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# Tea Tree Oil Acne Treatments on Pinterest: Will It Save Your Face?

## INTRODUCTION

Acne is a skin condition in which hair follicles, or pores, become clogged by bacteria, dead skin, or excess oils produced by sebaceous glands (Mayo Clinic). There are different kinds of acne ranging in severity and can cause more simple types of acne like whiteheads, or more complex acne like blackheads, papules, pustules, nodules, and cystic lesions. The majority of acne is caused by bacteria that invades open pores and eventually causes infections in the form of red, inflamed areas on the skin. Most commonly, the bacterium, *Propionibacterium acnes* (P. acnes), is associated with acne. However, because there are so many different types of acne, there is typically a need for several different types of treatments.

Given the different types and severity of acne, the acne skincare treatment industry is robust with more than 4.92 billion dollars in annual sales in the year 2016 and is only projected to increase from there. Acne can be difficult to treat because there are different causes and types of acne and each case varies by the person's lifestyle, hormones, stress level, genetics, skin type, and response to treatment. For instance, treatments proving effective for someone with oily skin and cystic acne, may not show similar results for another individual with dry skin and blackhead type acne. Treatments can vary drastically in price and availability..

There is an increasing societal trend for more natural and organic options for health and beauty products. The use of tea tree oil for the treatment of acne has been partially driven by social media. Pinterest is a particularly powerful consumer influence tool with more than 320 million people using Pinterest every month. Pinterest supplies information efficiently and succinctly in the form of eye-catching or inspiring photos that can then lead the user to a hyperlink for an outside website for more information or to make a purchase. Furthermore, a whopping 98% of Pinterest users reported that they use the ideas and products they find on Pinterest. With this marketing potential in the Pinterest platform, it is easy to see how an equally successful industry such as the market for skin care and beauty products would take advantage of this platform to promote their ingredients and products. Modern dermatologist-recommended treatments for acne can be financially taxing and the consumer may go through several treatments before finding one that works best for their skin type. As fears regarding antibacterial resistance grows, more consumers are looking for alternative treatments for acne on social media platforms (Mayo Clinic).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the rise in popularity of alternative treatments for acne, the purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions:

1. **Assess how Pinterest portrays acne treatments in the form of tea tree oil.**
2. **Analyze data and images to understand depiction of these treatments: is it positive or negative?**
3. **Why is this important and how is it applied to our lives**

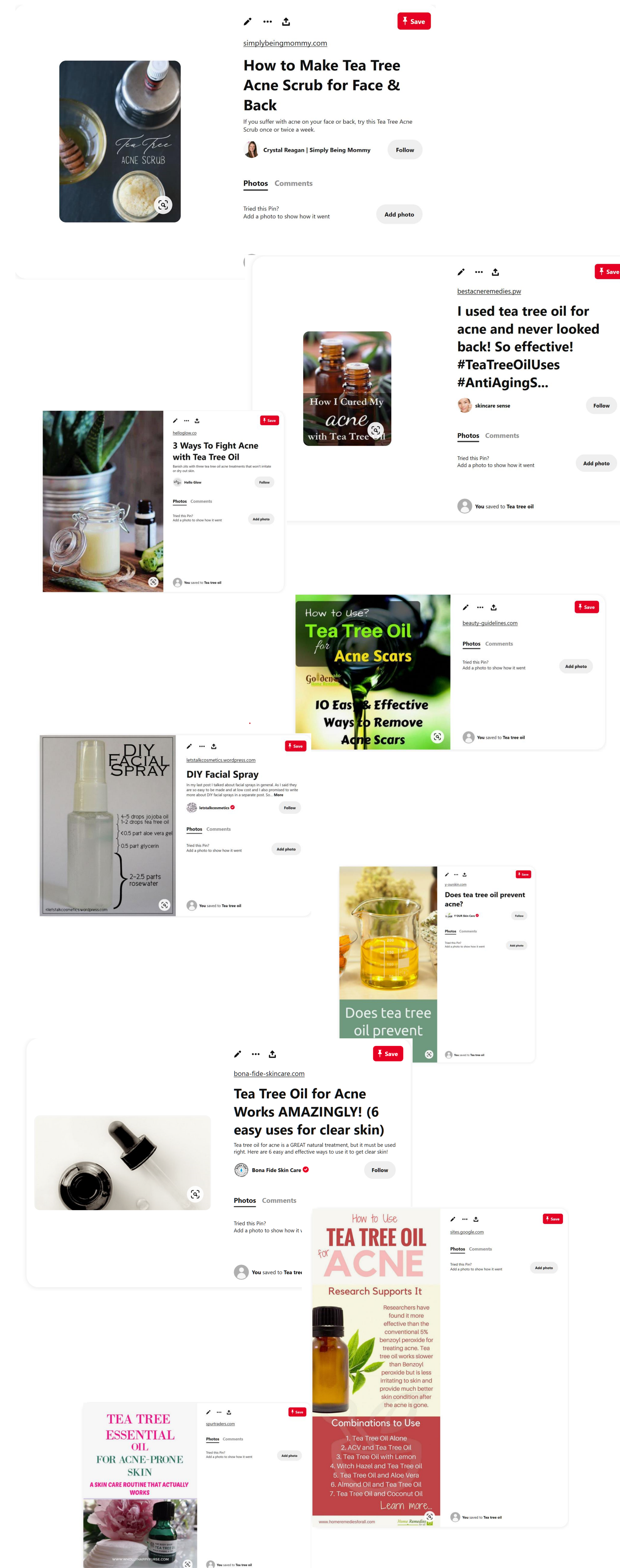
## METHODS

Using the search term tea tree oil acne treatment, samples were taken from every five pins to collect 250 pins for our final sample. From the data collected a code book was formed which was then pilot tested. A final codebook was developed which was used by 1 primary coder and two sub coders.

## RESULTS

Of the 250 pins sampled, the overall portrayal was mostly (66%) positive, while the other 34% of pins were “not apparent”. The percentage of commercial products was 30% , while homemade products was 40%. The most common severity of acne claimed to treat was severe acne, while none claimed to treat moderate acne. Surprisingly, only 20% of the sample recommended the use of additional ingredients. Additionally, 23% of the pins had other health claims. None of the pins sampled warned potential users of adverse side effects or possible risks.

## SAMPLE PINS



## CONCLUSION

With social media altering the way health information is portrayed, it is important to identify the difference between scientifically-proven and misleading information. This study ultimately revealed that social media is not a reliable source of information pertaining to tea tree oil as a topical acne treatment. Through this study, three key takeaways were discovered:

1. Pinterest tends to suggest a wide variety of search results that are not 100% accurate or reliable, as 34% of the pins sampled could not even give a clear message on whether tea tree oil was a good or bad acne treatment option.
2. When searching for a specific solution on a social media platform such as Pinterest, commercial marketing will always be a goal, deviating from the sole goal of helping the users of the platform. 30% of the pins sampled were trying to promote a commercial product rather than focusing on the effects of tea tree oil.
3. The importance of this study looks to the increased reliance on social media for sensitive information regarding health concerns. However, the information included in the pins is unclear with 23% making additional health claims that are not scientifically backed and additionally, all of the pins failed to convey potential risks of using tea tree oil as an acne treatment.

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