Content is still king,
but content strategy is queen.

Understanding message strategies and content preferences.

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Date
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Executive summary

The goal of this bachelor thesis *"Content is still king, but content strategy is queen."* is to make recommendations to the commissioning organisation ECOSUS to derive a suitable content strategy for their website relaunch by understanding the preferences of the customers. Therefore, content strategy was analysed based on its core elements *content tone, content type & format, content access & distribution* and *content governance* to answer the main question:

What are the website content preferences of ECOSUS' target audience?

The thesis is composed of the five chapters introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, results and conclusion.

The introduction entails a description of ECOSUS in which it is stated, that the German-based start-up that specialized in eco-friendly multi-purpose fertilizers has a problem with its current website. The initial goal of the website was to build the desired brand image of a trustworthy, sustainable and environmental-friendly company. Users were supposed to be encouraged by the content to establish contact. However, customers complained to the founder Matthias Hölscher about several issues such as the layout, the navigation and several others that are related to user experience (UX). In order to resolve the issues, a UX specialist was hired. Though, Matthias Hölscher decided to improve the content strategy, a component of UX, internally to reduce costs and dependence on external parties from the relaunch onwards which is however unknown to the company. Hence, ECOSUS desires to know how to design a content strategy.

Chapter 2, the theoretical framework, deals with the existing literature about UX, content strategy, message strategies, content type, communication channels and content consumption preferences. Both, UX and content strategy, can be analysed by their hedonic and pragmatic features. Regarding message strategies, several approaches have been defined over the last years, e.g. cognitive, affective and conative message strategies.

The methodology in chapter 3 entails a description of the research design and the data collection. Whereas message strategies are most effectively researched with perception testing, specific content preferences can be examined based on user preferences. Thus, a two-dimensional, quantitative, web-based research approach was chosen. Since the population of ECOSUS was unknown, convenience sampling was utilized. For the first dimension, the user experience questionnaire (UEQ) was used to measure the impact of the different message strategies on UX. The data was analysed with inferential statistics. For the second dimension, a questionnaire with questions about specific content preferences was distributed and analysed based on descriptive statistics.

The fourth chapter represents the results of both dimensions. The results of the first dimension show that only the scale *stimulation*, so 1 of the 6 scales that measured the UX in the UEQ, showed a significant difference between the mean values of both groups. Regarding the second dimension, participants prefer visual content over text-based content (specifically infographics and videos) and short, trustworthy (preferably from industry analysts) and mobile-optimized content that can easily be accessed via Google. Furthermore, participants prefer to interact with a company via email.

The last chapter, conclusion, entails a summary of the findings in connection with the theories. Since the participants did not have to perform specific tasks during the experiment of the first dimension, they may have been more focussed on hedonic UX features, as indicated by several researchers. In order to determine a suitable message strategy, more research is needed due to the fact that only one scale showed a significant difference. Moreover, infographics from industry analysts, videos and a prominently placed email addresses are recommended for the relaunch.

Foreword

Before you lies the dissertation *Content is still king, but content strategy is queen*. that aims at understanding customer preferences and message strategies. This thesis is the final part of my studies of Media & Entertainment Management in Leeuwarden and concludes my bachelor. I have been working on this study from August until November 2017.

The research topic is rooted in a start-up in which a good friend of mine is engaged and who reached out to me at the beginning of the year 2017. At first, my work for ECOSUS was limited to improving a flyer. Over the course of the year, my engagement developed and ultimately, I decided to focus my thesis on a current problem of the company. Due to those circumstances, I did not have a lot of troubles to find a topic for my thesis. However, specifying my research topic and defining the scope was difficult for me. Additionally, how to evaluate the crucial parts of the literature was during the process not transparent to me. Therefore, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Fan Ding for her constructive feedback and her flexible appointment scheduling over the last four months.

I am happy that I could work on a research topic that reflects a personal interest of mine which broadened my horizon during the process.

I hope you enjoy reading.

Tobias Drevenstedt

Cologne, November 27, 2017

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List of abbreviations

CGC = Company-generated content
CMS = Content Management System
CTA = Call-to-action
ISO = International Organization for Standardization
UEQ = User Experience Questionnaire
UGC = User-generated content
URL = Uniform Resource Locator (Link)
UX = User Experience

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1. Introduction

"Content is king." – Bill Gates (1996). Even though this quote from the founder of Microsoft is as of right now 21 years old, so long before websites, and even less social media were common ways of communication, it is still valid, maybe more than ever. This is due to several reasons: not only is content still a decisive factor when it comes to building a relationship between consumers and companies, it is also a crucial element of how search engines get their results and thus set the basis for building a relationship. Therefore, content needs to fulfil certain requirements to be useful. More specifically, content can be presented in numerous ways such as videos, infographics, guidelines, whitepapers or top-10 lists, but also in a variety of styles. Whereas some users expect to be informed with facts, others want to be entertained. If a company plans to provide the desired content to the desired user, decisions that lead there need to be well thought-out in beforehand.

ECOSUS, a German-based start-up founded in 2013 is currently facing such decisions. The company specialised in eco-friendly, organic multi-purpose fertilisers for soil, plant, animal, water and air applications. The start-up plans to grow as a company with attracting B2C customers who garden as well as B2B customers such as professional gardeners and farmers. This growth model utilises, among other channels, the company's website to build the desired *brand image* of a trustworthy, sustainable and environmental-friendly firm. Moreover, news and information on the website about the products and the company are utilised to encourage visitors to establish contact.

Background

As opposed to *brand identity*, which can be defined as the intended presentation of a brand, brand image refers to how customers actually perceive a brand (Wheeler, 2013). To be specific, brand image can be defined as "the sum of associations held in consumer memory that lead to perceptions about a brand" (Keller, 1993, p. 3). The impressions consumers have about a brand are based on several factors such as the packaging of the products, the appearance of the employees, the interior design of the store but also the perception of the brand identity. Thus, a company website, as an element of a company's brand identity, shapes the brand image. The overall impression a user has on a website can be described as the user experience (UX).

According to Garrett (2011), UX can be defined as "the experience a product creates for people who use it in the real world" (p. 24). Regarding websites, UX can be divided into technical components such as *usability & accessibility, functionality, information architecture* and *platform* as well as aesthetic components, such as the *user interface* and the *content strategy* (see Figure 1, User Experience Wheel) (IBM, 2014). Whereas technical components can often be sufficiently elaborated by meeting industry standards such as a responsive layout (a layout that automatically adapts to the users' screen size), aesthetic components need to be set up individually for each website, due to the unique requirements of the respective users. This research focusses specifically on the UX component content strategy.

Content strategy deals with "the planning, development and publishing of unique content for a certain target group" (Bloomstein, 2012, p. 43). Jones (2011) suggests a model that divides content strategy into the elements *content tone, content type & format, content access & distribution* and *content governance*, which are all based on the contents purpose & context (see figure 2, elements of content strategy). Whereas the content purpose refers to the objective, the context refers to how to reach it (Jones, 2011).

Content tone refers to the communicative style in which content is presented, commonly referred to as *message strategy* (Sharma & Singh, 2006). Researchers of the last decades often distinguish between two approaches:

1. Strategies with a focus on rational qualities (also known as pragmatic, informative or cognitive);
2. Strategies with a focus on emotional qualities (also known as hedonic, affective or entertaining).

Content type & format refers to specific types of content. When browsing the internet, many types can be found, e.g. pictures, slideshows, product reviews, plain text, case studies, YouTube videos, Facebook feeds etc. According to Jackson, Yates & Orlikowski (2007), it is important to consider the user when determining what type of content to use, since the type affects the effectivity of the communication. For example, when a YouTube video as a generally popular format is not used by a certain target audience, such a content type would rather hinder the experience for the consumer.

Content access & distribution refers to the media channels that are used by the target audience to receive, share and communicate information (Alexander, 2013). Media platforms offer different environments for content with specific requirements which need to be taken into consideration. For example, copyright issues are treated differently on the video platforms YouTube and Vimeo, which can, for instance, impact a product video that makes use of copyright protected music. Moreover, also variables such as file size (e.g. when uses a e-newsletter) need to be considered to reach the receiver of a message. Lastly, it is important to know which devices are being used to present content accordingly.

The fourth element of content strategy, content governance, refers to the adherence of variables that add to a consistent appearance such as length, language complexity, interaction or trustworthiness. For example, it may not be relevant whether information are accurate, the source is already a crucial factor for users to determine credibility (Kotler & Keller, 2009).

ECOSUS' status quo

As of right now, customers of ECOSUS frequently complained about the current website. Complaints were specifically directed towards the usability, the layout, the navigation, the information architecture as well as other issues which can be subsumed under UX. Moreover, the call-to-action (CTA) for the users to establish contact has only be used by very few (Hölscher, personal communication, September 16, 2017).

Since the current website failed in reaching the abovementioned objective of building the desired brand image, a website relaunch is currently in progress. The founder of ECOSUS, Matthias Hölscher, hired a UX specialist to solve issues regarding the information architecture, the functionality, the usability and the layout of the new website. Even though customer complaints did not directly address the current website's content, the management of ECOSUS wants to ensure that the content on the new website also adds value to the overall UX. To reduce costs and to be able to maintain the content of the website after the relaunch internally, the company wants to develop the content strategy by themselves. Since the company's website is an essential element of their growth model, the success of the relaunch is of high priority.

However, the development of a content strategy is unknown to the company. More precisely, Hölscher (personal communication, September 16, 2017) stated, that the current website did neither include carefully selected content nor a thought-through content strategy. Therefore, ECOSUS desires to know which message strategy to adopt and which specific preferences regarding content to consider for the relaunch, which is what this thesis is focussed on. Hence, research about the target audience's preferences concerning what and how they favour to be addressed is required.

Based on the above, the objective of this research is to make recommendations to the commissioning organisation ECOSUS to derive a suitable content strategy for the website relaunch by understanding the preferences of the customers.

Derived from the objective, the main research question of this study is:

What are the website content preferences of ECOSUS' target audience?

This introduction is followed by the theoretical framework that elaborates on existing knowledge regarding content preferences, content strategy, user experience and message strategies. Building on the theoretical framework, the methodology follows in which a research design is described. Even though the influence of certain variables on UX has been studied by many authors before, the impact of subtle changes such as changes in the content strategy have an unclear impact on UX (Tullis & Albert, 2013). Thus, this research may add new insights to the existing knowledge. In the last chapter, a conclusion is drawn based on the results and ultimately a recommendation to ECOSUS is provided.

2. Theoretical Framework

The aim of this chapter is to explore existing knowledge on the topics of user experience (UX), content strategy, message strategy and content preferences. The chapter starts with a definition of brand image and how that is affected by UX, followed by a review of the existing literature about UX that leads to the focus of this research: content strategy. The goal is to constructively find out what factors influence content strategy and how its specific aspects can be measured.

Brand image

With the first contact with a brand, consumers instinctively create an image of the product and the company (Botha, Bothma & Geldenhuys, 2008). This image is an association with the brand that lays the framework for the customer relationship. Such an association is not just good or bad, but rather consisting of personal values such as reliable, modern, overpriced, useful, worth the money and the like. The total sum of these values determines whether a consumer likes or dislikes a brand. Each additional contact further shapes the image, for instance a flyer, a phone call, a TV-advertisement, a brand ambassador or a website. On a website, the brand image is determined by the experience the user has while browsing it, also known as the user experience (Krug, 2014).

2.1 User Experience on the web

Comparable to Garrets' (2011) definition of UX as "the experience the product creates for the people who use it in the real world" (p. 24), the International Organization for Standardization (2010, p. 23) (ISO) defines UX as "a person's perceptions and responses that result from the use or anticipated use of a product, system or service". This implies that every interaction between a person and a product or service leads to a particular experience, consciously and subconsciously (Garrett, 2011). The experience is based on several factors, such as the ease of use, past experiences and expected outcomes. For example, searching the volume button on a car radio because turning the knob did not work leads to an unsatisfactory UX, since the driver expected the knob to be connected to the volume control. However, also mundane things such as instinctively pulling or pushing a door to open it are related to UX.

This study is however focused on UX on a website context, in which UX has a slightly different value. According to Krug (2014), websites are self-service products without an instruction manual. Therefore, users are led by their intuition, which is determined by the UX-design. Since the internet has developed exponentially over the last decades, many studies regarding UX have been conducted, which led to several theoretical models describing the mechanics of UX (Steckman & Andrews, 2017). For example, Morville (2004) defined UX in his "User Experience Honeycomb" with seven variables, namely credible, usable, desirable, useful, findable, accessible and valuable (see Appendix A, Figure 20, User Experience Honeycomb). This model has still validity, however, for the purpose of this study, it lacks accuracy. To be specific, Morville's "desirable" in which he expresses the need for triggering or emotional information can be connected to the aspect content strategy, though, more recent models such as IBMs User Experience Wheel (2011) include that issue more precisely. In the User Experience Wheel, six components build the overall UX, as figure 1 below shows:
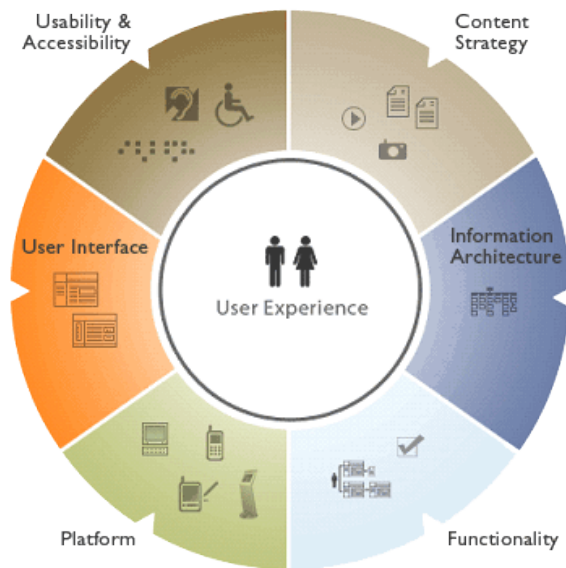
Figure 1 User Experience Wheel. Reprinted from Content Strategy and UX: A Modern Love Story by K. Halverson, 2011. Retrieved from http://uxmag.com/sites/default/files/uploads/halvorson-cs/IBMinfographic.gif Copyright by IBM 2011

The elements of the UX wheel can be divided into two categories: whereas *usability & accessibility, platform, functionality* and *information architecture* built the technical (pragmatic) components of UX, *user interface* and *content strategy* refer to aesthetic (hedonic) components (IBM, 2014). However, certain sub-areas of *usability, user interface* and *content strategy* fall under both categories.

2.1.1 Pragmatic vs. hedonic features

Whereas some researchers state that *pragmatic* features such as functionality and usability are more decisive for the overall UX, others state that *hedonic* features such as the user interface or the content are more significant. Hedonic refers in this context to emotional stimulation whereas pragmatic refers to functionality (Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006).

As Kumar, Sachan and Mukherjee (2017) explain in their study "*Qualitative approach to determine user experience of e-government services",* a sophisticated UX can be decisive for the success of a product. The researchers made use of a qualitative approach using face-to-face interviews and concluded that trust into a services' functionality is of significant importance to the user for a continuous engagement. Thus, the researchers argue that pragmatic features of UX are of greater importance to the user than hedonic features. This outcome contrasts with a study conducted by Partala and Saari (2015) who made use of a quantitative approach to understand the difference in UX of successful and unsuccessful technology adoptions. The researchers observed that the emotional experience users have while interacting with a product is its most important attribute.

Contradicting study outcomes have also been observed by Forzilizze and Battarbee (2004) who then concluded, that UX is depended on the situation of the interaction. This has also been observed by Hassenzahl, Kekez & Burmester (2002) who conducted a qualitative experiment in which one group of participants was asked to perform specific tasks with a software and another group was free to do whatever they wanted. The participant's experiences were collected after the experiment with the aid of the user experience questionnaire (UEQ). The UEQ is a questionnaire configured by Laugwitz, Held and Schrepp (2005) that is designed to measure UX, as described below. Hassenzahl et al. (2006) concluded, that the group that was asked to perform a set of tasks was more drawn to pragmatic features whereas the other group was more affected by hedonic features. Another perspective was however introduced by Yeung and Wyer (2004) who conducted a qualitative

experiment and observed that the affection towards hedonic features is more likely to be dependent on the participant's current mood, as opposed to the affection towards of pragmatic features.

Even though content strategy can be defined as an aesthetic UX component, certain sub-areas such as the content tone can be designed with a pragmatic or hedonic focus (Halvorson & Rach, 2012).

2.2 Content Strategy

Content strategy can be defined as the "planning for the creation, delivery, and governance of useful content" (Halvorson & Rach, 2012, p. 115). For content strategy on websites, as opposed to content strategy for social media applications, Jones (2011) defined a model consisting of five elements, as figure 2 below shows:
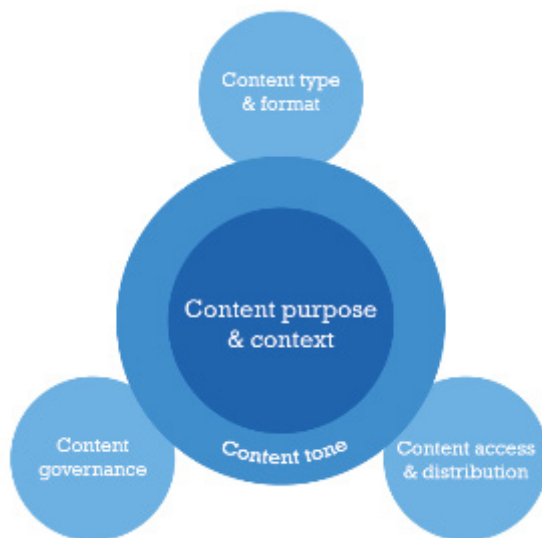

Figure 2 Elements of content strategy. Adapted from Clout: The Art and Science of Influential Web Content (p.26) by C. Jones, 2011, Berkeley: Pearson Education

The content purpose & context refer to the overall objective of the strategy which is shaped by the content tone that defines the communicational framework of the message. Content type & format refers to the type in which the content is presented. Moreover, content access & distribution refers to where the content is published and lastly, content governance relates to the adherence of certain standards. According to Kotler and Keller (2009), a consumer-based *communication audit* can be used to identify consumer preferences regarding content. However, in order to evaluate communicative strategies for websites, perception testing is more suitable (Wilson, 2013).

2.2.1 Content tone

According to Sharma and Singh (2006), content tone refers to the tone of voice that is used to set the communicational framework of a company or a brand, also referred to as *message strategy*. A message strategy is important for a consistent appearance and thus should be applied to all used media channels. Regarding websites, the authors state that a message strategy can be realized with headlines, taglines, plain text but also images that support the respective message. The design of message strategies has been researched by many authors over the last decades.
According to Friestad and Thorson (1986), advertisements can be divided into two categories, *thinking ads* and *feelings ads*. Whereas thinking ads aim to persuade the viewer with utilitarian features of a product such as saving money, feeling ads aim at influencing the mood of the viewer.
A more specific approach has been suggested by Taylor (1999) with his *six-segment message strategy wheel*, as figure 3 below shows.
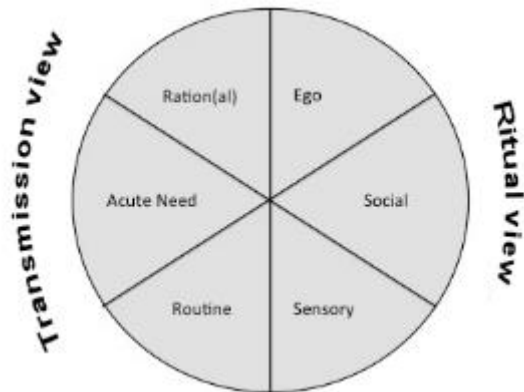
6

Figure 3 Six-Segment Message Strategy Wheel. Reprinted from GALE by R. E. Taylor, 1999. Retrieved from http://callisto.ggsrv.com/imgsrv/FastFetch/UBER1/ZI-4195-1999-NOV00-HAYSTACK-10-2

Whereas the transmission view is perceived by the head, Taylor (1999) argues, the ritual view is perceived by the heart. The six elements of the wheel refer to message strategies with individual focusses, as explained below:

1. *Ration(al)* – based on the need for factual information, i.e. a message strategy with a focus on logic;
2. *Acute Need* – based on a direct need that requires immediate satisfaction, i.e. a message strategy with a focus on a limited availability;
3. *Routine* – based on the repeating habits of consumers, i.e. a message strategy with a focus on a maintenance of a certain routine;
4. *Ego* – based on the need of self-representation, i.e. a message strategy with a focus on acknowledgement through consumption;
5. *Social* – based on the need of recognition from others, i.e. a message strategy with a focus on fulfilling desires of peers;
6. *Sensory* – based on the stimulation of senses, i.e. a message strategy with a focus on a certain smell, auditive, visual or haptic stimulus (Taylor, 1999).

A widely adopted approach is however suggest by Lavidge and Steiner (1961) with their *hierarchy of effects model*, a concept that utilises three core elements, as figure 4 below shows.
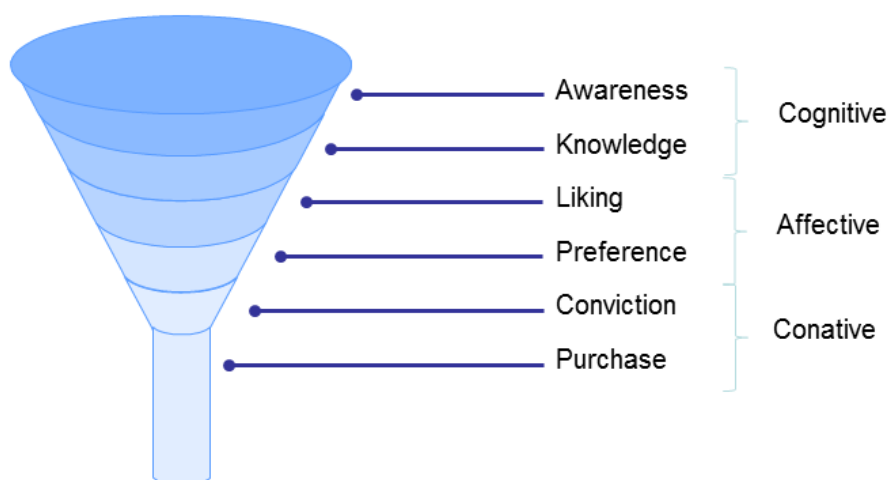

Figure 4 Hierarchy of Effects. Reprinted from ResearchGate by T. Lynn, 2013, Retrieved from https://media.licdn.com/mpr/mpr/shrinknp_800_800/AAGl2NS04OTM3LTk5NDk0NTgzMWUwMw.png

The six levels of the funnel can be described as follows:

- *Awareness* – consumers are unaware of the brand's existence thus the goal is to create awareness;
- *Knowledge* – awareness is established and can be enhanced with more specific brand knowledge;
- *Liking* – emotions can be used to present the brand likeable for the consumers;
- *Preference* – the company needs to clarify its unique value compared to the competition;
- *Conviction* – the brand relationship needs to be further strengthened;
- *Purchase* – the communicative focus needs to be directed on the purchase (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

In this concept, all the elements are successively linked to each other. Thus, an advertisement campaign could start with a cognitive message strategy that creates awareness and ends with a conative message strategy the emphasizes on the purchase. As figure 5 below indicates, a distinction between cognitive, affective and conative elements has been used by many other researchers.

Models

Stages	AIDA Model[a]	Hierarchy-of-Effects Model[b]	Innovation-Adoption Model[c]	Communications Model[d]
Cognitive Stage	Attention	Awareness ↓ Knowledge	Awareness	Exposure ↓ Reception ↓ Cognitive response
Affective Stage	Interest ↓ Desire	Liking ↓ Preference ↓ Conviction	Interest ↓ Evaluation	Attitude ↓ Intention
Behavior Stage	Action	Purchase	Trial ↓ Adoption	Behavior
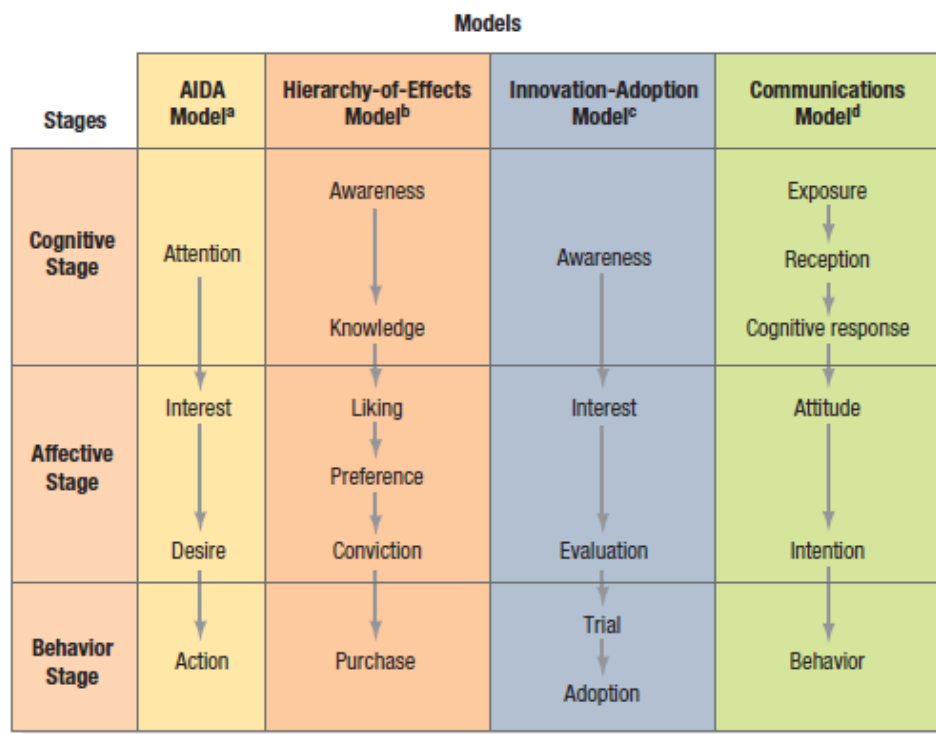
Figure 5 Response Hierarchy models. Reprinted from Marketing Management (p.481) by P. Kotler & K. L. Keller, 2012, New Jersey: Pearson Education

When comparing the models, it becomes apparent that all four models distinguish between three stages. However, the models are not advancements of each other but were instead developed for particular purposes, which can be derived from the fact that each stage has a different severity in each model. Whereas the AIDA model is the most linear and has its emphasis on the affective stage, the hierarchy of effects model, as explained above, functions like a funnel that leads to a purchase. The innovation-adoption model, however, emphasises on the behaviour stage with implementing a product (or service) trial. Lastly, the communications model has its focus on creating awareness in the cognitive stage (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Below, specific approaches that could be used for each stage are presented.

Cognitive message strategies

According to Clow and Baack (2015), a cognitive message strategy is most effective to create awareness. The researchers state that this is due to quick processing of rational information which leads, if executed correctly, to a successful persuasion of a customer. This has also been observed by Chaiken (2009) who suggests that information-based message strategies can be used to change an opinion, e.g. when it comes to overtaking customers from the competition. Hutton (1996) differentiates between five specific approaches for cognitive message strategies, namely:

1. Generic, e.g. "less fuel consumption";
2. Pre-emptive, e.g. "gets you faster from A to B";
3. Unique Selling Proposition (USP), e.g. "All cars need a mechanic, a […] doesn't";
4. Hyperbole, e.g. "the best car in the world";
5. Comparison, e.g. "less maintenance cost compared to [other brand]" (Hutton, 1996).

Marchand and Filiatrault (2001) conducted a qualitative study on the effects of different message strategies regarding HIV prevention in which they observed that a rational message strategy led to an increase of personal feelings towards HIV infections. On the other hand, the researchers noticed that an emotional message strategy had a positive influence on getting the participants to take action actively.

Affective message strategies

Researchers found out that negative emotions such a fear can be as or even more persuasive than factual information, as for example used on cigarette packages (Clow & Baack, 2015). However, also positive emotions can be utilised to build a relationship with a customer efficiently, as many approaches in content marketing do. Content Marketing is often based on affective message strategies that trigger interaction and emotions to connect with a target audience. With regards to specific approaches to affective message strategies, Hutton (1996) distinguishes between the three mentioned below:

1. Resonance, e.g. "I just love my live" (e.g. with a product in the background);
2. Emotional, e.g. "Share your freedom with a friend, offer a ride";
3. Storytelling, e.g. "Life becomes blurrier when your grow up, [product] helps to remember who you are".

Storytelling as an affective message strategy

An efficient way to make use of emotions as a strategy to convey information is by telling a story (Velose, 2009). Companies often make use of storytelling to communicate their core values while connecting naturally with their customers (Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu, 2005). However, consumers are becoming increasingly critical towards marketing strategies that seem manipulative, thus, trustworthiness is an important variable to consider (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Whether a story is told by a consumer or a company, it creates an experience that can be multiplied (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Furthermore, a company, brand, product or service or even the customer himself can be turned into the hero of a story which can lead to a positive brand resonance (Littman & Kelley, 2005).

Conative message strategies

Conative message strategies usually put pressure on a customer that provokes a buying decision, for example by stating a limited supply or a temporary special offer (Clow & Baack, 2015). Hutton (1996) distinguishes between the two approaches:

1. Action inducing, e.g. "Visit us today!";
2. Promotion supporting, e.g. "Buy one, get one free!" .

However, as opposed to a process that utilizes cognitive, affective and conative message strategies successively as suggested by the four models above (see figure 5, Response Hierarchy models), Kotler and Keller (2009) indicated that the first contact between a company and a consumer can be based on either a cognitive or an affective message strategy. The authors made also use of a dichotomous approach by differentiating between *informational (cognitive)* and *transformational (hedonic)* appeals. Informational refers to a communicative strategy that emphasises certain benefits of a product or service, e.g. a car with a low fuel consumption in comparison to the competition. On the other hand, transformational appeals emphasise on a benefit outside of the product or service, i.e. an experience that is created through consumption. A comparable example would be a car advertisement that focusses on the fun one might have taking the car out for a ride with friends. Due to the widespread usage in literature of Kotler's and Keller's (2009) approach, this study will treat cognitive and affective message strategies as equals regarding first contact with customers.

Since the effectivity of a message strategy is not generalizable but rather depended on the target audience, Wilson (2013) suggests perception testing to determine which message strategy to use. Concerning message strategies that are realized on websites, their impact on UX can be measured utilizing the UEQ, as indicated above (Laugwitz, Held & Schrepp, 2008).

User Experience Questionnaire (UEQ)

The UEQ is an efficient and validated way to measure UX configured by Laugwitz, Held and Schrepp (2008). The UEQ breaks down the concept of UX into distinct pragmatic and hedonic qualities to arrange a measurable construct. As mentioned above, research of the last decades often elaborated on the question to what extent pragmatic and hedonic qualities of UX are connected. To attribute to the relationship of pragmatic and hedonic qualities, a linking scale called *attractiveness* that connects the two qualities is incorporated in the UEQ. As the figure 6 below shows, the UEQ makes use of six scales in total:

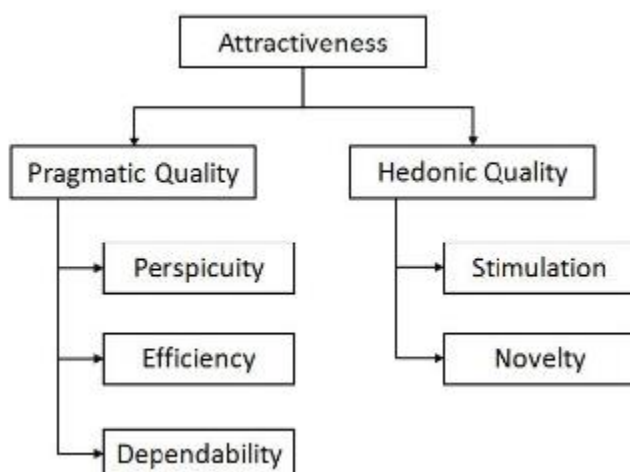*Figure 6 Structure of the User Experience Questionnaire. Reprinted from UEQ Online, by Laugwitz et al, 2008, Retrieved from http://www.ueq-online.org*

The six scales consist of 26 items, each with a semantic differential, e.g. "fast" and "slow" (see Appendix B, Figure 22, User Experience Questionnaire). The six scales are represented with 4-6 items each and specifically investigate the following questions:

- Attractiveness: Do users get an overall positive or negative impression?
- Perspicuity: Is the website intuitive or hard to understand?
- Efficiency: Is the website logically structured to fulfil tasks easily?
- Dependability: Can user rely on the functionality of the website?
- Stimulation: Is using the website motivating and exciting?
- Novelty: Is the website inventive?

Another well-known tool to measure UX is the AttrakDiff2 questionnaire which shows several similarities to the UEQ, though, researchers state that the UEQ is more suitable for software and web-based applications (Laugwitz, Held & Schrepp, 2005).

2.3 Types of content

In the process of creating a website, a decisive step is the content preparation (Van Duyne, Landay & Hong, 2003). Content preparation refers to the determination, organisation, structure and presentation of content (Lazar & Sears, 2006). Many different types of content can be identified such as plain text, video, audio, blogs, email newsletters, case studies and slideshows, though, target audiences respond differently to certain types of content (Young, 2014). According to Jackson et al. (2007), content types can be allocated into three categories, based on the AIDA principle(Jackson, Yates, & Orlikowski, 2007), as mentioned above. The commonly used acronym AIDA describes the customer journey and stands for **a**ttention, **i**nterest, **d**esire and **a**ction and is visualised as a funnel with all the elements vertically arranged (see Appendix A, Figure 21, AIDA model) (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Examples of the content type differentiation by Jackson et al. (2007) are:

- *Awareness*: blogs, checklists, guides, infographics, instructional videos, PowerPoints slides, tutorials, whitepapers etc.;
- *Consideration*: case studies, comparison charts, research, podcasts, product information, reviews, etc.;
- *Decision*: call-to-action, consultations, coupons, demo versions, trials, etc. (Jackson et al., 2007).

The researchers state that the type of content has a significant impact on the users' decision-making on websites and that users are discouraged by content that does not fit their needs. According to Revella (2015), an effective approach to determine content types for websites is to conduct buyer persona interviews. Such an interview aims at narrowing down target customers as well as their desires regarding content types. However, the researcher also states a survey among potential customers can be utilised alternatively to gather data on content preferences, for example when limitations in time or budget are present. Such an approach has also been used by Verhagen, Boter and Adelaar (2010) who conducted an A/B experiment followed by a survey as the data collecting instrument to determine content preferences regarding e-commerce websites. According to Krol (2016), a general insight into the preferences of a target audience can be collected by distinguishing between content with a focus on visuals, focus on text and focus on data (Krol, 2016).

2.4 Content access & distribution

Content access

In order to ensure that content gets to the desired user, marketers need to distribute the content on the right media channels (Alexander, 2013). There are many channels available, offline and online, e.g. newspapers, radio, website recommendations from peers, search engines, e-mail newsletters, video platforms, forums etc. that have different requirements for content (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). When a specific media channel is identified, certain actions such as utilising keywords, moderating a discussion but also advertising on desired websites can be utilised to reach desired consumer more efficiently (Alexander, 2013). Additionally, 50% of business-related content is accessed via phone which requires additional efforts to present content accordingly. Though, the use of mobile devices is heavily dependent on the target audience and therefore needs to be specifically researched (Krol, 2016).

Shareability

Shareability refers to the possibility of sharing content with others (Schiffer, 2009). This can either be done by just sharing a websites' URL via email or by using, if available, social media buttons. Such buttons are often to be found on news websites and provide the possibility to share content on social media feeds such as Facebook. In a study conducted by The New York Times Customer Insight Group (2010), researchers found out that 63% of the people feel the need to share content they have encountered if it is perceived as useful, entertaining or valuable. More specifically, the researchers identified five reasons for sharing content:

1. To improve the lives of the people they care about with providing valuable or entertaining information;
2. To build their character;
3. To strengthen contact;
4. To gain credit from others;
5. Or to support a particular cause (Brett, 2011).

However, the researcher state that there is a difference in business-related content and content that aims for entertainment, since entertaining content is more likely to be shared (Brett, 2011).

Customer contact

According to Schiff (2015), there are many ways to interact with customers to build a relationship such as emails, personal visits, social media, chats, phone calls etc. However, she states that the efficiency of the different methods is not generalisable since it severely depends on the industry itself as well as on customer preferences.

Contrary to determining specific media channels, omnichannel marketing as a relatively new marketing approach can be defined as a seamlessly integrated communication strategy on all available marketing channels, allowing the customer to switch between channels without a shift in experience (Pophal, 2015). However, especially for small- and medium-sized businesses, an omnichannel marketing approach can be inefficient since not all existing media channels are used by the target audience, as described by Schiff (2015). Hence, multichannel marketing, as a reduced alternative to omnichannel marketing with only a few selected channels may be more suitable for small- and medium-sized businesses (Pophal, 2015).

2.5 Content governance

Even though a specific content type is the most suitable for a certain target group, it may become unsatisfactory when it does not seem trustworthy to the consumer, is too long or to complex (Velose, 2009). Content governance refers to adherence to certain standards that a company desires to reflect in their content. Therefore, it is essential to develop standards that reflect values of the company but also consider desires of the customers. Such standards need to be taken into consideration already within the content preparation phase, as explained by Van Duyne et al. (2003).

Message source credibility

According to Kotler and Keller (2009), the attention a message receives is, besides the content itself, dependent on the sender. Therefore, companies often use famous brand ambassadors or trusted people to enhance the attention of their messages. However, the credibility of the source is of high importance. Message source credibility can be divided into the elements likability, trustworthiness and expertise (Malaviya, 2007). According to Kiecker and Cowles (2002), especially trustworthiness and expertise are important factors for companies that aim at B2B customers.

Length

The length of content, or the time it takes to consume it, is an additional factor that influences the decision whether or not to engage as a consumer (Deutsch, 2007). This applies to different types of content such as plain text, pictures, videos or e-mail newsletters and is important to consider while preparing content to match consumer preferences.

Concluding, whereas the content strategy elements content type, content access & distribution and content governance can be investigated based on user preferences, the content tone needs to be evaluated based on perception testing (Wilson, 2013). Even though the influence of certain variables on UX has been studied by many researchers before, the impact of subtle changes, such as different message strategies, have an unclear influence on UX (Tullis & Albert, 2013). Thus, the results of this study may add new insights into UX.

In order to answer the main question of this study, the following sub-questions have been identified based on Jones' (2011) model (see figure 2, Elements of content strategy):

Sub-questions:

1. *Which message strategy (cognitive or affective) does ECOSUS' target audience favour?*
2. *What are the preferred content types of ECOSUS' target audience?*
3. *What are the preferred channels of communication of ECOSUS' target audience?*
4. *What are the content consumption preferences of ECOSUS' target audience?*

3. Methodology

To answer the main question of this research, large quantities of impressions and preferences were required, thus, quantitative research was conducted. To be specific, a two-dimensional research consisting of perception testing to evaluate message strategies and user preference research to collect data on content type, content access & distribution and content governance was conducted.

3.1 Data collection

Due to the usage of different measurement tools to answer the sub-questions two dimensions have been identified, as table 3 below shows. The dimensions were investigated independently and successively.

Sub-Questions	Dimension	Variables	Measurement Tool
1. Which message strategy (cognitive or affective) does ECOSUS' target audience favour?	1	Attractiveness; Perspicuity; Efficiency; Dependability; Stimulation; Novelty	User Experience questionnaire
2. What are the preferred content types of ECOSUS' target audience?	2	Overall preference; Specific content types;	Survey
3. What are the preferred channels of communication of ECOSUS' target audience?	2	Content access; Platforms to share content; Contact a business; Contact by a business Devices;	Survey
4. What are the content consumption preferences of ECOSUS' target audience?	2	Consumption preference; Trustworthiness of content	Survey

Table 1 Sub-questions and corresponding dimensions and variables

3.1.1 First dimension

The first dimension aimed at gathering data regarding the content tone to answer the first sub-question:

1. Which message strategy (cognitive or affective) does ECOSUS' target audience favour?

An A/B experiment was conducted to analyse the perception of different message strategies. The overall goal of conducting an A/B test was to find out whether the message strategies have a different impact on the UX of the participants. Therefore, two websites were set up (see Appendix B, Figure 24, Complete website) that only differed in their headline copy strategies that simulated a cognitive and an affective message strategy. The websites were realized with WordPress and the participants were allocated randomly into either one of the groups with the plug-in Nelio A/B.
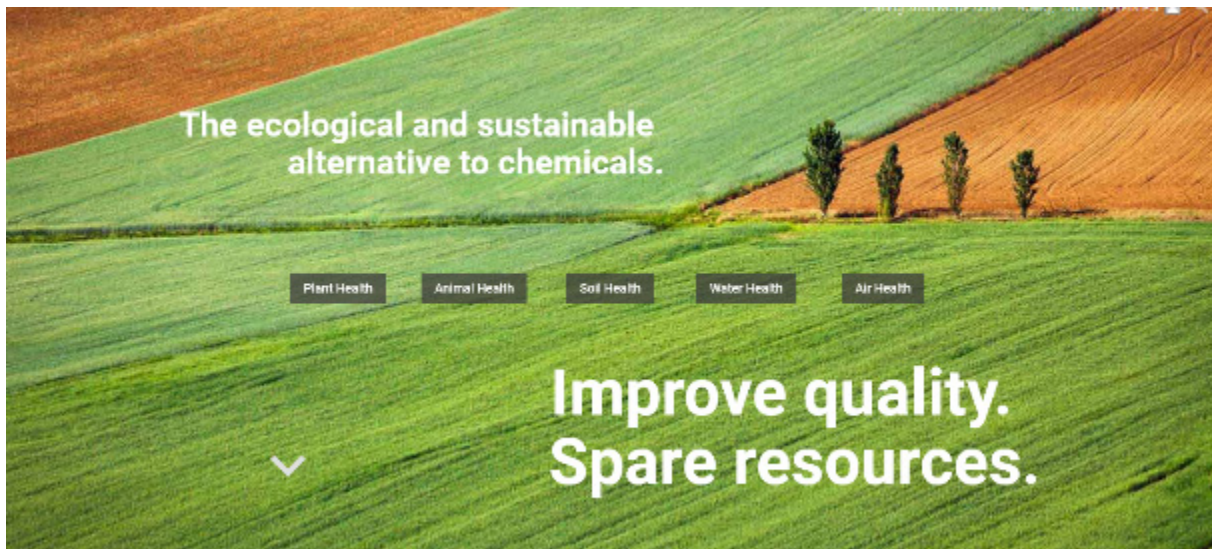
Figure 7 Screenshot Landing page with cognitive approach

The cognitive message strategy was designed in a way that it appeals to rational aspects of the user (Bagozzi, Gopinath & Nyer, 1999). As the figure shows, a full-sized picture with the headline "The ecological and sustainable alternative to chemicals" and the sub-headline "Improve quality. Spare resources." was presented on the landing page. Additionally, further taglines such as "ECOSUS products enhance the output by up to 15% in five operation fields while sparing resources" were used to emphasise on pragmatic features of the product. Since the ECOSUS products are presented as an alternative to antibiotics, which are commonly used for plant growth and animal health, the cognitive message approach used in this study is a comparison, as defined by Hutton (1996).
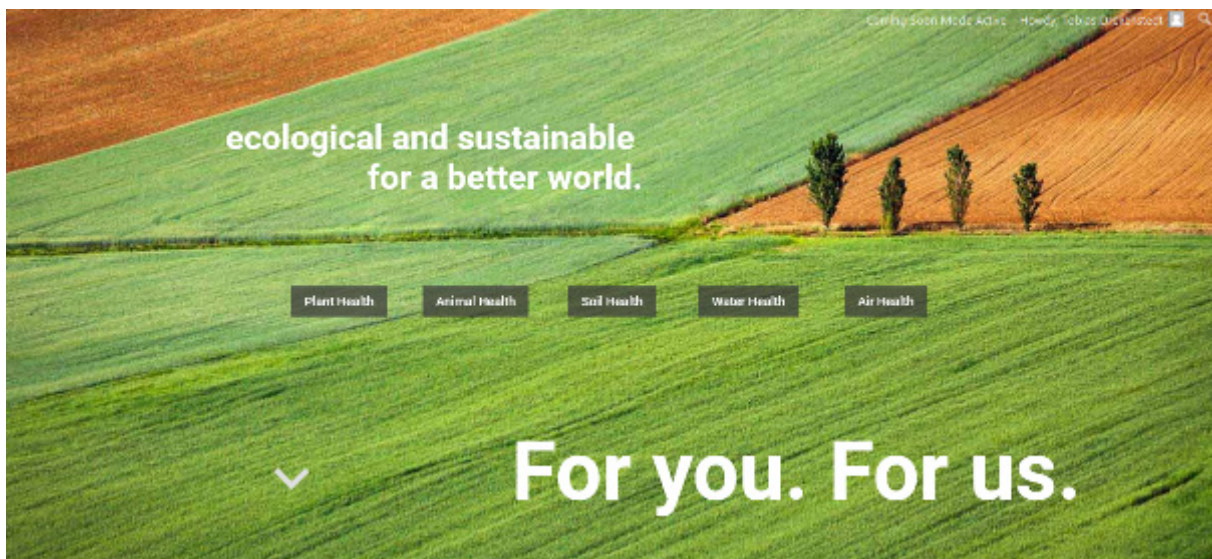

Figure 8 Screenshot Landing page with affective approach

The affective message strategy was realized with a storytelling approach. Participants saw the headline "ecological and sustainable for a better world" on a full-sized picture and the sub-headline "For you. For us." Afterwards, a tagline about common industry problems was shown and finally ECOSUS' solution to the problem "This is how we want to contribute to a better world:" was prominently displayed on the site followed by the product categories (see Appendix B, Figure 24, Complete website version with affective message strategy).

After visiting the websites, participants assessed their impression with filling out the UEQ (see Appendix A, Figure 22, Screenshot User Experience Questionnaire). Since the UEQ is composed in a way that it has a universal usability for several systems such software, programmes and tangible products, some items may need to be adapted to the context of the study (Laugwitz, Held, & Schrepp, 2005). In this case, the items "easy to learn"/"not easy to learn" have been changed to "easy to use"/"not easy to use" since it might have been unclear to participants whether "learn" refers to the content or the website in general. Furthermore, the order of the items was randomised and each item started with either a positive or a negative term. All the items were operationalised in a 7-point Likert-scale to reduce the central tendency bias. The UEQ measured the experience of the participants on both websites based on the variables attractiveness, perspicuity, efficiency, dependability, stimulation and novelty. As mentioned above, each variable is represented with 4-6 items on the questionnaire with 26 items in total. After the participants filled out the UEQ, the second dimension of the research was introduced which was equal to both groups.

3.1.2 Second dimension

The second dimension of this study aimed at gathering data for the elements content type, content access & distribution and content governance of Jones' model (see figure 2, elements of content strategy) to answer the three remaining sub-questions:

2. What are the preferred content types of ECOSUS' target audience?
3. What are the preferred channels of communication of ECOSUS' target audience?
4. What are the content consumption preferences of ECOSUS' target audience?

Data was gathered using an online survey consisting of 10 questions (see Appendix A, Figure 23 Content questionnaire). The goal of the survey was to investigate user preferences. Six questions of nominal nature were used to investigate general preferences (see Appendix A, figure 23, content questionnaire, questions 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 10) and to gather more specific insights, five ordinal questions were used. The ordinal questions measured on a 5-point Likert-scale how exactly participants relate to certain issues (see Appendix A, figure 23, content questionnaire, questions 3, 4, 8, and 9,). The ordinal questions were designed in a way that the answer categories can be compared with each other more specifically as compared to the nominal questions.

The questionnaires of both dimensions were realised with Google Forms and distributed via email to the participants who had five days to respond.

3.2 Sample Profile

The participants of this study were chosen with convenience sampling since the population was unknown. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the sample consists of people who are easy to reach (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). As a non-probability sampling technique, validity and generalizability of the outcomes are limited. However, the technique was chosen because ECOSUS has no customer base yet, hence participants were picked based on their affiliation with the target audience of ECOSUS. To be specific, potential B2C customers who garden as well as potential B2C customers who were either professional gardeners or farmers were addressed. The founder of ECOSUS Matthias Hölscher provided a list of potential customers from his professional network who mostly fall under the category gardeners. Since his contacts were from different countries across Europe, all questions were distributed in English. In order to have precision of 0.5 and an accepted error probability of 0.01, which are according to Schrepp et al. (2014) appropriate values for A/B testing, at least 30 participants per group were required.

3.3 Data analysis

3.3.1 UEQ

The first step of the data analysis of the first dimension is to determine Cronbach's Alpha-Coefficient to measure the reliability of the replies. All the items that belong to a specific scale, such as all the items that measured *attractiveness*, should correlate with each other. Afterwards, the scales were analysed with comparing the scale means. However, since the results of the two groups can be still statistically different even though the error bars that signify the confidence interval at 95% overlap, inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Hence, a two-sample t-test was conducted to determine significance.

The data was analysed with Microsoft Excel.

3.3.2 Content Questionnaire

The data of the content questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics. As figure 23 (Appendix A) shows, questions 1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 10 are questions of nominal nature. As for nominal questions, only the mode is an applicable measure of central tendency. Questions 3, 4, 8, and 9 were questions of ordinal nature. Possible measures of central tendency for ordinal questions are the median and the mode. However, as mentioned above, the ordinal questions and the answer categories were designed such a way that a comparison of the individual answers provides the basis to answer the sub-question. Thus, the most striking "Strongly agree" and "Agree" answers (or "Always" and "Often" and the like) were selected and compared to each other to get useful data.

Due to the fact that the survey was distributed among participants using Google Forms, Google Spreadsheets was used to process and visualize the data since the tools are programmed in a way that they correspond well with each other for such an analysis (Styron Jr., 2011).

3.3.3 Limitations

Certain limitations regarding the above-mentioned research design are apparent. Firstly, most of the respondents were German, however, the UEQ was in English which may have led to a language barrier. Secondly, it cannot be granted that all participants answered the questionnaire as asked on a Desktop-PC or Laptop. Respondents may still have used a smartphone or a tablet for which the websites were not fully optimised, due to limitations in time and budget. Thirdly, since the website was available for everyone during the time of the experiment, external users who did not participate in the survey were also diverted to either one of the websites, which was not specifically noticed by the plug-in responsible for the diversion. Thus, unequal group sizes were used in the experiment.

With regards to the research methods, additional limitations need to be taken into consideration. According to Tullis and Albert (2013), live-site metrics are the most effective tool to use during an A/B experiment on websites. However, in order to make use of live-site metrics, a website needs to have enough visitors per day. Since a dummy website was used for a limited time frame, the less accurate but still suggested alternative by Tullis and Albert (2013) of a survey was used. Regarding the second dimension of this study, Revella (2015) suggests gathering insights on content preferences on the basis of qualitative buyer persona interviews. Due to limitations in budget and time, the suggested alternative of a survey was used.

4. Results

A total of 91 people participated in the survey of which 47 evaluated the cognitive version (referred to as version 1) and 44 the affective version (referred to as version 2) of the first dimension. All participants answered the questions of the second dimension.

As described above, this study utilised convenience sampling among people who have a strong affiliation with the target audience. Due to the network of Mathias Hölscher, the founder of ECOSUS, especially gardeners but also farmers across Germany and Norway were contacted via email.
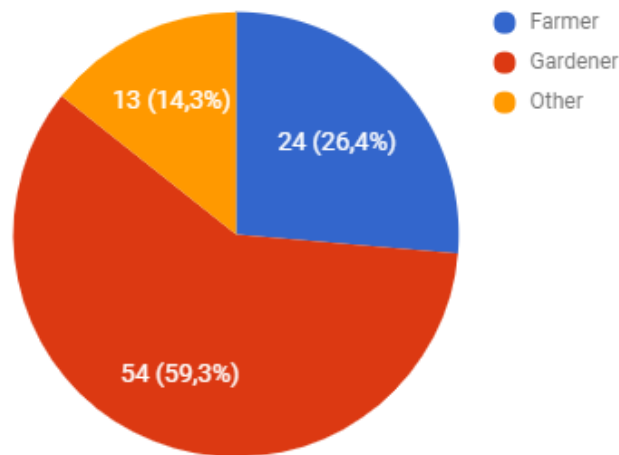

Figure 9 Occupation of the respondents

Above, figure 9 shows the occupation of the participants. The "*Other"* segment represents potential B2C customers who garden*.*

4.1. First Dimension

The first dimension aimed at understanding the element content tone of Jones' (2001) model. Below, the data of the UEQ is validated and analysed. Both groups had a sufficient sample size for a precision of 0.5 with an accepted error probability of 0.01 (see Appendix C, table 4 and 5, Required sample size for version 1 and 2). At the end of this chapter, the results are discussed and an answer to the first sub-question is given.

4.1.1 Reliability

	Alpha-Coefficient
Attractiveness	0,92
Perspicuity	0,64
Efficiency	0,69
Dependability	0,65
Stimulation	0,74
Novelty	0,65

Table 2 Alpha-Coefficient of the scales

As table 2 shows, the alpha-coefficient of the scales Attractiveness (0,92) and Stimulation (0,74) are above 0,7 whereas the scales Perspicuity (0,64), Efficiency (0,69), Dependability (0,65) and Novelty (0,65) have an alpha-coefficient below 0,7. However, since there is no generally accepted value of

the Cronbach's Alpha-Coefficient to represent consistency, the four scales below 0,7 will not be disregarded.

4.1.2 Overview version 1 and version 2

Version 1

The bar graph below represents the mean value of the respondents who assessed version 1. A value above 0,8 indicates a positive evaluation and values below -0,8 a negative evaluation.
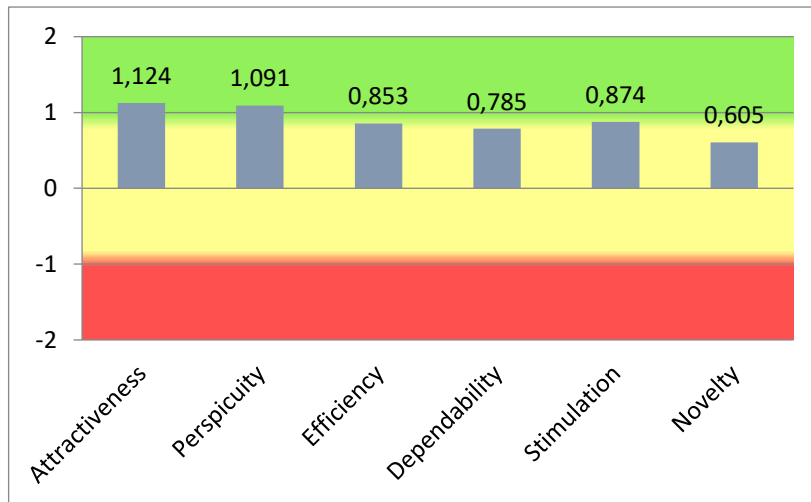

Figure 10 Scale means of version 1

As figure 10 shows, the scales Attractiveness (1,12), Perspicuity (1,09), Efficiency (0,85) and Stimulation (0,87) have a scale mean above 0,8 which indicates a positive impression whereas Dependability (0,75) and Novelty (0,60) can be considered as neutral responses.

Version 2

As figure 11 below shows, all six scales have a mean value above 0,8, thus, one could argue that the affective message strategy led to an overall more positive impression. However, even though higher scale means can be observed, it cannot be concluded that the values are significant.
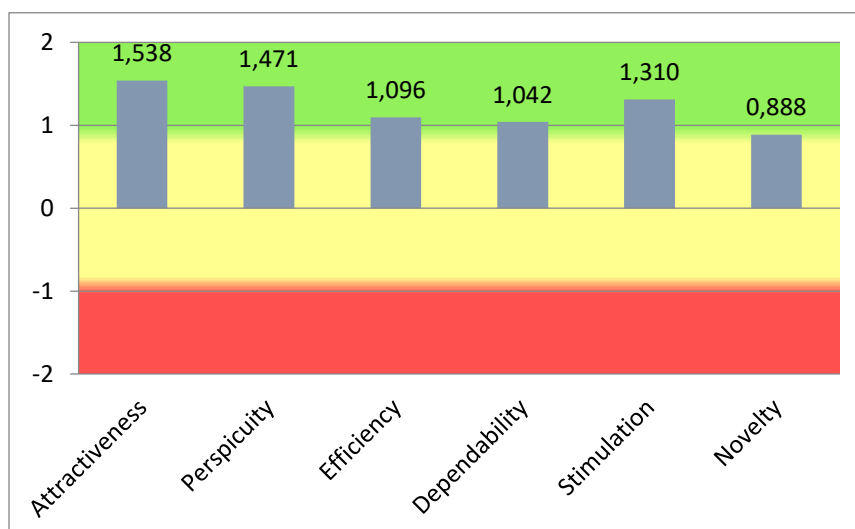

Figure 11 Scale means of version 2

4.1.3 Comparison of the scale means

Below, the two versions are compared with each other with error bars at the 95% confidence interval. The wider the error bar, the less accurate are the results (Laugwitz, Held & Schrepp, 2005).
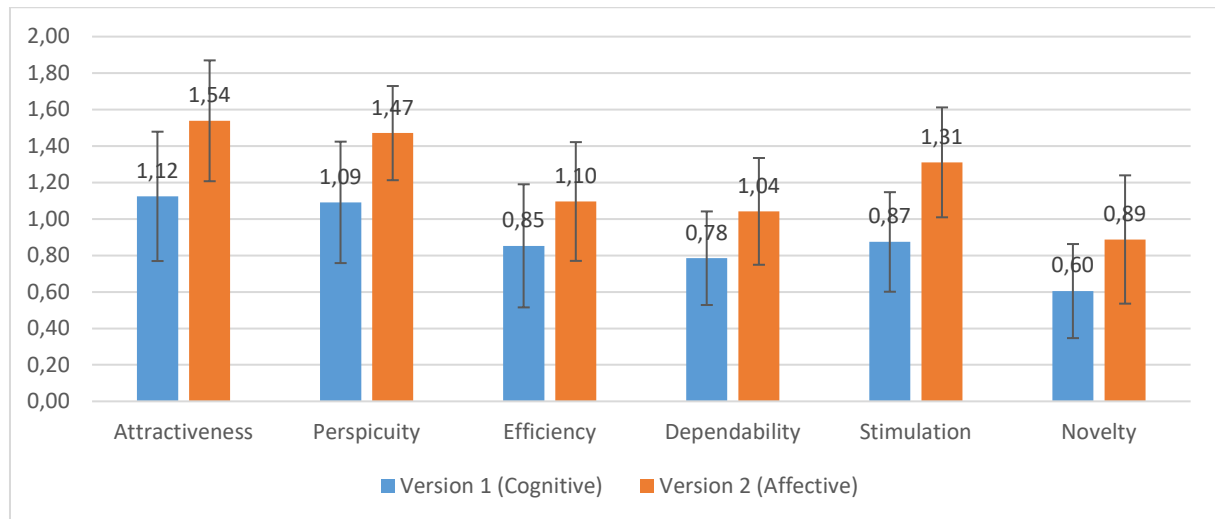

Figure 12 Comparison of the scale mean version 1 and version 2

Figure 12 depicts the scale means of both groups and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals. As none of the error bars overlap, one could argue that the differences are not significant. However, as mentioned above, the data will be analysed based on inferential statistics since significance can still be given. Therefore, a two-sample t-test assuming unequal variances (47 respondents vs. 44 respondents) was conducted at an alpha level (α) of 0,05. Values ≤ α signify that the difference of the means are statistically significant. The results of the test are shown in the table 4 below:

Attractiveness	0,09	**No Significant Difference**
Perspicuity	0,08	**No Significant Difference**
Efficiency	0,31	**No Significant Difference**
Dependability	0,19	**No Significant Difference**
Stimulation	0,03	**Significant Difference**
Novelty	0,20	**No Significant Difference**

Table 3 Two-sample t-test version 1 and version 2

As table 3 shows, the scales attractiveness, perspicuity, efficiency, dependability and novelty have p-values > 0.05 which indicates that the different scale means are not statistically significant. However, the scale s*timulation* has a p-value of 0,03, thus ≤ α, which indicates a significant difference, even though the confidence intervals of version 1 (0.60,1.15) and version 2 (1.01,1.61) overlapped, as shown in figure 8.

4.1.4 Analysis of the first dimension

The first dimension of this study was aimed at providing an answer to the first sub-question, "Which message strategy (cognitive or affective) does ECOSUS' target audience favour?".

The results show that 5 of the 6 scales have no significant difference between the perception of the of version 1 and version 2. However, when matching the results with the study outcome of Hassenzahl et al. (2002), one can see a certain similarity. The participants in this experiment were also not asked to perform a task while being on the website, and ultimately were more attached to

hedonic aspects as to cognitive. Thus, Forlizze & Batterbees' (2004) theory in which they state that UX has a situational dependence, may be reflected in the results of this survey.

Results

Based on the results, one cannot argue that the target audience of ECOSUS favours either one of the message strategies. Though, the scale *stimulation,* that was aimed at answering the question 'Is the website motivating or exciting to use?', shows that an affective message strategy leads to a more exciting UX to the target audience than a cognitive.

4.2 Second Dimension

The second dimension aimed at understanding the elements *content type, content access & distribution* and *content governance* of Jones' (2011) model. Below, the results for each variable are presented with emphasis on the most important outcomes. At the end of the chapter, the results are discussed and answers to sub-questions are given.

4.2.1 Content type preferences

Overall preference

The analysis of the overall content preference shows that 73,6% of the participants prefer visual content, 16,5% data and 9,9% facts.
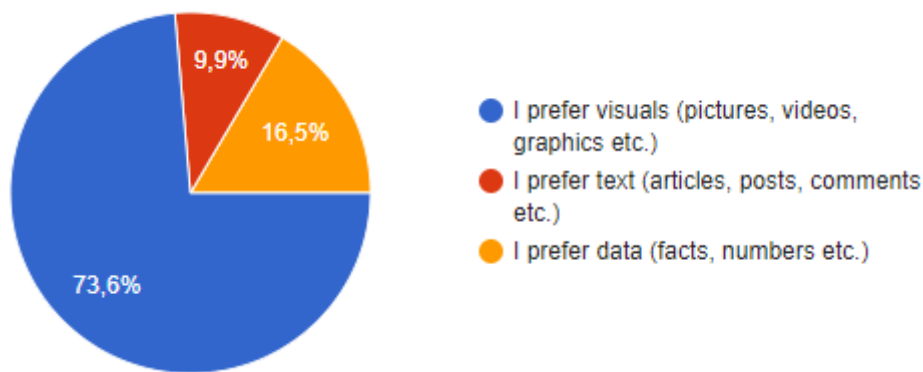

Figure 13 Results: Overall content preferences

Content type preference

With regards to the most preferred content types, infographics (67%) are most preferred followed by instructional videos (53,8%) and reviews (52,7%). On the other hand, coupons (11%), e-newsletters (11%), webinars (1,1%) and consultations (1,1%) are the least preferred content types (see Appendix C, Figure 27, Results preferred content types).

4.2.2 Channels of communication

Content Access

99% of the respondents almost always or often use Google to access business-related content, 52,7% almost always or often directly enter specific URLs of companies, 45% almost always or often ask friends or colleagues for a link and 35,1% of the respondents use shared articles on social media. E-mail newsletters (71,4%) and RSS feeds (86,7%) are used *seldom or never* as a source of business-related content, as figure 14 below shows:
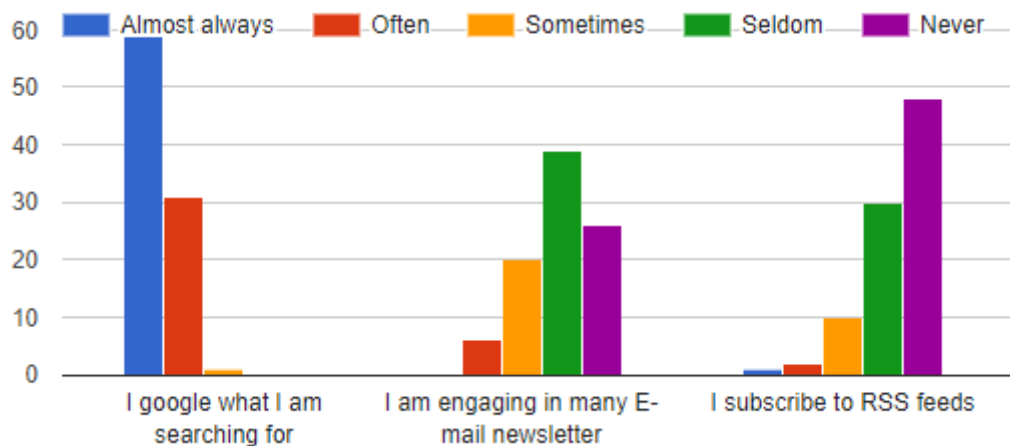
Figure 14 Condensed results: Access to business-related content

Sharing

With regards to platforms used by the respondents to share business-related content, 76,9% of the participants state that they almost always or often use emails, whereas 36,2% use Facebook almost always or often. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Google+ and Twitter are on the other hand used seldom or never by most respondents (see Appendix C, Figure 31, Results platforms to share business-related content). Additionally, 38,4% of the respondents state that they barely share business-related content in general (see Appendix C, Figure 32, Results Respondents who barely share business-related content).

Contact a business

As figure 15 below shows, 90,1% of the respondents state that they prefer to contact a business via email followed by 53,8% who also or solely prefer contact via telephone. 36,3% of the respondents prefer contact forms on websites and 35,2% prefer personal visits. Live chats and social media are preferred by 20,9%.
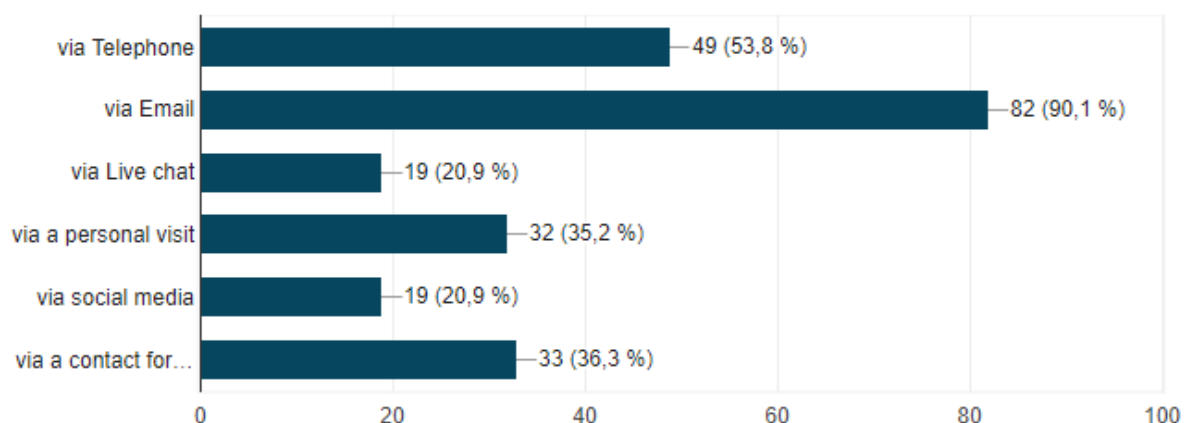

Figure 15 Results: Preferred method to contact a business

Contacted by a business

The overwhelming majority of respondents prefers to be contacted by a business via email (93,5%), whereas 40,7% also prefer to be contacted via telephone, as figure 16 below shows.
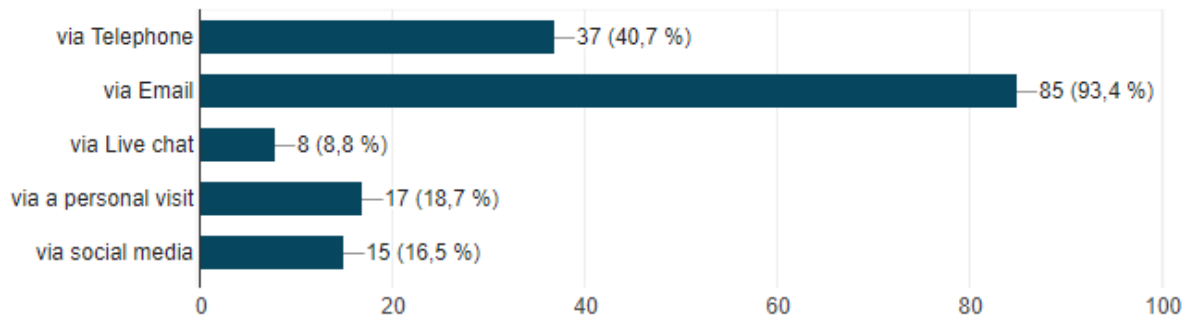
Figure 16 Results: preferred method of being contacted by a business

Usage of devices

The majority of respondents with 58,2%, state that they use a laptop to access business-related content whereas smartphones are used by 31,9% and desktop-PCs by 9,9%. Tablets are not used by any respondents, as figure 17 shows.
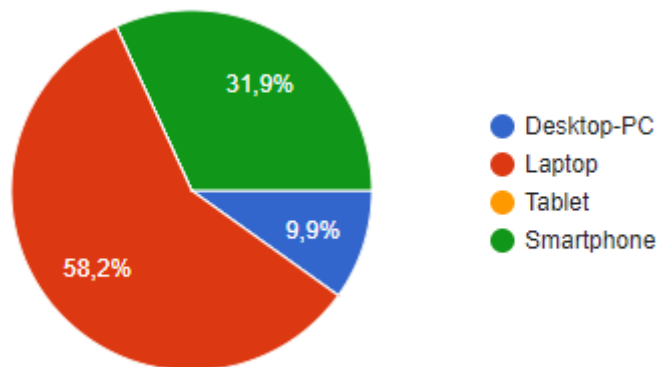

Figure 17 Results: Usage of devices

4.2.3 Content consumption preferences

General Content Consumption Preferences

The results show that the participants place a high emphasis on the trustworthiness of content with 41,8% of the respondents who strongly agree and 52,7% who agree that trustworthiness is important to them (see Appendix C, Figure 26 Results content consumption habits). Short formats are also preferred by the participants with 84,6% of the respondents who either strongly agree or agree.

Sources of business-related content

76% of the respondents consider industry analysts either extremely or very trustworthy as a source of business-related content, and 58,2% consider business websites as either extremely or very trustworthy. Social media (46,1%), influencer (42,8%), news sites (38%) and Blogs (8,7%) are perceived as moderately trustworthy (see Appendix C, Figure 29 Results trustworthiness of different sources).

Participant recommendations to creators of business-related content

As for recommendations from participants to creators of business-related content, 61,4% state that content should be more condensed and more videos should be utilised, as figure 18 shows.
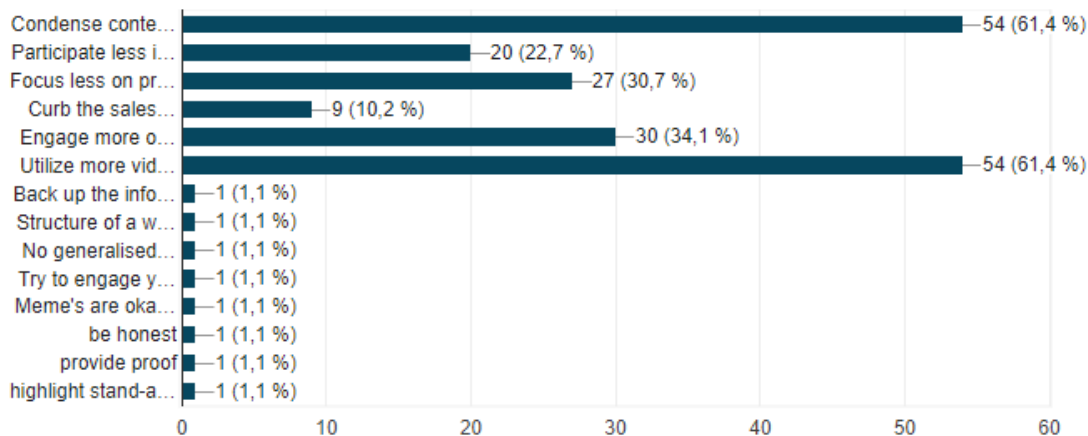

Figure 18 Results: Recommendations to creators of business-related content

4.2.4 Analysis of the second dimension

The results of the survey show several discrepancies and similarities when examined in detail. For example, even though text as a general content preference is only chosen by 9,9% of the participants, reviews (52,7%), blogs (36,3%), case studies (35,2%), checklists (34,1%) and guides (33%) as textual types of content show a higher approval. However, this inconsistency may be because participants were asked to choose their top choice with regards to general content preferences and could tick all preferred content types (see Appendix A, Figure 23 Content questionnaire).

Moreover, e-newsletters which are commonly distributed via email are only preferred by 11%, though, emails are used most frequently to share business-related content (42,8% of the participants use emails almost always to share business-related content, 23% of the participants often). Additionally, 90,1% of the participants prefer to contact a business via email and 93,4% prefer to be contacted by a business via email. Concluding, one can argue that emails are a despite the low approval rating of 11% in e-newsletters a preferred content type of ECOSUS' target audience, however only in the case of direct contact.

As mentioned in the literature review, almost 50% of business-related content is accessed via smartphone (Krol, 2016). However, the researcher mentions that this percentage is dependent on the target audience, which is reflected in the results of this study: approximately one-third of the respondents accesses business-related content with a smartphone (see Appendix C, Figure 17 Results: Usage of devices).

Furthermore, according to Brett (2011), entertaining content is more likely to be shared than informative, which is also reflected in the results of this study since 38,4% respondents stated explicitly that they barely (or never) share business-related content. Additionally, most of the reasons to share content defined by Brett (2011) are not applicable to business-related content.

Regarding trustworthiness of business-related content, industry analysts are the most trusted source whereas social media, influencers and blogs are the least trusted sources (see Appendix C, Figure 29

Results trustworthiness of different sources). This outcome is consistent with the aforementioned preference of emails to share business-related content as opposed to social media.

Results

On balance, the second dimension was aimed at providing answers to the remaining three sub-questions. Based on the results, one can state that *the preferred content types of ECOSUS' target audience* are of visual nature such as infographics or videos. Furthermore, *the preferred channel of communication* is email. To be specific, the target audience prefers emails to get in contact with a business as well as to be contacted by a business. Moreover, email is also the preferred channel to share content, however, business-related content is not shared at all by 38% of the respondents. Content is preferably accessed via Google and mobile-optimised. Additionally, as for *content consumption preferences*, trustworthiness is important to participants with information preferably coming from industry analysts. Lastly, condensed content is preferred.

5. Conclusion

"Content is king." – Bill Gates (1996). Even though this statement is still valid, the strategy behind the content is as important, analogue to the out-dated idiom "behind every great man is a great woman". Hence, the title of this study: *Content is still king, but content strategy is queen*. This thesis is about the configuration of an effective content strategy, a key concern of the commissioning organisation ECOSUS.

The German-based start-up specialised in eco-friendly multi-purpose fertilisers and is currently relaunching one of the core elements of their growth model, the website. The initial purpose of the website was to shape the desired brand image of a trustworthy, sustainable and environmental-friendly start-up. Through the websites content user were supposed to be encouraged to establish contact. However, the yet small circle of customers which consists of B2C customers who garden and B2B clients such as professional gardeners and farmers complained about the experience they have on current website. Thus, Matthias Hölscher, the founder of ECOSUS, decided that a website relaunch is necessary to improve the user experience (UX).

Whereas technical UX aspects of the website such as its functionality, its information architecture and its basic layout are being optimised by a specialist, the content strategy will be taken care of internally. This is due to the desire to take care of such matters from the relaunch onwards without external assistance. However, how to design a content strategy is unknown to the company. Thus, the objective of this research is to make recommendations to the commissioning organisation ECOSUS to derive a suitable content strategy for the website relaunch by understanding the preferences of the customers. Based on Jones' (2011) model that divides content strategy into the elements content tone, content types & format, content distribution & access and content governance, the following main question has been identified:

What are the website content preferences of ECOSUS' target audience?

Whereas the elements content type & format, content distribution & access and content governance can be researched based on user preferences, message strategies (content tone) need to be measured based on their effectivity (Wilson, 2013). Therefore, a two-dimensional, web-based, quantitative research was carried out. The first dimension was aimed to provide an answer to the first sub-question and the second dimension to the remaining three.

91 participants were accumulated via convenience sampling since the population was unknown. For the first dimension, the participants were randomly split into two groups for an A/B experiment. Whereas the first group saw a website that simulated via headline copy a cognitive message strategy, the second group saw a version that simulated an affective message strategy. Afterwards visiting the websites, both groups assessed their impressions with the aid of the User Experience Questionnaire (UEQ). The UEQ is a survey consisting 26 items with a semantic differential, e.g. "creative" vs. "dull". All items relate to one of six scales that individually measure the user experience (UX). After the participants filled out the UEQ, the second dimension was realised with a survey about content types & format, content distribution & access and content governance.

Regarding data analysis, the first dimension was analysed using inferential statistics. A two-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the difference of the scale means is significant. The second dimension was analysed using descriptive statistics.

Based on the results of the research, one can argue that the target audiences of ECOSUS have the following *website content preferences*:

Firstly, with regards to message strategies, it cannot be said that either a cognitive or an affective message strategy is ultimately more favoured. However, it can be said that an affective message strategy results in a more exciting UX to the target audience than a cognitive message strategy. Secondly, the target audience prefers visual content over text-based content. To be specific, infographics, videos and reviews are the preferred content type whereas coupons, e-newsletters and webinars are unpopular among the participants. Thirdly, trustworthiness is very important to the target audience and industry analysts are a preferred source. Fourthly, content is preferably easy to find on Google, mobile-optimized and condensed. Lastly, e-mail is the preferred communication channel to contact a business or get in contact with a business.

According to Tullis and Albert (2013), subtle changes on websites such as different headline copy strategies (cognitive vs. affective) have an unclear impact on UX, which is reflected in the results of this study since the inferential analyses resulted in no significant difference in 5 of 6 scales. However, the scale that showed a significant difference, stimulation, can be compared with a similar result from a study conducted by Hassenzahl, Kekekz and Bumester (2002). The researchers observed, that the group that did not have to perform a task during the experiment was more focussed on hedonic features. Therefore, one could argue, the theory of Forlizzi and Battarbee (2004) in which they state that UX has a situational dependence regarding hedonic and pragmatic features is reflected in this study.

Furthermore, also Brett's (2011) conclusion in which he states that business-related content is less likely to be shared is reflected in the results since the majority participants stated to barely share business-related content on specific platforms and one-third of the participants specifically stated to generally never share business-related content.

5.1 Recommendations

According to Hölscher (personal communication, September 16, 2017), the content purpose and context of the website relaunch is to build the desired brand image of a trustworthy, environmental-friendly and sustainable company. Based on the content of the website, users should be encouraged to establish contact with the company.

Regarding the content tone for the website relaunch, more research is needed to determine a suitable message strategy. However, ECOSUS can be advised to highlight the companies e-mail address on the website to make it easy for users to establish contact. Moreover, ECOSUS should ensure to make use of relevant keywords as well as other SEO arrangements to higher the chances of being found via Google. However, content should be presented as condensed as possible. When it comes to the presentation of the products (the fertilizers), industry analysts can be hired to test their efficiency in order to deliver trustworthy content to the users. The results of such tests should be presented in an infographic or a video, as opposed to often used case studies. Additionally, customers should either have the possibility to post comments or the website should present reviews somewhere to strengthen credibility further. The website should be fully mobile-optimised and as for getting in contact with customers through the website, ECOSUS could implement a field that can be used by visitors to insert their email addresses. Such email addresses can be used by ECOSUS to establish personal contact, however not in the form of e-newsletters. From a user perspective, social media buttons are not a necessity for the website.

5.2 Reflection & Discussion

Reflecting on the process of this study, it becomes apparent that certain variables have not been developed correctly. For example, the element *content governance* has been investigated almost solely on the variable trustworthiness, even though several other factors such as how to exactly

govern content or what level of language complexity should be applied for ECOSUS target audience also need to be examined in order to give a holistic recommendation.

Additionally, also other survey questions were not designed appropriately. First of all, the answer possibilities of the variable content access may not have been complete and participants did not have the chance to add other methods. Secondly, when considering that the majority of respondents were business owners in the garden and agriculture sector, questions regarding shareability of content on social media assume engagement of the participants on social media which may not be the case. Thirdly, the usage of an English version of the UEQ even though the majority of participants was German may have influenced the results since for example the scale perspicuity made use of very specific terms. Such a language barrier may has influenced the Cronbach's-Alpha Coefficients that were below 0,7. Therefore, when utilising a sophisticated measurement tool such as the UEQ, more accurate results can be gathered when using a version in the native language of the participants. Fourthly, even though a two-dimensional research design was the outcome of the literature review, the different statistical analyses result in a different reliability and accuracy of the results. This can be derived from the fact that a descriptive analysis of the mean values from both groups of the A/B testing would have resulted in a different outcome than the inferential analysis. Fifthly, from a technical point of view, a more elaborate plug-in to allocate participants into groups could have been used to receive more accurate results via live-site metrics, even though the website is not available. Especially for the variable length of content, live-site metrics could provide very accurate results since the behaviour of users could have been tracked and timed. Sixthly, the fact that convenience sampling was used and the websites were not fully mobile-optimized may have biased the results since participants may have answered the questionnaires on mobile devices. Seventhly, considering the different research approaches used in this study for the two dimensions, the main research question *(What are the website content preferences of ECOSUS' target audience?)* does not accurately imply that the message strategy was not researched based on preferences. Lastly, the theoretical framework of this study was focussed primarily on message strategies, even though the remaining aspects of content strategy were as important to provide proper recommendations. Thus, a more in-depth theoretical framework of the other elements of content strategy may have led to a more accurate research design.

Future research about content strategy could be of qualitative nature, for example with a focus group interview to understand the motivation behind content preferences as well as message strategies. Moreover, also conative message strategies which have been disregarded in this study could be included in future research, provided that such a strategy matches the objectives of the company. With regards to A/B testing and message strategies, future research could simulate a certain message strategy on a website with more than headline copy, for example with headline copy, pictures, videos and colour. Additionally, the impact of message strategies on UX on different devices could be researched, for instance on a laptop and a tablet to understand the influence of the devices.

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Appendices

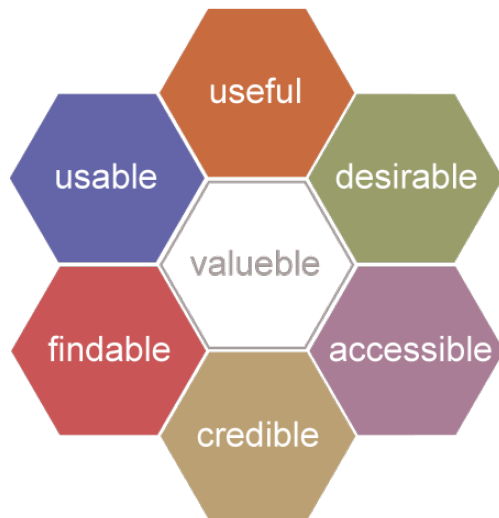## Appendices A: Theoretical Framework

Figure 19 User Experience Honeycomb. Reprinted from lisanneVDL by L. van der Linden, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.lisannevdl.nl/blog/user_experience_and_why_you_should_care

Figure 20 Hierarchy of Effects. Reprinted from ResearchGate by T. Lynn, 2013, Retrieved from https://media.licdn.com/mpr/mpr/shrinknp_800_800/AAEAAQAAAAAAAIMAAAAJDVkZWE0OTVmLTJhNzYtNGI2NS04OTM3LTk5NDk0NTgzMWUwMw.png

Figure 21 AIDA model from xchange.info by A. Winter, 2011, Retrieved from https://xchangeinfo.com/Awareness-Interest-Desire-Action-AIDA

Appendices B: Research Design

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
annoying	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	enjoyable	1
not understandable	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	understandable	2
creative	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	dull	3
easy to learn	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	difficult to learn	4
valuable	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	inferior	5
boring	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	exciting	6
not interesting	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	interesting	7
unpredictable	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	predictable	8
fast	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	slow	9
inventive	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	conventional	10
obstructive	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	supportive	11
good	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	bad	12
complicated	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	easy	13
unlikable	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	pleasing	14
usual	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	leading edge	15
unpleasant	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	pleasant	16
secure	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	not secure	17
motivating	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	demotivating	18
meets expectations	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	does not meet expectations	19
inefficient	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	efficient	20
clear	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	confusing	21
impractical	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	practical	22
organized	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	cluttered	23
attractive	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	unattractive	24
friendly	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	unfriendly	25
conservative	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	innovative	26

Figure 22 Screenshot User Experience Questionnaire by Laugwitz et al. (2009)

1. Which of the following content types do you prefer? [Check all that apply]

- Blogs
- Checklists
- eBooks
- e-Newsletters
- Guides
- Infographics
- Instructional Videos
- Whitepapers
- Brochures
- Case Studies
- Catalogs

- Comparison charts
- FAQ's
- Original Research
- Podcasts
- Product videos
- Reviews
- Testimonials
- Webinars
- Consultations
- Coupons
- Demos
- Free Trials

2. How would you describe your content preferences? [Please pick top choice]

- I prefer visuals (pictures, videos, graphics etc.)
- I prefer text (articles, posts, comments etc.)
- I prefer data (facts, numbers etc.)
- I prefer something else, namely:

3. How do you access business-related content? [Almost always to Never]

1. I google what I am searching for
2. I use shared articles on social media
3. I directly enter specific company websites (URLs)
4. I ask friends/colleagues (who provide me with links)
5. I am engaging in many E-mail newsletter
6. I subscribe to RSS feeds
7. I read newspapers
8. I read magazines
9. I listen to the radio
10. I watch TV
11. Other

4. Which platforms do you use most frequently to share business-related content?
[Almost always to Never]

1. Email
2. Facebook
3. Twitter
4. LinkedIn
5. Google+
6. SMS/MMS
7. WhatsApp
8. WeChat

5. How do you prefer to contact a business? [Tick all that apply]

- Via Telephone
- Via Email
- Via Live chat
- Via a personal visit
- Via social media
- Via a contact form
- Other…….

6. How do you prefer to be contacted by a business? [Tick all that apply]

- Via Telephone
- Via Email
- Via Live chat
- Via a personal visit
- Via social media
- Other…….

7. What device do you use mostly to access content? [Please pick top choice]

- Desktop-PC
- Laptop
- Tablet
- Smartphone

8. How would you describe your content consumption preferences?
[Strongly agree to strongly disagree]

1. I place a high emphasis on the trustworthiness of content
2. I prefer short formats

9. How trustworthy do you consider the following sources of business-related content? [Extremely to not at all]

1. Business websites
2. Social media
3. Influencers
4. Industry Analysts
5. Peer recommendations (in general)
6. News sites
7. Blogs

10. What recommendations would you give to creators of business-related content?
[Tick all that apply]

- Condense content to be shorter
- Participate less in online media trends (such as "Meme's")
- Focus less on product specifications and more on value
- Curb the sales messages
- Engage more on social media
- Utilize more videos
- Other......

Figure 23 Content questionnaire

Figure 24 Complete website version with affective message strategy

Appendices C: Research results

		Items																							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
2	3	4	1	4	5	3	6	7	4	3	7	7	2	7	2	7	7	1	7	1	1	7	7	2	6
5	7	2	2	4	4	6	7	1	2	5	1	7	6	3	5	2	4	2	6	1	7	1	2	2	6
1	2	7	5	4	1	5	7	2	7	1	7	6	1	6	2	6	4	7	4	6	4	4	7	4	7
5	4	1	2	3	6	5	4	3	2	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	3	4	5	6	4	3	1	2	6
4	5	2	2	2	4	5	5	1	1	4	1	4	4	3	3	4	4	5	4	5	6	2	3	3	6
6	6	3	2	3	5	6	5	5	2	6	2	6	7	5	6	2	2	2	5	1	7	2	2	1	5
5	5	6	5	6	5	5	4	5	4	5	2	3	6	3	6	2	3	3	5	4	4	3	2	2	6
6	6	2	2	3	5	6	5	4	2	4	2	6	6	4	6	2	2	4	5	2	6	2	2	2	6
5	6	2	6	4	4	5	5	3	4	4	5	3	5	5	4	4	4	3	4	6	2	5	5	4	5
6	6	3	2	3	5	7	4	3	6	5	2	6	6	3	6	3	3	4	4	2	5	3	1	1	3
6	6	3	4	2	4	5	5	2	3	6	3	5	5	4	5	2	2	2	7	1	6	1	1	2	5
6	6	2	1	3	3	2	6	5	4	6	2	6	6	2	6	2	3	3	6	2	6	1	2	1	5
1	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	5	6	6	3	5	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	5	5
5	6	3	2	2	5	5	4	3	2	4	3	7	6	5	5	4	3	3	5	2	6	1	1	3	6
5	6	2	2	2	5	5	5	2	4	6	2	5	5	4	6	2	4	2	6	2	6	2	2	3	2
6	6	2	1	3	5	5	4	2	4	5	2	6	6	6	6	2	3	2	7	1	6	2	2	2	6
4	3	4	6	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	6	2	3	4	4	4	4	5	3	6	4	4	4	4	4
6	5	3	3	2	5	5	4	3	5	4	2	6	6	4	6	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	2	2	5
6	5	2	1	4	5	6	3	1	3	6	2	6	5	5	6	4	2	3	5	2	4	2	2	2	5
5	5	3	5	4	5	5	3	2	3	6	3	5	4	5	5	4	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	4
4	7	2	4	2	6	6	4	3	3	6	2	6	5	4	5	2	2	2	5	2	6	3	2	4	6
2	5	4	3	5	5	5	3	6	2	4	6	5	3	5	3	2	3	6	1	7	2	6	3	4	6
2	4	3	6	5	2	3	6	6	6	6	3	1	2	3	3	6	3	3	3	5	4	5	5	4	4
5	5	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	3	5	4	5	6	5	5	5	5	4	2	4
5	4	3	2	2	5	6	5	4	2	6	2	3	5	2	4	4	4	3	5	2	5	1	2	2	5
5	5	3	2	4	5	6	5	1	5	5	3	6	5	2	6	4	3	3	5	4	5	4	2	3	5

Figure 25 Excerpt of the UEQ raw data

Scale	Attractiveness	Perspicuity	Efficiency	Dependability	Stimulation	Novelty
Standard Deviation	1,19	1,11	1,13	0,86	0,91	0,86
Precision=0.5, Err.Prob.=0.01	33	33	34	20	22	20

Table 4 Required sample size for version 1

Scale	Attractiveness	Perspicuity	Efficiency	Dependability	Stimulation	Novelty
Standard Deviation	1,07	0,83	1,05	0,94	0,97	1,14
Precision=0.5, Err.Prob.=0.01	18	18	29	24	25	34

Table 5 Required sample size for version 2

How would you describe your content consumption habits?
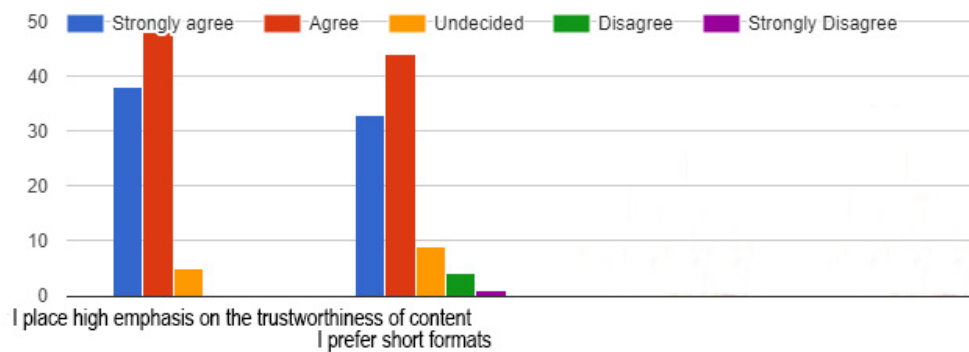

Figure 26 Results content consumption habits

Which of the following content types do you prefer? [Tick all that apply]
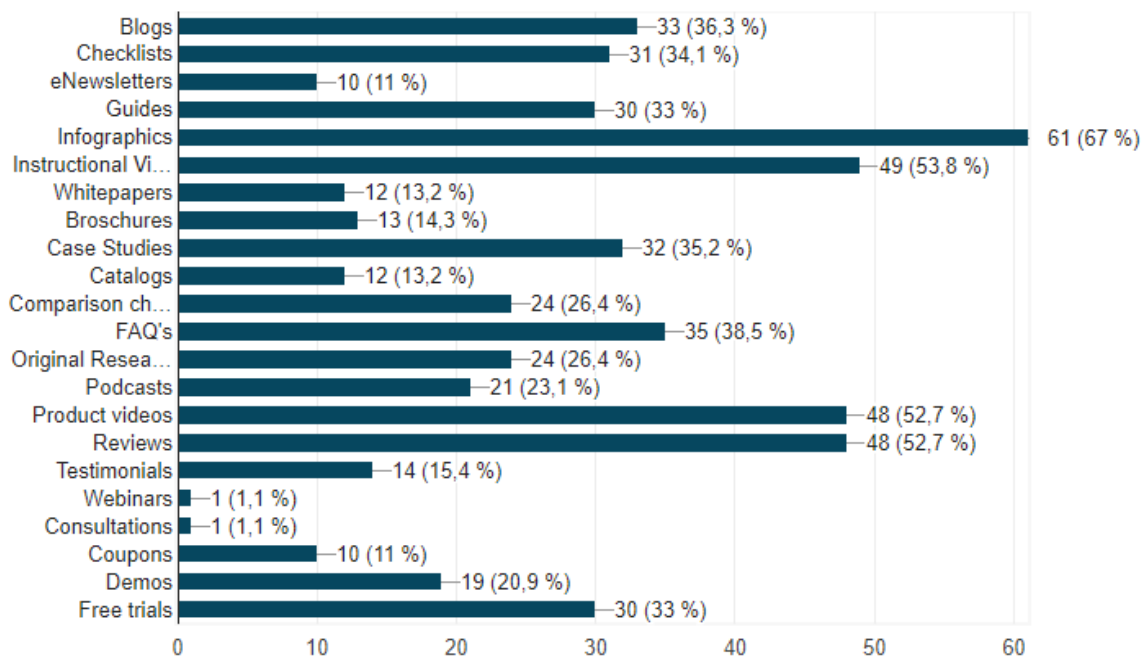
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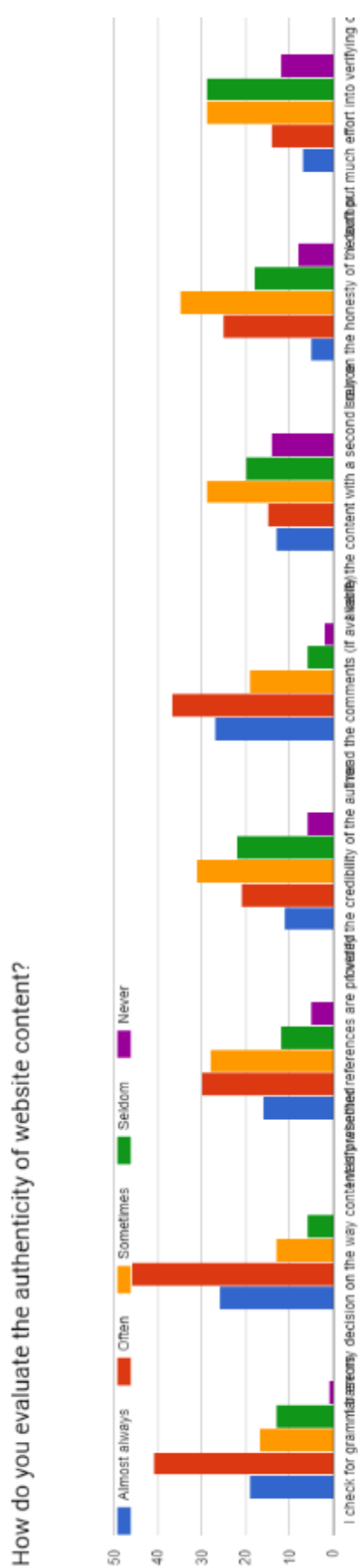*Figure 27 Results preferred content types*

How do you evaluate the authenticity of website content?

Figure 29 Results authenticity of website content

How trustworthy do you consider the following sources of business-related content?
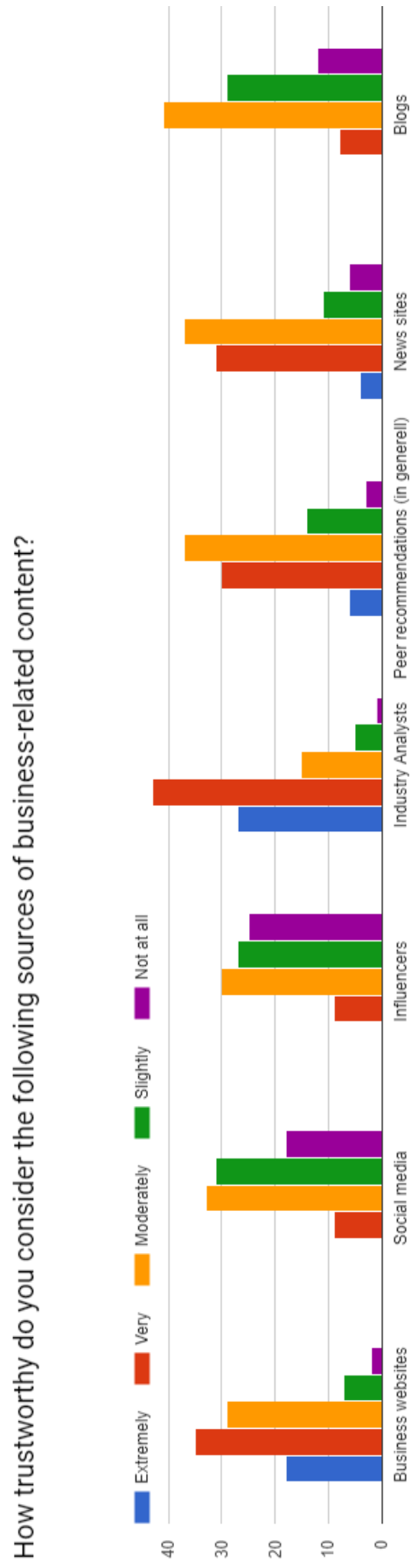
Figure 28 Results trustworthiness of different sources

Figure 30 Results access of business-related content

Figure 31 Results platforms to share business-related content
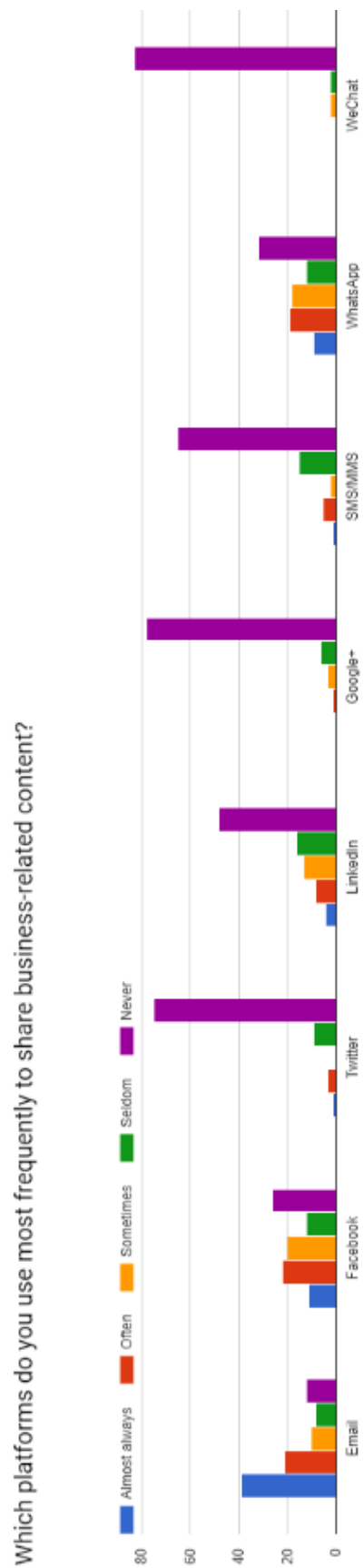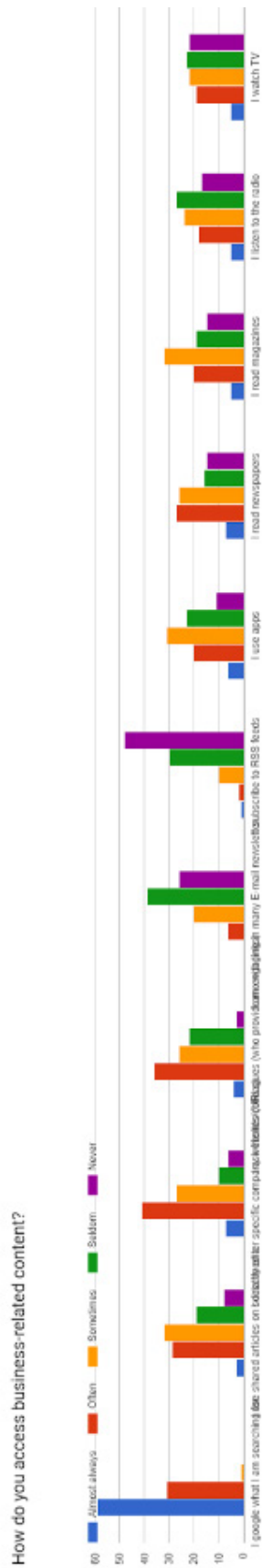
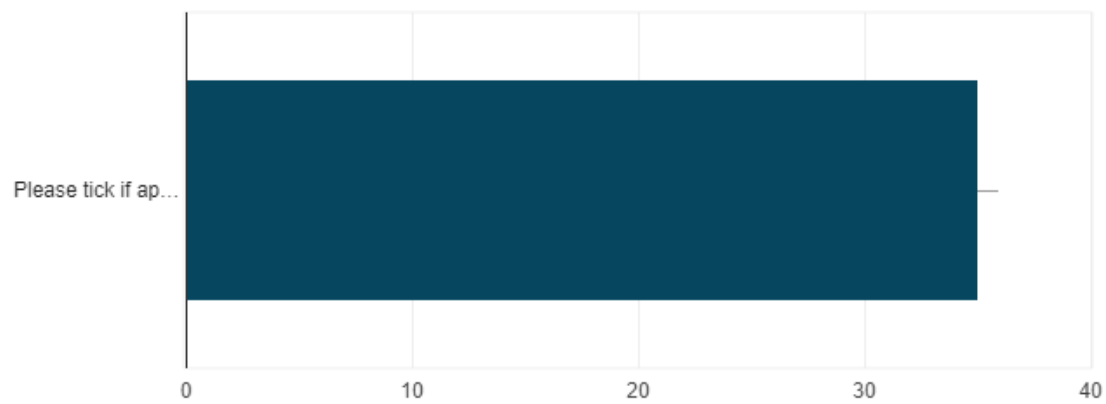## Generally, I barely (or never) share business-related content

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Figure 32 Results Respondents who barely share business-related content