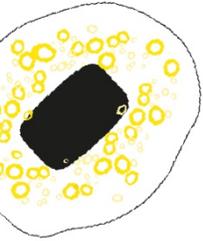


UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.



The Content Equation

*A Mixed Methods Study on Exploring Platform Swinging, Consumer Motives,
and Content Preferences on Social Media Among
Higher Educated Young Adults*

Hannah Christina Glaser - s2303213

Faculty of Behavioral Management and Social Sciences (BMS)

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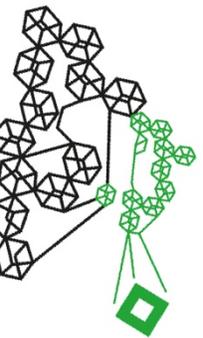
Examination Committee:

1st supervisor: Dr. Jordy Gosselt (UT-BMS)

2nd supervisor: Dr. Letizia Alvino (UT-BMS)

University of Twente, Enschede

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Abstract

In an era characterized by the overwhelming abundance of content on social media platforms, brands are challenged to shift away from traditional advertising methods to captivate consumers' attention. Content marketing (CM) has emerged as a compelling solution, urging brands to deliver valuable and engaging content that resonates deeply with their target audience. While previous research has primarily focused on single social media platforms, this study recognizes the undeniable reality that users effortlessly engage with multiple platforms. Thus, this study redirects the focus towards analyzing consumer behavior across various social media platforms, aiming to uncover CM success factors within this broader context. This research seeks to delve deeper into CM, examining its integrated layers, encompassing multi-platform social media usage, consumer employment motives, and preferred content formatting. Through a mixed methods approach, 731 diary study entries were reported by 60 participants ($M_{age} = 22.27$; 72% female) over one week. These entries notably shed light on widespread platform-swinging behavior, with Instagram emerging as the predominant choice. Furthermore, entertainment surfaced as the primary motivator for social media usage, while participants exhibited a strong preference for video-formatted content featuring authentic, informative, and hedonic attributes. Subsequently, a quantitative extension survey, constructed upon diary study results, involved an additional 178 higher educated young adults ($M_{age} = 23.60$; 63% female), delivering insights that strengthened diary study results. Cumulatively, the findings offer fresh insights by exploring emerging trends and phenomena such as platform-swinging, motivational usage among platform combinations, and the analysis of content formatting within this context. The study's findings provide practical guidance for marketers, offering guidelines for content creation and distribution. Ultimately, the study delved into the underlying mechanisms guiding CM, pinpointing the Media Richness Theory, the Uses and Gratification Theory, and Content Formatting as theoretical foundations. By conceptualizing their interfaces, a robust CM framework was established, introducing concepts such as Media Affordance Synthesis, Content Affordance Alignment, and User-Content Affinity, creating new grounds for future research.

Keywords: Content Marketing (CM), Social Media Platforms, Media Richness Theory (MRT), Consumer Motives, Uses and Gratification (U&G) Theory, Content Formatting

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Introduction, Research Gap, and Purpose

Social media's rapid growth has revolutionized brand-consumer interaction and connection building. Due to the abundance of content online, it has become increasingly challenging for brands to stand out and receive consumers' attention (Lou & Xie, 2021). Social media marketing has been recognized as crucial for creating awareness and has been understood as a generic marketing tool (Ibrahim & Aljarah, 2018). However, the effectiveness has been questioned amid information overload and digital noise in which consumers are increasingly dubious (Koob, 2021).

In this light, content marketing (CM) has gained momentum, proposing value-rich content for breaking through encountered digital clutter (Lou et al., 2019; Mathew & Soliman, 2021). CM improves the creation of longer-lasting impressions while also fostering customer engagement and trust by producing valuable and engaging content. Despite CM being a young dynamic field showing growing significance, the scientific community has not explored it to its full capacity. Research to this point has primarily conceptualized and defined CM (Vollero & Palazzo, 2015; Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018) and only started investigating how consumer engagement (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019), brand attitudes (Müller & Christandl, 2019) and brand building are impacted by it (Lou et al., 2019). Said studies have uncovered that consumers gain value by receiving relevant information, develop more positive brand attitudes, brand loyalty, and heightened buying intentions, indicating a rich future for brands successfully utilizing CM.

Notwithstanding uncovering CM benefits, research has yet to explore how consumers may possess varying usage intentions and gratifications linked to the combination of different social media platforms. Moreover, it is unknown what these variations may mean for marketers in terms of engagement and underlying content production. This is particularly important considering “platforms seek[ing] to differentiate themselves by offering unique capabilities and fulfilling various consumer needs, [leading to] social media users have[ing] gravitated toward using multiple sites to accomplish their goals” (Pelletier et al., 2020, p.11). Moreover, the more common use of quantitative methods and the accompanying neglect of qualitative analyses (Du Plessis, 2022) impedes valuable insights into the complexities and dynamics of CM, limiting maximizing its potential.

Recognized gaps in current research underscore the importance of addressing several key aspects in future studies. These gaps collectively emphasize the need to delve deeper into understanding consumer behavior and interaction with multiple social media platforms, particularly within the context of brand engagement and promotional content effectiveness (Pelletier et al., 2020; Peruta & Shields, 2018; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). By seeking insights into the immediate aftermath of consumer-platform interactions, researchers aim to capture real-time responses and behaviors, highlighting the dynamics of consumer engagement. With acquiring consumer insights regarding brand objectives across different platforms depth is added to the existing understanding of how consumers interpret and engage with brand messaging within diverse social media environments. Moreover, researchers emphasize investigating whether engagement levels exhibit similar patterns across multiple platforms to uncover overarching trends or differences in consumer behavior. Lastly, further exploration into gratification levels across various platforms and their potential relationship with the effectiveness of brands' promotional content should provide valuable insights into the underlying motivations driving consumer engagement and response to marketing efforts. These knowledge gaps prevent brands from developing effective marketing strategies, as they fail to comprehend consumer needs, utilize appropriate platforms, and provide relevant content, underscoring the significance of this research.

Variables of Interest

It is crucial to examine the foundational components of CM: platform utilization, consumer motivation, and content format preferences. Together, these three areas reveal distinct layers of social media consumption patterns and underlying mechanisms. Investigating various platform employment allows an understanding of how brands can effectively reach their target audience across a diverse array of social media platforms. Delving into consumer utilization motives helps marketers align their strategies with consumer behaviors while exploring diverse content formats preferred on different platforms is key to tailoring content accordingly. Therefore, relationally studying these three concepts is of utmost importance as they ultimately enable brands to succeed

at their marketing objectives while connecting with their audience in meaningful ways. To progress in comprehending these pivotal concepts, this research explores existing gaps within each domain.

Firstly, social media platforms are defined as spaces in which social activities encompassing communication, information sharing, and relationship building are transferred from the real world and are now digitalized (Jamil et al., 2022). As such, scholars declare social media platforms as vital brand tools (Appel et al., 2020; Ebrahim, 2020). Generally, research typically upholds the notion that communication strategies utilizing multiple media platforms tend to be more effective than those relying solely on a single medium (Luxton et al., 2015 as cited in Koob, 2021). However, to this day, studies have exclusively researched CM in the setting of single social media platforms (e.g., Khan, 2017; Qin, 2020). While much research has delved into the individual characteristics and media richness of single platforms, a significant gap in the literature exists concerning the interrelationships and combinations between them. It is evident that users do not limit themselves to a single platform, rather, they often utilize multiple platforms sequentially or even simultaneously. This raises questions about the rationale behind these combinations, the order in which platforms are used, and how different platforms complement or supplement each other. These factors are crucial for catering to diverse needs and preferences, especially considering the expectation that users use multiple social media platforms with ease. Therefore, a concern arises from the limited knowledge surrounding the evaluation of overall media richness in the context of diverse platform combinations.

Secondly, it is salient to comprehend consumers' utilization motives and the effects on consumer-brand interaction (Qin, 2020). Through the establishment of the Uses and Gratification (U&G) Theory, scholars understood that consumers have different usage motives for various social media platforms (e.g., Buzeta et al., 2020). Knowledge concerning separate gratifications has been gained, however, knowledge regarding gratification fulfillment in the context of employing multiple platforms is absent. With the widespread utilization of multiple platforms concurrently, it becomes essential to examine how gratification fulfillment is influenced by such usage patterns. A combination of platforms may lead to heightened gratifications, or even new gratifications arising through complementary usage of a multitude of platforms. The failure to align brand messaging with consumer motives may lead to a lack of resonance and connection building, leaving brands with missed opportunities to create meaningful interactions.

Thirdly, the actual distributed brand-related content must also be thoughtfully considered. Social media platforms enable a variety of opportunities for content development and interaction encompassing e.g., text-based, visual, video, and increasingly favored user-generated content (UGC) (Sykora et al., 2022). Research has explored the types of content that stimulate engagement (Jaakonmäki et al., 2017) and has examined the effectiveness of specific content types (Lou et al., 2022). However, there remains a gap in understanding the best practices for designing and implementing CM across various platforms, which has not been sufficiently addressed (Koob, 2021). The question remains which type of content production may be most fitting and possibly bound to which platform based on users' employment and motives.

This Study

It is vital for brands to establish a portfolio of which social media platform employment motives and preferences are anchored in their consumers and how to best reach them. The novelty of this research lies in its utilization of a mixed methods approach, with a qualitative perspective at core, studying the combination and relationship of multiple social media platforms used and the connection between consumer employment motives and content varying and sought among them. It adds to the existing body of literature by delivering insightful information on higher educated young adults' usage behavior, content employment, and the digital environment in general while adhering to future research suggestions of fellow researchers. In essence, this study aims to investigate CM so that brands can best create successful CM strategies, creating the following research question:

***RQ:** Which combinations of platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Instagram) do higher educated young adults engage with for what underlying motives (e.g., information, entertainment, empowerment), and which forms of content (e.g., photos, videos, UGC) are preferred on which platforms and in which contexts?*

Theoretical Framework

Content Marketing

CM has globally gained traction, steadily gaining significance in brands' marketing mix (Koob, 2021). Hollebeek and Macky (2019) define CM “as the creation and dissemination of relevant, valuable brand-related content to current or prospective customers on digital platforms to develop their favorable brand engagement, trust, and relationships” (p.1). Research suggests that CM is built upon the social exchange principle as CM focuses on adding value to consumers' lives through, e.g., helping them solve problems or supporting them to make well-informed decisions. The brand in return gains positive attitudes including brand trust, or behaviors including brand-related interactions and commitment (Koob, 2021).

CM is not to be equalized with advertising. With CM high-quality content is created that provides value for the consumer, it is more than purely promoting a brand's products and services with sole selling intentions (Lopes & Casais, 2022). Hollebeek and Macky (2019) distinguished four characteristics that differentiate CM from advertising. Firstly, CM demonstrates a brand's commitment to providing valuable information to (prospective) customers for free. Secondly, CM's overarching goal is to establish long-term relationships, instead of prioritizing immediate purchases. Thirdly, CM does not push and thrust content at customers, rather they count on them wanting to find valuable and worthwhile branded content. Lastly, through CM customers are earned through the provision of valuable content, as opposed to paid advertising.

Theoretical Foundation of Social Media Usage

While CM has been acknowledged as a valuable strategy for brands to engage with their audience, it is crucial to delve deeper into the factors that shape users' behavior on social media platforms. Social media usage is a result of a complex interplay of various factors, with multiple media theories attempting to provide insights. Among these, the Media Richness Theory (MRT), Uses and Gratification (U&G) Theory, and Content Formatting play a central role, forming the pillars

of this research. These three concepts, especially when considered together, offer a compelling explanation for patterns in social media usage (see Table 1).

To initiate the analysis of social media platform usage, particularly the combination of platforms, the MRT richness factor is recognized as the most appropriate theoretical framework. This selection is well-founded on the theory's proven track record of being successfully used to predict numerous cognitive and behavioral characteristics of media, such as media satisfaction and online consumer behavior, as emphasized by Sheer (2020). Moreover, as the MRT overall “is a widely cited information processing theory that explains media usage and communication effectiveness” (Cao et al., 2021, p.7), it is evaluated as being highly suitable for assessing the extensive realm of platform combination utilization.

In this research context, combining the MRT with the U&G Theory allows going beyond merely examining the richest platforms. Utilizing the U&G Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate motivations that steer user behavior. This approach allows delving into the specific drivers behind user engagement, particularly in terms of gratification need fulfillment. Through an in-depth examination, insights can be gained into why and how users seek content across various social media platforms, highlighting the nuanced ways in which they satisfy their information and entertainment needs (Falgoust et al., 2022; Mammadov, 2022; Whiting & Williams, 2013).

While media selection and understanding customer preferences are vital, the presented content itself plays a pivotal role. It is essential to consider not only where and why but also how consumers engage with information optimally and the formats they prefer (Moran et al., 2019; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). This third approach turns the emphasis away from medium and customer and towards content, exploring the best fit.

Table 1

Defining the Theoretical Foundation of Social Media Usage

Concept	Definition
Media Richness Theory (MRT)	According to the MRT, a communication channel's (medium's) effectiveness can be maximized by matching the richness of the medium with the task's ambiguity (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Uses and Gratification (U&G) Theory	The fundamental tenet of U&G Theory posits that individuals actively seek media that aligns with their needs, ultimately leading to personal satisfaction (Lariscy et al., 2011).
Content Format	Content types on social media refer to the various categories or formats of content that are shared on social networking platforms. These can include text posts, images, videos, links, polls, stories, and more, each designed to engage and inform the audience in different ways.

Multi-Platform Social Media Usage

After delving into the factors that shape social media usage, the focus is now shifted to the platforms where this usage unfolds. It is noteworthy to underscore that a weighty 4.80 billion individuals participate in daily interactions on social media, devoting an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes to this engagement (Chaffey, 2023). The typical social media user employs an average of 6.6 social media platforms, with popular choices including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok (Biggest Social Media Platforms 2023 | Statista, 2023). Social media have affected consumer behavior and marketing practices, and have been established as being “pervasive, widely used, and culturally relevant” (Appel et al., 2020, p. 2).

Media Richness Theory. Favoring one social media platform over another can be traced back to the MRT. According to the MRT, a communication channel's (medium's) effectiveness can be maximized by matching the richness of the medium with the task's ambiguity (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Generally, the theory is built around uncertainty and equivocality reduction through information processing. Uncertainty is the lack of understanding, reduced by the quantity of the content. Exemplarily, brands launching a new product post across various social media platforms, distributing comprehensive insight including product information, specifications, guides, first reviews, and behind the scenes of product development. By providing detailed content and answering customer questions, the brand reduces uncertainty about the product, helping potential customers make informed decisions. Conversely, equivocality is experienced confusion which cannot be reduced by any amount, but by the content quality or richness. Hereby, brands, as an example in the sector of healthcare, use social media platforms to share accurate and well-

researched information during a public health crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. By providing clear and reliable content, brands help to reduce equivocality and confusion.

Next to social media's downfalls for instance including the spread of misinformation (Suárez-Lledó & Álvarez-Gálvez, 2021), rising mental health concerns due to addictive use (Boer et al., 2021; Henzel & Håkansson, 2021; Sujarwoto et al., 2021), and the facilitation of cyberbullying (Lee et al., 2023) it has greatly proven its richness related to consumer brand relationships. Said richness is highly visible through the ascending usage numbers and research discovering its positive impact on enhanced brand experience (e.g., Zollo et al., 2020) as well as consumer behavior (e.g., Hasim et al., 2020). Despite this, it is of utmost importance to recognize that in the constantly evolving digital landscape, the widespread use of numerous social media platforms necessitates a refinement of the perspective on social media platform media richness. Undeniably social media can be broken up into various platforms whereby knowing when consumers choose to employ which platform, indicating its richness over another, is unknown. Moreover, the richness of social media platforms varies not only between individual social media platforms but also depends on how different platforms are used together and the specific order in which they are employed. First steps toward aggregating insights on single media richness have been taken, however, until now social media platforms have been primarily analyzed apart or viewed as one channel. Analyzing social media platform combinations and why users go online as a whole, painting an overall picture, has been left aside, and therefore remains unexplored. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding and assist brands in enhancing CM strategies, there is a need to go beyond current efforts.

When examining social media platforms holistically, it becomes evident that they all share common traits. Today's platforms offer a range of communication options, starting with the richest "face-to-face" live streaming, followed by video, voice, and the leanest text-based interactions (Daft et al., 1987). While each platform exhibits distinct emphases – for instance, TikTok prioritizes video content, Instagram blends images and videos, and Twitter embodies a text-centric approach – definitively ranking them in terms of richness proves unprofitable given their overall shared characteristics. Therefore, this research aims to extend the concept of social media richness to encompass multiple platforms, mirroring users' daily usage patterns. The expectation guiding this study underscores the belief that users comfortably engage with multiple social media

platforms routinely. Consequently, there is a need for traditional analyses of single social media platform richness to evolve, exploring the interconnectedness of platforms and how users navigate multiple platforms simultaneously. Resultingly, this field lacks qualitative analysis investigating the root of platform combination richness determined by various user groups.

Consumer Motives

In the networked age, consumers have created personal networks across multiple platforms (Lai, 2019), where they actively establish relationships with brands (Lopes & Casais, 2022). This shift is accompanied by a growing trend of using social media as an integral part of information search, encompassing product reviews and comparisons (Lopes & Casais, 2022). However, the dynamic landscape of social media introduces the challenge of reaching consumers effectively. Algorithms play a significant role in delivering brand-related content to users, making it crucial for brands to understand consumers' motives for using specific platforms (Qin, 2020). Moreover, it is possible to distinguish users' engagement levels, whereby the difference arises in the (inter)actions with the platform (Bodroža et al., 2022; Verrastro et al., 2020). Active social media users enable direct interactions through liking, commenting, and creating UGC (Verduyn et al., 2017). Oppositely, passive users simply absorb by skimming through and observing. With the plethora of social media platforms available brands must adapt their strategies corresponding to preferences and activity levels of consumers.

Uses and Gratification Theory. In understanding consumers' motives for employing specific interaction channels, the U&G Theory provides a valuable framework. "According to U&G Theory, people actively seek out particular media and content for specific uses and to achieve particular gratifications" (Buzeta et al., 2020, p.2). The theory examines why social media are utilized (Qin, 2020) and stipulates that social media use is objective-oriented (Khan et al., 2019). The key tenet is that media are utilized in a goal-directed manner as users are conscientious of their wants and needs (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). Buzeta and colleagues (2020) list four motivations, namely personal identity, integration and social interaction, information, and entertainment whereby Muntinga et al. (2011) proposed to add empowerment and remuneration

particular to social media usage. These six U&G categories drive motivations of social media platform usage and are of high importance to understanding users' behavior.

Over the past few decades, the U&G Theory has found application in various domains, ranging from traditional media like newspapers and radio to the digital realm, including the World Wide Web, virtual communities, and today's indispensable social media. Research has overwhelmingly investigated why individuals use social media as a whole, whereby Kamboj (2019) expresses that "gratifications obtained for information seeking surpass all other gratifications [...]" (p.15). Moreover, a different branch of research has examined varying usage motives across types of people. Here, Ezumah (2013) concluded that college students use social media networking sites to mainly keep in touch with friends and family and to share photos, compared to so-called Baby Boomers who use it for diversion and entertainment (Sheldon et al., 2021). Nevertheless, this greatly disregards the diversity among the many available social media platforms, each with possible distinct user gratification factors.

Fellow researchers sharing this perception recently began diving deeper and looking at platforms individually. Doing such, Pelletier et al. (2020) investigated three platforms, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which notably were the most used and biggest at that time. Herby, Facebook was shown to be used mostly for being social and to share one's personal content, Twitter's main driver was information seeking while Instagram was most heavily bound to entertainment gratifications. However, today such results need to be valued with caution as the landscape of platforms is continuously evolving as new forms of social media sites are established, new trends arise, and platforms steadily grow in importance. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate how individual motives might shift accordingly. It can be inferred that established connections between specific motives and platforms might require reevaluation, as brought to attention by the results of Falgoust et al. (2022). Falgoust et al. (2022) recently applied the U&G Theory to identify motivational factors behind young adults' participation in viral social media challenges on TikTok, one of the newest and rapidly emerging platforms. Their findings revealed TikTok's primary role as an entertainment platform. While this conclusion aligns with prior research (Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Meng & Leung, 2021), it diverges from Pelletier et al.'s (2020) findings, which linked entertainment gratification with Instagram. In essence, this highlights the need for ongoing research and reevaluation of the relationship between user motives and specific social media platforms. It

also highlights that certain social media platforms offer similar gratifications, suggesting that some may only fully satisfy the need for, e.g., entertainment when used together. Therefore, this study indicates that the notion of seeking one particular gratification per social media platform should be reconsidered, and an analysis of studying multiple social media platforms to uncover possible pairings should be explored.

Moreover, it should be expected that motives undergo changes over time, potentially rendering them irrelevant, while also considering the emergence of new motives within the context of social media platform usage. This inference is based on the COVID-19 pandemic as it came to show that gratifications concerning social media usage have progressed from being primarily 'entertaining' to 'passing time' in this era (Bowden-Green et al., 2021). That motives change over time can further be very prominently seen when looking at concluded research concerning the world's largest social media platform Facebook. Initially focused on reconnecting with friends (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008), later studies reveal Facebook gratification being leisure and content gratification (Joinson, 2008), followed by evolving to relationship building (Chen and Kim, 2013), and most recently bound to self-presentation (Pelletier et al., 2020). Through this progressiveness, it becomes evident that a sole social media platform undergoes significant evolution over time. Considering this, it is reasonable to expect that the emergence and evolution of multiple social media platforms will exert a more profound influence on shifting gratifications bound to platforms. As new platforms enter the social media landscape and existing ones continue to evolve, users are presented with a wider array of options for engaging with content, and ultimately to satisfying their needs and desires. Therefore, this dynamic environment of multiple evolving platforms creates a shifting landscape of gratifications. Herby, it is noteworthy that not only bigger shifts such as the emergence of new platforms might render connections, but simply an uprise of a new feature like the newly broadcast community feature introduced to Instagram (Oladipo, 2023) might do so too.

Content Format

Social media platforms provide a wide variety of content formats, each with its own function and user engagement strategy. Brands may effectively communicate by choosing content formats including text-based, visual, video, user-generated (organic), interactive, influencer (paid), storytelling, and behind-the-scenes content. Brands can employ diverse content forms to e.g., share concise messages (text-based content), build trust (UGC), encourage engagement (interactive content), or foster authenticity (behind-the-scenes content). Short-form video applications have been increasingly integrated into social media platforms (Hood et al., 2022), demonstrating the 2020s vertical video revolution (Zheng, 2023). With new eras and trends uprising, brands must keep up with developments and shift accordingly, highlighting the importance of generational marketing and customer trend observation (Hood et al., 2022; Mulier et al., 2021; Wang, 2021).

In that same vein, 60% of consumers think more businesses should communicate with their followers and customers about the kind of content they want them to produce (Tiushka, 2023). Meanwhile, “marketers need to think about the kind of message that they are conveying as well as how different kinds of people will process the information” (Alamäki et al., 2019, p.2). Next to the actual conveyed information, the content format acting as a transmitter also needs to be considered (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). The study by Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) has categorized three main content categories with which they started to test fitting content formats and their different impacts on users’ engagement levels. Their analysis *inter alia* showed that there were no significant interactions between transactional content and content format. However, rational content was most favorably received when presented through photos, while emotional content heightened engagement best in video format. Additionally, Tiushka (2023) reports that, overall, consumers are 2.4 times more inclined to engage with UGC as opposed to content produced by brands. In practical application, this suggests that brands should enthusiastically adopt and engage with UGC to establish meaningful consumer connections. Furthermore, it highlights the presence of connections between the conveyed information and content format, underscoring the need for further research to align business strategies with consumer preferences and the optimal content format.

Moreover, in line with the suggestion that emotional content is best suited for video formatting, statistics indicate that video formats overall have evolved into being the favored content

consumption format (Hood et al., 2022; Zheng, 2023). This underscores the significance of video content in today's digital landscape, as it is expected to possess substantial potential for engaging audiences and delivering impactful messages, regardless of the specific platform. Furthermore, it drives this study's anticipation that brands and marketers will allocate more resources to creating high-quality and engaging video content, as consumers become more and more drawn to this dynamic and captivating format. Lastly, retracting to the rise of short-form video platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, the creation and consumption of bite-sized video content is expected.

Platform-Content Alignment Framework

The interaction among the three concepts—MRT, U&G Theory, and Content Formatting—is anticipated but not presently observable, suggesting the potential development of a CM framework. Initially, marketers need to collect insights into the gratifications consumers desire, identify their preferences for social media platforms, and understand the combinations they use to satisfy these desired gratifications. Subsequently, they must assess the most suitable content format for each employment and the desired to be conveyed information. These three concepts do not only form an overarching connection but further hold deeper interrelatedness which intertwines each of them individually (see Figure 1).

Building on this, the connectedness of the two media-related theories, MRT and U&G Theory, arises from the fact that both ultimately contribute to the understanding of media selection led by individuals. Parallels can be drawn as both theories underline that media choice is individual, conscious, and based on needs. By exploring the attributes of communication channels through the lens of the MRT and delving into the motivations and requirements of media consumers with the U&G Theory, their synthesis allows for a noteworthy shift in perspective. The perspective moves beyond a technology-centric approach, which tends to prioritize the features of communication channels, towards a more holistic and user-oriented standpoint. This integrated approach, proposed to be named Media Affordance Synthesis, combines insights into the effectiveness of communication channels with a profound understanding of users' motivations and needs, offering a comprehensive view of how media and technology intersect with user preferences. Consequently,

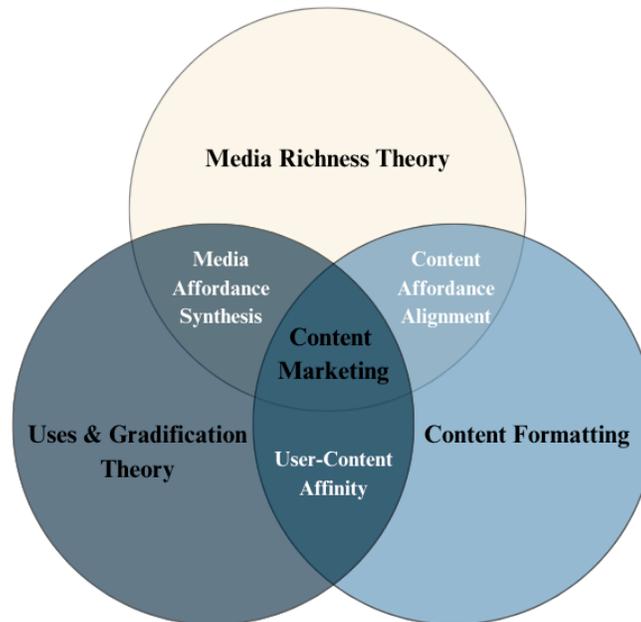
the Media Affordance Synthesis provides a nuanced context for communication strategies and media content creation that is centered around the users' experiences and expectations. It is inferred that the perceived richness of a medium, and combination of multiple, is impacted by the gratifications sought and obtained from consumption, and vice versa. Generally, this combination is anticipated to enable user segmentation based on personal motivations and preferences while further laying a foundation for explaining, and more advanced, predicting user behaviors across social media platforms.

This framework further anticipates a close relationship between the MRT and Content Formatting. Similar to identifying preferred social media platforms and combinations by one's target group, marketers must also determine the most suitable content format for conveying the desired information. Hereby it is deduced that the MRT concept of the richness factor can be applied to various formats of content determined by varied levels of engagement, interactivity, and sense simulation. It is expected that content with higher levels of ambiguity, such as tutorials or educational materials, is more effectively matched with richer formats like videos, interactive elements, and storytelling. On the other hand, rational information, such as factual data or brand statements, tends to be better suited for leaner formats like photos or text. The MRT content formatting relationship is being defined as Content Affordance Alignment.

Extending this line of thought, Content Formatting is additionally foreseen to not only be connected to the MRT but also to the U&G Theory. The rationale behind this stems from the notion that different gratifications sought are necessary to align with the content available on the selected platform. This is described as User-Content Affinity. The connectedness of gratifications needing to be in alignment with content formatting further can be drawn up to gratifications needing to meet diverse user groups. Different content forms might appeal to and resonate differently with various demographic groups, assuming that content formatting can be liked with gratification fulfillment of brand target audiences.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model displaying the interrelation of the MRT, U&G Theory and Content Formatting



Method

Research Design and Procedure

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies across three components. Firstly, and primarily, it entailed a diary study aimed at investigating the combinations of social media platforms that higher educated young adults utilize, exploring the underlying reasons behind their choices, and discerning preferences for content types. Utilizing a diary study as the primary data collection method allowed for a deeper understanding of one area (Patton, 2002 as cited in Etikan, 2016), highly fitting as CM has not been extensively studied. This approach enabled uncovering diary study participants' behavior and intentions (Carter & Mankoff, 2005) in real-time contexts and situations (Chun, 2016). Secondly, an underlying baseline questionnaire was utilized to gain insight into the demographics and characteristics of the diary study sample, including their social media usage patterns and platform preferences. Lastly, a separate diary study extension survey was designed upon diary study results to validate the findings. Recognizing the qualitative approach and the constraints of the limited population size in the diary study, this extension survey was subsequently designed to generalize the findings, allowing for broader applicability and a deeper understanding of social media usage patterns.

For all components of this study, participants were recruited through a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling while also employing the SONA system of the University of Twente. Convenience sampling was used as it allows recruiting individuals of a specific target group who meet certain established criteria (Sedgwick, 2013). Additionally, snowball sampling was further employed by asking participants to suggest names of prospective new participants and to promote this study throughout their social network (Leighton et al., 2021).

Diary Study and Baseline Questionnaire

The diary study, serving as the primary component of the mixed methods approach, was conducted in the initial phase. Following participant recruitment, consent, and contact information collection, a comprehensive WhatsApp message outlining the diary study setup and procedures was

individually sent to all participants one day before the study's start to ensure smooth data collection. Participants were further provided with detailed instructions through both an instructional video (Figure 2 & Appendix A) and a PDF document (Figure 3 & Appendix B), available in English and German, to prevent potential misinterpretations. Additionally, participants received their unique participation IDs to pseudonymize data collection, along with a link to access the baseline questionnaire. The following day the diary study started. Participants were asked to record their social media behaviors and experiences over a predetermined period of one week, seven diary study days. One week was the estimated time frame in which data saturation was expected to occur as participants deliver data multiple times a day and every day of the week is represented. Moreover, as the diary study included all days of the week possible variances of engagement and interaction were also accounted for. Throughout each diary study day, participants received a private message at 7am containing the diary study link and their individual respondent ID. Additionally, periodic reminder messages were sent at 11am, 3pm, and 7pm to prompt participants about the task. These reminders were distributed using the broadcast function on WhatsApp to ensure uniform delivery timing to all participants.

Figure 2

Explanation Video Snippet



Figure 3

Explanation PDF Snippet



Diary Study Extension Survey

Following the weeklong diary study, and the thereof resulting creation of the diary study extension survey, the final quantitative data collection started. The diary study extension survey link was distributed through story snippets amongst various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp (Figure 4). Since stories on each platform remained visible for only 24 hours, the distribution was repeated for five days. Each day at 9 am, a story was uploaded on all included social media platforms, nudging potential participants to complete the diary study extension survey while providing a direct link for immediate access. As after five days, no steady progress in respondents was made, data collection was decided to be concluded.

Figure 4

Diary Study Extension Survey Story Promotion



Instruments

Baseline Questionnaire

The baseline questionnaire purely functioned as a practicality to gather information about the participant pool of the diary study. It allowed gaining insights into participants' demographics, their social media usage and consumption time, their social media activity level as well as general usage motives and perception of various social media platforms. Example questions are: “How

much time do you spend on Social Media in one day on average approximately?”, and “Who do you follow across Social Media platforms mainly?” (Figure 5). A full outline of the baseline questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

Figure 5

Baseline Questionnaire Snippet

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE

English

How much time do you spend on Social Media in one day on average approximately?

< 30 minutes
 30 minutes to 1 hour
 1 hour to 2 hours
 2 hours to 3 hours
 3 hours to 4 hours
 > 4 hours

Who do you follow across Social Media platforms mainly? (multiple answers can be selected)

My friends
 My family
 Acquaintances
 Celebrities
 Influencers

Diary Study

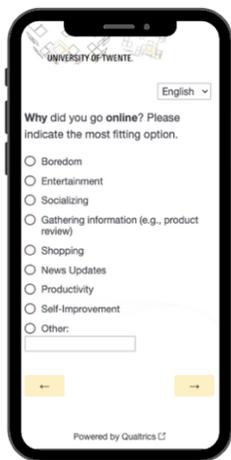
The diary study revealed and compared participants' daily social media platform behaviors, motives, and content preferences, and was available in both English and German (Figure 6). Hereby, the central task of the diary study was to catalog one's social media platform usage and the branded content or UGC participants come across. To assess this, participants were requested to fill out the diary study consecutively after using any social media platform and to record their answers as near to real-time as possible to capture authentic experiences.

Participants first indicated their respondent ID and date, followed by indicating the reason for going online. Then participants were asked to document the platform they engaged with and to give an indication of how long they used the platform. Concerning the actual brand-related content, participants were instructed to report on a brand-related post by providing a screenshot of it, give reasoning why that particular post was favored, indicate who the creator of the content is, how they came across that post, and if they engaged with it in any way. Subsequently, participants were

prompted to describe the content format and asked if they preferred other formatting over the chosen one, revealing consumers' content preferences. Lastly, it was asked if the interaction inspired the participant to perform a different action, e.g., visit the brand website, and if they used another platform. If the participant did use another platform, the same procedure entailing identical questions was followed. A full outline of the diary study is available in Appendix D.

Figure 6

Diary Study Snippet



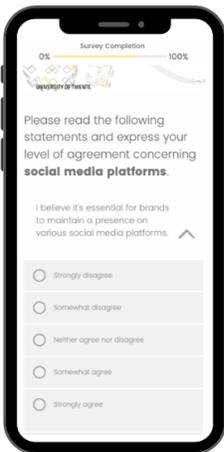
Diary Study Extension Survey

The diary study extension survey was developed based on insights derived from the initial diary study and participants' responses regarding the relevance of real-life scenarios and potential optimizations. This process led to the creation of items presented as statements, which collectively fell into three overarching constructs. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree (Figure 7). Construct 1 concerned social media platforms in general and was built out of 6 items. Example items are: "I believe it's essential for brands to maintain a presence on various social media platforms.", and "Whenever I go online, Instagram is consistently among the social media platforms I use.". Construct 2 regarded content on social media platforms and was made up of 6 items as well. Exemplary: "I believe it's essential for brands to align their content with current

social media trends.”, and “I primarily come across content about a brand through the content they post themselves.”. Construct 3 examined advertisements across social media platforms. This final construct was made up of 7 items, involving statements like: “I think the best advertisements are the ones that incorporate humor e.g., through memes or skits.”, and “I like when advertisements, influencer postings, or content by other users provide a direct link to the product, brand or service that is spoken about.”. A comprehensive outline of the diary study extension survey is available in Appendix E.

Figure 7

Diary Study Extension Survey Snippet



Pretests

To ensure the reliability and validity of the research instruments, a pretest methodology and procedures were contrived. The primary objectives encompassed assessing the instrument's clarity, identifying potential biases or ambiguities, evaluating data collection feasibility, gauging completion time, and scrutinizing the reliability and validity of measurement scales and variables.

Baseline Questionnaire and Diary Study. A randomly selected sample representative of the main study's target population comprising four individuals engaged in the pretest phase. Of the four participants, two tested the English version, and two the German version. The pretest was designed identically to the planned data collection, with participants receiving the diary study

instruction PDF for preparation, the baseline questionnaire, and the diary study task. Initially, the data collection period was predetermined to be 5 days, Wednesday to Sunday, during which participants were instructed to note down any unclarities and encountered problems. After the five-day trial, a focus group session was scheduled. Here the participants were asked to report on their experience and elaborate on their notes taken. This was followed by an open discussion round whereby the participants built upon their ideas and together came up with a final list of improvements. Next to the motivated discussion, prepared follow-up questions by the researcher were also addressed, ensuring the most successful instrument creation.

Ultimately, based on the pre-testing phase, parts of the instruments were adapted to the participant's feedback and evaluation. Participants appreciated examples in the Instruction PDF but found the detailed approach confusing. As a result, an instructional video was created for clearer task demonstration. The PDF was further revised to include a branded content and user-generated content definition and explicitly state the research goal. In the baseline questionnaire, a repetitive diary study question was condensed. Diary Study suggestions include adding Spotify and podcasts as options, providing larger answering boxes, and a back button, and including an example answer for the open question about why a particular post was chosen. Additionally, a discussion on the study's duration led to extending it to 7 days for a more comprehensive understanding of platform usage throughout the week.

Diary Study Extension Survey. To evaluate the effectiveness of the diary study extension survey, likewise, a representative sample of four individuals was randomly selected to participate in the pretest. Pretest participants were given access to the online survey and instructed to fill it in while thinking aloud. This allowed the researcher to follow the participant's thoughts and note down unclarities resulting in implementing two modifications. Hereby, firstly, the introductory statement of "Please read the following statements and express your level of agreement and disagreement concerning social media platforms." was adapted so it only stated to express one's level of agreement. Secondly, the social media platform item "When I go online, I use one and a maximum of two social media platforms at a time." was changed to "When I go online, I use a maximum of two social media platforms at a time." as it indicates the same and was clearer.

Research Sample

Baseline Questionnaire and Diary Study

Inclusion criteria ensure valuable findings and a suitable participant pool. To be eligible for diary study inclusion, participants had to be 1) proficient in reading and writing English or German; 2) between the ages of 18 to 29; 3) frequent social media users; and 4) required to have a smartphone, tablet, or computer to complete the online survey and diary study. Out of the 65 higher educated young adults in the diary study, 2 dropped out and 3 failed to complete at least 65% of the required diary study days. Among the final remaining 60 participants, 17 (28%) identified as male, while 43 (72%) identified as female. The mean age of all participants was 22 years ($M = 22.27$; $SD = 1.56$; range = 18-27). The sample consisted mainly of German participants ($n = 32$; 53%), a smaller group of Dutch participants ($n = 18$; 30%), two participants from Italy (3%), and one participant from Indonesia (2%), Bulgaria (2%), Moldavia (2%), Mexico (2%), Egypt (2%), France (2%), Greek (2%) and Poland (2%) respectively. All participants were university students on a full-time basis, with the majority ($n = 37$; 62%) enrolled in a master's program, while a minority ($n = 23$; 38%) were pursuing a bachelor's program.

Concerning participants' self-reported daily average social media usage, the most clustered time periods ranged between 1 to 3 hours, in which 2 to 3 hours was the most frequent ($n = 22$; 37%) closely followed by 1 to 2 hours ($n = 17$; 28%). When asked who participants follow across their various employed social media platforms, the answers were distributed among friends ($n = 60$; 100%), influencers ($n = 45$; 75%), family ($n = 42$; 70%), acquaintances ($n = 39$; 65%), brands ($n = 28$; 47%), celebrities ($n = 25$; 42%), and sport and news accounts ($n = 3$; 5%).

Diary Study Extension Survey

To be considered for participation in the diary study extension survey, individuals were required to meet the following criteria: 1) proficiency in reading and writing English or German; 2) aged between 18 and 29; and 3) possessing access to a smartphone, tablet, or computer for completing the online survey. As a result, there were a total of 192 responses, out of which 8 participants

dropped out and 6 failed to complete at least 90% of the questionnaire, leaving 178 valid responses. The sample pool consisted of 113 (63%) females, 63 (35%) males, and 2 (1%) non-binary/third gender, with a mean age of 24 years ($M = 23.60$; $SD = 2.192$; range = 18-29). Participants nationality was dominantly German ($n = 65$; 37%), followed by American ($n = 37$; 21%), Dutch ($n = 31$; 18%), Italian ($n = 12$; 7%), Spanish ($n = 8$; 4%), Bulgarian ($n = 5$; 3%), British ($n = 4$; 2%), Irish ($n = 4$; 2%), Turkish ($n = 3$; 2%), Mexican ($n = 2$; 1%), French ($n = 2$; 1%), and one participant each Romanian (1%), Finnish (1%), Zimbabwean (1%), Swiss (1%) and Latvian (1%). Participants self-reported level of education primarily regarded bachelor level ($n = 87$; 49%), followed by masters ($n = 42$; 24%), a high school degree ($n = 21$; 12%), some college ($n = 14$; 8%), and HBO ($n = 11$; 6%) whereby 3 (2%) participants preferred not to say.

Data Analysis

Diary Study

To ensure participants' confidentiality, each participant received a unique response ID which still allowed drawing inferences of participant results across time. As the diary study was conducted through Qualtrics, the data was initially translated into an Excel sheet. Following the translation of data into an Excel sheet, a careful review and cleaning process took place. To enable coding, redundant information like participants' entry duration in minutes, as well as confidentiality-threatening information (e.g., participants' IP address and location latitude) were removed. The still unstructured data needed to be formed into a clean Excel document in which each participant was represented by a singular sheet. Given that the diary study task involved uploading screenshots of favorite brand-related social media posts, the download data links provided through Qualtrics, had to be manually opened, saved, and organized into the appropriate participant sheet and corresponding diary study day. After completing this meticulous process for all 60 participants and manually screenshotting 731 social media post uploads, the coding cycles began.

Overall, three cycles of coding were applied in which the combination of deductive and inductive coding allowed for a more open and flexible coding procedure (Pierce, 1978, as cited in Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Deductive coding was employed by incorporating pre-defined

concepts that have been identified as crucial in existing literature (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The distinctive nature of this study, characterized by its originality and scope not fully addressed by existing literature, prompted the application of inductive coding. This method was instrumental in deriving codes directly from the data itself, complementing the pre-existing codes derived from deductive coding. During open coding, data was first segmented, and the first codes developed. Secondly, during axial coding, already assigned codes were retrieved and linkages established, lastly, during selective coding, main and sub-codes were verified, as well as findings documented and interpreted (Boeije, 2010). This resulted in the creation of 76 codes, whereby a total of 9 main categories were established (Table 2).

Table 2

All Diary Study Codes and Sub-codes

Code	Sub-codes
1. Social media usage motive	1.1 Boredom 1.2 Entertainment 1.3 Socializing 1.4 Information gathering 1.5 Shopping 1.6 News Update 1.7 Productivity 1.8 Self-Improvement 1.9 Habit 1.10 Procrastination 1.11 Stimulation 1.12 Create a post
2. Social media platform employment	2.1 Facebook 2.2 YouTube 2.3 Instagram 2.4 TikTok 2.5 X(Twitter) 2.6 Snapchat 2.7 Pinterest 2.8 LinkedIn 2.9 Spotify

3. Content selection motive	3.1 Informative
	3.2 Authentic
	3.3 Interactive
	3.4 Creative
	3.5 Aesthetic
	3.6 Vibrant design
	3.7 Useful/helpful
	3.8 Appealing music
	3.9 Funny
	3.10 Giveaway
	3.11 Influencer trust
	3.12 Relevant/personal
	3.13 Seasonal inspiration
	3.14 Trend alignment
	3.15 No selling intentions
4. Post creator	4.1 Brand
	4.2 Influencer
	4.3 User
	4.4 Do not know
5. Post finding	5.1 Subscriber
	5.2 Suggestion
	5.3 Advertising
	5.4 Send by a friend
6. Content format	6.1 Text based
	6.2 Photo
	6.3 Video
	6.4 Reel (Instagram)
	6.5 Behind the scenes
	6.6 Infographic
	6.7 Interactive
	6.8 Livestreaming
	6.9 Only verbal
	6.10 Combination
7. Content engagement	7.1 Liked
	7.2 Commented
	7.3 Reposted
	7.4 Shared

	7.5 No engagement
8. Different content preference	8.1 Text based
	8.2 Photo
	8.3 Video
	8.4 Reel (Instagram)
	8.5 Behind the scenes
	8.6 Infographic
	8.7 Interactive
	8.8 Livestreaming
	8.9 Only verbal
	8.10 No other content preference
9. Inspiration for further action	9.1 Click the provided link
	9.2 Visit the brands website
	9.3 Visit the brands social media account
	9.4 Look up further information
	9.5 Intention to visit physical store
	9.6 Purchase
	9.7 No further action

Baseline Questionnaire and Diary Study Extension Survey

The collected Qualtrics data on the baseline questionnaire as well as the diary study extension survey were each downloaded and converted into R Studio files. Following data set cleaning and verification that at least 90% of the questions have been answered, data analysis began. For the baseline questionnaire, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, including inferring frequencies, and calculating means, standard deviations, and ranges for all variables. For the diary study extension survey, a factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha for each envisioned construct, the Kaiser Criterion as well as descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were performed.

The constructs envisioned in the diary study extension survey were found to be inadequately represented by the factor loadings. The factor analysis did not sufficiently distribute the existing factors among the proposed constructs, a trend reflected in both the Cronbach's alpha analysis and the Kaiser Criterion. Cronbach's alpha values for each construct were notably low, even after

attempting to refine them by dropping items. Further, applying the Kaiser criterion unexpectedly identified seven constructs among the items, deviating from the intended framework and lacking coherence. Consequently, the initial approach was reassessed by examining the items individually through mean and standard deviation calculations. This method provided a straightforward approach to analysis, allowing for insights to be gained into the data on a per-item basis.

Results

Key Insights: Integrating Findings from the Three Studies

Over the course of seven diary study days, a total of 731 entries were recorded from 60 participants. Among these entries, 679 showcased the use of a primary social media platform, while the remaining 52 documented secondary platform engagements. Never was a third social media platform used. Overall, it was noticeable that participants showed a clear favoring of employed social media platforms and overall displayed a clear dominance of Instagram. Motives for generally going online, derived from both the baseline questionnaire and the diary study, most prominently arose out of the want to be entertained. Interestingly, hereby almost all social media platforms were deemed suitable for fulfilling the sought entertainment gratification while additionally on deeper levels also being associated with more distinct gratifications. Overall, the predominant content selected across various platforms primarily comprised posts created by brands themselves, recognized as advertisements by participants, and distributed in video format. The diary study extension survey validated uncovered qualitative findings while establishing an understanding that these notions are represented amongst a broader range of higher educated young adults. Below the results will be discussed per research question aspect, firstly spotlighting the usage of social media platforms and their combinations, then highlighting consumers' motives, and later emphasizing content formatting.

Multi-Platform Social Media Usage

In the baseline questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate their presence on various social media platforms. The majority (62%) reported having accounts on all nine provided platforms. Notably, Instagram emerged as the leading platform, with every participant ($n = 60$) indicating its usage, followed by Spotify ($n = 51$) and Snapchat ($n = 49$). Next to determining which social media platforms participants are registered on, they were also questioned concerning their daily employment. Instagram once again emerged as the most utilized platform on a daily basis, with all

participants ($n = 60$) reporting its use. Following Instagram, Spotify ranked second ($n = 37$), and TikTok took third place ($n = 31$) in terms of daily usage in relation to employment. Table 3 displays not only all social media platform account registrations and their daily usage but further displays a use per account score.

Table 3

Baseline Questionnaire: General Social Media Platform Ownership and Daily Usage

Social media platforms ranked by number of accounts	Social media platform account	Social media platform daily use	Use per account score
Instagram	60	60	100%
Spotify	51	37	72%
Snapchat	49	27	55%
YouTube	47	21	45%
LinkedIn	47	11	23%
Facebook	40	21	53%
TikTok	39	31	79%
Pinterest	37	8	22%
X(Twitter)	18	8	44%
Other: BeReal	3	1	33%
Other: Reddit	1	0	0%

Dominant Platforms in Sequential First and Secondary Usage

The 7-day diary study unveiled a diverse range of preferences among participants in terms of their chosen social media platforms. The data not only showcases the varied social media landscape but also highlights Instagram's prominence as the leading initial employed platform (Table 4). Instagram was the first employed social media platform in 445 made entries, whereby TikTok was the second most reported platform ($n = 155$), followed by YouTube ($n = 44$). Instagram and TikTok were not only the top two social media platforms in initial steps of going online; they were also the

two most favored in second social media platform usage. As such, Instagram and/or TikTok were employed in nearly every going online interaction.

Table 4

Diary Study: Employed Social Media Platforms

First employed social media platform ranked by number of entries	Number of entries
Instagram	445
TikTok	115
YouTube	44
Facebook	26
X(Twitter)	24
Pinterest	13
Snapchat	5
Spotify	4
LinkedIn	3
Sub Total 1	679
Second employed social media platform ranked by number of entries	Number of entries
Instagram	22
TikTok	12
YouTube	3
Spotify	3
Pinterest	3
Snapchat	3
LinkedIn	3
Facebook	2
X(Twitter)	1
Sub Total 2	52
Total	731

Pairings of Social Media Platforms

Participants of the diary study paired social media platforms in 52 instances (Table 5). These pairings are made up of a maximum of 2 different social media platforms. Surprisingly, none of the participants engaged with three social media platforms sequentially. Hereby it is noticeable that Instagram is included in nearly all pairings, namely 49 of 52. Overall, the most widespread combination of platforms concerns the pairing of Instagram and TikTok ($n = 11$), or vice versa TikTok and Instagram ($n = 11$). In addition to the evident matching of Instagram and TikTok, participants frequently paired Instagram with nearly all other existing social media platforms, whether Instagram was the primary ($n = 16$), or secondary ($n = 11$) platform employed.

Table 5

Diary Study: Pairings of Social Media Platforms

First employed social media platform	Paired with (secondly employed) social media platform	Count
Instagram	TikTok	11
TikTok	Instagram	11
Facebook	Instagram	4
Instagram	LinkedIn	3
Instagram	YouTube	3
Instagram	Snapchat	3
Instagram	Spotify	3
YouTube	Instagram	3
Instagram	Facebook	2
Instagram	Pinterest	2
Pinterest	Instagram	2
Snapchat	Instagram	1
Spotify	Instagram	1
TikTok	Pinterest	1
Spotify	TikTok	1
YouTube	X(Twitter)	1
Total		52

Social Media Usage Duration

Regarding the duration of social media platform usage, participants spent an average of 18 minutes ($M = 18.1$; $SD = 17.77$; range = 2-180 minutes) online when engaging with the initially employed social media platform. When transitioning to a secondary social media platform from the initial one, participants were online for an average of 9 minutes ($M = 8.77$; $SD = 5.07$; range = 2-65 minutes).

Consumer Motives

The baseline questionnaire results highlighted how participants aligned specific usage statements with the social media platforms they had accounts on, reflecting their varied purposes for using each platform. Said usage statements originated from the overall 6 U&G Theory motives that underpin social media usage. Each of these 6 U&G motives is made up of sets of 3 specific usage statements, resulting in a total of 18 usage statements altogether. Even though nearly all U&G categories are matched with multiple social media platforms they are weighted differently amongst the variety of social media platforms, highlighting consumer employment tendencies (Table 6).

In general, among all 6 U&G categories, *entertainment*, encompassing its three associated items, received substantial votes across all nine social media platforms, except for one instance, X(Twitter), which included only two out of the three items. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that *entertainment* was voted for most often, while also ranking highest among five out of the nine platforms. This underscores *entertainment's* influential motivational role in engaging in online activities (“I use this social media platform because it is entertaining”, “I use this social media platform because it relaxes me”, “I use this social media platform because it is fun”).

Table 6*Baseline Questionnaire: U&G Category Distribution among Social Media Platforms*

U&G categories	U&G items	Social media platforms	
		Facebook	YouTube
Entertainment	I use this social media platform because it is entertaining.	10	43
	I use this social media platform because it relaxes me.	1	35
	I use this social media platform because it is fun.	5	24
Integration and social interaction	I can interact with people like me on this social media platform.	6	1
	I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine.	9	1
Information	I have made connections to other people on this social media platform.	18	0
	This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends.	5	13
	I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on.	14	10
Personal identity	I use this social media platform to remember something important.	7	0
	On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am.	3	1
	I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform.	0	0
Remuneration	This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely.	1	1
	I use this social media platform to get a discount.	1	2
	I use this social media platform to take part in a competition.	1	1
Empowerment	I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions.	3	0
	On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users.	0	0
	On this social media platform, I want to influence other people.	0	0
	On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations.	0	0

	Total U&G score						
	Instagram	TikTok	X(Twitter)	Snapchat	Pinterest	LinkedIn	Spotify
51	36	10	19	22	0	38	553
25	19	0	5	22	0	45	
41	32	1	21	17	0	31	
39	9	2	31	1	21	0	297
17	9	3	10	7	19	1	
29	3	0	21	0	38	2	
30	19	4	16	5	2	10	269
41	16	16	5	3	26	6	
5	3	0	3	5	4	1	
30	3	0	12	6	28	4	143
4	1	0	0	0	23	0	
8	3	0	8	2	5	0	
3	3	0	0	0	0	0	64
5	2	0	0	0	0	0	
7	4	0	0	0	0	0	
5	0	0	1	4	2	1	39
1	0	0	1	0	7	0	
2	0	0	0	0	15	0	

Diary Entry Motivations for Going Online

The diary study results showcasing reasons for going online align with the results of the baseline questionnaire and prove the assertion that entertainment stands as a pivotal motivator for utilizing social media. This is substantiated by the frequency of 307 diary study entries where participants indicated entertainment being their primary reason for going online. The second most cited reason was boredom with 265 instances followed by a considerable drop in votes for other reasons such as socializing, staying up to date with news, seeking information, and habitual online behavior, as indicated in Table 7.

Table 7

Diary Study: Entry Reasons for going Online

Reason	Count
Entertainment	307
Boredom	265
Socializing	32
News update	19
Other: Habit	16
Gathering information	14
Productivity	7
Other: Procrastination form responsibilities	6
Shopping	5
Other: Background music	4
Other: Rest between sets in gym	2
Self-improvement	1
Other: To post a story	1
Total	679

Diverse Motivations on Different Platforms

While *entertainment* stands out as the predominant motivator overall, it clearly dominates three of the nine social media platforms: Spotify, YouTube, and Pinterest, respectively. Conversely,

integration and social interaction emerge as the primary motivators on three other platforms: Snapchat, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Regarding LinkedIn, it stood out that participants highly voted for the overall, rather sparsely voted for, U&G motive *empowerment*. It is the only platform that entails all 3 items of *empowerment* and the platform with the overall highest *empowerment score* (“On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users”, “On this social media platform, I want to influence other people”, “On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations”). Notably, X (Twitter) exhibits the least variation in motives, with a distinct lead in *information seeking*.

The remaining two social media platforms, TikTok and Instagram, also share *entertainment* as the leading motivational force, however, in both cases, there are close runner-ups that contribute to the platform's appeal. TikTok is not only viewed as a place for *entertainment* but additionally, as a place for *information seeking* that allows users to talk about something with their friends, to keep up with what is going on, and to remember something important. On the other hand, Instagram's *entertainment* factor is closely followed by the U&G motivator *integration and social interaction* which is only slightly ahead of the *information* U&G motive. This emphasizes Instagram's ability to offer an entertaining space in which users can interact with likewise people, make new connections, and belong to groups with similar interests. Moreover, like TikTok, it allows to keep up with what is going on, provides material that participants use to talk with friends about, and helps to remember something important.

Participants Actions and Responses

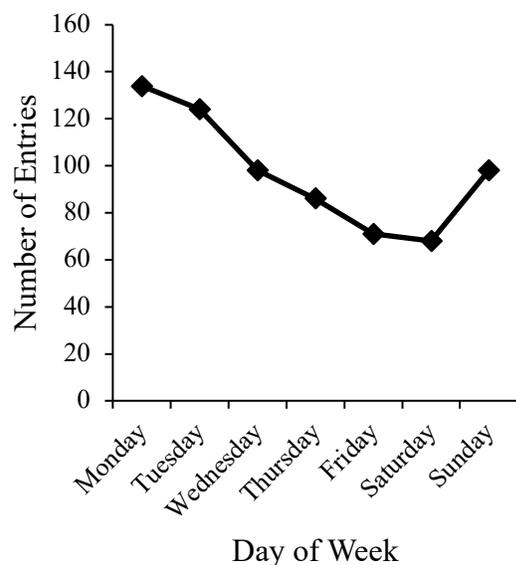
Considering participants' activity levels across all social media platforms documented among the entirety of 731 entries, it is evident that the diary study pool of participants can be defined as predominantly passive users. In both scenarios, engaging with either the first or second social media platform, there is a notable tendency for a lack of direct engagement with the actual content (455 entries). However, alongside this predominant passive usage, a subset of participants demonstrated active engagement. Among these, actions such as liking the content ($n = 181$),

sharing the post with a friend ($n = 42$), saving/pinning the content ($n = 16$), or clicking on provided links ($n = 15$) were observed.

In addition to encountering content without direct engagement, diary entries ($n = 259$) indicate that participants responded to encountered posts indirectly through follow-up activities. These included milder actions such as visiting the social media accounts of the brands that posted the content and following their profiles. Moreover, a common theme emerged of participants exploring the brand's website, where they checked prices, browsed more products, or searched for current discounts. Beyond website exploration, participants engaged in further research or information gathering, such as seeking reviews, investigating competition, or obtaining more details about specific products or services. Some participants expressed intentions to visit physical stores based on the content they interacted with, aiming to experience the brand's offerings firsthand. Notably, the highest level of active engagement observed was participants purchasing the advertised product. Finally, while immediate action was not always taken by participants, some expressed feeling inspired or motivated for future actions. For instance, some indicated a desire to return to the brand's page to explore additional recipes and ideas.

Participants Engagement Patterns

Considering user's engagement levels across all 7 diary study days it can be seen that participants engaged in social media activities the most at the beginning of the week (Figure 8). Monday (134 entries) and Tuesday (124 entries) are the two days showing the highest engagement rates. Subsequently, there is a gradual decline in online activities as the week progresses, reaching a midweek dip. Notably, an increase in engagement is observed on Sundays. It is important to acknowledge that various factors, including participants' work schedules, leisure preferences, and daily routines, likely influence these patterns in online engagement patterns.

Figure 8*Participants Diary Study Engagement Pattern***Content Format**

Of the plethora of content available across all social media platforms participant's entries most often concerned content created by a brand themselves ($n = 496$), an influencer talking about a product organically or as a collaboration with a brand ($n = 143$), or user-generated content ($n = 59$). Participants came across these posts as they were predominantly distributed as advertising ($n = 354$), due to following the creator ($n = 199$), or as it was a suggestion made by the platform tailored to the individual user ($n = 139$). Additionally, as most entries consisted of videos ($n = 302$) and Instagram Reels, Instagram's version of video content ($n = 103$), it became evident that the participants' most highly favored content format was video ($n = 405$). Among content formats, static content in the form of photos ($n = 281$) ranked second in favorability.

Following up on participants' initial reporting of favored content, the diary study further questioned participants if they would have preferred the conveyed information if it had been displayed through a different content formatting than the original one. Overall, in the vast majority of entries (94%), participants indicated "No" in their responses. However, a few entries did provide feedback for potential improvements. Notably, several participants expressed a preference for

video content instead of static content, offering specific suggestions like unboxing videos, behind-the-scenes footage, or product demonstration videos. The underlying rationale was that videos are perceived as more engaging, dynamic, and effective in conveying information, particularly for items like clothing, accessories, or products with specific functionalities. Furthermore, some participants raised concerns about the effectiveness of the existing format, suggesting that certain details might be overlooked or that the format could be enhanced for better comprehension.

Content Trends and Preferences

Participants of the 7-day diary study each curated a collective of content posted by, with, or about a product, service, or brand that they found appealing, interesting, and in their favor. Hereby, next to uploaded screenshots of the original post, participants made statements about why they liked that particular piece of content. From the entirety of 731 diary entries and alongside arguments, 12 content trends and preferences were able to be established. Said preferences were further categorized into three overarching themes: *content creation*, *communication strategies*, and the need for *adaptability and personalization*. This comprehensive exploration sheds light on the diverse preferences and insights of participants in shaping their engagement with online content.

Content Creation. In exploring participants' preferences for content creation, the study identifies distinct trends falling under the category of how content should be built up, highlighting key aspects: trends 1-5. An overwhelming consensus among participants was the cruciality of (1) visual appeal. Hereby, high-quality visuals, aesthetically pleasing designs, and a visually cohesive presentation were repeatedly mentioned as factors that foster positive impressions. In addition to that, some participants also voiced their favor towards vibrant colors as said to be contributing to capturing their attention. Just as pressing were statements concerning (2) short and concise content. Short, and concise formats were favored over lengthy or complex advertisements. As participants are often inundated with information on social media, their appreciation gravitates toward content that delivers its message swiftly and effectively. Fitting to such, a clear favor among participants was content demonstrating products through unboxing, reviews, or practical use. It is declared to provide valuable and useful information that generates interest as well as positive responses. Next

to that, a smaller group of participants expressed a liking towards (3) interactive features. The incorporation of interactive elements, such as polls, quizzes, and product feedback requests spread the feeling of being involved and encouraged participation. Besides such, giveaways and contests proved to be enhancing factors for interaction. Overall, even though sometimes special favors were expressed, participants encouraged (4) diverse content formats. Participants derive enjoyment from a diverse array of content types, encompassing images, videos, reels, and interactive features. Participant's inclination toward varied content indicates the importance of adopting a multifaceted approach to content creation. By incorporating a dynamic mix of formats, interest and engagement can be sustained, while also making it suitable for every post. Additionally, participants valued (5) creative and unique approaches that distinguished brands from the advertising mainstream. Deviating from trends while offering a personal perspective contributed to the memorability of the content.

Communication Strategies. Moving into the realm of how content should be communicated through posts, the study identifies four trends (6-9). Entailed is the wish for (6) genuine and transparent communication. Authenticity and transparency were highlighted as vital attributes in content. Participants appreciated content creators and brands that communicate openly about e.g., product details, promotions, or collaborations. Moreover, the seamless integration of branded content into regular posts was indicated to enhance relatability and trust. Through the 731 entries, it became further apparent that participants apprenticed (7) storytelling elements or a narrative structure. Even though participants appreciated straightforward and clear advertisements, storytelling aspects, whether through videos, images, or captions, that provide insights into a product or brand through a compelling story were also enjoyed. Besides such engagement strategies, content with (8) influencer connections was further well received. Participants often cataloged content based on existing influencer affinity as the prior relationship to him/her provides a trustworthy foundation that in turn heightened feelings toward the promoted product, service, or brand. Not only prior established emotions, but the sparking of (9) emotional appeal was a visible trend among participants' answers. Emotional elements, relatable content, and alignment with values contributed to overall content appeal. Hereby, participants especially appreciated clever and creative marketing strategies, such as playing on nostalgia, and humor, or using memes.

Adaptability and Personalization. In the final category, emphasizing adaptability and personalization, the study identifies three trends (10-12). To begin with, participants mentioned that content they came across and liked was nearly always (10) relevant and personal to them. Being exposed to content that aligned with their personal interest and current ongoing activities showed to have high captivity and evoke positive responses. Grabbing attention through content was also achieved through (11) incorporating trendy music as it brought more depth to the content experience, making it more immersive and enjoyable. Lastly, what greatly emerged was the appreciation for (12) seasonal and trend alignment. Especially aligning content with seasons emerged as a strategy that resonates with participants. Participants consistently emphasized that the festive content (as the study was conducted during Christmas) featuring gift guides, seasonal promotions, and wish lists not only grabbed their attention but also served as highly appreciated inspiration and help.

Diary Study Extension Survey: Exploring Perspectives on Social Media Usage

Among the diverse sample of 178 participants, the majority describe their general social media usage by indicating that they primarily use social media because they are bored ($n = 151$; 85%), seek entertainment ($n = 146$; 82%), consider it a habit ($n = 120$; 67%), and desire social interaction ($n = 87$; 49%). Given that these motives for social media usage were also unveiled by participants in the diary study, they are broadly recognized and accepted among all participants. Further diary study extension survey results regarding participant's favorite social media platform again underline the prominence of Instagram, as it was participants favorite platform ($n = 97$; 54%), followed by TikTok ($n = 36$; 20%) and YouTube ($n = 20$; 11%). Moreover, in line with the diary findings, Instagram's employment motive range amongst all 6 U&G categories, leading in entertainment ($n = 154$; 87%), integration and social interaction ($n = 129$; 72%), information ($n = 82$; 46%), personal identity ($n = 66$; 37%), remuneration ($n = 45$; 25%), and empowerment ($n = 42$; 24%).

Concerning the provided statements derived from the primary diary study results, overall, participants expressed a higher level of agreement with the majority of items, indicating a notable

consensus among both participant pools (Table 8). Particularly, participants showed strong agreement with statements such as "Whenever I go online, Instagram is consistently among the social media platforms I use," "I prefer when brands aim to establish a connection by showing a genuine interest in helping me with their product or service, rather than solely focusing on making a sale," "I overall prefer content in video formatting," and "I believe it's essential for brands to maintain a presence on various social media platforms." However, participants expressed disagreement with the statement "I enjoy seeing the same advertisements for a product, brand, or service across multiple social media platforms," indicating a dislike for this approach. Items with low standard deviation (sd.) indicate high consensus amongst participants, as they deviate minimally from the mean value. Notably, participants showed high consensus (low sd.) in agreement with statements such as "I prefer when brands aim to establish a connection by showing a genuine interest in helping me with their product or service, rather than solely focusing on making a sale," and "I predominantly come across content about a brand through advertisements distributed by social media platforms." Conversely, higher educated young adults in the diary study extension survey exhibited low consensus (high sd.) for statements like "Whenever I go online, TikTok is consistently among the social media platforms I use," and "I use TikTok to retrieve information, almost like a search engine," indicating varying perspectives among the participant pool.

Table 8

Mean and Standard Deviation of every Diary Study Extension Survey Item

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
I believe it's essential for brands to maintain a presence on various social media platforms.	4.05	0.86
When I go online, I use a maximum of two social media platforms at a time.	3.85	0.03
Whenever I go online, Instagram is consistently among the social media platforms I use.	4.17	1.11
Whenever I go online, TikTok is consistently among the social media platforms I use.	3.28	1.43
Whenever I go online, Spotify is consistently among the social media platforms I use.	3.02	1.29

I use TikTok to retrieve information, almost like a search engine.	3.02	1.40
I believe it's essential for brands to align their content with current social media trends.	3.52	0.99
I primarily come across content about a brand through the content they post themselves.	3.60	0.88
I primarily come across content about a brand through collaborations with influencers.	3.45	0.94
I primarily come across content about a brand through content generated by other users.	3.62	0.89
I predominantly come across content about a brand through advertisements distributed by social media platforms.	3.71	0.84
I overall prefer content in video formatting.	4.12	0.93
I enjoy seeing the same advertisements for a product, brand, or service across multiple social media platforms.	2.66	1.01
I prefer when brands aim to establish a connection by showing a genuine interest in helping me with their product or service, rather than solely focusing on making a sale.	4.13	0.75
I like when advertisements, influencer postings or content by other users provide a direct link to the product, brand or service that is spoken about.	3.89	0.87
I trust the advertisements and brand collaborations by influencers whom I follow.	3.08	1.00
I find myself often drawn to advertisements due to the music they feature.	3.30	1.16
I think the best advertisements are the ones that incorporate humor e.g., through memes or skits.	3.65	0.93
My preferred type of content related to a product, brand, or service on social media is informative content, such as unboxing videos, product demonstrations, and reviews.	3.81	1.07

Best Practices

While analyzing the 731 diary study entries, developing the 12 content trends, and analyzing the results of the diary study extension survey, it became evident that certain content aspects were more prominent than others. These discernible patterns, which correlate with the identified diary study

content trends but foreground the most emphasized ones by participants, are distilled into 5 'best practices'. It is essential to view the uncovered 12 diary study trends as content creation guidelines, with these best practices spotlighting the most critical elements to prioritize. This perspective plays a pivotal role in exploring valuable insights and actionable recommendations derived from this research.

Create Authentic Content

The aspect that was expressed to be most important regards authenticity. Overall, there was a high consensus that the better an advertisement/ sponsorship/ branded post was, the more authentic, less staged, and forced it seemed. Exemplarily, participant 17 diary study entry to Figure 9 reads: “It gave me the feeling that I was simply looking at two friends or colleagues who look very authentic, honest, and likeable. [...] It didn't seem to me at all that the post was posted for the purpose of promoting the sweater brand. That's why I liked the post immediately.” Moreover, participants appreciated it when content creators shared their honest opinions by them e.g., “explain[ing] [their] personal relationship and history with the product to make it more genuine and relatable.” (participant 12). Ultimately, participants expressed a clear preference for posts that initially did not appear to be sponsored or advertised. Participants expressed that they were pleasantly surprised and explained that “I liked it because I only saw later that it was partnered with a brand in the comments.” (participant 19), and “She (the creator of the post) sounded genuinely excited about this product. I wouldn't have known it was a sponsored post id it didn't say it at the bottom.” (participant 62). The importance of authenticity and the establishment of a genuine connection by showing interest in assisting the participant with a product or service was further emphasized in the diary study extension survey results. Participants notably and unanimously agreed on this matter, underscoring its significance in their preferences and perceptions.

Figure 9

Diary Entry of Participant 17 (Instagram Static Photo)



Design Content Informatively

Another highly valued aspect of participants was the level of informativity a post had. Hereby mostly videos were favored that were “Short, but informative. [...] . Also, the voice-over [...] is very pleasant and makes the product more valuable by telling it like a personal testimonial.” (participant 1, Figure 10). The inclusion of subtitles in videos contributed to the informativity of posts. This feature enabled participants to comprehend and engage with the content even with no sound. Informative clarity was further provided through creating e.g. advertisements that were “short and very clear and did not talk too much about it (the promoted item).” (participant 58). Moreover, participant 12 appreciated the creator's “honest recommendations and informative feel of the post” in which the creator solely mentioned some of her favorite jewelry stores. Participant 12 expressed that by “simply stating some of the brands rather than completely promoting them [...] makes it feel more honest and less annoying.”. The preference among participants for informative content related to a product, brand, or service on social media, exemplified through unboxing videos, product demonstrations, and reviews, was further highlighted by participants of the diary study extension survey. The majority of participants agreed with the statement, affirming the importance of informative content in their consumption preferences.

Figure 10

Diary Entry of Participant 1 (TikTok Video)



Incorporate Humorous Elements

Moreover, what participants highly favored was the incorporation of humorous elements, such as puns, and memes. Especially advertisements by M&M were reported on multiple times, e.g. Figure 11. Here participant 7 said “It had some humor in there, even though I am not a big fan of M&M, I really liked the humor in this advertisement”, showcasing the power of humorous elements. Similarly, the pun ‘Get it DOUGH-livered’ by Ben and Jerries attracted participant 14 (“I like the pun that they are using to make people buy their product”). Embodying a reasoning for participants’ preference for humorous elements, participant 25 chose a post made by an influencer and stated “[...] I like that the influencer content [...] was advertised in a humorous way. It did not feel like I was watching an ad.”. Similarly, participant 41 uploaded a post made by Porsche in which a horse is eating hay out of the hood of a car expressing “I think it was funny and original, didn’t feel like branded content at all. Didn’t even realize in the beginning.”. These examples underscore how humor can make advertisements feel less intrusive and more enjoyable for participants, leading to a positive reception of the brand's message. The findings regarding a preference for using humorous elements in content creation were reinforced by a larger participant pool in the diary study extension survey. Participants indicated a consensus level of agreement towards the notion that the best advertisements are those that incorporate humor, such as through memes or skits.

Figure 11

Diary Entry of Participant 7 (YouTube Video)



Incorporate Musical Elements

Multiple participants have explicitly stated that the addition of musical elements and song snippets derived from trending or seasonal suitable music has enormously impacted their encountered experiences. Exemplary participant 57 expressed “They showed a lot of different dresses and the music in the background is very good and accompanies the mood.” (Figure 12). The experience that musical elements impact one’s mood was further shared by participant 29 who expressed “I really liked the post because the background music chosen [...] it creates the overall mood of the post [...]”. Diary entries have also uncovered that music, even when solely present in the background, influenced participants to pay attention to the content even when it is not of initial interest (e.g., participant 60: “In combination with the music [...] I watched the whole advertisement. But I'm not interested in the product itself.”). Next to music being a secondary prop in an advertisement, it can also be very beneficial if used more actively as it has been proven to enhance post-catchiness. Participant 22 reported on a brand's post showcasing their new clothing and stated that it was a “Creative idea as the person in the video had several outfits that changed according to the music.”. Participant 58 had a similar experience as a brand “[..] caught my attention pretty easily and made me watch it because it was so intact with the music.”. Participants of the diary study extension survey further emphasized the significant impact of music by agreeing that they often find themselves drawn to advertisements because of the music they feature.

Figure 12

Diary Entry of Participant 57 (Instagram Video)



Post Across Platforms

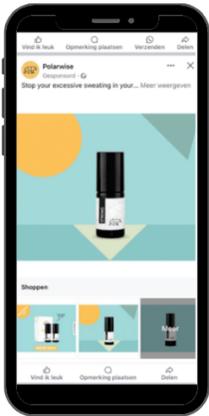
Participants noted when they encountered advertisements or similar content from the same brand across social media platforms. This not only fostered a connection but also left a lasting impression on consumers, which often resurfaced when they encountered the brand elsewhere. For instance, participant 4 shared an experience, stating, "I have seen this a week ago on Instagram, and I now saw it on Facebook. I might have interest in this product, so I like that I got a kind of reminder because I forgot about it." (Figure 13). Additionally, participant 21 described coming across a similar post by the same brand on the same platform, mentioning, "It's another advertisement for Müllermilch [...]. I knew this TikTok. However, I was interested to see how the advertisement was packaged this time, as I had already seen another advertisement for the new Müllermilch variety last time.". The more diverse diary study extension survey sample likewise agreed that it is crucial for brands to maintain a presence on various social media platforms. However, it is important to note that it was further uniformly expressed that encountering identical advertisements for a product, brand, or service was disliked. Suggesting a preference for diverse advertisement content across platforms, this indicates that while it is beneficial for brands to maintain a presence across various platforms, they must adapt their content, even when promoting the same product or service.

In a comprehensive evaluation of participants' preferences across all platforms, encompassing both diary study and diary study extension survey participants, a clear trend emerged

that brands should carefully consider when selecting a primary social media platform. Notably, Instagram stands out as the preferred choice, being the sole platform where all diary study participants maintain an account and receiving overwhelming favoritism from participants in the diary study extension survey compared to other platforms. Additionally, Instagram distinguished itself by aligning with all 18 statements across all six U&G categories across both studies. Lastly, its dominance is underlined by participants in the diary study extension survey showcasing the strongest agreement with the statement indicating that Instagram is consistently among the social media platforms they use.

Figure 13

Diary Entry of Participant 4 (Facebook, Static Photo)



Best Practice Case Example: Burga

The "Burga" phone case campaign exemplifies a best practice case in the realm of social media marketing, showcasing a strategic and comprehensive approach that resonated across multiple platforms. With a dynamic presence on Instagram (Figure 14), TikTok (Figure 15), Pinterest (Figure 16), and X(Twitter) (Figure 17), "Burga" strategically tapped into diverse user bases, leveraging the unique characteristics of each platform. The campaign's versatility extended to content formats, embracing photo (Twitter) and video content (Instagram and TikTok), both user-generated and brand-created. The incorporation of advertising (Pinterest) further expanded the reach and impact of the campaign. What sets "Burga" apart as a best practice is not only its

proficient use of platform diversity and varied content formats but also the genuine engagement it attracted from participants. The unprompted reports from multiple participants across platforms underscore the campaign's success, highlighting its ability to captivate and resonate with its target audience. Overall, the "Burga" campaign stands as a benchmark for effective CM, demonstrating the power of a thoughtful, integrated, and participant-engaging approach.

Figure 14

Burga Campaign on Instagram (Video)



Figure 15

Burga Campaign on TikTok (Video)

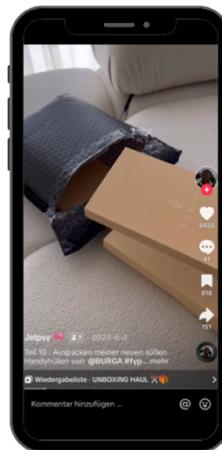


Figure 16

Burga Campaign on Pinterest (Static Photo)



Figure 17

Burga Campaign on X(Twitter) (Static Photo)



Discussion

Main Discussion

A critical gap persists in comprehending how consumers engage with a combination of different social media platforms, the gratifications they seek, and the types of content sought. Arising from that need, this research aimed to address these knowledge gaps, shedding light on the imperative components of content marketing (CM). This research's setup consisted of employing a diary study as the primary research instrument, accompanied by a baseline questionnaire and a subsequent diary study extension survey created out of initial diary study findings. A mixed methods approach was considered the most appropriate choice, as it allowed for the complementary use of qualitative and quantitative methods. By combining these two approaches, this research was able to cross-validate findings from different perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the research outcomes. The diary study's in-depth exploration led to an understanding of consumer's platform swinging dynamics with Instagram at core and their overarching entertainment gratification need. Concerning content formatting, the dominance of videos featuring authentic, informative, and hedonic attributes emerged from the data. By delving into underlying mechanisms that guide CM a CM framework was able to be established. This framework is grounded in three key theoretical foundations; Media Richness Theory (MRT) addressing the multi-platform social media usage, the Uses and Gratification (U&G) Theory exploring connected consumer motives, and Content Formatting, examining content creation. Through this study, interfaces between these already established concepts were uncovered and defined as Media Affordance Synthesis (U&G Theory & MRT), Content Affordance Alignment (MRT & Content Formatting), and User-Content Affinity (Content Formatting & U&G Theory), which together form a framework for the balanced creation of CM strategies.

Multi-Platform Social Media Usage

The scope of this research, directed towards unraveling the usage patterns across various social media platforms, encompassed nine distinct platforms: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok,

X(Twitter), Snapchat, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Spotify, respectively. Notably, the initial findings of this study highlight participants expected seamless navigation across a diverse array of platforms, with a predominant preference observed for YouTube and TikTok, but notably for Instagram. Especially emphasized by the qualitative diary study, Instagram's heightened richness is not solely attributed to the entire sample having active Instagram accounts; rather, it stems from being consistently favored as the primary medium for participants' daily tasks. This strategic alignment with the MRT underscores how Instagram maximizes its effectiveness by matching its richness with the routine of daily communication (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The platform's richness can be further emphasized through the comparison of negligible usage of any other social media platform in the diary study, alongside the predominant favorability expressed towards Instagram by the majority of participants in the quantitative diary study extension survey.

The dominance of Instagram in the realm of social media platforms is proof of the profound impact of network effects. Network effects, following Metcalfe's Law, highlight the positive impact of an additional user on the value of a platform for others in the network (Qiu et al., 2015; Yoo, 2020). The statistically proven phenomenon of network effects states that the value of a network is proportional to the square of its size (Zhang et al., 2015). This means that every diary study participant having an Instagram account, as influenced by their peers, relatives, and overall connections (Trivedi et al., 2021), contributes to a reinforcing cycle of usage, highlighting Instagram's pivotal network effect. Additionally, Van Hove (2016) emphasized that a social network's significance can be influenced by the diversity and quality of the services it provides. Instagram, with innovative features like Stories and Reels, and a variety of content formats, provides a rich and engaging user experience. In light of these insights, Instagram's supremacy (highest richness) over other platforms emerges as a multifaceted outcome shaped by user behaviors, network effects, and service diversity.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to approach these conclusions with caution, given that they do not advocate for brands to focus solely on Instagram. As strongly brought forward in the present study, participants engage with and pair together various social media platforms, emphasizing the importance for brands to understand the multifaceted social media preferences of their target audience. Tandoc et al. (2018) introduced the term "platform-swinging" to describe exactly such; the practice of individuals engaging with multiple social media platforms and regularly shifting

among them, rather than simply switching from one platform to another and forsaking the rest. That using multiple platforms is pervasive among higher educated young adults was not only acknowledged by fellow researchers (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Hruška & Marešová, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2018; Vannucci et al., 2018) and underlined by all three parts of this study, this research further explored more by looking at the explicitly made pairings in the diary study entries. While diving deeper into established platform pairings, it was hard to oversee that also here Instagram's presence surpasses all others, again emphasizing its richness and elevated network effect. The recurring patterns observed in the diary study illustrated that the entirety of combinations, except three, include Instagram as either the first or secondary platform, whereby it is most frequently paired with TikTok. The majority of higher educated young adults either employed Instagram first and subsequently TikTok, or vice versa, whereby some also paired Instagram with other platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. Consequently, brands may enhance their presence across platforms to increase touchpoints, diversify their content strategy, and expand their reach, while further benefitting from the repeated exposure effect as brought forward in both the diary study and diary study extension survey (Donnellan, 2016; Lim et al., 2015; McCoy et al., 2017; Moorthy & Hawkins, 2005).

Consumer Motives

This research viewed consumer motives through the lens proposed by the U&G Theory, entailing six motives, namely, *entertainment*, *integration and social interaction*, *information*, *personal identity*, *remuneration*, and *empowerment* (Buzeta et al., 2020; Muntinga et al., 2011). Through this, the second major finding prompts a discussion on the intricate dynamics of fulfilling gratifications by the U&G Theory across diverse platforms, challenging the notion of strict platform-bound gratifications. Despite users occasionally resorting to specific platforms for intentional needs (e.g., TikTok for *information*, LinkedIn for *empowerment*) as highlighted by the baseline questionnaire, all platforms were immensely employed to fulfill the U&G construct of *entertainment*. Moreover, the observed practice of platform swinging further contradicts the idea of platform-bound gratifications. When one platform failed to fully satisfy a need, participants turned to another platform, suggesting that platform-swinging offers greater opportunities for

gratification fulfillment. Besides, overarchingly, through the baseline questionnaire analysis, social media platforms did not differ foundationally from each other when viewed through the U&G employment motives. Only when investigated on a more granular level, and by taking *entertainment* out of the analysis, subtle but distinct gratifications were platform-bound.

Remarkably, across all nine social media platforms, Instagram emerged as distinctive, aligning with all eighteen items across all six U&G gratifications. This complete alignment, as brought forward in the baseline questionnaire, underscores Instagram's significant role within the U&G framework. Considering the combined effect of the U&G Theory and MRT, Instagram therefore can be named the richest social media platform. This echoes earlier research done by Kırcaburun et al. (2018) recognizing that "Instagram appears to have become one of the most important social networking platforms of recent times by meeting all kinds of users' different needs [...]" (p.17), while opposing Pelletier et al. (2020) findings. While Pelletier et al. (2020) found Facebook dominant for *social interaction*, this study contradicts. The discrepancy could stem from sample differences or the evolving landscape of gratification shifts, as observed in other studies (Bowden-Green et al., 2021; Chen & Kim, 2013; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Whiting & Williams, 2013). The unraveling of Instagram's richness in the context of the U&G Theory not only highlights its individual prominence but also intricately showcases the anticipated interplay between the U&G Theory and MRT.

Building on the recognition of Instagram's richness and its connection to various needs, researchers termed this phenomenon "Instagram stickiness" (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Ellison et al., 2007; Lin, 2022; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Aligned with the U&G Theory, which perceives social media usage as goal-directed (Lariscy et al., 2011), a platform's efficacy in satisfying users' needs heightens their usage, evolving it into a habitual behavior (Alhabash & Ma, 2017) – a phenomenon commonly referred to as "stickiness." Scholars in information systems have extensively observed the tendency for habitual usage of social media platforms, where users consistently return multiple times a day (Bou-Hamad, 2020; Kim, 2009; Seo & Ray, 2019), a pattern strongly affirmed by the results of this diary study. Lin's (2022) exploration of Instagram stickiness revealed that satisfaction from prolonged usage has transformed into a lasting behavioral inclination, deeply internalized as an indispensable online activity. While this study did not explicitly test this pattern, the week-long diary study data collection indicated consistent patterns, inferring its likely endurance. Participants

explicitly emphasized Instagram's habituation aspect, suggesting a sustained and potentially growing tendency.

Content Format

Next to establishing an understanding of platform swinging behaviors and employment motives of higher educated young adults, this research also investigated preferred content formatting. Recognizing that content types on social media encompass various categories or formats of shared posts, including text-based content, static photos, videos, polls, and more, each intended to engage and inform in different ways, the diary study entries offered valuable insights. The third and overall final insight of this research enriched the existing literature on brand-related content formatting within the CM framework. The inquiry into the most suitable content types for each platform based on user motives revealed no clear connections amongst either the diary study, baseline questionnaire or the diary study extension survey. In contrast, an approving general prevalent inclination towards video content across platforms, rather than the presence of distinct content formats exclusively associated with each platform, was heavily noticed across the diary study and diary study extension survey. This observation highlights the potential benefit of aligning content types with the conveyed information, rather than adjusting content to specific platforms. This is especially noteworthy considering that nearly all platforms offer comparable opportunities for utilizing various content types.

The general preference for video formatting amongst all study components aligns with the overarching trend of video content emerging as today's favored format, irrespective of individual social media platforms (Han, 2022; Hood et al., 2022; Törhönen et al., 2019; Zheng, 2023). This video preference can be attributed to its nature as a multimedia medium, facilitating the communication of semantically rich information through diverse symbolic systems (Lim & Benbasat, 2000). The social presence theory further supports this, emphasizing a medium's ability to convey social presence. As experienced by diary study participants, videos with their higher social presence, enable more effective interpersonal communication through the transmission of rich non-verbal cues and social interaction (Jung et al., 2017; Park et al., 2012). This connection can be correlated with the MRT: the higher the social presence, the richer the content and platform

experience. Additionally, diary study and diary study extension survey results underscore that not only social presence is highly appreciated, but, aligning with prior findings, that authenticity, transparency, and informativeness of brand-related content are also factors influencing individuals liking (Hu et al., 2020; Kapitan et al., 2021; Shoenberger et al., 2020; Yassin, 2021), especially when embedded in video formatting. With video trends dominating, the focus shifts to designing engaging high-quality and engaging videos. However, it is essential to acknowledge that traditional static images or textual content may still outperform in certain scenarios.

Next to such utilitarian attributes focusing on functional aspects and practical benefits, video formatting introduces hedonic attributes evoking emotional or sensory pleasure of advertising and content about a brand, highly fitting as *entertainment* was the highest sought U&G value. In this regard, scholars have considered the flow theory as an important factor in defining the stimulating nature of online experiences, strengthening relationships in online environments, and grasping an understanding of consumer responses (Carlson et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Pelet et al., 2017; Zarei et al., 2021). Flow states on social media can be achieved by heightening users' intrinsic interest, perceived control, focus, and enjoyment (Csíkszentmihályi & LeFevre, 1989; Obadă & Dabija, 2022), through e.g., as highlighted in this research, embedding musical and humorous elements. "Music is a very useful tool for persuasion [...]" (p.1) and comprises of a comprehensive language that can strongly resonate with both senses and emotions (Dunbar, 1990). In particular, elements such as sound, harmony, rhythm, and melody were shown to not only enhance effectiveness and recall for a product or ad but to further evoke participants moods, feelings, emotions, and overall preferences towards the advertised product (Alpert et al., 2005; Jain et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2021; Oakes, 2007; Raja et al., 2019).

Such findings were mirrored, even amplified, regarding humor in advertising. As showcased in this study, it greatly served as an attention-grabbing tool, highly successful in especially low-involvement situations, fostering product liking by mere association, a phenomenon also shared in previous research (Eisend, 2017; Makienko, 2014; Strick et al., 2009). Participants consistently mentioned in their diary entries and brought forward in the extension survey, that they appreciated advertisements incorporating humorous elements, even when the context was entirely unrelated to the product, supporting previous research findings (Strick et al., 2009; Strick et al., 2013). Despite this, it must be considered that both, music, and humor, are proven to evoke different

perceptions and impacts amongst sex (Zander, 2006) and greatly vary amongst cultures, historical time, and whether it is appreciated and viewed appropriately (Dore, 2020; Lalwani et al., 2009; Makienko, 2014).

Synthesizing the Findings

This study investigated CM by drawing up its fundamental theoretical components, which include the MRT, U&G Theory, and Content Formatting. It explored how these anchored theories intersect and conceptualized their interfaces, labeling them Media Affordance Synthesis (U&G Theory & MRT), Content Affordance Alignment (MRT & Content Formatting), and User-Content Affinity (Content Formatting & U&G Theory), while ultimately establishing a comprehensive content marketing framework.

Results elucidate that by integrating the MRT with the U&G Theory, an initially anticipated but now empirically supported shift towards a more comprehensive and user-centric perspective emerges. This Media Affordance Synthesis facilitates a nuanced understanding of social media platform utilization. By conscientiously considering both the technological dimensions (MRT) and the motivational underpinnings (U&G Theory) inherent in social media platform usage and their combinations, the overarching concept of platform richness is significantly enriched. The fundamental rationale underlying this assertion is that by discerning which gratifications are associated with each platform, platform richness can be elevated by analyzing how effectively these platforms cater to the sought-after gratifications. It is observed that platform richness is not solely determined by the magnitude of fulfillment but also by the diversity of gratifications fulfilled. This assertion is substantiated by the finding that Instagram emerges as the most prevalent social media platform among participants as it caters to more than one sought-after gratification. Participants indicated that Instagram excels in facilitating everyday activities, as they can seamlessly pursue entertainment, integration and social interaction, and information-seeking. Next to that, the Media Affordance Synthesis refers to the process of combining or merging the capabilities, functionalities, and opportunities provided by different social media platforms. It suggests, as showcased by diary study participants, a harmonious integration of various platforms, as they complementary fulfill users' gratifications in instances when one social media platform fails to do so. Consequently, the

Media Affordance Synthesis suggests that the richer an individual platform is, the more gratifications are sought from it, while also underlining that engagement across multiple media platforms enhances social media usage richness.

Furthermore, the Content Affordance Alignment concept, referring to the close interplay between the MRT and Content Formatting, was affirmed. The diary study findings underscore that the richness factor inherent in the MRT can be effectively applied across different content formats, ranging from information ambiguity to the type of information conveyed. For instance, content with higher ambiguity levels, such as tutorials, was preferred in richer content formatting such as videos or through interactive elements. Hereby, the determination of content richness is based on several factors including levels of sensory stimulation, felt presence, interactivity, and engagement. Consequently, leaner formatting, such as static pictures or textual information, was deemed more suitable for content conveying rational information such as factual data or brand claims. Overall, Content Affordance Alignment highlights the importance of selecting appropriate content formats to enhance communication effectiveness and audience engagement.

Lastly, approving the interconnectivity of the concepts on all three levels, User-Content Affinity being the connectedness of Content Formatting and the U&G Theory was further positively observed. Even though video formatting stood out to be the most favored content formatting overall, participants mentioned that sometimes varying formats are more suitable for differentiated needs. This study uncovered links between content formatting and specific needs, although achieving a comprehensive matching of formatting to each of the six general U&G categories proved to be difficult as generally, video formatting prospers. Besides, participants of the diary study laid open that video formatting was especially favored in the context of exemplary tutorials, instructions, and reviews. Static content in the form of photos was sought after related to factual data and brand statements whereby interactive formatting, like polls and question boxes, was deemed appropriate for social interaction and the feeling of connectedness and belongingness. The User-Content Affinity suggests that by fostering a strong affinity between users and content, brands can enhance engagement, satisfaction, and overall communication effectiveness.

Beyond the formulation of the platform-content alignment framework, this research highlights the effectiveness of CM compared to traditional advertising methods. Participants' diary entries underscore the value they place on brands that prioritize informative and entertaining

content, indicating a desire for deeper, ongoing relationships beyond mere sales-focused interactions. Aligned with the essence of CM, reported entries reveal an increasing focus on informing consumers through product-related content, including tutorials and "how-to" videos, as well as engaging in storytelling with emotional narratives. Participants derive value through cognitive assessment, assessing the informative value, and emotional assessment, evaluating the entertainment value of the content.

Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations

The main strength of this study lies in its comprehensive approach to unraveling the complex layers of CM. By examining social media platform usage, consumer motives, and content distribution through the lenses of MRT, U&G Theory, and Content Formatting, this study has significantly advanced the understanding of harnessing the power of CM. This study stands out for its unique research approach in the social media landscape, employing a mixed methods process and sequential study design. By embracing these methodologies, the research was able to delve deeper than previous studies into, especially the combination of a multitude of platforms, but overall, into the intricacies of CM. As one of the pioneering qualitative approaches recognizing the interconnectedness of the MRT, U&G Theory, and Content Formatting, the diary study method yielded valuable insights into the habits, engagements, motivations, and sentiments of higher educated young adults regarding their social media consumption. Exploring the field and building forth on aspects of established studies, including multiple platform analysis (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Hruška & Marešová, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2018; Vannucci et al., 2018) and consumer engagement (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019), while also addressing future research requests from fellow scholars (Pelletier et al., 2020; Peruta & Shields, 2018; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021), this study has expanded the breadth of existing knowledge. Furthermore, the frequent and real-time data collection inherent in the diary study design ensured the capture of participants' responses in their natural environment, yielding more reliable results (Carter & Mankoff, 2005; Chun, 2016). Additionally, the comprehensive coverage of a wide range of demographics by both the diary study and the sequential diary study extension survey further enhances the reliability of the findings.

Overall, these strengths underscore the robustness and validity of the findings generated by this study.

However, some limitations need to be taken seriously. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that the study was conducted during the Christmas season, with the second round of data collection coinciding with Cyber Monday. While this might initially appear insignificant, it is crucial to recognize that Christmas is a peak period for brands to amplify their engagement and undertake marketing initiatives. Consequently, heightened promotional activities during this period may have significantly influenced participants' social media experiences related to CM more profoundly than during off-peak seasons. Additionally, it is well-recognized that self-reporting bias is a common concern in research studies. While there was no explicit indication of such bias occurring in this study, the inherent risk of self-reporting bias always persists, potentially affecting the accuracy of the data collected. Next to that, even though the data collecting period comprised of 7 days, including all weekdays and the weekend, it can also be considered a snapshot in time compared to daily interactions yearly. As a result, it may not fully capture long-term trends, seasonal variations, and deeply ingrained habits of participants. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the sample of higher educated young adults represents only a narrow segment of the world's population. Additionally, while efforts were made to collect data from a diverse range of ethnicities, this study does not fully encompass the broad spectrum of ethnic and cultural diversity present globally. These factors could impact the generalizability of the findings and should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

These limitations present valuable opportunities for further research. To begin with, given that this study adopted a mixed-methods approach and relied on correlational evidence, future research could enhance its methodology by incorporating diversified methods, such as experimental designs. Researchers could manipulate variables and test causal relationships. Exemplary, through experimentally manipulating the types of content presented to participants on social media platforms and observing the effects on their engagement and behavior, researchers could systematically test and extend the proposed effects and existing findings with greater rigor and precision. Additionally, given the potential for self-reporting biases, future research could focus on collecting behavioral data to measure the actual online brand activities performed and the effects encountered by participants. This would provide a more objective understanding of

participants' interactions with social media platforms and branded content. Furthermore, research could delve deeper into the effects of different product categories by examining experiences and outcomes related to both low and high-involvement products. It is plausible that findings, such as the favorability of hedonic benefits, may vary across product categories. On a more granular level, extending the research period to collect longitudinal data could provide insights into how consumer media behavior evolves over time. Moreover, shifting the research setting to different seasons of the year could illuminate seasonal variations in social media usage patterns and consumer motivations. Finally, exploring varying social media platform preferences, consumer motives, and sought content formats across different age ranges, ethnicities, and cultures could offer a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in the digital landscape.

Implications

Academic Implications

Theoretical Advancements.

- This research contributes to theoretical advancements by recognizing the necessity for a more profound theoretical basis in content marketing. Through integrating and synthesizing established theoretical components, namely the Media Richness Theory, Uses and Gratification Theory, and Content Formatting, this study has unveiled previously unexplored aspects of platform-swinging behaviors, consumer motives, and content formatting preferences. By conceptualizing the interfaces between these theories and identifying their interconnectedness, this research provides a fresh perspective and introduces three new components: Media Affordance Synthesis, Content Affordance Alignment, and User-Content Affinity.

Methodological Innovations.

- This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating a diary study, baseline questionnaire, and diary study extension survey. This methodological innovation enabled a

comprehensive exploration of content marketing dynamics by capturing both qualitative insights and quantitative data. The diary study provided in-depth narratives of participants' real-time experiences and behaviors, offering rich understanding. On the other hand, the baseline questionnaire and diary study extension survey allowed for broader data collection, facilitating statistical analysis and the identification of overarching trends. By combining these methods, this research not only gained a holistic view of content marketing phenomena but also enhanced the credibility and robustness of the research findings.

Contributions to Academic Discourse.

- This research contributed to academic discourse by addressing gaps in the existing literature and offering new insights into the relationship between multi-platform social media usage, consumer motives and behavior, and content formatting practices. By exploring emerging trends and phenomena such as platform-swinging and the influence of network effects, the study expanded the breadth of knowledge in the field and aimed to stimulate further research and discussion. Additionally, the identification of Instagram's significance within the context of content marketing, as well as the validation of the content marketing framework offered valuable contributions to academic discourse and provided a foundation for future research.

Managerial Implications

Multi-Platform Social Media Usage.

- **Be aware of Instagram's dominance:** Instagram stood out as the top platform in terms of both overall presence and daily usage among participants. This underscores the importance for brands targeting this demographic to focus on their presence and engagement strategies on Instagram. The study emphasizes Instagram's leading position among social media platforms, attributed to its robust features and network effects. Recognizing the significance of Instagram can enable brands to harness its potential for successful marketing initiatives.

- **Know that user's platform-swing:** The study sheds light on the phenomenon of "platform-swinging," where users actively engage with multiple platforms. This emphasizes the necessity for brands to establish a presence across various platforms, leveraging diverse touchpoints to reach a broader audience. The frequent pairing of Instagram with other platforms, particularly TikTok, highlights the interconnected nature of social media usage. Brands can capitalize on this by implementing cross-platform strategies that utilize the unique strengths of each platform, creating comprehensive and engaging brand experiences across multiple channels.

Consumer Motives.

- **Understand consumers overall motive for social media usage:** The research provides valuable insights into the diverse motives driving social media use among consumers. By identifying entertainment as a predominant motivator across various platforms, marketers can tailor their content strategies to align with this key driver, ensuring their offerings resonate with consumers' desires for entertainment.
- **Be aware of platforms slight distinctions:** The study highlights slight variations in employment motives between different social media platforms. While entertainment is heavily present amongst all, it dominates platforms like Spotify, YouTube, and Pinterest. Integration and social interaction are more prominent on platforms like Snapchat, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Marketers can use this insight to develop precise platform-specific engagement strategies that cater to the unique motivations of users on each platform.

Content Format.

- **Know the content format preferences of your target audience:** The research reveals a clear preference for video content among participants, suggesting that brands should prioritize creating engaging and informative videos to capture audience attention. By focusing on video content, brands can effectively communicate their messages in a dynamic and visually appealing manner, enhancing overall favorability, engagement, and brand perception.

- **Create authentic and informative content:** The study underscores the significance of authentic and informative brand-related content, which greatly impacts user engagement and preference. Brands should prioritize genuine communication and transparent messaging to establish trust and credibility with their audience. By openly sharing product details, promotions, and insights, brands can cultivate stronger connections and foster loyalty among consumers.

Conclusion

The focus on singular social media platform analysis has restricted the scientific research community from fully understanding user behavior in today's digital landscape. Acknowledging that users undeniably engage with and pair together multiple platforms, this study sought to explore content marketing within the border context of multi-platform social media employment, consumer motives, and content preferences. In addressing the research question, higher educated young adults extensively utilize and combine various social media platforms, with Instagram clearly standing out as the preferred choice. Entertainment was identified as the primary motive for social media engagement, alongside a strong preference for video content characterized by authenticity, transparency, and hedonistic qualities. By synthesizing these findings and conceptualizing the interfaces of the study's theoretical pillars—the Media Richness Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Content Formatting—a content marketing framework was developed. This framework introduces concepts such as Media Affordance Synthesis, Content Affordance Alignment, and User-Content Affinity, laying the groundwork for future research in the field. Lastly, the study results present practical recommendations and strategic guidance for brands aiming to enhance their content marketing strategies and ultimately help them excel.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Instruction Video Links

English link

<https://youtu.be/T48nFtFOfOc>

German link

<https://youtu.be/uZHNTu7Oeu4>

Appendix B

Information PDFs

English version Part 1

Unveiling the Utilization of Social Media Platforms, Consumer Motives, and Content Preferences

Thank you for being part of my Master Thesis research!

This document explains the build-up of this study and gives you information for successful completion.

x Hannah Glaser

01 Survey

This research begins with a brief **survey** that should require no more than 5 minutes of your time. You will receive a **link** that will direct you to **Qualtrics**, a website with which the survey was created. There you will be asked questions regarding you as a person, your general social media usage as well as your usage and perception of various social media platforms.

02 Diary Study

The main part of this research involves a **diary study** that is set up to be **1 week** (7 days) long. **Daily** you will report your social media behavior the moment you go offline and report it by filling in a **questionnaire**. For your convenience, I will provide you with a link to the questionnaire every morning, however, you can also just leave the tab open on your browser. This link can be reused multiple times, meaning that after every social media interaction, you will use this link to take hold of your behavior.

The task you are kindly asked to follow is the exact same every day.

Every day it is expected that you:

- **Catalog your social media behavior:** The moment you go offline, you are expected to fill in the questionnaire. Here you will be asked a few questions about why you went online in the first place, which social media platform or platforms you used, what branded content you came across, and questions concerning the content format that was in.
- **Take a screenshot of branded content/user-generated content you like:** To ensure comprehensive data collection you are asked to provide a screenshot of a branded-related social media post that you like. Please ensure to do this for every platform you use. This means that every time you go online, remember to take a screenshot of a post you favor per social media platform.

Definitions

01 Branded Content

Branded content refers to a type of content that is **created** or **sponsored** by a brand with the goal of **promoting the brand itself** more than explicitly promoting a product or service. The content is typically designed to **engage** the audience and build **brand awareness**, or **loyalty**.

02 User Generated Content

User-generated content is content that is **created** and **shared** by individual **users** or **consumers**, rather than by the brand or company. This content is **voluntarily produced** and **distributed**, showcasing the **authentic experiences, opinions**, and **contributions** of the users themselves.

To briefly recap the aim of this research:

The goal is to **identify** which **combinations** of **platforms** you engage with for what underlying **motives**, and which forms of **content** you **prefer** on which **platforms** and in which **contexts**.

Thank you very much in advance!
If any uncertainties arise, please make sure to
watch the instruction video or reach out to
me directly.

Hannah Glaser: +49 176 637 44 065

Enthüllung der Nutzung von Social Media-Plattformen, Verbrauchermotiven und Inhaltspräferenzen

Vielen Dank, dass du dich an meiner Masterarbeit beteiligst!

Dieses Dokument erklärt den Aufbau meiner Studie und gibt dir Informationen für eine erfolgreichen Durchführung.

x Hannah Graser

01 Umfrage

Diese Untersuchung beginnt mit einer **kurzen Umfrage**, die nicht mehr als 5 Minuten deiner Zeit in Anspruch nehmen sollte. Du erhältst einen Link, der dich zu Qualtrics führt, einer Website, mit der die Umfrage erstellt wurde. Dort werden dir Fragen zu **deiner Person**, deiner **allgemeinen Nutzung** sozialer Medien sowie zu deiner Nutzung und **Wahrnehmung** verschiedener sozialer Medienplattformen gestellt.

02 Diary Study

Der Hauptteil dieser Untersuchung umfasst eine Tagebuchstudie, die auf **eine Woche** (7 Tage) angelegt ist. **Täglich** wirst du über dein Verhalten in den sozialen Medien berichten, sobald du **offline** gehst, und dies durch Ausfüllen eines Fragebogens mitteilen. Zu deiner Bequemlichkeit werde ich dir jeden Morgen einen Link zum Fragebogen zur Verfügung stellen, du kannst aber auch einfach die Seite in deinem Browser geöffnet lassen. Dieser Link kann mehrfach verwendet werden, d. h. nach jeder Interaktion mit sozialen Medien wirst du diesen Link verwenden, um dein Verhalten zu erfassen.

Die Aufgabe, um die du gebeten wirst, ist jeden Tag genau dieselbe.

Es wird von dir erwartet, dass du jeden Tag:

- **Dein Social-Media-Verhalten katalogisierst:** In dem Moment, in dem du offline gehst, wird von dir erwartet, dass du den Fragebogen ausfüllst. Hier werden dir ein paar Fragen dazu gestellt, warum du überhaupt online gegangen bist, welche Social-Media-Plattform(en) du benutzt hast, auf welche Markeninhalte du gestoßen bist und Fragen zum Format der Inhalte, die du gesehen hast.
- **Einen Screenshot von Markeninhalten/benutzergenerierten Inhalten machst, die dir gefallen:** Um eine umfassende Datenerfassung zu gewährleisten, wirst du gebeten, einen Screenshot eines markenbezogenen Social-Media-Posts zu machen, der dir gefällt. Bitte stelle sicher, dass du dies für jede Plattform tust, die du nutzt. Das bedeutet, dass du jedes Mal, wenn du online gehst, daran denkst, einen Screenshot von einem Beitrag zu machen, der dir auf der jeweiligen Social-Media-Plattform gefällt.

Definitionen

01 Branded Content

Branded Content bezieht sich auf eine Art von Posts, die von einer **Marke erstellt** oder **gesponsert** werden, mit dem Ziel, die **Marke** selbst mehr zu **fördern** als ein bestimmtes Produkt oder eine Dienstleistung. Der Inhalt ist in der Regel darauf ausgerichtet, **Nutzer** zu **engagieren** und **Markenbewusstsein** oder **-loyalität** aufzubauen.

02 User Generated Content

User Generated Content sich um Inhalte, die von **individuellen Benutzern** oder **Verbrauchern** erstellt und geteilt werden, anstatt von der Marke oder dem Unternehmen. Diese Inhalte werden **freiwillig produziert** und **verbreitet** und zeigen die **authentischen Erfahrungen, Meinungen** und **Beiträge** der Benutzer selbst.

Um das Ziel dieser Studie kurz zusammenzufassen:

Das Ziel ist es, herauszufinden, welche **Kombinationen** von **Plattformen** Sie aus welchen **Gründen nutzen** und welche **Formen** von Inhalten Sie auf welchen **Plattformen** und in welchen **Kontexten** bevorzugen.

Herzlichen Dank im Voraus!
Bei Unklarheiten schaue dir bitte das
Anleitungsvideo an oder wende dich direkt an
mich.

Hannah Glaser: +49 176 637 44 065

Appendix C

Baseline Questionnaire Outline

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

I hereby happily invite you to participate in the research for my **Master Thesis** on **how brands can best employ Content Marketing** in today's overstimulated world of social media.

Please read the following information carefully.

The **aim** of this study is to explore the combination and relationship of multiple social media platforms used and the connection between employment motives and content varying and sought among them. To achieve this, a week long diary study will be conducted.

Your data will be treated with care and will be subject to absolute confidentiality. Moreover, all collected data will be used exclusively and anonymously for the Master Thesis of the Double Degree in Digital Marketing of Communication Science and Business Administration.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point or decline to answer questions that make you uncomfortable. Additionally, within five months of the study's completion, you will have the option to receive a summary of the research findings by sending an email to the address provided below.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to reach out too:

h.c.glaser@student.utwente.nl

I would like to take this opportunity to **thank you** in advance for your assistance with this research, I greatly appreciate it!

Kind regards,
Hannah Christina Glaser

Please indicate your choice below:

- Yes, I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I understand that I can refuse to answer questions and withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason.
- No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

Skip To: End of Survey If Dear Participant, I hereby happily invite you to participate in the research for my Master Thesis... = No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Demographics

What is your **respondent ID**?

What is your **gender**?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say
-
-

How **old** are you?

What is your **nationality**?

- German
 - Dutch
 - Other: _____
 - Prefer not to say
-

What is your current **education level**?

- HBO
- Bachelor
- Master
- PHD
- Other: _____
- Prefer not to say

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Social Media Usage

How much **time** do you **spend** on Social Media in one **day** on average approximately?

- < 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to 1 hour
- 1 hour to 2 hours
- 2 hours to 3 hours
- 3 hours to 4 hours
- > 4 hours
-

Who do you **follow** across **Social Media platforms** mainly? (multiple answers can be selected)

- My friends
- My family
- Acquaintances
- Celebrities
- Influencers
- Brands
- Other _____
-

Would you describe yourself as an **active Social Media user**? (multiple answers can be selected)

Yes, I post content myself

Yes, I like content

Yes, I comment on content

No, I merely scroll

Other: _____

End of Block: Social Media Usage

Start of Block: Social Media Platforms

Which social media platforms do you have an **account** on? (multiple answers can be selected)

Facebook

YouTube

Instagram

TikTok

X (Twitter)

Snapchat

Pinterest

LinkedIn

Spotify

Other: _____

Which social media platforms do you **use daily**? (multiple answers can be selected)

Facebook

YouTube

Instagram

TikTok

X (Twitter)

Snapchat

Pinterest

LinkedIn

Spotify

Other: _____

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = Facebook

Why do you use **Facebook**? (multiple answers can be selected)

- I use this social media platform because it is entertaining
- I use this social media platform because it relaxes me
- I use this social media platform because it is fun
- I can interact with people like me on this social media platform
- I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine
- I have made connections to other people on this social media platform
- On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am
- I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform
- This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely
- This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends
- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important

- I use this social media platform to get a discount
- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition
- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions
- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users
- On this social media platform, I want to influence other people
- On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = YouTube

Why do you use **YouTube**? (multiple answers can be selected)

- I use this social media platform because it is entertaining
- I use this social media platform because it relaxes me
- I use this social media platform because it is fun
- I can interact with people like me on this social media platform
- I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine
- I have made connections to other people on this social media platform

- On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am
- I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform
- This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely
- This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends
- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important
- I use this social media platform to get a discount
- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition
- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions
- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users
- On this social media platform, I want to influence other people
- On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = Instagram

Why do you use **Instagram**? (multiple answers can be selected)

- I use this social media platform because it is entertaining
- I use this social media platform because it relaxes me
- I use this social media platform because it is fun
- I can interact with people like me on this social media platform
- I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine
- I have made connections to other people on this social media platform
- On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am
- I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform
- This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely
- This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends
- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important
- I use this social media platform to get a discount
- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition

- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions
- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users
- On this social media platform, I want to influence other people
- On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = TikTok

Why do you use **TikTok**? (multiple answers can be selected)

- I use this social media platform because it is entertaining
- I use this social media platform because it relaxes me
- I use this social media platform because it is fun
- I can interact with people like me on this social media platform
- I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine
- I have made connections to other people on this social media platform
- On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am
- I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform

- This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely
- This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends
- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important
- I use this social media platform to get a discount
- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition
- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions
- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users
- On this social media platform, I want to influence other people
- On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = X (Twitter)

Why do you use X(Twitter)? (multiple answers can be selected)

- I use this social media platform because it is entertaining
- I use this social media platform because it relaxes me

- I use this social media platform because it is fun
- I can interact with people like me on this social media platform
- I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine
- I have made connections to other people on this social media platform
- On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am
- I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform
- This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely
- This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends
- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important
- I use this social media platform to get a discount
- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition
- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions
- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users

On this social media platform, I want to influence other people

On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = Snapchat

Why do you use **Snapchat**? (multiple answers can be selected)

I use this social media platform because it is entertaining

I use this social media platform because it relaxes me

I use this social media platform because it is fun

I can interact with people like me on this social media platform

I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine

I have made connections to other people on this social media platform

On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am

I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform

This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely

This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends

- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important
- I use this social media platform to get a discount
- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition
- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions
- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users
- On this social media platform, I want to influence other people
- On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = Pinterest

Why do you use **Pinterest**? (multiple answers can be selected)

- I use this social media platform because it is entertaining
- I use this social media platform because it relaxes me
- I use this social media platform because it is fun
- I can interact with people like me on this social media platform

- I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine
- I have made connections to other people on this social media platform
- On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am
- I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform
- This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely
- This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends
- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important
- I use this social media platform to get a discount
- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition
- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions
- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users
- On this social media platform, I want to influence other people
- On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = LinkedIn

Why do you use LinkedIn? (multiple answers can be selected)

- I use this social media platform because it is entertaining
- I use this social media platform because it relaxes me
- I use this social media platform because it is fun
- I can interact with people like me on this social media platform
- I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine
- I have made connections to other people on this social media platform
- On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am
- I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform
- This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely
- This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends
- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important
- I use this social media platform to get a discount

- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition
- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions
- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users
- On this social media platform, I want to influence other people
- On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = Spotify

Why do you use **Spotify**? (multiple answers can be selected)

- I use this social media platform because it is entertaining
- I use this social media platform because it relaxes me
- I use this social media platform because it is fun
- I can interact with people like me on this social media platform
- I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine
- I have made connections to other people on this social media platform
- On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am

- I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform
- This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely
- This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends
- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important
- I use this social media platform to get a discount
- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition
- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions
- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users
- On this social media platform, I want to influence other people
- On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

Display This Question:

If Which social media platforms do you have an account on? (multiple answers can be selected) = Other:

Why do you use the **other** mentioned **social media platform**? (multiple answers can be selected)

- I use this social media platform because it is entertaining

- I use this social media platform because it relaxes me
- I use this social media platform because it is fun
- I can interact with people like me on this social media platform
- I use this social media platform to belong to a group with the same interests as mine
- I have made connections to other people on this social media platform
- On this social media platform, I can present to others who I am
- I try to improve my reputation among other users on this social media platform
- This social media platform allows me to express my opinions freely
- This social media platform gives me something to talk about with my friends
- I use this social media platform to keep up with what's going on
- I use this social media platform to remember something important
- I use this social media platform to get a discount
- I use this social media platform to take part in a competition
- I use this social media platform to access discounts and promotions

- On this social media platform, I want to give suggestions to other users
- On this social media platform, I want to influence other people
- On this social media platform, I want to influence companies and organizations

End of Block: Social Media Platforms

Appendix D

Diary Study Outline

Start of Block: Instructions

Thank you for joining my study!

This study spans **one week** (7 days). If you have any questions, check the **instructional video and PDF**. Feel free to contact me (Hannah Glaser) at +49 17663744065 if anything's unclear.

Thank you so much in advance!

Best,
Hannah Glaser

End of Block: Instructions

Start of Block: Info/Definition

To briefly recap the aim of this research: The goal is to **identify** which combinations of **platforms** you engage with for what underlying **motives**, and which forms of **content** you **prefer** on which **platforms** and in which **contexts**.

End of Block: Info/Definition

Start of Block: Respondent Info

What is your **respondent ID**?

Date What is the current **date**? (dd/mm/yyyy)

End of Block: Respondent Info

Start of Block: Why Online

Why did you go **online**? Please indicate the most fitting option.

- Boredom (1)
- Entertainment (2)
- Socializing (3)
- Gathering information (e.g., product review) (4)
- Shopping (5)
- News Updates (6)
- Productivity (7)
- Self-Improvement (8)
- Other: (9) _____

End of Block: Why Online

Start of Block: Social Media Platform 1

Which social media platform did you use? If you used multiple, please indicate which one you engaged with **first**.

Facebook (1)

YouTube (2)

Instagram (3)

TikTok (4)

X (Twitter) (5)

Snapchat (6)

Pinterest (7)

LinkedIn (8)

Spotify (10)

Other: (9) _____

How long did you approximately interact with the just mentioned social media platform? (please answer in minutes)

Page Break

Which **branded content or user generated content (UGC)** about a brand itself, a product(s) or service(s) did you come across that you liked the most? Please upload a screenshot.

Why did you like this post so much? Please give a short **explanation**.

E.g.1: I like that the brand posted a meme which has nothing to do with seeking to sell a product but is more about building a relationship.

E.g.2: I liked the candid new collection video that a brand posted. I especially liked the video since I was able to see the pieces worn which helps me picture the clothes on me. Also I liked that the video seemed not staged and forced.

Who is the **creator** of the post?

- A brand themselves (1)
- A influencer (2)
- A user (user generated content) (3)
- Other: (4) _____
- I don't know (5)

How did you come **across** this post?

- I follow this account (1)
- It was a suggestion (2)
- It was an advertising (3)
- Other (4) _____

Page Break

Which **content format** did the content have?

- Text based (1)
 - Photo (2)
 - Video (3)
 - Reel (Instagram) (4)
 - Behind the scenes (5)
 - Infographic (6)
 - Interactive (e.g., question box, voting feature,...) (7)
 - Lifestreaming (8)
 - Only verbal (audio) (10)
 - Other: (9) _____
-

Did you **engage** with the content? (multiple answers can be selected)

Yes, I liked the post (1)

Yes, I commented on the post (2)

Yes, I reposted the post (3)

Yes, I send the post to a friend (4)

No, I did not engage with the content at all (5)

Other: (6) _____

Would you **prefer** if the information was displayed through a **different content format**? If, Yes, please indicate which content format you would have preferred and why.

Page Break

Did this interaction **inspire** or lead to you **performing a different action**? (e.g., visit the brand social media account, search for more content related to what you just encountered, visit the brand website, purchase a promoted item, etc.)

Did you engage with **another** social media platform?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Did you engage with another social media platform? = No

End of Block: Social Media Platform 1

Start of Block: Social Media Platform 2

What **other social media platform** did you use? Please indicate your **second** social media platform.

Facebook (1)

YouTube (2)

Instagram (3)

TikTok (4)

X (Twitter) (5)

Snapchat (6)

Pinterest (7)

LinkedIn (8)

Spotify (10)

Other: (9) _____

How long did you approximately interact with the just mentioned social media platform? (please answer in minutes)

Page Break

Which **branded content or user generated content (UGC)** about a brand itself, a product(s) or service(s) did you come across that you liked the most? Please upload a screenshot.

Why did you like this post so much? Please give a short **explanation**.

E.g.1: I like that the brand posted a meme which has nothing to do with seeking to sell a product but is more about building a relationship.

E.g.2: I liked the candid new collection video that a brand posted. I especially liked the video since I was able to see the pieces worn which helps me picture the clothes on me. Also I liked that the video seemed not staged and forced.

Who is the **creator** of the post?

- A brand themselves (1)
- A influencer (2)
- A user (user generated content) (3)
- Other: (4) _____
- I don't know (5)

How did you come **across** this post?

- I follow this account (1)
 - It was a suggestion (2)
 - It was an advertising (3)
 - Other (4) _____
-

Page Break

Which **content format** did the content have?

- Text based (1)
 - Photo (2)
 - Video (3)
 - Reel (Instagram) (4)
 - Behind the scences (5)
 - Infographic (6)
 - Interactive (e.g., question box, voting feature,...) (7)
 - Lifestreaming (8)
 - Only verbal (audio) (10)
 - Other: (9) _____
-

Did you **engage** with the content? (multiple answers can be selected)

Yes, I liked the post (1)

Yes, I commented on the post (2)

Yes, I reposted the post (3)

Yes, I send the post to a friend (4)

No, I did not engage with the content at all (5)

Other: (6) _____

Would you **prefer** if the information was displayed through a **different content format**? If, Yes, please indicate which content format you would have preferred and why.

Page Break

Did this interaction **inspire** or lead to you **performing a different action**? (e.g., visit the brand social media account, search for more content related to what you just encountered, visit the brand website, purchase a promoted item, etc.)

Did you engage with **another** social media platform?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Did you engage with another social media platform? = No

End of Block: Social Media Platform 2

Start of Block: Social Media Platform 3

Appendix E

Diary Study Extension Survey Outline

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Informed consent Dear Participant,

I hereby happily invite you to participate in the research for my **Master Thesis** on **how brands can best employ Content Marketing** in today's overstimulated world of social media.

Please read the following information carefully.

The **aim** of this study is to explore the combination and relationship of multiple social media platforms used and the connection between employment motives and content varying and sought among them. To achieve this, you will answer a few questions and declare your agreement or disagreement.

Your data will be treated with care and will be subject to absolute confidentiality. Moreover, all collected data will be used exclusively and anonymously for the Master Thesis of the Double Degree in Digital Marketing of Communication Science and Business Administration.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point or decline to answer questions that make you uncomfortable. Additionally, within five months of the study's completion, you will have the option to receive a summary of the research findings by sending an email to the address provided below.

If you have any **questions** or require further information, please feel free to reach out too:
h.c.glaser@student.utwente.nl

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your assistance with this research, I greatly appreciate it!

Kind regards,
Hannah Christina Glaser

Please indicate your choice below:

- Yes, I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I understand that I can refuse to answer questions and withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. (1)
- No, I do not wish to participate in this study. (2)

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Demographics

What is your **gender**?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)
-

How **old** are you?

What is your **nationality**?

- German (1)
- Dutch (2)
- American (3)
- Other: (4) _____
- Prefer not to say (5)
-

What is your highest **education level**?

- Highschool Degree (7)
- Some College (8)
- HBO (1)
- Bachelor (2)
- Master (3)
- PHD (4)
- Other: (5) _____
- Prefer not to say (6)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Questions

Please read the following statements and select the most suitable answer.

I mostly use **social media** because...

Please select all that apply

- ... I am bored. (1)
 - ... I want to be entertained. (2)
 - ... I want to socialize. (3)
 - ... I want to procrastinate. (4)
 - ... I want to gather information. (5)
 - ... it has become a habit of mine. (6)
 - ... I want to shop. (7)
 - ... I want to check the news. (8)
 - ... I want to be productive. (9)
 - ... I want to self improve. (10)
-

My **favorite** social media platform is...

Facebook. (1)

YouTube. (2)

Instagram. (3)

TikTok. (4)

X (Twitter). (5)

Snapchat. (6)

Pinterest. (7)

LinkedIn. (8)

Spotify. (9)

Other, namely: (10) _____

I use **Instagram** for...

Please select all that apply

- entertainment. (1)
- social interaction. (2)
- self-presentation. (3)
- information retrieval. (4)
- getting discounts or promotions. (5)
- empowering others. (6)
- I do not have an Instagram account. (7)

Page Break

Please read the following statements and express your level of agreement concerning **social media platforms**.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I believe it's essential for brands to maintain a presence on various social media platforms. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I go online, I use a maximum of two social media platforms at a time. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whenever I go online, Instagram is consistently among the social media platforms I use. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whenever I go online, TikTok is consistently among the social media platforms I use. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whenever I go online, Spotify is consistently among the social media platforms I use. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use TikTok to retrieve information, almost like a search engine. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please read the following statements and express your level of agreement concerning **content** on social media platforms.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I believe it's essential for brands to align their content with current social media trends. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I primarily come across content about a brand through the content they post themselves. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I primarily come across content about a brand through collaborations with influencers. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I primarily come across content about a brand through content generated by other users. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I predominantly come across content about a brand through advertisements distributed by social media platforms. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I overall prefer content in video formatting. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please read the following statements and express your level of agreement concerning **advertisements** on social media platforms.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I enjoy seeing the same advertisements for a product, brand, or service across multiple social media platforms. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I prefer when brands aim to establish a connection by showing a genuine interest in helping me with their product or service, rather than solely focusing on making a sale. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like when advertisements, influencer postings or content by other users provide a direct link to the product, brand or service that is spoken about. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I trust the advertisements and brand collaborations by influencers whom I follow. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself often drawn to advertisements due to the music they feature. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think the best advertisements are the ones that incorporate humor e.g., through memes or skits. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My preferred type of content related to a product, brand, or service on social media is informative content, such as unboxing videos, product demonstrations, and reviews. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Questions