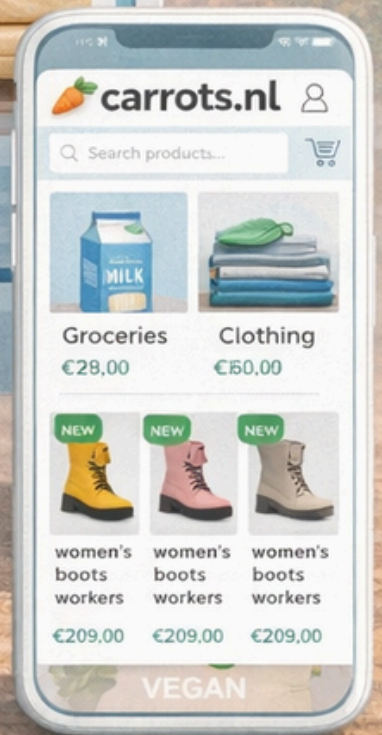


CREATIVE BRIEF



carrots.nl



next
chapter
MEDIA

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Executive Summary

Carrots is a Dutch online marketplace that brings together exclusively vegan, ethical and cruelty-free products across categories such as food, fashion, cosmetics and home goods. The platform was founded in response to the growing complexity of ethical shopping, where consumers are expected to navigate unclear labels, hidden ingredients, or questionable claims independently. Carrots' core mission is to remove this burden by carefully researching and checking all products before they are offered on their website. However, despite this strong foundation, the brand currently struggles to communicate this value clearly through its content. Brand awareness remains limited and Carrots' role as a supportive guide is not yet visible.

Audience research reveals that Carrots' target group is highly motivated to live more ethically, yet often feels overwhelmed, uncertain whom to trust and afraid of making the "wrong" choice. The primary objective of this creative brief is therefore to strengthen brand awareness and engagement by building emotional trust through content. Rather than focusing on short-term conversion, the strategy aims to make Carrots recognisable as a place that reduces mental effort and normalises ethical choices as part of everyday life.

This approach is captured in the central creative concept. The concept reframes the brand as a trustworthy place that has already taken care of the complexity behind ethical shopping, allowing people to move forward without doubt or judgment.

Content built around this concept explains complex topics in simple language, acknowledges daily frustrations and offers a glimpse behind the scenes of the brand.

From this concept, the following mission statement was formulated:

"We create transparent, trustworthy, and non-judgmental content that helps people understand vegan and ethical choices, so they can feel confident, reassured, and supported in navigating them."

The mission reflects Carrots' role as a guide rather than an instructor and aligns with the audience's expressed need for reassurance before action.

The following document further explores how this concept and mission are translated into a clear creative concept and content strategy for Carrots.



2 Challenge & Objective

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGE

The organizational challenge originates from a consumer problem described in the client brief: many people who want to buy ethical, vegan, and cruelty-free products find it difficult to locate suitable options. The brief states that a common reason for not purchasing vegan products is not lack of interest, but the practical difficulty of finding “the right products” (The Vegan Project - MCMS client case study booklet, 2025). The platform was created to address this by offering one accessible online space where consumers can easily shop for ethical, vegan, and cruelty-free products.

During the first client meeting, the founder of Carrots confirmed that the main challenge is not the product offer itself, but communication and audience connection. She explained that the customer base is very broad in terms of age, background, and spending power, which makes it hard to present a single clear brand identity (M. Grootcholten, personal communication, September 16th, 2025). The goal, as described by M. Grootcholten in the meeting, is to create a place where consumers can “just shop and not be a detective on the product”. However, this message is not yet consistently visible in ‘Carrot’s current communication.

As a result, potential users may perceive Carrots as “just another webshop” rather than as a trusted guide that removes stress and uncertainty from ethical, vegan, and cruelty-free shopping. This directly limits growth: without strong awareness, direct clarity, or storytelling, users lack motivation to explore or return to the website, let alone recommend it to others. A focused content and media strategy is therefore urgently needed to build brand trust and long-term loyalty. If unaddressed, Carrots risks remaining invisible in an increasingly competitive vegan market.



Success Criteria & Measurement

MARKETING & CONTENT OBJECTIVES

To ensure that Carrots' marketing and content efforts remain realistic, this project applies the SMART framework. SMART objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound, allowing progress to be tracked systematically and ensuring that content activities directly address Carrots' organisational challenge: low awareness and unclear brand meaning (Doran, 2017).

Given Carrots' limited monthly marketing budget of $\approx$ €1,000 and the founder's priority on awareness, emotional connection, and engagement (M. Grootsholten, personal communication, October 7, 2025), the objectives prioritise organic growth and community-oriented content.

SUCCESS CRITERIA & MEASUREMENT PLAN

Success will be evaluated through KPIs aligned with the client's priorities of awareness, engagement and community building (M. Grootsholten, personal communication, 7th of October 2025).

Key indicators include reach, engagement rate, CTR, time-on-page, newsletter sign-ups and repeat visits. Data will be collected via Google Analytics, Instagram Insights, TikTok Analytics, email platform analytics and branded search tracking.

OBJECTIVE 1

Strengthen Brand Awareness

Increase brand awareness and brand recognition among ethically conscious 22–30 year olds in the Netherlands through consistent educational and identity-driven content, measured via reach, impressions, branded search activity and website traffic.

OBJECTIVE 2

Deepen Engagement & Trust

Increase audience engagement and emotional connection by delivering transparent and non-judgemental content, measured through engagement rate, saves, comments, shares and time-on-page.

OBJECTIVE 3

Grow Community & Retention

Strengthen long-term brand relationships and community attachment through recurring content formats and newsletters, measured by repeat visits, newsletter subscriptions and returning users.

4 Key insights at a Glance



****INSIGHTS FROM THE MARKETING ENVIRONMENT**

CLIENT INTRODUCTION

Carrots was founded in 2020 as a direct response to the founders personal frustrations. Founder Maayke Grootsholten experienced first-hand how difficult it is to shop in line with personal values when faced with unclear labels and hidden ingredients. As she explains:

“I really wanted a place where I could just shop and not be a detective on the product.”

(Maayke Grootsholten, personal communication, 16 September 2025)

This personal frustration became the foundation of Carrots' business model: making it easier for people who want to shop vegan and cruelty-free by taking away the stress and effort of having to research everything themselves. Today, Carrots is a Dutch online marketplace offering exclusively ethical, vegan, and cruelty-free products across food, personal care, fashion, and home categories. Each brand and product is carefully researched and checked before being listed. This ensures that customers can trust that every item already aligns with their ethical values, and they can just shop.

In the first client interview on the 16th of September 2025, founder Maayke Grootsholten described the brand as *cheeky, honest, inspiring, carefree, and non-judgmental*, stating:

“People don't like to be told they're doing something wrong. We want to show them how easy it can be to do something right.”

To clarify Carrots' intended brand positioning, Sinek's Golden Circle model is used to outline the platform's core logic (Straker & Nusem, 2019):

Why does it exist? To make ethical, vegan and cruelty-free choices easy, trustworthy and stress-free.

How does it operate? By researching and transparently vetting all products and brands before they appear on the marketplace.

What is it? A one-stop online marketplace where every product already meets vegan, ethical and cruelty-free standards.

This overview shows that Carrots' purpose, process, and offering are clearly defined. The central issue, therefore lies not in the brand concept itself, but in consistently communicating this concept in a way that creates emotional clarity, trust and recognition among the target audience.

5 Brand & Positioning

POSITIONING & VALUE PROPOSITION

Carrots operates within the Dutch vegan and cruelty-free retail market as an online marketplace that aims to make ethical consumption easier and more accessible. While large e-commerce platforms now make vegan options more available, consumers often still have to do the work themselves: filtering products, scanning ingredient lists, and deciding whether "ethical", "vegan" and "cruelty-free" claims are actually reliable. This effort and uncertainty can become a real friction point, especially since vegan status is not always clear from ingredient lists and people may still feel unsure about what is truly vegan (Stremmel et al., 2022). At the same time, many specialised ethical retailers offer a narrower selection or communicate in a more serious, activist tone, which can feel intimidating to people who are curious but not fully committed. Carrots positions itself between these extremes: a broad and approachable marketplace where products are verified so people can "shop without being a detective," with a wide assortment across categories in one place (Grootscholten, personal communication, September 16, 2025).

This positioning reflects the founder's frustration with constantly questioning whether products are truly ethical, vegan, and cruelty-free, as well as her ambition to offer the range of a mass-market platform while keeping strict ethical standards (Grootscholten, personal communication, September 16, 2025). Credibility is central to this promise: in ethical categories, trust is easily damaged by unclear or misleading sustainability claims, which is why transparency and credible verification signals matter for brand trust (AlQahtani, 2025).

Carrots should feel trustworthy and inviting. In brand personality terms, it aligns most strongly with Sincerity (honest, caring, ethical) and Excitement (fresh, playful, approachable) (Aaker, 1997). The tone is supportive rather than telling people what to do, since overly strong sustainability messages can lead to resistance (a felt threat to freedom), which reduces openness to the message (Freudenreich & Penz, 2025).

In addition, overt guilt appeals can backfire; a more effective approach is to subtly activate people's own self-accountability instead of trying to pressure them emotionally (Peloza et al., 2013). This supports Carrots' intention to guide rather than judge, helping both committed vegans and "veg-curious" shoppers make easier, more confident choices (Grootscholten, personal communication, October 7, 2025).

Using Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism as a way to summarise the brand, Carrots' culture is rooted in compassion for animals and the belief that ethical living should not feel complicated or exclusive (Kapferer, 2012). Its personality is friendly, user-focused, and modern, matching the client's goal of appealing to different age groups without feeling too niche. In its relationship with users, Carrots acts as a helpful guide that does the checking in advance, making decisions easier and more certain.

As Maayke explained, ethical shopping should feel like "just some carefree shopping... you don't need to check the ingredients yourself." (Grootscholten, personal communication, September 16, 2025). The self-image reflected back to customers is that of someone who wants to live ethically without pressure or sacrifice. Visual cues such as the playful brand name "Carrots" and warm, natural colours reinforce this accessible and reassuring identity (carrots.nl,n.d).

Based on these elements, Carrots' value proposition combines functional and emotional benefits for ethically minded consumers who seek ease and reassurance. Functionally, the platform offers a carefully selected and verified vegan and cruelty-free assortment across categories reducing the need for repeated checking and doubt (Stremmel et al., 2022; AlQahtani, 2025).

Emotionally, Carrots enable users to feel confident, supported and positive about their purchasing decisions, making ethical consumption feel less demanding. Unlike large platforms that lack built-in trust and niche ethical stores that can feel ideological, Carrots makes vegan shopping easy, transparent, and trustworthy (Freudenreich & Penz, 2025; Peloza et al., 2013; Grootscholten, personal communication, September 16, 2025).

From Insight to Action

To evaluate Carrots' strategic position, a SWOT analysis was conducted. SWOT is a widely used strategic framework that examines internal strengths and weaknesses alongside external opportunities and threats, providing a clear structure for identifying strategic priorities (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The analysis draws on client interviews, platform observations and external literature.

A key strength of Carrots lies in its strict focus on offering only verified vegan and cruelty-free products, directly addressing consumer uncertainty around ethical claims. In addition, the platform operates as a multi-category marketplace, offering products across categories such as food, cosmetics, and lifestyle, supporting its ambition to function as a one-stop shop for ethical consumption (Carrots.nl, n.d.; Grootsholten, personal communication, September 16, 2025). Furthermore, the brand's consciously non-judgemental and supportive tone is a clear advantage in a category that is often communicated in a judgemental or activist way. However, several weaknesses currently limit the brand's impact. Brand awareness is very low, as reflected in limited social media reach and engagement, with almost 109 followers on Instagram and 73 on Facebook, minimal likes, no comments, and irregular posting, most recently in 2024. Additionally, communication frequently addresses a very broad audience (e.g. "Fijne dag allemaal"), resulting in an unclear target focus and less precise messaging.

From an external perspective, Carrots operates within a market shaped by several opportunities. Research indicates steady growth in vegetarian and flexitarian lifestyles in the Netherlands, reflecting increasing openness to ethical and plant-based consumption choices (Zhu & Ocké, 2025; Dagevos & Verbeke, 2022). While ethical consumption does not always lead to fully vegan choices across all categories, these trends show a broader move toward value-driven consumption. At the same time, scepticism about sustainability claims has increased the need for transparency and trust (Boermans et al., 2024; Zwinselman, 2021). However, Carrots also faces significant threats. Large mass-market platforms benefit from scale, visibility and convenience, while content saturation within the ethical and sustainability space makes it increasingly difficult for smaller brands to stand out and build meaningful engagement.

To translate these insights into strategic direction, the TOWS matrix is applied. Building on the TOWS framework developed by Weihrich (1982), several strategic directions can be identified. First, Carrots should build on its strength in verification and ethical credibility to respond to consumer scepticism and create trust-based storytelling (SO strategy). Second, the brand's accessible and non-judgemental tone can be used to differentiate it from both mass-market and activist competitors in a crowded content environment (ST strategy). Finally, content should be used strategically to address low brand awareness and unclear audience focus by clearly communicating what Carrots stands for and who it is for (WO strategy). These strategic directions provide a clear foundation for the strategy developed in the following section.



BRAND & BUSINESS SUMMARY

Carrots is defined by the combination of ethical credibility and everyday accessibility. The brand positions ethical, vegan and cruelty-free consumption as a practical, positive lifestyle choice that can fit into everyday routines instead of any kind of obligation. In a market where ethical or vegan choices often feel complex, judgmental, or overwhelming, Carrots differentiates itself through clarity, reassurance and a supportive tone. As a result, content must consistently express trust, ease, and emotional safety, while clearly communicating what the brand stands for and who it is for. These brand-level insights provide the foundation for analysing how Carrots can meaningfully position itself within the competitive and category landscape explored in the following section.

7 Category & Competitor

MARKET/CATEGORY OVERVIEW

The vegan, cruelty-free and ethical consumer market has grown steadily in recent years. What was once a niche lifestyle choice has become a normal shopping habit for many people (Euromonitor International, 2025). More consumers care about animal welfare, environmental impact and ethical production, which has led to a wider range of vegan and ethical products on the market. However, this growth has also made the category more crowded and harder to navigate.

One of the main changes in this market is that choosing has become more complicated. Consumers are faced with many different brands, labels and sustainability claims and it is often unclear what these claims really mean or how they compare. Policy research from the European Commission shows that unclear or poorly explained ethical claims create confusion and increase scepticism, making it harder for people to trust what they see when shopping (European Commission, 2022). Despite the growth of ethical options, the market still places much of the responsibility for making the “right” choice on the consumer.

Research in the plant-based sector shows that this confusion affects buying behaviour. According to ProVeg International, many consumers interested in vegan or plant-based products feel unsure at the point of purchase due to unclear information, limited guidance and concerns about price or quality (ProVeg International, 2020). Even when the motivation is high, this uncertainty can lead people to delay decisions or choose more familiar options.

As a result, one of the main challenges in the category is helping consumers turn good intentions into action. As shown in the previous audience insights, audiences expect brands and platforms to be transparent and supportive. Rather than vague promises or moral pressure, they want simple explanations for options that fit easily into daily life.

Overall, the ethical, cruelty-free and vegan consumer market is shaped by a clear tension: people want to make better choices, but the process often feels confusing and tiring. Brands and platforms that reduce complexity, build trust and make ethical shopping easier are better aligned with current consumer expectations. This tension creates an opportunity for brands to actively reduce the effort and uncertainty involved in everyday ethical, cruelty-free and vegan decision-making.

COMPETITOR CONTENT SCAN

Carrots operates in a competitive landscape that includes both direct and indirect competitors within the vegan and ethical consumer goods market. Direct competitors such as “ShopLikeYouGiveADamn (SLYGAD)” and “VEGA-LIFE.nl” focus specifically on vegan and ethical products, while indirect competitors including “Avocadostore.de”, “DithaBonita” and “BrandMission.nl” attract similar value-driven audiences through broader sustainability or lifestyle positioning. Across competitors, content is mainly used to educate consumers, communicate ethical values and display their products. SLYGAD relies heavily on short-form video content, particularly Instagram Reels and experimental TikToks, where products are shown in everyday situations rather than direct sales contexts. This approach works well because it combines emotion and visual clarity, while frequent posting helps sustain visibility and engagement.

VEGA-LIFE.nl takes a more practical and informational approach, sharing content about vegan living through Instagram and Facebook. While this provides useful guidance, engagement remains limited due to low interactivity and little variation in formats. Among indirect competitors, Avocadostore.de uses high-frequency educational posts, influencer collaborations and product-focused Reels, which perform well by highlighting trust signals such as eco-labels and certifications. Ditha Bonita and BrandMission.nl rely more on blog-based storytelling to explain product origins and values, building credibility but limiting reach due to lower posting frequency and reduced social visibility.

Overall, the competitor analysis showed that content performs best when it is visually engaging, easy to understand and shared regularly. Short-form videos reduce effort for audiences and support discovery, while simple educational content builds trust. In contrast, static formats, low interaction, or reliance on a single content type tend to weaken engagement.

WHITE-SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

To identify strategic content opportunities for Carrots, the POEM framework of Paid, Owned, and Earned media is used to assess where competitors focus their efforts and where gaps remain (Vasan et al., 2021). Most analysed competitors, including BrandMission, Shop Like You Give a Damn, VEGA-LIFE and Ditha Bonita, rely mainly on owned media such as social platforms, blogs and newsletters. Their content focuses on ethical values and product stories, with limited attention to practical guidance or decision support. This comparison reveals a clear white space in the category. While competitors explain why products are ethical or vegan, they rarely help consumers understand how to apply these choices in everyday life.

This gap is especially relevant for Carrots as a multi category marketplace serving consumers who are not necessarily vegan. For these audiences, ethical intent exists, but confusion and lack of clarity create friction at the moment of choice. In-depth and sense making content is also underused across the market. Practical guides, clear explanations of labels, and simple comparisons across categories could reduce uncertainty and build trust. Strengthening owned channels such as educational blog content and newsletters would support long term discovery beyond short term social visibility. This creates an opportunity for Carrots to own the role of a practical and non judgemental guide that helps non vegan consumers make confident everyday vegan choices across categories.

Macro Context

PESTLE HIGHLIGHTS

As a result, ethical brands must clearly communicate value, convenience and trust to remain relevant under economic pressure, rather than relying primarily on moral arguments. Technological factors further shape Carrots' operating environment.

Digital and social platforms increasingly function as primary spaces for product discovery, particularly through short-form and social commerce formats. At the same time, consumers report declining trust in online information due to the prevalence of paid influencer content and AI-generated material (McKinsey & Company, 2025). Research supports this trend, showing that clear verification and easy-to-understand explanations increase trust and confidence when buying ethical products online (Liu et al., 2023). Together, these developments reinforce the importance of Carrots' role in reducing information asymmetry and simplifying decision-making in a sceptical digital environment. From a legal perspective, rules around sustainability and ethical claims in the European Union are becoming stricter. Policymakers are paying closer attention to unclear or misleading green and ethical claims because of consumer confusion and greenwashing. At the same time, there is no single legally binding EU-wide definition of "vegan," which creates unclear labelling and a higher risk of misunderstanding (Vegan Labelling Study, 2023).

This legal uncertainty increases the value of platforms that verify and curate products, positioning Carrots as a trusted intermediary rather than a self-claiming brand.

Overall, social acceptance of ethical lifestyles, financial pressure on sustainable spending, digital trust shifts, and stricter legal rules are the most important macro-level factors for Carrots. Together, these factors point to the need for a content strategy focused on clarity, reassurance, and accessibility rather than persuasion or moral pressure.

To analyse the broader environment in which Carrots operates, a PESTLE analysis is applied. The PESTLE framework examines political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors that shape organisational behaviour and consumer decision-making. It is particularly useful for identifying external forces that influence market expectations and content relevance (Johnson et al., 2020). Given the scope of this project, the analysis focuses on the most influential factors for Carrots' positioning and content strategy.

From a social perspective, veganism, ethical and cruelty-free consumption are increasingly becoming part of everyday lifestyle choices rather than niche or activist practices. While younger and urban audiences play a leading role in this shift, ethical consumption is expanding across age groups and product categories, including cosmetics, fashion and home goods. At the same time, consumers often experience social pressure or judgement when engaging with ethical, vegan and cruelty-free lifestyles. This highlights the need for inclusive and non-moralising communication that frames ethical choices as accessible, flexible and supportive rather than idealistic or exclusive (Grootscholten, personal communication, September 16, 2025; Baláková et al., 2024).

From an economic perspective, rising living costs and financial uncertainty increase price sensitivity, even among ethically motivated consumers. Research indicates that engagement with sustainable products is strongly influenced by perceived affordability and financial stability, particularly among Millennials in the Netherlands (Skordoulis et al., 2025).

9 TRENDS & IMPLICATIONS

To translate macro-level developments into strategic direction, a Trend → Implication approach is applied. This method links broader societal and market trends directly to content decisions, ensuring that strategy responds to external conditions rather than internal assumptions.

TREND 1: ETHICAL CONSUMPTION AS AN EVERYDAY LIFESTYLE.

1



Ethical consumption is becoming more common in everyday shopping, instead of being seen as niche or activist. Humphery (2017) describes how ethical consumption has become part of everyday commerce, shaped by normal market practices rather than exceptional moral acts. At the same time, vegan consumption in Europe has grown beyond strict vegan identities. The vegan trend is now linked to mainstream demand and product innovation, reflecting practical lifestyle choices rather than ideology alone (Saari et al., 2021).

2

TREND 2: ETHICAL FATIGUE AND EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD.

Research shows that consumers often experience frustration and emotional exhaustion when attempting to act ethically in complex and information-heavy consumption environments, which can lead to disengagement rather than action (Spotswood et al., 2025).

Implication: Carrots should adopt a light, reassuring and non-judgemental tone that reduces pressure and supports small, manageable steps.

Implication: Content should frame ethical choices as familiar, practical and easy to integrate into daily life

TREND 3: GROWING DEMAND FOR TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST.

3

Consumers are becoming more sceptical of ethical claims and greenwashing, particularly in digital spaces where trust in brands is weak (Zhang et al., 2025). Studies also show that transparent and easily understandable information improves consumer confidence and decision-making (Tolegenov et al., 2024).

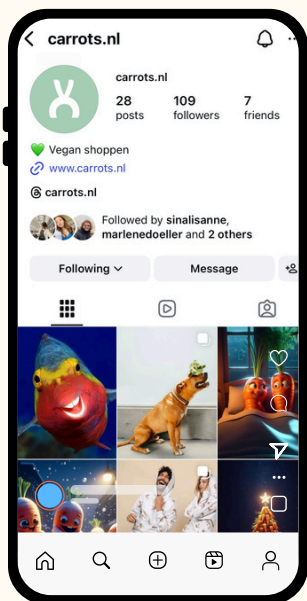
Implication: Content should clearly explain verification processes and emphasise credibility, positioning Carrots as a trusted guide that has already done the checking.

Together, these trends reinforce the need for content that makes ethical consumption feel clear, emotionally safe and easy to engage with.

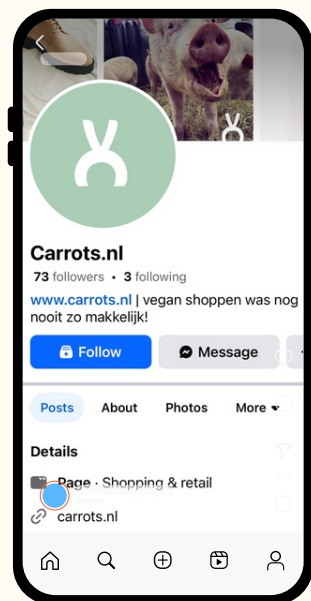
10 CURRENT COMMUNICATION & CONTENT PERFORMANCE

A review of Carrots' current communication shows that its strong ethical value proposition is not yet effectively translated into content that supports different stages of audience engagement. Carrots' social media presence is currently limited, with an inactive Instagram account of 109 followers (see picture A) and an inactive Facebook account of 73 followers (see picture B). The See–Think–Do–Care (3S) model explains how audiences move from passive awareness to active engagement and long-term relationships through intent-based content stages (Kaushik & Kaushik, 2016).

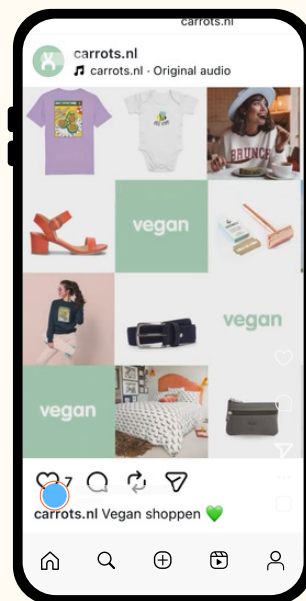
In the *See* stage, content struggles to capture attention and build brand awareness. Instagram posts rely heavily on static visuals and repetitive “vegan” messaging (see picture C), which fails to stand out in or create strong brand recall. While Carrots communicates what it sells, it does not yet communicate why it matters and what differs them from other vegan marketplaces. In the *Think* stage, content functions largely as a product catalogue (see picture D) rather than helping users emotionally connect with the brand. There is little storytelling, explanation, or reassurance around ethical impact, trust, or ease.



Picture A



Picture B



Picture C



Picture D

A review of Carrots' current communication shows that its strong ethical value proposition is not yet effectively translated into In the *Do* stage, calls-to-action remain vague and passive, offering no guidance to stay in contact on their socials and on their website through a newsletter. This reduces the likelihood of meaningful interaction or conversion. Finally, the Care stage is underdeveloped: there are few community-building elements, follow-up touchpoints, or content formats that encourage long-term engagement, trust, or loyalty. A similar pattern is visible on the website, which communicates vegan values clearly but lacks emotional storytelling and brand personality. Overall, this analysis indicates a need for a more strategic, audience-centred content approach that strengthens visibility in the *See* stage, supports trust in the *Think* stage, clarifies action in the *Do* stage, and fosters community and emotional connection in the *Care* stage. This forms the basis for the strategic content recommendations that follow.

11 Audience Insights

Carrots' primary audience consists of young consumers aged 22–30 living in the Netherlands. This group includes committed vegans, ethically conscious individuals and those curious about vegan and cruelty-free lifestyles. They actively seek, or are open to exploring, ethical products. These characteristics align with both the client's description of the target audience and the findings of this project's primary research.

The quantitative survey included 133 respondents who follow or are interested in vegan, ethical and cruelty-free consumption. Most respondents were between 18 and 25 years old (Appendix A, Graph 1), with 80.5% living in the Netherlands (Appendix A, Graph 2). The majority reported an annual income below €25,000 (Appendix A, Graph 3), and 69.9% identified as female (Appendix A, Graph 4), indicating a young, ethically motivated audience with limited financial resources. Media usage data shows strong engagement with Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok and YouTube, while traditional media is used far less frequently. Respondents primarily use media for enjoyment and social interaction rather than information-seeking (Appendix A, Graphs 5–6), suggesting that content should be engaging, community-oriented and accessible.

Personality and value analysis further clarify audience motivations. Using the Big Five Personality Model, respondents scored highest on Openness (Appendix A, Graph 7), a trait associated with curiosity, creativity and receptiveness to new ideas (McCrae & Costa, 1997). This suggests strong responsiveness to innovative and non-traditional brand approaches. Additionally, Schwartz's Human Values Theory revealed high importance placed on Universalism and Benevolence (Appendix A, Graph 8), indicating strong concern for sustainability, fairness and animal welfare (Schwartz, 1973). Values related to power, status and tradition scored significantly lower. Prior research links these self-transcendent values to ethical consumption and positive responses to socially responsible brands (Diddi & Niehm, 2017). Client interviews reinforced this orientation, emphasising a relaxed, inclusive tone and the importance of making vegan shopping feel easy and positive rather than activist-driven (Grootscholten, personal communication, 16 September 2025).

For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted

with eight participants aged 22–30 living in the Netherlands, including both men and women, ranging from vegans to those curious about veganism and ethical living. This age group was selected based on survey outcomes and allowed for insights across different living situations. The sample size enabled in-depth exploration while maintaining analytical depth. Interviews revealed that despite strong ethical intentions, participants struggle with unclear labels, suspected greenwashing and high research effort: "In most stores, especially with cosmetics, it's super difficult to know if they're actually cruelty-free, so I have to do so much research before buying" (Participant 1). These barriers reduce perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991) and increase uncertainty.

Social influence also plays a key role. Ethical behaviour is shaped by subjective norms, with friends, influencers and online communities validating and normalising ethical choices: "Having an actual person talk to you about it makes it feel much easier and more normal" (Participant 2). Convenience and habit further determine behaviour. In line with Self-Determination Theory, ethical choices are more sustainable when they feel easy and integrated into daily life (Ryan et al., 2000). However, price sensitivity remains a major constraint, particularly given limited income levels: "It's absolutely perfect... it's just damn expensive" (Participant 3).

Together, these insights show that Carrots' audience is highly motivated but needs practical guidance, social reassurance and accessible solutions to act in line with their values. Personas, customer journey mapping and the jobs-to-be-done framework translate these findings into actionable strategy. All subsequent sub-sections (3.4.1–3.4.4) are grounded in this research and provide the foundation for decisions on content, tone of voice, platform choice and campaign development.

PERSONA

Tess (25)

Junior HR Representative |
Netherlands

Income: ~€25,000/year

Vegan level/consumption habits :

Mostly vegan / cruelty-free, but flexible

Personality: Warm, empathetic,
thoughtful, practical

Type: Soft-Conscious Ethical Explorer



Hobbies and interests

- Cooking simple plant-based meals
- Browsing TikTok and WhatsApp for inspiration
- Yoga, walking, and slow-living routines
- Skincare, self-care, and wellness
- Supporting small creators and local markets



Quotes

"I can't control anybody else's choices. I can only control my own. If I want other people to do good, I need to make the changes with myself first."

"If you're not at least willing to go halfway towards what's ethical, it kind of reflects on your personality. I can coexist, but the people I'm really close with usually share my values."

"I prefer to buy online because then I can specifically search for what I want."

"I like to just buy everything in the same place."



Short Bio

Tess is a warm, ethically minded young woman who wants her everyday choices to reflect her values - without feeling overwhelmed or judged. She is not strictly vegan but actively seeks cruelty-free and ethical products when they are accessible and affordable. Tess values honesty, simplicity, and emotional safety, and prefers brands that support her journey rather than tell her what she should do.



Buying Behavior

- Emotion-led but reassurance-seeking
- Needs clarity, proof, and transparency before purchasing
- Sensitive to price, but willing to pay slightly more if trust is high
- Avoids brands that feel judgmental, pushy or unclear



What Tess needs

- Clear proof that products are really vegan and cruelty-free
- One trusted place instead of many different shops
- Calm, supportive communication without guilt or pressure
- Clear explanations instead of sales talk



Goals & Motivations

- Find one trusted place for vegan essentials
- Support honest, transparent brands
- Build a lifestyle that aligns with her values
- Starting a community
- Avoiding animal harming
- Reduce environmental impact



Pain Points & Challenges

- High prices for ethical products
- Confusing or unclear labels
- Fear of greenwashing
- Feeling overwhelmed by research
- Vegan spaces that feel judgmental or too commercial
- Social norms that normalise animal harm

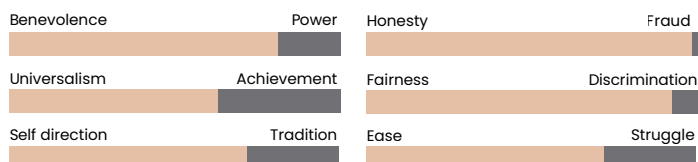


Pain Points & Challenges

- High prices for ethical products
- Confusing or unclear labels
- Fear of greenwashing
- Feeling overwhelmed by research
- Vegan spaces that feel judgmental or too commercial
- Social norms that normalise animal harm



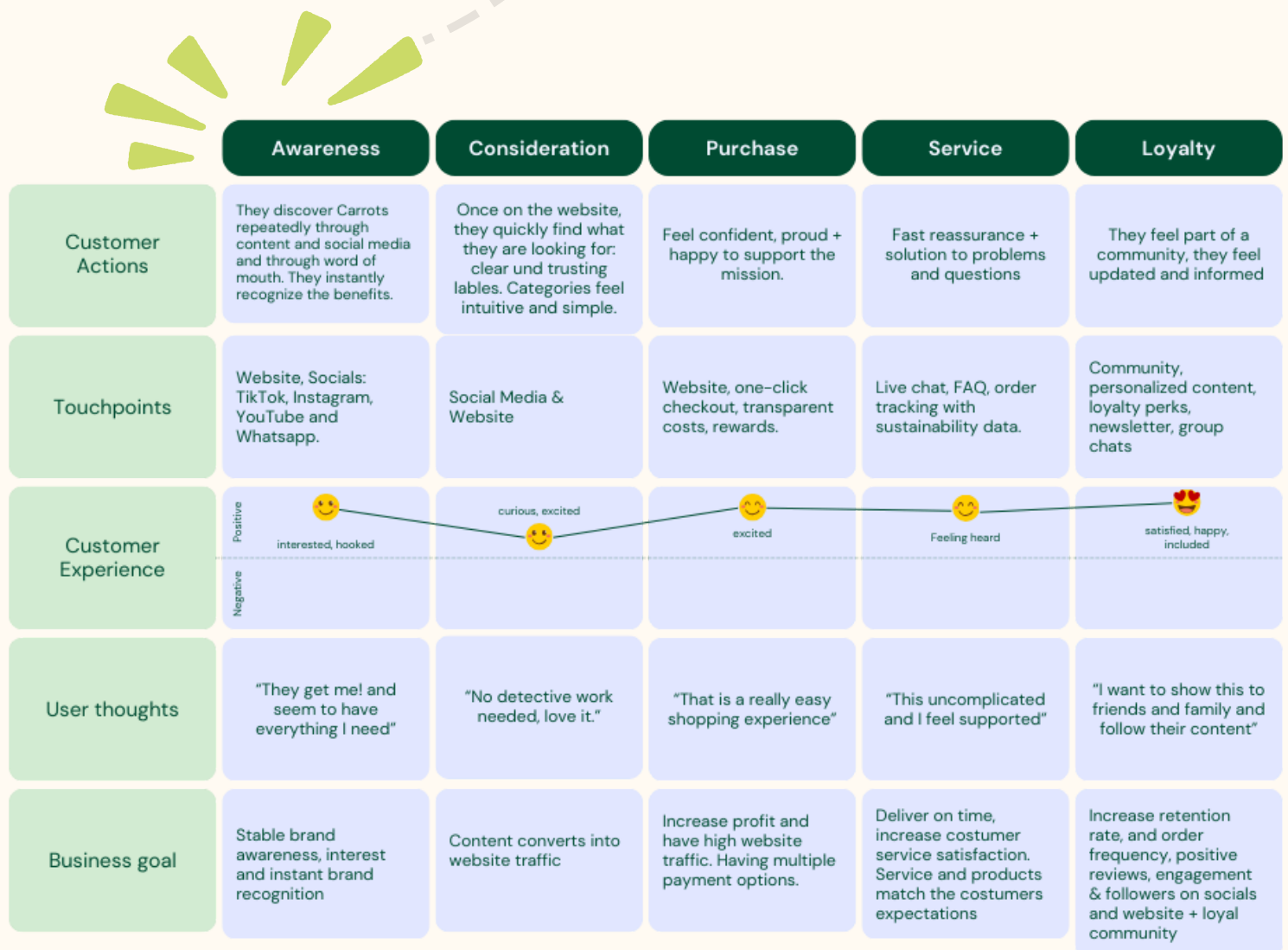
Personal Values



12 Customer Journey

A customer journey describes how people experience a brand across different stages and touchpoints, taking both functional needs and emotional responses into account (Van Slooten, 2018). The journey maps for Carrots show how the brand intends the experience to work, how customers experience it in practice and how the journey should ideally function. From the Carrots perspective, the journey is designed as a supportive path from awareness to loyalty.

Users are expected to discover the platform through social media and word of mouth, explore a curated range of 100% vegan products and feel reassured that everything has already been checked. A simple checkout and ongoing communication through newsletters, social channels and community content are intended to maintain engagement. From the customer perspective, users often feel curious but cautious, especially during consideration and purchase. They look for clear information, reassurance around trust and pricing, and visible support. The ideal journey brings these perspectives closer together by strengthening clarity, guidance, and community, helping users feel confident, supported and connected over time.



AUDIENCE NEEDS, BARRIERS & TRIGGERS

People want to buy vegan products without second-guessing. They need quick reassurance that Carrots has already verified what's truly vegan, because label-checking feels exhausting and risky (Aslan, 2022). For Carrots, the core job is not simply to buy vegan products, but to make ethical choices without doubt, effort, or constant checking. Users want to trust that products are already verified as 100% vegan, save time otherwise spent reading labels and complete their purchase with ease and confidence. Key barriers include information overload, uncertainty around vegan claims and limited time. Key triggers include clear vegan verification, a single marketplace offering only vegan products and reassurance through a smooth and simple user experience. These insights position Carrots as a solution that removes complexity from ethical consumption and makes vegan choices accessible to everyone.

RESEARCH SUMMARY & IMPLICATIONS

Mixed-methods research shows that Carrots' audience is primarily driven by ethical and identity-based motivations. Quantitative results confirm strong Universalism and Benevolence values (Schwartz, 1973), while qualitative findings explain that intentions are often blocked by low perceived behavioural control due to unclear information and greenwashing (Ajzen, 1991). Social influence supports ethical choices, but convenience, habits and price sensitivity limit behaviour. Therefore, Carrots must act as a trusted guide providing transparent, supportive and easy-to-use content from the first touchpoint.

Sweet spot



14 Content Domain & Pillars

CONTENT DOMAIN

A content domain defines the thematic territory within which a brand consistently creates content, guided by audience needs and brand values rather than short-term promotional goals. It establishes not only what the brand talks about, but also the role it takes for its audience (Pulizzi, 2014).

For Carrots, the content domain is *“The detective work is already done. You’re good.”*

This domain reflects the central insight that many ethically motivated consumers want to make vegan and cruelty-free choices, but feel overwhelmed by unclear labels, suspected greenwashing and the mental effort required to check the ingredients of products themselves. Instead of encouraging immediate behavioral change, Carrots’ content aims to remove uncertainty by reassuring them that the research and checking work has already been taken care of. Within this domain, Carrots can address categories such as food, fashion, cosmetics and home goods, all united by the shared challenge of unclear labels, false claims, and decision fatigue. The content domain, therefore, positions Carrots as a transparent, supportive guide that helps people make sense of ethical choices, without pressure or judgment.

CONTENT PILLARS

① Good to Know

One-liner

Clear explanations of labels, claims, and trends - without overwhelm. So people feel confident without having to research everything themselves.

This pillar focuses on explaining labels, claims and trends in a clear and accessible way. It responds directly to insights around confusion, greenwashing scepticism, and information overload by offering simple explanations that help audiences understand what matters and why (picture E).



Picture E

② Social Situations, Handled Gently

One-liner

Relatable content that helps people navigate everyday moments, without drama or pressure.

This pillar addresses the emotional and social friction surrounding ethical choices. Content normalises everyday situations, reassures audiences that imperfection is acceptable and reduces the pressure often associated with vegan or ethical living (picture F).



Picture F

③ Checked by Carrots

One-liner

Showing how Carrots selects and checks products, building trust through transparency.

This pillar builds trust by showing how Carrots selects products and partners. By making verification and decision-making processes visible, it reinforces the brand’s role as a reliable and transparent guide (picture G).

Together, these pillars define a coherent content territory focused on clarity, reassurance and trust.



Picture G

15 CONTENT MISSION STATEMENT

A content mission statement defines the purpose of a brand's content by clarifying who it is for, how it is approached, and what value it creates for the audience (Pulizzi, 2014). The content mission statement for Carrots is: *"We create transparent, trustworthy, and non-judgemental content that helps people understand vegan and ethical choices, so they can feel confident, reassured and supported in navigating them."*

Within this mission, transparent content refers to openly explaining how products are selected, what labels and claims mean, and where limitations or trade-offs exist, reducing information overload and perceived greenwashing. Trustworthy content is grounded in verified information,

consistent messaging and honest storytelling, enabling audiences to rely on Carrots as a credible guide rather than a promotional voice. Non-judgemental content avoids prescriptive language or moral pressure and instead acknowledges different stages, frustrations, and personal journeys within ethical/ vegan lifestyle choices. This mission aligns with Carrots' brand identity as a transparent and ethical guide rather than a persuasive seller, focusing exclusively on audience needs and content value rather than conversion or shopping behaviour. By emphasising clarity and emotional reassurance, the mission statement reflects consumer insights indicating that confidence and understanding are essential conditions for sustained engagement with ethical consumption (Pulizzi, 2014).

STRATEGY RATIONALE

The content strategy is directly derived from the insights identified in section 3. Research shows that consumers interested in vegan and ethical living frequently experience information overload, scepticism towards brand claims and social pressure associated with ethical choices. Rather than motivating action, these barriers often lead to hesitation or avoidance. In response, Carrots' strategy shifts away from product-led or persuasive content and instead positions content as a sense-making and reassurance tool. This approach reflects Pulizzi's *Epic Content Marketing* principle that effective content should prioritise delivering consistent, audience-centred value over direct promotion in order to build trust and relevance over time (Pulizzi, 2014).

The *Good to Know* pillar responds to cognitive overload by simplifying complex topics such as labels, claims and trends. *Social Situations, Handled Gently* addresses emotional barriers by normalising everyday experiences and reducing feelings of judgement or pressure. *Checked by Carrots* builds credibility by making verification processes visible, showing behind the scenes of the brand and thereby reducing scepticism and shifting responsibility away from the consumer. This strategy differentiates Carrots from other ethical platforms that often emphasise moral urgency or ideal behaviour. Instead, Carrots adopt the role of a calm, supportive guide. This positioning is consistent with the brand's values and supports Pulizzi's view that long-term trust and engagement are built through relevance and consistency rather than short-term persuasion (Pulizzi, 2014).

SUCCESS METRICS

Success will be measured across different stages of the customer journey to reflect the awareness- and trust-led nature of the content strategy. At the awareness stage, metrics such as reach, content completion rates and time spent with content will indicate whether content captures attention and feels relevant. At the consideration stage, engagement metrics such as saves, shares and repeat interactions will signal growing trust and perceived usefulness. At the relationship stage, returning users, newsletter retention and qualitative feedback will indicate whether the content creates ongoing value. This was confirmed by the founder of carrots during our last feedback meeting:

Insights from these metrics will inform continuous optimisation. High-performing topics and formats will be expanded, while content that causes confusion or disengagement will be refined. Qualitative signals such as comments and direct messages will be used to align content more closely with audience language and emotional needs.

"Yes, if more people will trust the platform and will visit us and that it will be more like a community, not just just buy one product once, but that people are starting to follow us for information as well and for fun things..."

(Grootscholten, personal communication, January 19, 2025)

Creative Strategy

A large orange circle occupies the left and center of the page. Inside the circle, the words "Creative" and "Strategy" are written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, stacked vertically. Below the word "Strategy", there is a horizontal light purple bar with rounded ends. Several green, four-pointed starburst graphics are scattered around the circle, primarily on the right side and top right.

16 Creative Concept

CONCEPT ONE-LINER & NARRATIVE HOOK

The detective work is already done. You're good.

A creative concept is the central, unifying idea that translates strategic insights into a coherent narrative and guides creative expression across content (Belch & Belch, 2021). The creative concept for Carrots emerges from a shared personal wish and frustration identified in both the client and the researched target audience regarding the complexity of ethical shopping. It positions Carrots as the platform that removes effort, doubt and pressure by taking on the role of the “detective,” researching, comparing and verifying ethical products on behalf of consumers. This narrative reframes ethical consumption from a demanding and sometimes confusing responsibility into an easy, reassuring and even enjoyable experience, in line with the client’s vision to support ethical choices without judgement.

HOW THE CONCEPT COMES TO LIFE

We recommend rolling out the concept using a simple 3H content mix: Hero, Hub and Hygiene, a framework that structures content into high-impact campaigns (Hero), recurring formats that build audience relationships (Hub), and always-on content designed to meet everyday informational needs (Hygiene) (Think with Google, 2024).

Each pillar shows up differently across these layers. *Good to Know* mostly sits in Hub/Hygiene: regular educational posts that make labels and claims easier to understand (short videos, carousels, stories). *Social Situations, Handled Gently* is mainly Hub: relatable moments and scripts that help people feel seen and supported in everyday situations (quote posts, carousel storytelling, short scripts). *Checked by Carrots* is Hero/Hub: a strong brand intro (brand video, short-form clips) plus recurring “how we verify” content.

Across everything, Carrots sounds calm, friendly, and reassuring. The brand avoids guilt, urgency, or telling people what they “should” do. Instead, it keeps things simple, acknowledges uncertainty, and makes small steps feel valid (Aaker, 1997; Freudenreich & Penz, 2025; Peloza et al., 2013). Visually, the content stays warm and natural, soft colours, natural light, clean layouts, so it feels open and accessible (Primary research: brand materials/visual direction, 2025).

CHANNELS & DISTRIBUTION

We recommend keeping the channel mix focused. Based on our audience research, Facebook is not prioritised (see Appendix A, Graph 5). We focus on the platforms where our audience is most active (see Appendix A, Graph 5). Each platform is assigned a distinct role within the channel mix, ensuring that social media drives reach and engagement, owned channels support relationship building, and search-led platforms provide decision-support content.

- **Instagram (main hub):** Most used by TA (see Appendix A, Graph 5), pillar content, community prompts, and saveable educational content. An Instagram Broadcast Channel can be a great community touchpoint to share behind the scenes of carrots or where updates and upcoming new products/ sales can be communicated in.
- **YouTube (Shorts + brand video):** Second most used video platform by TA (see Appendix A, Graph 5), the platform for the 60-second brand video and Shorts versions of *Good to Know* and *Checked by Carrots*
- **TikTok (optional):** A platform to post *Good to Know* and *Checked by Carrots*, *only* recommended if capacity is there, since it is used less by the TA (see Appendix A, Graph 5).
- **WhatsApp (pilot):** Most used platform by TA (see Appendix A, Graph 5). Can be a great community touchpoint: updates on sales and new products via WhatsApp Channel or broadcast list; optional small group pilot if moderation is realistic.
- **Email (newsletter):** Activate the inactive Newsletter to engage subscribers and drive return visits to the website.
- **Website/Blogs:** Add educational content from social media (“what this label means,” “how we verify”) to product pages on the website, to reduce uncertainty and doubt at the point of purchase. We also recommend starting a blog on the website (see Appendix A, Graph 5) to post monthly entries about the brand, partners, and information about products.



17 CREATIVE GUIDELINES

All Carrots content should reinforce transparency, reassurance and trust, helping ethical, cruelty-free and vegan lifestyle choices feel easier. Content should use simple language that feels warm and friendly. The tone can be light and slightly playful, using gentle humour that feels relatable. As M. Grootsholten described on the 19th of January: **“It should be fun as well. Making a little bit of fun about yourself is funny too.”**

The message that ethical choices are not always easy and that there are people that share this frustration should be dominant. Content should focus on explaining and guiding rather than convincing or pushing people to act. Short reassuring phrases like

“We already checked, you’re good”, “We checked so you don’t have to.” or “Ethical shopping, without the homework.” can be used to reduce doubt. Content should not be shaming or judgemental in any way. The content should not make people feel guilty for their current lifestyle choices. Avoid moralising language, shocking images, or showing animal harm. Do not use difficult terms, heavy explanations, or overly sales-focused messages. Avoid highlighting luxury and exclusivity.

The visual identity of Carrots is calm and approachable, centred around a soft green colour palette that signals care, nature and sustainability without feeling loud or activist. These guidelines will help keep Carrots brand identity consistent across all platforms.

CONCEPT RATIONALE

This concept works because it directly addresses the main barrier that emerged in both the client conversations and the audience research: ethical shopping often feels like a mix of effort and uncertainty. Many people want to buy vegan and cruelty-free products, but they do not want to spend time decoding labels or worrying that they might have missed something. The line *“The detective work is already done”* turns Carrots’ verification process into a clear and reassuring promise. Carrots takes responsibility for the checking, allowing customers to shop with confidence and without second-guessing their choices. The concept also fits closely with the brand’s positioning. Carrots aims to sit between mass marketplaces, which offer wide choice but little guidance, and niche ethical stores, which communicate strong values but can sometimes feel intimidating. This idea reinforces that middle space by combining easy, everyday shopping with built-in credibility. Trust is further strengthened through the *Checked by Carrots* pillar, which makes the verification process visible and repeatable rather than something that is simply claimed.

Finally, the concept is designed to work consistently across channels. *Good to Know* reduces confusion through clear, practical explainers (Hub/Hygiene). *Social Situations, Handled Gently* lowers emotional pressure and helps people feel understood and included (Hub). *Checked by Carrots* provides proof and transparency, introducing the brand and reinforcing trust over time (Hero/Hub). Throughout all content, the tone remains supportive rather than moralising. This is intentional, as research shows that assertive sustainability messaging can trigger resistance and that explicit guilt appeals may backfire (Freudenreich & Penz, 2025; Peloza et al., 2013). Together, these elements make the promise believable and scalable: Carrots becomes the place where ethical, cruelty-free and vegan shopping feels easy, reassuring and trustworthy, without the homework..

DESIRED EFFECT

The desired effect is for people to feel calmer, more reassured and less pressured when making ethical, cruelty-free and vegan choices. In the short term, this should lead to stronger engagement, such as saves, shares, comments and replies, as the content provides reassurance and clear guidance. Over time, this sense of reassurance is expected to build trust in Carrots, reflected in repeat visits, email clicks and returning users. As the audience gets a better understanding of what Carrots is and what problems it is solving, stronger conversion signals such as product page visits, add-to-cart actions and purchases should follow, alongside a growing sense of community around the brand.

18 Research Transparency

METHODS & SAMPLE

This study applied a mixed-methods design combining semi-structured interviews with quantitative survey analysis. The primary research focused on 18–35-year-olds in the Netherlands who follow or are curious about vegan and ethical consumption. For the Qualitative research the age group of the target audience has been further defined to 22-30 years old. The interviews explored motivations, barriers and decision-making processes, while the survey measured abstract psychological constructs, including Schwartz's human values and the Five-Factor Model of personality. Using both methods enabled triangulation of findings and allowed behavioural patterns to be examined from both an individual and a broader quantitative perspective.

LIMITATIONS & BIASES

To assess whether the quantitative scales produced reliable and comparable results, internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's alpha, with $\alpha \geq .70$ considered acceptable. However, several value and personality scales scored below this threshold. Possible reasons are the abstract nature of the measured constructs, language barriers and respondent fatigue caused by many similar survey items. Due to these reliability issues, aggregated scales could not always be used, requiring additional calculations of centered C-values for individual value and personality dimensions, which limited full comparability. Therefore a full reliability for all outcomes drawn from calculations can not be guaranteed. Several limitations also apply to the qualitative phase of this study. Some interviews were conducted in Dutch and later translated into English, which may have led to a loss of meaning or nuance in participants' expressions. Furthermore, qualitative analysis is greatly interpretative and therefore subject to potential researcher bias. To reduce this risk, interrater reliability procedures were applied, with multiple researchers coding the same material and discussing discrepancies. Nevertheless, complete objectivity in qualitative interpretation cannot be fully guaranteed.

DATA PACKAGE INDEX

The submitted data package includes the survey, raw SPSS dataset, statistical results, interview guide, coding and transcripts of all interviews, all three customer journeys and the final pitch presentation.

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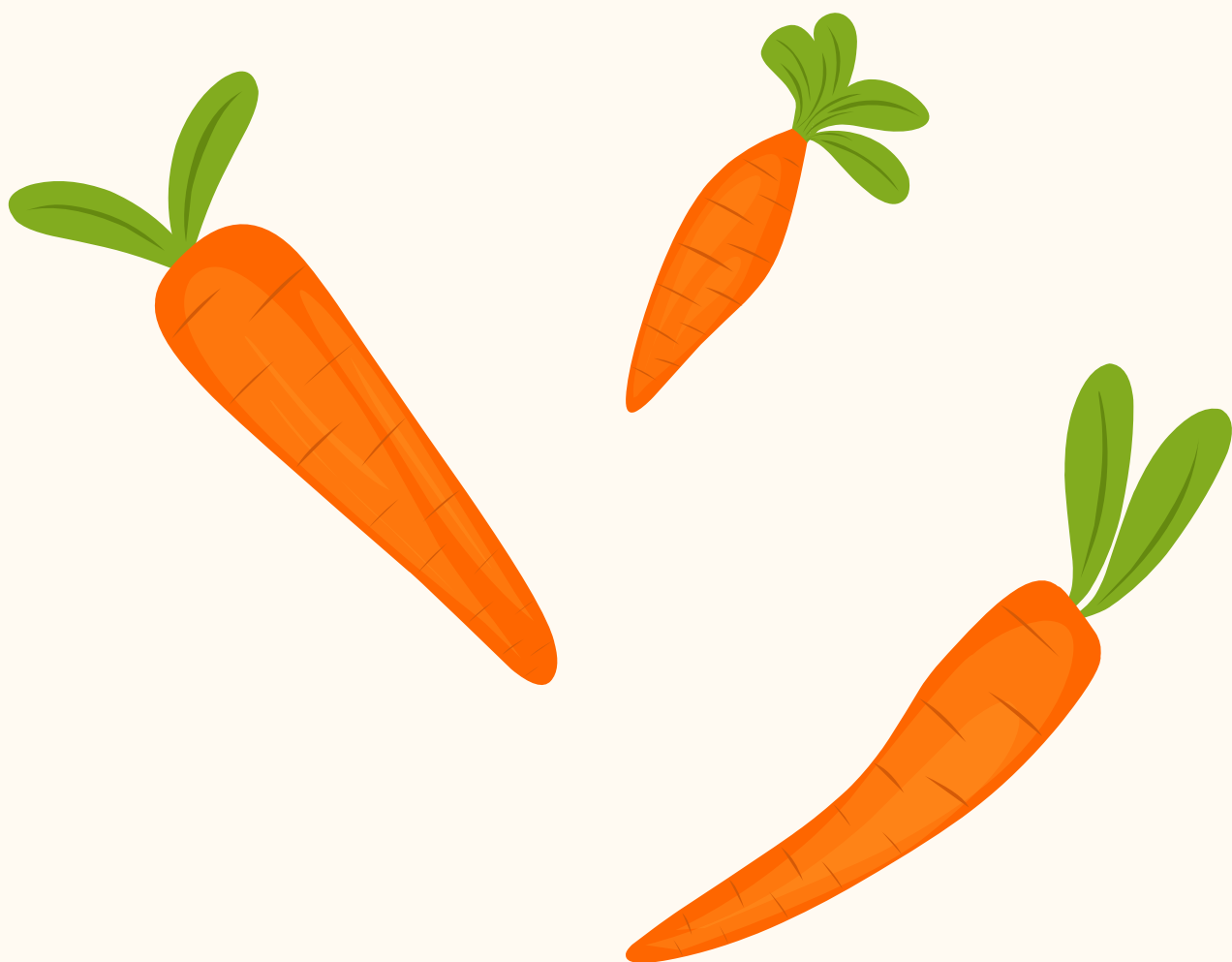
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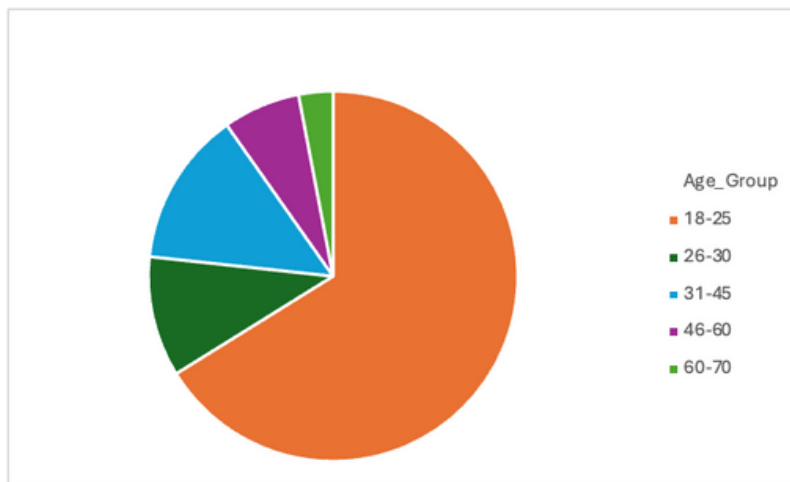


Appendix

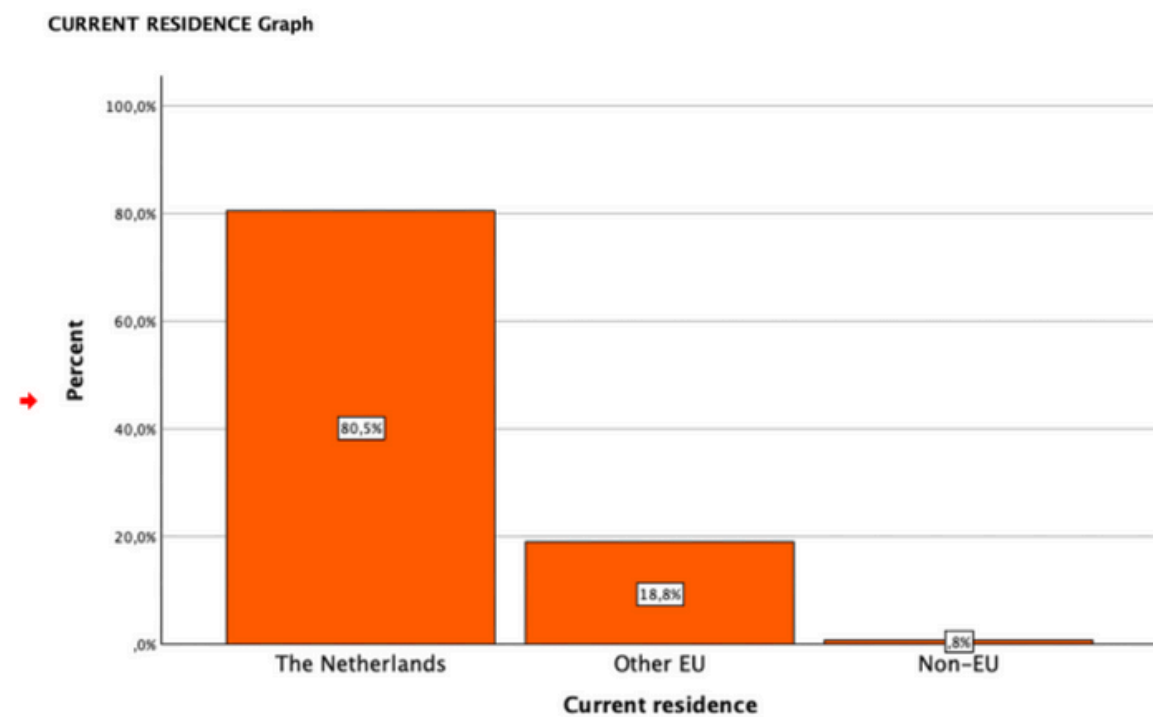
APPENDIX A

Research outcomes

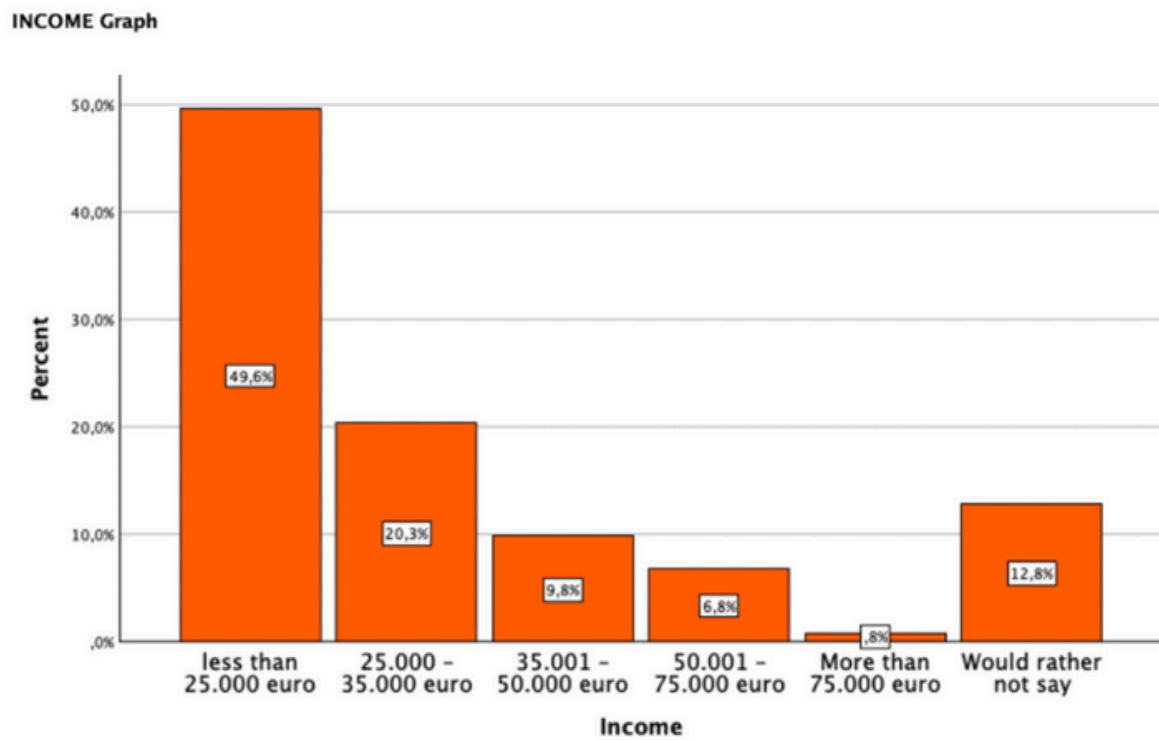
Graph 1



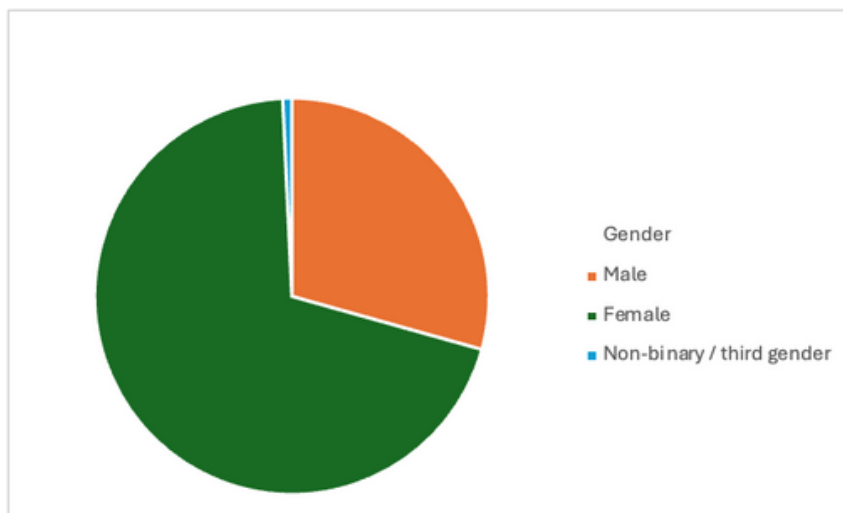
Graph 2:



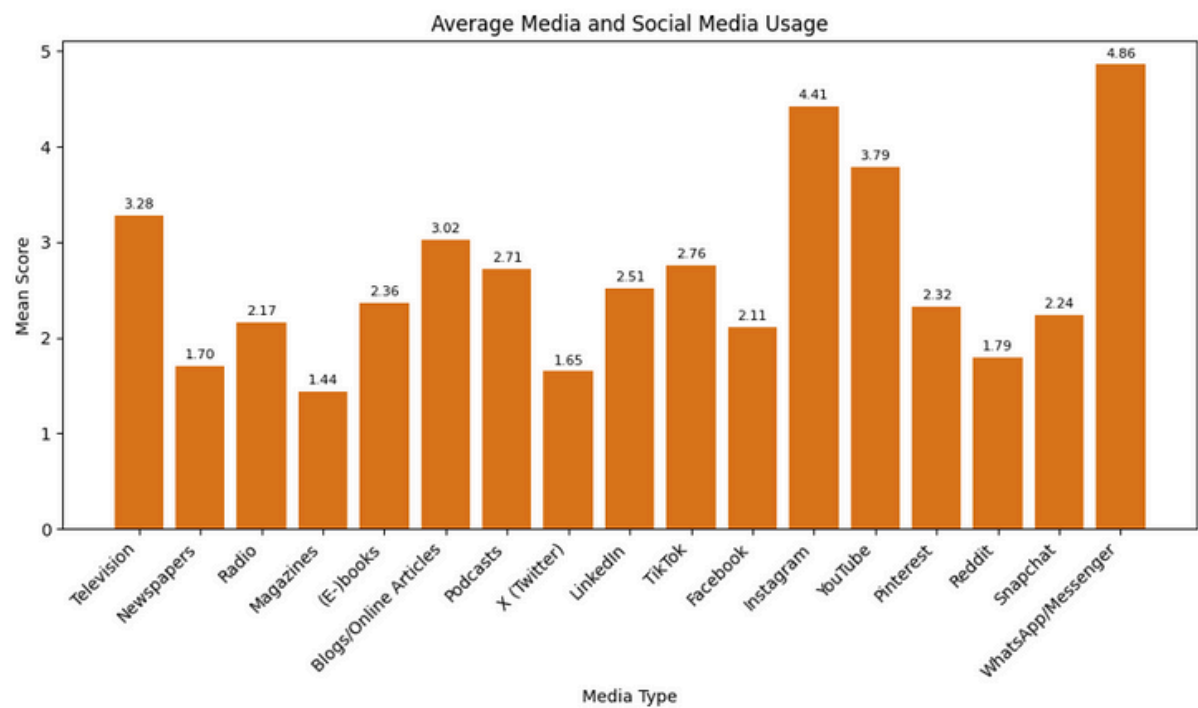
Graph 3:



Graph 4:

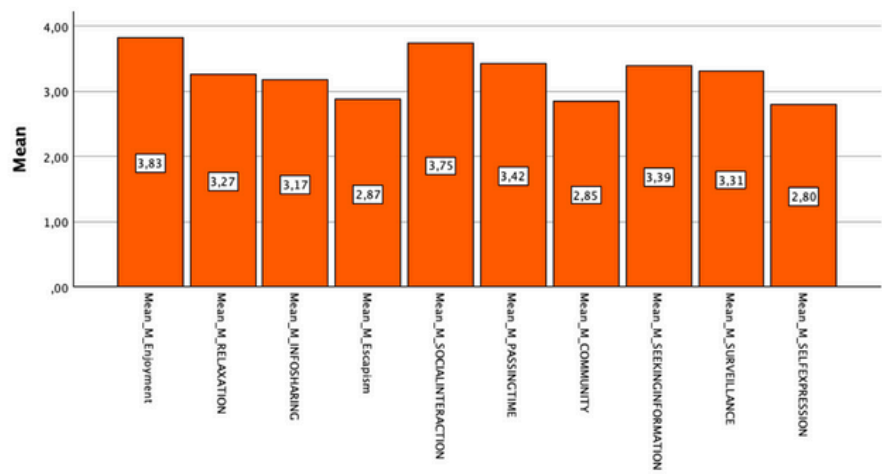


Graph 5:



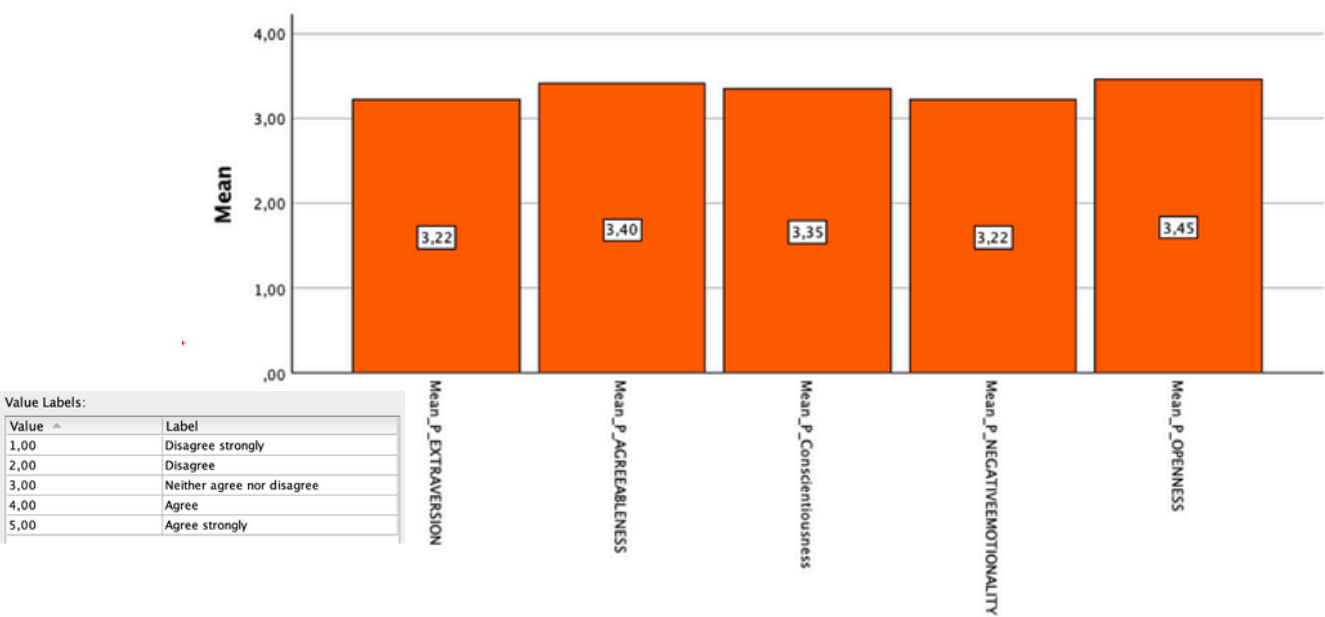
Value	Label
1,00	(Almost) never
2,00	Less than once per week
3,00	1 or 2 times per week
4,00	3 or 4 times per week
5,00	(Almost) every day

Graph 6:



Value Labels:	
Value	Label
1,00	Completely disagree
2,00	Disagree
3,00	Neither disagree nor agree
4,00	Agree
5,00	Completely agree

Graph 7:



Graph 8: (more explanation and how we came to this conclusion can be found in document “Outcomes SPSS”)

