Adolescent Response to Body-Positive Content on TikTok

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INTRODUCTION

- Adolescent body image can be influenced by social media.
  - 69% of females (ages 10 to 18 state that photographs of models and celebrities in the media motivated their "ideal" body shape
  - Previous studies have shown that teen body image is significantly dependent on the context of the social media and the peer feedback for their posts.
- The "body positive" movement on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok seeks to empower individuals and boost confidence
- However the movement can also lead to body shaming and hateful comments such as "fairy comments"
- Little research has been done on newer platforms like TikTok, to examine the content of body positive posts and the feedback they received.
- The purpose of this study is to understand how teens interact with body positivity content on TikTok, and recognize that this response could impact teen self-esteem.

METHODS

Setting: The top twenty comments and first three reponses to each were coded for positive and negative sentiments towards the creator on the top ten TikTok videos under the hashtag #bodypositivity.

Demographic Variables:
-Likes, Shares, Number of Comments, Type of Video

Comment Evaluation:
- Categorized as per a codebook of descriptions that specify positive and negative responses

Comment Variables	Definitions
Pro-body positive sentiments	This describes any comment that supports the creator who posted the #bodypositive content; eg. "you're beautiful" or "I wish I had your confidence".
Anti-body positive sentiments	This describes any comment that spreads hate against the creator who posted the #bodypositive content, which includes both fairy comments and general negativity.
Fairy Comments	A fairy comment is a popular type of TikTok comment that begins misleads the reader by ending with a message to contradict the first statement. These two parts of the comment are often separated by various emojis, most commonly the fairy emoji, hence the name fairy comment. Examples: "you go girl ✨ ❤️don't come back 🧡💛💚💙💜", "life is good 🧡💛💚✨ just not with you in it ❤️💔❤️", etc.
Personal Diets	Any mention of a personal practice or habit related to eating, including diets like vegetarianism, paleo, etc., approaches to eating, eating disorders etc.
Improving Mood	When people share their own experiences with accepting their bodies or mention a newfound confidence from watching the creator's videos.
Neutral	Comments that convey neither positive nor negative sentiments to the creator, for instance, "Where did you buy that shirt?"

RESULTS

All Comments:

	Personal Practices	Improvement of Mood	Fairy Comments	General Sentiments	Total
Positive	16	23	0	113	152
Negative	2	0	0	20	22
Neutral	12	0	1	13	26
Total	30	23	1	146	200

Types of Positive Comments, Types of Neutral Comments, & Types of Negative Comments Overall

Personal Diets/Practices: 17.6%   Fairy Comments: 0.5%
Improvement of Mood: 11.5%   General Negative Sentiments:10.0%
General Positive Sentiments: 56.5%

Total Positive: 76.0%   Total Neutral: 14.0%   Total Negative: 10.0%

Of the top 10 #bodypositivity videos, 8 mentioned body shape or size, 2 mentioned health conditions, and 3 mentioned body changes.

Video Mentions of Body Shape/Size:

Personal Diets/Practices: 10.6%   Fairy Comments: 0%
Improvement of Mood: 11.2%   General Negative Sentiments: 12.0%
General Positive Sentiments: 83.1%

Total Positive: 78.1%   Total Neutral: 8.75%   Total Negative: 13.1%

Had highest percentage of negative comments

Video Mentions of Health Conditions:

Personal Diets/Practices: 32.5%   Fairy Comments: 2.5%
Improvement of Mood: 12.5%   General Negative Sentiments: 0%
General Positive Sentiments: 52.5%

Total Positive: 70.0%   Total Neutral: 30.0%   Total Negative: 0%

Content from #bodypositivity that mentions health conditions is typically more positively received than content with mentions of body shape and body changes.

Video Mentions of Body Changes:

Personal Diets/Practices: 50.0%   Fairy Comments: 0%
Improvement of Mood: 15.0%   General Negative Sentiments: 8.33%
General Positive Sentiments: 48.3%

Total Positive: 65.0%   Total Neutral: 25.0%   Total Negative: 10.0%

Example Comments:

Positive:
YOURE GORGEOUS DONT BE INSECURE ABOUT ANYTHING YOUR HONESTLY GORGEOUS NOTHING IS WRONG BESTI <3   ♡ 38

Negative:
body positivity isn't gonna stop your heart from stopping   ♡ 1

Neutral:
I accidentally stepped on my dogs tennis ball the other day and thought I broke my foot.   ♡ 46.5K

Improvement of Mood:
This made me feel more comfortable with how my body has changed 🐱 🙂   ♡ 1843

Personal Practice:
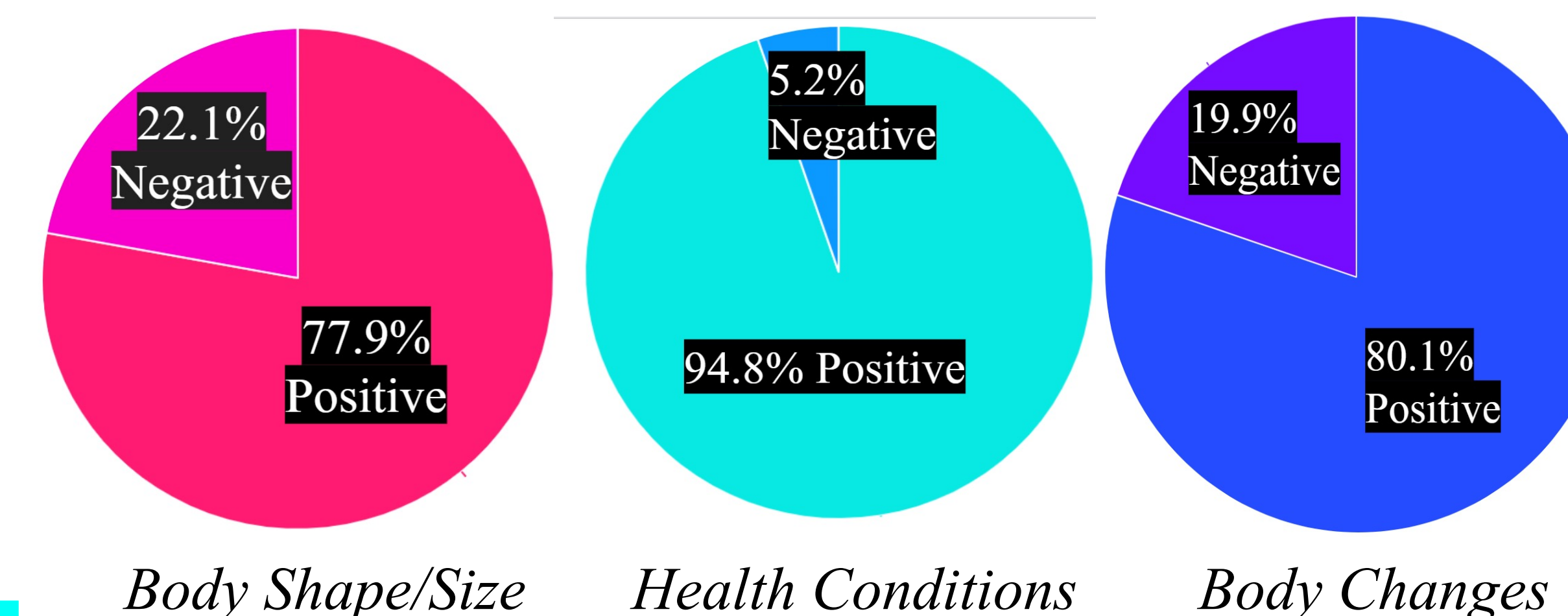Bro I'm fairly fit and I can't even do that. I'm impressed.   ♡ 17

Fairy Comment:
I got mine from eating too many sweets 🍬 I'm built ✨different✨ 😍 #WIP   ♡ 1664

Thread Replies:

Overall – Positive: 81.4%   Negative: 18.6%

Body Shape/Size — 22.1% Negative, 77.9% Positive
Health Conditions — 5.2% Negative, 94.8% Positive
Body Changes — 19.9% Negative, 80.1% Positive

Limitations:

- Based on the TikTok algorithm, top comments and top videos vary based on the user
- Although TikTok is a platform that has a significant majority of adolescent users, there is no way to ensure that all commenters and posters were adolescents
- TikTok already has its own community guidelines that could result in negative comments being removed

CONCLUSIONS

There is a far higher percentage of positive responses to #bodypositivity content than negative responses, and the positive responses garnered more likes than the negative comments.

The responses within a thread beneath the top comments often had a higher percentage of negative comments that the comment section itself..

Although this was not the focus of this study, it was observed that comments were more negative farther down the comment sections. Future studies could look into the variations between top comments and lower comments.

Anecdotal evidences suggests that fairy comments have been a recurring theme with body positive content in the past,so an unexpected finding was that there seems to be a low percentage of fairy comments on #bodypositivity content

Potential reasons for this finding are that the novelty of fairy comments has worn off amongst adolescents or that the TikTok community guidelines have evolved to remove fairy comments

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