

r/SkincareAddiction

A Digital Ethnography of a Healthy Community

By Nina Lutz

Context of Skincare and Skincare Online

Before we approach an ethnography of r/SkincareAddiction, it is important to contextualize skincare, especially in the United States, as this is the context for r/SkincareAddiction.

Skincare is a mega industry that exists all over the world, and it is worth billions and has taken over shelves and social media worldwide. Varieties of brands compete on the stage of skincare — from luxury to drugstore. And as we have seen drugstore products expand and enter into a new generation of over the counter skincare, we see a variety of communities emerge to get the most bang for their buck and find the best routines possible. And makeup artists and influencers seek to have the best canvas for cosmetics.

Overall skincare and makeup are closely connected but occupy very different goals and spaces. Many makeup artists are educated in skincare and practice it, but overall much of skincare, in particular the skincare we see online focuses on products and routines that are treating specific concerns or just trying to improve skin in general. A lot of this overlap also comes from the influencer economy. For example, it is not unusual for a makeup influencer to post a review about skin care or share content about how they take off their makeup, take care of their skin, and use skin care to prep their skin for more makeup.

A variety of online skin communities, from reddit to YouTube to Twitter to specialized websites like skincare-junkie.com focus on a variety of product reviews, routines, and other influencers. These influencers are often self educated skin care gurus who give brand and product reviews along with routine tips and tricks. These skincare specific influencers, such as "Skincare by Hyram" and "Labmuffin", have millions of followers between them. It is smaller than beauty influencers, but if you consider how other influencers are also on the skincare game from The Bachelor stars to TikTok stars to beauty gurus — skincare is well online and in the influencer market.

Because everyone has different skin composition and environmental factors, skincare routines vary a lot from person to person. This is part of the reason there is such a massive market and community around it. Skin also varies between age ranges and variety of other demographics ranging from lifestyle to genetic conditions.

In the last few years, skincare has become more popular in the mainstream. It has become more international, with Korean skincare becoming a huge trend all over the world as millions seek to have skin that looks like glass with no pores.

The skincare section at CVS used to just be some very stinging acne products, a few wrinkle and eye creams, and some moisturizers and soaps. Just look at your local drugstore — it's definitely grown.

Skincare has exploded and is here to stay, both on and offline.

Context of r/SkincareAddiction on Reddit

Reddit is home to a variety of different online communities. There are over 400 million average monthly users, over 200K active communities, and over 20 billion screen views per month. Dubbed “The Front-page of the Internet” Reddit is definitely well traffic and diverse in its communities. Some up and coming communities include: r/mead, r/VeganFoodPorn, r/AdvancedRunning, r/glossier, and r/FondantHate.

One of these countless communities is r/SkincareAddiction. As of 3/16/20, r/SkincareAddiction has 1.1 million members. The community was created January 5 2012.

On Reddit there are a variety of communities pertaining to esthetics and aesthetics. r/SkinCare is actually a private reddit that you need approval for. r/Skincare_Addiction is very very similar to r/SkincareAddiction with less members and newer (August 2016, 31.1k members). There is also r/SkinCareAddictionUK which focuses on brands that are available in the UK (created July 2014, 19.8k members).

There are also a variety of subreddits for a variety of skin conditions from r/acne (60.6k, January 2009), r/Rosacea (April 2008, 13.3k), and r/eczema (May 2010, 26k). Similar to r/SkincareAddictionUK, there are more subreddits pertaining to different countries and also age and gender breakdowns such as r/30PlusSkinCare (41.4k, March 2015), r/malegrooming (101k, October 2010). There are also communities around common skin medications and treatments such as r/Accutane (21.7k, July 2012) and r/tretinoin (33.6k, May 2014). And communities around particular brands or regimens, like r/glossier (14.2k, September 2016) or r/koreanskincare (1.5k, September 2017) or r/KoreanBeauty (30.4k, April 2014).

Given all these communities, r/SkincareAddiction is the largest, most active, and one of the oldest in the realm of Reddit skincare communities. Therefore it is the focus of this ethnography.

Structure, Governance, and Features of r/SkincareAddiction

Structurally, r/SkincareAddiction functions like many subreddits. It has a list of rules and conduct, moderators, a variety options that you can filter by in the sidebar, a weekly schedule of threads, and a very generous wiki.

Overall r/SkincareAddiction is heavily documented in terms of all of its features and governance and post requirements and templates.

Please note for this section, any *italicized text* is from the subreddit

Moderators

There are a total of 10 moderators enforcing the community guidelines of the subreddit as well as two bots: ScA_Bot and AutoModerator. Many of these moderators are also pretty active in the community, contributing to a lot of conversations and adding their own content.

Rules and Conduct

The rules and conduct of r/SkincareAddiction is very well documented [here](#). Below is the shortened version of the rules.

Rule 1: Be kind and respectful [Full Rule 1 explanation](#)

Rule 2: Safety first [Full Rule 2 explanation](#)

Rule 3: No referral code spam. [Full Rule 3 explanation](#)

Rule 4: Don't spam your blog, your product, your anything. [Full Rule 4 explanation](#)

Rule 5: No rogue AMAs. [Full Rule 5 explanation](#)

Rule 6: Stay on topic. [Full Rule 6 explanation](#)

Rule 7: Follow our post requirements. [Full Rule 7 explanation](#)

Shortened Version of Post Requirements

The reddit has a long [post requirements](#) section. Here are some shortened points of it:

- All posts have to include a [valid tag](#) in the post title. You write this tag in the title field when uploading your post.
- We don't allow 'identify' questions as standalone posts. That means "What is this thing?" questions should be asked in the [Daily Help Thread](#) stickied to the top of the sub.
- Selfie and B&A posts (posts that celebrate progress or show off someone's skin in a positive way)
- Hauls (posts that show off recent skincare buys)
- Shelfies (pictures of your current skincare collection)
- Reviews (posts meant to give an opinion/evaluation of a product)

Enforcement policy

[Full enforcement policy](#)

Hopefully, most of the time we'll just comment to tell you to keep the rules in mind, or to be careful about your behaviour. Think of these as a gentle reminder.

In the case of obvious rule-breaking behaviour (like bullying, spam, etc.) we will be more strict. On the first offense, we'll remove your comment or post and leave a mod comment explaining our decision with an official warning. We'll tell you explicitly that you will be banned if you break the rule again. On the second offense, you will be banned. We do reserve the right to depart from this policy in cases of extreme rule-breaking behaviour.

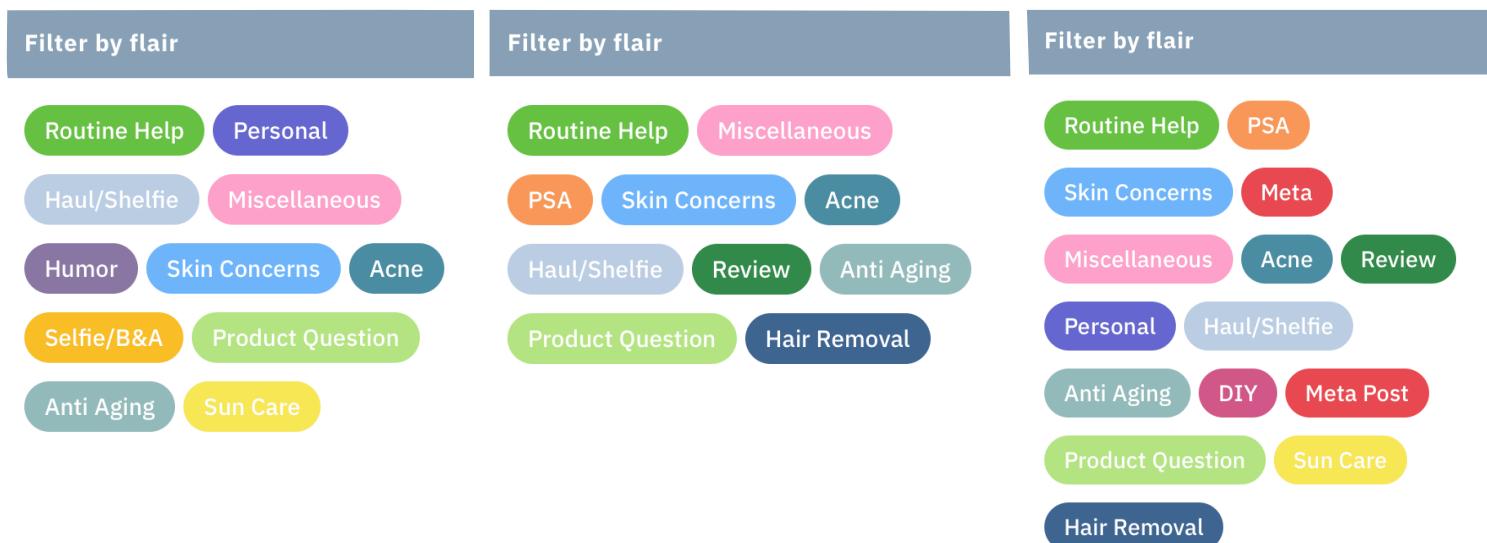
Reporting

[How to report](#)

See something that breaks our rules? Report it! We appreciate everyone who helps us out by reporting rule breaking behaviour :)

Filters

Like many subreddits, r/skinCareAddiction has a variety of filters that appear in the sidebar. These are called flairs and can change over time. Below is an example of some flairs.



Weekly Schedule

As shown in the rules and conduct, the Reddit has a very specific

| | |
|-----------|--|
| All week | Daily Help Thread |
| Monday | <u>HG Threads</u> |
| Wednesday | Discussion day (text-post only) & <u>No/Low Buy Threads</u> |
| Friday | Casual Friday (Humor, Cringe, Selfies, B&As are allowed; General Chat) |
| Sunday | Rants, Raves & New Purchases |

Daily Thread — New or Need Help?

This is the thread that acts as a door for a lot of folks who are not part of this subreddit. This is a fairly unique feature as a lot of subreddits do not have a lot of entry points for people who are not members of the community. This daily thread offers lots of advice and lets the community help new comers or just people coming for a random skincare or product question.

HG Threads

There are weekly themed thread of holy grail products. Much as the name suggests, in the skincare and beauty community, holy grail products are product faves — the moisturizer you always turn to, your ride or die products.

Previous categories have included: sunscreen, serums & toners, moisturizers, cleansers, masks, and more. These threads seem to repeat and not be every single week, but they have their own templates for each post and seem to be quite popular.

Often these products and threads are referenced in the wiki of the group.

Discussion Day

These are only text posts, most often asking questions, doing a product review, or other types of things that don't utilize pictures as much. Discussion Day seems to be a bit less enforced, but in general you will see far less or no photos on Wednesdays.

↑ r/SkinCareAddiction · Posted by u/brntrfranklin 1 hour ago

↓ [routine help] How's this routine look? Products recommended by DECIEM

Routine Help

27 year old (M) and I have wide pores and rough skin. I've never had a real routine in place and have just used Cerave Foaming cleanser, Cerave Daily Moisturizing lotion, and whatever sunscreen I have lying around. Based off previous posts I've seen people work miracles using products like retinol , tretinoin, and Ordinary's glycolic acid. So I asked for a recommendation on a product that would be similar and below is what they suggested.

AM

The Ordinary Squalane Cleanser, Hylamide Pore Flush Booster, The Ordinary "Buffet", The Ordinary Natural Moisturizing Factors + HA Sun protection

PM

The Ordinary Squalane Cleanser, Hylamide Pore Flush Booster, NIOD Non-Acid Acid Precursor (NAAP), The Ordinary 100% Organic Cold Pressed Rose Hip Seed Oil

6 Comments Give Award Share ... 100% Upvoted

No/Low Buy Threads

Looking at buying less things and maintaining not buying things for a period of time. This is rooted in the fact that skincare is not free and many folks in this reddit are students or working class individuals. Skincare for many people is a source of self-care and self-improvement and often comes from the aim of fixing things that folks are very self conscious about. As described in one of the no/low buy threads, this creates a balance problem between having a calming routine but also trying to save money:

↑ _ihavemanynames_ Dry/Sensitive | Mod | European | Patch test ALL the things! 7 points · 4 days ago

↓ Yeahh I bought a BHA, or actually I got someone else to add a BHA to the order they were going to make anyway, which made it easier for me.

I struggled with anxiety before, and right now I'm noticing that I'm just doing everything I can to feel like I have some measure of control over my life and the world. So that's why I bought it. It's hard to just make space for my fear rather than to try and solve a problem, you know?

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

↑ charlotte095 PA+++++ | Moisture is the essence of water 18 points · 17 days ago

↓ I haven't bought a new product since Jan 10th! This is huge for me. I'm actively trying to get through all the products I currently have and only replenishing HG products (namely, my curology bottle). This shift away from mindless consumerism has really impacted other aspects of my life. I've made nearly every single meal at home for the past month, have attempted to go zero-waste with food, and overall being more aware of how I consumer and purchase goods.

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

↑ _ihavemanynames_ Dry/Sensitive | Mod | European | Patch test ALL the things! 6 points · 16 days ago

↓ Congratulations, that's wonderful! It's hard work to get out of the 'more things = better' mindset, it's awesome that you're doing that!

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

↑ tah_infty_n_beyarnd 2 points · 3 days ago

↓ Same. My skincare routine is the one thing I can control, and I'm celebrating almost three months of making it a nightly habit, no matter how tired I am. I do all the steps, and have had plenty of time to try out new products. Sheet masks are my favorite thing to do now since every day is #RobeLife. I feel like I am in control of things to some extent. My skincare routine gave me so much confidence and anti-anxiety that I even decreased my reliance on Rx meds for anxiety. Thanks skincare! I hope you are doing well.

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

Casual

These threads are just casual conversation that doesn't have to do with skincare. It's where you might see some more active members of the community that have grown to know each other through this subreddit.

↑ Boredom_belikethat Female | Combo skin | Sensitive 1 point · 15 days ago

↓ Tell me an interesting fact.

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

↑ dontcutmeof- 3 points · 14 days ago

↓ The moon has 3 golf balls on it, left behind from astronauts. We littered on the moon lol.

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

↑ Boredom_belikethat Female | Combo skin | Sensitive 1 point · 14 days ago

↓ Wow, we be littering everywhere.

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

B&As

B&A stands for before and after in the skincare community and other communities, often shown as B&A selfies. r/SkincareAddiction only allows B&A selfies on certain days. These are supposed to also be accompanied with the person's routine. This is meant to show how far someone has come in their skincare journey and is often met with positive reactions from the community. I think it's also important to see just how much of a different skincare can mean for people but also how long it can take, often over months and years.



Rants, Raves, New Purchases

These threads are essentially product review threads. It is where people talk about products they hated or something that didn't work for their skin.

↑ janea0 16 points · 7 days ago

↓ Just a rant because my skin was doing so well and recently have been experiencing breakouts due to all the extra stress lately lol

[Reply](#) [Give Award](#) [Share](#) [Report](#) [Save](#)

↑ lordsnarksalot 3 points · 6 days ago

↓ SAME. it's so bad.

[Reply](#) [Give Award](#) [Share](#) [Report](#) [Save](#)

↑ Ramenazi 6 points · 7 days ago

↓ [Rave] Just bought the Ceramidin liquid last week. I'm on tretinoin and man, it worked wonders! I'm still peeling but no irritation or dryness whatsoever. I'm so amazed

[Reply](#) [Give Award](#) [Share](#) [Report](#) [Save](#)

New purchase:

- **LRP Toleriane Sensitive Riche** I just bought this and have used it twice but man, I can totally see this being HG!!! Someone on here said that LRP is like "luxury Cerave" and I get that - this cream is like Cerave in the tub but more elegant (and the ingredients are quite different, this does not have ceramides but uses shea butter and squalane as its moisturizing base). It's a thick white cream but does get absorbed fast, you don't need a lot. Keeps my dry tret face nice and normal all day. It is more expensive per ml than I am used to (\$25 CAD for a 40ml tube) but I heard there are sales often so I'm going to be on a lookout for those. I can't wait to try other products in the Toleriane line!

↑ JustAnotherOlive 2 points · 13 days ago

↓ *Rant:* I wish The Ordinary worked for me. I've tried probably 10 different products, and the only one that didn't mess up my face was The AHA/BHA peel.

Rave: My sokoglam order finally arrived with lots of extra samples, and my Soon Jung pH balancing toner that I am loving

[Reply](#) [Give Award](#) [Share](#) [Report](#) [Save](#)

r/SkincareAddiction Wiki

Along with its structure, r/SkincareAddiction has a very populated wiki with lots of resources, many of which overlap with Holy Grail threads.

Skincare Core

▷▷ THE SCA ROUTINE ◁◁

CLEANSERS

MOISTURIZERS

SUNSCREEN

▷▷ SEARCH THE SUB ◁◁

To the left are the categories of the subreddits wiki.

There is a **Skincare Core**, including an **SCA routine**. An **SCA routine** is in the r/SkincareAddiction basic routine which includes: Cleanser, Moisturizer, and Sunscreen. This comes from baseline recommendations of most estheticians. In the skincare world these three steps are the most essential and is where every beginner should start. r/SkincareAddiction is very much geared at beginners to experts so it is not a surprise that so much of their wiki is dedicated to these fundamentals such as different cleansers for different skin types and the importance of sunscreen.

Everything...

...ON SKIN CONCERN

...ABOUT PRODUCTS

...ABOUT INGREDIENTS

...IN THE WIKI

The **Everything** section has the most broad and popular categories of information for skincare. These sections are curated by moderators and senior people in the community but are updated more often than the SCA routine section. This is because the wiki is constantly evolving and new ingredients and products are always hitting the market. The **Skin Concerns** section also provides links towards particular subreddits for various skin concerns.

More Help

ROUTINE ORDER

EXPANDING YOUR ROUTINE

HOW TO PATCH TEST

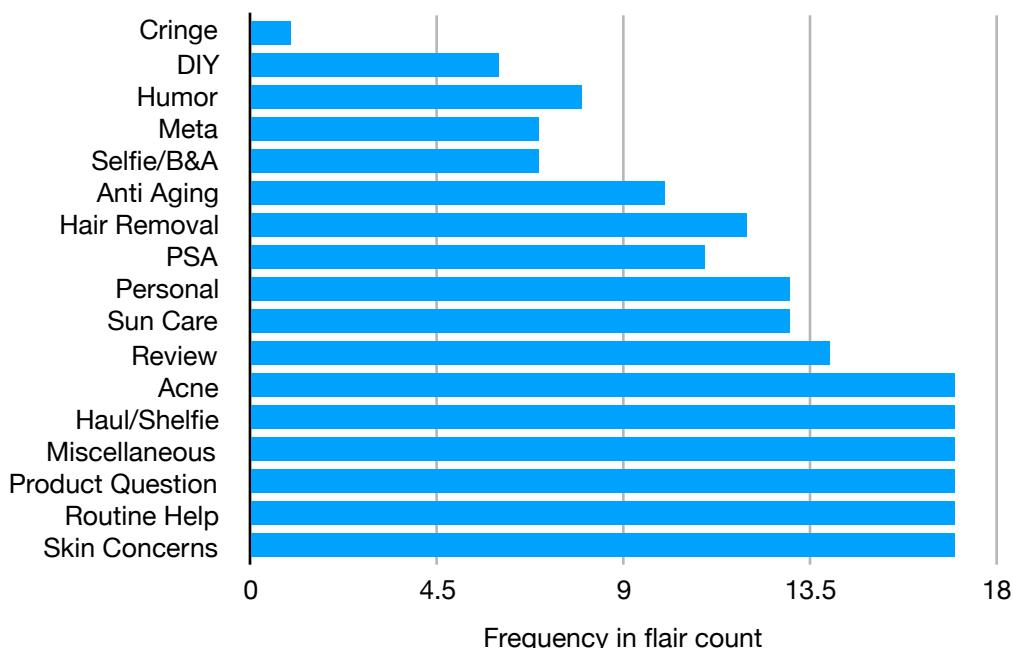
SHAVING

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

The **More Help** section is the section that is newer and is constantly updated as new sections are made. Things like **Routine Order**, for example, has changed as more and more people have incorporated things like peels and chemical exfoliants into their skincare routines.

Trends in r/SkincareAddiction: Popular Flairs

According to flair data collected for over 2 weeks, the high frequency of post types are:
If we consider these, we see a variety of trends in the types of posts under these topics.



Product Question and Routine Help

These are very often text posts where a user sources opinions from the community about the status of their routine and if it can be improved and how or to see the opinion about a particular product.

Skin Concerns

These posts are very popular and very diverse. They often come from outside users who are seeking advice and help from the r/SkincareAddiction community.

Posted by u/sistarwars 20 hours ago
Skin Concerns [skin concerns] How do I get rid of small pores and redness ?

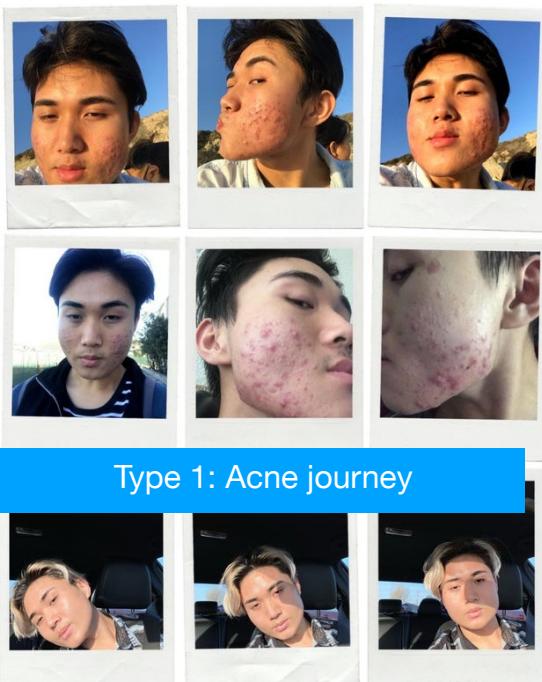
Posted by u/isisididisi 3 hours ago
Skin Concerns [Skin Concern] extremely thin eyelids (in the pic you can see the veins) is there anything I can do about it? It makes it hard to apply makeup and skin feels super fragile

Posted by u/probablywatchingtv 20 hours ago
Skin Concerns [skin concern] chin broke out in a weird rash/acne patch? The texture on this patch is rough and scaly feeling ?

Acne

Acne is perhaps one of the biggest motivators for skincare journeys both on and off r/SkincareAddiction. Acne is something that happens to everyone at some point, whether it be chronic breakouts for years or just a spot or two now and then. We can broadly categorize posts tagged acne on r/SkincareAddiction as the following types:

1. Acne journey: Showing progression of improving acne, this often overlaps with B&As
2. Acne treatment: Asking for advice while following and utilizing (often dermatologist prescribed) treatments.
3. General cry for help: Often a picture and routine and asking for help with a particular region or type of acne
4. Rant on acne: Posts that aren't seeking any particular advice but just expressing the pain and frustration of having acne or a breakout



↑ r/SkincareAddiction · Posted by u/noahjonesx 2 days ago
2 [Acne] Cystic Acne and Redness - please help!
↓ Acne

Type 3: general cry for help

↑ r/SkincareAddiction · Posted by u/Truzy61 3 hours ago
1 [Acne] Need help with Differin gel
↓ Acne

Type 2: Acne treatment

I've been using Differin well over 6 months now. I wasn't using it the right way at first. I was still exfoliating a LOT, used it more as a spot treatment, or sometimes slathered on way too much. So when I wasn't seeing results I read up on it and since November I've been using it in what I think is the right way. My acne is still at its worst though and I'm breaking out just about every day. I've been reading the purging should only last about 6 weeks though. Am I still doing something wrong? Has anyone else experienced this?

↑ r/SkincareAddiction · Posted by u/dibbydibby2x4 1 year ago
1.7k [acne] [rant] it's crazy how amazing my skin looked two days ago vs what it looks like today
↓ Acne

Type 4: Acne rant

anyone feel like their skin changes drastically day to day? im so sick of this. im 21, i shouldnt be dealing with all of this acne anymore :(im just so upset and need to vent.

Edit: wow this post has blown up a lot more than I was expecting. Thank you all so much for sharing your experiences here, you've all made me feel like I'm not alone :)

250 Comments Give Award Share Save Hide Report 98% Upvoted

Haul/Shelfie

This is exactly what it sounds like. Overall these communities love to see the whole routine and it is a good visual way to see trends within the community between popular products that people have incorporated into their whole routine. Because these tend to be from folks who have been part of the community and practicing skincare longer, therefore they tend to have more products. For example, you can see CeraVe and The Ordinary as very trending brands in a lot of these recent shelfies.



r/SkincareAddiction User Profile

If we look at the users in r/SkincareAddiction, there could be considered 3 main populations from the posts in the subreddit:

1. Members outside the community who are there to ask a question or two but not to become a member of the community.
2. New community members that are looking to start a skincare journey.
3. More established community members who answer a lot of questions and are actively participating in a variety of trends in the community.

This demographic setup is unique. In some ways this online community provides service to outsiders, which is not always seen in communities. Furthermore, there is no real bias towards gender. While one would think more women would be in this community, there are a lot of male identifying individuals who post to the community. As with people of color.

In terms of what brings people into the community and what they are getting out of it, that of course varies between users. As we can see with the main trends, most people enter the community either because they have found happiness or confidence in skincare or are starting a new skincare journey.

In a world as large as skincare, it makes sense that having communities like this would be beneficial for its members. Having more people to try and give information about various ingredients and brands and products is one of the most useful ways to garner this information, since it's a space free of influencer sponsorships. From the large wiki to a bank of posts, there really is so much valuable information for anyone who is invested in skincare.

A skincare journey, as much of the beauty world defines, is a long term investment to improve your skin. It varies from person to person, some go on prescribed treatments, others try integrating a skincare treatment for the first time, others are trying measures such as diet or peels or facials. Despite their differences, the goal is always to improve the skin.

Throughout a skincare journey, there is various trial and error of different routines and practices. Having a knowledgeable community that is also positively supportive of improvements in the skin is a hugely desirable thing. Much like how weight loss communities have been developed for support, tips, and accountability.

Much like weight loss communities, these types of communities aren't full of people who don't have to try for their skin. If you are in r/SkincareAddiction the odds are, you don't have perfect skin and if you do it's because of a regime you have had to work for over time and through a process informed by your lifestyle and body.

Along with improving skin, comes a good boost to confidence and links with mental health. A lot of posts on the subreddit engage with issues of confidence and mental health. This is why so many users have just rants on acne and the mental health effects of it. There are other posts about the anxiety of skin on different areas of the body. Having a supportive community around this is nothing new in online spaces, but is extremely helpful for a variety of users.

Along with the mental health component, a lot of skin conditions from acne to irritation to sun damage can be extremely painful. Posts also touch on this and discuss the physical pain these skin conditions bring.

Healthy Online Communities Around Aesthetics and Esthetics

Deb Roy from MIT Media Lab offers the following guidelines for healthy communities:

Shared Attention: Is there overlap in what we are talking about?

Shared Reality: Are we using the same facts?

Variety: Are we exposed to different opinions grounded in shared reality?

Receptivity: Are we open, civil, and listening to different opinions?

Additionally I would like to offer the following guidelines for an online community around aesthetics and esthetics:

1. *No medical diagnoses*

This is based in the idea that skin is an organ of the body and some skin conditions can have serious medical consequences or be a sign of something else in the body (such as a butterfly rash from lupus). Furthermore, there are many off-market acne prescriptions that could be unsafe for the skin. Skincare products go through rigorous standards, but certain chemicals can only be prescribed by a doctor. And therefore it is extremely important that a community of non-doctors do not start handing out diagnoses.

2. *No brand affiliation or marketing (including MLM)*

This is extremely important because skincare is not free. Dermatologists are not free, nor are licensed estheticians or other skincare experts. Anyone doing anything adjacent to skincare is spending money that they have earned for this. In an oversaturated market full of influencers peddling products that don't work (and Kylie's walnut scrub...) it is extremely important that members of a skincare community do not have the motivation to make money from its members. Nor to involve them in multi level marketing schemes of various skincare products.

3. *No promoting DIY solutions or "hacks" that have been disproven by science or the community*

Similarly to point 1, skin is a real organ on the body and doing the wrong things to it can have real consequences. There is a variety of DIY skin care solutions and brands that may be extremely irritating and could cause infections, allergic reactions, and worse. There is a variety of peer reviewed literature that dispels certain chemicals for skin or oral consumption, and these chemicals and substances should not be touted in these communities.

r/SkincareAddiction as a Healthy Community

I would say that r/SkincareAddiction is a healthy community. Measured against the rules set out above, here is how it stacks up.

Shared Attention: Is there overlap in what we are talking about?

Definitely. Just one scroll through this subreddit and a look at its posts, wiki, and structure and you can tell that it is all about skincare.

Shared Reality: Are we using the same facts?

Yes. Overall the facts used by the mods and the general community follow a lot of general skincare rules and things that are outlined in the wiki.

Variety: Are we exposed to different opinions grounded in shared reality?

Yes and no. There definitely are different opinions and one of the most common things you will see in these types of communities is that some products work well on others but can break others out. There is variety in opinion and responses towards products, but much of this is still rooted in general trends and a respect of this difference.

Receptivity: Are we open, civil, and listening to different opinions?

Yes, see the codes of conduct. There is a huge amount of documentation about rules of conduct and overall the community is quite respectful.

Along with these rules, we can look at how the community stacks up against the additional rules set up for healthy communities around aesthetics and esthetics.

1. No medical diagnoses

This is also outlined in the community guidelines, in Rule 2 in particular.

2. No brand affiliation or marketing (including MLM)

This is included in the community guidelines, in Rule 3 and Rule 4.

3. No promoting DIY solutions or “hacks” that have been disproven by science or the community

This is covered under Rule 2 in the rules and conduct of the reddit is about safety and not encouraging unsafe treatments. This encompasses harmful DIYs.

Overall, this community is healthy when measured with these guidelines. Also in looking at its trends and large user base and weekly activity, we can see these as other indicators of health. We can also see these indicators by looking at the reasons people come to this community along with the types of posts these users make.

r/SkincareAddiction is a safe space for a variety of people to gain advice and solutions to what can be an extremely consuming problem. People with good skin don't fully understand the extent that things like acne, rosacea, and other skin ailments can wreck someone's self confidence and fuel anxiety and depression. In a world that is so obsessed with looks, it is hard to avoid this in any sphere, but skin can be particularly difficult to control and maintain. And r/SkincareAddiction can be a safe haven for this.