

EDITORIAL

Esthetic dentistry: the last stand

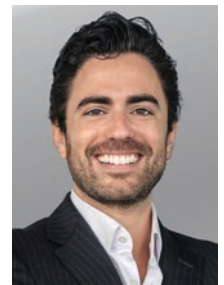
In an era of AI-enhanced beauty, esthetic dentistry stares at a challenging future. Artificial intelligence now allows anyone to show a flawless smile in their digital photos or video calls. The world is flooded with algorithmically perfected grins, leaving tooth gaps and yellowed enamel in the past. Why invest in painful plastic surgeries or costly veneers when a filter can brighten your smile effortlessly?

Digital beautification tools are everywhere – over 90% of young people regularly use image filters on apps like Snapchat or TikTok, smoothing flaws with a tap. This trend projects a future dilemma: Esthetic dentistry's craftsmanship is being challenged by instant, virtual perfection.

For individuals, the rise of AI-altered images is changing their self-perception. People increasingly live through improved digital selves. The more we interact via screens, the less relevant our physical imperfections seem – colleagues on Zoom or friends on Instagram only see the polished version. And think about it, how often do you see most of your friends? Exactly. This detachment could start to breed reluctance toward improving the actual state of our mouths. Within this new mindset, the urgency to look for real dental treatments weakens – the motivation to

endure aligners or sutures fades when AI can simulate the same dopamine release and confidence boost virtually. The result is a generation growing apathetic toward the art of esthetic dentistry.

For the dental profession, this shift implies a sobering perspective. Esthetic procedures – tooth whitening, ceramic veneers, orthodontic aligners – could see a sharp decline in demand as patients realize their digital smile is what counts. If fewer patients seek elective procedures, esthetic-based practices could see their case numbers fall. Some practitioners have already felt this pressure – during the COVID-19 pandemic, when overall dental appointments plummeted, cosmetic interventions were among the first services that patients postponed. While that decline was temporary, it highlighted how quickly esthetic dentistry can suffer when people reconsider their priorities. Ironically, today's market projections for 2030 still portray esthetic dentistry as booming, but such optimism may be shortsighted. The patients who fill our dental offices are a hybrid generation, where technology has not been first nature. But how about in 20 years from now, when screen-hungry millennials represent the core population with spending power?



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From a business perspective, dental practices may need to adapt their service portfolios. Emphasizing the health benefits and functional importance of treatments is crucial. Dentists should frame cosmetic procedures not just as vanity goals, but as part of an integral oral care program. For example, straightening teeth with aligners isn't only "for looks" – it can improve chewing function and breathing, and make oral hygiene easier, preventing future problems. By focusing on outcomes that AI cannot replicate such as improved oral function leading to overall long-term

health, dentists can maintain their relevance, even as purely esthetic demand potentially wanes.

In a future where a picture-perfect smile may no longer require a dental appointment, will esthetic dentistry still stand?

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alfonso Gil', with a stylized, flowing script.

Alfonso Gil

