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Content Analysis of Backyard Conservation Websites

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Content Analysis of Backyard Conservation Websites

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Introduction

- Websites for backyard conservation programs are common, but we aren't sure how effective they are (or if they are effective).
- The goal was to create a content analysis of the persuasive techniques that communication theory suggests are effective.

Methods

- Quantitative content analysis
 - Two undergraduate coders
 - Calculated intercoder reliability before and during coding to ensure objective results
- Sample: list of 140+ US-based sites
- Determined how often sites had a clear target audience, offered participation signs, acknowledged difficulty participants might face, promoted hopeful themes, included tips for participants, and other factors.

Research Question

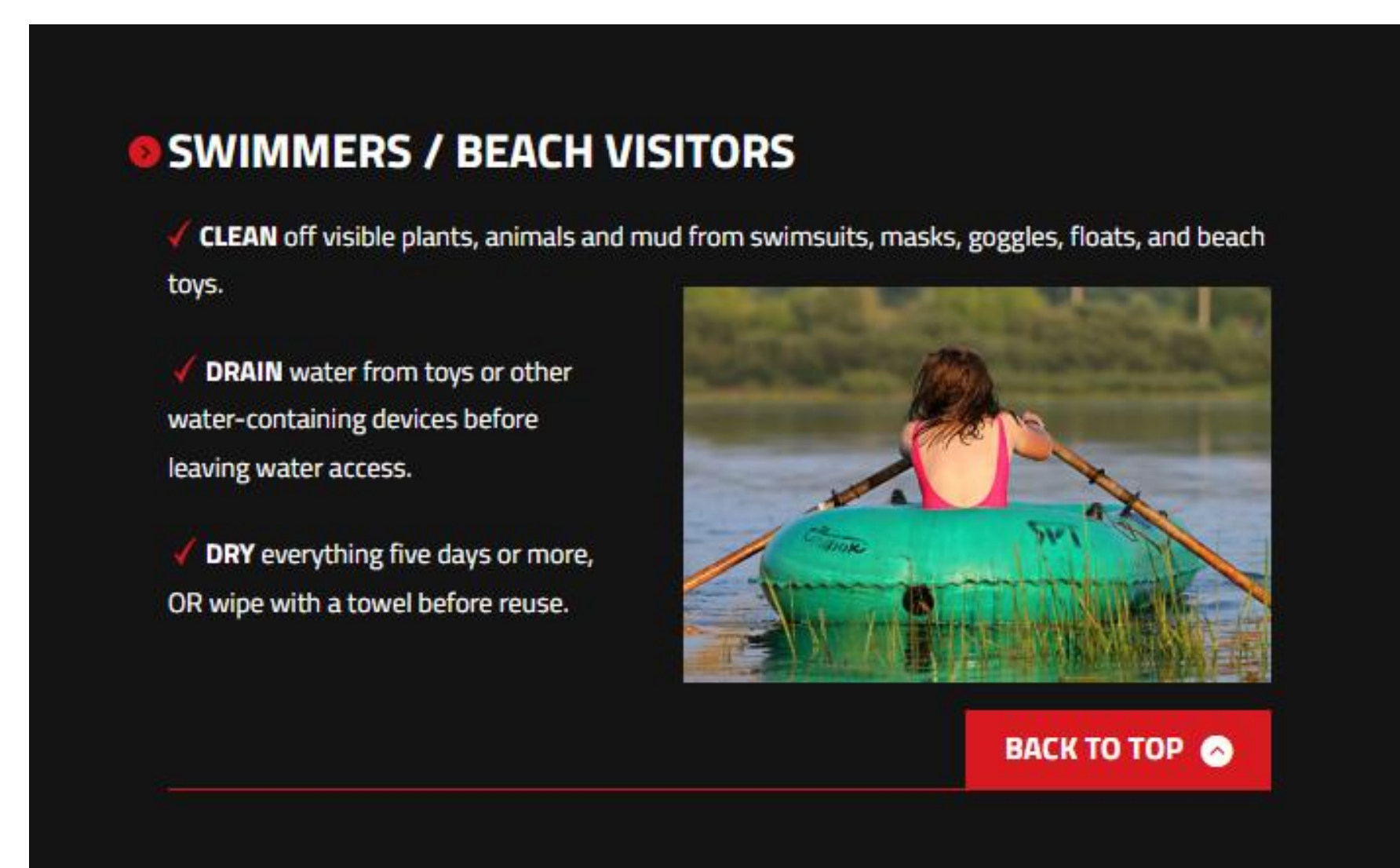
- What persuasive appeals or techniques are used in backyard conservation sites?



Participation Sign
Source: Illinois Audubon Society

You can make a difference whether you have a small backyard, patio planters, a school yard, a community park, or a 20-acre farm.

Hopeful theme
Source: Wyoming Wildlife Federation



Tips for swimmers/beach visitors to “stop aquatic hitchhikers” (invasive species)
Source: Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers

Results

- More than one-third (34.7%) of sites did not have a specific audience.
- 68.9% of sites offered participation signs to share the program with others
- Less than 1 in 10 (8.7%) sites acknowledged challenges/difficulties participants might face in the program
- 39.1% of sites contained themes of hope or hopefulness for participants
- Almost 60% of sites contained conservation tips for participants

Conclusions

- An effective message needs a clear target audience. Many sites didn't have this.
- The goal is to expand programs and lawn practices beyond participants. Lawn signs promote this.
- Many sites are created by non-professionals or volunteers without the inclusion of communication theory.
- As we deal with environmental issues, it is important to effectively persuade people to participate in environmentally-friendly behaviors.