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Generation Z's Presence Online:
A Study on How Ryanair Uses Gen Z's
Humor on Social Media to Increase Brand
Recognition

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z or Gen Z, born around 1996-2012, is the demographic cohort that succeeds Millennials or Generation Y. They are also known as the digital natives; this is due to their most defining characteristic being the presence of technology during their lives, especially during their childhoods. Gen Z spends a great percentage of their time on social media and, since they are the newest generation to wield purchasing power and cultural capital, knowing how to properly target them on their channels becomes a priority. Ryanair is a company that made a breakthrough in this field; it has had an important role in shaping the way brands are starting to approach Gen Z. For this reason, this paper will use this brand's case to properly analyze the importance of online presence for brand recognition, taking into consideration the engagement rate on a series of posts. The data from this example is used to explain how to properly target the generation that currently rules over social media.

Keywords: generation Z, strategic communication, social media, interactive communication, Ryanair.

RESUMEN

La generación Z, nacida alrededor de 1996-2012, es el grupo demográfico que sucede a los Millennials o generación Y. También se les conoce como los 'nativos digitales'; esto se debe a que su característica más definitoria es la presencia de la tecnología durante sus vidas, en especial durante su infancia. La generación Z pasa un gran porcentaje de su tiempo en las redes sociales y, dado que son la generación más nueva en ejercer poder adquisitivo y capital cultural, saber cómo acercarse a ellos se convierte en una prioridad. Ryanair es una empresa que hizo un gran avance en este campo; ha tenido un papel importante en la forma en que las marcas se acercan a este grupo de gente. Por esta razón, este estudio utilizará el caso de Ryanair para analizar la importancia de la presencia en línea para un mejor reconocimiento de marca. Todo esto se hace teniendo en cuenta el nivel de interactividad que se ha conseguido en varias publicaciones de dicha empresa. Los datos de este caso se usan para definir cómo las empresas pueden dirigirse a la generación que actualmente gobierna en las redes sociales.

Palabras clave: generación Z, comunicación estratégica, redes sociales, comunicación interactive, Ryanair.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Generation Z (Gen Z), also known as the digital natives, is the demographic cohort that succeeds Millennials or Generation Y. Researchers have argued as to the exact years to which Generation Z belongs to; general consensus indicates that people born between 1996 to around 2010 are Gen Zers –this would be the most used term to refer to them. Unlike other generations, a defining quality for Gen Z is its diversity. In fact, the number of biracial and multiracial children represents one of the segments that has been rapidly growing the most in the United States of America (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2011).

A generation is defined by historical events and related phenomena that create a distinct generational gap; in other words, according to Parry and Urwin (2011), for a generation to be identified as such, there needs to be some sort of proximity to important events of cultural phenomenon that took place. Studies show that Millennials find that 9/11 is a historical event that has marked a milestone in their lives. In the case of Gen Z, researchers are still trying to figure out what exactly is the most relevant event for this group of people. Some argue that the growing income gap and shrinking middle class has proved to be one of Gen Z's identificatory moments. In fact, financial hardships in the homes of many Generation Z youth probably led them to be conscious of the true meaning of money (Turner, 2015). Many argue that it was actually COVID-19 and the quarantine that followed in most countries in the world that shaped Generation Z's lives as it affected them in a particular way that did not to other generations.

However, as the name 'digital natives' may imply, probably the most defining characteristic of Gen Z is the presence of technology during their lives, especially during their childhoods. When the Internet made information widely accessible, the way people communicated was forever altered. Smartphones, tablets, computers, etc. have allowed people to access everything at any given time, thus becoming a hub of all sorts of entertainment. In a fairly recent study, the Pew Research Center (Vogels, Gelles-Watnick, & Massarat, 2022) announced that about 95% of American teenagers aged 13-17 have access to smartphones. Not surprisingly, growing up with these resources made Generation Z be dubbed as 'addicted' to their phones, which, in turn, has made them some kind of monarchs of social media. In fact, a survey by Morning Consult (Briggs, 2022) disclosed that 54% of Gen Z spends around 4 hours daily on social media.

All of this has made social media's importance to rise, as they have exponentially grown in number over the course of only around two decades. Nowadays, people have learnt to social media to make connections and share information with the rest of the world. Social media presents many advantages: from allowing people to stay in contact with their loved ones, to allowing companies to launch their projects and work to a much bigger audience, which could potentially increase sales and brand recognition as a whole by interacting with their public.

Interactive communication in social media refers to how users behave towards other people on a social media network. This can take many forms, but most platforms share the following features to interact with their digital content: liking/disliking, commenting, saving, etc. In this context, on the one hand, social media allows brands to listen and to speak to their audience. On the other hand, consumers can express their own opinions or feelings about the brand and what is posted to its accounts (Kim, Chung, & Fiore, 2023). Therefore, companies are questioning the best strategic path for their brands to follow on the Internet.

Some brands have achieved exceptional success, and one that has become an example to follow is Ryanair. In 2021, the low-budget European airline, known for its bad reputation due to bad customer reviews, made a change to its social media strategy that would determine its prospects for the future. Ryanair began by asking itself how it could possibly reach and engage its younger audience. Lily Raferty –Ryanair's former Social Media Creator– came up with a simple winner strategy: to keep up with popular trends and make them on brand with the company, while using Gen Z humor to connect with their young audience (Raferty, 2021). Thus, Ryanair became very active on Tik Tok, the app that rose in popularity especially among Generation Z during the quarantine of 2020.

Ryanair not only proved that a brand does not need to invest a big budget to achieve success on social media, but also managed to endure one of the most challenging apps in the market at the moment. As of the first half of 2023, their account on this platform has amassed over 2 million followers. Michael Corcoran –Ryanair's current Head of Social– credits this success to their decision to experiment early on with a newer audience with great potential: Gen Z (Thompson, 2021). "Having a quite different approach from most brands within the industry, Ryanair's boldness, originality, and ingenuity were greatly appreciated by Tik Tok's user base" (Cucu, 2022, para. 12).

1. Purpose and reason for research

Thus begins the debate of how Ryanair did it and how can others to learn from it. The answer may seem simple at first, however, dealing with Generation Z may prove to be more difficult than many companies expect. Although, as mentioned previously, Gen Z is more diverse than previous generations, being online for extended periods of time and connected with the entire world has allowed this faction of society to share a more unified sense of humor, which, as expected, heavily relies on generational slang. In this manner, companies must know how to handle them and should always keep in mind that Gen Z is a very consolidated group, and that angering a minority may as well bring a storm of criticism –what is more commonly known as ‘cancel culture’.

It is for this reason that studying how to properly target Gen Z on social media –as it is their main form of communication– should be a priority for companies that wish to achieve such kind of success. It becomes especially important when considering that Generation Z is now coming of age, which means that they are the newest generation to wield purchasing power and cultural capital. Seeing as Ryanair has had an important role in shaping the way companies are starting to approach Gen Z, this paper will use this brand’s case to properly analyze the importance of being present online and how to properly target the generation that currently rules over social media.

2. Structure and Objectives

This paper will first tackle some topics that are essential for the full comprehension of the topic before the analysis. The first part of the theoretical framework talks about Generation Z, their concerns, their humor, and their slang –among other things– to showcase their importance. Afterwards, the concept of what Public Relations (PR) is, as well as what strategic communication and also brand recognition have to do with PR will be tackled. Next, the paper will follow by presenting different forms of communication in social media. The last part of the theoretical framework has to do with interactive communication in social media; for this, some of the most popular platforms have been chosen, those are: Tik Tok, Instagram, and Twitter.

The paper also provides a brief overview of what the state of the question in research looks like as of the first half of 2023. In the analysis, this paper first tackles Ryanair's strategy on Tik Tok, Instagram, and Twitter and goes over the how and the why success of such magnitude was achieved; it also provides some numerical information about the engagement rate. Lastly, in the analysis, this paper exhibits learning opportunities that can help a brand grow in terms of brand recognition, while taking into consideration that not all brands stand on the same ground and have different limits.

Firstly, this paper offers an in-depth framework of essential concepts related to the topic; a variety of documents –journals, reports, websites, etc.– were consulted, accessed, and referenced. These documents were mostly accessed through Google Scholar, Research Gate, Academia, and JSTOR. In the State of the Question in Research section, the paper goes more in depth into the documents that helped the most to the completion of the analysis. Secondly, the analysis was carried out mostly by examining Ryanair's accounts on three social media networks (Tik Tok, Instagram, and Twitter), using the engagement rate formula to calculate tangible success. This paper also covers Michael Corcoran's –Ryanair's Head of Social– advice on how to achieve success on social media as a brand, as well as other aspects that should be considered.

This paper aims to provide insight into how Ryanair in particular is targeting Gen Z, by examining its presence on three social media. All of the data obtained from the analysis will aim to prove how this company's strategy on social media is working. Moreover, this research is done to provide a starting point for companies that want to target Generation Z. Nevertheless, the length of the study is limited by its nature –an undergraduate final degree project–, which is why this line of research is left open to further investigation.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section of the paper will focus on explaining all the important topics that are important to fully understand for the analysis. It will begin by tackling the concept of Generation Z and other topics related to this group of people. Afterwards, it will offer a definition of Public Relations (PR) and the role that strategic communication and brand recognition play within it. Lastly, the different types of communication on social media, as well as the interactivity of them will be explained in depth.

1. The online generation: Generation Z

Studying generations is not an exact science and, for this reason, marking generational cutoff points may not be completely accurate. However, most researchers tend to agree that Generation Z starts in 1997 and ends around 2007-2012. Since some of Generation Z is still young, it is not possible to set an endpoint. However, it has become a trend to mark a new generation every fifteen years; for instance, Millennials –also known as ‘Generation Y’ (not common)– (1981-1996), Generation X (1965-1980), etc. This is another reason why researchers still disagree on the dates. “We believe 1996 is a meaningful cutoff between Millennials and Gen Z for a number of reasons, including key political, economic and social factors that define the Millennial generation’s formative years” (Dimock, 2019, p. 3). This paper will also refer to Generation Z as ‘Gen Z’.

A generation is defined by historical events and related phenomena that create a distinct generational gap; in other words, according to Parry and Urwin (2011), for a generation to be identified as such, there needs to be some sort of proximity to important events of cultural phenomenon that took place. To give an example, in the case of Millennials, the 9/11 terrorist attack on the twin towers of New York City is often talked about as a representative moment of historical significance for that generation because a vast majority of them were old enough to understand what was happening.

The growing income gap and shrinking middle class has proved to be one of Gen Z’s identificatory moments. “The financial hardships in the homes of many Generation Z youth might have led them to be highly conscious of the importance of money, and so saving might be of high importance to them” (Turner, 2015, p. 104).

However, the most defining characteristic of Gen Z is the presence of technology during their lives, especially during their childhoods. Thanks to the Internet, information and resources became widely accessible and this has, therefore, unequivocally altered the way people communicate, conduct business, etc. Of particular importance is the presence of this technology in the classroom, which enhance the learning experiences.

Smartphones, tablets, computers, etc. have allowed people to access everything at any given time, thus becoming a hub of all sorts of entertainment. For this reason, Gen Z being attached to devices has been a subject of debate for some time and research suggests that, in many cases, this attachment has long-term negative effects on users.

Gen Z is defined to be especially diverse, seeing as the number of biracial and multiracial children represents one of the segments that has been rapidly growing the most in the United States of America (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2011). Moreover, Gen Z is characterized to be more accepting of other people's struggles and differences, that is why it has allowed the LGBTQ community to grow outside of their secrecy. This is due to Gen Zers being more exposed to a plethora of cultural perspectives.

Gen Z is also referred to as digital natives, I-generation and sometimes net-gen. They have acquired these names because they are the generation born in an era already ruled by technology. Although less popular, the word 'zoomer' is sometimes used to refer to Gen Z, as it is easier to pronounce. However, 'zoomer' used to refer to an especially active baby boomer. Taking the latter argument into consideration, in order to not make things more confusing, people have taken to use 'Gen Z'. Moreover, Gen Z itself has already popularized the name and it would be impractical to start using 'zoomer' more (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

1.1. Generation Z on Social Media

Being called digital natives, it is easy to imagine that Gen Z has an important presence on social media. Madden (Madden, 2019) wrote a book, *Hello, Gen Z*, in which she highlighted the primary reasons why Gen Z use social media; to do this, there was a study carried out with over 100 members of Gen Z about their thoughts on technology.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is a term “coined to describe Gen Z’s approach to life in general, and in particular as a major factor that drives so much of their online behavior, use of technology and consumption of social media” (Madden, 2020, para. 4). Gen Z feel a ‘pressing need’ to know what is and what is not a trend anymore, to have the latest technology in the market, to know what is going on in the world. However, new content and products are generated on a daily basis and it is becoming increasingly harder to track everything. “FOMO [is related to a number of] negative outcomes, including poor mood, decreased sense of life satisfaction, and dysregulated sleep” (Adams, Murdock, Daly-Cano, & Rose, 2020, p. 8). In this manner, individuals tend to stay constantly connected, and, by doing so, they are changing the way the world communicates because they are able to continue in person conversation online and vice versa; it is a constant flow of information.

“The audience, behind the barrier of a screen, are not required to respond in a way that would be appropriate and expected in a face-to-face scenario” (Madden, 2020, para. 11). Social media has allowed society to find avoid boredom and find some sort of entertainment on spending time online. According to Sigman and Matthes (Sigman & Matthes, 2012), the average young European spends four years of 24-hour days in front of a screen. Moreover, it is important to remember that anonymity is always attractive, and the Internet provides it; in other words, it is the act of maintaining some form of privacy while having fun is appealing to Gen Z. For this reason, social media like Twitter, Tumblr, and Reddit are so popular: they allow the user to express their opinion under a potentially fake persona. Of course, this is an issue that especially worries the parents of Gen Z and makes them fear for their child’s safety.

1.2. The importance of social issues to Generation Z

As it was previously stated, Gen Z was born to a world that was already struggling in many fronts: climate change, social inequalities, etc. In light of a worrying global situation, due to Gen Z being the most well-educated generation yet, zoomers have developed more liberal attitudes in order to fight these issues.

A Pew Research Center report has highlighted some points. For instance, they stated that, as of 2018 in the United States of America, over 70% of Gen Z agrees that the government should work harder to solve problems. In addition, “majorities among Gen Z [...] say increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. is a good thing for society [...] and they’re

more likely to have a positive view of interracial and same-sex marriage than their older counterparts” (Parker, Graf, & Igielnik, 2019, para. 7). In fact, only 15% of Gen Zers think that same-sex couples should not marry. Furthermore, 35% of Gen Z admitted to knowing someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns, the highest percentage of all current living generations.

Moreover, over 50% of the American Gen Z believe that climate change is worsening due to human activity; it should also be mentioned that this study carried out by Pew Research Center does also talk about other generations and, according to their data, a slightly higher percentage of Millennials believe that humans are at fault of climate change. Gen Zers and Millennials also share a similar percentage in their views on race with over 60% of them agreeing that certain communities are treated unfairly.

In general, Gen Z and Millennials do not show significant differences in their views of the world. Looking at data like the previously mentioned report, it is clear that with every new generation, more liberal attitudes start to become increasingly evident. Moreover, thanks to social media, users are able to express their opinions online at any given time, and Gen Z makes the most of it. Gen Zers, as well as Millennials to some extent, are sometimes called the ‘snowflake generations.’ This is a group of people younger than thirty years old, who are viewed as being oversensitive and, therefore, ‘extremely’ prone to taking offence and being less resilient when faced with opposing opinions; sometimes, it can also mean ‘mob mentality.’ This term is used against people who actively fight against homophobia, racism, gender inequality, global warming, etc. A table about Generation Z’s slang and humor can be found in the annex.

1.2.1. Cancel culture

The term ‘mob mentality’ is often used in contexts in which someone raises their voice against something or someone. In turn, people, who may or may not have any knowledge of the situation, take to hating said thing, person, etc.

Cancel culture is a subject of controversy since it brings a number of problems into the picture. For instance, when someone is cancelled, they will face an extreme amount of backlash: from simple memes being made about the topic, to intense cyberbullying and, sometimes, death threats. However, many people argue that it is not bad if extremes are not reached because it

means that someone has a chance of learning what is right and what is wrong so social change can be made.

Nevertheless, cancel culture has made many people fall into depressive episodes and cases of suicide are far and wide. It is very present online wherever Gen Z is concerned and, instead of being used to support social issues, people are getting cancelled because they said they do not like a celebrity, a book, etc. Cancel culture has started to become the norm when a group of people disagrees with someone's statement.

It must be said that many are against all of this and advocate for teaching instead of outright bullying and hating. One of their arguments is that punishing people and sending them death threats to change their opinion will not help the social at cause, but, rather, it will hinder it. This is because the person subject to this will either be extremely scared, which in of itself is not a way to learn and it is just creating trauma related to a topic, or angry. The latter usually leads to said person building a community of people who agree with their point of view and who will stand up for them and fight those who were canceling them, thus creating a cycle of hatred and negativity.

1.3. Generation Z's humor

Gen Z's humor is heavily influenced by the current world situation. This is why it uses irony and/or sarcasm and relies to an extent on self-deprecating jokes (e.g. topics such as finding the will to live or wanting to die), as well as on trauma. Gen Z explains this by stating that it is easier to make fun of what is wrong.

Furthermore, Gen Z humor started out from Millennial humor; this is probably a reason why, as previously stated, it can seem dark as opposed to other kinds of humor. However, one thing that sets Gen Zers apart from Millennials is that the formers go as far as considering the latter to be 'cringey' and serious. In this way, Gen Z humor has become also non-sensical and has strayed by going to certain extremes. Some examples of this include: 'deep-fried' memes, bass-booster videos, etc.

The meme is a form of humor that Gen Z, as well as Millennials, uses. Usually, it consists of some sort of digital content that stems from something relatable, trendy, and/or funny.

Memes are used as a way to express oneself and can take many forms. Nowadays, reactions photos, videos, music, etc. are used as memes. “Memes serve a significant function as they are culturally constitutive of discursive communities” (Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies, 2021, p. 77).

Furthermore, slang and language play an important role in how memes are made. Gen Z’s slang in English heavily relies on other languages, dialects, and ways of speaking. One that must be specially mentioned is African American Vernacular English (AAVE). There has been a great amount of controversy regarding this topic because many Gen Zers are claiming AAVE vocabulary as Gen Z slang on social media.

AAVE began to be used outside the Black community to show a fierce and ‘sassy’ image: a study about the usage of AAVE in social media demonstrates that, in fact, AAVE signals the development of a very specific persona, especially within the gay men community (Ilbury, 2019). This is something that many black people are standing up against. However, the general consensus is that it is okay to use words from AAVE, as long as they are not appropriated. Ushiyama et al. (Ushiyama, Oganessian, Boehm, Lee, & Vaughn, 2021, para. 23) say that they want to remind their readers that “regardless of humor, there are real world consequences to this type of usage.”

2. Public relations

This paper requires an in-depth definition of what Public Relations is, as well as what it does, and how it is often viewed by the general population. Therefore, this first section’s aim will tackle this.

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defines Public Relations as a form of strategic communication that focuses on building a relationship between organizations and their publics. It is not possible to establish an accurate date of when PR truly began, since it is a form of communication that has been used for some time already. However, the formal and proper practice of PR started in the 20th century. “At its core, Public Relations is about influencing, engaging and building a relationship with key stakeholders across numerous platforms in order to shape and frame the public perception of an organization” (PRSA, n.d., para. 4).

Public Relations should not be confused with advertising; the latter is a marketing activity that focuses on selling a certain product or service to a specific target audience. Advertising does not have to be about selling, it can simply be about influencing the target audience to do something. According to many experts, advertising is one of the oldest forms of marketing as it is known today. O’Barr points out that, “long before America was colonized, commerce flourished in the Old World where various methods were used to promote trade” (O’Barr, 2010, para. 1). From notice boards to free samples on the streets, advertising has been present ever since the human race had something to trade with and, now that technology has come so far, advertising is all the more innovative and creative.

In this manner, Public Relations refers to the relationship that has to be built with all kinds of stakeholders, while advertising is about influencing and raising awareness so specific target audiences –it is usually a certain group of external stakeholders– want to take action. Both PR and advertising are stereotyped as marketing practices that ‘lie’ to potential customers in order to earn money. The main argument criticizes the fact that they create some form of false needs, which encourages people to buy. However, many rebut it by saying that ‘false needs’ are a Marxist concept¹, and, in fact, there are many psychological theories that suggest that instead of manipulating others, what PR and advertising do is give an opportunity that allows customers to care for their true needs and discover their real psyche.

Having said this, the question of how businesses can harness the power of public relations to increase brand recognition is risen. This is mostly done with a good strategic communication plan.

2.1. Strategic Communication

Strategic communication is a key factor within public relations to achieve a good level of brand recognition. A brand communication strategy is a plan that businesses develop in order to strengthen their branding efforts. It outlines the best ways to reach the target audience by sharing the brand’s identity (D’Angelo, 2022).

¹ False needs are created through advertising and capitalism; this is how they are imposed upon the individual.

To create an appropriate strategy, businesses must take into consideration the following drivers and provide an answer to all the questions (ASP Team, 2020):

- Financial objectives:
 - Shareholder value: how can a business increase it?
 - Growth: how can a business grow in terms of innovation, quantity of jobs, salaries, etc.?
- Customer objectives:
 - Brand: how can a business create brand recognition and awareness?
 - Customer focus: what is the target audience of a business?
- Product/Service objectives:
 - Value: what is the perceived value of the product/service that a business offers?
 - Product/Service: is the product/service innovative? Will it fulfil the needs of the target audience? How can it be improved?
 - Market and threats: who are the competitors? How can be a business position itself above them?
- Internal objectives:
 - People: are all stakeholders happy? What are their needs? What and how will they communicate to the outside world?
 - Social/Environmental: is the business driven by social/environmental issues? In what way?

A company should have an answer to all of these questions before it starts to think about developing a strategic communication plan that will contribute to the brand recognition.

2.2. Brand Recognition

Brand recognition does not equal brand awareness. The latter would be the previous step to brand recognition, as the public first needs to be aware of the existence of a brand in order to be able to recognize it in future instances. Brand awareness is imperative to achieve brand recognition. For this, businesses need to have a good understanding of who their target audience is and how to communicate with them. This, along knowing who the competitors are

and consistency through all forms of communication are key factors in turning brand awareness into brand recognition (Thimothy, 2020).

Brand recognition refers to how quickly a consumer is able to recognize, as well as discriminate, a brand, when said person is exposed to a logo, slogan, etc. (Keller, 1993). This concept is not to be confused with brand recall; although both are intertwined, brand recall refers to the moment when a consumer is able to recall the existence of a brand through pre-existing knowledge or experience (Bagozzi & Sailk, 1983). According to Anderson and Bower (1972), brand recognition is a sub process of brand recall.

According to Goldstein and Gigerenzer (2002), when in a situation where people have to make a decision between two similar things, they tend to choose the one which is the most familiar to them. This is the main reason why brand recognition is so important; brand recognition is one of the most important factors that influence a purchase decision.

In this manner, businesses have learnt that brand recognition can be increased through a good strategic communication plan on social media.

3. Social media communications

Social media networks are a form of communication based on the internet. They are platforms that essentially allow users to converse, share information, and create content. Social media includes: blogs (corporate or personal), instant messaging through the internet, social networking sites, wikis, etc.

Nowadays, billions of people use social media to make connections and share information with the rest of the world. On a personal level, social media allows people to stay in contact with their family and friends. However, on a more professional level, social media allows companies to broadcast their work, projects, and much more to the entire world, this can increase sales and overall brand recognition.

The importance of social media keeps growing as the years go by, this is a fact sustained by the study of how Gen Z –the newest generation to wield purchasing power and cultural capital– behaves on the internet. A survey by Morning Consult (Briggs, 2022) says that 54% of Gen Z spends around 4 hours daily on social media, and almost 2 every 5 people spend even

more than that. This survey also shows that YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok, and Snapchat are Gen Z’s most used social media. Moreover, according to a recent survey carried out by Pew Research Center (Vogels, Gelles-Watnick, & Massarat, 2022), about 95% of American teenagers aged 13-17 have access to smartphones, which, in turn, allows them to be connected to the internet and social media. In fact, 46% of them says they use the internet ‘almost constantly’ and 54% of them say it would be hard to give up social media. Furthermore, about one-in-five teens visit and/or use YouTube constantly.

It is due to this context that it is important to study how to properly target Gen Z on social media, as it is their main form of communication and, therefore, the reason why companies should be present on a series of platforms depending on the industry to which they are a part of. For this reason, this point will focus on understanding the different models of social media communications to, then, be able to provide an in-depth analysis of how Gen Z behaves on certain platforms. Social media communications models include: one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many. Below is a table that briefly summarizes what each model encompasses.

	Asynchronous	Synchronous
One-to-one	E-mail, text message	Voice, instant messenger
One-to-many	Book, newspaper, audio and video recording, Web 1.0 / webpage, download	Broadcast radio and television
Many-to-many	Web 2.0 / wiki, blog, social network site	Online chatroom

Table 1. Six communicative practices. Source: Jensen & Helles (2017)

3.1. One-to-one

The one-to-one model –also known as communicative practice– refers to interpersonal communication, in other words, the communication that takes place between two individuals. It can be interactive (two-way) or not (one-way). For instance, one-to-one can be a text message, a call, etc. to a singular person. “Communication in one-to-one situations can be most beneficial when both individuals are at ease and can take turns talking and listening” (VerbalHub, n.d., para. 3). One-to-one communication is referred to as the most personalized among all the models.

This type of communication flows from a sender to a receiver and vice versa. The receiver can be someone the sender knows or does not know personally. If it is the latter, it is always important to create a positive atmosphere before delivering any sort of information. One-to-one communication tends to have 3 steps: greeting, information exchange, and goodbye. Firstly, one must greet the other in a proper manner according to the relationship and the atmosphere; it may require introducing oneself. Secondly comes the exchange of information, this step tends to be smoother when the communication is being carried out through oral means, for instance, a call or a face-to-face conversation. Lastly, the way to say goodbye will depend on the circumstance as well as the relationship with the other.

3.2. One-to-many

One-to-many is a model typically found in ‘old’ media. However, this does not mean that it is not used anymore. For instance, print, radio, and television are all forms of one-to-many. “In this type of communication, a single source provides information to multiple receivers such as a commercial on a nationwide (or local) news broadcast, a newspaper article, or a book just to name a few examples” (IMRE UK, 2018, para. 2). This type of communication does not tend to be interactive; it is usually a one-way communication process.

This model involves a specific person broadcasting a message to a group of people; it has been widely associated with how leaders communicate with their communities. Furthermore, in the one-to-many model, the sender has many receivers, however, feedback is not part of it. For this message to be effective, one must know how to target the specific audience that is going to be listening, in order to shape the message to their own wants and needs.

3.3. Many-to-many

Many-to-many is a model in which information is generated from multiple sources and also received by multiple sources. It is important to remember that in this model, there is no core singular source. This type of communicative practice is usually found in internet-based forms of communication, such as social media platforms (IMRE UK, 2018). An example of the many-to-many model would be a number of users sharing their opinions about a certain topic (trending or not), which are, in turn, received by everyone and vice versa.

The many-to-many model is the hardest to control from a business standpoint, as it involves a group of people having an interactive discussion (two-way) about a certain topic. Companies will find it challenging to guide said discussion as it will be constantly and rapidly changing depending on who is participating and what is being said.

It must be mentioned that if a company chooses to listen to the discussion and have take-aways from it, it will be considered as a many-to-one form of communication. The many-to-one model is not usually considered to be one of the main communicative practices, however, it is one that has been steadily appearing in business as industries have progressed to now listen to its related communities.

4. Interactive Communication and Engagement

“Effective Interactive Communication is transmitting and receiving information clearly and communicating actively with others in a manner that is effective and consistent with the organizational objectives” (Government of Canada, 2016, para. 1). This type of communication is one in which there is a focus on the way a message is transmitted and received between two or more people; this is always a two-way process.

Interactive communication has existed since the dawn of time, and it has been present not only in human history, but also in the way animals communicate with each other. Although human communication is far more complex and comprises many diverse cultural elements, animals are sociable beings and, therefore, need to be in contact with their own kin.

Human communication has developed from imperfect speech to adapt to society’s interests and needs and encompasses all the complexities of today’s world. Interactive communication is present in almost all forms of communication, it being especially important in verbal communication (spoken and written).

According to Li and Li (2014), interactivity can be studied from a functional approach, which focuses on how interactivity can be influenced by factors such as:

- How fast can content be manipulated?
- In what ways can content be manipulated?
- What level of control does a business have in a mediated environment (mapping)?

Interactivity can also be studied from a contingency approach, which describes three levels of interactivity:

- Two-way communication/non-interactivity: the flow of communication.
- Reactive: a message that indirectly addresses a previous message.
- Interactive: a message that directly addresses a previous message.

The internet and especially social media platforms have taken interactive communication to the next level, as they allow a person to interact with the entirety of the world's internet users. In the following points, this paper will look at three specific social media platforms –Instagram, Tik Tok, and Twitter– to understand how some of the most important social media of today allows users to interact with each other.

4.1. Interactive communication on social media

Most social media shares similar features: posting and creating content, as well as interacting with other content. In fact, social media, as the name says, is meant to be 'social'; in other words, social media is another way for people to socialize without leaving the comfort of their homes.

Interactive communication in social media refers to how users behave towards other people on a specific platform. This can include liking/disliking, commenting, saving, etc. Interaction on social media has two main features: two-way communication and user control (Sreejesh, Paul, Strong, & Pius, 2020). First, two-way communication allows reciprocal conversation between or among users in real-time (Sreejesh, Paul, Strong, & Pius, 2020). On the one hand, social media allows brands to listen and speak to their audience. On the other hand, consumers can express their own opinions or feelings about the brand and what it decides to post (Kim, Chung, & Fiore, 2023). Second, user control allows consumers to be selective about the information they acquire and share through diverse actions (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005).

Interactivity serves to measure the engagement rate. This can track how the audience is involved with the content of a company; it is a metric that helps analyze the efficacy of brand campaigns (Sprout Social, n.d.). The engagement rate is usually calculated with the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{total of interactions (retweets + quoted tweets + likes + comments + bookmarks)} \times 100}{\text{views or total of followers}}$$

= *Engagement Rate %*

Equation 1. Source: López Navarrete, Cabrera Méndez, Díez Somavilla, & Calduch Losa (2021)

The engagement rate helps understand how successful a strategy on social media is, as it allows the company to know what is working and what is not. Each social media platform has different forms of interaction, which is why the percentage of a good engagement rate varies depending on the amount of interactivity.

Seeing as each social media network offers different ways to interact with content within the platform, as well as different public metrics, the engagement rate may not always be accurate when calculated without data that tends to be private to each company.

This paper will now look at what interactive communication is like in some of the most popular platforms: Instagram, Tik Tok, and Twitter. It must be noted that, although Twitter is not among the top 3 most used social media by Generation Z (see point 2 on Social Media), it is going to be studied in this paper, seeing as Twitter is about microblogging and users broadcast their opinion to everyone and anyone –prime example of one-to-many communication.

4.1.1. Instagram

Instagram is an online social network that allows users to share photos and videos; specific content can be found through the use of hashtags (#). “Instagram is more personal compared to other social networks. People tend to share more of their privacy and home” (Ric & Benazić, 2022, p. 5205).

Instagram is a visually-oriented platform, where users –individuals, organizations, etc.– have their own profile to which they can upload photos, videos, reels –reels are short videos, almost always in vertical form–, stories, etc. Other users can interact by following other profiles or with others’ content by liking, commenting, saving, reposting on their own stories or sending it to others. Moreover, Instagram stories feature several interactive functions:

allowing users to take a quiz, participate in polls, ask questions, etc. (Kim, Chung, & Fiore, 2023).

As for content created by businesses, Instagram provides them with various ad formats to share information about their products through visually attractive content to attract their attention (Kim, Chung, & Fiore, 2023).

The following is the formula that is used in most cases to calculate the engagement rate of Instagram posts:

$$\frac{(\text{total of interactions (likes + comments + saves)}) \times 100}{\text{views or total of followers}} = \text{Engagement Rate \%}$$

Equation 2.

In the case of Instagram, the public can only use the total of followers, this is because the number of views is private to the company. It would be more accurate to calculate the engagement rate with the number of views or accounts reached.

4.1.2. Tik Tok

Tik Tok is a fairly new mobile-app, which rose in popularity after the global pandemic of COVID-19 and the quarantine that was established in most countries in the world. Tik Tok became extremely successful for its short-term and high-traffic content, as well as for the speed of the network (Yan & Zhang, 2019). Much like Instagram, content on Tik Tok can be found through the use of hashtags (#). However, Tik Tok also allows users to look for content through the music or filter that was used on a video. Recently, a new intelligent feature was added: the app itself creates a search bar for each video, so users can easily look for similar content.

Similarly to Instagram, users on Tik Tok create their own profile and interact with others content by liking, commenting, saving, reposting, sharing, etc. Tik Tok's content was purely video based until recently; Tik Tok added a new feature that allows users to share photos. Thanks to the algorithm of the app, content that is of interest to the user will be displayed on

what is called the ‘for you page’. The algorithm heavily relies on the idea of user gratification (Scherr & Wang, 2021), which engages the user’s attention and therefore, indirectly encourages interaction with others’ content. Furthermore, the app also allows businesses to sponsor their content by proclaiming themselves as businesses or not.

The following is the formula that is used in most cases to calculate the engagement rate of content posted on Tik Tok:

$$\frac{(total\ of\ interactions\ (likes\ +\ comments\ +\ saves\ +\ shares)) \times 100}{views} = Engagement\ Rate\ \%$$

Equation 3.

It is more accurate to use views instead of the number of followers because of how Tik Tok’s algorithm works. Moreover, Tik Tok allows every user to see the total number of views. The engagement rate helps understand how successful the strategy is.

4.1.3. Twitter

Twitter is an app that is supported by almost all devices. This platform’s purpose is to spread information as fast as possible –this is the reason why it has a character limit– and aims to create easy content for a world that has a low attention span and ultimately looks for speed (Forsey, 2021).

Unlike Instagram and Tik Tok, Twitter is not a visually based social media network. In fact, although Twitter does allow its users to post photos and videos, Twitter’s charm is its simple and short SMS-style posts, called ‘Tweets’, which have a 280-character limit. Li & Li (2014) describe Twitter as a two-way communication platform, seeing as users can leave comments by the ‘@ reply’ or ‘@ mention’ function without any restraint. Among other actions, users can like, quote, comment on, and repost tweets. Twitter helps organizations to grow a following by providing valuable content in the form of quick-and-compelling advertisements

“like a shout-out to a webinar your business is conducting, or a free e-book” (Forsey, 2021, para. 15).

The following is the formula that is used in most cases to calculate the engagement rate of content posted on Twitter:

$$\frac{(total\ of\ interactions\ (retweets\ +\ quoted\ tweets\ +\ likes\ +\ comments\ +\ bookmarks) \times 100}{views\ or\ total\ of\ followers}$$

= *Engagement Rate %*

Equation 4.

In the case of Twitter, the public could only use the total of followers until fairly recently, this was because the number of views used to be private to the company. For older tweets, it would be more accurate to calculate the engagement rate with the number of views or accounts reached. With this new feature, it will be easier to calculate the engagement rate better than before. However, tweets that were posted before the update do not show the number of views.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Generation Z is the newest group of people that has reached the age of maturity and, therefore, the newest generation to wield purchasing power and cultural capital. This is the reason why it has become fundamental for organizations of all types to understand how this new group of people behaves on and off the Internet. However, this paper only focuses on the online behavior of Generation Z on three specific social media: Tik Tok, Instagram, and Twitter. Seeing as Generation Z is now coming of age, it is reasonable to expect a big number of reports and studies to be released in the near future, which will analyze this generational group of people in depth.

When it comes to research about Generation Z, there is one fact tank that must be mentioned: Pew Research Center. It is a nonpartisan fact tank that conducts polls, demographic research, and all kinds of data-driven social science research. It has already carried out many valuable studies about and involving Generation Z. For this reason, for the completion of this paper, data created and posted by Pew Research Center has been referenced. The following examples, as well as other kind of demographic research, can be found in its entirety on Pew Research Center's website. Moreover, this paper also provides the access links to these on the bibliography section.

For instance, Dimock (2019) –president of this fact tank– wrote an article. In it, he says that there is no scientific method of knowing when a generation ends and the next begins, so he explains how generational cutoffs are set. This is mainly done by analyzing what historical events of significant importance have had an impact on a group of people. To give an example, in the case of Millennials, it is generally believed that the 9/11 terrorist attacks marked the lives of this group of people, while Gen Z have no recollection whatsoever of it.

Another report published by Pew Research Center by Parker, Graf, and Igielnik (2019) also attempts to understand how generational cutoffs are set. However, this shows the results of a survey taken by Americans belonging to the current six existing generations, these are: Silent Generation (1928-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996), and Generation Z (1996/1997-2012). This report highlights the fact that Gen Z is similar to Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues.

To mention one last report published by Pew Research Center, written by Vogels, Gelles-Watnick, and Massarat (2022). This report provides information regarding the usage of social

media and technology –mainly smartphones and the Internet– in the younger American Generation Z (ages 13-17). Results show that YouTube, Tik Tok, and Instagram are the most used social media networks as of 2022. In addition, 95% of them have access to digital devices and 97% admitted to using the Internet on a daily basis.

As of the first half of 2023, there is still not a significant amount of research on how companies should specifically target Generation Z on social media networks. This paper analyzes Ryanair's case, which is one that will probably be studied in depth because of how the social media team managed to cater to Gen Z. By doing so, they exponentially increased their brand recognition and helped its brand reputation to recover to an extent. Many journals such as The Sun, The Guardian, and The Washington Post have already written short articles about Ryanair's success, especially on Tik Tok. They all go over the same thing: the bad reputation of the company and how it achieved a significant amount of success on social media and mention Lily Raferty –Ryanair's former Social Media Creator– as the main driver. Moreover, the brand's success has changed strategic communication on social media, and many companies have taken to follow in on its steps and have also found success.

The numerical data examined in the analysis follows López Navarrete, Cabrera Méndez, Díez Somavilla, and Calduch Losa (2021). They provide the engagement rate formula to measure the level of interaction on YouTube, particularly Spanish YouTubers content. This formula allowed them to compare the increase in interaction and involvement with content in a specific period of time, which goes from 2009 through 2019. In addition, Delgado Rocha, Méndez R., and Hidalgo (2022) also use this formula to measure interactivity. Their research analyzes the role of activity on social media platforms –such as Tik Tok– in the context of COVID-19 during the Ecuadorian election of 2021. This is done to understand the relationship that is established between the messages spread on social networks and the political actions, which can be translated into votes.

Wahid, Karjaluoto, Taiminen, and Asiati (2022) carried out an investigation to examine what strategies global brands could use to engage consumers; more specifically, they provide insights into how brands can achieve a high degree of success on Tik Tok or, simply, enhance said strategy. They analyzed the Indonesian Tik Tok accounts of a number of global smartphone brands and their data collection period was finished in December 2021. Moreover, this study analyses the effects of content characteristics (informational and emotional

characteristics), language, as well as non-verbal information that can add to a higher level of engagement.

In addition, there is a study by Dobre, Milovan, Duțu, Preda, and Agapie (2021) that examines how luxury brands can use social media by determining the extent to which Eastern European Millennials and Generation Z consumers perceive them. Their research shows that these types of brands are indeed compatible with social media as a form of marketing channel. Though a multidimensional approach based on data obtained from interactions on a social media platform, these authors explain that, even in the case of inadequacy, luxury brands can use the facilities that technology provides to depict what customers think is specific to their sector of the industry.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The paper will provide an answer to the following questions:

- How is Ryanair targeting Gen Z on Tik Tok, Instagram, and Twitter?
- Will the engagement rate prove Ryanair's strategy is truly working?
- What can other companies learn from Ryanair's strategy?

The core objective of this paper is to prove the success of Ryanair's strategy as well as to exemplify how important Generation Z is becoming. For this, the case of the European airline Ryanair was chosen. This company's strategic communication on three platforms (Tik Tok, Instagram, and Twitter) allowed it to increase brand recognition worldwide despite its bad reputation. In this line, the analysis aims to provide insight into how Generation Z communicates, behaves, and uses social media, as well as to give importance to understanding one's audience to achieve the biggest amount of success. With this knowledge, companies may be able to more accurately target this generational group.

While it is true that a number of companies have also achieved significant success through their social media strategy, this paper will only focus on examining Ryanair's case. This is due to how the company managed to attain a good level of brand recognition, while it had –and still does have– a bad reputation. Gen Z will continue to wield purchasing power and cultural capital for some years and it should be in most companies' interest to know how this group of people wants to be targeted on social media.

In this manner, as explained previously, the next section will analyze the difference in strategies on three social media networks. For this, a number of posts on each platform has been chosen. The examples chosen to represent Ryanair's activity on Tik Tok will be analyzed in deeper detail because this network provides more information about analytics than the other two. In addition, the engagement rate formula, proposed by López Navarrete, Cabrera Méndez, Díez Somavilla, & Calduch Losa (2021), is used to understand the level of interactivity achieved for the chosen examples, which will help achieve the overall objectives of this paper.

All the numerical data for the analysis was obtained in the beginning of April of 2023. It must be noted that this is constantly changing due to the nature of social media. This means that the percentages obtained from the formulas may have slightly changed. One of the objectives of this paper is to use this data to further prove the success of this type of strategy

when targeting Generation Z. Moreover, the analysis is based on objective observation and scrutinization of the above-mentioned social media platforms.

All of this is done to analyze Ryanair's successful strategies on social media, especially on Tik Tok, which is where the brand has managed to shine the most. Furthermore, this paper's objectives are to offer an insight into how companies may choose to communicate with Generation Z by using social media as a channel, while taking into consideration the limits that brands in other industry sectors may have.

V. ANALYSIS

1. Ryanair on Social Media

This paper will begin by looking at Ryanair's content on Tik Tok as it is the one that has gained the most recognition and it is talked about the most among the company's social media. Furthermore, on many social media platforms, it has been called the 'Ryanair Effect', a business strategic communication model on social media than many companies are copying. Afterwards, it will briefly cover Ryanair's content both on Instagram and Twitter.

1.1. Ryanair on Tik Tok

In order to be able to have a similar strategy to that of Ryanair on social media and, also, achieve a desirable engagement rate and increase interactivity, companies have to understand how Gen Z behaves, what their interests are, and what would be the best course to reach them without failing or, as Gen Z would say, to not be 'cringey'. The first step would be to have a good communications and marketing team. The members of the team would not only need to be up to date with the latest trends, but, also, they would need to be personally present on the social media that they will be working on, which will allow them to understand what trends work best with their brand. Ideally, the team will be composed of members of Gen Z, seeing as they are the ones who consume this form of content outside the office; in this manner, they themselves would be the target audience, and their jobs would most likely be more effective and interesting for them.

The challenge that Tik Tok presents to brands is how to create engaging videos that are, ideally, under 15 seconds. For this reason, following trends is the easy-way-out. However, this is also challenging, as companies must learn how not to lose their essence. In 2021, Raferty became a Social Media Creator for Ryanair, a European low-budget airline. She set the ground for a successful account, which grew to amass more than 2M followers, as of March 2023. Raferty based her efforts on authenticity and focused on the oldest Gen Zers. In addition, Corcoran, Ryanair's Head of Social, credits the company's success on Tik Tok to their decision to experiment early on with a newer audience –Gen Z– because they saw a big potential in them (Thompson, 2021). "Having a quite different approach from most brands within the industry, Ryanair's boldness, originality, and ingenuity were greatly appreciated by Tik Tok's

user base” (Cucu, 2022, para. 12). In these circumstances, Ryanair asked itself how it could possibly reach and engage its younger audience, without failing. This is how Raferty came up with a simple winner strategy: to keep up with popular trends and make them on brand with the company, while using Gen Z humor to connect with their audience (Raferty, 2021). Moreover, Ryanair proved that a brand does not need to invest a big budget to achieve success on social media like Tik Tok; being creative is the way to manage the algorithm.

Ryanair’s Tik Tok videos are characterized by the use of the filter in which the eyes and lips of a person are pasted into a photo and/or video in a slightly misshapen way. Below are some examples of Ryanair’s Tik Tok’s as well as the trends that were used; the data mentioned is from March 2023.

Example 1:

Ryanair used a Tik Tok sound that is highly popular; it is called ‘wonders of magic’. It has almost 100 000 videos under it. This trend has been used in a wide variety of scenarios; most of them are about the person being annoying and/or obnoxious on purpose. Since Ryanair is a low-budget airline, the seating conditions are mostly of the economic type. For this reason, it is common to see people complaining about the leg room. Ryanair used this trend with an ironic intention. It was viewed almost 800 000 times, and has a high interactivity. Around 14.14 % of viewers interacted in some way with it. Note that these numbers rise every day, so this percentage is an estimate. The calculation is formulated in the point about ‘Reaction’ later on. This is the link to watch this video: <https://bit.ly/3GTpjim>.

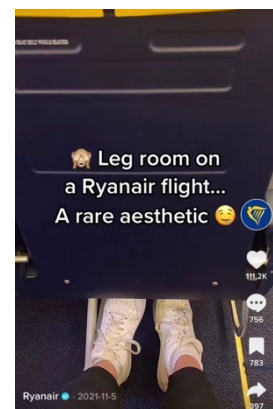


Figure 1: Example 1 of Ryanair's Tik Tok



Figure 2: Example 2 of Ryanair's Tik Tok

Example 2:

Ryanair used a Tik Tok sound that is not very popular, it only has 550 videos under it; it is called ‘original sound – lovecapybarass’. Although the sound by itself is not very popular, the hashtag ‘#capybara’ is, which is how Ryanair is reaching a large number of people. A capybara is a rodent; an animal that has become popular on the Internet for its appearance and the comedic purposes that it serves. While this trend, and the content posted by Ryanair, does not have to do with the brand itself, Ryanair photoshopped a series of capybaras



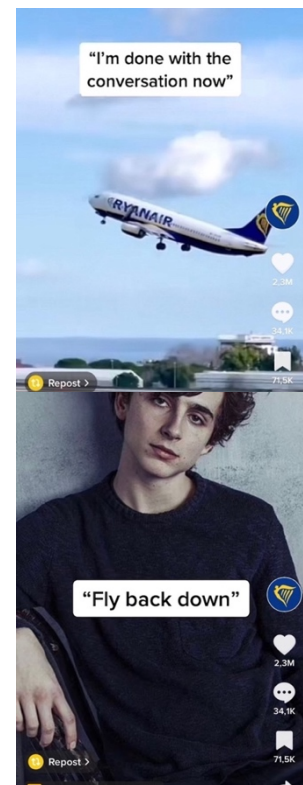
Figure 3: Example 2 of Ryanair's Tik Tok

into pictures of Ryanair planes; the second picture is an example of said photographs. Here is an example of Ryanair using the filter that allows the administrators of the account and content creators to paste their eyes and mouth into any picture. It was viewed over 2.8 million times and has a high interactivity. Around 21.38 % of viewers interacted in some way with it. Note that these numbers rise every day, so this percentage is an estimate. The calculation is formulated in the point about 'Reaction' later on. This is the link to watch this video:

<https://bit.ly/3opiD5u>.

Example 3:

Ryanair used a highly popular Tik Tok sound, which has many variations. This specific one does not have a particular name, but it has around 121 500 videos under it. This is one of Ryanair's most popular videos on Tik Tok. This is due not only to the fact that they used a popular sound, but also because Ryanair is not being serious and it –or the administrators of the account/content creators– are choosing to talk about an actor that is specially known for his looks and admit that he is attractive. This trend is about how someone can be extremely strong-willed until someone that is attractive –in this case, the actor Timothée Chalamet– demands something of them. Ryanair stayed on brand once again by using videos of its planes taking off and landing; it also changed “sit back down” to “fly back down”, which adds humor and is on brand. This is Ryanair's most liked video. It was viewed around 13 million times and has a high interactivity. Around 18.77 % of viewers interacted in some way with



Figures 4 and 5: Example 3 of Ryanair's Tik Tok

it. Note that these numbers rise every day, so this percentage is an estimate. The calculation is formulated in the point 'Reaction' later on. This is the link to watch this video:

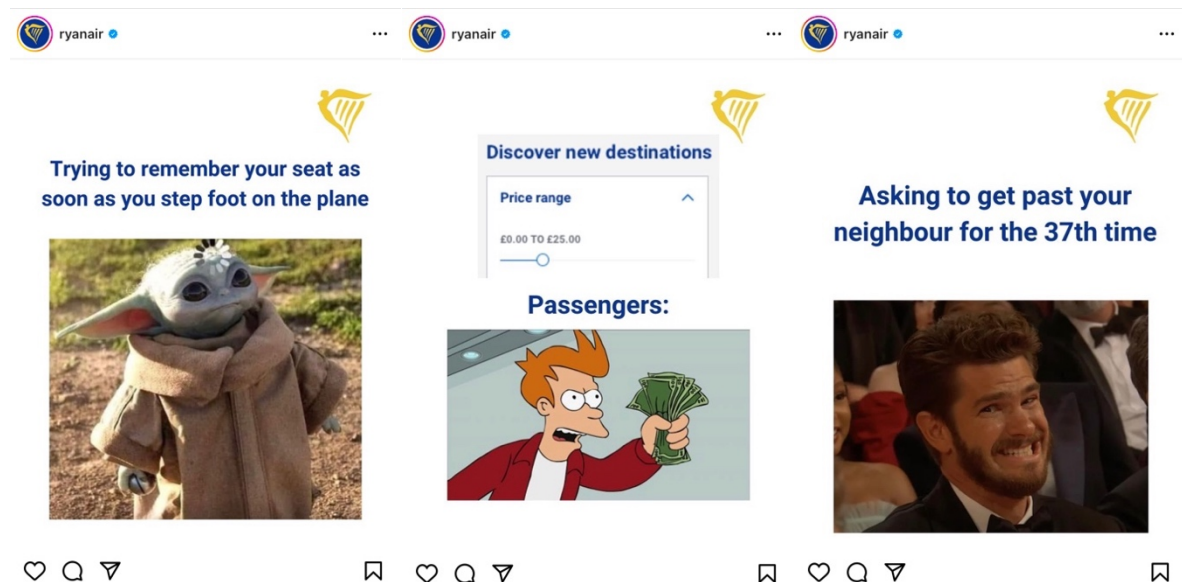
<https://bit.ly/3UIHmh7>.

Ryanair also consistently interacts with its audience on Tik Tok by replying to comments, which serves to further humanize the brand and makes it look closer to the public. Furthermore, Ryanair is also present on many comment sections of other brands, celebrities, and even not famous users.

1.2. Ryanair on Instagram

After Ryanair's success on Tik Tok, the company decided to reproduce the strategy on its Instagram profile by uploading reels –Instagram's version of Tik Toks– in the same humoristic tone.

However, before Instagram introduced the reels' feature, it was a platform that focused on a grid-like profile of mostly photographs. For this reason, while, as mentioned, Ryanair still posts video content, the company's approach is slightly different to that of Tik Tok. However, despite the content of the reels, the humor that Ryanair uses on these posts is more Millennial-like. Below are three examples of Ryanair's still-content on Instagram:



Figures 6, 7, and 8: Examples of Ryanair's Instagram

All of these examples display a type of humor that may be seen as more light-hearted, compared to the one that the brand uses on Tik Tok. Although there are only three images, most of Ryanair's posts on this social media network are similar. They are characterized by a statement that the viewer may think of as relatable, followed by a reaction photograph taken from moments from series, movies, etc. that represent a specific emotion. In the examples displayed above, these come from, in order: (1) the show *The Mandalorian*, popular because it takes place in the Star Wars Universe; (2) the show *Futurama*, whose first episode was released in 1999, this is why it was mostly Millennials and older generations watching it; and (3) actor Andrew Garfield showing an 'awkward smile' at an award ceremony. All of these have to do

with older generations than Gen Z; they are still popular among the latter group of people, but their origins are farther in the past. This type of humor on Instagram used to be more common some years ago, and most meme accounts posted them regularly. However, nowadays, reaction pictures are more common on Twitter.

1.3. Ryanair on Twitter

The Washington Post dubbed Ryanair as “the most savage Twitter account of any brand in the sky” (Bikales, 2022, para. 1). This account is managed in a similar way to how their Tik Tok is and displays an almost identical behavior to that of the airline’s replies to comments under their Tik Tok videos. It is characterized by an unrestrained, savage, and funny ‘clapbacks’.

One tweet that must be mentioned, seeing as it quickly became viral and even non-European journals talked about it, is the following (on the left is the original tweet by a passenger; on the right is Ryanair’s response:



Figures 9 and 10: Ryanair Replying (right) to a User’s Complaint on Twitter (left)

Ryanair aims to be funny by being slightly annoying and cynical, which is a quality of Gen Z’s humor. This example highlights how the company fights off complaints with humor. It is

clear that Ryanair recognizes the problem, but cannot do anything about it, this is why they chose to be funny. Moreover, when passengers buy seats, there is a pop up that warns them of this particular issue. Ryanair’s attitude aims to fight complains about its service, in a specific way that will make the public laugh and thus, not focus on the negative part.

However, since Twitter consists mostly of written and short messages that do not require much effort to produce, Ryanair has an advantage to talk about many other topics, while still staying on brand for the most part:



Figure 11: Example 1 of Ryanair’s Twitter

Example 1:

Ryanair makes fun of Djokovic’s statement and uses irony to disagree with him. Djokovic’s statement does not have to do with Ryanair. However, the company chooses to talk about it and position itself, while staying on brand. In this case, Ryanair talks about something that is relevant to the company. After COVID-19, most European countries required visitors to have the vaccine to enter.

Example 2:

Ryanair does not stay on brand. It chooses to talk about and combine two topics that do not have to do with the company at all, but that interest a big audience. Entertainment is important to all generations. Right now, in Europe, soccer and Eurovision are often talked about. This example showcases a clear example that proves that Twitter offers more freedom when it comes to the content that is posted.



Figure 12: Example 2 of Ryanair’s Twitter

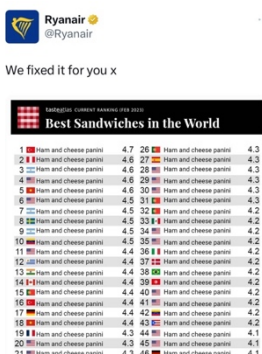


Figure 13: Example 2 of Ryanair’s Twitter

Example 3:

Ryanair usually offers a ham and cheese panini to buy on its flights. The original photo had a real ranking of different types of sandwiches. Ryanair edited the photo, so it says “ham and cheese panini” as the best type of sandwich around the world. The company stayed on brand and chose to talk about this particular topic with a focus on the food

that it offers on board. As a hypothesis, considering how the company praises it, this type of sandwich is probably very popular, and it is most likely the product that is most bought on board Ryanair planes.

Example 4:

BeReal is an app that grew in popularity in 2022. The app sends a notification once a day and users have to take a photo from wherever they are. They only have less than two minutes to take it. Ryanair aims to be relatable by showing that when the notification was sent. With the same filter that the company uses on Tik Tok to make content, the plane shows that it was watching Formula 1, which is very popular among all generations, at the time the BeReal notification was sent. This ‘meme’ humanizes the company by putting itself on the public’s level to somehow establish a connection by being relatable.



Figure 14: Example 2 of Ryanair's Twitter

2. Reaction

Ryanair owes most of its success to the popularity that it garnered on Tik Tok. Until 2021, when Ryanair started posting regularly on Tik Tok, the company had a bad reputation. In fact, in 2019, the Which? survey revealed that Ryanair had been rated as the worst airline for the sixth consecutive year; 70% of participants said they would not fly with Ryanair (Topham, 2019). Ryanair still continued to have a high number of customer due to its extremely low fares. This brand reputation drove Ryanair to opt for a more humanizing strategy, and, through social media, it placed itself among Generation Z by using its humor and trends.

In 2022, Ryanair “only escapes last place [...] though the horrendous experience offered by Wizz Air” (Wilson & Boland, 2023, para. 17), and, although the service has not changed, the company’s brand awareness has increased exponentially. Ryanair is an airline that only flies in Europe –it calls itself “Europe’s Favorite Airline”–, but the level of popularity that the company gained on social media has attracted users from outside of the above-mentioned continent . In fact, Jimmy Fallon –American comedian and television host (The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon)– talked about the ‘window issue’ tweet.

Furthermore, Ryanair’s social media content has become so popular that it has reached an audience outside its target –European Gen Z–: North America’s Gen Z. Ryanair’s comment sections will always have American ‘fans’ asking why the company does not fly to their side of the world. With globalization comes an increasing interest in traveling among young people, especially college students, whose vast majority does not have a stable income. For this reason, low fares are attractive to them, even if the flying conditions are not the best; Ryanair has seen a positioning advantage in these wants and needs.

Furthermore, Ryanair registers a high interactivity rate in most of its posts, as well as a high engagement rate in all three platforms. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the engagement rate can be calculated with the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{total of interactions (likes + comments + etc.)} \times 100}{\text{reach (views) or total of followers}} = \text{Engagement Rate \%}$$

Equation 5.

Twitter recently added a feature that allows everyone to see how many people have viewed a tweet; with this data, the percentage can be more accurate. Nevertheless, some of the tweets that were chosen are older than this update –it is fairly recent–; that is the reason why the engagement rate cannot be properly calculated. This is a reoccurring problem in many other cases because people outside of Ryanair do not have access to this sort of data. Similarly, on Instagram, only the posting account can see the number of people that their content has reached.

For this reason, this paper will focus on analyzing Ryanair’s Tik Tok’s engagement rate, mainly of the three examples displayed above. “For Tik Tok, we’d consider a good engagement rate to fall anywhere between 4% and 18%” (Adobe Express, 2022, para. 4). The examples mentioned above have the following engagement rates:

Example 1, Tik Tok about leg room:

$$\frac{(111\,200 \text{ likes} + 754 \text{ comments} + 783 \text{ saves} + 400 \text{ shares}) \times 100}{799\,900 \text{ views}} = 14.14 \% \text{ Engagement Rate}$$

Equation 6.

Example 2, Tik Tok about Capybaras:

$$\frac{(412\,600 \text{ likes} + 6\,244 \text{ comments} + 30\,000 \text{ saves} + 150\,500 \text{ shares}) \times 100}{2\,800\,000 \text{ views}} = 21.38 \% \text{ Engagement Rate}$$

Equation 7.

Example 3, Tik Tok about Timothée Chalamet:

$$\frac{(2\,300\,000 \text{ likes} + 34\,000 \text{ comments} + 71\,600 \text{ saves} + 35\,500 \text{ shares}) \times 100}{13\,000\,000 \text{ views}} = 18.77 \% \text{ Engagement Rate}$$

Equation 8.

These results show that Ryanair's Tik Toks usually have a good engagement rate. The first example would show the average engagement rate of Ryanair's older Tik Tok videos. The second example is one of the highest engagement rates that the company has achieved so far; it is above what is normally considered a good percentage. The last one provides an example of the engagement rate achieved on one of the more recent videos.

Moreover, the average of these percentages is 18.09 %, somewhat above of what is considered a good number. Note that this was calculated only with the three examples displayed

above. For a more accurate average, the engagement rate formula would have to be used to calculate every single percentage of all videos posted on Tik Tok by Ryanair, using data taken at the same exact point in time.

3. Learning Opportunities

This section will now focus on using Ryanair's case as an example for other companies, whose goals and objectives are similar to that of the airline. For that, the paper will first tackle Michael Corcoran's –current Head of Social of Ryanair– advice. Afterwards, it covers some issues to take into consideration when choosing to target Gen Z on social media like Ryanair did.

Corcoran has given some tips and tricks as to how companies may achieve the success that Ryanair has. Firstly, he encourages brands to approach their accounts as creators rather than be what they are –brands–, and to find a the most appropriate niche. Furthermore, he believes that a good marketing strategy for social media should go beyond video views; companies must read comments to understand how and why people interact in different ways with the content that has been made public. He claims that replying to some of said comments is crucial. He expressed that measurable success does not always equate to numbers “it can serve as great PR or be a steppingstone to other long-term business goals” (Thompson, 2021). Moreover, Ryanair owes a lot of their success on Tik Tok to being the first company to dare to target their audience in such a manner; before Ryanair, it was something considered unthinkable by most brands.

Many brands have followed Ryanair's strategy on Tik Tok, some examples would be: Duolingo, Scrub Daddy, and Webtoon. Their presence on this platform has boosted their brand recognition worldwide.

3.1. Ethical Issues and Performative Activism

In this manner, a company must also ask itself what are the things that concern their audience, and how to support Gen Z's opinion on those without falling into performative activism. As it was previously explained (see point 4 on Generation Z), Gen Z is particularly concerned about ethical issues, such as: sexism, racism, homophobia, etc. Most of these ethical

issues have to do with society and human rights, which are political topics that can cause many controversies.

Performative activism refers to a form of activism that utilizes performance as a communicative tool (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2022). This type of activism on Tik Tok and other social media has begun to be called ‘playful activism’ by some. This is due to its ‘playful’ nature, which “directly derives from Tik Tok’s affordances in which playful challenges can be politicized, as users are using this practice to raise awareness, spread ideologies, and ‘externalize personal political opinion via an audiovisual act (Medina Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos, & Hegelich, 2020, p. 264).” (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2022, p. 416).

Performative and/or playful activism can cause brands to end up ‘canceled’, which may lead to a mob mentality that leads people to shun the brand. This will cause its reputation to hit rock-bottom and may cause a reputational crisis from which companies may not be able to recover from. For this reason, activism must be trod with care. Companies should first look at their mission, vision, and values to discern what topics concern it the most and, especially, where the company’s support would be most appreciated.

As seen in the analysis, although Ryanair does talk about certain topics, it does not say anything considered as controversial. Instead, Ryanair has probably studied the interests that Gen Z may have and what they think about more political points. For instance, Figure 11 displayed above provides an example of this particular point. The vaccines that protect against the COVID-19 used to be mandatory to enter most countries in the European Union. Since Ryanair’s job is to fly passengers, this is something that concern the company. In this manner, showing their support and ‘clappingback’ made the company more favorable to the opinion of Twitter users. In this manner, the brand chose a topic where its opinion would be important and valued by its target audience, without being controversial.

3.2. Limits

To be able to follow Corcoran’s advice, understanding the brand’s target audience should always be a priority for a company. It becomes obvious that not all companies are able to create strategies as Ryanair has, the reason being that their public would simply not be reached at the moment. While its target audience does not discriminate when it comes to the age, Ryanair’s

social media strategies are mostly aimed at getting Generation Z's attention –Millennials are also important, but, as established by Lily Raferty, Ryanair has been specifically using Gen Z's humor.

As with any type of strategy, there are many risks that come with humanizing the brand and getting close with the target audience. Even so, choosing this approach, rather than a more corporate one will put the company until scrutiny. Adam Fisher, a content editor at MediaFirst, said that companies always have to consider whether the kind of humor that is going to be used fits the brand identity or not.

VI. CONCLUSION

Ryanair owes its success to Tik Tok and its former Social Media Creator, Lily Raferty. The popularity that the company garnered on this social media platform allowed the brand to achieve a high degree recognition and awareness. This was of particular interest to many other companies because Ryanair managed this accomplishment despite its bad reputation. In fact, the Which? survey has revealed that Ryanair had been rated as the worst airline for some time. In 2019, 70% of participants said they would not fly with Ryanair (Topham, 2019); in 2022, Ryanair “only escapes last place [...] though the horrendous experience offered by Wizz Air” (Wilson & Boland, 2023, para. 17). Despite the multiple bad reviews, Ryanair still continued to have many costumers and did not see a significant drop in its sales because of its low fares –not including the period of time in which airports were closed due to COVID-19–; in other words, people were still willing to travel with Ryanair because for a flight of few hours, people are still willing to endure the poor conditions in order to travel for cheap. In this context, this brand reputation drove Ryanair to opt for a more humanizing strategy, and, through social media, it placed itself among Generation Z by using its humor and trends.

Ryanair’s strategy on social media focused its efforts on Gen Z, while using its humor, and slang to reach it. This was a good strategy because the company showed an understanding of how this group of people behaves online. The European airline proved that a brand does not need to invest a big budget to achieve success on social media, and this was done by learning how to manage one of the most challenging apps in the market at the moment: Tik Tok. As of the first half of 2023, their account on this platform has garnered over 2 million followers.

Some points to highlight regarding the analysis:

- On Tik Tok, Ryanair has used trending sounds and memes. Of special note is the filter that is now characteristic to the brand’s videos; the filter places the eyes and lips of a person in a photo and/or video in a slightly way. Ryanair usually reaches around an average of 18.09 % engagement rate, due to how simple and easy it is to interact with content on the platform.
- On Instagram, Ryanair has mostly uploaded memes that are more catered to a slightly older audience than Gen Z, as the memes are those that are usually used by Millennials. However, the brand has also uploaded some of its Tik Toks thanks to the new Reels feature.

- On Twitter, Ryanair has stuck to what is more commonly known as ‘clapbacks’. The nature of the app has allowed the brand to talk about many topics such as Formula 1, politics, etc. In addition, Ryanair shows an understanding of where its opinion is important and valued.

On all of these platforms, but especially on Tik Tok, Ryanair consistently interacts with its audience by replying to comments, which serves to further humanize the brand and makes it look closer to the public. Furthermore, Ryanair is also present on many comment sections of other brands, celebrities, and even not famous users.

Many other brands have followed Ryanair and some of them have also found a great success in the way they changed how to manage their social media accounts, especially on Tik Tok. Some names that can be mentioned are Duolingo, Scrub Daddy, and Webtoon. In this manner, Ryanair, as well as all of these other brands, have proven how important it is to understand Generation Z, specifically their humor and slang, as it is very characteristic of them. Also, Gen Z places great importance on ethical issues.

Nevertheless, not all brands are able to follow this path, for the simple reasons that their target audience may not be or include Generation Z. However, Gen Z is now coming of age and are starting to wield purchasing power. Thus, companies may see themselves having to understand how this group of people communicate sooner than they think, which makes this type of research important.

The analysis provides an answer to all the questions that were established by giving detailed examples of Ryanair’s content on the three chosen social media platforms. Moreover, the formula of the engagement rate was used to prove the extent of this company’s success and how it affects brand recognition. Lastly, following this line, the paper offers some insights into how companies can learn by following Ryanair’s example.

The extension of this paper is limited by its nature, seeing as it is an undergraduate final degree project. For this reason, this research could be extended in a number of ways because this is a topic of interest to many companies. Ryanair’s case, as well as other companies’ cases, could be examined in more depth to achieve a higher understanding of how this company achieved a good brand recognition despite its bad reputation. In this manner, this line of research stays open.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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VIII. ANNEX

The following table presents a series of terms that Generation Z uses with their meanings explained, as well as some examples of how they may be used. All of these have been extracted from social media:

SLANG	MEANING	EXAMPLE
Aesthetic	Something that is pleasing to look at.	"I like the aesthetic of the web site."
Ate and left no crumbs	Someone did an excellent job. Referring to how someone might have eaten a meal.	"Her presentation was amazing. She truly ate and left no crumbs."
Beef	To have a grudge with another person.	"No one knows why they fought, but they seem to have so much beef."
BFFR	Acronym that stands for "Be F*****g For Real", used in contexts in which someone has lied, said/done something that does not make sense, etc..	"Did you really think he was not in a relationship? Girl, BFFR."
Cap	Another word for lying.	"That meal was so good, no cap."
Caught in 4k	To be incriminated with digital evidence. 4k is considered to be high quality imagery.	"They caught him in 4k."
Clapback	A comeback, pumped with attitude.	"They were fighting, but she won. You should have heard her clapback, it was great."
Cringe/cringey/cringy	Something that is embarrassing, which makes someone feel ashamed or embarrassed.	"His jokes are so bad; they make me cringe every time."
Glow up/down	A personal transformation for the better (up) or worse (down).	"Have you seen her? She has the best glow up/She has the worst glow down."

Ick	Something that makes someone instantly unattractive.	“Did you see him picking his nose? That is such an ick.”
L/W	‘L’ is an abbreviated term for ‘loss’. ‘W’ is an abbreviated term for ‘win’.	Example for ‘L’: “He was in a fight and got beat up. He took an L.” Example for ‘W’: “The team struggled, but managed a W.”
Local	Refers to people that have no personality.	“Locals think they are funny.”
Mid	Someone or something is average or poor quality.	“We waited years for this album, and it is so mid, what a disappointment.”
Mood	Something is relatable at a specific point in time.	Person A: “I can never find a good partner.” Person B: “Mood.”
Period/Periodt	Expression used at the end of a sentence to indicate that that is the end of the discussion. Also used to compliment others or agree with others.	Example 1: “That is what I said. Period.” Example 2: “Your outfit looks so good, period!” Example 3: Person A: “That was the worst movie I have ever seen” Person B: “Period.”
Rizz	Charisma. (Cha-RIS-ma)	“He has so much rizz, he gets all the girls.”
Stan	Another term for ‘fan’. It can be used as a verb.	Example 1 (noun): “I love Harry Styles. I am one of his most devoted stans.” Example 2 (verb): “I want to stan him, he has a great vibe.”

Sus	Suspicious. (SUS-picious)	“Is it not a bit suspicious that she knows everything about him?”
Tea	Gossip	“I have so much for you.”
To be extra	To be unnecessarily dramatic, excessive or over the top.	“She is so extra; she will exaggerate everything.”
To give	To give an impression of being/having something.	“It is giving mental illness.”
To ghost	To avoid/stop contact with someone, mainly on social media.	Person A: “He will not stop texting me.” Person B: “You should ghost him.”
To simp	To do a lot for a person they like.	Person A: “I gave her flowers and bought her coffee every week.” Person B: “Stop simping, she is not even your girlfriend.”
To slap	Something is extremely good.	“His latest album slaps.”
To slay	To do something and succeed. It can also be used to imply that someone look good.	“Oh my god! You are slaying today!”
Vibes	A distinctive emotional atmosphere.	Example 1: “He gives creepy vibes.” Example 2: “He has amazing vibes. I want to be his friend.”
Viral	Digital content that becomes popular on social media in a short span of time.	“Her Tik Tok is so funny, it went viral in a matter of hours.”

Table 2. Compiled by author.