THE ROLE OF 'ABOUT US' PAGES IN ONLINE FOOD STORES

ROLA PODSTRON 'O NAS' W SKLEPACH ONLINE Z PRODUKTAMI ŻYWNOŚCIOWYMI

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the article was to delineate the role and diversity of the 'About Us' pages on the websites of online food retailers. The research employed the content analysis method, allowing for identification of the content variables on the studied pages, along with an analysis of their frequency and occurrence. The findings revealed that the utilisation of 'About Us' pages is prevalent in organic food online stores. These pages exhibit a diverse range of content, primarily centred around promoting the offered products and conveying the values associated with a healthy lifestyle and nutrition.

Key words: content marketing, ' About Us' page, online stores, food products, organic food, e-commerce

ABSTRAKT

Celem głównym artykułu było określenia roli i zróżnicowania podstron 'O nas' na stronach internetowych sklepów detalicznych online z produktami żywnościowymi. W opracowaniu wykorzystano metodę content analysis, która umożliwiła identyfikację zmiennych treściowych badanych podstron i częstość i występowania. Badanie pokazało, że w sklepach internetowych z żywnością ekologiczną, wykorzystanie podstrony 'O nas' było powszechne, charakteryzowały się one dużym zróżnicowaniem treściowym i koncentrowały się głównie na promocji oferowanych produktów i wyznawanych wartości zdrowego stylu życia i żywienia.

Słowa kluczowe: marketing treści, strona 'O nas', sklepy online, produkty żywnościowe, żywność ekologiczna, handel elektroniczny

JEL: M, M3, M31

Introduction

E-commerce is increasingly becoming a widely used channel for selling and distributing food products. In recent years, there has been a surge in the sale of food products and a rise in the number of online grocery stores. Competition among these online stores for customers is intensifying. Therefore, to stand out in the market and cultivate loyal customers, they must prioritise a high-quality offering supported by effective marketing activities. A store's website is not merely a platform for selling products but a sophisticated marketing mechanism through which companies can leverage multiple tools to achieve market success. One crucial element of the store's website that enables differentiation and trust-building with

buyers is the 'About Us' page. This article aims to identify the role of 'About Us' pages in the marketing communication of online stores and the degree of differentiation among them. The primary purpose of the article is to define the role and diversification of the 'About Us' pages on the websites of online food retailers.

Using the content analysis method, variables related to the content of the studied web pages were identified, coded and counted. Content analysis is a systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of content characteristics (Neuendorf, 2002). The main stages of this research include the observation of web pages, the selection of variables to be surveyed (representing specific categories of content), coding instances of variables on analysed pages and quantitative analysis of encoded data. While the method of content analysis has been employed multiple times in the scientific literature to analyse website content, the author of this article is not aware of any scientific study focusing specifically on the content analysis of 'About Us' pages.

The Role of the 'About Us' Page in the Marketing Communication of Online Stores

The large number of online stores means that many of them offer similar products from the same suppliers on the market. The high quality of the products offered and the wide assortment are important, but not sufficient in online sales. The quality of the online store website consists of two important dimensions: the quality of the online store website design and the information quality of the online store (Kamaladevi & Vanithamani, 2014). The quality of the store design consists of features such as, the speed of closing transactions, a wide selection of products, convenience in navigating the store and ease of searching for products. In turn, the information quality is determined by characteristics such as accurate information, up-to-date information, information on the status of the order and information presented in a transparent and comprehensible form. Information quality increases the ease of use of the online store and trust in it.

In the age of social media, consumers demand from companies a more open and interpersonal model of communication. Through social networks, brands try to provide an interpersonal model of communication, in which the company and the brand are no longer anonymous, but are backed by specific people known to customers and specific transparent actions of

companies, for example, related to corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, and concern for the welfare of consumers and the environment. Companies are required to have, among other things, authenticity (to make them feel personal and authentic), transparency (to have an open and transparent attitude to their business practices and social engagement) and long-term vision (to optimise their operations for long-term customer relationships) (Shih, 2012). This marketing approach is now also becoming the norm in promotional messages, where brands try to show a human face by presenting employees and their passions on the website, as well as try to present their pro-social activities transparently.

In the design concepts of online stores, a large role is attached to the quality of posted content. Moreover, the quality of content is a broad concept and refers to both their informational and aesthetic spheres. Visitors to the store website encountering interesting and attractive content are more willing to stay on the website, as well as more willing to return to it. In recent years, content marketing has gained importance as a branch of Internet marketing. Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a defined audience (Content Marketing Institute, 2022). Thanks to content marketing, companies become content publishers and can decide on what information to publish on their website. Content posted on the website should be created with their audience in mind while maintaining high quality of the message, also in the aesthetic sphere (Bakalarska-Stankiewicz, 2020).

To make an online store brand stand out on the market, you need to invest in high-quality, diverse content. Nowadays, Internet users are exposed to a large amount of information and content. It is therefore important to use content that attracts the attention of consumers. To this end, visual content is becoming increasingly important, which can more effectively distinguish the brand and the company. Businesses should use video materials on their websites to present their products and to build a good corporate image. Video marketing is an effective way to strengthen customer relationships and maintain a good brand image in the minds of Internet users (Han et al., 2022). The growing role of infographics as content on websites is also noticeable. Infographics are defined as visualisations of data or ideas used to convey complex information in a way that makes it easier for audiences to understand (Smiciklas, 2012).

Companies can communicate their values through the brand story (storytelling), thereby providing meaning to the brand (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). The brand story is therefore an important tool for building bonds between the brand and consumers (Dias & Cavalheiro, 2022). The brand story consists of elements such as what the brand says about itself, what the brand does (what the company does), what others say about the brand and how others interact with the brand (Tyagi, 2021).

The 'About Us' page is one of the tools of what the brand says about itself and at the same time it is one of the few places on the website where the company has the opportunity to present its values, vision and tell its story. This can be done in the form of text, but also with the use of different methods of presentation of image and video information. Through the use of different information formats, the message can affect consumers in the sphere of objective textual information, through visual means and affect consumers' emotions, which makes the message better remembered by consumers. The brand can use pictures, infographics (e.g. timeline infographics) or special web design techniques, for example, 'parallax scrolling', which are based on an optical 3D illusion, when the background of the page scrolls slower than the main content presented. These are among the most effective visual techniques of presentation of information on the website, which significantly improves the customer experience on the website of the online store (Wang & Sundar 2018).

Experts in the field of e-commerce point out that the 'About Us' page is a very important element of building the trust and reputation of the online store among customers (Krysik, 2021). The contents of the 'About Us' website, such as the history of the company, its mission, transformations, traditions, values and local involvement, add up to create a branding background that gives customers a sense of trust and security (Jasiński, 2021). An important task of the 'About Us' page is to invent the personality of your company and then share it with the clients, which is not an easy task (Sharma, 2023). It is indicated that the 'About Us' page should have the following details (Roach, 2021):

- History of the online store. In this section it is necessary to describe in an engaging way the circumstances of the establishment of the store, milestones in the development of the company and its achievements.
- Team members. Introducing employees who are passionate about developing their online business. This element is important because in

this way we show the human side of the business and it is easier for consumers to establish relationships with people.

- Multimedia and infographics. The use of infographics is better than long text descriptions because they make it easier for visitors to understand and remember the concept of this online business. A good solution is also to add a video about the creation of the company and its main concepts and distinguishing features.

The global e-commerce platform Shopify publishes the following tips for online store owners using its services, which relate to the goals that the online store can achieve through the 'About Us' page (Keenan, 2022):

- Communicating stories about the business and how it started;
- Describing which buyers and what needs the store serves;
- Description of the business model;
- Show the face of the company by introducing the founders or a member of the team;
- Placing persuasive content in the form of an instructional video, data visualisation and links to posts, so that they do not have to be posted on the homepage.

It is worth noting that the 'About Us' page may also contain any important information about the company, which would overload the homepage of the store and introduce information confusion on it.

Online food stores are usually small businesses. They do not have such a well-known store brand as large retail chains. For small online stores, the most important task is to attract customers, interest in the store's offer and increase confidence in the store. Thanks to engaging content on the 'About Us' page, the store has the opportunity to attract consumers and achieve their trust.

Characteristics and Variety of 'About Us' Pages of Online Food Stores

The research sample selection for the study was purposeful. Stores that promoted themselves online as health or organic food stores were selected. As a result, the research sample has been limited to entities that are less diverse in terms of industry, more specialised, small online enterprises, which strive to differentiate themselves on the market and gain the trust of consumers through exceptional quality products, but also through online

marketing activities. Therefore they can treat the 'About Us' page as an important element of the online store.

The sample consisted of 30 online shops whose web addresses are listed in Table 1. The analysis of websites of online stores was carried out by the author in June 2023.

Table 1. Addresses of the surveyed websites of online stores with food products

Web addresses of online stores	https://sklep.brat.pl, https://naturalniezdrowe.pl, https://ekoninja.pl, https://marketbio.pl, https://pyszneeko.pl, https://ekologiczny24.pl, https://zdrowykoszyk.pl, https://ecowybrane.pl, https://ekochatka.pl, https://www.zdrowazywnosc.com.pl, https://e-superfood.pl, https://www.aleeko.pl, https://zdrowienastole.pl, https://zywiolzdrowia.pl, https://biowski.pl, https://zdrowysklep24.pl, https://orvita.pl, https://zakreconysloik.com.pl, https://www.polenastole.pl, https://karmnik.org, https://www.delikatesyznatury.pl, https://kraina-zdrowia.com, https://ekolandia24.pl, https://smakitucholi.sklep.pl, https://organic24.pl, https://twojekologiczny.pl, https://sklep.biobabalscy.pl, https://spizarniasokolka.abstore.pl, https://www.delikatesyzdrowo.pl, https://arkanasmaku.pl

Source: Own research.

During the content analysis study, the following variables were identified, representing the content categories present on the 'About Us' pages: 1. Natural and cultural attractiveness of the region where the store is located (LS); 2. Many years of experience (WD); 3. Expression of the company's values of health and healthy lifestyle (HS); 4. High-quality products, careful selection of products and suppliers in terms of quality, careful selection of products in the assortment to meet the needs of buyers (PJ); 5. Products from certified organic farming (PU); 6. Wide range of products in store, wide assortment (PW); 7. Listed main categories of products available in the store, product specialisation (PG); 8. Offering exceptional products, hard to find in other stores (PT); 9. Low, attractive, competitive prices (NC); 10. High standards of customer service (KO); 11. Natural products, unprocessed, without preservatives and other artificial additives (PN); 12. Listed brand names of products available in the store offer (MA); 13. Fast shipping, fast order fulfillment (SW); 14. Fast and safe delivery of products to the customer

(SD); 15. Request for customer feedback, openness to customer feedback (OP); 16. Invitation to visit social media (SM); 17. Types of packaging used, organic packaging (OR); 18. Promotions and discounts (PR); 19. Invitation to subscribe to the newsletter (ZN); 20. Invitation to visit the company blog (ZB); 21. Large scale of activity (DU); 22. Careful picking and packing of the order (SK); 23. Expert knowledge of the food products and food market (WM); 24. The store holds certificates, awards and distinctions (PC); 25. Convenient payment (WP); 26. Many supply options (DO); 27. Presentation of the team of employees as full of passion and commitment at work (ZP); 28. Simultaneous running of a stationary store or wholesale store (HU); 29. The store is a Polish company (FP); 30. Polish product suppliers (DP); 31. Local product suppliers (DL); 32. Trusted suppliers (DZ); 33. Concern for the environment (TS); 34. Wishes for customers, for example, good shopping or an invitation to shop in the store (KZ); 35. Educating consumers about healthy eating, organic food, locally produced food (ED); 36. The ability to make purchases without registering in the store (BR); 37. Presentation of the owners or team of employees by name (NA); 38. Invitation to propose products by consumers to introduce them to the store assortment (KP).

In addition to the variables listed above representing each thematic category of content, the study also identified four variables representing the use of visual formats on the 'About Us' page, and these were the following variables. 1. Photos (ZZ); 2. Graphic elements (GR); 3. Infographic (IN); 4. Film (FI).

Table 2. Frequency of occurrence of content variables on the 'About Us' pages of online stores

Variable symbol (frequency in numerical terms) (frequency in percentage terms)	Variables representing thematic categories of content: PJ(22)(73%*), PN(17)(57%), HS(16)(53%), WD(12)(40%), PU(12)(40%), PG(10)(33%), DZ(10)(33%), KZ(10)(33%), KO(9)(30%), PW(6)(20%), PT(5)(17%), NA(5)(17%), DP(5)(17%), ZB(5)(17%), ED(5)(17%), PC(4)(13%), PR(4)(13%), SK(4)(13%), SW(4)(13%), TS(4)(13%), NC(4)(13%), HU(4)(13%), ZP(4)(13%), SD(3)(10%), DL(3)(10%), ZN(3)(10%), FP(3)(10%), DO(2)(7%), LS(2)(7%), OP(2)(7%), OR(2)(7%), SM(2)(7%), WM(2)(7%), DU(2)(7%), MA(1)(3%), BR(1)(3%), WP(1)(3%), KP(1)(3%) Variables representing visual formats: IN(7)(23%), GR(7)(23%), ZZ(7)(23%), FI(2)(7%)

Source: Own research.

*Percentage values shown in the table in brackets were rounded to whole numbers for ease of reading.

Table 2 presents the frequencies of the surveyed variables representing the content identified during the survey on the 'About Us' pages of the surveyed online stores. The values in brackets next to the content attributes indicate the frequency of content occurrence in numerical and percentage terms.

As can be seen from Table 2, the content analysis showed a wide variation in the incidence of variables. There was less variation in the variables representing image formats included on the analysed pages. Particularly noteworthy are the same frequency values for graphics, infographics and photos.

Some thematic content variables occur with a frequency of several tens of percents, and some with a frequency of several percents. In order to approximate the frequency of content categories posted on the 'About Us' page, the data are divided into three groups in terms of frequency. The first group of the most common variables is presented in Figure 1. These are variables that occur on the studied pages with a frequency of at least 30%.

Figure 1. The most common content categories on the 'About Us' pages

Category	Frequency
High quality products (PJ)	73%
Natural products, unprocessed (PN)	57%
Healthy lifestyle (HS)	53%
Organic products (PU)	40%
Many years of experience (WD)	40%
Wishes, greetings for customers (KZ)	33%
Trusted suppliers (DZ)	33%
Main product categories (PG)	33%
High standards of customer service (KO)	30%

Source: Own research.

As shown in Figure 1, most of the analysed 'About Us' pages contained content related to the high quality of the products offered by the online store. These contents appeared on 73% of the examined pages. The stores indicated that their products were of high quality due to the very good knowledge of

the store staff about the quality of the products and the needs of consumers. Thanks to their expertise, they make a careful selection of products in the store's assortment. As can be seen from Figure 1, the second most frequent content was that stores offered natural products, unprocessed and without artificial chemicals (57% of pages). Other variables that also referred to the products offered by the store, and included in Figure 1, were related to the certified organic crops offered by the store (40% of instances) and represented an indication of the main or unique categories of products offered by the store (33%).

As Figure 1 shows, a very common way (53%) to describe their store was to include content in which companies expressed their values of healthy lifestyles, including the importance of healthy eating. An important feature of content found in 40% of the surveyed pages was the indication of many years of experience in the industry expressed most often by indicating the year of establishment of the store. Such information can be considered at the same time as an element of creating a story about the brand, brand image, as well as a tool to build trust among customers.

An important content category included on the surveyed pages was also the indication of high trust in suppliers (33%). The trust in suppliers was in many cases supported by good and long-term cooperation with them.

In many cases, the content indicated high standards of customer service (30%). This kind of content conveys to the customers that they can expect to quickly resolve any problems with which they turn to the company, which can positively affect the trust in the store.
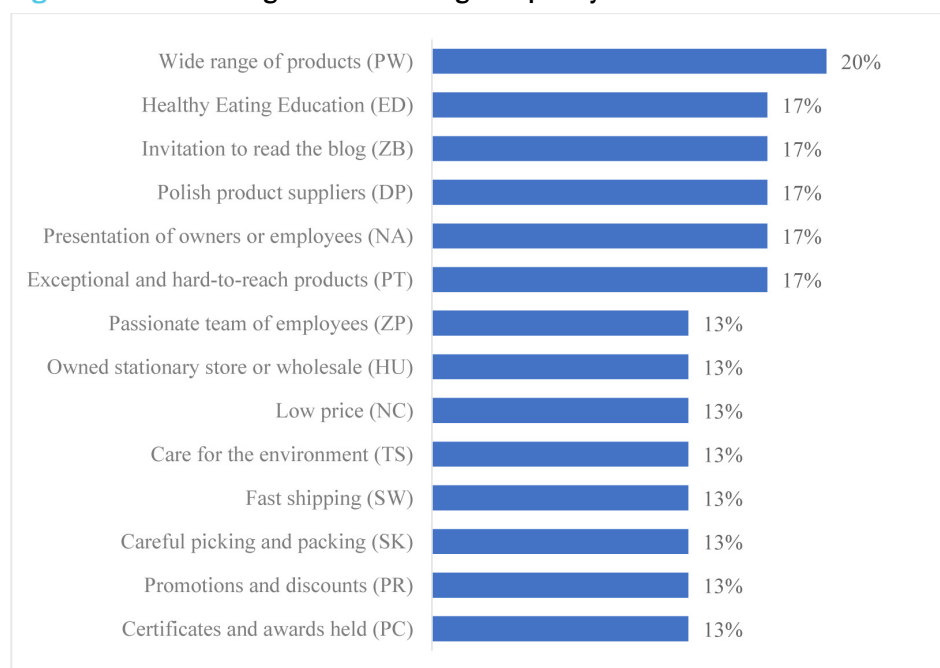
Variables related to less frequent content on the pages are presented in Figure 2.

As shown in Figure 2, product-related variables were also included in the group of less frequent variables. In 20% of cases, store descriptions indicated a wide range of products available in the store; 17% of online stores indicated that their products were of national origin. The fact that the store offers unique and hard-to-reach products on the market was also indicated with a frequency of 17%.

Figure 2 also shows that other variables that were relatively common (with a frequency of 17%) were content about educating consumers about healthy eating and organic products and inviting them to read the store's blog. Such content can build an image among consumers of a company that has knowledge in the field of food and healthy eating. Similarly, there was

content in which the owners or employees of the online store introduced themselves to consumers. Introducing the store's employees makes the company and the store's brand adopt a more human face, and its employees are no longer anonymous to consumers, which can be a tool for building trust and establishing relationships with customers. A similar role was played by content referring to the presentation of the team employees as people with passion and dedication to their work in the store (frequency 13%).

Figure 2. Content categories with average frequency

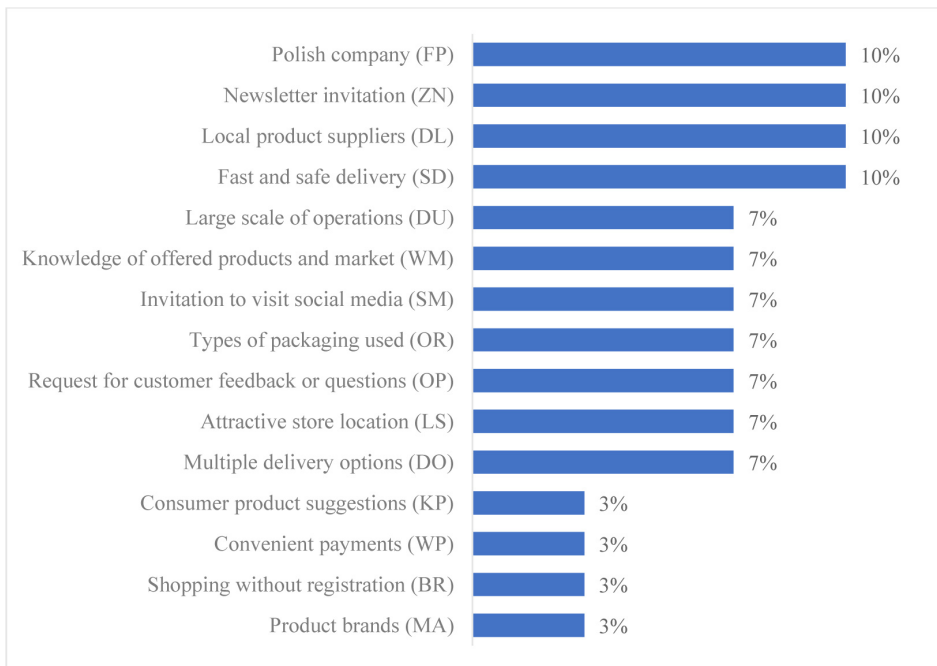| Content category	Frequency
Wide range of products (PW)	20%
Healthy Eating Education (ED)	17%
Invitation to read the blog (ZB)	17%
Polish product suppliers (DP)	17%
Presentation of owners or employees (NA)	17%
Exceptional and hard-to-reach products (PT)	17%
Passionate team of employees (ZP)	13%
Owned stationary store or wholesale (HU)	13%
Low price (NC)	13%
Care for the environment (TS)	13%
Fast shipping (SW)	13%
Careful picking and packing (SK)	13%
Promotions and discounts (PR)	13%
Certificates and awards held (PC)	13%

Source: Own research.

With the same frequency of 13% there was a variable referring to having in addition to an online store also a stationary store or a wholesale store. This information can also increase consumer confidence in the store and present the online store in their eyes as a solid company with a physical location.

The group of variables presented in Figure 2 also includes two variables related to the financial benefits that customers may derive from purchases in the store. These were variables relating to attractive prices offered for products sold (13%) and promotions and discounts (13%).

The two features presented in Figure 2 related to the logistics functions of order handling and they also occurred with a 13% frequency. It was fast shipping of purchased products, and careful picking and packing by the store staff.

With a 13% frequency, they also indicated features of content that have a high potential to build trust and image of the store in the eyes of customers. These were variables related to certificates, awards and distinctions given to the online store and the second feature related to environmental concern. Nowadays, concern for the environment is very well perceived by consumers, especially consumers of organic products. Therefore, by posting such content online, stores can win over many consumers.

Figure 3. Content categories with the lowest frequency.

Category	Frequency
Polish company (FP)	10%
Newsletter invitation (ZN)	10%
Local product suppliers (DL)	10%
Fast and safe delivery (SD)	10%
Large scale of operations (DU)	7%
Knowledge of offered products and market (WM)	7%
Invitation to visit social media (SM)	7%
Types of packaging used (OR)	7%
Request for customer feedback or questions (OP)	7%
Attractive store location (LS)	7%
Multiple delivery options (DO)	7%
Consumer product suggestions (KP)	3%
Convenient payments (WP)	3%
Shopping without registration (BR)	3%
Product brands (MA)	3%

Source: Own research.

Figure 3 shows the content variables with the lowest frequency (up to 10%). It is worth noting the fact that these were the rarest content categories, which makes them at the same time the most distinctive content of online stores in what they say about themselves on the 'About Us' pages.

Two characteristics that were relatively more often pointed out in this group related to consumer patriotism, with a 10% of frequency. The first was that the presented online store is a Polish company with Polish capital, while the second was that the products available in the store are of local origin (usually in the sense of a single region or voivodship).

Sometimes it was reported about the large scale of the store's activity (7%), for example, by indicating the number of completed orders. Presenting the scale of the store's activity may have an impact on increasing consumer confidence. Also in 7% of the cases, stores tried to encourage customers by informing them that they have very good knowledge of the products sold and the market.

Figure 3 shows that this group of variables also includes several that refer to logistics processes and activities, such as fast and safe delivery (10%), the types of packaging used (7%) and the number of delivery options available to the store (7%). When informing about the packaging, the surveyed online stores presented it most often in the context of the use of environmentally friendly packaging or in line with the concept of Zero Waste, such as the use of biodegradable packaging or packaging fillers derived from recycling.

In Figure 3, it can also be seen that among the group of the least frequently appearing content variables were those referring to the openness of the store's employees to customers. Inviting customers to visit the store's social media like Facebook profile (7%), asking for customer feedback on the store's performance and purchased products (7%), as well as asking customers to make suggestions for products that should appear in the store's offerings (3%), are all content indicating a willingness to help customers and listen to them.

The rarest content was those that pointed to an easy way to make purchases in the online store. Consumers were encouraged to make purchases by promising them a convenient payment process and the ability to make purchases without creating an online customer account (shopping without registration).

Conclusions

The 'About Us' page serves as a pivotal element in enhancing the information quality of online stores. It functions as a potent tool for content marketing, allowing online stores to establish a crucial channel for shaping

the company's image, store brand and customer trust through compelling and aesthetically appealing content. Through brand storytelling, companies can effectively communicate their guiding values, lending meaning to the store's brand. Establishing customer trust holds particular significance for online stores, where encountering unfair practices towards consumers is not uncommon.

The 'About Us' page provides an opportunity for the company and brand to present a human face by introducing the individuals behind it. This page enables online stores to create an impression of authenticity, transparency in business practices, social commitment and a long-term vision – qualities increasingly valued in the age of social media.

A content analysis study conducted by the author revealed that the 'About Us' page is a crucial element for online food stores, yet it exhibits significant variability in content. The survey identified the frequency of different content categories on the examined store pages. The most prevalent category focused on products sold, emphasising qualities such as product excellence, natural and unprocessed ingredients, and the origin of organic products. Additionally, online stores frequently included content promoting a healthy lifestyle and eating habits.

Certain websites surveyed showcased content highlighting the expertise of store staff, providing education on organic food characteristics, inviting visitors to a blog sharing expertise on healthy eating, and conveying the company employees' familiarity with healthy eating rules and food product ingredients.

Other notable content on the pages included social information and efforts to build interpersonal relationships with customers. This involved introducing store owners, presenting employees with brief profiles, depicting passionate employees, encouraging social media engagement and inviting consumers to dialogue by asking questions and expressing opinions.

Online stores commonly made promises on their 'About Us' pages, such as commitments to high standards of customer service, low prices, promotions, discounts, fast shipping, accurate picking and packaging, and diverse delivery options.

Factors contributing to customer trust were found to include information on years of experience, the scale of activity, operation of physical stores or wholesale operations, and details about awards and certificates held by the online store.

In an era where environmental concerns are paramount, information about the environmental activities of online shops, especially in the case of organic food stores, was found to resonate positively with consumers. Some stores conveyed their commitment to environmental care, while others highlighted packaging solutions aligned with Zero Waste principles.

The analysis demonstrated that the use of the 'About Us' page was prevalent in surveyed organic food online stores. While most pages focused on product promotion and espousing values related to a healthy lifestyle, some provided insufficient information for building trust and branding.

The substantial variation in content frequency arises from most stores opting for concise descriptions. However, it is crucial to emphasize that 'About Us' pages should not be subject to strict volume restrictions. The information should be presented transparently and attractively, with online stores encouraged to share their 'brand story' to engage customers effectively.

In terms of visual presentation, the examined pages predominantly used images in the form of graphics and photos to enhance content. Recommendations include greater utilisation of dynamic images, such as videos featuring employees discussing the store, increased use of infographics seamlessly integrated into text, and the incorporation of modern presentation techniques like timelines and parallax scrolling to enhance consumer engagement with the content.

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