



# Challenging female ideal body stereotypes: A qualitative research of positive body image representations on the Red (Xiaohongshu) platform

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## ABSTRACT

The ideal female body stereotype is one of the longstanding aesthetic standards in Chinese society and culture, which not only affects individual women's self-perception and psychological state, but is also constantly reinforced in social media, with increasingly outrageous aesthetic standards causing distress in females. Red (Xiaohongshu), as the most popular social media platform for Chinese women, presents a growing number of users who are aware of the negative effects of this ideal body image and challenge it by posting positive body image posts under the theme "rejecting body anxiety". Existing studies mostly focus on the analysis of static images or single text symbols of positive body image, and thus, the lack of research on the dynamic construction process of videos and how to construct a positive body image on the Red platform is addressed in this study. This study utilised the representation theory and employed textual analysis as the research method to analyse 134 posts by five influencers promoting a positive body image on Red. Results show that influencers use visual and verbal elements to close the distance between themselves and viewers, and guide viewers towards a more positive body image, which helps challenge the "white, young and thin" ideal body standard. The findings provide useful insights into applying the representation theory to short videos on social media. They also demonstrate how influencers use visual and spoken elements to promote positive body images and help us understand how women interpret their body experiences online.

Keywords: **Positive body image, social media, Xiaohongshu, representation, stereotypes**

## INTRODUCTION

There is a worldwide epidemic of media-induced body image preoccupation. The media has long imposed an aesthetic standard of “ideal thinness” (Cohen et al., 2019a). The public’s pursuit and presentation of the ideal body has grown considerably more prominent, particularly among women, teenagers, and individuals who overwhelmingly care about how others perceive them (Thompson & Harriger, 2023). More than three billion people use social media every day. In the United States, 23% frequently take note of their body shape and 11% avoid body images; in Australia, about 23% report dysmorphic worries; and in Switzerland, over 70% of women want to be thinner, despite most being of normal weight. In China, 54.3% of women view themselves as “too fat” (Kilpela et al., 2015; Momo, 2021).

The topic of “female body image” has long persisted in the Chinese culture. The proverb “a good girl is no more than 50 kilogrammes” has probably been widely propagated more than any other. Although this ideal weight is difficult for an adult woman to attain, it is often linked with positive attributes like attractiveness, prosperity, and social standing, and as a result, shapes the public opinion of the “ideal” female figure (Zhang, 2012). This expectation has had a significant impact on societal norms and aesthetic standards with the rise of social media (Bair et al., 2012). Platforms that rely on photos tend to make users more nervous than platforms that rely on text alone (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Similar to traditional media, image-based social media is strongly associated with the internalization of female self-ideals, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorders (Cohen et al., 2019b).

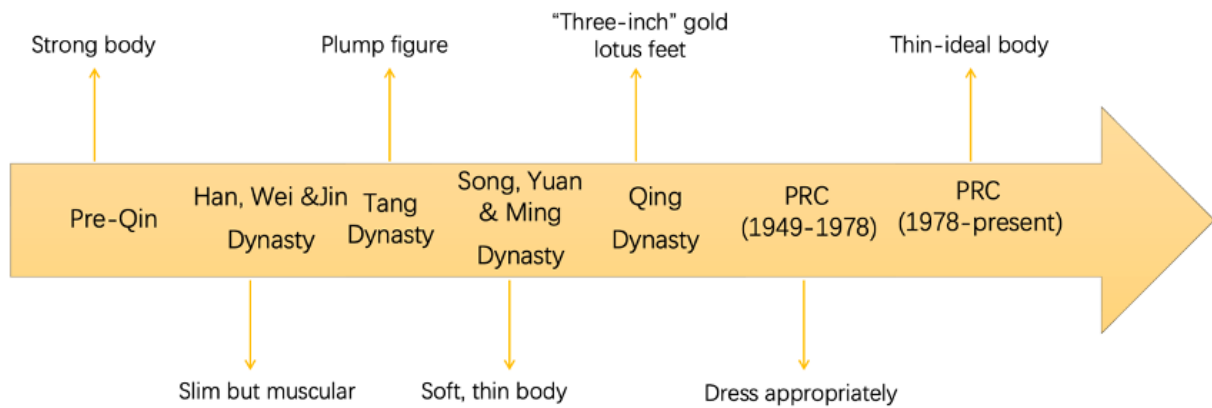
Xiaohongshu (Red), the platform with the highest share of female users in China (Weiboyi & Pangjing, 2022), has become a central space for women to create posts about body image, make lifestyle choices, and share daily content. While idealized bodies remain dominant, a new trend called “rejecting body anxiety” has recently emerged, offering an alternative view that challenges body stereotypes and promotes acceptance. This study therefore examines how influencers on Red construct and communicate this trend to contest the ideal body norm.

### *“Thin-ideal” body image in China*

To understand the ideal body image in China, it is important to mention the aesthetic standards of its aesthetic culture (Figure 1). Throughout China’s 5,000 years of history, female body standards have changed with different periods. Strong bodies were considered beautiful in the pre-Qin era while Zhao Feiyan’s delicate figure was a source of envy throughout the Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties. The plump form became the ideal of beauty after the Tang Dynasty, exemplified by Yang Yuhuan, one of China’s four national beauties. Soft and thin bodies were deemed beautiful in the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties and during the Qing Dynasty, women viewed a “three-inch golden lotus” foot as beautiful (Liu, 2022; Zhang et al., 2018).

Since the People’s Republic of China was in a new stage of nation-building in its early years, people admired the image of strong and proper women (Wielink, 2019). The rapid development of China’s economy from the 80s in the 20th century has led to greater flexibility and desire among modern Chinese women. The consequence of this phenomenon is the development of a cultural standard of “perfect beauty”

in conventional media, including visual advertising in periodicals and television commercials (Jung, 2018). Repeated exposure to media material gradually influences viewers to regard it as a conventional societal norm (Geber & Hefner, 2019).



**Figure 1.** Different standards of the body during different periods in China

Over the past decade, social media has become a major source of reference on social norms and aesthetic standards (Balakrishnan, et al., 2025; Man & Nawi, 2025). China’s social media is rife with young women’s blind worship of unhealthy body images. There is a divide between the Internet’s depictions of women and those created by the mainstream media. The “white, young and thin” requirement as the benchmark originated in 2020. “White and thin” may be understood as referring to fair complexion, a young appearance, and a slim physique. An emblematic occurrence related to the concept of “white and thin” is the widespread appeal of the “BM style”. Brandy Melville (BM) is an Italian company that only offers size S clothing. It is highly coveted by prominent celebrities and influencers. Wearing BM has become the benchmark for evaluating a desirable physique, and many Chinese females take pride in wearing BM. Subsequently, a series of additional aesthetic criteria emerged successively, including designations like “A4 waist”, “chopstick legs”, and “elf ears”. Unfortunately, these apparently impractical body ideals have had a profound impact on every young Chinese woman who values her physical appearance (Thompson & Harriger, 2023).

### *The negative impact of the ideal body image*

There are many negative effects caused by the ideal body image, and the most direct effect is body dysmorphic disorder, which is also defined by scholars as a negative body image. This disorder refers to negative perceptions, emotional experiences and related behavioural adjustments related to one’s body (Chen, 2023; Wood et al., 1996). Several researchers have linked media exposure to developing and maintaining body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Frederick et al., 2017; Grabe et al., 2008; Levine & Murnen, 2009). Furthermore, individuals who are dissatisfied with their bodies are more likely to engage in potentially hazardous weight control behaviours such as dieting, fasting, self-induced purging, and the use of diuretics, laxatives, and diet drugs (Moore, 1993).

Additionally, body dissatisfaction not only causes changes in eating habits but also contributes to poor mental health (Dolenc, 2019). Body image issues associated with

weight or other aspects of physical appearance are now widespread globally (Rodgers et al., 2023). Multiple studies have demonstrated the link between negative body image and mental health issues, such as depression, postpartum depression, and poor psychosocial functioning (Rodgers et al., 2023). A 2019 study from the UK found that 20% of individuals are ashamed of their body image, 34% feel despondent or dejected, and 19% are disgusted by their body image. The study also found that 13% of adults have had suicidal thoughts or feelings due to anxiety about their body image (Mental Health Foundation, 2019).

Additionally, the trend of cosmetic surgery is also on the rise with body dissatisfaction. The risks associated with cosmetic surgery are unforeseeable, such as venous thromboembolism or surgical site infection (Di Gesto et al., 2022; Gillen & Markey, 2021; Kaoutzanis et al., 2016; Saad et al., 2014; Yun et al., 2015).

### *Body positivity in China*

Body positivity is a movement that gained popularity in Western media, including Facebook and Instagram, that questions the ideal image that is pushed in the media (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). Nevertheless, the Chinese market's limitations hindered its rise in popularity on Chinese social media until the latter part of 2020 (Lang et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). The movement questions the conventional perception of beauty as well as promotes the acceptance and positive regard for one's own body within the female population, therefore highlighting the wide range of body images.

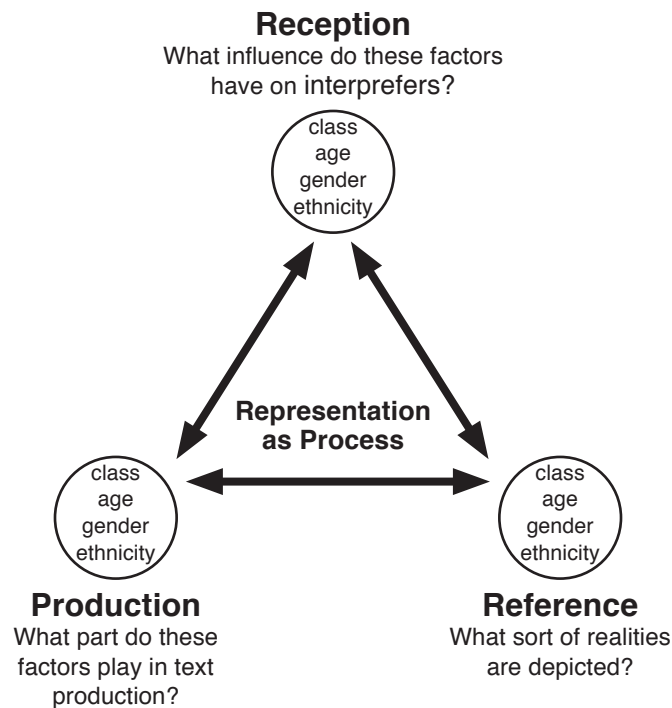
Red (Xiaohongshu) is the most used social platform for women. As of mid-August 2024, the topic of "refusing body anxiety" had reached 770 million views and 60,000 participants, reflecting the emotions of young Chinese female users who rebel against the stereotype of ideal body reaching a climax. Zhang (2022) found that idealized female images including perfect goddesses, hot moms, life experts, elite women, and emotional experts, significantly increase women's anxiety. It is worth noting that women gradually realized the irrationality of this regulation which led to rebellious psychology, and the concept of body began to self-awaken and emancipate, as more and more young women rebelled in the face of such an unreasonable expectation. Many influencers have also openly opposed the aesthetic of white and thin, reflecting on and denying this aesthetic, as well as sharing content under the label "rejecting body anxiety".

### *Theoretical framework*

In previous studies, researchers have focused primarily on images that promote positive body attitudes, while videos have received far less attention (Cohen et al., 2019b; Lazuka et al., 2020). This study adopted Stuart Hall's Representation Theory (1997) as its main theoretical foundation, in combination with Daniel Chandler's Media Representation System (2006), with a focus on videos that represent "rejecting body anxiety".

The analysis of the production process is particularly crucial. On the one hand, it helps us reveal the construction logic of the representations behind the content of body positivity and identify which visual and discourse elements are used to convey the meaning of body positivity. On the other hand, it also enables us to distinguish whether these contents have truly challenged the mainstream aesthetic. To understand content that truly has a positive impact on women's body image, it is necessary to understand how visuals, language, and symbols convey a positive body image.

## The present study



**Figure 2.** System of representation (Chandler, 2006)

This research, grounded in the representation theory, analysed the practices of five female influencers who explicitly reject body anxiety. It explored their utilization of visual and verbal elements components found in their videos on the Red platform to foster a positive body image. In this process, they contest idealized body norms and advocate for women's self-acceptance and identity.

## METHOD

### Sample

The keyword search was used to identify the relevant terms within the search interface of the Red platform application. Since the concept of "body positivity" does not exist within China, this study adopted other terms that have meanings parallel to it, such as "#rejectingbodyanxiety" and "#bodyanxiety", instead of "#bodypositivity."

Based on the search results, the influencers with the highest frequency (n=68) of posts were filtered. After that, the Xinhong website was used; this website allows users to search in Red and it also provides comprehensive data services, including Red traffic management and brand promotion strategies. The four main conditions for selecting each account are as follows: (1) number of followers (at least 50,000 followers; n = 26 was deleted), (2) body positivity-related content (e.g., accounts about body positivity/positive body imagery; n = 10 was deleted); (3) activity level on Red (at least 100 posts, including the most recent ones published within two weeks of sampling; n=19 was deleted); (4) interaction on the Red platform (more than 10,000 readings, more than 1,000 likes and favourites, and more than 100 comments; n = 8 was deleted) Thus, the remaining

accounts that met the criteria were reserved for encoding ( $n = 5$ ). The final coding was then based on each account's dedicated posts on body positivity, for a total of 134 posts.

**Table 1.** Influencer accounts that promoted “Rejecting body anxiety” and their basic information

Influencer (No.)	Followers	Number of likes and comments	Theme
1	124 k	0.94 million	Exercise; Health
2	580 k	7.28 million	Exercise; Health
3	143 k	1.724 million	Exercise; Health; Product promotion
4	260 k	1.288 million	Make-up; Daily life
5	128 k	1.08 million	Fashion; Outfits

### *Coding procedure*

This study followed the six-step thematic analysis process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), and conducted coding separately for the visual texts and the spoken texts of the “rejecting body anxiety” videos.

First, the researcher reviewed the videos, transcribed the influencers' spoken content verbatim, and recorded key visual elements for each video. Second, based on an initial understanding of the data, inductive methods were used to generate the initial codes. Visual coding included influencers' body mass index (BMI), makeup style, clothing choices, presentation of “imperfect parts,” camera use, and shooting settings and so on. After completing the preliminary analysis of visual texts, the organization and coding of spoken content in the videos followed. The spoken part usually included the influencer's self-narration, voice-over, or direct speech to the camera. These segments are important portrayals of attitudes, personal experiences, and viewpoints, and serve as key material for examining how influencers convey the idea of body positivity.

To ensure the reliability of the analysis, a second trained researcher independently coded approximately 20% of the sample. The Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated as 0.81, indicating a high level of agreement. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and the coding instructions were refined accordingly. After coding about 80% of the videos, no new codes emerged, suggesting that data saturation had been reached. The remaining samples were used to confirm the stability of the thematic structure.

## RESULTS

### *Videos' visual elements*

Table 2 presents the visual elements of the videos analysed.

**Table 2.** Visual elements of “rejecting body anxiety” videos

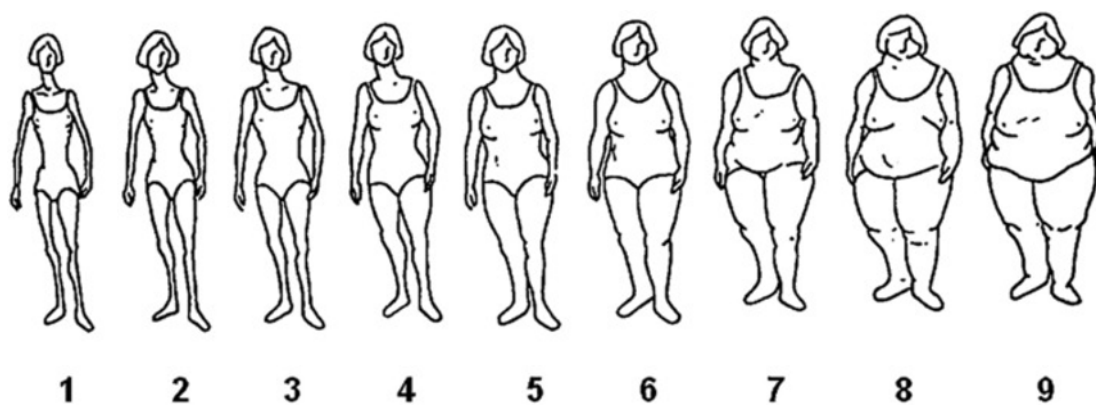
No.	BMI (1-9)	Makeup and Styling	Body Exposure (0-5)	Visible Flaws	Visual Framing	Shooting environment
1	7	Dark skin tones, Western-style makeup	4	Tall, strong, double chin, accessory breasts, neck lines	Head-up, medium shot, long shot	Home, sports ground, on the street

**Table 2. (con't)**

No.	BMI (1-9)	Makeup and Styling	Body Exposure (0-5)	Visible Flaws	Visual Framing	Shooting environment
2	6	Dark skin tones, Western-style makeup	4	Thick arms, fat, body hair, thick legs	Head-up, medium shot, long shot	Home, seaside, natural fields
3	6	Dark skin tones, Western-style makeup	5	Slightly chubby, fat upper body	Head-up, long shot	Home
4	5	Light skin tone, Korean-style makeup	3	Thick legs, wide hips	Head-up, medium shot	Home, shooting studio
5	5	Light skin tone, Western-style makeup	3	Short, growth streaks, flabby arms, the back is thicker	Head-up, long shot	Home, on the streets
6	6	Dark skin tones, Western-style makeup, Chinese-style makeup	3	Tall, big belly, thick legs	Head-up, long shot, medium shot	Home, outdoors

As can be seen from the character description shown in the video (Figure 3), there is a significant gap between the five influencers and the idealized body image. First, the influencers' Body Mass Index (Figure 3) mainly ranged between 5–7, which denotes slightly overweight and plump body types. This shows that they are not the “very thin” type in the public's view, but rather differ from mainstream beauty ideals. This makes their messages about “rejecting body anxiety” more convincing.

In addition, the researcher also recorded the influencers' skin tone and makeup style. Four of them have darker skin tones, showing bronze or wheat-coloured skin, and they use Western-style makeup features such as contouring, thick eyebrows, and rich lip colours, giving a more mature and confident look.



**Figure 3. Body mass index**

In terms of clothing style, the influencers showed clear diversity and a sense of self-expression. Some chose outfits with more skin exposure, such as off-shoulder long dresses, sports bras with tight leggings, or fitted and sexy clothes, to highlight a confident

and bold attitude toward their bodies. It is worth noting that many influencers actively showed body parts that are traditionally seen as “imperfect,” such as arm fat, belly fat, or thick legs. This open body display matches their verbal expressions of self-acceptance and confidence.

In addition to the figures, the angles of the shots complemented the environment and the figures. As the videos were mainly published on the Red platform, the shooting angle was more in line with the current use and habits of mobile phones, that is, vertical screen shooting. The videos were mainly based on the head-up angle, and combined the shooting techniques of medium and long shots. On the one hand, it shortens the distance between the user and the viewer, and on the other hand, it also helps the user to fully perceive the overall image of the person. In addition, some close-ups were used in some popular science videos to further show the imperfect characteristics of their figures, which achieved the purpose of eliminating body anxiety.

The shooting environment is also a factor that was not mentioned in previous studies. Among the videos of the five influencers, the family scene appeared most frequently, and the characters often demonstrated a more natural state. Secondly, they walked on the street confidently, not afraid of showing their body image to others. The natural environment, such as the seaside and the field, also frequently appears in the video, which expands the user’s perception and further deepens the harmony between the body and the environment.

### *Videos’ verbal elements*

Open coding and thematic analysis were conducted on the spoken content in the videos. In the process of induction, two main themes were identified: “positive body image” and “challenge the ideal body”, along with several representative sub-themes (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Themes of videos’ verbal elements

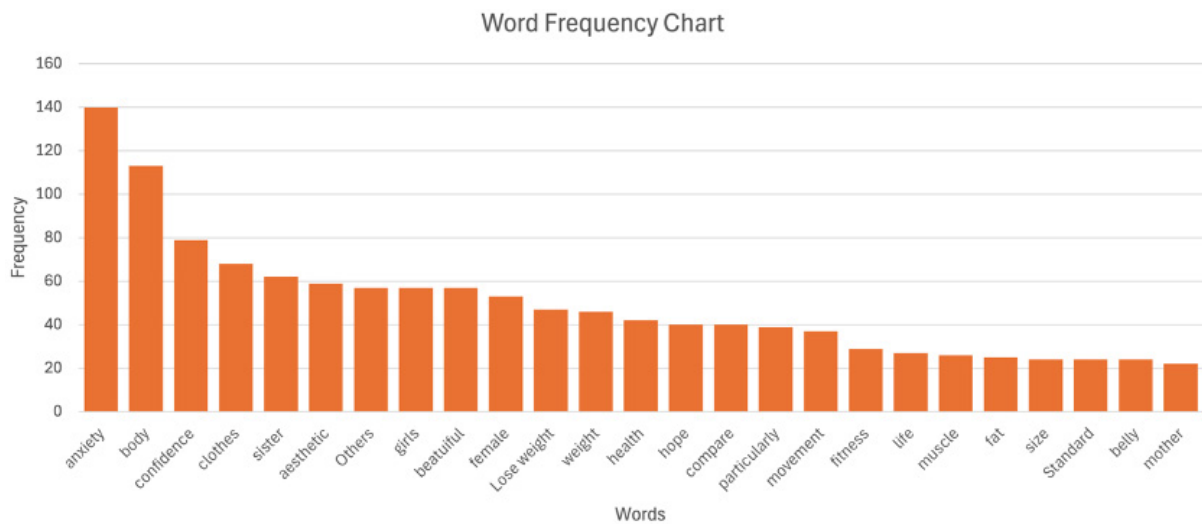
Theme	Subtheme	Source of themes
Positive Body Image	Body confidence	Through analysis, it was found that influencers repeatedly stressed that confidence does not depend on appearance or weight, but comes from accepting the natural state of the body. At the same time, they called for rejecting overly altered and technologically modified body images.
	Embrace imperfections	In many videos, influencers directly pointed out body “imperfections”, such as small belly or wide hips, and emphasized that these are normal body traits.
	Love your body	Influencers emphasized the positive meaning of body traits and reminded women to recognize and value their uniqueness, in order to resist society’s single standard of women’s appearance.
	Self-encouragement	On one hand, influencers emphasized the diversity of beauty. On the other hand, they reminded viewers not to be influenced by external evaluations, but to build self-confidence from within.
	Self-preservation	This kind of content reflected a kind of “self-preservation” attitude when users face social pressure, that is, resisting negative external evaluation through psychological defence.  This theme emphasizes that health is more important than appearance. It advocates improving both physical and mental well-being through exercise and a healthy lifestyle, instead of equating health with slimming.

**Table 3. (con't)**

Theme	Subtheme	Source of themes
Challenge the ideal body	Rebel against a monolithic aesthetic	Influencers often question the single beauty standard promoted by mainstream media and society, highlight the importance of nature and health, and remind audiences not to be controlled by “weight numbers”.
	Resistance to social expectations	Influencers stress that physical traits such as folds or body differences are normal and should not be reasons for shame. At the same time, they point out that women should not be forced to meet male appearance expectations, and that confidence should come from oneself, not from outside.
	A rebellion against social expectations	Influencers criticize how business and the market use “body anxiety” to create consumer demand, stressing that these standards are artificially constructed, and reminding women that they do not need to be bound by them.

**Word frequency**

In order to further verify and complement the results of the thematic analysis, a word frequency count of the spoken content was also conducted (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Word frequency**

“Anxiety” appeared with the highest frequency, at a total of 140 times, which directly underlines anxiety as the theme of this study, and the second was “body” with a frequency of 113 times; this indicates that bloggers frequently discuss body-related anxiety, and also confirmed the accuracy of the sample. The frequency of other terms was less than 100. This means that the bloggers discussed the topics of “anxiety” and “body” more elaborately. The third term was “confidence” (79). Confidence here refers not only to self-assurance, but also the encouragement bloggers give to their followers to help more women gain a state of self-confidence.

The word frequency distribution is related to real-time events. The emergence of the words “clothes (68)”, “aesthetic (59)”, “size (24)” and “standard (24)” reflects the recent widespread discussion in the Chinese society about the standardization of clothing

sizes. Other words also reflect the popularity of body management on social media. For example, the frequent use of “lose weight (47)”, “compare (40)” and “fat (25)” all point to the topic of weight loss. In addition, “health (42)”, “fitness (29)” and “muscle (26)” highlight the importance of health and fitness.

It should be noted that these keywords are highly consistent with the core subthemes revealed in the thematic analysis, reflecting the influencers’ concentrated focus on issues such as body anxiety, body diversity, self-confidence, identity, and appearance-related pressure in their linguistic construction.

### *Theme development*

By analysing the verbal content of the selected videos, it can be observed that the influencers mainly focused on two main themes: Positive Body Image and Challenging the Ideal Body. These two themes reflect the core attitude conveyed by their opinionated expressions; they encourage women to be confident and accept themselves as well as question the inherent aesthetic standards of society.

Regarding the first theme, positive body image, influencers shared their experience and positive emotions to encourage other users to develop body confidence and self-acceptance. They often mentioned slogans such as Embrace imperfections, Love your body, Self-encouragement and Healthy lifestyle. These expressions help viewers reduce anxiety, and also make the concept of “rejecting body anxiety” more relevant to daily life.

Secondly, is the theme of “Challenging the ideal body”. This is another type of content that embodies the resistance against social aesthetic standards. Influencers expressed their dissatisfaction with rigid standards such as “white, young, and thin” through statements like “resisting a single aesthetic” and “resisting social expectations”. Through these expressions, influencers promote a more inclusive and diverse understanding of beauty.

## DISCUSSION

This study, through an examination of the visual and discursive elements in “rejecting body anxiety” videos found on Red, finds that the influencers of these videos challenge the standards of ideal body images not only by showcasing positive body images, but also by using a narrative discourse that helps other female users build a positive body image.

### *Dynamic “non-ideal” body image*

First of all, from the perspective of body image representation, all five influencers advocate a healthy and natural body image, including skin in its natural state, the display of different body types, as well as diversified clothing and posture. These influencers, as a whole, did not fit into the category of the so-called “ideal thin” body type. Their figures were closer to the diverse types of ordinary women. In terms of skin tone, some have a healthy tan while others have fair skin, and this variation further broadens the visibility of body positivity. Their clothing choices were not constrained by body curves, waist size, or arm shape; instead, they confidently wore slip dresses, sports bras, and cropped tops, appearing naturally in front of the camera with arms, shoulders, and midsections visible, body parts that society might label as “flaws”. This courageous way of showing themselves

sends a clear message; there is no need to conform to a single standard of body type, and no need to hide parts of the body considered “imperfect”. These representations are consistent with the concept of an expected positive body image (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

Since this study focused on videos, it is clear that compared to earlier research that centred on images, moving bodies give influencers more layered opportunities for self-presentation. The influencers utilised expressive body language, and their presence on camera reflects both confidence and ease. The influencers also communicated with viewers through the platform as if they were friends, aiming to create a relaxed atmosphere. They used their facial expressions and body movements, and this kind of emotional influence often helps the audience remember the content much better compared to reasoning alone.

Their gestures appear relaxed and natural; some were seen running or taking photos, while others concentrated on showing moments from daily life or workout routines. Paired with confident smiles, these scenes send a positive signal to viewers, as they did not shy away from revealing parts like a small belly or fuller arms. Thus, their body representations act as a capital on which they mobilize their motions to communicate with the audiences of different body types. Differing from the popularly accepted ones, each can also be beautiful in their own ways. These ordinary scenes subtly convey to the audience that the body belongs to oneself, using visual symbols to encourage viewers to see the body as a medium for personal expression rather than an accessory to social beauty standards. This contrasts strongly with the “thin-ideal image” usually posed in social media, underlining a real concept that would give hope to the rest of the female viewers in being realistic about their bodies.

Secondly, the camera angles and distances emphasize the representation of body image. In the samples, it was often found that a balanced perspective was commonly used, whilst avoiding the judgmental feel of overhead shots and the admiration of low-angle shots. Instead, the balanced perspective, which is closer to a natural and authentic viewpoint, communicates with the viewers of the videos on an equal footing. Further, in order to better express their natural physical state, influencers used close-ups to magnify the so-called “imperfect” parts, whilst using long shots to show the whole body more comprehensively. For example, when they compare their body before and after wearing shapewear or when they run freely on the beach.

The choice of the shooting environment also enriches the efficacy of body image representation, and the five influencers mainly shot their videos in natural sceneries such as home, street, and seaside. It is worth noting that the presentation of the street is very different from other scenes. The environment of the home and the seaside is relatively static, while the street where people come and go often prompts interactions with other passers-by. In the video, it is easy to spot other passers-by looking at the influencer. For example, Influencer 1 walks confidently on the streets of Japan in cheongsam, where the image of thinness prevails, but she still shows off her body confidently while facing the scrutiny of others. For viewers of the video, Influencer 1's behaviour is a concrete expression of a positive body image.

Overall, compared to static images, these videos are more engaging and persuasive in conveying the idea of body positivity. Moving images can enhance emotional expression through facial expressions, body language, and an interactive atmosphere, allows viewers to feel a sense of confidence and beauty more directly. This

immediate emotional connection and visual impact makes it easier for viewers to break away from fixed beauty standards and to recognize and accept diverse body aesthetics.

### *Nurturing body confidence*

Visual elements are the most direct expression of the characteristics of the body image, while spoken content can express opinions. Through the analysis of the influencers' spoken texts, two themes were identified: Positive Body Image and Resistance to the Ideal Body Image. These themes related to positive body image aligns with previous research; however, the other two themes were not mentioned in past studies. The first is direct resistance against ideal body images, and the second is the encouragement for young women to develop healthy lifestyles, thereby constructing a discourse that challenges ideal body image standards.

Firstly, influencers directly questioned and reflected on societal aesthetics and body standards. These discussions are often related to social hot topics, such as the BM trend (where only size S is sold), which led many women to feel proud if they could fit into size S clothes, and ashamed if they could not. Another example is Chinese tennis player Zheng Qinwen winning an Olympic championship; instead of celebrating the rise of female strength, the focus was on her H-shaped waist not fitting traditional aesthetics. Influencers criticised these trends and used critical words to express their dissatisfaction with the current standard of “white, young and thin”. They hope to provide female users with a perspective of reflection and reinvention through their discourse, to tell female audiences that the standards held by society are not necessarily right, and to give them the ability to question and re-examine their own body image.

Additionally, influencers used the camera to create a direct dialogue with their audience. The analysis found that terms like “sisters” and “girls” were used frequently, which, combined with the level camera angles mentioned in the previous section, directly closes the distance between influencers and users, making it feel like a conversation between friends. This approach helps users receive the messages the influencers want to convey more easily while browsing the videos, resonating with other viewers. The number of likes and comments under the videos serves as the best evidence of this connection.

Last but not least, influencers used positive language to encourage and persuade users. For example, “*We shouldn't be limited to white and thin, or a single aesthetic, beauty can be diverse.*”, “*Instead of wishing you beauty, I hope that you will have upward vitality*”, “*Your worth is not determined by your weight*” and so on. Through these words, influencers rebelled against the pressure of body image on female users, and also encouraged others to identify with themselves. While they emphasized the importance of exercise and a healthy lifestyle, they refused to tie it to slimming, but instead encouraged healthy ways to improve physical fitness and self-confidence. They aimed to inform more women that mental health and physical health are equally important through their own examples, so that more women can pay attention to themselves and appreciate their bodies.

In short, the discourse characteristics in the “Rejecting body anxiety” videos not only challenged the stereotype of the ideal body image through the positive expression of the influencers, but also established a discourse against the ideal body standard, and also laid the foundation for the development of a positive body image in China.

### *Representation systems in social media*

This study applied the representation theory to the analysis of body image-related content in social media. The representation theory has long been used to study how bodies are portrayed in traditional media such as television and advertising, but its application in short-video social media platforms is still limited. Existing research often focuses on the effects of social media on users' body anxiety, and less on how the content itself uses language and visual elements to show different body meanings and convey positive body images.

Against this background, this study examined “rejecting body anxiety” videos on the Red platform and explored how influencers shape positive representation of body images through visual presentation, filming choices and spoken expressions. This type of analysis helps extend the use of the representation theory to new media environments and provides more detailed insights into how body images are portrayed in short-video content.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the representation of a positive body image requires more extensive data support. This study selected a sample of five influencers using the Xinhong website, and combed through their posts related to “rejecting body anxiety”. At the same time, the number of videos from each influencer is not balanced because the number of posts of each influencer is not the same. For example, although Influencer 5 provided 55 posts, due to the diversity of expressions in the posts, it did not significantly impact the results. Therefore, future research could select a wider range of data and not be limited to the content produced by characteristic bloggers to achieve a balanced sample.

Second, with the popularity of positive body image, commercialization is bound to be a major potential negative factor. Several body-positive accounts have become more monetised as they became more popular, with influencers being paid to promote commercial products. A total of nine posts containing advertisements appeared in this study, which did not seriously affect the data results because of their small percentage. However, in the process of commercialization, body-positive influencers may deviate from campaign of body positivity (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). Similarly, in China, Red itself is a platform that started with e-commerce, and commercial content is inevitably the first choice of its operation. Thus, merchants may not be keen in losing golden opportunities and posts for commercial purposes will inevitably interfere in the body positivity campaign or promotion.

### CONCLUSION

In summary, through the qualitative analysis of the visual and verbal elements of “rejecting body anxiety” videos on the Red platform, this study highlights the challenges of positive body image and the resistance discourse against the stereotype ideal body. The findings of this study offer some additional insights into the use of the representation theory in the context of short videos on social media. They also provide a new perspective

on how influencers use visual and spoken elements to convey positive body images, and further help us understand how women make sense of their body experiences on social media.

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