

MAPPING SKINIMALISM NARRATIVES ON INSTAGRAM HASHTAG POSTS

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ABSTRACT

Skinimalism has gained visibility as a beauty trend promoting fewer products, fewer routine steps, and deliberate essentials. This study maps how skinimalism is narrated in Instagram hashtag posts using qualitative netnographic observation and descriptive content analysis. Forty caption entries were purposively sampled from the #skinimalism feed; after removing near-duplicates, 36 unique captions were analyzed. Captions were predominantly in English (63.9%), followed by Indonesian (25.0%) and other languages (11.1%), with #skinimalism appearing explicitly in 80.6% of captions. Dominant narrative categories comprised trend definition or education (30.6%), product promotion (27.8%), and routine guidance (22.2%). Nonexclusive thematic coding revealed routine simplification as the most prevalent element (66.7%), followed by natural look aesthetics (33.3%), while multifunctionality or hybrid product framing was relatively limited (11.1%). Actor cues were identifiable in many posts, including brands or commercial accounts (22.2%), creators or educators (19.4%), clinics or experts (11.1%), and individual users (8.3%), although 38.9% could not be clearly classified. Engagement assessed from visible comment excerpts (n = 40) indicated limited discourse, with half of the posts showing no comments and the remainder dominated by emotive or transactional responses. This limited engagement does not necessarily signal weak consumer interest but reflects Instagram's role in stabilizing trend narratives through curated, authored content. Overall, the hashtag feed functions as a structured narrative field that reinforces skinimalism through procedural templates and marketing-aligned messaging rather than extended peer deliberation.

Keywords: skinimalism; consumer behavior; netnography; beauty trends; social media marketing

INTRODUCTION

Instagram has become a major venue where contemporary beauty meanings are produced, circulated, and stabilized through posts that combine visual aesthetics,

captions, hashtags, and platform-specific engagement signals (Kozinets, 2020; Rogers, 2021). For many users, hashtag feeds function as searchable collections that help organize and retrieve trend-related content, while for brands and creators they operate as distribution infrastructures that connect product claims with culturally legible ideas about skincare practice (Erz et al., 2018; Rogers, 2021). In this setting, the hashtag is not only a label for content discovery; it also functions as a discursive resource that shapes what becomes visible and recognizable as a trend, who the trend is understood to address, and what counts as appropriate practice within that trend (Loukianov et al., 2023). Because hashtag posts are intentionally authored and publicly visible, they provide a direct lens on how beauty trends are packaged as stories and instructions even when sustained conversational interaction in comment threads is limited (Kozinets, 2020; La Rocca & Boccia Artieri, 2022).

One trend that has become salient in recent years is skinimalism, often framed as a return to fewer products, fewer routine steps, and more deliberate selection of what is considered essential. A recent mini review characterizes skin minimalism as part of a broader “less is more” orientation that encourages consumers to limit daily product use and reduce cosmetic packaging, while also warning that excessive and frequently changing product use can contribute to skin stress and irritation (Kalwat, 2023). Although skinimalism is frequently discussed in consumer and industry facing sources, scholarly work that treats the concept as a social media narrative and examines how it is publicly articulated through platform content remains limited. This gap matters because trends do not diffuse only through personal adoption. They also spread through repeated narrative templates that define a problem, present a solution, and attach moral or practical value to particular routines and products (Amure & Agarwal, 2025; Shiller, 2020).

Hashtag posts are especially relevant for understanding skinimalism because the narrative often functions as a structured message rather than an emergent conversation. Preliminary observation of posts under the hashtag shows that many entries are promotional or educational, including brand content that links simplified routines to product bundles, as well as creator content that explains what skinimalism is and how to perform it. Comments frequently contain short reactions or transactional questions, which limits the analytic value of comment based approaches for this topic in practice. Under such conditions, the post itself becomes the primary unit for mapping discourse. Captions and associated hashtags encode the persuasive vocabulary of the trend, including claims about routine efficiency, skin barrier care, avoidance of overuse, and reduced waste. These messages also reveal who holds discursive authority in the hashtag space, whether it is brands, clinics, influencers, or individual users, and how each actor positions skinimalism as expertise, lifestyle, or product strategy.

Methodologically, studying hashtag discourse aligns with qualitative digital research that adapts ethnographic sensibilities to online settings. Netnography

emphasizes contextual reading of platform content, attention to cultural meanings, and systematic documentation of how discourse is produced and organized in digital environments (Kozinets, 2020). Ethical internet research guidance further underscores that public availability does not remove the need for care with contextual integrity, identifiability, and potential downstream harm, especially when reporting user generated content (Franzke et al., 2019). Together, these frameworks support an observational approach that prioritizes transparency in sampling and analysis over scale. This is particularly appropriate when interaction is sparse and when access constraints make large scale data extraction impractical, given that social media data access has increasingly been shaped by platform governance and restricted API conditions (Ohme et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, this article maps how skinimalism is narrated within Instagram hashtag posts rather than inferring consumer motives from comment discourse. The goal is to produce an empirically grounded description of the dominant narrative patterns attached to skinimalism, the types of actors who propagate them, and the engagement characteristics that accompany different post categories. By treating the hashtag feed as a curated discursive field, the study offers a concise and reproducible template for trend mapping that can support both academic inquiry and practical market sensing.

Research questions

RQ1: What narrative themes dominate Instagram hashtag posts that reference skinimalism, particularly in relation to routine simplification, product multifunctionality, and natural look aesthetics? (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bruns & Burgess, 2015)

RQ2: Which actor types most frequently produce skinimalism hashtag content, and how do their narrative framings differ across brands, clinics, creators, and individual users? (Barari et al., 2025; Entman, 1993)

RQ3: What engagement patterns are observable in skinimalism hashtag posts, and what do sparse or transactional comments imply about the nature of the discourse within this hashtag space? (Anderson et al., 2025)

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative netnographic observation and descriptive content analysis to map how skinimalism is narrated in Instagram hashtag posts (Kozinets, 2020). The analysis focuses on authored posts rather than comment threads because preliminary exploration of the hashtag indicated that comments were often sparse and rarely contained substantive discussion. Consistent with ethical guidance for internet research, the study relies only on publicly accessible content and applies cautious reporting practices to minimize the risk of re-identification when describing user-generated material (Franzke et al., 2019).

Data source and sampling

Data were drawn from Instagram posts appearing under the hashtag #skinimalism within a defined observation window. Posts were collected using manual purposive sampling, selecting entries that contained a caption or visual content clearly related to the concept of skinimalism, such as definitions of the trend, simplified routine advice, claims about reducing product use, or promotion of multifunctional products aligned with “less is more” messaging (Etikan, 2016; Kozinets, 2020; Palinkas et al., 2015). Posts that were duplicated, unrelated to skincare and cosmetics, or contained no meaningful textual context were excluded. For each included post, the researcher recorded the post URL or identifier, date of capture, account type (brand, clinic, creator, or individual user where inferable from the profile and post context), caption text, visible hashtag set, and simple engagement indicators (for example, number of comments and observable interaction type). A structured observation log was maintained to support transparency and reproducibility of the collection process.

Unit of analysis and coding framework

The unit of analysis was the Instagram post, operationalized as the combination of image or video content and the associated caption and hashtags. Posts were coded using a deductive thematic framework informed by published descriptions of skin minimalism as a “less is more” approach emphasizing routine reduction, product selectivity, and reduced packaging waste (Kalwat, 2023).

Coding proceeded in two stages. First, each post was assigned to a dominant narrative category, such as product promotion, trend definition or education, routine guidance, barrier or sensitivity messaging, or sustainability and packaging reduction. Second, posts were coded for the presence of core skinimalism narrative elements, including routine simplification, multifunctionality and hybrid products, and natural-look or minimal makeup positioning. Additional descriptive codes captured the rhetorical framing of the post, for example whether the message emphasized efficiency and practicality, caution against overconsumption, skin health and irritation avoidance, or environmental responsibility.

Comment handling and engagement description

Although the study is centered on posts, comment sections were not treated as primary textual data. Instead, comments were used only to describe engagement at a high level, such as whether comments were absent, primarily emotive reactions, transactional questions about products, or occasional reflective discussion. This approach avoids over-interpreting limited conversational data while still allowing the study to characterize the communicative structure of the hashtag space.

Analytic procedure and trustworthiness

Analysis was conducted using descriptive summaries of narrative categories and actor types, followed by qualitative synthesis of recurring storylines and framing strategies across posts. To strengthen trustworthiness, the researcher maintained

an audit trail including the observation log, the codebook, and examples supporting each theme. Where feasible, a subset of posts can be re-coded after a time interval to check coding stability, and disagreements can be resolved by refining category definitions and updating the codebook. Findings are presented as exploratory and are not intended to generalize to the full population of Instagram content under #skinimalism; rather, they aim to map dominant narrative patterns that are visible within the sampled hashtag feed.

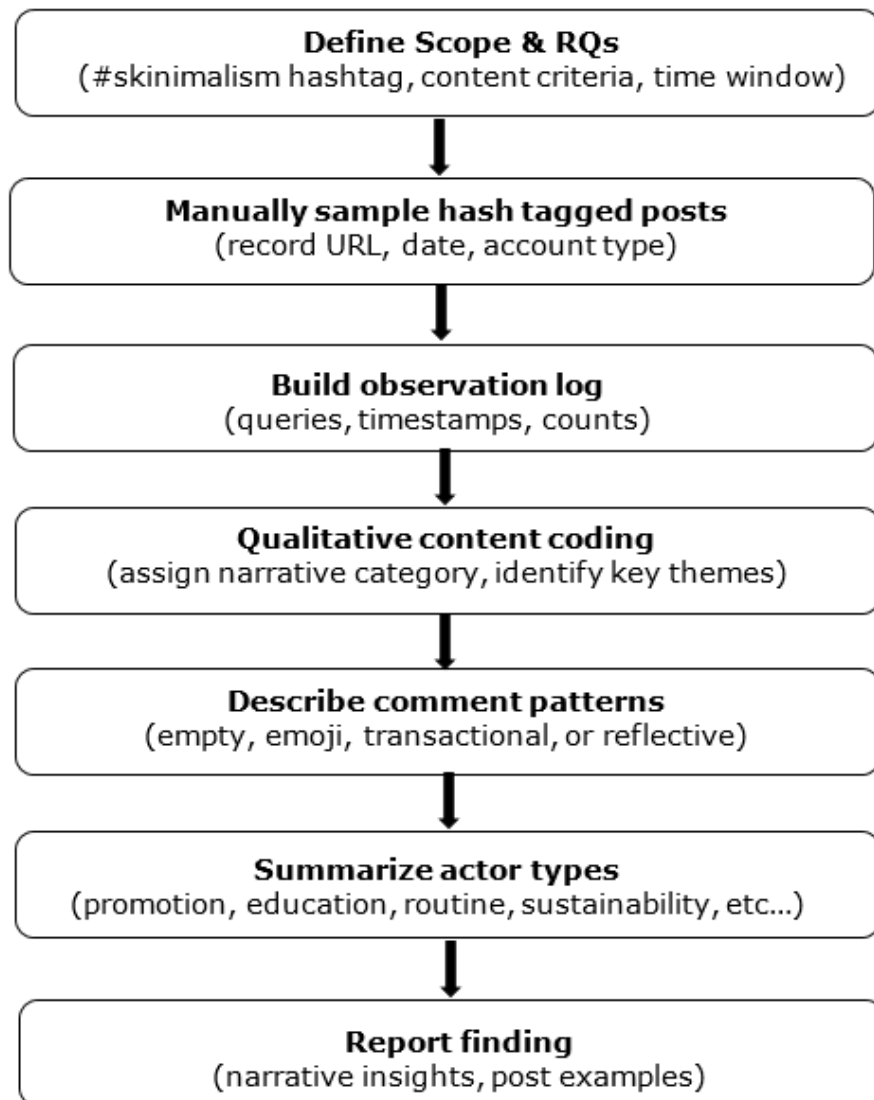


Figure 1. Research workflow for mapping skinimalism narratives in Instagram hashtag posts through manual purposive sampling, post-level coding, and descriptive content analysis.

RESULTS

Dataset overview

Forty Instagram caption entries were purposively sampled from the hashtag feed (search term: skinimalism). After removing near-duplicate captions, 36 unique captions were retained for analysis ($n = 36$). Most captions were in English ($n =$

23; 63.9%), followed by Indonesian (n = 9; 25.0%) and other languages (n = 4; 11.1%). The hashtag #skiminalism appeared explicitly in 29 of the 36 captions (80.6%), typically alongside routine- and minimalism-oriented hashtags such as #lessismore, #cleanbeauty, and #skincarerroutine. Data collection relied on visible text excerpts and does not represent complete post-level analytics or full comment threads (Ohme et al., 2024; Rogers, 2021).

RQ1. What narrative themes dominate Instagram hashtag posts that reference skiminalism (routine simplification, multifunctionality, natural look aesthetics)?

Caption coding shows that the hashtag stream is dominated by authored narrative templates, especially trend explanation/education and Ohme. Table 1 summarizes mutually exclusive dominant narrative categories.

Table 1. Primary narrative categories of skiminalism captions (n = 36)

Primary narrative category	n	%
Trend definition or education	11	30.6
Product promotion	10	27.8
Routine guidance	8	22.2
Other or mixed framing	6	16.7
Minimalism and value framing	1	2.8

To answer RQ1 more directly, we coded non-exclusive thematic elements relevant to the research question. Table 2 shows that the most dominant theme is routine simplification, followed by natural-look aesthetics, while multifunctionality/hybrid logic appears only in a smaller subset.

Table 2. Core thematic elements present in captions (non-exclusive coding; n = 36)

Narrative element (core RQ1 themes emphasized)	n	%
Routine simplification (fewer steps/layering)	24	66.7
Natural look aesthetics (glow, no-makeup, minimal makeup)	12	33.3
Multifunctionality/hybrid products (tinted SPF, 2-in-1, multi-benefit)	4	11.1
Barrier/sensitivity framing	7	19.4
Sustainability/clean cues (waste reduction, eco, vegan, clean beauty)	5	13.9

Framing of skiminalism varies systematically across actor types. Brand and commercial accounts predominantly frame skiminalism as a language of product compatibility, linking “less is more” narratives to products positioned as essential, efficient, or capable of delivering multiple benefits within simplified routines (Erz et al., 2018; La Rocca & Boccia Artieri, 2022). Creators and educators tend to dominate definitional and instructional framings, presenting skiminalism through explanatory posts and step-by-step routine templates that translate the trend into

practical guidance (Abidin, 2016). In contrast, clinic and expert accounts frame skinimalism primarily through a skin health perspective, emphasizing skin barrier protection, irritation avoidance, and sensitivity management, which aligns with clinical interpretations of skin minimalism that caution against excessive or frequently changing product use. Individual users, when identifiable, most often frame skinimalism in relation to everyday constraints such as limited time, specific life stages, or personal preferences, positioning the trend as a pragmatic adaptation to daily circumstances rather than a formalized routine or product strategy (Schönian & Laube, 2013).

Skinimalism narratives are therefore dominated by routine simplification and natural aesthetic positioning, while multifunctionality remains secondary. The hashtag feed functions to stabilize skinimalism primarily through procedural templates—such as routine steps and “less is more” claims—rather than through detailed peer discussion, reflecting the role of hashtags as tools for narrative visibility and content organization rather than dialogic exchange.

RQ2. Which actor types most frequently produce skinimalism hashtag content, and how do their framings differ?

Due to profile metadata was not consistently available in the captured excerpts, actor types were inferred conservatively through caption cues (commercial calls-to-action, clinic/expert markers, creator educational phrasing, and personal narratives). Table 3 summarizes this coding.

Table 3. Actor types inferred from caption cues (n = 36)

Actor type (inferred)	n	%
Brand or commercial accounts	8	22.2
Creator or educator accounts	7	19.4
Clinic or expert accounts	4	11.1
Individual users	3	8.3
Unclear (insufficient cues)	14	38.9

Among posts where actor cues were identifiable, brands/commercial accounts and creators/educators appear most frequently, suggesting that skinimalism discourse in hashtag posts is driven mainly by promotion and education, rather than by peer conversation alone (Erz et al., 2018; La Rocca & Boccia Artieri, 2022).

RQ3. What engagement patterns are observable, and what do sparse or transactional comments imply about hashtag discourse?

Engagement was assessed only from visible comment excerpts in the captured posts (n = 40). In many cases, the excerpt showed no comments, or only minimal responses.

Table 4. Engagement patterns in visible comment excerpts (n = 40 posts)

Engagement type	n	%
No observable comments in excerpt	20	50.0
Emotive or affirmational comments	14	35.0
Transactional or help-seeking questions	3	7.5
Social tagging or mixed brief interaction	3	7.5

Where comments appeared, they were often limited to short affirmation (emoji, praise) or practical questions such as availability and suitability. This indicates that the hashtag feed functions more like a broadcast and discovery space rather than a deliberative discussion forum. Hashtags organize topical visibility but do not guarantee sustained interaction (Erz et al., 2018; Loukianov et al., 2023). This is consistent with Instagram's platform logic, where visibility is shaped by curated presentation and searchable topical indexing (Rogers, 2021).

Sparse or transactional comment patterns imply that the discourse is structured primarily through post level authored narratives, and that meaning is stabilized by recurring captions and hashtag bundles rather than extended user deliberation (Kozinets, 2020; La Rocca & Boccia Artieri, 2022).

DISCUSSION

Skinimalism as structured narrative rather than consumer debate

Results suggest that #skinimalism is dominated by authored templates that explain and promote routines, consistent with netnography's emphasis on platform situated meaning production (Kozinets, 2020). The dominance of routine simplification indicates that skinimalism functions primarily as a procedural narrative: it tells users what skincare should look like and why it is desirable.

Routine simplification dominates; multifunctionality is secondary

Routine reduction is the most stable rhetorical anchor, while multifunctionality appears less frequently. This aligns with the clinical notion that limiting excessive product changes may reduce irritation and stress on the skin barrier (Kalwat, 2023). Sustainability and clean cues appear but are not central.

Actor ecology shows how skinimalism is co-produced

Brands and creators contribute most visible content, indicating that hashtags operate as a hybrid system where cultural trends are circulated through marketing infrastructures and creator pedagogy (Erz et al., 2018; La Rocca & Boccia Artieri, 2022). The blurred boundary between education and promotion suggests that "less" becomes a persuasive marketing claim, not only a lifestyle practice.

Sparse comments suggest hashtag feeds are discovery infrastructures

The high proportion of posts with no visible comment engagement suggests that hashtag feeds are less conversational and more archival and distributive. When comments exist, they tend to support lightweight alignment or transactional Q&A. This fits scholarship describing hashtags as indexing devices that stabilize discursive visibility rather than dialogic exchange (Loukianov et al., 2023; Rogers, 2021).

Ethical and methodological constraints

Platform governance increasingly limits data access, small purposive samples remain a realistic approach for exploratory studies, provided transparency and minimal harm practices are followed (Franzke et al., 2019; Ohme et al., 2024). The study therefore prioritizes reproducible description over population generalization.

Implications for research design: post level mapping is methodologically appropriate for this topic

The present findings indicate that a post centered mapping strategy is a better fit for the empirical reality of the hashtag feed. A descriptive content analysis grounded in netnographic principles can capture how the trend is framed, who frames it, and which narrative templates recur, without over interpreting limited interaction data (Kozinets, 2020). Ethical internet research guidance also supports a conservative approach that emphasizes anonymization, careful paraphrasing, and contextual integrity, especially when using public user generated content (Franzke et al., 2019).

Practical implications: skinimalism messaging is easily co opted for marketing

The prominence of promotional captions suggests that skinimalism is frequently mobilized as a marketing language for positioning products as essential, multifunctional, or minimal routine compatible. This has two practical consequences. First, the hashtag can function as a discovery channel for consumers, but it also acts as a persuasion channel where “less” is framed as a quality claim. Second, when educational narratives coexist with promotional narratives, the boundary between consumer advice and product marketing may become blurred, which can shape how the trend is understood and adopted.

Limitations and future work

This study is exploratory and based on a small purposive sample of hashtag posts. It does not estimate prevalence across the full hashtag population, and it cannot capture private accounts or algorithmic personalization effects that shape what users see. Future work can strengthen the design by expanding the sampling window, applying a stratified approach across actor types, and adding complementary hashtags (for example, routine minimalism, slow beauty, or

barrier care) to test whether the narrative distribution changes. If richer interaction data are found in other hashtag communities, comment analysis could be reintroduced as a secondary layer.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Instagram's #skinimalism feed operates less as an open forum for consumer debate and more as a curated narrative space where the trend is repeatedly *defined, taught, and marketed* through short, authored caption templates. From the 36 unique captions analyzed, skinimalism is most consistently stabilized as routine simplification (66.7%), with a secondary emphasis on natural-look aesthetics (33.3%), while multifunctionality or hybrid-product framing appears comparatively marginal (11.1%). This pattern indicates that "less" is communicated primarily as a *procedural routine logic* (fewer steps, deliberate essentials) rather than as a strong innovation narrative centered on multi-benefit product design.

The hashtag discourse is also shaped by who speaks most visibly within it. Where actor cues could be inferred, posts were most often produced by brands/commercial accounts and creators/educators, with clinics/experts and individual users appearing less frequently, and a substantial portion remaining unclear due to limited metadata in the excerpted material. This composition helps explain why skinimalism narratives frequently blur the boundary between education and promotion: the trend is circulated through *instructional language* that is often compatible with marketing objectives.

Finally, the engagement evidence reinforces the interpretation of #skinimalism as a discovery infrastructure rather than a deliberative community. Half of the observed posts showed no visible comments, and the rest were dominated by emotive or transactional responses. Rather than signaling weak interest, this pattern suggests that meaning around skinimalism is maintained through repeated caption-and-hashtag conventions—circulating "how-to" routines and minimalism cues—more than through sustained peer discussion.

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