



Utilizing TikTok for branding and marketing. An empirical study of three airlines.

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In recent years, social media marketing has become the new norm for branding, and one specific social media platform, TikTok, has become one of the most popular ones to be on. Since its launch, TikTok has skyrocketed into a phenomenon where millions of people are watching videos for entertainment and information, while partaking into the fun by also creating their own. Due to the undeniable popularity of this platform, a lot of organizations, including airlines, have realized its potential. The excitement surrounding TikTok is not slowing down, and more and more companies are considering joining in, creating profiles. This paper investigates how three different airlines use TikTok for social media marketing and branding. While hoping to provide a deeper understanding on social media and content marketing, components such as brand personality and brand image are discussed alongside the main functions of TikTok, and how TikTok can be used for successful branding.

This paper being a research-based thesis, an Empirical study approach with different observation methods was used to gather information on the airlines, while gathering numerical data on how much and how successfully the three airlines are utilizing TikTok. Additional research and observation were done to reflect on the content created by the investigated airlines, and if the content is coherent with the company's brand image and brand personality.

The goal of the empirical study is to offer suggestions that have roots in the theoretical framework, on how airlines can utilize TikTok for social media marketing and branding. The airlines chosen were Air France, Delta Airlines and Ryanair. Introduction provides further understanding on why these airlines were selected, and following the theoretical framework, these airlines are introduced more in detail, with an overlook to their TikTok profiles and video content.

This thesis is done in relation to bachelor's degree -level studies in the Business Administration in Aviation program.

Key words

Social media marketing, Content marketing, TikTok, Air France, Delta airlines, Ryanair, Branding, Brand Personality, Brand Image.

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1 Introduction

For the past decade – and now more than ever, our days rotate incredibly heavily around digital world, and we can control and plan our lives from the palm of our hands with mobile phones. With our focus on electronic devices, marketing has transitioned from the traditional ways of advertisement and branding, on the multiple different online platforms and social media channels. In the corporate business world, utilizing social media and content marketing for branding opportunities has become the rule rather than the exception. Branding and content marketing on social media are the new norm, and when done right, they offer great ways to increase sales and ways to reach audiences.

This thesis investigates into a comparatively new form of social media, TikTok – which has become a global phenomenon since its launch few years ago, and how creating content on this platform can be beneficial for businesses. This thesis is aiming to create recommendation and suggestions on how to utilize TikTok to its full potential. To do that, understanding how social media and content marketing work is discussed, and looking into on what TikTok can offer to its users as a digital platform.

An empirical research was conducted to gain information and use as examples to see how different Airlines are utilizing TikTok and what type of content they are creating to market their product. This topic was chosen due to believing that TikTok is the most popular social media platform on the market right now, which would make it one of the most powerful marketing tools of today – and of the future. The topic is believed to be relevant, and the result can offer insight on how to start utilizing TikTok for marketing and branding. In addition to the relevancy in today's marketing climate, it was also out of personal curiosity of wanting to see if different airlines present themselves on TikTok in a way that resemble one another, or do they have distinctive differences in approach? Do their brands differ significantly and if yes – how can the content they create be interpreted? Do they partake in popular trends to increase viewership, or do they prefer to produce more original content, even if it means lower viewership?

1.1 Structure of the thesis

To create a compelling analysis on each airline's TikTok and to analyse if the content created is coherent with their overall brand, each airlines Brand image and Brand personality types needed to be investigated first. While the theoretical framework discusses about the meaning of these concepts, it is in the later chapters of this thesis when conclusions on each airline's portrayal is investigated in more detail.

This thesis also discusses sustainability aspects in relation to both content creation and usage of social media in general. From the viewpoint of each airlines TikTok profile, as well as the negative impact social media has on the environment.

The Empirical research is presented in Chapter 5, which follows the deep dive of the previous chapter where TikTok and its main functions are discussed, as well as explaining more about the areas that were tracked during the research period. In short: The empirical research observed three different airline's TikTok pages for 5 weeks, tracking the development of their videos "like" amount, profile's follower statistics and the number of videos posted. The three airlines chosen were Air France, Ryanair, and Delta airlines. These airlines were selected because all the airlines are already active social media users with TikTok profiles, and their traffic numbers are similar annually in relation to the size of their fleet and destination offering. Additionally, these airlines all cater to somewhat similar clientele, are Western airlines either based, or have a large destination offering in both Europe and USA.

After establishing concepts such as Content marketing and Social Media marketing, this thesis makes arguments on each airlines Brand image and Brand personality, according to the observations and theoretical framework. The empirical research and result analysis chapters also provide visualization of the numerical data gathered. In each airline's analysis chapter, there observations and arguments are backed up pictures and explanations on videos in general, while highlighting the most popular ones.

Further discussion on the results and analysis, also acknowledges the possible limitation of the research, as well as the credibility of the results. Accompanied by speculation about how this research could be continued and developed for future studies, the conclusion of this thesis aims to produce suggestions on how to utilize TikTok to boost brand awareness, marketing, and advertising, and what key aspects as an airline – or any other company for that matter, should take into consideration when choosing to use this application to promote.

Followed by references, the appendices include links to the profiles discussed, and an image of the project plan which was created to be the base of this thesis.

1.2 Notions on the theoretical framework

The main idea of this thesis is to focus on how to further focus on branding, and content marketing only on one specific social media platform, TikTok. This is largely different than establishing a brand in general. Brand creation includes a compound of different areas and is increasingly more complex form than what this thesis extends to, and therefore, it is less

relevant to this research. Consequently, going deeper into concepts such as brand architecture, and different branding models, was not deemed necessary or beneficial to this specific study.

Focus of this thesis lays in discussion about the importance of marketing and branding on social media – and by using empirical research and observation method, this paper talks about how these three example airlines do content marketing and branding on TikTok. Other vital aspect for this thesis is introduction into brand personality and brand image framework and models, but anything more in depth of building a brand is outside the scope of this thesis.

1.3 Sustainability as part of the thesis

As sustainability is a big conversation topic today, it was deemed important to discuss about it in relation to social media usage and content marketing, and therefore, providing a brief introduction on how sustainable marketing on social media exactly is. In addition, there is speculation on how to use TikTok and do content marketing in a more sustainable way.

Another part of sustainability in this thesis about its relation to the aviation industry. Due to the environmental impact of aviation to the world's carbon emissions a lot of airlines have adjusted their advertising and come up with new ways to promote more sustainable practises. On a global scale, the public is requesting airlines to not only acknowledge the harmful effects aviation, but to provide solutions on how to have more positive impact on the climate.

However, sustainability was not observed as a main part of the research over the course of 5 weeks – nevertheless, some salutations to it can be found after the empirical research result analysis in short, as well as in the airline introduction part in the upcoming chapter.

2 The three Airlines of the Research

This part introduces the three airlines that were chosen to be observed over a 5-week research period. The theoretical part is followed by overview to TikTok as a platform, and the three airlines are discussed in more detail again in their own respective chapters afterwards, accompanied by the development and analysis of the data collection.

As mentioned in the Introduction chapter, the three airlines were chosen given the fact that they all had an existing TikTok profile, sharing similarities in passenger numbers in comparison to the fleet size and destinations. All three airlines serve to a fairly similar client bases – and while minor discrepancies in customer segmentation may appear, they are all Western airlines, having either a base or multitude of destinations in Europe or United States of America. Therefore, the companies behind the airlines do not have large cultural differences amongst one another, which leads to believe that all companies see social media and TikTok similarly – allowing the differences being only related to how the brand chooses to present themselves without cultural construct weighing in the background.

2.1 Air France

Air France is a French legacy carrier based in France and its main hub is Charles De Gaulle airport in Paris, and the airlines core values include innovation, safety, excellence, diversity, and customer commitment. Air France is often presented in mainstream media as Air France-KLM, as that is the Group behind operations of both Air France, the Royal Dutch airline KLM, in addition to Transavia airlines. (Air France 2023). While Air France is part of the Group with other airlines, they are still an individual operator and presents themselves on social media as an individual airline. Meaning that the findings and observations are solely about Air France and not about the Air France-KLM Group as a collective.

2.2 Delta Airlines

Delta Airlines, more commonly referenced only as “Delta”, is an American airline company established in 1925, and in 2024 the airline is celebrating 99 years in the business. Delta states integrity, honesty, leadership, and perseverance as their core values, while on their website they also highlight diversity, equity, and inclusion. Delta’s purpose and values, according to them go “*Beyond flight*” and as a brand Delta is most determined to provide a superior travel experience. (Delta, 2023). Delta is one of the most awarded airlines from the United States and has earned a reputation of a legacy carrier which is known for their professionalism and client-tailored services. (Business Strategy Hub, 2023).

2.3 Ryanair

Ryanair is an Irish airline based in Dublin, and the only ultra low-cost carrier being observed in this research. The airline is the main branch of Ryanair Group, with other airlines including couple of other low-cost operators. (Ryanair, 2023). On their website, there is no clear specific motto or signature slogan which promotes the brand of the airline. However, there were multiple advertisement and marketing campaigns. One of the advertisement for summer 2023 read “Low fares, great care” which perchance suits the company’s signage and branding – this is further speculated in chapter 8.

3 Theoretical framework

The goal of this chapter is to provide more information on two of the more important aspects of digital marketing for this research: Content marketing and Social Media marketing, and how these aspects impact branding, and what elevating one's brand on different platforms contains in theory.

Firstly, talking about branding, the overall perception of it is related the design, approach and management of the company's image and brand. All these aspects impact the overtone of the company and its character association amongst the public, other companies, and within their distinctive customer bases. In a nutshell, it is about the reputation of the service and the product, and while often being about the intangible characteristics, the quality of a tangible product is the support pillar of a brand, and branding. (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015; Romano, 2022).

The most well-known strategies for digital marketing today include Search Engine Optimization or SEO for short, Pay-per-Click advertising or PPC for short, email and affiliate marketing, banner advertising, and content and social media marketing. The last two mentioned being the ones investigated further in this thesis. By utilizing these huge online platforms, such as TikTok, companies do not only benefit sale-wise, but their brand has a chance to gain unrivalled visibility, compared to companies who are not. In comparison to the more traditional ways of marketing, such as magazines and billboards, social media marketing has a possibility to be very cost efficient. Companies can further promote their brand to reach millions of more people and make their product known across the globe on a scale that was unprecedented before this age of internet on mobile phones. (TextBroker 2024; Vertex, 2023).

3.1 Content marketing and social media marketing

Content and Social Media marketing are two practices of digital marketing and brand advertising of today, and the main ideas backing up the empirical research in this thesis. Therefore, the focus of the theory part lies amongst these concepts. In addition, this chapter also introduces the concept of Brand Image and Brand Personality, and why these notions are important when it comes to branding and advertising brand on social media.

Social media marketing is a concept of marketing services and different products through multiple social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, and as highlighted by this thesis: TikTok. Marketing on Social media channels should go hand in hand with the branding and overall company image, and this is where content marketing comes to play a bigger part.

Without comprehensive content marketing and social media marketing strategy, it might be difficult to reach target audiences and attract new customers. Content marketing promotes the company's brand – elevating branding, interacting with customers on social media channels via an informative, engaging, and entertaining ways. This can be done for example with podcasts, blog posts, or pictures, or with videos, which is what TikTok focuses on. (Kloot, 2023).

Unrelated to the chosen social media platform used for content marketing, it is crucial that there is a clear visual or aural advocate, a reason for the audience to interact with the content. The thought behind content creation and marketing is to be goal oriented. In content marketing and creation, the marketing should be done in a way that is as organic as possible. Promoting naturally without pushing a product, realizing that there is a real person in the audience to be reached. These days multiple platforms and applications are intertwined with one another, making sharing the same piece of content across multiple platforms much easier – which can affect being noticed successfully more apparent. (Kloot, 2023; Vertex, 2023).

Based on all above, TikTok is the perfect conduit for content marketing. The application makes showcasing the product and additional services incredibly easy. However, on this platform it is good to remember that Content marketing and branding without a well-formed strategy does not have longevity. While working without a properly constructed strategy, fun and trendy content created may have a chance going viral at first and bringing an additional audience, but as the content done on impulse – indifference to the brand in general, stops resonating with the somewhat mismatched demographic, the audiences may vanish as quick as they came. Staying true and connected to the brand becomes vital soon enough, as branding and content marketing in a coherent, meticulously way has a higher potential to attract desired demographic and customer bases. Content marketing plan should include intricate marketing goals and performance indicators. Having an understanding of the target audience and comprehension on what type of content resonates with them in a triumphantly way, is part of the key to success. If keeping track of uploads and content ideas becomes inarticulate, forming a content calendar can be beneficial way to assure that metrics and performance is tracked, and ideas are not wasted. (Sumrak & Julien, 2023).

Following a strategy and assuring optimization between creating and communicating, a well-thought-out strategy helps to fine-tune things in the long run. Having a calendar included in the strategy may help content marketing teams and social media representatives divide their time spent the most beneficial way. Time optimization should be done in a clear division, and for example could divide approximately 20% of their time to create content,

and 80% of their time promoting and distributing it, while keeping track of trends and how they can be implemented accordingly. (Sumrak & Julien, 2023).

One of the important aspects when creating a strategy, is first to establish the customer: whether the intension is to reach private customers or other businesses, B2C or B2B. The two strategies may share similarities, but there are immense differences too. In B2C the one being convinced to a purchase are individuals who normally have fewer limitations and do not necessarily need to take other people's opinions into consideration while weighing their decision making. But in B2B it is often an entire organization and a board of decision-makers who must come to an agreement on all purchases – as the money spent will have an impact on much larger scale. With this in mind, timing of purchases and time spent on purchase decision making become big differences: while individuals can enjoy social media throughout the day for their own enjoyment and consume content to make purchases as they please – having fewer restrictions on when and where to purchase a product, companies and organization-level buyers on the other hand have limited time to agree on sales and discuss possible alternatives. (Sumrak & Julien, 2023).

3.2 Brand Image

Branding is complex and has multiple layers to be included in, but on a more basic level it includes crafting the brands personality and designing marketing properties around that personality. This contains areas such as logo design and the image, or story of the company's that is being shared with the world. The underlying goal is to get the interest of the target audiences and form a relationship with them. A company's brand is created around their value proposition, and this is where the idea of a brand image with the company's reputation enters the discussion. Consumer opinions are impacted by multiple factors, yet largely it is about the tangible quality of product and customer service. Another part of brand image is brand personality. Well-establishes brand personality helps with the intangible, creating authenticity that resonates with target audiences, and makes customers feel more connected to the brand. One of the original concepts for Brand image creation was introduced by Philip Kotler, who was a pioneer of modern marketing. A quote from Kotler himself describes Brand image as something that is "*created by the sum total of all the experiences that consumers have with the brand.*" (Romano J, 2022; The Marketing Journal, 2016). In this thesis, it is Kotler's concept of Brand Image -model that is being used when describing the airlines in the Empirical study chapters. This Brand image -theory by Kotler recognizes six main Brand image types, and they are summarised on a WIX blogpost written by Jenna Romano as follow:

1. Functional image: Brand is associated with practical benefits of the product, such quality, reliability, and durability.
2. Emotional image: association with emotional benefits, such as happiness or a sense of security.
3. Personal image: brand image association with personal attributes to the product or service, e.g., style or uniqueness.
4. User image: association and benefits created based on, and/or around a person who uses it, e.g., high-profile professional athletes or celebrities.
5. Social image: association lies within the social status the product or service offers – meaning luxury, sophistication, and exclusivity.
6. Symbolic image: the product or service has a symbolic meaning, representing things such as freedom, success, or adventure. (Romano, 2022).

These six main brand image types are used later in the thesis for identifying how the airlines represent themselves on their official website in comparison to their TikTok – to see if the brand image presented on two different platforms are parallel to one another.

3.3 Brand Personality

Brand personality is another aspect of branding, and often it can be demonstrated in content, ways of communication on multiple platforms, and in marketing style and behaviour. In the Branding Journal, a journalist Matthew Paul discusses different dimensions of Brand personality, which were first introduced already back in the late 90s' by Jennifer L. Aaker. Jennifer L. Aaker is a marketing and brand expert in Stanford University. She provided a structure for Brand personality by creating a theory in 1997, and based on that, the 5 dimensions of Brand personality model – or the Aaker Model, came to be. (Paul, M. 2022).

According to the Aaker model the five dimensions of Brand personality are Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness. For further context: Sincerity as personality type tend to be ethical and trustworthy, down to earth, and wholesome, Excitement personality is about being bold and spirited, Competence personality is for brand that associate themselves being reliable, Sophisticated are glamorous, classy, and charming, and finally the Ruggedness personality is about being outdoorsy and adventurous. (Paul, M. 2022). Added here is an adaptation of those 5 dimensions of Brand personality according to Jennifer L. Aaker:

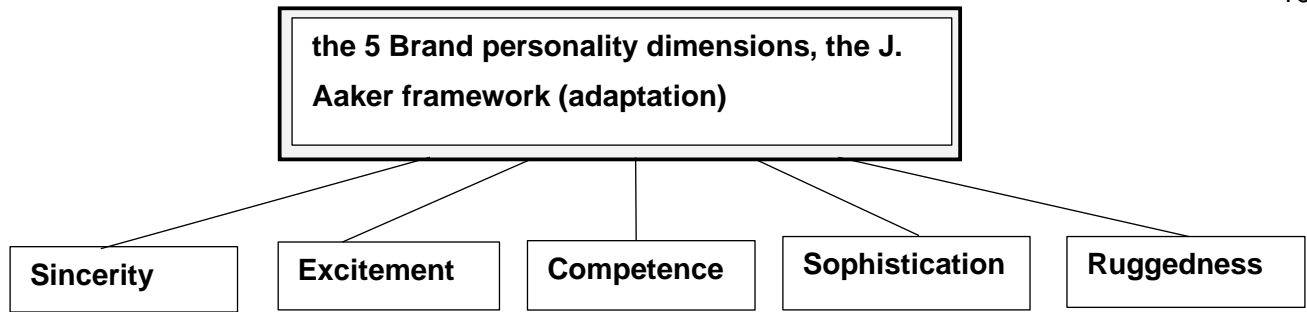


Figure 1: The J. Aaker model, 5 Brand personality dimensions. (Adapted from Matthew Paul's The Branding Journal -article).

Examples of Sincerity personality could be a brand such as Patagonia, for Excitement Red Bull and Tesla fit the category, for Competence; Volvo, while Sophistication can be associated with high-end brands such as Chanel, and Ruggedness with e.g., Harley-Davidson motorcycles. (Paul, M 2022). In another article written by McAllister Marketing, in similar fashion different Brand Personality traits are presented. However, according to this article there would be six, and not five dimensions. They overlap with the Aaker model significantly and as the McAllister Marketing article lists the six traits as: 1. Youthful and care-free, 2. Sincere and thoughtful, 3. Athletic and outdoorsy, 4. Competent and influential, 5. Sophisticated and elegant, and 6. Status and allure, they are evidently inspired and based on the Aaker-model. Establishing these traits and finding the Brand personality type is important since it will help set the tone of branding, further allowing companies to better convey the differentiating factors, showing what sets them apart from the competition. By addressing these different personalities, the product and brand can be marketed in many ways, making it more appealing to a wider range of audiences. Furthermore, personification of a brand evokes positive emotion and creates brand equity, resulting to devoted customers. (McAllister Marketing, 2024).

As the Aaker 5-dimensional model was the blueprint already in the 90s' to brand personality types, and Kotler's framework it is referenced and influences marketing experts of today, it is these two models that will be used in this thesis to reflect on which of the traits do the three airlines of this thesis exhibit.

3.4 Branding on social media

Utilizing social media for branding can be a fun and creative way to showcase the identity of any company – and in the light of this thesis, identity of any airline. Content created can offer a glimpse to the everyday workday of employees, or management, show workers participating in challenges or charity events, and therefore further create positive associations for the company amongst their customers and public. Social media is a great way to provide and additional understanding of company's' value proposition, brand image, and brand personality, and offers a visual on how it stands out from others who are offering similar product and services, and why purchase from them specifically. However, that being said, brand

advertising and marketing on social media are more than only showcasing the product offering, it is also entertainment. People want to be entertained on social media, and therefore triumphant and engaging branding secures the company a position of being the preferred choice for vast audiences and consumers. (Decker, 2023; Wong, 2023).

Today consumers are exposed to new brands and a considerable number of options constantly, especially on social media, and TikTok, yet these platforms have great potential and power to converse and connect with consumers in a direct way., But since there is a constant overload of brands and choice for consumers, standing out is crucial and that is why advertising one's own brand in a truthful, identifiable fashion is important. (Decker, 2023; Wong, 2023). What this means, is that while it might be vital to also try and reach out a new clientele by experimental marketing, it is fundamental to advertise the company's brand image accordingly, how it established from the ground up. This pushes the idea of what the brand is essentially about. And as consumers on social media tend to follow a company's online profile because they have either experienced the product or services before and were happy with them, or because the brand advertising and marketing on social media resonates with their own personality and taste. It is important for companies stay true to their brand on social media platforms, such as TikTok, because these interaction between the creator and spectator can help furthermore help reach audiences in subsections of similar brand image and personality. (Holt, 2016).

3.5 Sustainability aspects of social media

It is often thought that social media is very environmentally responsible, since there really is not any other physical material being used than a smartphone. However, to guarantee 24/7 availability and scrolling all these various applications requires more frequent loading of these devices – which results in a remarkable amount of electricity usage. Social media companies store every ounce of data being used to data centres that are of substantial size. And these data centres, too, require extensive amounts of resources and electricity to operate. A web article on Brightly website, reported by Jenna Mignano, Calin Van Paris, and Tehrene Firman, states that the carbon footprint of being an hour on TikTok a day is an equivalent of driving a car for 230 kilometres. (Mignano, Van Paris & Firman, 2023).

However, it is not only the scrolling on social media and TikTok that emits carbon emissions, as that same article on Brightly directs attention to the content as well. Social media content has a lot to do with trends, and influential people on these platforms often showcase their lifestyle and push product for their audiences has led to the copious increase in consumerism, pushing people to shop online in a way that is not necessary. The number of choices people have today resulted into countless of hours browsing of all the options available –

which leads to more clicks and data storage and electricity usage as references in the earlier paragraph. (Mignano, Van Paris & Firman, 2023).

So, how to be more sustainable with social media and content creation? The article mentioned in the paragraph above was also discussed by Victoria Gutiérrez Bernal in her article on sustainability in social media marketing, and the following tips are a blend of the two articles on how to become more sustainable social media user: having a set time-limit on an application can be a useful start. Time-limit makes one more alert on the fact of how much time being online truly consumes, and allows people start prioritizing face-to-face contact again, rather than being connected only virtually. Another way to stay green online is to learn how to not do purchases based on impulse decision. Debating on a purchase decision for approximately a week prior is a good way to select only the necessary purchases – this waiting also opens a possibility to reconsider acquiring comparable product from a second-hand store or from a small retailer. (Gutiérrez Bernal, 2023; Mignano, Van Paris & Firman, 2023).

For businesses, reducing digital and social media carbon footprint can be done by optimizing content and loading times. Simply compressing the size of a specific image or video cuts down energy usage and the amount of transferred data. Additionally, eliminating ill performing ads and posts and replacing them with more thoughtful content and advertisements is a way to be more sustainable. Lastly, using platforms that are advertisement-heavy naturally consume larger amounts of energy – therefore publishing content and marketing on platform that have green energy running data centres is not only more environmentally friendly, but it helps create a more positive associations with the company and brand amongst consumers. Additionally, creating content about sustainable behaviour, promoting eco-friendliness of the products, and by constructing conversation around clean living are ways to incorporate sustainability to marketing. (Gutiérrez Bernal. 2023).

4 TikTok as a social media platform

Moving on to TikTok, this chapter presents and discusses the application, introducing the main functions that were tracked in the empirical research. Adding on to the theoretical framework in chapter 2, and how this platform can be used for branding and marketing.

TikTok is a short-form video application, which has seen an unprecedented growth in user numbers in only a couple of years. Created in 2016 by ByteDance, a Chinese tech company, the application – known in China as Douyin, gained over 100 million users over the span of one year in mainland China and Thailand. With high hopes for even further expansion to the Western market, ByteDance created TikTok in 2017, and prospering on a global scale in 2018. (Tidy & Smith Galer, 2020).

The application thrives especially amidst the younger audiences, as it came to use after the most significant shift in technological use had already happened and become the new normal: owning a smart phone from an adolescent age. The key to TikTok's intensifying popularity lies on short-term video format, which is the most preferred way of content consumption today. The increasing desire of an individuals from younger generations to express their opinions more openly and provide commentary regarding popular trends and news, the app was a perfect outlet to do so. In addition, large number of different communities and niches attracted people, making them feel more included, being able to demonstrate creative skills and have fun collaborating with other users added to the popularity during Covid-19 lockdowns. Inclusion of innovative ads and B2C partnerships attracted companies as businesses to join TikTok too, to stay relevant and resonate with consumers through the isolative period. (Ceci, 2024; Tidy & Smith Galer, 2020).

Today, the application has over 1 billion monthly users worldwide, and approximately 20% of the global internet users have TikTok. TikTok user numbers are highest amongst younger audiences, such as late millennials and Gen Z. (Woodward, 2023). These generation are often described as "digital natives", as they grew up with smart phones, being exposed to and adapted early on to the different social media platforms. TikTok is available in 150 countries and highest number of users are in Asia. TikTok is recognized these days from its great marketing opportunities for consumer individuals to gain business opportunities, but the application also advertises its own business dedicated profile settings, promoting the simplicity for advertisers and companies to start marketing on TikTok by signing up on "TikTok for Businesses". (Battisby, 2023).

4.1 Key concepts and usage

To avoid confusion on any level when discussing the different ways people can interact with TikTok videos, this subchapter introduces different key functions of TikTok. When talking about number of views, it simply means how many times the video has been watched from start to finish. This number tends to be significantly higher than the actual interactions, such as likes and comments on a video. Liking a video means that people double tapped their screen or pressed the heart icon on the right side of the phone screen after or during the video. Similarly to “saving” a video, “like” adds the video to a separate file from where they can be accessed again more easily, this file is in an individual’s own profile page. Share is a function from which users can send the link to the TikTok video to someone else, e.g., via text, iMessage or WhatsApp or add it to a story on Instagram and Facebook. Comment function in a quite self-explanatory way, means that a user has left a comment on the comment box which can be opened to the video. However, there is a function that allows the person posting the video to turn commenting off, then nobody can add comments on that specific video.

All these functions mentioned are listed on the right side of the screen when using the platform on a mobile device. See the picture below this paragraph for clarity. From top to bottom the heart shape represents *like*, the speech bubble with three dots inside represents *comments*, the split-end tag represents *save* -function, and the right pointing arrow is the *share* -function.

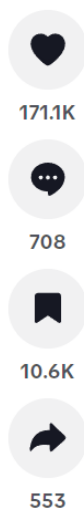


Figure 2: Icons of the main functions on TikTok.

The totality of views on the video can be seen in a profile overview – the views are shown next to a play-button shaped icon. This can be seen later part of this thesis as the chapter moves into the screenshots of each airline’s profile overview. Hashtag (#) is a sign used

online and multiple social media platforms and its purpose is to help categorize the description texts it accompanies (Merriam-Webster, 2024). People can browse other videos on TikTok that have same hashtags attached to them, by simply clicking it on the description window. In addition to hashtags, people can add popular songs, sound clips from tv shows or movies, or make their own commentary as a background sound on their video. Sometimes a certain sound goes viral due to one amusing video it was added on first, prompting others across the platform to make their own version of the video – and by adding this popular sound to it, the chances of the video gaining masses of views increases. “Hopping on a trend” is something that TikTok is known for, and sometimes people try to be trendsetters by creating a challenge, for example a dance, that other people can easily make their version of, and by being the originator – you receive more views and followers when credited.

These days TikTok users are also utilizing the search feature of the application in a way that almost resembles Google, or YouTube. Making it the all-around app where people can find information and learn skills. The TikTok algorithm collects user data on what is popular on the platform based on searches, views, likes, sounds, and clicks on profiles and hashtags. Every user on TikTok has their own For You -page and the algorithm suggests videos for people based on the data collected when browsing and using the application, meaning that each user’s For You -page video content suggestions are custom made by the algorithm in relation to these interests, however, the algorithm promotes popular videos more easily – making connections between collected user data, being a form of artificial intelligence, the algorithm suggests same videos for people who have some point in time liked or viewed similar content. (Social Native, 2022).

4.2 TikTok for branding and advertising

There are multiple ways for businesses to utilize TikTok for branding. Companies do not only need to put their trust in the algorithm, sounds or hashtags, but companies can also partner up with TikTok users who have gained a large following already on their own. Collaborations and paid partnerships allow two or more parties to create branded content together.

Branded content is a video made with advertising as a focal point in a collaborative effort, where one party promotes the company’s services, or product offering as agreed, by creating a positive image of the brand to their viewers. Branded content includes e.g., endorsements, brand ambassador partnerships, special promotion codes, and affiliate links. Branded content is a great addition for companies on how to reach audiences outside their existing customer base. To new potential customers, when the recommendation is coming

from a trusted influencer it might seem more genuine for the masses – and when done well, this is a prime example of organic advertisement in brand marketing. This type of brand advertising often proves beneficial for both parties financially, and it also allows companies potentially to create different form of content than they have before. (TikTok, 2023).

This type of natural, informative, and fun way of visually demonstrating the brand and product – paired with beneficial information is proved to be more appealing to customers. Collaborations and brand advertising in this fashion can help create a stronger connection with different online communities and increase sales, since TikTok is becoming more and more a community-based platform. Promotional content or paid partnerships is something that can be easily incorporated by airlines. A lot of young influencers, whether it is someone up-and-coming or a well-established social media celebrity, travel a lot and part of their job online is to film their travels and experiences to their audiences. As this is something they are most likely to partake in regardless – offering a collaboration opportunity to customer with a big following is something that can be done with little effort. Promotional video of the airline's offering posted by a popular individual may have a more positive effect, creating additional interest amongst new clientele, compared to if the video was posted on the airline's own TikTok profile. Moreover, encouraging users not only to comment but also to save and share the videos they find funny or interesting – increases the possibilities that other videos created by the airline or an affiliate, will be shown in the future on many For You -pages too. However, if one does not wish to collaborate but is determined to showcase the airline and brand on this platform in a more traditional way, it should be remembered that TikTok is about having a more imaginative approach to showing off the brand and product, and to advertising should be done in a light-hearted way. This approachable and fun angle to brand marketing on TikTok further assures the interest of younger generation as upcoming clientele. (Social Native, 2022).

Additionally, as TikTok's search engine is becoming increasingly popular to find information on different topics, companies on TikTok could either create Q&A (questions and answers) type videos to their profile or provide direct links to their official website for information. Adding direct links to booking or customer service creates more traffic on the website. With this, it is good to recognize that while this thesis is focused on how Airlines specifically can use TikTok to reach existing and future customers, advertising and branding on social media is beneficial not only for B2C (Business-to-Consumer) brands, but it can be implemented by B2B brands too. Companies benefit from branding and advertising on social media platforms, such as TikTok, by becoming more known within the industry as a high-profile power on that platform by targeting their own niche. This type of social media marketing and branding supports other marketing outlets in addition, and in the digital world it can significantly

increase the company's placement within the Search Engine Optimization rankings. (Wong, 2023; Social Native, 2022).

4.3 Criticism on TikTok and social media

As discussed, TikTok can be a great platform for people and communities to come together, however, there is also a lot of criticism surrounding it. It is not only the unfortunate and sort of invisible sustainability issues, which were already discussed in subchapter 3.3., but the application, much like other channels of social media is often scrutinized for being too lenient with their age policy and not limiting content access for very young audiences. While TikTok does have an age suggestion and limit, 13-years-old, the adolescent is still able to trick the format and get online with this social media platform. In addition to age limit there are Family Pairing options and direct messaging restriction possibilities. (TikTok, 2024).

Despite efforts for more restricted content, social media channels may have exploitative content on them, and at a certain age young audiences can be easily manipulated and influenced by other people online. It is an issue which TikTok, amongst other channels, are aware of, limiting the more extreme content that violate guidelines, removing vulgar videos and sounds, and restricting profile access of people who continuously go against their policies. While these social media channels do have responsibility on the type of content that people are allowed to post in general, it is also the responsibility of a guardians and parents to discuss about both positive and negative aspects of social media with their children and monitoring the usage of TikTok and content they are seeing.

Other common conversation topic of today, is the fact that social media is incredibly addicting, even for adults. The effects of hours spent on scrolling through different channels with mobile phone have already been discussed from the sustainability angle, however, the psychological effects of it need to be highlighted too. People, and especially the adolescent online have come numb to the effect too much time on TikTok and other social media apps impact mental health. Michael Rich, a paediatrician, brings light on The Guardian's article about social media to the concerning trends that can take place amongst young users, who are seeking attention in ways that are not healthy. Marc Faddoul from digital rights organization says in the same article by The Guardian that TikTok especially can be tricky because no-one is getting depressed over night, but it happens by being chronically online in a continuous fashion. According to Faddoul (2022) TikTok provides "*an endless stream of emotional nudges, which can be hard to recognize* – "as it takes a toll on one's psyche and though process cunningly. (Paul, K. 2022).

While aware of the issues, without trying to undermine them, this thesis chooses to concentrate on the positive aspects of the platform, and possibilities it can offer. Yet, some of the less positive connotations are discussed more in the later chapters, such as conclusion.

5 Conducting the research

This chapter introduces the empirical research which was conducted over a 5-week period to track and help understand how these three airlines utilize TikTok. It provides a brief prologue into what empirical research is, and why it was chosen as the data collection method for this thesis.

As brand image and brand personality are important reflections in the analysis part of the thesis later, there is a paragraph about how these areas were investigated in relation to the theoretical part described in chapter 2. Before diving deeper into the research and the airlines on chapter 5, this chapter focuses on providing clarity on how to read the results and data, as the observations were tracked, and created into charts distinct just for this thesis.

5.1 Empirical research

Empirical research is a study, where conclusions are made based on evidence that has been gathered via different methods – observation being the one used in this thesis. The evidence gathered can be measured and comparable, often involving both quantitative and qualitative studies as empirical research is based on a primary existing data. (Voxco, 2023).

Benefits of empirical research include the confirmation of having primary data and the ability to authenticate it. Portrayal of developmental conclusions can be reflected on as there is already occurring information. This type of approach is useful to help provide further evidence on changes in different dynamics. However, there are also disadvantages in this style of research, including but not limited to the process of collecting data. As gathering these measurements can be time consuming and, in some cases, attaining permission for observation for data collection can be complicated. (Voxco, 2023).

When this research was conducted, all the mandatory observations and measurements were drawn from social media. This allowed anyone with TikTok account to have access to the information used. Therefore, acquiring permission to track the needed data or sharing of screenshots was not necessary. Regarding this study and research there was no need for a separate consent agreements since everything tracked and observed throughout is public information. Choosing to do an Empirical research was deemed the clearest way to obtain the necessary data for this study. The time spent on the data collection was something that could be decided beforehand, and the five-week period is believed to be adequate to provide result to be analysed and discussed.

For this thesis, multiple areas were observed on each airline's TikTok profile and measured throughout the process. First, the idea was to observe the number of followers each airline had in the beginning and keep track of the development on this, and how many likes their videos had cultivated in total amount. Other aspects were how many videos they have on the profile in and how many views their most viewed video has. As established, a view and like are two very different things on TikTok, it was deemed necessary measure of engagement to see also how many likes that specific video has in comparison to the views. The data collection happened through observational research over 5 weeks of investigation to the chosen airlines' TikTok profiles. The starting date was Monday 2nd of October 2023, and the tracking period ended 6th of November 2023.

5.2 Brand image and personality as part of the research

The numeric results and data are only one part of the study that is being analysed later. As discussed in the theoretical framework establishing each company's Brand image and personality is an important part of the thesis, as this will allow further investigation of the content created in TikTok. This allows the and suggestions of how to utilize TikTok for branding to be more precise. The inquiry to the brand personality and image is done based on Kotler's framework and Aaker's model, which were introduced in chapter 2. It should also be mentioned that while the airlines may promote traits from multiple Brand image types described by Kotler, and Brand personalities based on the Aaker model – the prominent one is the main type that may help set the airlines brands apart. The content created by the airline on their official TikTok profile will also be reflected on the airlines brand and how it can be seen as a support of their branding. Not every video will be talked about individually, but the overview of the profile and still shots from the videos will be shared. Posting of screen captures from the videos and comment on the newer and most popular videos will be also presented and used to reference when discussing and analysing the result and how that impacts the product – which is the recommendation of how to utilize TikTok for social media presence, brand, and advertising.

5.3 Understanding the results

As mentioned, this research started from following the most basic form of information on weekly reviews: how many followers and likes the profile has in total, how many views and likes the most popular video has gained more on the weekly basis – as well as the general idea, trend or content of new videos published during the research period. To follow the engagement of new followers or people who simply came across the profile, this research also follows the number of views and likes of each airlines all time most viewed, also referenced as most popular, video on TikTok, how it was on day one compared to how it is at the end of the research. These statistics and numbers were collected on Excel sheets.

An excel sheet was kept throughout to follow of the likes, comment, saves, and view, and these excel sheets are made into graphs and diagrams to provide a visual of the development throughout the 5-week time. Videos with highest view counts are talked and presented individually, accompanied by these graphs, while the overall image of the profile is added as a screenshot on talked in relation to the Brand image and Personality models.

For this research, six different view categories were created and tracked for every airline to further help summarize the result. These categories are as follow:

- Category 1: Videos with views from 1 million to 4 million.
- Category 2: Videos with views from 5 million to 9 million.
- Category 3: Videos with views of 10 million or more.
- Category 4: Videos with less than 100 thousand views.
- Category 5: Videos with views from 100 thousand to 500 thousand views.
- Category 6: Videos with views from 600 thousand to 900 thousand views.

Moreover, a detailed description of categories is included here; Category one is for videos which have views starting from 1 million to 4 million, and this means that as long as the first number indicating millions begins with number four it is included in Category 1 – and the thousands are not taken into consideration, meaning that the number of views may go as far as 4 999 999, so as long as the indicator of millions does remains below 5, the category remains the same.

This same method is used throughout the calculations on every category: if the first number of the amount indicator – when talking either thousands or millions, does not increase above the number that starts the next category, it is calculated to the previous. For example, the Category 5 is for videos with views between 100 000 and 500 000, and until the beginning number which indicates hundreds of thousands does not break to 600 000 – only going as high as 599 999, it is still calculated to Category 5. When viewing the increase of numbers on follower, likes and views – it is reminded once more, that there is a distinctive difference between views and likes, difference is that by liking the video there is engagement and interaction happening, while viewing does not accumulate to the interactions automatically.

As the result discusses both viewership and actual amount engagement on the videos, it is good to keep in mind that even though the number of views significantly increases, the number of likes may not move in similar fashion. Another important notice when reading the results is that the word “thousand” has been shortened on the pie charts and graphs to a

capital letter K, and a capital letter M presents “million”. These two are common prefixes used in statistics and in the metric system. (Lamb, 2024).

In the beginning of the empirical research, prior to beginning the observations the hypothesis was that view-wise the most popular airlines would have the steadiest increase in follower amount and likes, and the airline which already had most views would be most frequent uploader with new ones.

6 Air France

This chapter discusses the first airline observed throughout the research, which is Air France. As the introductions of the airlines was done in Chapter 2, this part of the thesis goes directly to conclusions on which brand image and brand personality suits the airline the most. Following the theoretical framework, the conclusions are made based on Kotler's and Aaker's models. The findings were done in reflection to their official website in comparison to their branding on TikTok. This is made to see if the social media marketing and branding is coherent. All the airlines observed follow the same pattern of discussion.

6.1 Air France's Brand image and Brand personality

On their official website Air France mentions multiple core values that create the airlines brand. These core values are innovation, safety, excellency, diversity, and customer commitment. On their website the airline also features a new brand video, launched in 2022 the video showcases the French "chic" and embodies the airlines ambition to offer its customer the best of France. The video features a lady in a red dress ascending through sequence of different scenes showcasing the Eiffel Tower, French haute cuisine and hospitality, and a sea of clouds. The video ends in the company's advertising signature which states "Elegance is a journey. Air France". Air France is integrating that certain "Je ne Sais quoi" and feeling of France into their advertising and brand image, prompting the airline to be associated with elegance, expertise of air travel and all things French. (Air France, 2023). The company's TikTok bio read "Welcome on board! For any questions, contact us on our WhatsApp or Messenger" paired with an airplane and speech bubble emojis. This makes the airline seem more available to customers, while keeping it business minded and simplistic.

It is clear when looking at the website, advertisement signature and the airlines core values, that it is mainly about "Social image". Based to Kotler's framework, this comes be the main image of Air France, since it is the haute couture ideas of Parisian gourmet food and fashion on the frontlines of how the airline portrays itself on their website. It promotes social status of their service and product: luxury, sophistication, and exclusivity. This feel can be seen already from the overview of the airlines TikTok profile, visualized by screenshots: figure 3 and 4.

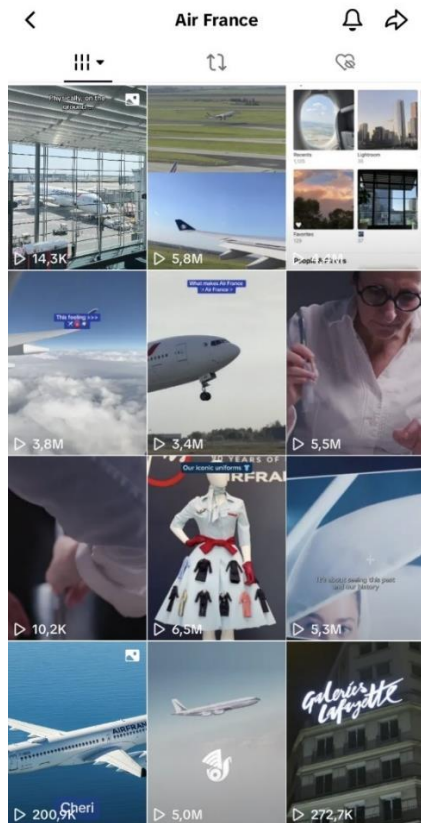


Figure 3: an overview of Air France's TikTok videos.

In addition, when looked from the Aaker's personality dimension point of view, the Brand Personality of Air France, they mostly exhibit the traits of Sophistication and Competence. This goes perfectly well together their profile on TikTok, as it came instantly clear during the research, that their videos in general are mainly about showing off all the charm and glamour of the Airline's 90-year legacy, paired with Parisian fashion, presented in collaboration with the aviation themes, and food created by French chefs for the Airline. All the while their videos also present their merit as one of Europe's most well-known legacy carriers, promoting reliability and success. Attached below are a screenshot of the TikTok profiles video overview, and a collage created to highlight the feel and ambiance of the videos in general.

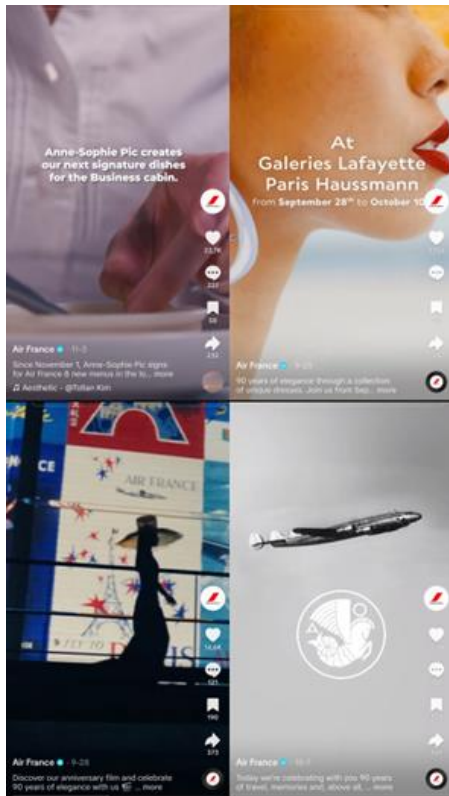


Figure 4: a closeup on four videos selected from the overview.

6.2 Empirical research

Based on the observations conducted during the Empirical study, Air France boosted their followers from 410,6 thousand to 421,9 thousand over the course of 5 weeks, and total likes on all their videos together climbed up to 2.7 million from 2.2 million. The airline's TikTok profile had total of 91 videos in the beginning, and over the course of 5 weeks they increased their number to 97 videos. Meaning they only posted 6 new videos during the research period. From those 97 videos biggest percentage increase of 5% was on view categories two and five. The only decrease of views was on category four – which indicates a positive result – since there was less videos with views under 100 000, it naturally means that the old videos gained an additional number on viewers, boosting the higher number categories. Category three is for videos that have a viewership of 10 million or more, and throughout the research none of Air France's videos was able to reach this milestone. Although their most popular video did not come far from it.

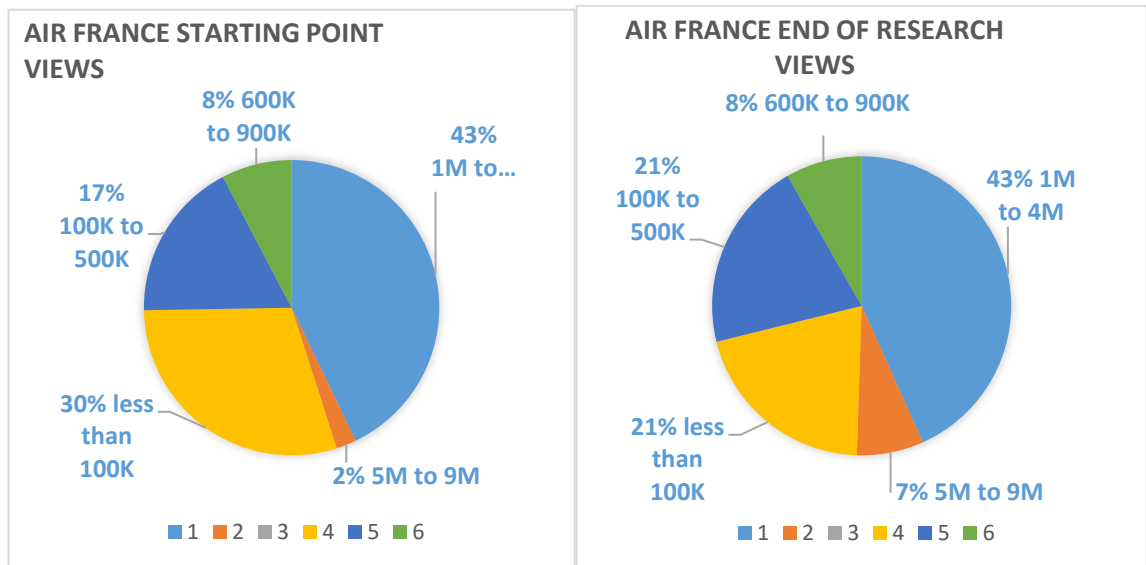


Figure 5: Pie charts representing the starting point and result of the overall views of a TikTok profile.

- Category 1: Videos with views from 1 million to 4 million.
- Category 2: Videos with views from 5 million to 9 million.
- Category 3: Videos with views of 10 million or more.
- Category 4: Videos with less than 100 thousand views.
- Category 5: Videos with views from 100 thousand to 500 thousand views.
- Category 6: Videos with views from 600 thousand to 900 thousand views.

6.2.1 Air France most viewed video

Air France had the highest percentage of views with more than a million play times in correlation to the total number of videos posted on the profile. 50% of their videos crossed the 1 million view mark, and their most popular video also had the biggest increase in views throughout the 5-week period. Indeed, Air France was the only airline out of the four airlines tracked whose most popular video from the beginning gained more views on it. Indeed, none of the other airlines was able to gain more views on their pinned, and most popular videos in million.

To help see a glimpse of the video a few screenshots were taken and added as pictures to this thesis. Additionally, the appendix section of the thesis features a direct link to each TikTok video discussed throughout.

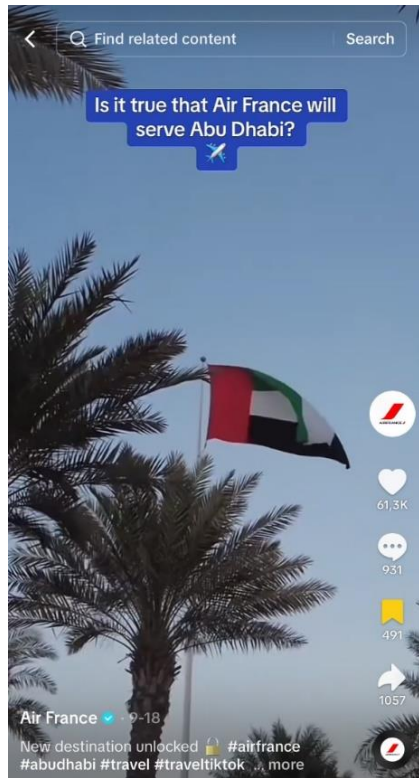


Figure 6: Screenshot of Air France's most viewed video about opening a route to Abu Dhabi.

Air France's most popular videos were one that introduced Abu Dhabi as a new destination for the airline. The video features middle eastern music and promotional pictures of Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates flag, and Air France aircraft.

This is a very standard way of promoting a new destination while offering useful information of when and how often this new product offering is available. Combined with a sound which expresses excitement and anticipation, went viral, and therefore this is a great example of combining, attractive visual images that make people admire the destination, while providing information that is beneficial for the interested clients, and utilizing the TikTok algorithm with a sound that was circling and popular on the platform in that moment.

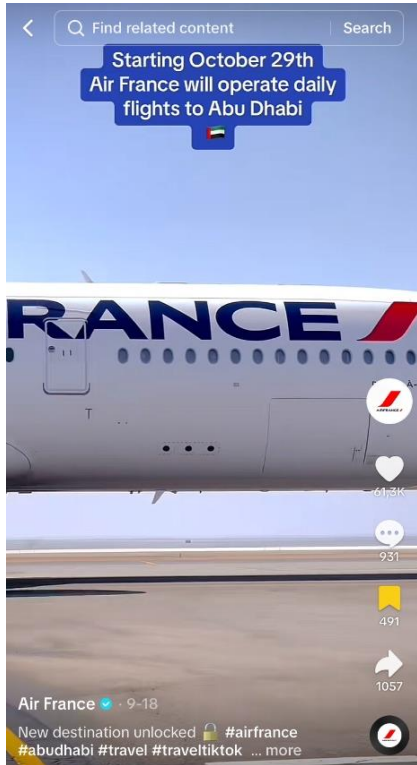


Figure 7: Another screenshot of Air France’s most viewed video about flight operations to Abu Dhabi.

This specific video had 6,7 million views in the beginning of the research, and by the end, the video had been seen more than 2,5 million times more, the video reaching a total of 9,3 million views. Engagement on the video at the end of research – which was on the 6th of November, was as follow: 60,9 thousand likes, 455 saves, 1045 shares and 931 comments. View-to-like ratio and engagement percentage was up 6,6%. The video saw an increase on all points of measurement. In the following graph the orange line represents the likes in thousands (marked on the right), in relation to views in millions (marked on the left) with the 1st column representing the starting point, and the 6th column the end of week 5.

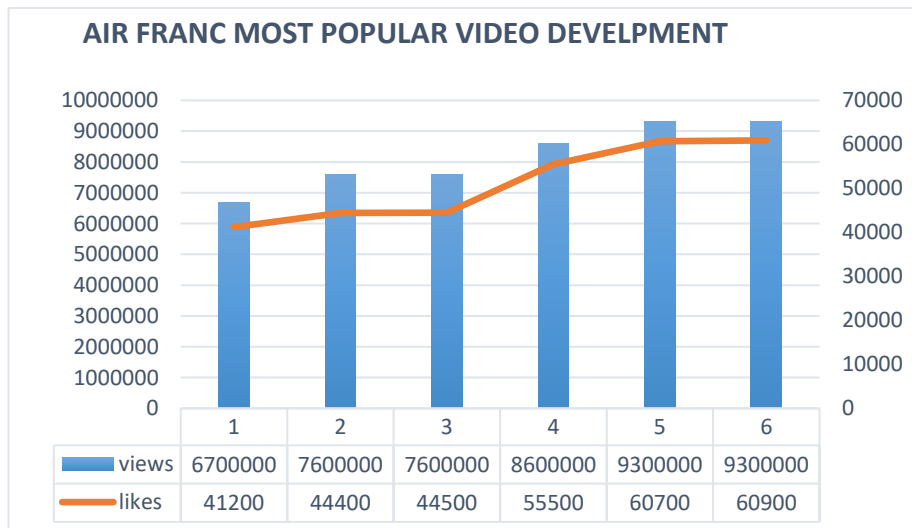


Figure 8: A graph of view and like development.

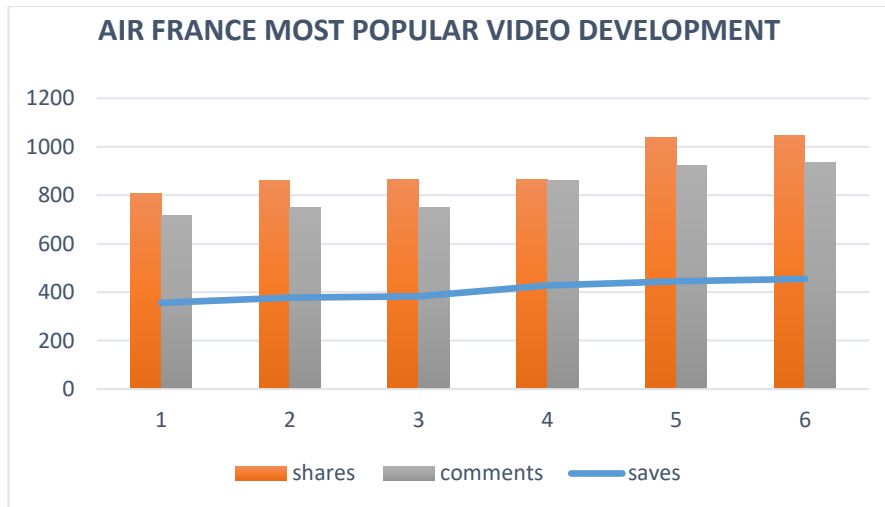


Figure 9: A graph of share, comment, and save development.

What these graphs tell us, is that this one video had a similar increase with likes as it did with the views. Additionally, the saves on the video were the lowest numbers and did not have a large increase, but the shares and comments had a parallel pattern to them – having a more visible development. Air France’s view development was anticipated, and similar results were expected to a certain degree with every profile, however, as it will become apparent – Air France was in a league of its own when it comes to impressive increase in results, compared to the other two discussed next.

6.2.2 Notes on sustainability

From a sustainability point of view, Air France’s TikTok profile does not promote sustainable practices, at least none were noticed when collecting data for this thesis. They had significantly lower number of videos in total, all nearly all of them performed successfully. This popular and interesting content with very little throwaway videos makes the company appear more conscious. While the airline’s TikTok does not promote sustainable practices that much, the airline’s corporate website does mention in the Key Figures that their CO₂ emissions per passenger-kilometre will be down -30% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels (Air France, 2023).

7 Delta airlines

This chapter discusses about Delta’s Brand image and Brand personality in relation to the frameworks introduced in the theoretical framework. After establishing how they identify on these models, screenshots from their TikTok are presented as a supporting fact. After this, the numerical data collected through observation is presented as graphs and charts, as was done in chapter 6 with Air France.

7.1 Delta’s Brand image and Brand personality

Delta positions themselves brand image-wise mainly to the ‘Functional image’ type when reflected on Kotler’s type definitions. Delta fits this category since it is one of most awardee airlines in the United States and has a reputation as a reliable and durable legacy carrier – creating associations to the more practical benefits of the product and service they offer. Their TikTok advertisement also plays into the Emotional image, aiming to create a sense of security, reliability, and happiness to people. The Aaker model of brand personalities goes hand in hand with this as the slogan written to their TikTok biography field under the profile name, the slogan reads “We can take you there” paired with an airplane emoji. This slogan speaks for itself in the Competence dimension.



Figure 10: An overview of Delta’s TikTok profile videos

Looking at the TikTok profile and the content of the videos they post – these two image types mentioned above become clear again. A lot of the videos on Delta’s profile revolve around the working community and Delta’s operations as a family of sorts, relying not only showing the emotional side, but the high functioning and informative aspects of their operations. These things combine gives an image that Delta is a caring airline, with devoted employees, and as a business Delta is competent and capable in their product offering. A large part of their videos revolves around their employees “day-in-life” videos, offering a glimpse to the everyday workday of mechanics, pilots, flight attendants and customer service agents – while simultaneously providing travelling tips and advertisement of services on board, such as a free Wi-Fi.



Figure 11: A screenshot from one of Delta’s TikTok videos for international women’s day.

This family-oriented versatility of all Delta’s operations is further visualized three screenshots on the next page. First, with showing how women at Delta are working an all parts of operational fields, and how a lot of familiar work together at Delta, the airline’s TikTok videos are aimed to pull the heartstring of their audience. In addition, the videos often recognizing special occasions and theme’s, such as Mother’s Day and Women’s History month. All this further emphasizes the fact that Delta is branding themselves in line with the Emotional Image and Competent Personality type.

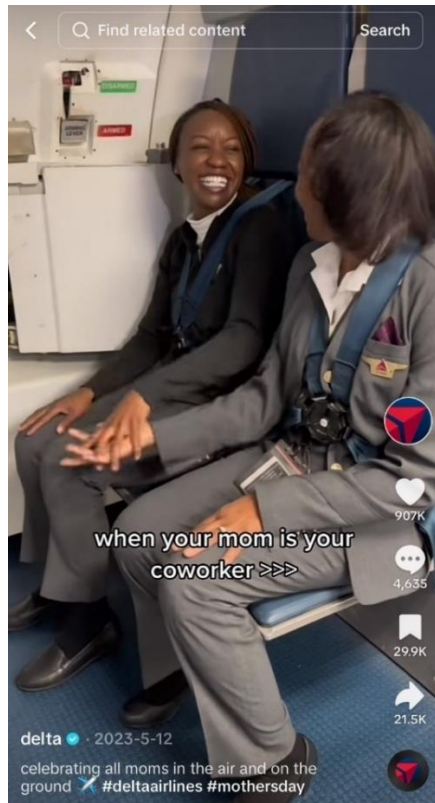


Figure 12: A screenshot from one of Delta’s TikTok videos for Mother’s Day.

7.2 Empirical research and results

Out of the four airlines observed during the empirical research, Delta has posted second most videos on TikTok. At the start the airline had a total of 164 videos on their profile with a combined number of likes accumulating to 15.5 million. This was a rather impressive number as the airline had dedicated following of 526.6 thousand users. Delta’s most viewed video had a remarkable number of views: 23.4 million, paired with 4.1 million likes. Whereas their second most watched video had 15.9 million views but only 104.8 thousand likes. These numbers already in the beginning of the research support the part that after going viral – the algorithm might boost the next video to a huge amount of TikTok users – but the engagement percentage may get stuck in low numbers as the new content does not resonate with audiences, is not in unison of the current trends or independently funny. As discussed, a higher amount of exposure on the platform does not automatically equal a high number of likes, comments, or new followers.

During the observation period Delta’s TikTok profile followers went from 526 thousand to 533 thousand, and the total amount of likes combined from all the 163 videos went from 15,5 million, to 15,7 million on 172 videos. Results are that Delta posted nine new videos during the 5-week period.

The likes of 163 videos were distributed in the beginning as follows: 12 videos in category 1 (videos with views from 1 million to 4 million), zero videos in category 2 (videos with views from 5 million to 9 million), five videos in category 3 (10 million or more), 87 videos in category 4 (videos with less than 100 thousand views. On top of these, Delta had 53 videos in category 5 (videos with views from 100 thousand to 500 thousand), and five videos in category 6 (videos with views from 600 thousand to 900 thousand).

Like Air France, Delta had growth in viewership on all high number Categories and had a percentage drop only on Category 6, meaning that by the end of the 5 weeks, more of their videos had crossed 1 million views, and or got over 5 million views, qualifying to the Category 2. Category 4 dropped by two percentages because few more videos broke 100 thousand views or more. For a reminder the categories are explained in detail again under the pie charts.

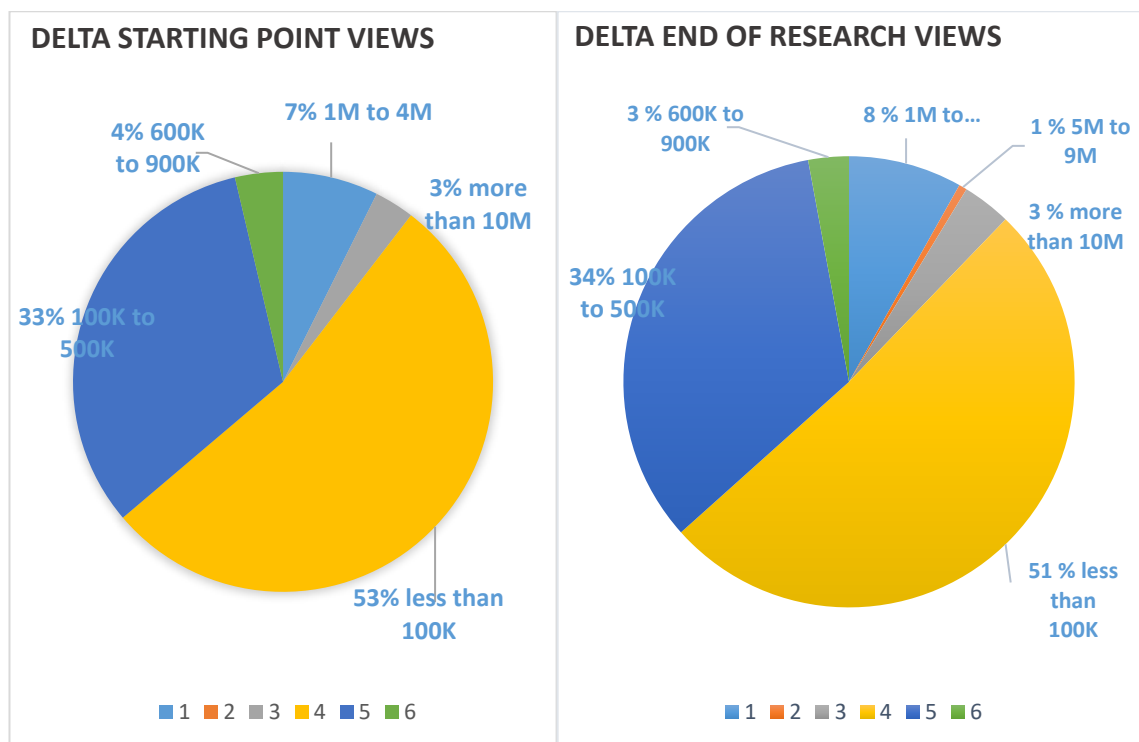


Figure 13: Pie charts representing the starting point and result of the overall views of a TikTok profile.

- Category 1: Videos with views from 1 million to 4 million.
- Category 2: Videos with views from 5 million to 9 million.
- Category 3: Videos with views of 10 million or more.
- Category 4: Videos with less than 100 thousand views.
- Category 5: Videos with views from 100 thousand to 500 thousand views.
- Category 6: Videos with views from 600 thousand to 900 thousand views.

7.2.1 Delta's most viewed video

The content of Delta's most viewed video was about two pilots who are excited to work together as they are best friends, or "besties" as described in a youthful way to appeal to the demographic of TikTok, as can be seen on figure 14. Furthermore, on the video the pilots are bumping their heads slightly to the rhythm of the song used in the background. The sound used for this video is deemed a "viral sound" as it has another 636 thousand videos made with it.

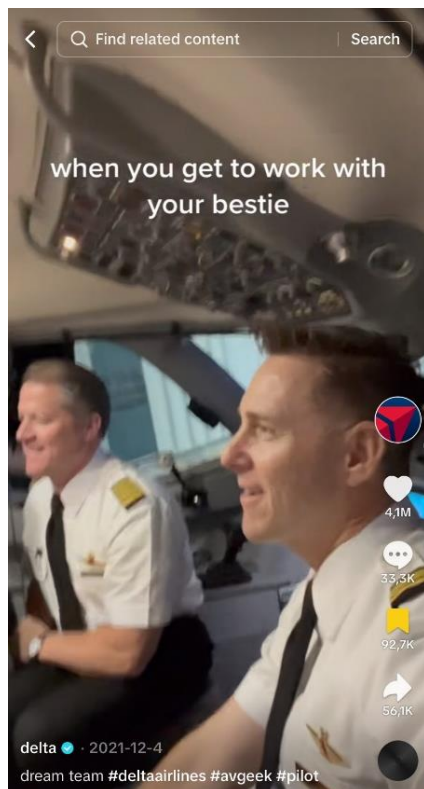


Figure 14: A screenshot of Delta's most viewed video "when you get to work with your bestie".

As the video had clearly already gone viral on the platform prior to the beginning of the study's observation period, and therefore the numbers did not improve in any form, except for a slight nudge on saves. Nevertheless, graphs were made. The views and like ratio remained the same: 23.4 million views with just above 4 million likes, creating an engagement percentage of 24,3%. On other areas saves had the slightest increase from 92.5 thousand to 92.7 thousand and shares went from 56 thousand to 56.1 thousand. Comments remained the same at 33.3 thousand.

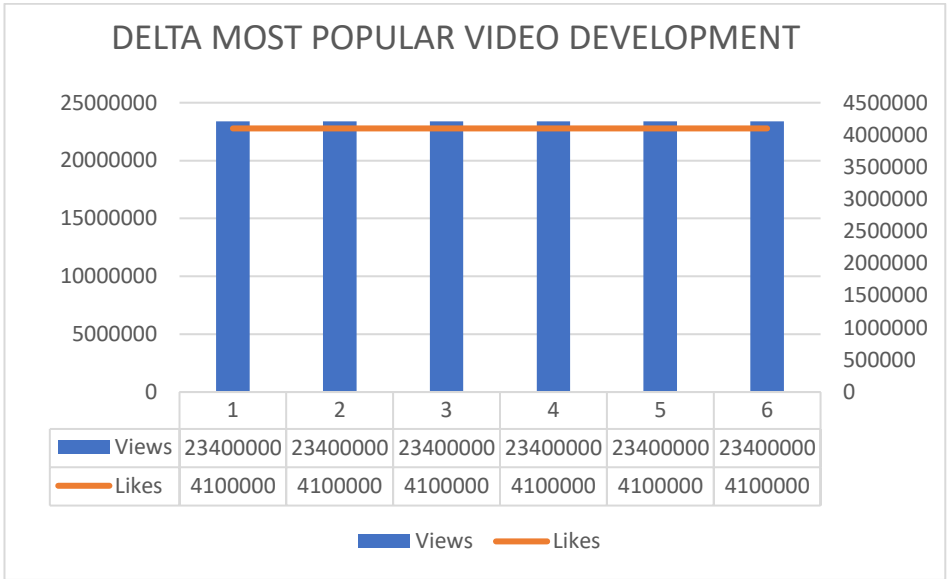


Figure 15: A graph of view and like development.

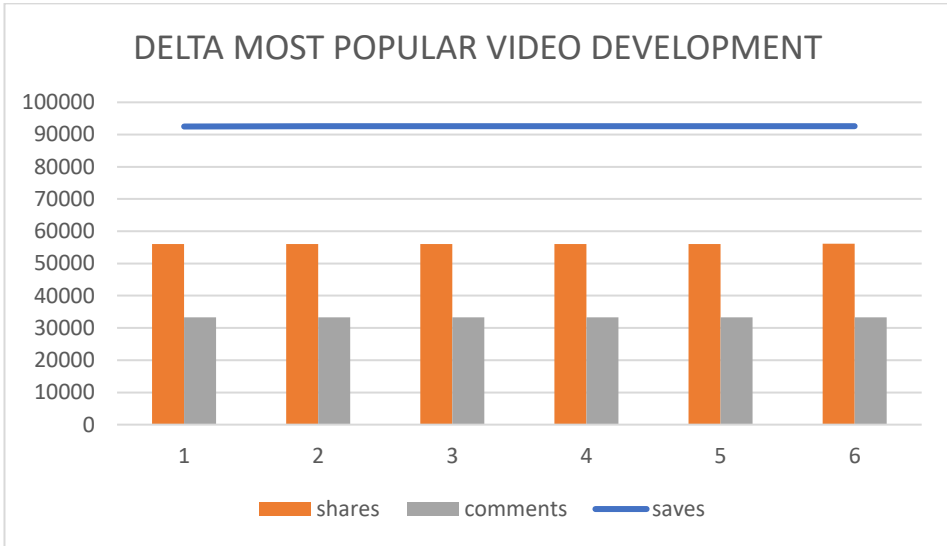


Figure 16: A graph of share, comment, and save development.

What these graphs tell us, is that the video had near to zero percentage increase in any of the tracked areas. This could be due to the fact that since it was already so highly viewed – there simply was not enough new people who could have seen it. Shares, comments, and likes remained the same.

7.2.2 Notes on sustainability

From a sustainability point of view, their TikTok, at least within the content created did not express any sustainability concerns – at least none were noticed when browsing the profile for this thesis. Additionally, the sheer number of videos on the profile requires a large amount of data to be stored, and as many of their videos performed in a very underwhelming fashion, many of their videos could be deleted and content could be reconsidered. On their official sit Delta Airlines does affirm that the airline is committed to Net-Zero CO₂ Emissions

by 2050. (Delta, 2024). It may not be as popular type of content to create on TikTok, but sustainability content and marketing could go very well together with Delta's branding on TikTok, it makes the company appear evermore competent, reliable and it could have a positive emotional reaction from those who value the transparency and consciousness.

8 Ryanair

Following the structure of the chapters six and eight, this chapter discusses about Ryanair's Brand image and Brand personality, accompanied by an introduction to the most viewed video and content in general. And in the later stage of this chapter, there is presentation of the empirical data results, done via observational methods in the form of numerical data collection.

8.1 Ryanair Brand image and Brand personality.

Out of the three airlines discussed, Ryanair is the most widely recognized for their incredibly humorous approach concerning their branding and marketing on TikTok. Their content often makes its way to other forms of social media – and it has made even the news. Their TikTok content is clearly designed to attract the younger generation, which is on brand since likely this is the customer segment they are trying to convince into buying their tickets. The content in general has a self-aware, slightly brazen, and a sarcastic tone, often mocking difficult passengers and poking fun at annoying parts of air travel with their “cheap” reputation. These dramatizations include scenarios such as stuffing oversized carry-on bags and petitioning for a “hygiene check” or a “toilet fee”. (Bondarenko, 2023). The TikTok profile's biography also has a slogan “Catch flights, not feelings” with an emoji that shows a hand being manicured with nail polish and sparkles. Again, referring to the so-called carefree approach and advertising of their low-cost fares while solidifying their efforts to be relatable to more of adolescent audiences that do not take this form of advertisement necessary as critically.

Ryanair does not clearly state their motto nor are their core values easily found from their corporate website. However, in their Code of Business Conduct and Ethics they state that as an airline Ryanair is “committed to fulfilling their customers need in an honest and fair manner.” (Ryanair, 2024). And additionally on the corporate website they state that they have the lowest fares in Europe, while being “*the cleanest and greenest*” airline group. (Ryanair, 2023). Based on solely these few facts, it is somewhat difficult to begin establishing what category of Brand Image or Personality Ryanair falls into. What comes to mind based on this low fare and promise to fill customer needs, is possibly a Functional Image or even a Symbolic Image, when based on Kotler's definitions. Functional because the brand associated themselves with having practical benefits, being reliable and affordable for passengers who value saving money over comfort and variety of pre-included add-ons of a more traditional product most airlines offer. Additionally, the Symbolic Image would fit Ryanair due to them advertising themselves as the greenest airline group. Another symbolic

aspect could be that they create a sense of freedom and adventure for young audiences to due to the lower price points.

Investigating the Brand Personality type based on the Aaker model, it could be argued that Ryanair fits best with "Ruggedness" and "Excitement". Looking their TikTok, similar remarks can be made. The humorous and carefree way of promoting the airlines services and having more fun with poking fun at different stereotypical behaviours and experiences associated with traveling – and low fare traveling especially. Most of their TikTok's feature a picture of their airplane with large eyes on it, while spelling out snazzy comments or staff dramatically demonstrating customer complaints while utilizing popular sounds and clips from other viral videos to boost views. It could be argued that the airline does not treat their TikTok profile as the most serious way of marketing branding and should not be taken too critically when reflected on the Ryanair groups commitment to their product and customer service.

Ryanair TikTok profile and videos main point is simply to be seen, about making a splash, and getting a reaction – without it necessarily having to be positive. Catering to young audiences, the videos should be considered and seen light-heartedly, as they can be quite controversial.

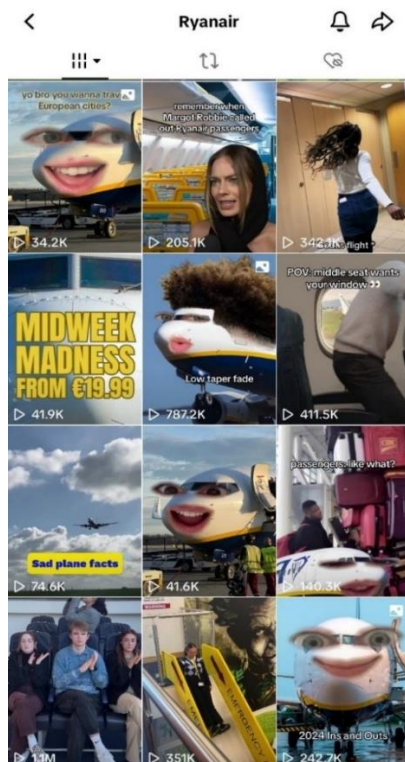


Figure 17: A screenshot of Ryanair's TikTok profile video overview.

The attached screen shot above – figure 17, shows an image of Ryanair's TikTok profile overview, where the frequent Plane with eyes -character, can be seen on top left, on the middle on two rows lower and again on the bottom right corner. The last two screen shots

show the other type of content the airline often posts – related to the staff demonstration and commentary on passenger complaints and behaviour.



Figure 18: A screenshot of a Ryanair’s TikTok video “passengers getting ready to complain about a flight no one forced them to book”.

The airline also often utilizes the video caption – which is meant for hashtags and video description for people to read, to add more of a social commentary, this can be seen with figure 18: “*You’re more predictable than Max winning a grand prix.*” referencing to the popular motor sport Formula 1, and while creating waves and debates in subcommunities of TikTok, niche comment like that translates to a smart remark on things that are extremely expectable. In that video a man dances to a popular sound, so called “hyping” themselves up to file complaints about a flight they booked voluntarily. The other example added, Figure 19, shows a staff member dressed as a customer forcing their cabin baggage to fit the measurement box, proving that their bag is according to the size requirement.



Figure 19: A screenshot of a Ryanair's TikTok video "when the bag is too big, and they do this".

8.2 Empirical research ad results

Out of all four airlines in this research, Ryanair had the highest numbers on everything from the get-go. The account had 2.1 million followers, and 34.1 million views in total on their 240 videos. Their most popular videos were pinned on top of the profile and had 16.1 million views with 1.4 million likes, and 13.6 million views with 2.4 million likes. The prior will be discussed in further detail in the second part of this chapter. The videos were divided in their respective categories as follow: 56 videos in Category 1 (1 million to 4 million views), eight in Category 2 (5 million views up to 9 million), six videos in category 3 (views more than 10 million), two in Category 4 (under 100 thousand views), 129 videos in Category 5 (views 100 thousand to 500 thousand), and finally 39 in Category 6 (from 600 thousand views to the 900 thousands).

Over the course of the observational period Ryanair was able to do the most impressive change in Category 4: as everything posted at the time had experienced a viewership increase – leaving none of their videos under 100 thousand views. Additionally, as it can be seen from the charts below, the other videos with lower views had an increase as well – 1% increase on Category 1, and a 3% increase in Category 6. The percentage in category 5 dropped while the higher view video category percentage remained the same in general. Ryanair posted 14 new videos over the course of 5-weeks, however one of the videos had been deleted during, bringing the remaining number of new videos to 13. This deletion was noticed during the weekly updates as the video dated during week one was nowhere to be

seen on week 2. The follower count remained the same – 2.1 million followers, however the likes in total reached 34.6 million.

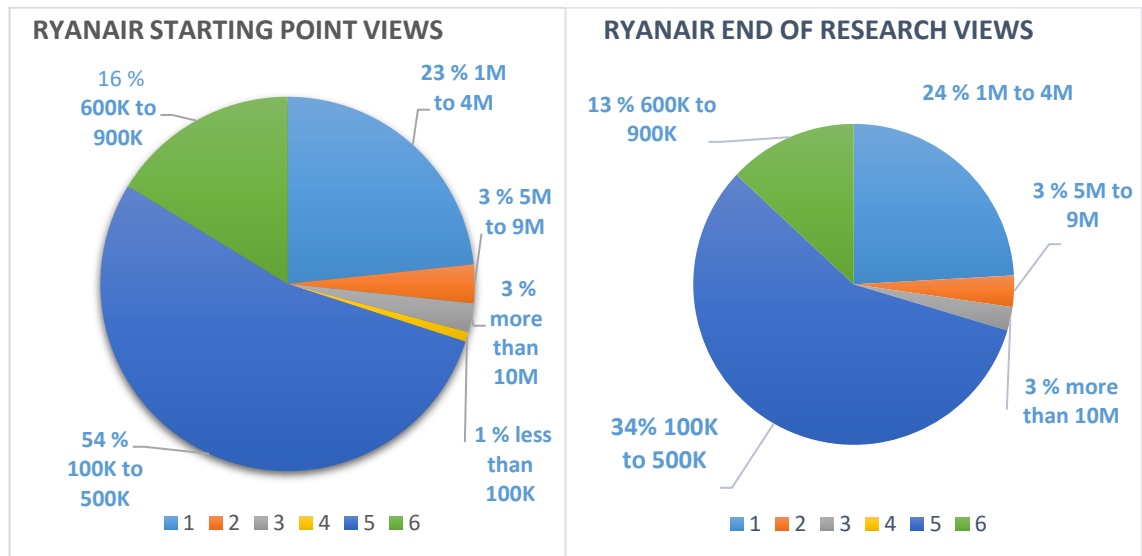


Figure 20: Pie charts representing the starting point and result of the overall views of a TikTok profile.

8.2.1 Ryanair's most viewed video

Ryanair's most popular video is about the cartoon version of one of their planes – by making it as a green screen added backdrop and having eyes and mouth to provide features and faces and lip-sync to the added sound. This video too was a social commentary of sorts on the irony of how people often declare that they will never fly with Ryanair again after their unpleasing experience – yet they often do fly with Ryanair again. The video is paired with a mischievous music and laughing. See the image on the next page to see a screenshot of the beginning of the video.

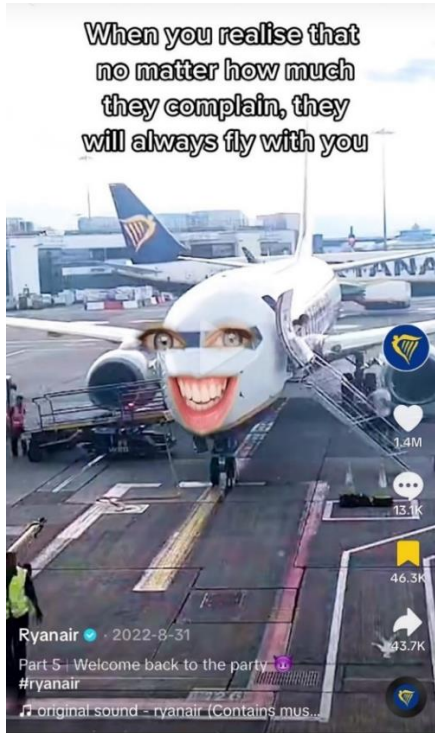


Figure 21: A screenshot of Ryanair’s most viewed TikTok featuring their frequent character: Air-plane with eyes.

The graphs created based on the excel file do not clearly show the slight change in the share and save -part. The saves went up from 46.1 thousand to 46.3 thousand, as the shares increased in a similar fashion by a couple hundred – from 43.1 thousand to 43.5 thousand. A small change but necessary to mention more. Furthermore, the view and like ratio of this video did not change during the 5-weeks.

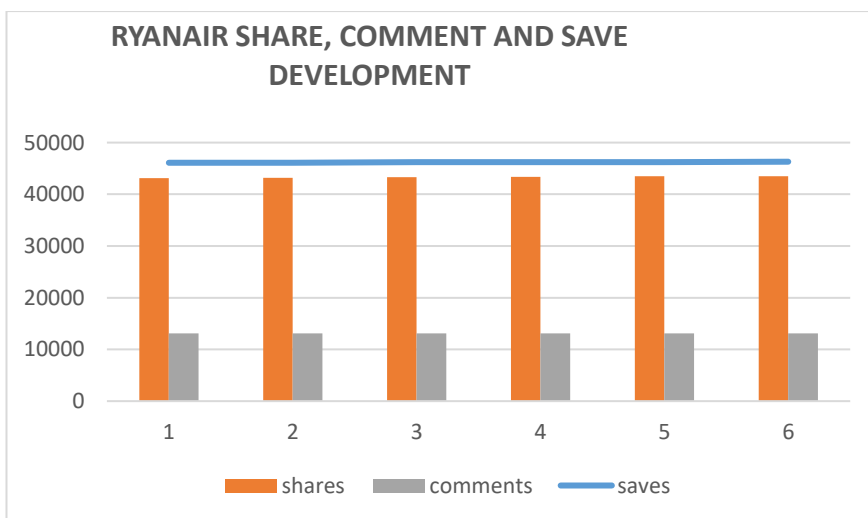


Figure 22: A graph of share, comment, and save development.

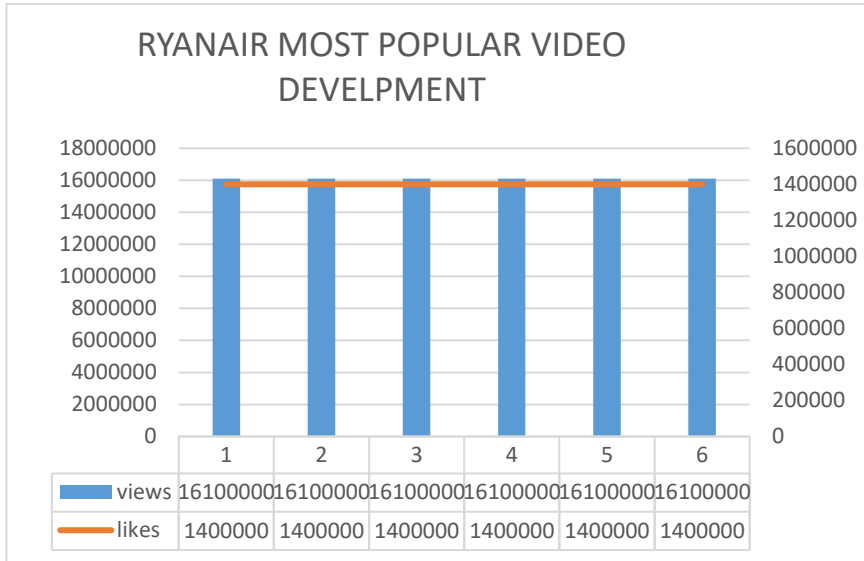


Figure 23: A graph of view and like development.

8.2.2 Notes on sustainability

Ryanair, much like other observed airlines did not explicitly have any sustainability related content on their TikTok, and the number of videos posted require quite a bit of data to be stores – and the editing done takes more time to perfect. However, the Ryanair Group mentions on their corporate website that they are a very Green Group – so it could have been fun to see some level of demonstration of the airline’s devotion to sustainable practices. Since the airline is not shy to post various content on their profile – more videos from the 200 posted ones could promote green practices more.

9 Analysis and further discussion

This chapter analyses and discusses everything that has been observed and learned from the research. Additionally, it investigates into possible further research development plan, and if this study had limitations and how credible the results are when creating suggestions on utilizing TikTok.

In the beginning of the research, bigger developments were expected to happen throughout the weeks of following the TikTok profiles. It came apparent by the end, that tracking the most popular video was not as beneficial as perhaps focusing on the growth of a video posted during the research, for example on week two. This could have provided better insight into how fast videos gain audience and likes. As Air France was the only one to increase their engagement numbers significantly on their already most popular video, one cannot help but wonder, if it would have been better to choose all new TikTok videos and follow those numbers increasing.

9.1 Credibility and limitations of the research and results

It is important to remember when reading the results and the number of views on the most popular videos, two of them - Delta and Ryanair, already had a remarkably higher number of times watched compared to Air France. Logically thinking, the views on them statistically have significantly harder time to be gained again to a similar degree, when compared to a less viewed one.

And what is meant by this, is that, for example, already in the beginning of the observation Delta's "BFF Pilots" video had more than 40 million views, and therefore does not have the ability to gain more views from the same people who during the research see a video with only 500 thousand views from Air France – if the same people who viewed that specific Delta TikTok saw the video from Air France during this research – Delta's numbers remain the same whereas Air France's gains near 40 million views, leading to significant increase. Understanding this now, with more opinions gathered based on the results, it could have been more fascinating to follow the development of videos posted at the same time, to see if only one had gone viral, and if yes, what was the content about?

Additionally, for the sake of the research to remain true to this one platform, other social media profiles were not browsed to see if the brand personality and image reflects the same for the airlines. One would assume that it does – however for a deeper understanding it could be beneficial to compare all different social media platforms to one another. Credibility

research in relation to providing profound suggestion, and having a deeper comprehension of the developments, focusing on slightly different aspects could have been more beneficial.

However, looking at the branding, brand personality and brand image of these TikTok profiles this thesis can still analyse and provide insights on which approach seems to be successful on TikTok, what attracts the users, and is able to provide recommendations for other airlines and businesses to follow, if so desired.

9.2 Further research opportunities

For further development, it could be very interesting research to focus on couple other airlines, or any other business, to have them start their profile from scratch and follow the development over the course of 5-week period, or even longer. With everyone starting from nothing, it could be a continuation of this study to see how the content, branding, and marketing of each profile on TikTok develops based on the determined brand image and personality. This could also provide additional understanding on how much the algorithm effects on the popularity of a video. And if following the suggestions created in chapter 10 have a positive impact or is it more of a game or algorithmic luck with TikTok.

Additionally, it could be interesting to investigate if the content created successfully on TikTok would be as popular on other similar social media channels. Could the young demographic and audience actually end up being a disservice to some companies or airlines? Is their target audience easier to reach in some other way than short videos?

10 Utilizing TikTok for social media marketing and branding

Based on the research, suggestions and recommendation can be provided for TikTok utilization to its full potential, and how marketing one's brand on this social media platform can be done in a beneficial way. This chapter introduces content suggestions, number of uploads per week, and distinct ways to potentially increase the chances of a TikTok becoming highly viewed, liked, and to gain a following. These suggestions mark a starting point to utilizing TikTok as an extremely fun and engaging social media marketing tool and branding platform.

Airlines, and any other business who wishes to advertise on TikTok, should first and foremost have a clear vision of their brand: what is the personality type and image they are trying to showcase. After that it is important to establish if this specific social media platform is another way to officially advertise and promote the brand, product, and service – or is it more about connecting with customers on a light-hearted way and if marketing in this type of way represent the company's values accurately.

It is important first to establish one's brands personality and image – how do they brand themselves. Having a clear intent on which type of content resonates with the brand and what is the customer demographics they are trying to attract with the TikTok videos. Since the content that the company as a brand creates and advertises is mainly for their desired customer base. If one focuses only on trying to create a viral video to gain as many views as possible – may not have the desired outcome in the long run as ignoring values and brand image for the sake of a viral video may have negative effect. Participating on trends can have a view boost for a period, however, once the people who only enjoy fun and care-free humorous content will stop following the profile once they discover that the videos normally posted are more about high class, expensive couture experiences – the branding on social media needs to resonate with the viewer to keep them interested and engaging.

After understanding what it is that one wants to achieve with having this platform – one should create an upload calendar. Keeping track on viral sounds, dance trends or video themes can be beneficial – once it is established how it can be conveyed to cater your brand in complimentary way, appealing to the correct client base and demographic. Posting content which stays true to the brand will help the right people to find your page.

Based on the observed airlines and their TikTok profiles, and engagement percentage on their posts, a recommended frequency of posting would be approximately three times a week. However, with this it is quality over quantity, as having a goal-oriented content that makes people want to comment and engage, is the best policy when aiming for a dedicated

audience, and it is environmentally friendlier. Moreover, having approximately three videos per week allows people to browse TikTok enough to see each video when they open the application. A steady uploading schedule with correct hashtags and sounds increases chances to go viral with the help of the algorithm in the future, if they are related to the trends circling around the platform at that time.

For the sake of this thesis, the following recommendations were created, and can be followed by any airline or any business – even an individual, who wishes to start promoting their brand and marketing on TikTok.

Firstly, it is important to *Establish your Brand image and Brand personality*. Make it clear what it is, that your company represents. After this *Define your audience*. Who is the primary customer, and which segments you wish to attract?

Then comes the easier part: *Create a TikTok profile*. On the profile page's biography box provide useful links, e.g., to the main booking website. Profile delivers the first impression, therefore having a recognizable logo (company logo) as a profile picture is useful, and having a slogan or a catchy phrase included attracts people to browse the videos attached to the profile.

Create an upload calendar, making it clear when to create content and when to post it. Content marketing should *be goal oriented*. Be informative, advertise your brand in a way that appears organic, join in on the fun, spread awareness of the services and product. The content needs to make audiences feel like they have a reason to engage with you – it can be a logical reason or an emotional response. Logical response to an Airline's video can accumulate from a purely informative video which is about a promotional code or a new destination, or an emotional reaction to a story that resonates, e.g., Delta talked about how amazing it is to work with a best friend or mother on Mother's Day – as people relate to those positive emotions it causes them to share, like and comment on the video.

Implement current trends of viral videos to match your Brand's image and personality. Popular videos for companies include e.g., Behind the scenes footage, personalized spin on viral trends, product reviews and introductions, a Day in Life -video blogs.

Use *popular sounds, hashtags*, investigate into the possibility and potential of collaborating with a popular TikTok user who already have a large following, and has an image that fits well with your company. Be aware of the innuendos and subliminal messages the content may convey, but importantly remember to *have fun with it*.

11 Conclusion

This is the final chapter of the thesis, and it aims to bring together everything discussed. To review: an empirical study was conducted, and data collection and analysis was based on observations of three airlines and their usage of social media platform called TikTok. These airlines were Delta, Ryanair, and Air France, all of them have profiles set on TikTok. The selection process was based on facts including similar traffic numbers and destinations, catering to a similar clientele and they are western airlines. After this chapter all the references made, and sources of information are listed, followed by appendices.

Sustainability of content and social media marketing was discussed mainly on the theoretical part, and as it was not the focus of observations during this research – however it was discussed in short at the end of every airline's empirical data result analysis. Other focal aspect of sustainability in content marketing was the importance of well-established strategy when branding on social media, which brought attention to the significance of being goal-oriented and comprehending one's brand image and brand personality. Having a content strategy and social media marketing plan is not only important when reaching out to correct audience, but also goes hand in hand with sustainability – making a full circle with organic marketing and brand advertising. Other discussion included a subchapter on the criticism TikTok has faced, and what are the more harmful aspects of social media. Despite the issues surrounding it, the thesis chose to discuss about the positive effects of social media.

The results of the Empirical research method – observational data collection in this case, were tracked and listed on an excel file over a course of 5 weeks. From this file pie charts and graphs were created to make visually more clear and pleasant result read. The discussion about each airlines Brand Personality and Brand Image provided insight on their brand and there was a discussion about how they present themselves on their official website versus what is promoted on their TikTok profiles. The content of their branding on this social media platform was discussed in general, with few screen shots provided for visualization and the most viewed video from each airline was talked about in relation to the data collected and numerical value of that post.

The results showed an increase in the numbers on multiple observed areas – likes, saves, comments and follower amount. However, naturally some airlines gained more than others, while also posting new content more frequently. Air France showed great increase in their numbers, and their elegant and sophisticated image was backed up by their TikTok profile and the content created around French fashion, food while highlighting their 90-years in operation, rectifying their brand as a trusted legacy carrier, and with that French "Je ne Sais

Quai” the airline gives an impression on their TikTok that they will fly their customers to their destination in a sophisticated manner. Most of their videos were above million views.

Delta had a high number of videos posted from the very beginning, which speaks to the popularity of TikTok in America. The airline’s TikTok had very high views on some of their most popular videos. Their branding on this platform was about being extremely competent. Many of their posts also had somewhat of an emotional angle to them. Their brand is about being family-oriented and reliable. The TikTok profile and content of the videos give off a feeling that they will get their customers to their destination, while providing quality service as the most awarded Airline in the United States of America.

Ryanair was the only airline whose TikTok profile was significantly different from the Ryanair Group’s website. Portrayed in a very brazen and even controversial way – the airline’s videos content creates somewhat of a feeling that they post almost whatever they want on TikTok. However, it works well to their target audience, as they had millions of views on several videos. Their branding on TikTok is that even though the airline may be more a little rough around the edges, booking Ryanair assures you get an adventure and is reliable, they will get you to your destination.

From the Empirical research and theoretical framework, suggestions were created on how TikTok can be utilized for social media marketing, and branding. The suggestions are thought to be sort of a stepping stone on how to benefit from TikTok, and can be implemented by any airline, company, or an individual.

The goal of this thesis was to create suggestions on how other airlines and businesses could begin to utilize TikTok for marketing. These suggestions were presented and discussed in detail in Chapter 10. The suggestions were drawn from both theoretical framework discussion and results of the empirical research. The most crucial parts being possibly to have a concrete understanding of one’s brand image and brand personality, having an upload calendar and content strategy. This part also included examples of content that was deemed popular on the platform, as well as other ways to attract the correct audiences and gain viewership – hashtags, sounds, and adapting popular trends according to your audience and brand’s image and personality.

Other part of interest which was being looked at was to see how airlines differentiate from one another on this platform, and what has been observed, it could be said that they differ a great deal. It was very intriguing to see these three airlines have a very different approaches on marketing on social media, and how all of them have their unique way of branding and promoting their individual brand. TikTok, as mentioned in the very beginning, is an

application that is here to stay, and with its ever-growing popularity this is the perfect time to capitalize on it. TikTok as a social network has the potential to do great things for any airline, and any brand.

As a more sentimental ending phrase, it could be stated that for an Airline company to have a TikTok is just a natural course, since TikTok as a platform has the capability to do the very same thing Aviation industry already does, which is bringing people and communities together.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Thesis plan

1. Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Topic of the thesis -Demand – why is it relevant? -Objective of the research, what is the product vs. hypothesis. 	-Why was this topic selected?	Deadline: 25.9.2023
2. Literature review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Brief introduction to the relevancy of social media marketing today. -Definition of branding and brand advertising on modern platforms. -Definition and characteristics of TikTok as a social media platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Out of all the social media platforms to investigate, why was TikTok selected. -What Brands can achieve with successful utilization of this platform. -What is the main aspect of this specific platform? 	1.10.2023
3. Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Empirical research and how it will be conducted. -Justification of the selected method -Introduction to the airlines in this research and summary on the starting point. -What is the hypothesis for the end results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Why do I believe this method was the way to collect data? -What do I expect the results to be in the beginning and why so? -How can I follow multiple development points of this one specific platform. 	<p>Starting date of the research 2nd of October – follow for 5 weeks.</p> <p>Deadline for the research 6.11.2023</p>
4. Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Detailed description of the process, results -Statistics 	-Based on the results – what was done similarly by the airlines observed on this platform and what was different? Does it directly reflect on the result of the research?	Deadline: 30.11.2023
5. Conclusions that can be made based on the results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Deep analysis based on the result. -Creating a guideline to successful use of TikTok for advertising based on the research. -Discussion on the potential flaws of the research, validity of the result and things to take into consideration. 		Deadline: 30.12.2023
6. Reflections/ further discussion	-Further discussion of the analysis	-How can this be implemented to other areas of advertising as in not just on TikTok and not just by airlines.	<p>Deadline: 30.1.2024</p> <p>Final touches deadline: 30.2.2024</p>

Appendix 2. URL addressed to TikTok profiles and videos

All profiles were first accessed in the beginning of the Empirical research period.

Air France TikTok profile: <https://www.tiktok.com/@airfrance?lang=en>

Air France most viewed video: <https://www.tiktok.com/@airfrance/video/7280142814120332577?lang=en>

Delta TikTok profile: <https://www.tiktok.com/@delta?lang=en>

Delta most viewed video: <https://www.tiktok.com/@delta/video/7037603204858727726?lang=en>

Ryanair TikTok profile: <https://www.tiktok.com/@ryanair?lang=en>

Ryanair most viewed video: <https://www.tiktok.com/@ryanair/video/7138071334243831046?lang=en>