



Universidad Pontificia Comillas ICADE

MILLENNIALS AND MERCEDES, FRIENDS FOREVER?

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ABSTRACT

After the appearance of the Internet that boosted the phenomenon of globalization, consumer behavior and lifestyle changed so radically that multiple marketers and professionals in the marketing field deeply studied (and continue to do so) the new consumer profiles with the purpose of untangling their complex and disruptive patterns. The prominent and most influential consumer group in the new Era is the vowed *Millennial* generation that has been polemic, innovating and above all, challenging for brands in all industries. Going through a thorough analysis of a leader firm in a powerful industry will indeed uncover some of the key factors that drives a brand towards marketing success in the 21st Century. Mercedes-Benz is a well-known example of a brand that has adapted its culture, procedures, goals and core business to fit in the new modern world and attract the connected *Millennial* collective. Mercedes has become a role model within and across all kinds of industries, as a brand that has faced the challenges of the daring generation by implementing the right changes and once more, succeeding. This paper wraps up an analysis of the automotive brand moves, objectives and operations with the purpose of uncovering the course that the science of marketing follows today, trying to satisfy the Millennial consumer (crucial for the economic profitability of all businesses).

Key words: Millennials, consumers, Mercedes, Generation Y, brand, marketing, placement, positioning, media, platforms, social-media, influencers, collective, revolution, segment, Youth marketing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives

The following research paper aims to analyze the behavior and beliefs of the *Millennial* consumer in order to be able to carry out a further analysis of the marketing strategy of the automotive brand, *Mercedes-Benz*. A strategy that was implemented in order to align Mercedes offers to that of the Millennials demands.

The purpose is establishing how the generation is like, what has made them be that way, what are their motivations and what drives them towards their goals. What these goals are, why do they behave the way they do and what things do they believe and stand for. Once all these is researched, it will be possible to study how these factors affects the collective as a consumer. Understanding and empathizing with the revolutionary and complex generation that now owns, the majority of the market (and therefore, has the strongest influence in the same one). Therefore, a conclusion as in how to address this expectant and demanding public will be achieved.

All this will be done in order to deeply analyze the marketing strategic procedures of the worldwide known automotive brand, Mercedes-Benz. Mercedes has updated its technology and media in order to satisfy Millennials, the world's biggest consumption segment. The goal lays in studying what strategies they have followed, how they have done and implemented them and what it is that has led them to succeed. They have driven their strategy ahead of time, drastically changing their way of communicating and approaching the client by readdressing their products and services to the new and complex target group of millennials.

So then, the first research on Millennials will collect enough knowledge on the collective in order to later judge Mercedes Benz strategy in the most accurate way possible. The paper aims to learn and understand from the company's marketing and communication procedures and actions, why certain decisions where taken and what are the key factors that have been making the company succeed during the years of change.

1.2 Methodology

The paper is structured into two different main chapters. First, a literature review on the Millennial consumer backed-up by the books *Perspectivas de las Ciencias Sociales* (Martínez Prats et al., 2020), *Marketing to Millennials* (Fromm & Garton, 2013) and *Positioning* (Trout

& Ries, 2001). Furthermore, the analysis of the collective is based in studies and journal articles found through the research tools *Google Scholar*, *Scopus* and *Emerald*. The main sources are two studies carried out by the Boston Consulting Group Global in the years 2012 and 2014, and other qualitative studies such as *Generation Y values and lifestyle segments* (Valentine & Powers, 2013); that uses the VALS scale (VALS stands for “Values and Lifestyles”; a methodology widely used for the purpose of psychographic market segmentation).

Then, the second chapter that starts by contextualizing Mercedes-Benz in order to understand what their all-time purpose has been to later do an accurate analysis on the strategy carried out. The official website of the company as well as its social media sites and platforms have been used with the purpose of studying concrete examples of campaigns and actions carried out by the brand in the past 10 years of their marketing transformation.

By aligning the assumptions made in chapter one and the analysis of the company made in chapter 2 a personal conclusion on the success of the strategic implementation is achieved.

1.3 Motivation

That the world has been witness of the change of an era, has gone from an opinion to an undoubted fact. This transition has allowed for the transformation of behaviors, attitudes, perspectives and all in all, people, who have led the market to an also drastic transformation. Marketers have modified the science and art of marketing as a consequence of the evolution of technologies and social media platforms conquering industries in all kinds of sectors. Due to this, professionals have recognized the birth of a new branch in the field that wraps up the multiple emerging strategies that have adapted marketing to younger generations, *Youth Marketing*.

The following research paper will serve to other businesses and professionals as a guide to get involved with the new marketing branch and properly address the millennial consumer. Having a detailed analysis of how does this collective work, together with a concrete study of a brand that has undergone certain actions in order to get involved with the generation and its purposes, will serve for future businesses and professionals to follow the right path and adequately build efficient strategies.

2. CHAPTER 1: MILLENNIALS LITERATURE REVIEW

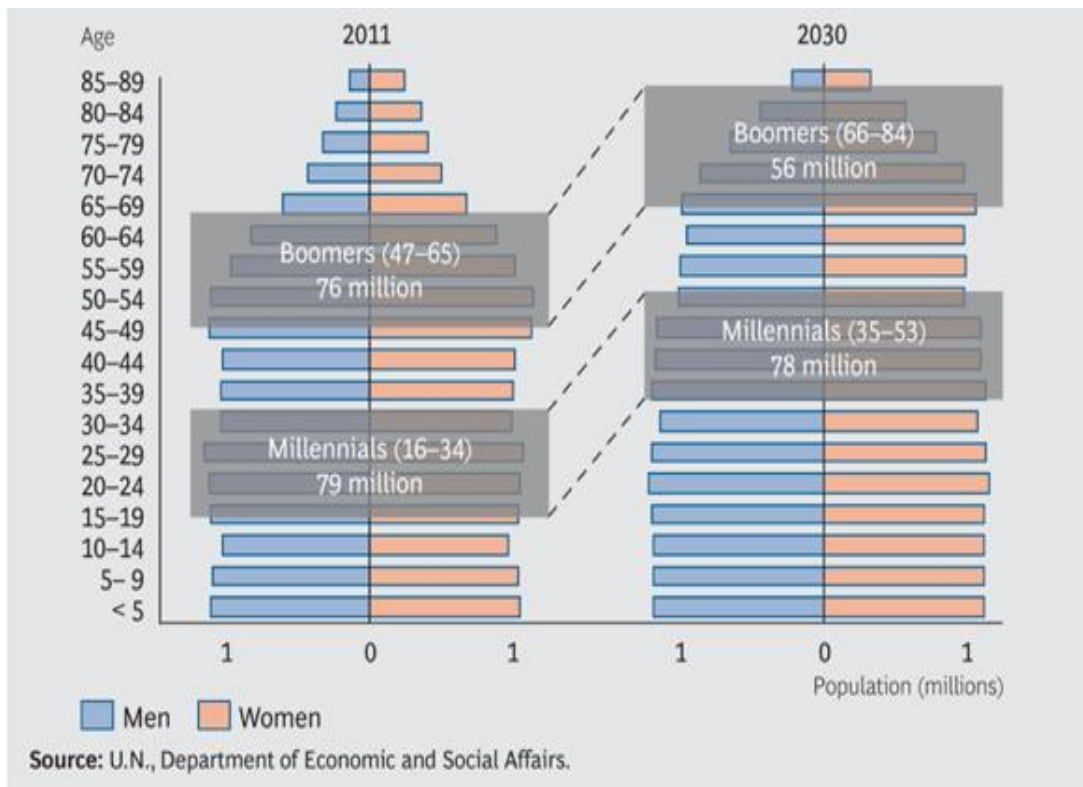
2.1 Who is the Millennial generation?

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, is the generation that follows Baby Boomers (or Generation X). They are a distinctive generation that has supposed an inflection point as a result of the era change. They are the largest consumer market in the world, nearly tripling Baby Boomers. It has been rather difficult for researchers and sociologists to agree on a date range that comprises the generation, therefore, for the following project Generation Y will be understood as the generation of kids born between 1977 and 1996. This is the same assumption Valentine Dawn and Thomas Powers assumed for their study carried away in the year 2013 using the VALS scale.

According to their study, Millennials widely differ with previous generations in their values and way of thinking. They are a connected generation thanks to their early familiarization with Internet and digital devices. Moreover, and what drives attention to these collective, is their commitment to social causes and responsibilities. Their identity is strongly defined and that is why they look for companies that reflect and look after their same beliefs and values. Millennials will be more prone to consume from a company depending on how identified they feel with the culture and message. Generation Y has been described as individualistic, well-educated, technologically savvy, sophisticated, skeptical, mature, “cool” and with a strong self-identity (Valentine & Powers, 2013).

Millennials are the largest living adult generation in the U.S, adding up to 72,1 million (Pew Research Center tabulations of US Census Bureau, 2020). It has been predicted by a study conducted by the BCG that they will be outnumbering non-millennials by the year 2030 (Figure 1). Since the year 2000, the collective has been graduating from college and entering the labor market influencing the way both companies and consumers behave, as they are now the leading figures. Spending is being made in vast majority by millennials, therefore, it is true that “no brand can afford to ignore millennials” as Fromm and Garton state in their book *Marketing to Millennials* (2013). A generation of a such size has saved money as a result of having joined the labor market; money that will be potentially spent. Seems like a more than enough reason for many companies to adapt their message with the purpose of attracting and satisfying the millennial consumer.

Figure 1: U.S Millennials Will Outnumber Non-Millennials by 2030



Source: (Barton et al., 2012).

Many are the facts that have aligned in order to make this generation a unique one. They have been the generation crossing the bridge towards technological evolution, instant global communication and media saturation. All these has happened due to new channels of communication arising, channels that have become the biggest fear for traditional media, better known as: social media. Experienced marketers had never seen before Twitter, Facebook, Instagram... and nor would've predicted the impact these have had. They have driven millennials attention towards social causes, polemic topics, movements and revolutions. They provided access to tons of information, provoking an increasingly involvement and commitment to all these emerging issues. As a consequence, young adults' interest in printed media and standard television has severally decreased, leaving companies with the need of changing the way they regard consumers (as what companies used to communicate with their consumers was, the now outdated, traditional media). The whole game had turned around, and companies have seen themselves in the need of implementing certain changes and competing for the rough task of being differentiated.

2.2 How should brands approach Millennials?

Brands invest in advertisement in order to achieve two main goals: consumer's attention and consumer's memory. They want to capture their attention towards the ad so that they get a chance of the spot being remembered and what is most important, the brand being remembered. Advertisement has the power of driving consumers' attitudes. A power that should not be underestimated as "It shapes the attitudes of the society and the individual and inevitably influences customer behavior" (Jakštienė, Susnienė and Narbutas, 2008). It is important for a brand to know to whom it is forwarding the ads in order to make them appealing to that specific public. However, in a market where there is too much of everything, competition is unimaginable wide and advertising a brand becomes a challenge.

According to the study "Psychological Impact of Advertising on the Customer Behavior" (2008), advertisement aims for three aspects: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. Cognition refers to how the consumer perceives the ad, emotion to what (if any) feelings grow inside the consumer after the ad's impact, and behavior to having motivated the consumer into actually taking the action of buying the product. Ad's most important function is to differentiate the product and retain the public's attention; therefore, today's marketing strategies pursue these aspects. The most efficient way to achieve them is by presenting the information in a visual format as it is for what the human needs less energy. When the first televisions were introduced in the 1930s, brands started to experiment their first campaigns in those fat screens, targeting a rather innocent public. By the time, they were far from info-saturation as there was very little competition to obtain a space on TV, it was such an innovation. Here is where the main reason of the big disparity between Generation X vulnerability to ads and Millennials lays. Generation X attention was very easily captured, they lived the evolution and introduction of network TV, therefore, anything that popped up in the screen was attention seeker. However, Millennials have a rather diverse scene.

Valentine and Powers demonstrated in their study (2013) what it was being assumed: ads do not have the same influence power today, as they did with Baby Boomers. Mainstream media is publicity-saturated, which has been defined as the excess of advertisements accumulated in the same media channel provoking a feeling of rejection and indifference in consumers (Hammer, Riebe & Kennedy, 2009), losing all purpose of the ad. Millennials have been bombed with information, publicity and too many stimuli on a daily basis. It has been found that consumers are approached by 5,000 ads a day and only 3% of these are later remembered (Martínez Prats, et al. 2020). It is not a surprise that this generation brains are

saturated and do not respond anymore to standard advertisements. Advertisements need to be direct, honest and fast. New marketing strategies need to be found and applied in order to succeed in the overwhelmed market.

Email is a good example that reflects and proves the change in consumer behavior. Email is one of the biggest platforms of communication in the world, predicted to keep growing at a 3% rate during the next 4 years, according to Statista findings (2021). Nevertheless, and bucking these statistics, Millennials prefer communicating via text message. They are the least likely generation to communicate through email (Valentine and Powers, 2013). Brands use email to generate a more one in one relationship with the client. They are able to personalize messages depending on its guests' personal preferences, do subscription letters, create individual emails to target specific consumers... However, this does not seem to work with Generation Y, they are looking for different experiences that really impact their expectations, these emails don't event distract them. So then, it can be concluded that brands that want to approach millennials directly should try to do so through different techniques. Events, digital media and product placement are the ones that work best with the collective.

2.2.1 Millennials and events

Events are offline experiences the client lives firsthand with the company. The consumer is highly involved with the brand, which is effective in terms of brand penetration, however, they are forwarded to already purchasers of the brand. Events focus on retaining consumers rather than on expanding in attracting new ones. Therefore, loyalty and retention are what this strategy seeks for.

A generation like millennials that has an unaccountable desire for feeling connected, wishes to share and live experiences not alone but surrounded by others (these do not necessarily have to be close family and friends). They demand brands to make them participants of group dynamics in which they are given the opportunity to be surrounded by new people, feel socially accepted and amplify their network connections. A BCG study carried out in 2012, shows that millennials are much more likely to demand living offline experiences with other people and being able to participate in group dynamics and share opinions, than non-millennials.

Events should be thought wisely as Millennials have the need of broadcasting all their opinions and beliefs; opinions that are built according to the experience lived and the perception the brand transmits. Effective marketing strategies have both online and offline programs that have a link and fusion between each other. Through offline programs (events) the brand will directly forward to the customer the interest in building a trustworthy relationship with them. This relationship will later be monitored and followed through online programs. These means keeping up with the client (with its expectations), updating them on any news, answering their questions and allowing them to interact with the brand anywhere, any time.

It is because of this that events should not be thought of individually but bonded to an online program. Brands that target millennials need to have in mind their need of connection, of letting everybody know how they feel. A good experience will make Millennials want to express their content with the brand and even take action (on behalf of the brand) on enhancing others into trying the product or service. However, the same way a positive experience may have an incredibly good outcome, a negative one will leave terrible consequences. Because social media engages with millions of people, an unfortunate comment or post will have an impact. Brands do not want platforms to have unfavorable records of the company as these will reach not only actual, but future or potential customers. The footprint left on the internet is an impossible one to get rid-off and no brand can afford the luxury of a negative shoutout (as it is something that could even ruin them).

So then, events are big investments for brands and when carried out, they should be thought of as a priority. They have to be deeply researched and detailed, assuring the right strategies and activities are carried out with the targeted public, provoking in them certain sense of commitment. It is in this way that brands will build a loyal forge with the consumer.

2.2.2 Millennials and Product Placement

Moreover, product placement does seek and regard new client's attention. Is a different marketing practice that inserts a brand name or product into a motion picture, television or other media in order to involve the audience with the brand through the natural process of the

movie, program or other (Williams, et al., 2011). A well-known example of an early attempt in product placement is the appearance of *Nike* in *Back to The Future* movies.

As explained above, ads in a visual format are what better impact consumers. Little effort has to be made by them, they do not have to read nor think, they just have to let themselves be approached. However, this technique is not as simple as designing a short movie and play it for 10 seconds on whatever TV channel. People are now able to watch things on streaming, deferred, where they have the opportunity of skipping any ad interruption; certainly, they do: “90% of people with digital video recorders skip TV ads” (Russell, 2006).

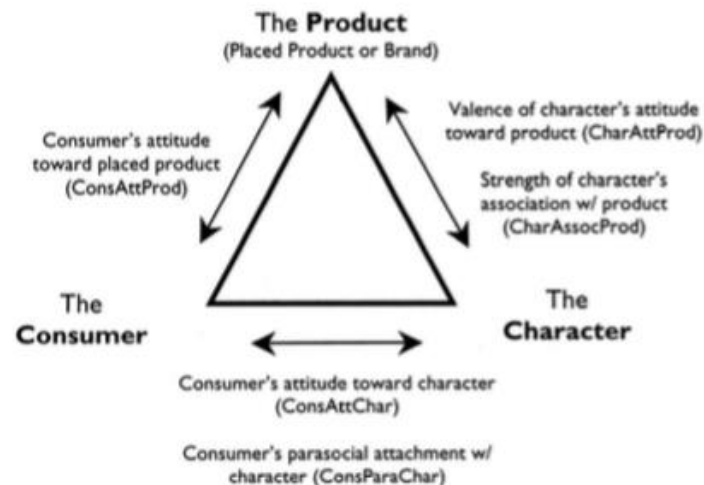
One of marketer’s main target for brand promotion is YouTube, the biggest video sharing platform that reaches people all around the world. Large efforts and research are put every day in order to find the most effective ad and place it in a platform of such size. The latest statistics show that YouTube has 30 million active users, 77% of US millennials use YouTube and 35% of those, claim to be “binge-watching” videos on a daily basis (Omnicores Group, 2021). So then, there is little doubt on why brands compete amongst each other for the best spots and advertising conditions in the platform.

The ad format used in YouTube is known as “pre-roll”, in which brands play before the start of a video their clip. However, a *skipping ad* function has been enabled, a button that allows spectators to go directly to the content they want to watch, heavily damaging any branding intention. According to a study released by the CNBC in 2017, 65% of YouTube’s audience skip online video ads. People claim that skipping the ad is a natural reaction an “ingrained behavior” (CNBC, 2017) making advertisement investments feel more in vain than ever. Some companies have even tried to promote themselves by placing the brand name next to the skip button in an effort of being spotted by the viewer and later remembered. However, this strategy has not had good outcomes and has been proven to be very little or not to effective at all. In addition, other subscription platforms like Netflix or HBO which have the most demanded and top-quality programs have no ad pauses, at all.

Product placement has harmed severally traditional marketing strategies as it does not use consumer’s entertainment minutes, which bothers them and enhances them to skip ads. It directly places the products and services on the programs, movies and videos they watch, later influencing their consuming behavior without them even noticing. The product placement

industry has become a billionaire one as it has been linked by brands to an increase in sales. Research has proven that product placement magnifies brand awareness and affinity, and it motivates prospective purchasers. The popularity of this strategy started rising at important rates in the 1990's, when phenomena like a critical growth in coffee bars (such as *Starbucks*) was noticed and directly attributed to the sitcom *Friends* (Russell & Stern, 2006).

Figure 2: Balance Model of Product Placement Effects



Source: (Russell & Stern, 2006).

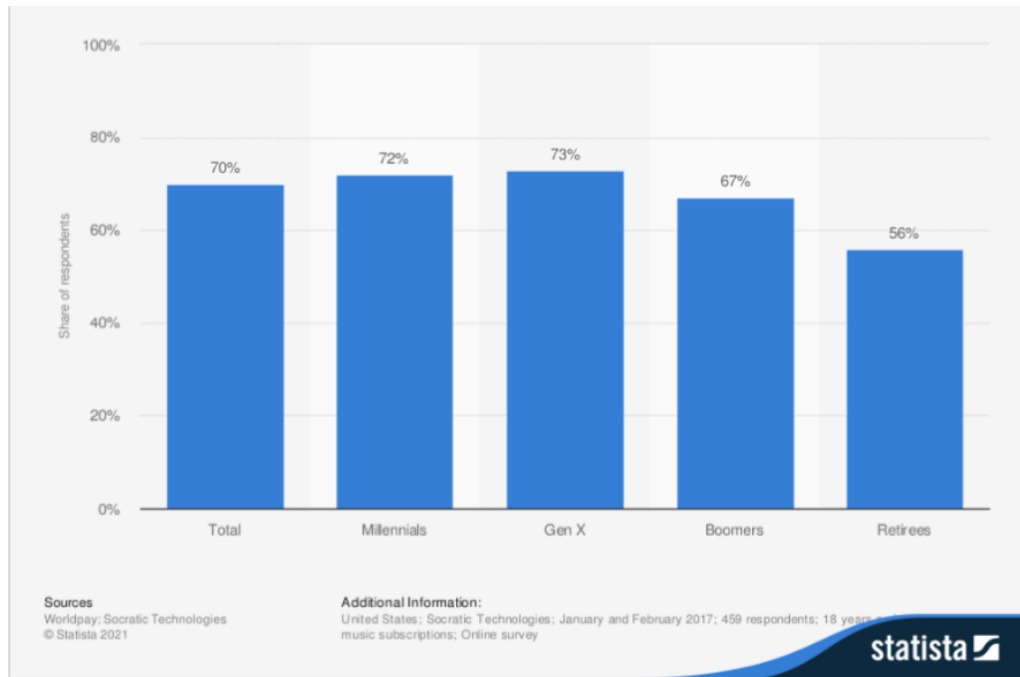
The process follows three stages represented in the figure above: Character-product, consumer-character and consumer-product. The viewer watches movies or series programs in which characters are linked to products (as clothes they wear or cars they drive). Then, certain sense of familiarity is built between the consumer and the character (this could be admiration or sympathy towards that character). After this exposure, the consumer is influenced into behaving in the same way and consuming the same products the character does. Character's fill viewers of information about the products; how, when and why they use them.

It is important for brands that choose to follow this strategy to find the optimum point of placement exposure; the product should be visible long enough to capture attention but not too long to annoy consumer (Williams, et al. 2011). Obviously, the more popular and successful the program is, the more people it achieves, the more influence power it has and the more expensive it gets. However, it happens that sometimes product placement does not incur a cost for brands, as program producers also have the need of using specific products in order to gain reality (under a certain budget). This is why sometimes producers and brands negotiate

tradeoffs (the movie needs the product and does not want to pay for it, and the product needs promotion in the movie and does not want to pay either. Therefore, they arrive to an agreement). It is also important to decide whether a brand wants to establish a weak or strong association. Weak associations refer to mere “backgrounding”, the product just being there (going back to the sitcom *Friends* example, where *Barilla* tomato sauce or *Heineken* beers are placed in the apartment with no interaction with the characters). Strong association happens when characters do speak, have an opinion and interact with the product (for example *Audi* in the *Iron Man* Trilogy).

Russell’s study for the *Journal of Advertising* (2006), demonstrates how sitcoms are the variety of program that has the strongest impact on consumer’s memory. Brands that have invested in placing their product on sitcoms have later been better recalled by consumers than those placed on realities or movies. This is because sitcoms have seasons that manage to engage consumers for large periods of time. They are composed of short episodes (the shortest, the easier it is to capture audience attention), that at the same time form seasons that are slowly released over time. The audience is able to develop a feeling of familiarity with the program, the characters and the stories that happen to them. Consumers familiarize and sympathize with this variety of series very rapidly and they even get a fictitious feeling of “commitment” with the protagonists. It is in brand’s interest to place their products wisely on the most popular programs, and it is here where the next question pops up: How and where do Millennials consume audiovisual content? The answer is clear, *Netflix*.

Figure 3: Share of consumers with an active Netflix subscription in the United States as of February 2017, by age group.



Source: (Statista, 2021).

It has been found that Millennials are more likely than their previous generation to be subscribed and spend a significant amount of their time on TV or video sources. *Netflix* is the perfect example, as it is the leading video subscription service nearly doubling *Amazon* and *Hulu* (main competitors) in number of subscribers. Moreover, it is the most popular platform among consumers between 16 and 34 years old. Their success is due to their wide catalogue of films and programs, added up to even offering original content (like “*House of Cards*” or “*Stranger Things*”). According to figure 3, 72% of Netflix subscribers are Millennials (Statista, 2017). Therefore, it can be concluded that Netflix should be marketer’s target.

Every enigma regarding product placement seems to be covered by now. Millennials do not stand advertising spots anymore and product placement is the right alternative for brands to hedge and redirect their advertisement investments. By the times that are running and with the arousal of a mortal virus that has stopped the world economy and is now drowning whole countries under economic depressions, it does not seem like the right time to invest money in any area, at all. However, “consumer consumption of entertainment increases when economic times get tough” (Russell, 2006). So then, the argument changes around. Could there be a better time than now to get all hands-on deck to work on marketing initiatives and build advertisement campaigns? Certainly, not.

All in all, in order to come across a successful a branding strategy, with the enough strength to impact the demanding public of millennials, companies should follow the following four steps:

1. *How?* Product placement
2. *Where?* Netflix
3. *What?* Sitcoms
4. *When?* Economic decline

2.2.3 Millennials and digital Media

Some of the words that best define millennials is skepticism. It is because of this that they would rather listen or look for mouth-to-mouth advice from friends and family, than listen to an expert, a corporation or the internet. Millennials look for their peer's opinion on firsthand experiences in order to make decisions on what products and brands to buy. They are highly likely to do what is known as "crowd sourcing" (collecting information and opinions about a product or service, typically from the internet, from a large group of people). Millennials are aware they are brand's target and are not happy with it; then making decisions based in third people opinions is their way of turning a blind eye on ads in an effort to confront corporate marketing manipulations. According to a study carried out by the BCG (2012), 50% of millennials claim to read reviews and look for information about products when shopping, versus 21% of non-millennials consumers. This happens due to the huge and instant access they have to social media.

Millennials have the possibility of contacting immediately and in real time people from all around the world, allowing them to cultivate substantial networks. People have more voice than ever and also now, more than ever, wish to self-express. They are listened, as they have been given the freedom of expressing opinions in platforms that at the same time reach millions of other people. It is because of this that any profile is able to receive tons of visits and even become instantly viral. Obviously, if millennials wish to listen to non-corporate opinions, these comments have a big repercussion in how the brand is perceived by the consumer therefore, it is important for every company to monitor these online interactions and make sure they play in their favor.

Brands have joined social media in order to have constant presence and accessibility. Millennials sympathize more with brands that have social media profiles than with those that don't. Users on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter... have more influencing power than brands do, which is both a threat and an opportunity for them. Having these influencing people speak beneficially about a brand is what strategies seek for. It is with this phenomenon that the terms "influencer" arises.

"Influencers are users in social media who have established credibility in a specific industry through their activity in this media. They have access to a large audience of consumers who follow their social media activity regularly and are generally perceived as trustworthy by other users". (Stubb & Nyström, 2019)

These powerful influencing figures have spontaneously emerged, sympathizing and gaining popularity across the world. Influencers are also known as content creators, content that reaches million followers or subscribers they have been able to gather and content brands wish to be a part off. Brand positioning in the influencer marketing world is known as sponsored content. Influencer's wear, use and consume from certain products, promoting them and getting in return some kind of compensation form the brand. In order to protect consumers, content creators have been regulated by federal laws which have made mandatory to specify when a collaboration or a sponsored action is being made in order to avoid misleading customers. It has been found that millennials feel annoyed with sponsored or paid content as they join social media with the opposite purpose, which is getting real and trustworthy advice from others that can relate to them. Hence, paid content is exactly what millennials are running away from... Nevertheless, brand collaborations are influencers main source of income, they fully depend on them as the content they create is delivered for free in the platforms.

Moreover, a rather positive outcome is being experienced in the other side of the deal. It has been found that brands have increased sales and received positive attitudes and feedback from customers since their collaborations with social media influencers (Stubb & Nyström, 2019). Subsequently, brands and influencers are not going to cease working together, they have to manage to keep doing it in a way that does not bother the millennial user. It is because of this that we can conclude that digital media and influencer marketing function is to align incentives between brands, influencers and customers. At the optimum point all of them will come out with their desired positive outcomes.

Marketers have deeply studied how to achieve the optimal point and have come across some conclusions in order to make their strategies more powerful; seeking to build advocacy plans which is what millennials are willing to listen to. They want exclusivity with influencers, to have closed deals that claim and commit a certain influencer into working ultimately with the brand and no other in the industry. With these kind of deals corporations have given birth to brand ambassadors, with whom they will make long-term collaborations. Companies target influencers, celebrities, artists... (that comply with the companies' values) and make them the principal image and reflect of a loyal customer. One example is *Rafael Nadal* as the ambassador for *Banco Santander*. According to *Santander* the athlete "reflects values, hard work, discipline humility and respect, the bank stands for". Therefore, all campaigns, sponsors or ads the bank does or plans to do in the foreseeable future, will be done with Nadal and his image. Furthermore, if Nadal was to speak about or recommend any bank, he would do so about Santander.

To summarize, millennials do not listen, nor want to, to corporation ads or direct messages from them. They want to listen from advice of figures and individuals they know and familiarize with. Companies have to focus on aligning interests not only with consumers, but also with these influencers or ambassadors. Advocacy plans that involve continually communicating with customers through their preferred channels, listening to their feedback, monitoring it and providing them with content from their influential figures is what marketing is about in the 21st century.

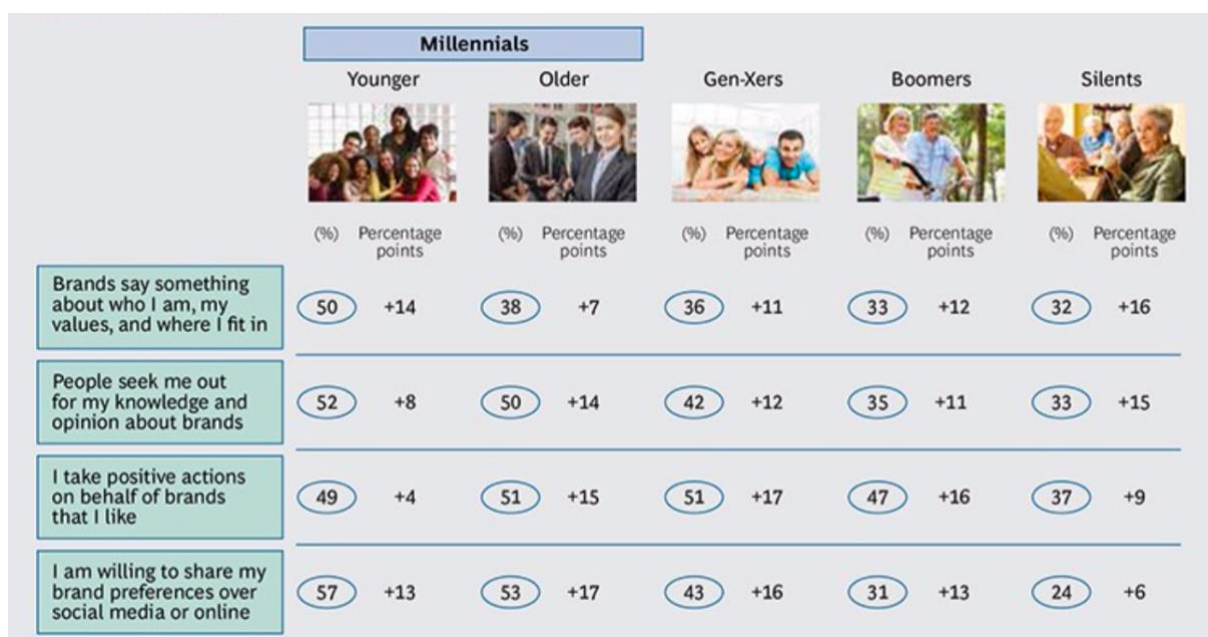
2.3 Millennial's mindset: Their beliefs and motivations

It is in millennials intrinsic nature to believe in social issues and take action in them. World problems are not perceived as external or unconnected causes, but as direct and personal ones. They integrate social problems in their daily lives: in their way of consuming, working, moving... They want to work and consume from brands that are socially and environmentally conscious. They know who they are because of all the information displayed to them and the access they have through the internet. Furthermore, they have managed to pressure governments to the point of making them implement policies and laws that require for brands to behave in an *ethical* and "*green*" way (some examples are fair trade and free commerce). A minimum in terms of social responsibility, is demanded from millennials to corporations and

big entities, leaving them with no further choice than to get involved and work to make a difference.

Millennials have developed deeper relations and involvement with brands than previous generations did (Figure 4). They believe brands speak about who they are and the values they stand for, they see brands and consumption as a way of self-expression and that is the main reason of their concern. In order to align their beliefs, with their actions they look for companies that leverage their resources to help with social and environmental causes. Millennials believe in a common fight; they want to join companies rather than acting alone. A BCG study points out how 30% of millennials prefer to get involved in cause campaigns, enhance others to do so and collaborate in fundraising, versus 22% of non-millennials (2012).

Figure 4: U.S Millennials engage with brands much more extensively and personally than older consumers.



Source: (Barton et al., 2021).

Millennials see institutions and corporations as global changers. Firms that are able to engage and commit with Millennial’s beliefs and revolutions have better opportunities to build a loyal (and long-term) relationship with them. So then, it can be concluded that the best marketing strategies are the ones that involve the brand with a social cause and even turn the focus and objective of the company around it.

3. CHAPTER 2: MERCEDES-BENZ BRAND & MARKETING ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction of Mercedes-Benz

With the purpose of accurately understanding Mercedes decisions, philosophy and culture, an overview of the brand's long past and history will be made, since it goes more than 100 years back. The initiation of Mercedes happened in a moment in history in which the automotive industry was undergoing revolution that radically changed businesses and operating procedures. Mercedes managed to get deeply involved, becoming one of the main and most significant roles in the disruptive scene. The brand Mercedes has, since the very beginning, always been at the top of the industry. It has been one of the fastest brands in reaching and developing the most advanced and state-of-the-art technology and knowledge. However, above all, Mercedes has always been at the spotlight for its elegant, luxurious, and inaccessible prestige.

Founded by Carl Benz, who created and manufactured its first car in the year 1886, who accomplished to lead the company towards the successful business it has become years later. Carl managed to give the corporation the definite big push with the acquisition of the firm Gottlieb Daimler. The transaction was subject to certain specific restrictions; the most highlighted one was how all brand's cars had to be named after Mercedes, Carl's daughter. Once the two firms were fully merged, the corporation became official under the name Daimler-Benz AG (nonetheless, the cars will always be launched as Mercedes-Benz).

The concept of Mercedes as an exclusive and elegant car started in the year 1904, when the model Mercedes-Simplex 60 PS was released. The car was a spacious tourism that seek to recall in the inside, an elegant living room in which its passengers could comfortably spend hours traveling all around. "Seats upholstered with the finest brocade", these are the words the proper brand uses to describe the interior of the old car model. It was around 25 years later, that Mercedes-Benz Nürburg (W 08) was launched, a car ahead of its time for the advanced and modern technology it counted with. It was with this model that Mercedes widen its appeal; it did not only mean elegance and tradition, but also technology, efficiency, and pleasure for driving. The car main and most disrupting feature was the engine. A smooth eight-cylinder engine, capable of powering the car up to 20.000 kilometers in perfect conditions, something unimaginable in the years running. It was at this point that Mercedes became internationally famous, known and heard overseas for its futurist innovations and perspectives in the

automotive world. All in all, Mercedes achieved to gather to concepts under the same brand umbrella, advanced mobility, in the most luxury shapes.

Moreover, during the First World War Mercedes was enhanced to keep up studying its engines design and capacity. By this time, the brand focus lied in analyzing and researching the aerodynamics of the engines through the flow of hot air within them. These air streams were what allowed cars travel long distances at impressive speeds. Furthermore, passengers experience was the firm's priority, it is because of this that they were seeking to manufacture the most smooth and silent engine, in order to provide the most enjoyable journeys.

Security has always been one of the industry's most important traits. A car manufacturer whose name recalls the idea of "security", can bring significant changes in sale volumes. Therefore, during the 50s the brand decided to invest in making their models more secure ones. 10 years later, Mercedes was ready and launched a model pioneer in security due to the innovations the car came with. Things that today seem so basic like door locks and a double circuit braking system, were incorporated. So then, the firm released the 220-model, which impacted the industry in a radical way, as corporations saw themselves with no further choice than to keep up with the new incorporations if they did not want to lag behind. Now, Mercedes was not only widely known, but it had become the industry's brand leader and model.

Mercedes introduces two new disciplines: security and efficiency. These traits emerge with the 126 car, a model in which the security seat belt and airbag made their debut. Moreover, they kept focusing on building the best passenger impression, working in the tourisms suspension in order to avoid the feeling of bumps in country roads and more controversial roads. These resulted in Mercedes adding the word experience into the dictionary of words of what the corporation means. A pleasant and smooth experience that now, was inevitably more secure. Not even now that technology has advanced so rapidly, but already in the year 1998, the influential German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine, compared Mercedes cars to a magic flying carpet. They published how the car's suspension had been so accurately achieved that it seemed as if the car could predict and detect bumps even before them happening. It can be concluded that Mercedes R&D capacity, goes several steps ahead the industry and its competitors. In addition, it was also by this time that Mercedes developed the revolutionary incorporation of the Automated Parking System (APS) and the Satellite Navigation System, allowing its customers to broaden the scope of destinies they could contemplate.

Between the years 2005 and 2013 the climate controversy approached the automotive industry hard, introducing to all companies a new issue that had to be addressed. The world raised awareness towards sustainability and climate change, calling for action all businesses, especially those that were significantly taking part (the automotive industry was certainly one of them). Mercedes processed all the information and revolution going on and decided, just as they always had, to make a move and take part in it by launching an ecofriendly car. These one was manufactured through sustainable processes and only using recycled and reusable pieces and products, which awarded Mercedes with the first ever environmental certificate in the industry. The car was the first hybrid model of a very long series that was about to arrive and become one of the main and most relevant Mercedes business units today. It was the end of diesel and the beginning of hybrid and pluggable cars.

Through the years and thanks to the rapid advances of technology, Mercedes has improved, evolved, and innovated with the purpose of satisfying and adapting to the needs of the consumer. A rather fluctuant consumer better described for being fussy and with increasing expectations from the industry, has become the main reason for Mercedes constant change in goals and objectives through history. From manufacturing the most sophisticated and luxurious car designs to working on powering cars through electronic batteries. These are the factors that have perfectly differentiated Mercedes from its competitors. After all these years, Mercedes has established a link with the meaning of efficiency, technology, comfortableness, security, elegance, exclusivity, and environmental responsibility.

Mercedes would offer consumers things that they did not even know wanted, overtaking the market, the industry, and the driven force of the change in era, technology. After going over the history of the firm, it can be concluded that Mercedes is an example of compromise and ambition. They see threats as challenges and transform these challenges in opportunities to benefit from. So then, why not face again one of these challenges? Millennials, according to Dr. José Javier Ruiz Cartagena (2017), are the biggest and most powerful consumer segment in the world; managing to attract the collective is a rather tough, however necessary task. Mercedes-Benz is certainly the perfect profile to do so.

For the following paper, just as the attitudes and behaviors of millennials have been studied allowing to understand the emerging demands and needs, the automotive manufacturer and its boundaries will be analyzed, with the objective of overlapping both interests.

3.2 Mercedes-Benz Marketing Strategy over the years

3.2.1 Brand positioning

To begin with, it is important to understand what brand positioning is, what its core function is and how relevant it is in order to carry out an efficient marketing strategy. Persuasiveness is certainly the biggest priority among a brand's communication strategy. Is the base line to become consumer's first choice. However, and with the purpose of carrying out an effective strategy a corporation must define, identify and later meet its target consumer. Positioning has been defined as the spot brands gain in consumer's brain with respect of that of competitors in the market (Espinosa, R. 2019). All in all, consumer's minds end up becoming companies' ultimate goal.

Jack Trout and Al Ries, recognized as two of the all-time fathers of marketing, explain in the book *Positioning* (2001), how a reliable and significant strategy is developed by putting the focus in the message being transmitted to the client, rather than in the product itself. So then, it can be concluded from their book, that consumer's perception about the product is of more important than the actual characteristics the product wraps around itself. Trying to achieve every single profile in the market would not be wise for any brand. The world is overwhelmed by very disruptive consumer profiles that in addition, are the daily basis target of millions of other advertisings and stimuli. In order for companies to succeed, a more realistic approach should be developed. Segmenting the market, differentiating the brand from its competitors and going after the desired (and previously defined) consumer profile.

Trout and Ries highlight putting all efforts in building the best perception possible of the product rather than actually improving the same one. The goal lays in reflecting the adequate image in consumers brain. For them, "perception is reality" (Villacampa, 2020), and due to this a company should work in transmitting what the selected segment demands to see. Moreover, if the brand is of a large size and is one of the industry leaders (just as Mercedes-Benz is) it competes with an undoubted significant advantage. Mercedes challenge is to maintain this advantage and never lag behind emerging trends and brands in the industry. Mercedes is a brand with an extended and broad line series with multiple different products. Obviously, this has happened as a result of their success however, it may also be translated as a potential risk. The broader the line of products the more consumers a company targets, the more segments are satisfied and the harder it gets to maintain a constant approach and message.

This may mislead and confuse consumers and blur in their minds the distinction of a brand. This is the challenge large size firms such as Mercedes have to face.

Overall, the objective of brand positioning is to have a differentiated idea of what does your product or service mean and what exactly is that satisfies in the market that is different from competitors (competitive advantage). It is among brand's needs, to focus on satisfying determined segments inside an industry in order to offer unique added value to consumers. It is this differentiated value that influences people's choice when consuming. As a brand position focus increases and gets more specific, more accurate its strategies will be. However, the scope of clients that it would be targeting will be reduced as it gets more specific. The optimal point is to be found by leveraging all factors.

3.2.2 Mercedes-Benz positioning

After going through the history of the brand, it is possible to appreciate the influencing power Mercedes has in the automotive industry. Due to several years of technological evolution, of studying the market, its demands and expectations, Mercedes goes beyond satisfying the basic need of its core business (transportation). Mercedes offers high quality range, category, class and culture in contrast to its competitors. Now that a sharper idea of the brand and its meaning is established, its objectives and target group are identified and understood.

Mercedes from the very beginning had set its goals in creating a distinct identity across other automotive brands. The cars' design, together with the logo and image of the three-pointed star, are considered the brand's trademark. The star reflects the meaning of the three main company values: fascination, responsibility and perfection. Mercedes designs reflect what values the brand stands for and make them visible to consumers.

When developing and working in future campaigns, Mercedes puts its focus in achieving a long-lasting effect on the client, rather than a short-term impact. For example, when the launch of a new line series happens, they do not create personalized campaigns for that line to be sold. Instead, they produce advertisements and billboards that speak about the company as a whole. They make sound, enhancing people to speak about Mercedes and inevitably, making them notice the innovations and new products available. This has been Mercedes all time *modus operandi*.

In the year 2009, Mercedes published the details and intentions of their positioning and segmentation plan, together with some key factors. They made a clear and precise description of who the client they were targeting was and how they would be forwarding him. The client was described in two aspects. First, from the demographic look for which he was a man between 40 and 65 years (mainly follows the family man pattern). From the socioeconomic look, it was described as an executive profile with elevated level of studies and income. This has been the brand's main target for most of its life and it is considered the general look of its most common client. Mercedes advanced technology has allowed the brand to work on several and distinct models, building a wider range of car series and eventually amplifying their target group. They have adapted each of their cars to a determined segment in the market, increasing in size its target group and the possibility of reaching potential new customers. Regardless their innovations and evolutions, the brand has always maintained its main focus on the elder executive male profile, that looks for luxury and high end feel over everything.

With the purpose of getting an accurate overview of how Mercedes has segmented the market and who is the population it regards with each different product, a table representing Mercedes-Benz Spanish market is represented bellow (*figure 5*):

Figure 5: Mercedes-Benz segmentation according to each car line model

Urban	
A Class	Female population
B Class	Women with children and big families
For families	
R Class	"Monospace", mixt population
C Class	"Breaks", for men frequent use (work and private use).
E Class	
Coupes	
S Class	Demanding men. High range with multiple options and advanced tools and technology.
CLS Class	
SUVs (Only for men)	
G Class	4x4
M Class	4x4 design in order to use in the city. "Designed for the wilderness. Enjoyed in the city"
GL Class	(Same as class M, more advanced in technology)
Sportsmanship	
CLK	Classic design
SLK	Aggressive design
CL	High range and state-of-the-art design.
SL	Sportsmanship and driving pleasure.
SLR	Formula 1 inspired, powerful motor appeal.

Source: (García, 2015).

3.2.3 Mercedes-Benz first steps towards millennials

Once Mercedes segmentation has been settled and in order to stick with the objective of this research paper, the market will now be segmented according to an age distinction variable which focuses on the millennial consumer.

The paper has analyzed millennials in multiple ways and perspectives, allowing to draw many assumptions. One of them was the skepticism that defines the generation as a consequence of being overloaded with information from media and traditional advertisement. When consumers' brain saturates as a result of being the target of such quantities of stimuli, it becomes a rather impossible task to even leave a glimpse of a footprint on them. The least

collapsed the mind is the easier it gets for marketers to deal with their job. However, as it has been learnt, millennials do not respond any more to ads or campaigns as previous generations did, that is why marketing strategies across industries have had to be updated. Nevertheless, it is important to have in mind that Mercedes cannot be analyzed as a standard brand in the market as it is a company with over more than 100 years old. The analysis and update of its marketing strategy so far, will be done in an exceptional way as it is a brand that, because of its prolonged life, has already built a name in the industry.

So then, Mercedes has been operating for many years which means that their first steps in the advertising world were with campaigns that regarded elder and therefore, more vulnerable and influenceable generations (like Gen X). As studied earlier, these generations were easily approached by brands and their publicity because of how unexploited their minds were. A bunch of fortunate brands that arrived at the early stage of marketing targeted them, benefiting from the purity of their minds. These companies gained a name and a spot in their memories and with the adequate strategies, some have managed to maintain their position.

As it is said “first come, first serve” and Mercedes has been a genuine example of this. The brand was one of the all-time first automotive brands in the world, which has provided them not only with an amazing technological advantage, but with a positioning and branding one too. They have already targeted a large group of consumers that has later been regarded with loyalty and advocacy programs assuring a loyal consumer profile that has eventually lasted many years. Not millennials, but their parents and even grandparents have already been targeted by the brand. The scope of the market has now changed, and the most powerful consumer is the millennial generation. A new marketing mission has raised for the brand that faces the need of engaging with a younger and divergent consumer.

Certainly, Mercedes was one of the early birds, leaving the brand with a not such pessimist outlook in their foreseeable brand positioning. They play with an important advantage: having had an impact on millennials parents. Impressive enough, this could be a game changer factor, since millennials are the most likely consumer to listen to their peers (family and friends) advice and recommendations (“*crowd sourcing*” in point 3.3). According to Karen L. Fingerman (2017), relationships between parents and its children on their “young adulthood”, have radically changed in the past decades. Involvement and communication of

parents with young adult children has impressively increased, making millennials experience deeper and closer contact with their parents than Gen X did.

All in all, Millennials is a generation that has accomplished a very close relation with their parents that added to their skepticism towards ads, results in a generation that consumes according to what they are told or advised. They are prone to listen to what their Generation X father or mother has to say, a consumer group that again has been previously and accurately triggered by Mercedes Benz.

Mercedes reasons for establishing this new goal are clear. They have to worry about millennials being publicity-saturated, however, not as much as young brands that have just arrived and have to deal not only with getting a position in the market, but of being even noticed in the same one. Thanks to Mercedes long history, they can have for granted having an impression in consumers overall. Nonetheless, not everything is done, and it would be certainly unwise for the brand to settle with their loyal customers. It is true that the company has taken care of building a sense of loyalty, provoking later generations to follow their parents' steps and trusting what they have learnt is trustworthy. Having arrived first assures a company with a cluster of loyal customers and therefore, a big advantage in the brand positioning "game". After being provided with a first contact with millennials, the next step is to finish to convince them, as to retain and attract more of them.

Moving on, an analysis of how Mercedes had eventually taken action in the matter will be done with the purpose of understanding the reasoning of such a recognized strategy.

3.2.4 The start of the marketing transition: Generation Benz and #TakeTheWheel

New younger generations that add up to 75 million potential consumers (Zoeller, S. 2021), have an unimaginable influence and power in the market, a fact that has made them so attractive for brands that didn't have interest in targeting them. Mercedes decided to adjust not only its strategies, but also its products in order to deliver what the young audience was demanding. The brand marketing strategy shifted directions and is now building a more modern, energetic, fun and approachable image than the luxurious and classical one it used to pursue (without leaving aside their quality and exclusive reputation). The shift and work behind this has been such, that it has been recognized studied and analyzed all over the world by

marketers and professionals of the field. These are the factors that have built and gathered the objective of this paper.

So then, for luxurious brands like Mercedes and others in the industry such as BMW or Audi, it is significantly important to maintain loyal consumers as they approach younger ones. Older clients for these brands suppose a hedge tool for their core businesses and they should not be put at risk. Therefore, the most common strategy in the luxurious automotive industry is the introduction of new cheaper models that expand line series. The logic behind this strategy is providing millennials throughout their lives with cheaper products that would progressively increase in price as they increase their income. Then, brands offer would involve cheaper products that younger audiences are able to afford, together with their all-time luxurious and highly priced cars (that they would not cease to manufacture). In conclusion, the millennial generation is being reached as their loyal consumers are still taken care of.

Finally, it was in the year 2011 that the brand decided to change their marketing segmentation and designed a thoroughly and skillfully plan to engage with a younger consumer demographic. Mercedes launched what was called “Generation-Benz”, which constituted an online community formed by 250 people between their twenties and late thirties. Their function consisted in giving consulting advice on consumer shopping habits and preferences of young generations, to the marketing team of the brand. Mercedes started gathering significant amounts of valuable information that would guide them in the mission of attracting millennials. This has been recognized as a “social listening” strategy that provided Mercedes with a huge insight on what the targeted audience was willing to see. Mercedes then, took advantage of all the insight assembled information and built a younger profile consumer with all the key characteristics that needed to be pursued. These gave them the possibility of building perfect marketing and social campaigns that would engage the younger consumer with the brand.

Moreover, by 2013 this information was used to create their first “affordable” product, the *CLA-Class* (with a starting price under \$30,000). Prices seemed like the first and strongest barrier for millennials; their main motivator for discarding Mercedes as their car brand. Therefore, printed and traditional advertising focused all attention on the impressive price of the new car model. The process was the following: The new car’s TV ad was done for the 2013 Super Bowl starring the singer Usher and the model Kate Upton (disruptive representatives of the brand for what the public was used to). At some point the ad zooms-in a workman putting

up the last corner of the billboard for the *CLA*, displaying in that way the price of this one (represented in the following figure).

Figure 6: 2013 CLA Super Bowl ad



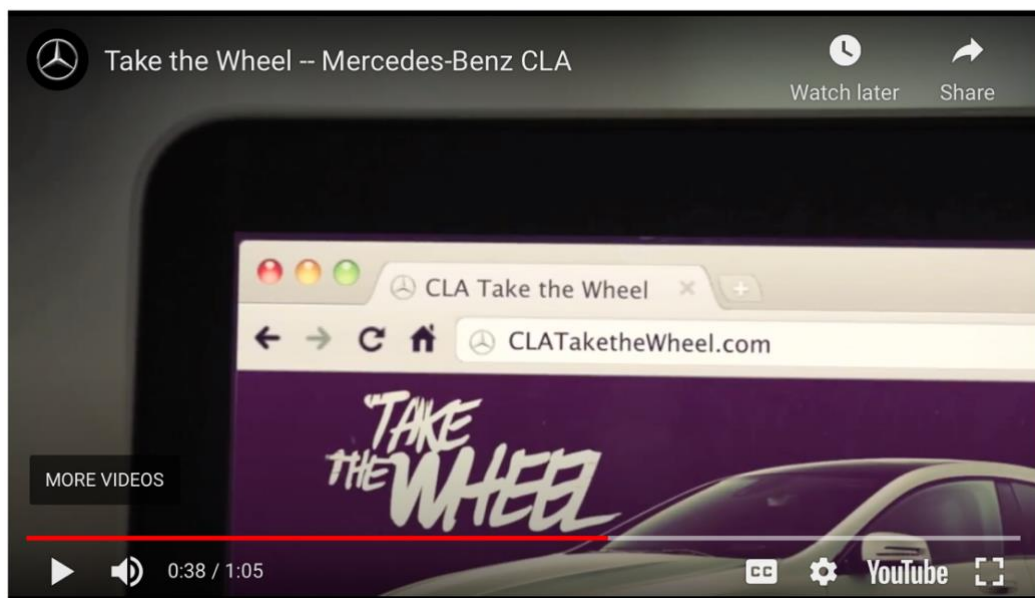
Source: (Turnbull, 2018).

The campaign certainly managed to have an impact as it came together with Mercedes being the biggest sponsor of the Super Bowl stadium that year (*Mercedes-Benz Super Dome* in New Orleans). It has been estimated that the ad reached around 108 million Americans and was later followed by the campaign *#TakeTheWheel* on Instagram. A campaign that, with no surprise, has been vowed in the marketing world as it met with all the key requirements needed to involve millennials.

As it has been previously studied, the younger group is better and more accurately approached through social media. It is because of this that from this point forward Mercedes objective was to reach brand awareness with the new *CLA* through digital and social media featuring key influencers. They put all hands-on deck and developed this Instagram based campaign (*#TakeTheWheel*) where they challenged five of the most famous photographers to take the best possible picture of the new *CLA*. The goal of these photographers was to obtain

the most liked picture in order to win the car model. The reasoning and strategy behind this were not only to reach Mercedes followers, but the followers of all 5 photographers involved in the matter and as a result, broadening their consumer scope. According to a research done by Cision (Denten, L. 2013) involving five famous Instagram profiles made Mercedes reach around 3 million new followers. Followers that were not casually reached; Mercedes had previously studied the professionals' profiles in order to make sure their follower, matched their target market. The brand supported the campaign with other platforms and sites (such as YouTube and Facebook) allowing users to learn more information on the project and the company and as a result, getting them involved.

Figure 7: Mercedes-Benz #Takethewheel YouTube spot.



Source: (Mercedes-Benz USA, 2013)

The strategy (represented through a screenshot in the above figure), was a perfect fit for the millennial generation as it was backed up in Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, dealing in that way with the four main channels that influence and attract the consumer group. These were the first steps towards what is now known as Youth marketing (emerging strategies that adapt marketing to younger generations) and Mercedes is the perfect example of a successful story in the matter.

Mercedes new segmentation plan involved owned, paid and earned media through the use of social and digital media. The strategy has been described as an integrated marketing

communication approach as it has blended successfully all its media platforms under the same reasoning line. The brand has been launching different campaigns that have been appropriately supported in all media channels. Mercedes thoroughly and skillfully designed a plan to engage with the younger consumer demographic and in addition, maintain their all-time prestige.

3.2.5 Mercedes-Benz, Social Media & Digital strategy

It is undoubtful that social media has become for marketers, a new branding tool. Mercedes marketing twist involved immersing the brand in the new web of channels millennials interact with. However; each platform has a different appeal and certainly, a different public. Millennials comprise a generation of a very broad age group that ranges between people in their mid-twenties and their forties. Such a big group has somewhat disruptive personalities and behaviors within them. Different social media sites regard the different subgroups inside millennials (for example Instagram has a more juvenile appeal and Facebook a more mature one), it is because of this that each brand should follow different digital media patterns depending on the regarded platform and this is eventually, what Mercedes has done. Depending on the site you navigate in you would be regarded differently, finding different content and messages. “They change and adapt the tone of voice between the platforms to engage their followers and generate more of social conversations” (Brand24, 2016). Therefore, a deeper insight on the brands approach in each social media platform will be done for the purpose of this research paper.

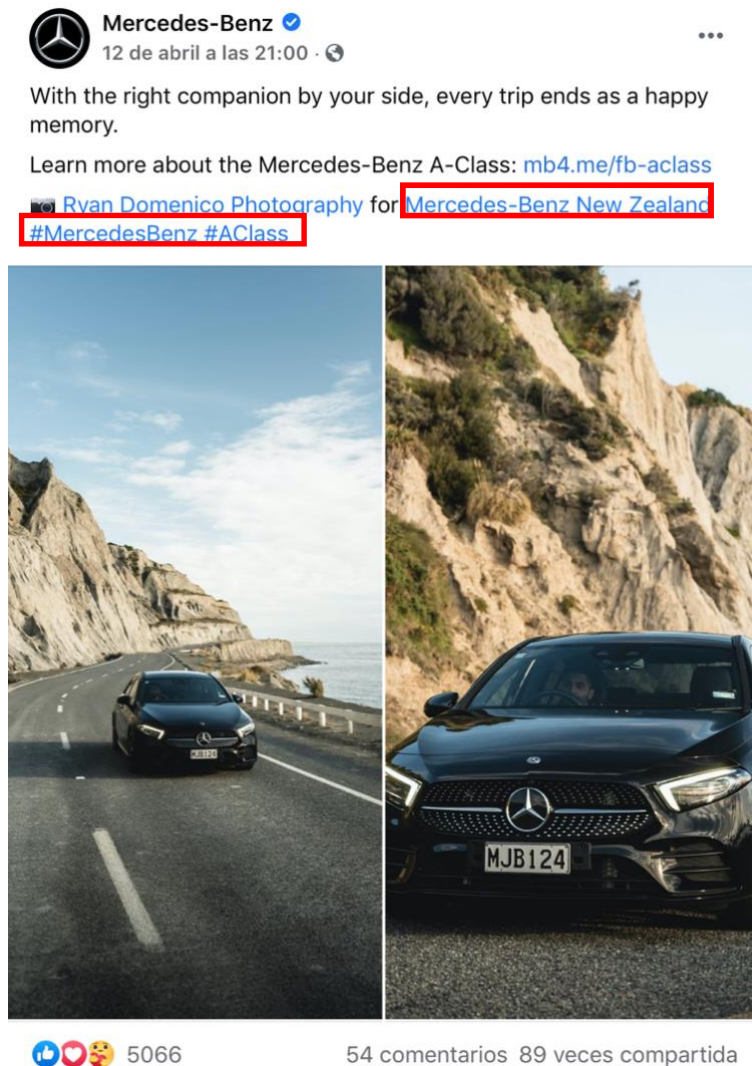
3.2.5.1 Facebook

Starting off with Facebook, where the brand has managed to gather up today the impressive amount of 23 million followers. Nonetheless, the company does not have a single profile, but multiple ones with particular local and business focus. That way, one will be able to find different profiles for different countries (like Mercedes-Benz Spain with 385k followers) and different business units (Mercedes-Benz museum with 716k followers). In order to reinforce the message being sent across all their business sites, they tag and mention each other simultaneously in the posts they make, cross-promoting publication from their entire social media web. Furthermore, they have created branded hashtags such as #AClass, #MBclassic and more, in order to create a bank of content regarding the topics the hashtags refer to. This allows followers to dive more easily into what interests them and even participate in creating original content for the brand. (Hashtags are freely used by any user in any platform. Individuals are able to upload content regarding the matter of whatever hashtag creating free

content for the same one. This provides brands with free original content from influencers and consumers).

Below is an example of one of their recent Facebook posts engaging with the mentioned strategies (pointed in red in the figure).

Figure 8: Mercedes-Benz Facebook post by April 12th, 2021.



Source: (@Mercedes-Benz, 2021)

Their Facebook page is a very engaging one since they keep up the pace of posting, by doing so 2 or 3 times a day. They do not only post about the cars, they go after a more engaging and original appeal and post a wide range of content; from car racing news, automotive technological innovations or videos and pictures of some of the influencers the brand features.

Mercedes claims that through their Facebook account they are willing to represent the lifestyle the car manufacturer represents, going beyond the products itself. They listen to their followers' feedback and provide them with relevant content making them feel involved in the Mercedes experience.

3.2.5.2 Twitter

Moving on, in Twitter the company does not have the same impact or voice it has on Facebook, as it counts with 3.6 million followers (in comparison with the 23 million Facebook followers). For this platform the company has again multiple profiles for particular units and uses the *cross-promoting* strategy by constantly tagging and referring to the other profiles. It is in this platform where Mercedes-Benz is the most active and talkative. It makes an average of 8 posts a day and publicly interacts and directly responds to comments and tweets from their followers; answering questions and concerns or just thanking their fans comments. Engaging so much with their followers and giving them voice in their twitter wall is a really enhancing strategy to attract millennials who (as previously studied), like to have a voice and opinion, wish to feel listened by the brand and identified with their message.

The use of hashtags does not cease on Twitter, in fact they build new and engage with popular hashtags in order to reach a greater impact; some examples are #MBLove or #MidWeekMotivation (used in general across Twitter). That kind of hashtags increase Mercedes-Benz visibility as they are used across all users giving them the chance of reaching users outside their followers list. Moreover, they use more day-to-day language and expressions, giving the brand a less serious and more humoristic look, they like to joke and get involved in not the formal posts users link the brand to. They tend to use *emojis* which increment the feeling of closeness with their followers inviting them to communicate and speak with the brands' profile.

Below on figure 9 an example of the brand directly interacting with users and using popular hashtags. On the right (figure 10), a recent example of an original tweet (all pointed in red).

Figure 9: Mercedes-Benz Twitter post by April 20th, 2021.



Source: (@Mercedes-Benz, 2021b)

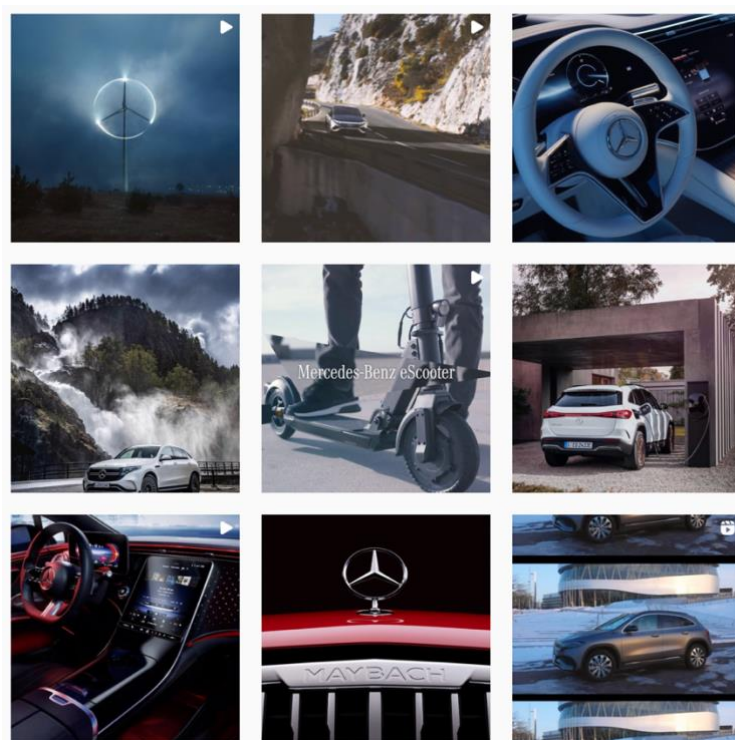
3.2.5.3 Instagram

Finally, Instagram, which has become their most influencing and powerful social media platform. They count with 32 million followers and that is why they are really rigorous on the visual appeal and aesthetics of the account. Their whole profile is extremely detailed, the colors

and shapes of the posts and the order in which they post them are deeply thought and planned. The feed has a very artsy call which makes it pleasant and charming to watch, recalling the experience of visiting an art gallery. Mark Aikman, responsible for Mercedes marketing services and digital customer experience, claimed “success is built on the quality of aesthetics. Imagery is everything on Instagram”. He also highlighted how for this platform it is important to create original content and avoid reposting from influencers or brand representatives, in order to offer unique value to engage consumers.

Not like with Facebook and Twitter, Mercedes Instagram account serves as a brand platform. Mercedes does not look after sales or making noise on promotions through this account, the focus lays upon creating valuable content, sustaining and boosting the image of the brand. The following figure is a screenshot of their feed at mid-April 2021, that reflects their visually appealing purpose.

Figure 10: Mercedes-Benz Instagram feed by April 20th, 2021.



Source: (@mercedesbenz, 2021).

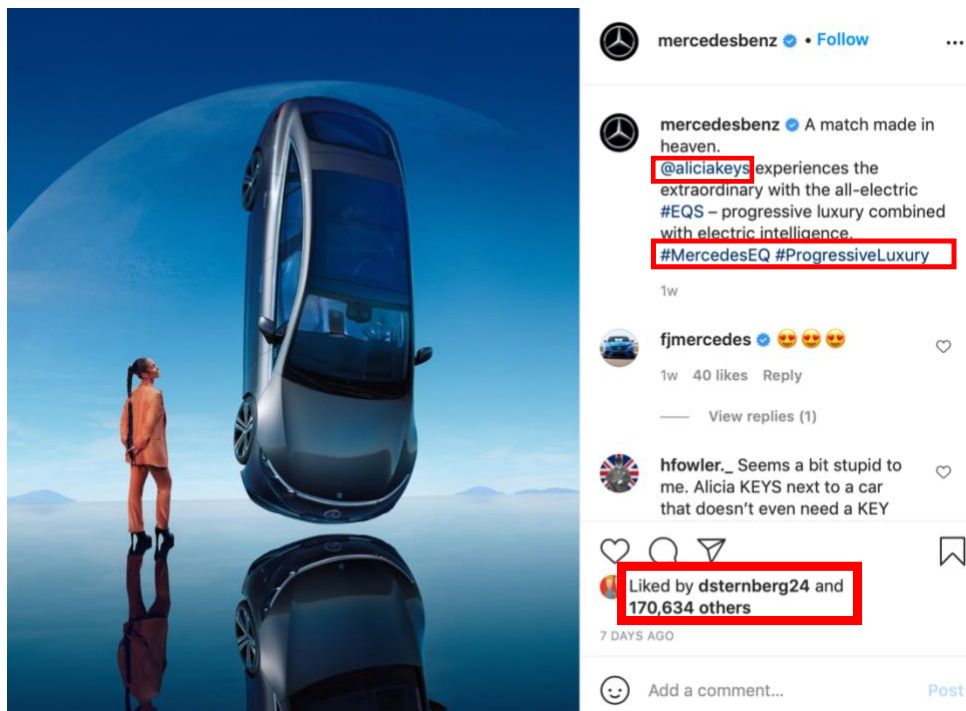
They are as active as they are in Twitter with an average rate of 5 to 7 posts a day. It is the platform where they, more successfully, engage and reach followers as they amount a total of 150,000 to 250,000 average likes per post. According to an analysis made by the brand in

the year 2018, Mercedes under their global user name gets 27.6 million likes per month. These numbers are certainly deserving as the work behind the making of the pictures and videos is extremely precise, pursuing their all-time exclusive and luxurious image.

Since they want to provide the profile with unique content that cannot be seen in any other kind of digital platform, they use brand ambassadors and influencers in a different way. Instead of having influencers post on their profiles the standard branded content, it is Mercedes that makes the posts and uploads the pictures featuring them.

Again, they would use hashtags and strategies already mentioned, from their other social media accounts. Furthermore, they add disruptive strategies such as handing over the account to their influencers and making them post under the *@mercedesbenz* username; assuring the account is constantly delivering special and distinctive content. In the following figure, an example of a post featuring the singer Alicia Keys (one of the brand's main ambassadors). This is a unique post made by Mercedes-Benz which cannot be found (and would not be found) in Alicia Keys Instagram account or other. (Pointed in red the characteristics mentioned).

Figure 11: Mercedes-Benz starring Alicia Keys by April 15th, 2021.



Source: (@mercedesbenz, 2021).

All these factors have driven Mercedes on the right track, making it the most successful brand on Instagram. On November 2018 the brand reached the Instagram milestone of amounting a total of 1 billion likes. Interbrand (a renamed US consultancy company), proclaimed Mercedes the first brand from the list of companies in the “Best Global Brands 2018” (built by Interbrand) to reach the billion likes. It was because of this that Mercedes was awarded with the title of being the most successful brand on Instagram.

3.3 Mercedes-Benz today

Once all the necessary changes were adopted and adapted around the brand’s image and appeal, impactful advertising campaigns and collaborations have been made sticking with the company’s objective. Mercedes has been adequately repositioned in the market thanks to the consistency of these campaigns. Following up, the project aims to analyze specific examples that will allow to draw final conclusions on the story behind the car manufacturer and the millennial collective.

Bellow, a study of three different campaigns developed during the past decade, adapted and personalized for three different cars, that deliver the same consistent message. (Lewis Hamilton featuring the AMG car, Dabiz Muñoz featuring the GLC Coupé and the campaign “Designed for the wilderness. Enjoyed in the city” featuring the GLA model).

3.3.1 Lewis Hamilton. AMG.

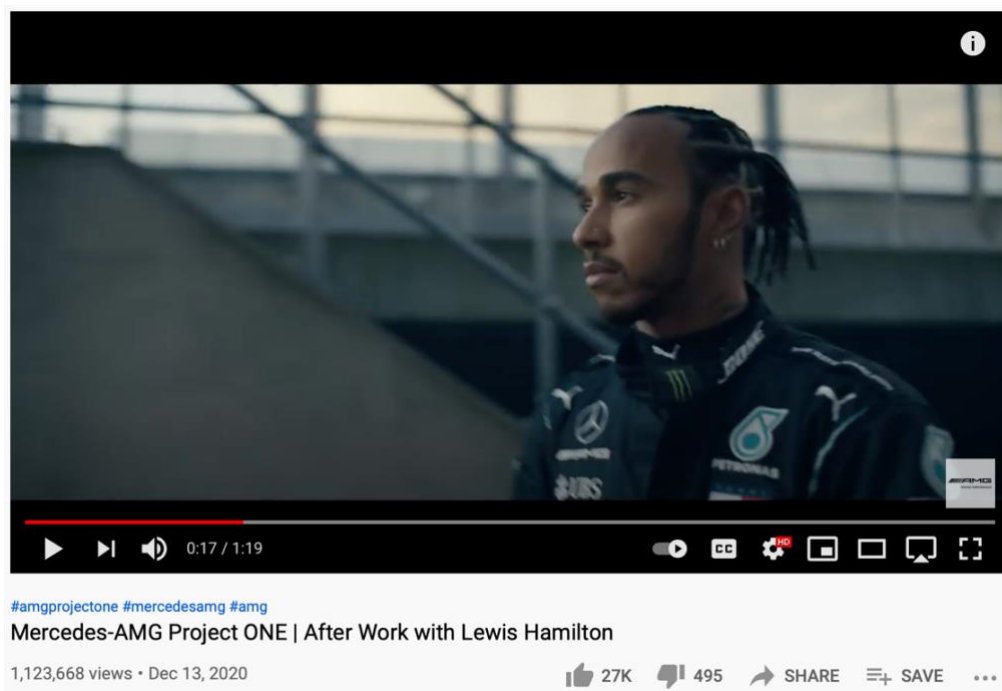
Mercedes decided to sponsor the British Formula One Champion Lewis Hamilton in the year 2007 and joined the Mercedes works team in the year 2013. Since the partnership took place, the driver has won 74 Formula One races. Mercedes has been renovating its contract with the driver ever since and actually, they have recently announced the new contract for 2021.

“I am excited to be heading into my ninth season with my Mercedes teammates” announced the driver on February. Lewis Hamilton image aligns with what Mercedes stands for and pursues to reflect. According to Markus Schäfer, Mercedes Non-Executive Chairman, the brand feels identified with Lewis Hamilton hard working and commitment. He claims Lewis is always “hungry” for more and ready to work on going beyond himself, just like Mercedes that as a car manufacturer aims to develop the latest technology in order to deliver

the best and most modern products. Consumers needs are Mercedes preferences and Lewis Hamilton looks after his fans and likes to always reflect an image of gratitude.

Lewis Hamilton look is one which bucks normality and erodes with what's expected. He likes to dress differently in an alternative and rebel way. His look reflects recklessness and wilderness. Through his image and making him one of the representatives of the brand, Mercedes seeks to transmit power, speed and agility. Lewis Hamilton completely breaks with the standardized consumer profile of Mercedes-Benz, going for a less serious and more aggressive appeal. The last campaign in collaboration with the driver was the “After Work” one, featuring the new Mercedes-AMG. The marketing campaign was launched in YouTube, Facebook and Instagram after the last formula One race of last year's season. The campaign has later been followed by different cut-downs, short videos and spots on different social media channels. The video shows the after-work life of the driver trying to enhance revolution and mutiny.

Figure 12: Mercedes—Benz starring Lewis Hamilton in YouTube short film by December 13th. 2020.



Source: (Mercedes-AMG, 2020).

The professional driver after several years of undenied success and repeatedly being the number one, has become a role model for young generations. Betting for Lewis Hamilton as one of the biggest representatives and brand ambassadors was a certain risky move, however

a clever and worth one to make too. It represents exactly the opposite of what Mercedes-Benz used to mean, contributing to the core objective of this strategy. Hamilton regards and attracts Mercedes new target group who are the majority of his followers and fans, achieving in that way the millennial collective.

3.3.2 Dabiz Muñoz. GLC Coupé.

As previously mentioned, Mercedes-Benz is an international and well-known brand that has developed several submarkets with different geographical focuses. Obviously, the marketing strategy has always followed the same tone of voice as to deliver a consistent image all across the globe. The aim now, will be to analyze one of Mercedes specific local focuses (in this case the Spanish market), in order to take a deeper look into the brand *modus operandi* and the developing of such marketing strategy.

Mercedes-Benz collaboration with the Spanish Chef Dabiz Muñoz started in the year 2015. Dabiz is a distinguished and well-known chef that has won three Michelin stars. He owns two of the most frequented and prestigious restaurants in Madrid (DiverXO and StretXO), that serve the most extravagant and unexpected dishes. Dabiz bucks absolutely with the mainstream, not only in the kitchen but also with his look and contrasting haircut (that has ended up becoming his corporate image). The chef has developed extraordinary culinary creations that blend very opposite concepts. In the one hand elegance and inaccessibility and in the other, extravagance and impetuosity. Dabiz has managed to mix in his elaborations, cuisines from all around the world, creating unique tasting experiences. Things that seem to contradict themselves form a perfect and unbelievable symphony in the chef's plates.

Dabiz Muñoz appeal, certainly aligns with Mercedes marketing purposes; Dabiz is not only reckless but also one of the main Spanish millennial references and role model. The brand wanted the chef to serve as the image for what was going to be the new GLC Coupé with the purpose of reflecting how it was the perfect car for the life world and passion of someone like Dabiz Muñoz. According to Mercedes Global Media Site Daimler, the GLC Coupé combines the “striking looks of an SUV with the dynamic elegance of a Coupé”; something outside the mainstream that perfectly lines up with Dabiz Muñoz work.

Figure 13: 2016 Daimler press release in Spain featuring Dabiz Muñoz.



Source: (Daimler, 2015).

The short film “Una estrella no significa nada”, of the international SUV campaign which started in Autumn 2015. In order to make more noise and gain attention on social media, the campaign was supported by a 12 second Instagram video post that was later featured in the other social media platforms of the brand such as YouTube. (On the next page, a screenshot from Mercedes-Benz España YouTube channel, where the short film was released).

Figure 14: Mercedes-Benz featuring Dabiz Muñoz in YouTube short film by 16th January 2015.



Source: (Mercedes-Benz [Mercedes-Benz España], 2015).

The media document released by the brand after the producing of the campaign claims: “The campaign is intended to appeal to an urban, predominantly male, target group who are in the prime of life. (...) They are trendsetter with a strong appreciation of luxury and design”. Dabiz Muñoz would have never served as the image of the old Mercedes-Benz culture; it is the perfect example of the contrast the company has went through, the target group it looks for and the goals it aims to reach, today.

3.3.3 “Designed for the wilderness. Enjoyed in the city”. GLA.

The “designed for the wilderness. Enjoyed in the city” campaign was launched in May 2020 for the new GLA model of the SUVs series. Mercedes-Benz launched the campaign as to restart their communication and marketing work after the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, that pressed pause mode in all businesses in the world. Mercedes decided to come back from the disaster with a campaign that had a humoristic and sarcastic tone. The campaign does not only break with the usual advertising cliché of the brand, as the proper corporation released in May 2020; it also forwards a message of irony to a population that is desperate and feed-up as a result of the virus. A population that needs a little comedy more than ever. Therefore, Mercedes managed to deliver this sympathetic message in the perfect timing. They turned

around the downside of the pandemic, taking advantage of it and releasing short films for which everyone could sympathize with.

So then, the SUV models are designed and equipped with some of the best technology in order to allow the consumer to drive in all kind of off-road experiences. Nevertheless, Mercedes after several years of trying to transmit this up-to-date technology image to its consumers, the majority of people buying the GLA use the car in the cities. Mercedes had always seen this as a waste of technology and time for their R&D department, they were designing this amazing car that was not having the proper use. After years of releasing spots and campaigns that looked to transmit the desired appeal, Mercedes surprised with this vowed campaign. They unexpectedly accepted the fact that the GLA was not going to be bought with the off-road experience purpose and commit with the city appeal consumers were going for. Therefore, they went after the paradox their clients had independently built around the car, a car that had been designed for the wilderness, thus enjoyed in the city.

The campaign consists in four TV spots of 20 to 30 seconds long that tells four different stories of different people that put themselves in wild and different circumstances. They safely arrive to these risky places, yet end up going back to the city, their comfortable place and where them and the GLA really belong. As Mercedes-Benz claimed, the spots are full of self-irony charming and humorous. The campaign was launched in determined TV channels around Europe and later released in all the brand social media online platforms. In addition to this the campaign was also backed by traditional marketing in the form of printed ads.

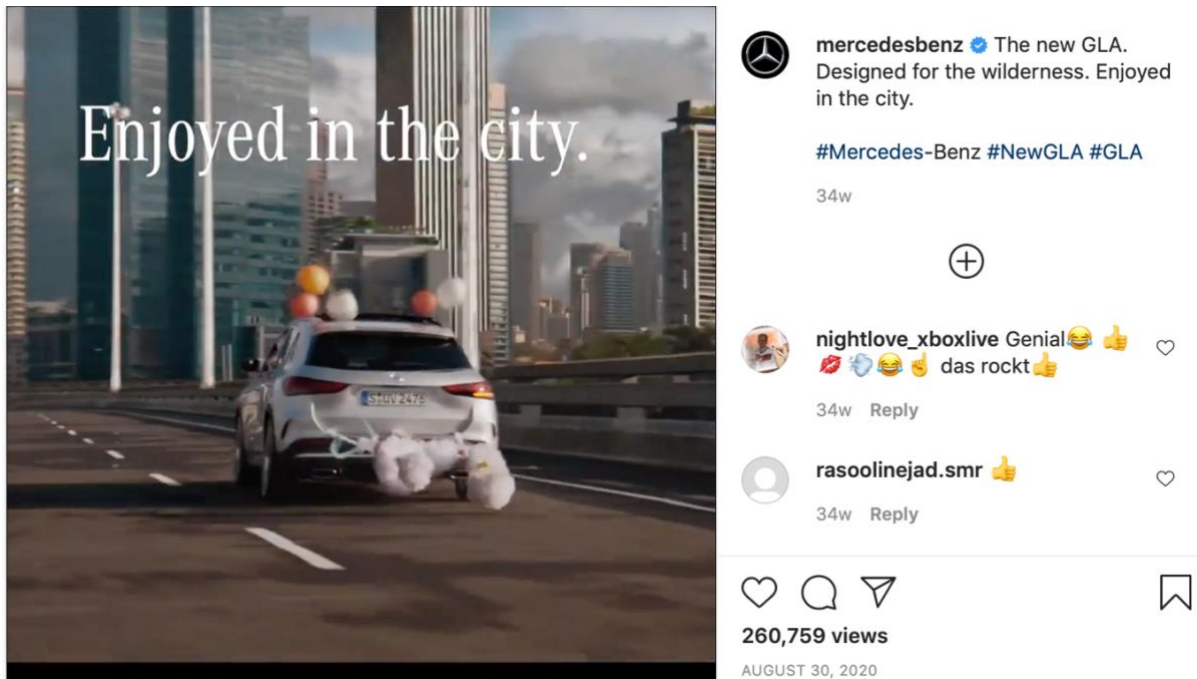
Figure 15: Mercedes-Benz Instagram short film for the campaign “Designed for the wilderness. Enjoyed in the city”.



Source: (@mercedesbenz 2020).

In the figure above a screenshot of one of the short film released, in which a family is trying to celebrate a wedding on the hedge of a cliff. The couple ends up returning safely in the GLA to the city, where they truly belong. Bellow, a screenshot of the just defined situation at the end of the spot.

Figure 16: Final image of the short film starring the GLA.



Source: (@mercedesbenz, 2020).

Mercedes again uses millennials generation figures, to have the leading role in the film. Moreover, they call for millennial's attention not only with the storyline of the ad and the irony in this one, but with the look of the stars on the film. They are young adults that represent accurately the image of a millennial. A wild couple with an alternative look, doing something that the majority wouldn't do, bucking traditions and transmitting a sense of free living.

4. FINAL CONCLUSION

The millennial generation has been agreed to be the broadest and most complex generation today. One that has gained enough influencing power to manage to conquer the market, changing its laws and its standardized operating procedures. They have arrived at such influencing capacity because, as previously explained, millennials are the largest living population and therefore, the largest consumer group. This allows them to have more bargaining power than firms that, as learned from Fromm and Garton (2013), in order to be profitable, need to satisfy their needs. Millennials have been widely studied by marketers, that intend to collect enough data to arrive to certain conclusions that will allow them to come up with exact formulas and procedures with the purpose of attracting the collective. The task of trying to understand the generation is faced by marketers as a challenge, however, an unavoidable one.

Millennials are a generation that radically differentiates themselves from the generations that precedes them. They are the founders and leaders of the most polemic topics in today's society. They are a concerned generation that fights for the values they stand for and like to clearly state what are those values they are standing for. Since they have a strong feeling for justice, they have even changed their way of consuming in order to reflect who they are. They expect from the market committed and responsible companies, that have purpose beyond being profitable. Moreover, they are the "*connected*" generation, the generation that has made the debut as internet and social media users. This factor perfectly aligns with their strong defined personality; they are a generation that wants to make noise and be heard and certainly, has been supplied with the perfect tools to do so. The concepts more repeatedly used to describe them are skeptical, hard to convince and technologically savvy. Altogether, millennials are an alternative generation that like to be thought of as unpredictable individuals the market cannot and will not control.

As millennials keep increasing their control over the market, the more brands that intend to approach them. The task for emerging start-ups and little firms is within reach; however, it is for large and lifelong firms like the all-time car manufacturer Mercedes-Benz, that the task gets tortuous. Mercedes has served as an example of a success story of a brand who bet for millennials bucking its (functioning) all-time appeal. With the objective of forwarding and satisfying the new segment group, they did not only transform their

communication and advertising campaigns, but they updated their core business, culture and operating standards, innovating in all fields and departments. All in all, it is accurately assumed that millennials have won the pulse against the market and brands have been left with little or even no choice.

Mercedes-Benz strategy has been widely vowed and studied because of how drastic and successful the transformation was. They compromised in making a 180 degree turn in their marketing strategy focusing in a long-term purpose rather than in a short-term one. They did not conform with launching a new car model that would align with millennials desires, instead they made changes in all their product lines, updating their advertising campaigns and calling for millennials attention by featuring disruptive new images such as Lewis Hamilton. The famous Formula One driver, lags far behind the expected and usual Mercedes-Benz consumer, however, with the purpose of getting immersed in the new *Youth Marketing* he became the firm ambassador. Firm ambassador, one of the millennial marketing creations, a loyal representative of the firm that reflects the values and meaning a brand pretends to pursue. Lewis Hamilton does not mean seriousness and certainly does not mean tradition. He means recklessness, speed, risks... He confronts the traditional Mercedes-Benz image attracting the millennial collective that consumes according to what the brand represents and according to what their role models, now known as influencers, consume. Millennials being skeptical means millennials not trusting corporations and relying on external profiles advice on what to consume. Lewis Hamilton becoming the principal image of the firm was one of the key elements in the *Mercedes transformation journey*, significantly repercussing in consumers decisions.

Moreover, millennials are not as vulnerable to ads as other generations used to be, because of their impermeability for stimuli caused by an overexposure to them. This introduces social media and the crucial role it plays in the transformation of marketing. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are the most frequented platforms with the highest number of everyday active users. They have become the new and most effective client communication channels, causing the involvement of Mercedes and also becoming one of the key factors in their success.

So then, the brand became a social media user and has been ever since committed to deliver the chased appeal. Mercedes success within these platforms is undeniable as on Instagram, for example, they managed to become the leader automotive brand where they have achieved 95% of user-generated content, interacting with fans and followers directly with the

account. They have generated a network of 300 social media photographers and influencers around the brand (Daimler, 2016). Mercedes plan came down to the elimination of the traditional values linked to the brand, in order to better suit the growing and emerging generation that had changed all marketers outlines and schemes. The proper brand claims to have built a new philosophy around millennials looking for a symbiosis between emotion and intelligence.

Nevertheless, and what has been demonstrated throughout the paper to be an important fact for their success is how they have gone after the new target group without ceasing to deliver offers and content to their loyal and traditional consumer. This one still aligns with the elegant, inaccessible and luxurious appeal. Mercedes maintained the more “traditional” line of cars and through loyalty programs and special events did not leave aside their past consumer profile.

Taking care of their loyal consumer at the same time they were disrupting in the new world of Youth Marketing has been demonstrated throughout the paper to be one of the base lines for Mercedes to stay solid during the process.

After analyzing millennial’s mindset and attitudes in order to extract conclusions that justify and allow to predict their consumer behaviors, and after studying the popular Mercedes-Benz transformation, it can be concluded that the right steps were taken. Mercedes gathered data and properly analyzed the segment before addressing it, as a consequence, they were able to develop the right strategies and procedures in order to engage with the generation. The key to their success was staying profitable at the start of the transformation thanks to their loyal clients and undergoing modern *Youth Marketing* strategies in order to deliver to millennials messages (through the adequate channels) of recklessness, responsibility, commitment, technology and innovation. The firm should serve now as a role model, not only for other brands in the industry but of brands across all industries. It has established the basis of marketing to Millennials and managed to predict who claimed to be the unpredictable generation. After all, the answer to the question is yes, Millennials and Mercedes, friends forever.

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