

Original Paper

Research on Commercial Ethics Issues in the Medical Aesthetic Industry

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Abstract

With the development of the economy and the improvement of living standards, the medical aesthetic industry has rapidly expanded worldwide. However, driven by the pursuit of beauty and profit maximization, numerous commercial ethical issues have surfaced within this industry. This study aims to explore the ethical challenges in the medical aesthetic industry, analyzing their causes, manifestations, and impacts. The paper reveals key problems such as false advertising, breaches of consumer privacy, unprofessional behavior, product safety and quality concerns, as well as issues like non-transparent pricing and excessive marketing. Moreover, the study proposes solutions and suggestions, including strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing industry self-regulation, and increasing consumer rights awareness, to promote the sustainable development of the medical aesthetic industry.

Keywords

Medical aesthetics, Commercial ethics, Consumer rights, Industry standardization, Corporate social responsibility

1. Introduction

In recent years, the medical aesthetic industry has garnered global attention due to its significant economic benefits and wide societal demand. With advancements in technology and the expansion of the market, an increasing number of individuals and businesses have ventured into this field. However, as the industry grows rapidly, it also faces numerous ethical challenges, including false advertising, information asymmetry, and inadequate protection of consumer privacy. These business ethics issues have become more prominent, attracting the attention of the public and the academic community.

2. Overview of the Medical Aesthetic Industry

2.1 Definition and Classification of Medical Aesthetics

Medical aesthetics, commonly known as "medical beauty" (医美), refers to a range of services and activities that use medical methods and techniques to enhance a person's appearance. Based on the nature of the procedures, medical aesthetics can be categorized into two main types: surgical and non-surgical. Surgical procedures include traditional plastic surgeries like rhinoplasty and liposuction, while non-surgical procedures involve minimally invasive techniques like laser treatments, microneedling, and injectable fillers.

2.2 Development History of the Medical Aesthetic Industry Domestically and Internationally

The development of the medical aesthetic industry can be traced back to the early 20th century, initially limited to affluent individuals. As technology advanced and economic conditions improved, it gradually became accessible to the mass market. Internationally, Western countries, particularly in Europe and the United States, have established relatively mature industry standards and regulatory mechanisms due to their early technological advancements. In Asia, especially in countries like South Korea and China, the medical aesthetic industry has seen rapid growth over the past decade, with the market expanding significantly and attracting global attention.

2.3 Current Status of the Medical Aesthetic Industry

Currently, the medical aesthetic industry is experiencing a period of rapid growth. According to statistics, the industry has maintained an annual growth rate in the double digits. Furthermore, market participants are becoming increasingly diverse, with many cross-industry enterprises entering the field in addition to specialized medical aesthetic institutions. Additionally, the consumer base is becoming younger, with growing demands for high-quality products and services.

2.4 Forecast of Future Development Trends

The medical aesthetic industry is expected to continue its growth trajectory in the future, although the growth rate may slow due to market saturation. Technological innovation will remain a key driver of industry development, including personalized treatment plans and the application of intelligent devices. At the same time, with the rise of consumer awareness and improvements in legal frameworks, competition within the industry will become more rational. Successful companies will increasingly focus on brand building and service quality.

3. Overview of Commercial Ethics

3.1 Definition of Commercial Ethics

Commercial ethics is the study of the behavioral norms and moral standards that businesses and their employees should follow in commercial activities. It covers areas such as honesty, responsibility, transparency, fairness, and respect for stakeholders. Commercial ethics is not only concerned with legal compliance but also addresses the choices and judgments that businesses and individuals make when facing moral dilemmas.

3.2 Theoretical Framework of Commercial Ethics

The theoretical framework of commercial ethics includes various ethical theories and principles. For example, utilitarianism emphasizes the consequences of actions, while Kant's moral philosophy focuses on the adherence to duties and rules. Other theories, such as justice theory, deontology, virtue ethics, stakeholder theory, and models like moral inference theory, contract theory, and Wittgenstein's "language game" concept, provide multiple perspectives for businesses and individuals to consider when making complex commercial decisions.

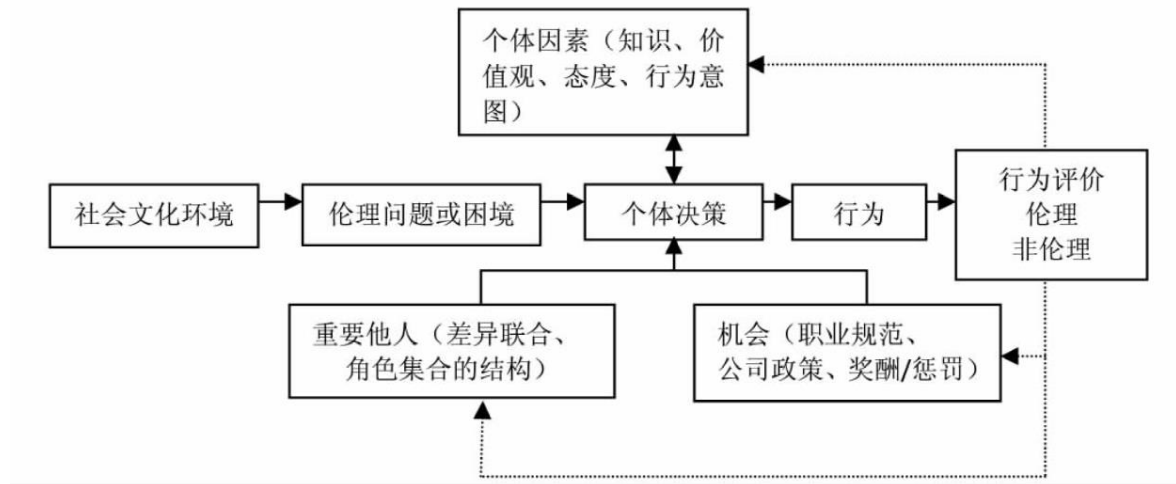


Figure 1. Ferrell and Gresham's Contingency Model of Ethical Decision-Making

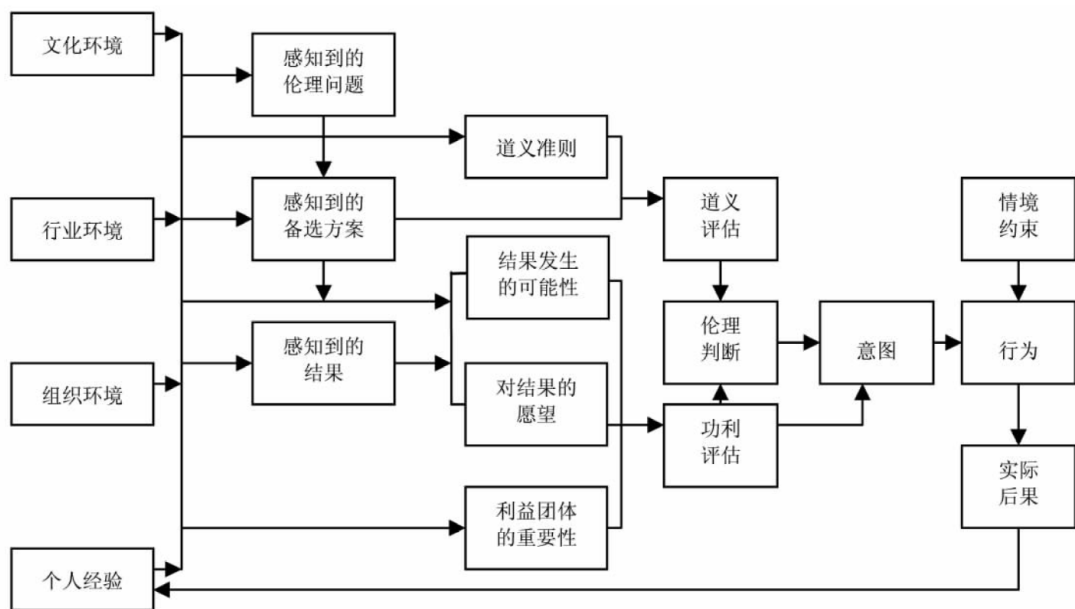


Figure 2. Hunt and Vitell's Ethical Decision-Making Model

3.3 Relationship Between Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Business ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are closely linked, though they have different focuses. Business ethics is more concerned with internal decision-making and behavioral guidelines within a company, while CSR pertains to the company's external responsibilities toward society and the environment. The level of business ethics within a company directly affects its effectiveness in fulfilling social responsibility. Conversely, actively engaging in CSR can also promote an improvement in the company's business ethics.

4. Analysis of Ethical Issues in the Medical Aesthetics and Cosmetic Surgery Industry

4.1 False Advertising Issues

Advertising is one of the main methods used to attract customers in the medical aesthetics industry. However, some companies, in pursuit of profit maximization, often exaggerate product effectiveness or conceal potential risks, leading to consumer misguidance. This false advertising not only violates the principles of honesty and integrity but may also seriously affect consumers' physical and mental health.

4.2 Consumer Privacy Protection Issues

Medical aesthetics services involve a large amount of personal sensitive information, including health status and physical defects. Some institutions disclose or misuse this information without adequate authorization, seriously infringing on consumers' privacy rights as protected by personal data protection laws.

4.3 Ethical Issues Resulting from Unprofessional Behavior

The medical aesthetics industry has relatively low entry barriers, leading some individuals without professional training to engage in related work. These individuals may lack the necessary expertise and skills, leading to improper procedures or accidents. Such unprofessional behavior not only harms consumers' rights but also tarnishes the overall image of the industry.

4.4 Ethical Issues Related to Product Safety and Quality

Safety and quality are core requirements for medical aesthetics products. However, there are some untested or uncertified products used in the market, which could lead to serious health problems. Companies that neglect product safety and quality management during research, production, and sales violate the basic business ethics of being responsible to consumers.

4.5 Price Transparency and Consumer Rights Protection Issues

Lack of price transparency is a widespread issue in the medical aesthetics industry. Some companies take advantage of consumers' lack of knowledge about prices to engage in price fraud or hidden charges. This behavior not only infringes on consumers' rights to know and choose but also violates the principles of fair competition in the market.

4.6 Over-treatment and Forced Consumption

Over-treatment in medical aesthetics refers to institutions or doctors using excessive methods or adding unnecessary procedures for the sake of economic gain. This phenomenon is also common in medical

treatments, highlighting the conflict between professional ethics and economic interests. Common practices include exacerbating consumers' appearance anxiety to encourage excessive treatments, with some procedures involving forced consumption in surgical medical aesthetics.

5. Solutions and Recommendations

5.1 Strengthening Legislation and Regulatory Enforcement

To address the ethical issues in the medical aesthetics industry, reform is needed at the legal level. It is recommended that stricter and more specific regulations be established to standardize industry practices, along with increased law enforcement to ensure compliance. Regulatory agencies should regularly inspect medical aesthetics institutions and impose severe penalties for violations.

5.2 Enhancing Industry Self-regulation and Ethics Education

Industry associations should play a guiding role by establishing self-regulation mechanisms, setting industry standards and service guidelines, raising entry thresholds, and improving the technical capabilities of practitioners. Additionally, promoting business ethics education among professionals is crucial to reinforcing their sense of professional ethics. Regular workshops and training courses should be organized to increase practitioners' awareness of the importance of business ethics.

5.3 Strengthening Consumer Awareness and Protection Measures

Raising awareness of consumer rights protection and enhancing consumers' ability to protect themselves are essential. A dedicated consumer rights protection organization should be established to offer consultation and legal assistance to consumers. Additionally, consumers should be encouraged to voice their concerns and complaints through official channels, ensuring their issues are addressed promptly and properly.

5.4 Building a Multi-stakeholder Supervision System

A diverse supervision system involving the government, industry organizations, media, and the public should be established. The government can use media outlets to expose violations and raise public awareness of oversight. The public should also be encouraged to participate in the supervision process by sharing their experiences and opinions on social media platforms, fostering a societal environment of shared accountability. This collaboration can effectively promote the healthy development of the medical aesthetics industry.

5.5 Increasing Industry Transparency

Medical aesthetics institutions should be required to disclose information about services, prices, and practitioner qualifications, ensuring consumers' right to know. Companies should be encouraged to adopt transparent and open methods for marketing and advertising, eliminating false advertising and consumer misguidance. An information disclosure system for the medical aesthetics industry should be established to regularly update the public on industry trends and regulatory actions, thereby boosting consumer confidence.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

6.1 Research Conclusions

This study comprehensively analyzes and discusses the ethical issues in the medical aesthetics and cosmetic surgery industry. The research finds that false advertising, insufficient consumer privacy protection, unprofessional behavior, product quality and safety issues, and price transparency problems are the main ethical challenges facing the industry. These issues not only harm consumers' rights but also impact the industry's healthy development and social image. Therefore, corresponding solutions and recommendations are proposed from the perspectives of legislative reform, industry self-regulation, consumer education, and multi-stakeholder oversight.

6.2 Research Limitations and Future Prospects

Despite efforts to cover various aspects of ethical issues in the medical aesthetics and cosmetic surgery industry, there are limitations, such as constraints in data access. The ethical issues in this industry result from multiple factors and require joint efforts from the government, industry, and consumers to strengthen regulation, raise industry standards, and enhance professional ethics education. Industry self-regulation mechanisms need to be established to promote sustainable development. The emphasis should be on promoting a natural and healthy beauty concept, prioritizing health, respecting natural beauty, and fostering diversity in aesthetics. Future research could expand into more regions and cultural contexts to examine ethical issues in different environments. As technology advances and markets change, new ethical challenges may emerge, warranting continuous attention and updates in research and countermeasures. Ultimately, the goal is to create a more fair, transparent, and sustainable environment for the medical aesthetics industry.

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