

# The QWEB tool: evaluation sheet for the quality of nutrition articles on the World Wide Web

Using the example of articles on the effect of coconut oil for weight loss

Marianne Kriz, Jutta M. Möseneder, Gabriele Leitner

## Abstract

One of the greatest challenges laypersons face when looking for reliable health information is the lack of knowledge on the quality criteria of articles. Nutrition experts should find out which popular science topics people come across online. Hence, it is important to take a systematic approach and imitate the search behavior of laypersons. The free QWEB tool for experts is a guideline to enable specific and structured analysis of the quality criteria of web articles. The sample research and analysis of articles on “coconut oil for weight loss” illustrates that most websites found by laypersons are unsuitable to provide adequate information. Just one out of 25 articles was recommendable. The median of possible points across all categories was 44.2%, in the category “Content” it was 36.7% and in “Transparency” it was 13.3%. The median value was highest in the category “Independence” at 60%.

**Keywords:** web-based content, online nutritional information, online health information, evaluation tool, QWEB tool, online health literacy

## Introduction

These days the internet is indispensable when it comes to obtaining information fast and free of charge [1]. Health information is one of the three most common topics for online research. For this reason most people use search engines like Google or Yahoo, which do not work on a scientific basis and which display both commercial and independent websites [2, 3].

Since anyone can publish unchecked content online, researchers must be able to evaluate the quality of the information themselves [4–6]. However, almost 50% of Europeans have an inadequate level of health competence (health literacy), which presumably also extends to their online health competence (eHealth literacy) [7]. This means that most laypersons lack basic knowledge on how to assess the quality of internet articles [6].

Often, they judge the reliability of articles solely by the appearance of the website rather than by formal criteria [8]. Frequently, information is accepted without reflection and recommendations are implemented without prior discussion with practitioners [9]. A Canadian study showed that most incorrect advice was given on commercial websites (relating to Canadian nutritional recommendations) and usually claims were made without citing sources [10].

The algorithm of non-scientific search engines also agrees to be constructed to enable achieving top places in the search results through specific website design [3]. According to one Austrian and one British study, the majority of all online articles published by the mass media is formulated in an exaggeratedly positive way and scientific statements are severely distorted [11–13].



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## Das QWEB-Tool: Bewertungsbogen für die Qualität von Ernährungs-Beiträgen im World Wide Web

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Webseite:

Datum:

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Pro Frage ist nur EINE Antwort zulässig!

### A) UNABHÄNGIGKEIT (gesamt 15)

1. Ist die Finanzierungsquelle der Webseite offengelegt? [1–5]  
 JA (3 P.)  NEIN (0 P.)

Diese Information sollte im Impressum zu finden sein. Bei Nichtangabe ist NEIN anzukreuzen. Die Frage werdet nicht, ob eine Webseite mit Werbung unabhängig ist oder primär kommerzielle Zwecke verfolgt.

2. Wird im Impressum ein nicht-kommerzielles Ziel deklariert? [4–7]  
 JA (3 P.)  NEIN (0 P.)

Falls dem so ist, findet man diese Information ebenso im Impressum, Wortlaut in etwa „dient der Weitergabe unabhängiger medizinischer Informationen“. Diese explizite Angabe gilt als ein hohes Gütekriterium.

3. Verweist die Webseite auf ihren eigenen Webshop bzw. findet man Affiliate Links zu anderen Webshops oder Plattformen? [1, 5]

NEIN (3 P.)  JA (0 P.)

Sogenannte Affiliate Links sind Hyperlinks, durch deren Anklicken vom Produkthersteller eine Provision gezahlt wird [8]. Inhaltlicher Bias ist sehr wahrscheinlich, wenn eine Webseite einen Beitrag verfasst und darin ein Produkt aus dem eigenen Webshop explizit erwähnt wird oder sogar einen Hyperlink gesetzt wurde, der direkt zum Produkt im Webshop führt.

4. Werden Werbebeiträge für den Webshop klar und deutlich abgegrenzt vom Text beworben? [4, 7]

KEINE WERBUNG (3 P.)  
 JA (1,5 P.)  NEIN (0 P.)

Besonders Affiliate Links werden häufig nicht auf den ersten Blick als solche erkennbar im Text eingebaut =

versteckte Werbung. Wenn Werbung z. B. am Websitenrand in einem eingerahmten Kasten mit dem Begriff Werbung versehen zu finden ist, gilt diese als ausreichend gut gekennzeichnet und daher ist JA anzukreuzen (grafische Abtrennung, z. B. „Werbung“, „Werbeeinschaltung“).

5. Wird das beworbene Produkt besonders positiv dargestellt? [2, 5, 7]

KEINE WERBUNG (3 P.)  
 NEIN = AUSGEWOGEN (1,5 P.)  
 JA (0 P.)

Das Nickerwählen von Nachteilen und Nebenwirkungen oder Informationen über alternative, gleichwertige Produkte, Methoden etc. sowie das massive Hervorheben von positiven Attributen spricht für eine fehlende Seriosität einer Webseite.

### Punkte UNABHÄNGIGKEIT:

Wert in %:

## Objective

This article describes the development of such a tool for nutrition-related websites, herein-after referred to as the QWEB tool<sup>1</sup> (**Q**uality of **W**orld **W**ide **E**WEB articles on nutrition). It is intended as a guideline for nutritional specialists in the systematic processing of web articles and shows which specific formal criteria must be considered alongside the content of an article. However, the tool cannot replace the conscientious reading of articles, the follow-up of cited sources, and background reading in specialist literature.

It is also explained how specialists can carry out a search so realistically in order to find the websites typically visited by laypersons who are looking for nutritional information using Google. As a practical illustration of how the tool supports the research work of nutritional specialists, a sample of 25 articles on the “effect of coconut oil on weight loss” was evaluated.

## Methodological approach

### Development of the QWEB tool

In 2016 in the course of a bachelor thesis an evaluation sheet was developed for the assessment of articles on coconut and palm oil [15]. The idea and concept for this basic tool originated from a British study which examined the quality of websites on celiac disease based upon a catalogue of questions [16]. Using the sources and additional text passages identified in a systematic literature review, important quality characteristics were established and supplemented with personal considerations. The new QWEB tool with 35 questions resulted from a revision of the basic tool. A few questions were adapted and necessary filter questions were incorporated. To maximize efficiency the original five questions on quality certifications were reduced to two. Those in the category “Independence” were formulated more generally since the tool was intended to be suitable for the assessment of various topics. This implies, *inter alia*, web-

Fig. 1: The first page of the QWEB tool

It can therefore be assumed that laypersons click on commercial websites more often than on scientific ones and thus tend to see non-scientific content [8, 10].

According to one study, 60% of social media users consider content from social networks when forming opinions and they are particularly receptive to advertising on these channels [14]. This is a fact put to good use by the nutritional supplements industry; companies are also increasingly advertising through users on the platform Instagram. These influencers cooperate with manufacturers and present the products on their profiles. This form of advertising produces a new problem for advisors because laypersons place a great deal of trust in such influencers. Recommendations from practitioners and physicians are often questioned if they differ from popular science theories.

It is therefore crucial that nutritional specialists do not only address evidence-based knowledge but also common popular science topics. In order to obtain an overview of the websites accessible to laypersons, it is thus useful to have a tool for their evaluation. To date there are hardly any validated tools to check web articles for content and formal quality, and not even one that deals specifically with nutritional topics.

<sup>1</sup> The QWEB tool can be downloaded free of charge as a blank form and completed on a computer: [www.ernaehrungs-umschau.de](http://www.ernaehrungs-umschau.de) > issue 4/2019 and in Online PLUS

<p><b>B) TRANSPARENZ (gesamt 15)</b></p> <p>a) Autorenschaft (gesamt 5)</p> <p>6. Werden AutorInnen angegeben? [1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>→ wenn NEIN, weiter bei Frage 11</p> <p>7. Werden deren Qualifikationsnachweise/Berufsberechtigungen angegeben? [2, 4, 9]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN = TEILWEISE (0,5 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>→ wenn NEIN, weiter bei Frage 10</p> <p>8. Sind diese Qualifikationsnachweise belegbar und recherchierbar? [2, 6]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN = TEILWEISE (0,5 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>Mittels Eingabe in die Suchmaschine Google recherchieren, ob z. B. ein Lebenslauf oder eine persönliche Webseite der Person existiert, wo dies belegt wird.</p> <p>9. Sind die AutorInnen in einem Beruf mit einem ernährungswissenschaftlichen/diätologischen oder medizinischen (u. a.) Hintergrund tätig? [2, 4]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN = TEILWEISE (0,5 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>Hiermit soll die Abgrenzung von Nicht-Ernährungsfachleuten (JournalistInnen, Privatpersonen, Köchinnen, ErnährungsberaterInnen etc.) erfolgen, da nur Personen mit fachlicher Qualifikation und ausreichendem Hintergrundwissen über ernährungsmedizinische Themen kompetent informieren können. Beispielsweise soll auch bei Beiträgen auf einem persönlichen Blog von einer erkrankten Person NEIN angekreuzt werden, da eine Erkrankung niemals Garant für medizinisch korrektes, umfassendes Wissen sein kann.</p> <p>10. Sind Kontaktdaten (E-Mail-Adresse, Angabe des Institutes etc.) der AutorInnen vorhanden? [1]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN = TEILWEISE (0,5 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>b) Hintergrund (gesamt 5)</p> <p>11. Ist der Ursprung von Informationen ersichtlich? [1, 4, 5, 7]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>→ wenn NEIN, weiter bei Frage 15</p> <p>Hier steht die Kennzeichnung vom Ursprung von Informationen im Vordergrund, es wird noch nicht näher betrachtet, ob eine Quelle wissenschaftlich hochwertig ist (es sollen mehr als zwei Quellenangaben vorhanden sein, sowohl wissenschaftliche als auch populärwissen-</p>	<p>schaftliche sind zulässig). Bei keiner, einer oder zwei Quellenangaben ist NEIN anzukreuzen, <u>erst ab drei Quellen JA</u>.</p> <p>12. Ist mehr als die Hälfte der angegebenen Quellen aktuell?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0,5 P.)</p> <p>Aktuell wurde mit „nicht älter als 10 Jahre“ definiert. Hier ist zu bedenken, dass es besonders bei „allgemeinem Wissen“ häufig keine aktuelleren Quellen gibt, wenn sich der Stand der Wissenschaft nicht geändert hat, z. B. Definitionen von Grundumsatz oder Angaben von Energiegehalt (in kcal) von einzelnen Makronährstoffen. In solch einem Fall sind die angegebenen, älteren Quellen zu den aktuellen hinzuzurechnen und es ist JA anzukreuzen.</p> <p>13. Führen mehr als die Hälfte der Literaturhinweise zu kostenloren Volltexten? [7]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0,5 P.)</p> <p>Wenn überwiegend populärwissenschaftliche Quellen (Blogs, Zeitungartikel, unwissenschaftliche Journal und Verlage) etc. angegeben sind, ist NEIN anzukreuzen, da diese Frage auf rein wissenschaftliche Studien abzielt. Wenn zwar nur wissenschaftliche Publikationen als Literaturhinweis angegeben wurden, überwiegend aber die Volltexte nicht kostenlos abrufbar sind, ist dies auch ungünstig, daher ist ebenso NEIN anzukreuzen.</p> <p>14. Werden mehr als die Hälfte der angeführten Studien bzw. Informationen mit rein wissenschaftlichen Quellen belegt? [7, 9]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>Hier wird noch nicht bewertet, ob eine angegebene Studie eine hohe Evidenzklasse aufweist. „Rein wissenschaftlich“ wurde von „populärwissenschaftlich/unwissenschaftlich“ abgegrenzt festgelegt: Der Beitrag, die Studie etc. muss in einem Fachjournal, auf der Webseite einer Fachgesellschaft etc. zu finden und in Google Scholar, PubMed u. ä. auffindbar und publiziert sein.</p> <p>15. Ist klar zu erkennen, welche Aussagen der subjektiven Meinung der AutorInnen entsprechen und somit nicht belegt und zitiert wurden? [6]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN = TEILWEISE (0,5 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>Unbelegte Aussagen sind entweder nicht zitiert worden oder spiegeln die subjektive Meinung des Autors/der Autorin wider. Da dies in vielen Fällen nicht ersichtlich ist, sollen Aussagen im Zweifel als nicht zitiert gezählt werden, daher ist NEIN anzukreuzen.</p>
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Fig. 2: Questions from the QWEB tool category “Transparency”

sites presenting dietary options for the treatment of an illness can be evaluated as well as those marketing the products and provide information on them. Some questions were formulated in more detail and for a large proportion interpretation guides were added to help in answering them. This is intended to ensure that different people evaluate an article in a similar way. The structure was also revised and divided into the three categories “Independence”, “Transparency” and “Content”.

### Award of points and weighting

For the 35 questions a maximum total of 60 points can be awarded. The higher the number of points achieved, the higher the quality of the article examined. Most questions are to be answered “yes” or “no”, for some questions the answer “partly” is also possible.

The categories were weighted differently based on their importance for the overall quality. Besides the category “Content”, to which 50% of the possible points are allocated, formal criteria for “Independence” and “Transparency” have a major impact on the overall quality of an article. Hence 25% of the possible points are allocated to each of the two indices “Independence” and “Transparency”. Because of the different number of questions

in the two categories, for “Independence” 3 points are allocated for each question and for “Transparency” there is 1 point allocated for each question. For better comparability between the variously weighted indices, instead of the absolute number of points the relative values (in %) were used. It is left to the users of the tool to decide whether they want to work with absolute or relative values.

### Imitation of laypersons’ search

An essential methodological approach is to imitate laypersons since it is web content to be examined which is typically found by them.

Searches should be carried out with the most frequently used non-scientific search engine Google. In the search query two terms are combined [9, 17]. Laypersons look mainly at quickly accessible search results, a maximum of 5 entries on the first page [9, 17, 18]. The inclusion criterion for the research is therefore to examine only websites that appear on the first page of search results.

Equally, only German language search terms and search results should be considered in the research. Articles which appear several times with various search term combinations are only evaluated once. Blog entries can be included in the research. Content from forums and social networks is excluded since these are too complex to evaluate using the tool.

## Results

As an illustration, the following presents an extract from the questions of the QWEB tool and the sample research:

### Index “Independence” (5 questions)

This category (♦ Figure 1) evaluates the financing and advertising of the website (if included). The aim is to find out if there is an online shop marketing any products mentioned in the article. A criterion for good quality is an explanation of advantages and disadvantages of an advertised product [19].

### Index “Transparency” (15 questions)

The index “Transparency” (♦ Figure 2) examines on the one hand details of the authors and their contact details and on the other hand whether sources, both academic and

non-academic (e.g. private blogs or popular science books), are given [19–21]. These should be at most 10 years old.

In order to be able to verify content, the free availability of publications is important. Since scientific knowledge is subject to constant change, websites should have been updated within the last four months [20, 21]. Finally, an evaluation is made whether the health websites have quality certifications. Such certifications check the principles for a trustworthy website presentation, but do not consider content-related criteria. The most common certifications are awarded by the Health on the Net Foundation (HON), the action forum for health information on the Internet *Aktionsforum Gesundheitsinformationssystem* (afgis) and the public health foundation *Stiftung Gesundheit* [22–24].

### Index Content Quality (15 questions)

In this section (♦ Figure 3) recommendations are checked for factual accuracy. The cited studies are examined, not only for reliability, but also for whether content is presented in the article with distorted evidence in comparison to the publication [10, 19, 23].

Besides the balanced content of an article, the writing style is also important, e.g. many websites often present a product as a “cure all” or formulate “conspiracy theories” [10, 21]. The explanation of any specialist terms and complex topics mentioned contributes to the clarity of an article [5, 19]. Texts are also examined for structure, succinctness and errors.

### How can nutrition specialists use the QWEB tool?

To demonstrate how the tool can be used, research about coconut oil and its effects on body weight was carried out as an example. Four search term pairs were selected, “coconut oil superfood,” “coconut oil healthy,” “coconut oil lose weight”, and “coconut oil weight reduction,” and these were entered into the search engine Google.at. The application of the stated inclusion and exclusion criteria produced 25 web articles.

For the evaluation in the period from 12.02.2018 to 17.03.2018 the website’s name and evaluation date were entered in the QWEB tool. Each article was read and processed again using the tool. Comments and interpretation guides for many questions supported compa-

<p>c) Aktualität (gesamt 3)</p> <p>16. Wurde die gesamte Webseite innerhalb der letzten 4 Monate aktualisiert? [2, 9]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN/INFORMATION NICHT VORHANDEN (0 P.)</p> <p>17. Ist das Erstellungsdatum des Einzelbeitrags angegeben? [1, 4, 5, 7, 9]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>Falls ein Beitrag erst vor kurzem erstellt und daher noch nicht aktualisiert wurde, ist JA anzukreuzen.</p> <p>18. Ist das Datum der letzten Aktualisierung des Beitrags ersichtlich? [1, 4, 5, 7]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA/BEITRAG AKTUELL (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>19. Trägt die Webseite ein Qualitätssiegel? (HON, Stiftung-Gesundheit, AFGIS etc.) [5, 6]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>→ wenn NEIN, weiter bei Frage 21</p> <p>20. Ist das Siegel (gemäß den jeweiligen Siegellinien) aktuell? [5]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (1 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>Punkte TRANSPARENZ:</p> <p>Wert in %:</p> <p>C) Inhalt (gesamt 30)</p> <p>a) Evidenz (gesamt 10)</p> <p>21. Sind mehr als die Hälfte der angegebenen Studien oder Informationen aussagekräftig? [2], [5], [7]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (2 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN/NICHT VORHANDEN (0 P.)</p> <p>Diese Frage dient zur Abgrenzung von Nr. 14. Nun wird abgeklärt, ob zitierte Studien bei ihrem Studiendesign wissenschaftlich vorgegangen sind und ob Rahmenbedingungen eingehalten wurden (Validität, <i>In vivo</i>- vs. <i>In vitro</i>-Studie, Verblindung, Probandenzahlen, Studiendauer etc.). AnwenderInnen des Tools müssen Wissen über Studienqualität mitbringen. Bei fachlichen Aussagen sollen AnwenderInnen in der Lage sein, die Inhalte mit z. B. Leitlinien oder Fachbüchern abzugleichen.</p> <p>22. Sind Angaben zum Evidenzgrad der verwendeten Quellen im Beitrag zu finden? [7]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (2 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN = TEILWEISE (1 P.)  <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>→ wenn NEIN, weiter bei Frage 24</p>	<p>23. Werden Evidenz und Inhalt im Beitrag verzerrt zum Originaltext dargestellt?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (2 P.)  <input type="checkbox"/> POSITIVERE DARSTELLUNG (0 P.)</p> <p>Dass Studien zitiert werden, deren Ergebnisse im Beitrag dann aber verfälscht wiedergegeben werden, ist häufig zu beobachten. Daher ist es wichtig, zumindest das Abstract, besser aber auch die Methodik und die Diskussion der Ergebnisse zumindest querzulesen.</p> <p>24. Entsprechen die im Beitrag abgegebenen Ernährungsempfehlungen den grundlegenden bekannten Leitlinien der Indikation? [7]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (2 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN = TEILWEISE (1 P.)  <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN/NICHT VORHANDEN (0 P.)</p> <p>AnwenderInnen sollten in den jeweiligen Leitlinien nachlesen, wenn ihnen die Inhalte nicht bekannt sind.</p> <p>25. Werden Fachgesellschaften oder Leitlinien als Referenz für Ernährungsempfehlungen genannt bzw. zitiert?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (2 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> TEILWEISE (1 P.)  <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>b) Ausgewogenheit (gesamt 10)</p> <p>26. Beleuchtet der Beitrag sowohl Vor- als auch Nachteile des Themas? [5, 7]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> JA (2 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (0 P.)</p> <p>27. Werden im Beitrag Inhalte als Tatsachen dargestellt, obwohl bekannte Studien darüber maximal eine mögliche Evidenz beschreiben? [5, 9]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NEIN (2 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> TEILWEISE (1 P.)  <input type="checkbox"/> JA (0 P.)</p> <p>Leider wird häufig besonders auf Webseiten mit kommerziellen Absichten die Wahrheit soweit verzerrt, dass sich Aussagen über das beworbene Produkt für Werbezwecke eignen, z. B. die antibiotische Wirkung von Kokosöl: Es gibt aber keine Studie die zeigt, dass laurinsäurereiches Kokosöl antibiotisch wirksam ist!</p> <p>28. Wird das Produkt (oder die Therapieempfehlung/die Verhaltensintervention etc.) im Beitrag als „Allheilmittel/ultimative Lösung“ etc. positioniert? [5, 9]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NEIN/KEIN Produkt/Intervention etc. vorhanden (2 P.) <input type="checkbox"/> JA (0 P.)</p> <p>Wenn in Beiträgen ein Produkt etc. „hochgelobt“ und als alternativs dargestellt wird oder aber nur Vorteile hervorgehoben werden o. ä., ist von einer niedrigen Glaubwürdigkeit der Webseite auszugehen.</p>
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Fig. 3: Questions from the QWEB tool category “Content”

table responses. Literature citations were followed up and skim read, provided they were available free of charge, and the methodology of cited studies was examined. In order to check the accuracy of technically relevant content, specialist literature was consulted if necessary.

The points awarded were entered into the evaluation sheet and a table. The total points for each index and the overall total were calculated and these results were converted into relative values each (in % of possible points per category and overall). Users can decide for themselves whether they also want to work with relative values for better comparability or use absolute points instead. For subsequent evaluation of the article the principle is as follows: if less than half the total number of points available is achieved then the article is unsuitable to provide adequate information on the topic. If an article achieves 75% of the points, it is conditionally suitable to provide nutritional information. The formal aspects and citation of sources ought to be critically examined again and nutritional recommendations compared with specialist literature [21]. Only an article which was awarded 75% of the possible points was seen as reliable since it largely complied with the carefully selected quality criteria.

♦ Table 1 shows the results of the 25 websites arranged by the over-

Examined website	Index "Independence"	Index "Transparency"	Index "Content"	Total Index
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
drgoerg.com	0	0	23.3	11.7
trainingsworld.com	0	36.7	20	19.2
kokosoel.com	10	33.3	26.7	24.2
kokosöl.info	30	0	33.3	24.2
wunderweib.de	40	13.3	23.3	25
zentrum-der-gesundheit.de	0	36.7	33.3	25.8
meinstoffwechsel.com	30	6.7	36.7	27.5
carrotsforclaire.de	20	33.3	30	28.3
kokos-nuss.de	60	0	30	30
instyle.de	80	6.7	20	31.7
kokosoel.eu	60	13.3	36.7	36.7
heilpraxis.net	80	33.3	30	43.3
foodspring.de	0	30	73.3	44.2
marathonfitness.de	20	46.7	56.7	45.0
eatsmarter.de	30	6.7	73.3	45.8
fitforfun.de	80	0	56.7	48.3
augsburger-allgemeine.de	80	13.3	53.3	50
swr3.de	60	33.3	56.7	51.7
Welt.de	10	33.3	83.3	52.5
focus.de	80	33.3	63.3	55
t-online.de	80	33.3	70	58.3
huffingtonpost.de	60	53.3	70	63.3
merkur.de	80	13.3	83.3	65
bento.de	80	56.7	66.7	67.5
kleinezeitung.at	100	46.7	86.7	80

Tab. 1: Website-based evaluation of QWEB tool application on the topic of coconut oil based on the three categories "Independence," "Transparency" and "Content" and the overall evaluation (relative values in %)  
 Evaluation in the period 12.02.2018–17.03.2018

	Index „Independence“	Index „Transparency“	Index „Content“	total
Median <sup>a</sup> (%)	60.0	13.3	53.3	44.2
IQR (%)	65	28.3	40	27.1
Minimum (%)	0	0	20	11.7
Maximum (%)	100	56,7	86,7	80

Tab. 2: Overall assessment (relative values in %) of the application of the QWEB tool on the topic of coconut oil based upon the three categories "Independence," "Transparency" and "Content"

<sup>a</sup> due to the lack of information on normal distributions of the variables the average trend of the median with the standard deviation IQR was selected for the descriptive statement.

IQR = interquartile range

all index, broken down into the three categories as well as the overall index.

As shown in ♦ Table 2 the median of the overall index is less than half of the possible points (44.2%). The worst rated article had an overall evaluation of 11.7%, the one with the highest score was evaluated at 80%. The highest median score was achieved in the category "Independence". In the category "Transparency" the result was less than 15%. In the indices "Independence" and "Transparency" there were several articles which did not score any points. For "Content" the score was at least 20%. Only in the category "Independence" articles were able to achieve the full score. In the

index "Transparency" the greatest weaknesses were to be found with results of a maximum of 56.7%. The article with the best quality of content achieved 86.7%.

## Discussion

In order to be able to specifically evaluate in the sample research with regards to the extent to which an article is recommendable as a source of reliable information on the effect of coconut oil for weight loss, the overall index was used. In this aspect 17 articles achieved less than 50% of the possible points and were thus unsuitable. In 2016 two of these websites ([www.zentrum-der-gesundheit.de](http://www.zentrum-der-gesundheit.de) and [www.kokosöl.info](http://www.kokosöl.info)) were even investigated by the consumer organization *Verbraucherzentrale Hamburg* and criticized for their concealed marketing interests and the circulation of information with no scientific support [25].

Eight articles only partly fulfilled the criteria, with less than 75% of the points and could only be conditionally recommended. Just one single article at 80% was able to achieve the critical threshold and is thus a suitable source of information.

The QWEB tool puts much emphasis on the different weighting of the categories. This is intended to emphasize the significance of the criteria for "Independence" and "Transparency", because content is only one of three measures of overall quality. A high-quality article suitable to impart health information should be written responsibly and fulfil essential quality characteristics. Persons without much background knowledge should be able to see where the information in a text comes from easily and should be able to trust that, they can get factual and competent answers on a health issue on the internet too.

When making search queries it should be remembered that results may be influenced by personal information stored from earlier searches. The influence of this stored data can be minimized by working in what is known as an "incognito" browser window or deleting the browser history or page-related cookies. In this sample research, conventional search queries and those in an "incognito" window produced almost identical results; all evaluated articles were to be found in both

search variants.

The results of this pilot study are not representative, further studies with this tool are recommendable in order to be able to make generally applicable statements.

## Conclusion

Although the evaluation of web articles using the QWEB tool requires more effort than simply "skimming" an article, experts benefit from the tool because it allows them to prove the theory that most websites found by laypersons are not suitable for nutritional education. The criteria are well conceived, the questioning in categories is systematic and structured.

The tool is not primarily suited to finding high-quality information but instead for identification based on the criteria of content likely to be found by laypersons as non-independent, non-transparent and/or qualitatively inferior due to the lack of sources or incorrect sources.

The sample research was also able to confirm that there is a lack of easily locatable, detailed information on nutritional topics by reputable specialist associations on the internet. Therefore, an urgent need for high-quality information on popular nutritional trends and myths is clearly identified.

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### Interessenkonflikt

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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