plastikkirurg #mediconutnskötare #fyller
#botox #juvaderm #plg #förbundsöppet
#plaat #investinyou #beauty #skönhet

Dessamla! Och ett stort tack för
er ett fantastiskt omhändertagande säg vidag i

Lagga till kommentar...
APPENDIX 5 - Ethical

Snart är sommaren här, det vill vi fira med ett fint erbjudande på bröstförstoringar!

Bröstförstoring, inklusive kapselförstärkning och övernatning för endast 36,900:-

Boka din tid för konsultation på telefon ________ eller maila till info@________ och uppge "midsommar2016". Tillgänglighet finns i mån av tider. För att ta del av erbjudandet krävs att konsultation sker innan 25/6 2016 och operation sker innan 31/8 2016.

Kostnadsfri ärbarbehandling för dig som genomför operation innan 25/6 😊
SVARAVLAGSNADE FETTANSAMLINGAR?

Besväras du av oönskade fettansamlingar som är oöjpfiga att åt bort med trots att du motionerat och haft en god kosthållning? Dessa fettansamlingar kan vara ett resultat av hormonella och genetiska faktorer och är oftast svåra att få bort via enbart god kost och motion.

Fettsugning är en metod som hjälper dig att avlägna dina oönskade fettansamlingar för gott.... Läs mer!