

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Interest in aesthetics during COVID-19 pandemic: A Google trends analysis

To the Editor,

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a multitude of effects on daily life. Aesthetic and cosmetic surgery practices have been significantly reduced in their working capacity or closed during this time.¹ Interest in elective procedures as judged by search engine popularity has increased to almost pre-pandemic levels but expectedly started to decline again amid the second wave of the pandemic.² Google Trends is a tool that assesses relative popularity of an object during a selected time range, and popularity is judged on a scale ranging from 0 being the least popular to one hundred being the most popular.³ Using Google Trends, we gauged public interest in 3 common cosmetic procedures in Egypt (Botox, hyaluronic acid fillers, and laser hair removal) from February 14, 2020, to February 14, 2021.

Decline of interest was apparent during March and April of 2020, relative to the first two months of declaring self-quarantine in Egypt (first case in Egypt recorded on February 15, 2020) (Figure 1). The average interest levels of all search terms, shown in Figure 2, demonstrated an overall drop of approximately 15 points from February 2020 to May 2020 and continued to decrease by June and July reaching a lowest decrease in interest by early November (28 points; $p < 0.05$). However, by late November and early December, the relative interest began to rise, reaching earlier pre-COVID rates. Another decline of interest in cosmetic procedures was observed in January 2021 by the time of an impending second wave and rise in number of cases.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected multiple aspects of life among which it negatively impacted interest in medical aesthetics.³ The negative trends in seeking aesthetic procedures could have been influenced by financial insecurity during the pandemic as individuals have lost jobs and other sources of income.⁴ Given the consumer-driven nature of cosmetic procedures, we conjecture that the economic impact of the pandemic precipitated losses to the cosmetic market as reported by Guzman et al.⁵ Among other negatively influencing trends was coronaphobia (fear of COVID transmission in health facilities). Moreover, lack of social communication during times of quarantines negatively influenced people's desire to seek cosmetic treatments.^{6,7} Moreover, in Egypt, during early months of the pandemic and due to the limitation of resources (supplies of imported cosmetic products), a number of physicians were affected by their ability to provide cosmetic services.

By late November, interest rates began to surge up once more with the relative decline in the earlier wave of the pandemic, and this could have been positively influenced by the downstream effects of home quarantine (weight gain, burnout, mood swings) and news of successful vaccine development.⁶

Interest in cosmetic themes display seasonal variance.⁶ These findings on seasonal variation searches corroborate Ward et al, who showed a peak of interest for general plastic surgery in December/January and a second peak in June/July.¹ We postulate that in

Public interest in common non-surgical procedures (botox, hyaluronic acid fillers, and laser hair removal) during COVID 19 pandemic

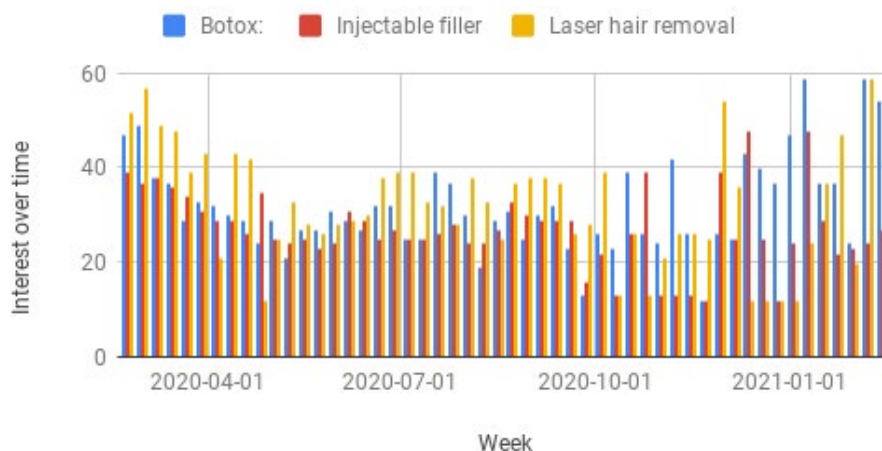


FIGURE 1 Public interest in common nonsurgical procedures (Botox, fillers, laser hair removal) during the COVID-19 pandemic

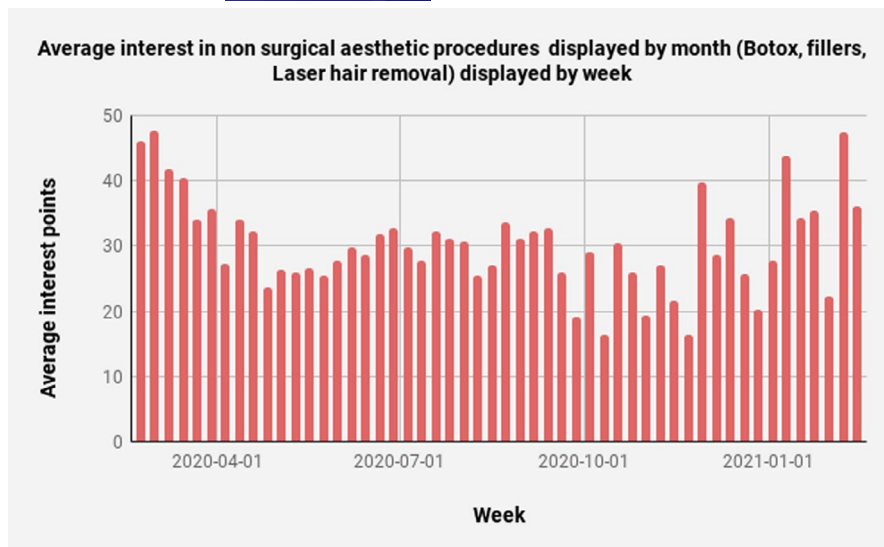


FIGURE 2 Average interest in nonsurgical aesthetic procedures displayed by month (Botox, fillers, laser hair removal) displayed by week

addition to COVID-19 pandemic, holidays and time off for procedures and recovery drive these seasonal spikes.

As the pandemic evolves, these factors may contribute differently over time, shaping the curve of changing public interest in aesthetic procedures. Despite blockade and self-quarantine, interest in aesthetics remains to continue at times of the pandemic. Further research exploring the relationship of online searches to aesthetic dermatology needs may be warranted.

KEYWORDS

aesthetics, COVID-19, Google trends

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors have no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to the work.

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