

Inside the Snapchat filter surgery boom

Yet another scary side effect of living in a social media-saturated world



By [Victoria Jowett](#) Jul 10, 2017



We all have a favourite Snapchat filter. Side note: mine's the flower crown (basic, I know). When you can cheat perfect skin, sky-high cheekbones and pillowy lips with just a flick of the thumb, is it any wonder we've become *so* used to seeing airbrushed, edited versions of our reflection? That level of so-called 'perfection', that was once reserved for models on billboards and famous faces on the covers of glossy magazines, has now been embraced by the masses (*if you know how to get smart with your filters and Facetune*).

As a Beauty Editor, I'm all for celebrating creativity and experimentation when it comes to the way you look. After all, the image you present to the world makes you unique - it can help define who you are and boost your confidence. But over the past couple of years, an 'Instagram uniform' has appeared. Girls and guys with blown up lips and poreless skin, noses and cheeks contoured to oblivion, feline eyes and brows high and arched. Beauty trends come and go, but with the addition of airbrushing apps and filters that can manipulate your features, the line between what's real and what isn't, starts to get hella blurry.



So, what happens when you strip all of the artificial enhancements away? We're suddenly looking in the mirror and seeing what we perceive to be a less beautiful and less perfect version of the face we've become accustomed to on our screens. It's bound to take it's toll...

And it really is.

From selfie to surgery

"The rise of the selfie has made us more self-critical, whether we are aware of it or not, and it puts pressure on people to be selfie-perfect", explains Jo Hemmings, a psychologist speaking on behalf of [The Harley Medical Group](#). "For some, this is simply a case of using a filter or an image-adjusting app on their smart phones before posting it. But for others it instills a crisis of confidence and a real desire to make more substantial alternations to their face or body."

This is the point at which it moves past manipulating faces with makeup, and instead there's a desire to make the kind of cosmetic 'improvements' that can't be washed off at the end of the day.

EVERYONE IS DISPLAYING THE BEST VERSION OF THEMSELVES, WHICH CAN LEAD TO A CRISIS IN SELF-IMAGE.

[The Harley Medical Group's](#) Director, Simon Smith, says, "young people want to fit in with their peer group and are reluctant to embrace a distinctive physical trait. A lot of this peer pressure has started coming from social media influences, where everyone is displaying the best version

of themselves. This can often lead to a crisis in self-image."

But how do we know social media is to blame? Cosmetic enhancements, both surgical and non-surgical, have been a part of our society since before the rise of Snapchat and Instagram. People have always wanted facelifts and nose jobs, so why are we now pointing the finger at these apps?



The new normal?

I spoke to Dr Mabroor Bhatti, a consultant surgeon at the [Transform Cosmetic Surgery](#) in London. "Social media is becoming an enormous influence when it comes to both cosmetic surgery and non-surgical treatments. I believe this is increasing partly as a result of apps such as Instagram and Snapchat, where celebrities like Kylie Jenner have so much influence. They are happy to use filters to change their own appearance and are often open about any surgery or treatments they have had themselves. This is a significant step away from attitudes 10 years ago, when celebs were less likely to admit they'd had any work done."

So not only is there more pressure to 'keep up appearances' with the Instagram set, but the stigma around embracing cosmetic surgery has also drastically declined. Combine these two factors, and is it any wonder girls as young as 18 and under are saving up for lip fillers?

"Social media has such a huge impact on today's society. Celebrities are being more transparent in sharing surgery they've had personally, making it less taboo. But also our selfie culture has led to people becoming more conscious of their image." Says Expert Plastic Surgeon, [Dr. George Samouris](#), who is based at [The Hospital Group](#) in London.



The pressure seems to be hitting younger generations the hardest, which is no surprise if you consider the fact that Gen Z and millennials spend more time on social media than any previous generations. For most, myself included, scrolling through Instagram and Snapchat is the first thing we do in the morning and the last thing we do at night.

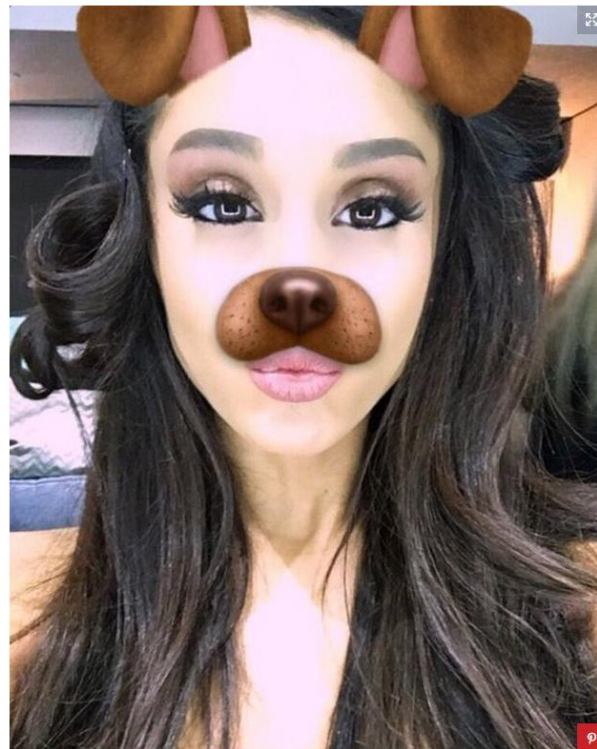
"The influence of social media tends to be most concentrated in the 20s-30s age bracket" says Dr. George Samouris, and Dr. Mabroor Bhatti agrees; "18-24 year olds are the most likely to reference looking good in pictures as a motivation for wanting to improve their appearance with a cosmetic procedure, compared to older generations who are more likely to say they simply want to feel good about themselves." Says Dr. Bhatti.

18-24S ARE MOST LIKELY TO REFERENCE LOOKING GOOD IN PICTURES AS A MOTIVATION FOR WANTING SURGERY

That's a pretty powerful sentiment. If Dr. Bhatti is correct, and the driving force behind more 18-to-24 year olds seeking a cosmetic procedure is to 'look good in pictures', whilst older generations purely 'want to feel better about themselves', it speaks to where we are as a society. Is it purely a

coincidence that the generation who have grown up in a world where social media sets the bar on beauty, are the same ones who are most concerned with keeping up the facade? Or is this just an example of the maturity and self-acceptance that comes with getting older?

Rabbia Aslam is the Clinical Director at [HC MedSpa in London](#), a clinic that specialises in non-surgical cosmetic procedures like injectables, fillers and laser treatments, explained to me that she has even started to receive enquiries from teenagers...



ARIANA GRANDE/SNAPCHAT

"Social media has taken over and we find that the majority of its users are indeed, the younger generation. With such huge influencers and cosmetic procedures becoming ever more popular, many of our clients are 21 plus. However, with the emergence of social media, we now receive enquiries from as young as 15-20."

In January 2017 it was reported that there are currently 2.7 billion active social media users in the world right now. Now, I'm not saying everyone's in it for the filters, obvs that's not the case, social media has opened up the world and brought it to our phone screens. But as our vision of the world has grown, it's fair to say, so has the pressure to 'keep up'.

THERE'S AN ALTERED PERCEPTION OF BEAUTY ON SOCIAL MEDIA WHICH PEOPLE TRY TO TRANSLATE INTO REAL LIFE

Data from the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) found that the number of cosmetic ops last year grew by 13%. Dr Sarah Shah, who specialises in non-invasive cosmetic procedures at her Harley Street clinic, noticed an increase in clients bringing Instagram pictures

and airbrushed selfies as reference pictures for how they want to look.

"There seems to be an altered social perception of beauty on social media which people try to translate into real life. This trend has grown over the past two years with a sharp incline over the past year."

Case in point: lip fillers.

The Case of the Ever-Expanding Lips

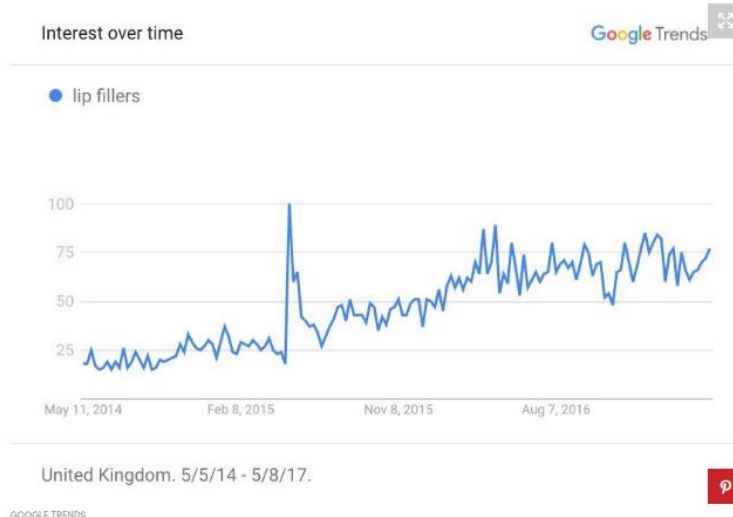
Of all the surgeons and doctors I've spoken too, they've unanimously agreed that 'fuller lips' has seen the biggest rise in demand. Closely followed by sculpting of the jawline, cheeks and nose.



"Fuller lips continue to be the main trend driven by social media and celebrity culture" says Plastic Surgeon, Dr. George Samouris. "The sculpted face, with prominent cheekbones is also popular; this has followed on from the contouring phenomenon. Some of the popular Snapchat filters also tend to raise the eyebrows slightly, giving a wide-eyed look, and this has been a sought after image that can be achieved with botox in some cases, or via a brow lift if required."

If, like me, you prefer visual cues, just take a look at a Google Trends' analysis of people searching for 'lip fillers' over the past 3 years:

Incase you were wondering, the sharp spike in searches around May 2015, happened the day after [Kylie Jenner admitted to having lip fillers...](#)



"Reality TV stars and celebrities such as Kylie Jenner and the Kardashians are regularly used as inspiration for surgery trends" says Dr. Samouris. But whilst Kylie *may* have kickstarted the trend, it's our peers and followers that keep it going. "People often refer to celebrity features to illustrate the look they are trying to achieve but interestingly, they also show images of their friends and peers, taken from their Facebook or Instagram to depict the image they wish to imitate."

It seems like a vicious cycle. Our peers are FaceTuning, filtering, and airbrushing their pictures, in the hopes of getting approval from us, whether that's in the form of a 'like' or a few flame emojis 🔥 here and there. Then these same pictures are being taken to doctors, surgeons and aestheticians as visual references for how we'd *like* to look - with a little nip and tuck, naturally. And for what? To gain approval from the very same people who altered their pictures for *our* approval to begin with.

It's kind of exhausting when you think about it.

My point here isn't to slam social media. Trust me, I luurve to scroll through Instagram on my daily commute as much as anyone. But it is important to raise awareness around how much it's taking a toll on us as a generation. As someone who works on the front line of the beauty industry, reporting on trends and seeing how they develop and grow, I've seen how influencers and big brands can promote one standard of beauty, and as an individual it can be had to deny the pressure to conform. Of course we won't all be taking that flower crown-filtered selfie to a cosmetic surgeon, but the thought that *someone* out there might, is worth talking about...