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## TIKTOK AS A METHOD OF BRANDS' COMMUNICATION WITH GENERATION Z

Consumer behavior has evolved over the years, leading to changes in the perception of consumption and the emergence of trends that help create a profile of the modern consumer. The first two decades of the 21st century brought significant changes in consumer behavior, under the influence of the Internet and social media. The purpose of this paper is to present the profiles of Generation Z consumers, and to see if the TikTok application plays an important role in brands' communication with Generation Z. Virtual communication has become widespread; this poses a challenge for brands, especially among the younger generation. The study shows that as age increases, the time a person has had an account on TikTok decreases, as does the appreciation of this application.

**Keywords:** TikTok, Generation Z, communication, brand

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the development of new technologies, including the Internet, has been observed. The Internet has become not only a place where one looks for information or makes purchase or sale transactions. With the development of the Internet, social media appeared, where a large part of Internet users' lives, especially these ones, take place from the young generation. The development of new technologies also brought some changes in consumer behavior (Dybka, 2017). Nowadays, customers can make purchases all over the world without leaving home. They also have access to information about the offer and opinions about it, which are available on Internet forums and in widely used social media (Gracz, Ostrowska, 2014). Speaking about consumers who are most affected by these changes, Generation Z should be mentioned.

Generation Z has the ability to roll out enormous improvements in marketing and purchasing propensities in comparison with other generations. Their presence in the virtual world is quite prominent since they have a thirst to always follow the latest trend.

The use of social media by Generation Z continues to arouse interest among researchers, market entities and entrepreneurs (Yadav, Rai). Young consumers are a market segment that undoubtedly poses a challenge for modern marketing.

TikTok is one of these new platforms, which has burst onto the international market with its own logic and language. It is the seventh most used social network in the world

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(Hootsuite, 2021), and it became the first non-Facebook app to reach 3 billion global downloads (Chan, 2021). The interest in TikTok also rests on the young, belonging to the millennial and centennial generations, reaching 24% of those under 35 years old (Newman, 2021). TikTok is associated with a young audience, mainly belonging to gen Z (Pellicer, 2019; Schmidt, 2019). This is the audience that tends to be the most active (Montag et al., 2021), especially teenagers looking to expand their social network, gain fame, self-express themselves, and create an identity (Bucknell et al., 2020). The main reasons for using TikTok are self-presentation, trendiness, nescapist addiction, and novelty (Scherr, Wang, 2021). Brands are the driving force behind the marketing industry. In this context, a brand can best be defined as an intangible marketing or business concept that helps people identify a company, product, or individual. To be successful, brands will need to learn to market to Generation Z, which is quickly gaining power as a consumer group. When building a relationship with members of this generation, "Companies should be attuned to three implications for this generation: consumption as access rather than possession, consumption as an expression of individual identity, and consumption as a matter of ethical concern". According to the author of the article, an important characteristic shared by Generation Z is the search for truth and authenticity (Francis, Hoefel, 2018). The aim of this paper is to present the profile of consumers of Generation Z and check whether the TikTok application plays an important role in brands' communication with Generation Z.

## 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GENERATION Z

The term "generation" is present both in everyday language and in scientific discourse. It was first used in the 19th century by Wilhelm Dilthey who defined a generation as a group of people living at the same time, influenced by the same events, and therefore perceiving reality in a similar way. Each generation develops its own collective personality, which influences the way of life of its members, including their approach to authorities, organizations and participation in it, as well as their expectations towards work and even the ways in which they intend to meet their needs (Kopertyńska, Kmiotek, 2014). R. Waśko points out in his study that when defining the concept of generation, it is assumed that it is "a community with peer characteristics created on the basis of common thoughts and behaviors, which are reactions to various types of historical events". (Waśko, 2016). It is impossible to determine the exact time frame for a given generation. The various critical dates given by the authors only serve to conventionally indicate the period in which a given generation was born. At the end of the 20th century, a new generation appears, called Generation Z. Generation Z is the youngest, most ethnically diverse and largest generation in history (Dadić et al., 2022).

It is assumed that Generation Z are people born after 1994, i.e. in years marked by rapid technological progress (Prensky, 2001). In reference to this young generation, terms such as: Generation M (Multitasking), Generation C (Connected Generation), Net Generation (constantly connected) began to be used (Mladkova, 2011). Generation Z is the first generation born in a world connected to the Internet, and therefore "living and breathing" technology. This also applies to the higher education environment, where Generation Z students rely on computer recordings instead of taking notes, are more inclined to ask questions online, do not like to wait for answers, but demand immediate information and communication (Daukševičute, 2016; Rothman, 2016). The world without the Internet is abstract to them, and the use of it from the computer has become an indispensable part of their home life (Greenfieldet, 2009).

The characteristic features of Generation Z (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Chomałowska, 2014; Cilliers, 2017):

- the most technologically savvy generation in history, born in the digital world, familiar and acquainted with new technology,
- more realistic and cautious, materialistic approach to life,
- full of worries about the future,
- self-confident,
- open and accepting of diversity, they themselves as a generation are internally very diverse,
- they become even more involved in the issues of global warming, hunger, wars, etc. honesty and lack of discrimination are more important to them than money, status,
- learning and development in accordance with the principle of "just in time learning", they want to have everything and know immediately, on demand, preferably online,
- they do not like the vision of long-term career building,
- it is important for them to quickly access information,
- professional and private life should constitute a whole in which they want to be themselves and be guided by the same values,
- growing up in the "online mode", social games, they developed various competences valued on the labor market very early,
- they are not afraid of risk and make decisions quickly.

Members of Generation Z boast many skills and benefits that come from living in the modern technological era. They have the ability to multitask, i.e. perform many tasks at the same time – with effective results. They receive and process information quickly, but at the same time require easier access to information. The life of young people from Generation Z takes place in the world of hyperproduction, networking and virtuality. They strive for material, quick earnings, satisfaction and a consumerist lifestyle. They live in an online world that allows them to exchange messages and communicate with the entire world with just one click. The incredible development of technology has opened a window to the entire world for them (White, 2017). For representatives of Generation Z, cyberspace is related to real space, which means that they do not hesitate to enter information about themselves on the Internet (Pandit, 2015). Representatives of Generation Z are connected to the Internet 24 hours a day. New communication devices and techniques are essential in everyday life. Easy access to the Internet allows them to search for information that interests them (Szymczyk, 2016). Even establishing relationships with other people is being replaced by online contacts (Gajda, 2017). Representatives of this generation experience difficulties in functioning outside the Internet, which manifests itself in the loss of contact with the people around them and the inability to concentrate (Stillman, Stillman, 2017). They perceive real reality through the prism of the online world. They most often communicate via social media and instant messengers. People from Generation Z like to travel and do it not only for pleasure, but also for self-development and getting to know other cultures.

### 3. TIKTOK APPLICATION

TikTok is the fastest growing short video app worldwide (Kaye et al., 2021). The TikTok platform was created in 2016. The author is the renowned Chinese company ByteDance in China under the name Douyin (Omar, Dequan, 2020). The global increase in interest in this application can be dated back to 2017, when ByteDance bought the Musical.ly

platform, already popular in the West, for a billion dollars, thus taking over all its users. In August 2018, ByteDance expired the Musical.ly name, and its users received the following message: “Musical.ly has a new name. Welcome to TikTok!” The merger of Musical.ly and Tik-tok turned out to be a success, and the platform quickly gained numerous supporters. These platforms enable interaction between their members and also provide the opportunity to co-create website resources by feeding them with content (Olkowska, 2020). The possibility for TikTok users to take grassroots initiatives makes it a space not only to present their creativity, expression or self-presentation, but also to share their creativity with others. Thus, a social networking site or application can be treated as a separate area around which there is a community focusing on a specific trend, topic, text or person.

The main difference of TikTok is its algorithm and consumption experience. Unlike other platforms, the user does not see as a priority the recent content of the accounts they follow, but instead they are shown the content that the app’s algorithm selects on the For You Page, in a continuous, never-ending succession of videos. TikTok’s algorithm makes it possible for any video from any user – regardless of their number of followers – to be shown on this homepage. Determining factors to achieve this visibility and virality seem to be the use of trending sounds and hashtags, or the number of interactions – likes, comments, shares – achieved by the video in a given time among a reduced group of users (Klug et al., 2021). Particularly interesting videos available on the platform gain popularity in a short time, thus becoming a viral video. Its reputation depends on factors such as: the frequency of sharing, commenting or clicking on the heart icon, through which recipients express their approval of a given film. The viral nature of the video is often perceived by broadcasters as an ennoblement (Cervi, 2021).

An additional phenomenon that can be observed on TikTok are the so-called trends (Negreira, Herrero, Garcia, 2022). They involve repeating activities previously recorded by other users. Thanks to this, TikTok users have the opportunity to present themselves without the need to come up with new, creative content, which is an easy and attractive entertainment tool (Juda, 2021). Trends on TikTok may be shaped top-down by the application's creators, encouraging users to record them in the discovery tab, but it may also be a bottom-up initiative of the Tiktokers themselves. Often, creative strategies and tactics influence the current application content. The platform also allows you to create live shows. This feature allows Tiktokers to develop a closer bond with their followers by answering their questions in real time. Users can also invite other Tiktokers to their live streams, with whom they can create so-called duets (Juda, 2021). Duets are a core part of the TikTok experience: users can take another person’s video and add themselves performing the same action, scene or choreography. Challenges are often community-created trends – even if they can also take the form of sponsored hashtags-, in which many TikTok users will make videos attempting to do the same action/dance/trick (Cervi, Calvo, Marin-Lliadó, 2021). Launched in 2017, TikTok soon grew to be one of the most downloaded apps worldwide (Sensor Tower, 2019). In the U.S., 60% of the TikTok active users are aged 16–24 year olds (Reuters, 2019). In fact, TikTok users in the US open the app eight times a day and spend on average 46 minutes on the app each day (Sloane, Rittenhouse, 2019).

TikTok is the app has grown rapidly in popularity and is continuing a rapid growth rate due to its highly personalized algorithm and addicting content format. TikTok is quickly establishing itself as an essential component of the marketing mix, especially for those wishing to target the newest wave of consumers. Research supports the necessity of successful integration of TikTok content into a brand’s marketing strategy if seeking to

target an audience consisting of members of Generation Z. Also, in relation to other social media platforms, TikTok usage is becoming more popular among this generation. (Fromm, Read, 2018; Grow, Yang, 2018; Priporas et al., 2017). Tik Tok holds a crucial advantage in the marketing mix for those brands who wish to target Generation Z consumers. As media habits and consumer interests evolve, brands must also evolve their marketing strategies. As gen Z kids become gen Z adults with substantial purchasing power, they must be increasingly marketed to in a way that suits their particular media consumption habits, which differ greatly from those of any previous generation. The social media landscape is constantly changing, making Facebook, Twitter, and other more traditional social media advertising platforms virtually irrelevant. The rise in popularity of influencer culture and short video content point marketers towards new platforms, new strategies, and new product placements (Rezek, 2022). Similar to the most user-generated platforms' business model, TikTok's main business strategy is advertising its audience. With billions of users' data on hand, TikTok is able to help its clients find their target audience; and by copying styles of user's content, TikTok produces more authentic TikTok advertisements to publicize client's products that could raise the purchase intentions of the audience. Written on its official web page that addresses the privacy issues, TikTok collects nearly all the data users generated on the platform, which includes users' "profile information", "content and behavior information", "location" and "Information from the third parties" (TikTok-Privacy Policy, 2020). This data is the core and fundamental resource for TikTok to attract businesses globally (Yang, 2020; Azpeitia, 2021; Zhenliang Li, 2022).

The implication TikTok for business means that it is free and effective advertising. Social media can help share and give small business exposure with relative ease and has been faster. Business can create advertisements in hopes of promoting their brands or products for free, with high chance of exposure. People are more inclined to visit a certain destination or buy products on TikTok because of its engagement with the users, and due to psychological effects young people's tendency of doing something that is trending. Video based marketing on TikTok is more enjoyable than regular advertisement due to the nature of TikTok, which is entertainment based. Video based marketing on TikTok has a better chance of earning customer attraction (Baquit, Putra, Farres, Adha, Herlambang, 2021).

#### **4. AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF TIKTOK IN BRANDS' COMMUNICATION WITH GENERATION Z BASED ON OWN RESEARCH**

The aim of the study was to check whether the TikTok application plays an important role in brand communication with Generation Z. Due to the stated goal of the research process, the following research problems were formulated:

- Q1: Is TikTok an effective tool for brands to communicate with Generation Z?
- Q2: How does gen Z rate brand engagement on TikTok?
- Q3: What is Generation Z's attitude towards the actions taken by brands on TikTok?
- Q4: Does TikTok influence the purchasing decisions of Generation Z (are they more willing to choose products advertised and recommended on TikTok by famous influencers)?

The research group consisted of people aged 18 to 26, students and secondary school students. 321 respondents took part in the study, both women and men. The research was conducted in October–November 2022, using an online survey. The research conducted was a primary, quantitative, sporadic, non-exhaustive study.

Among the respondents, women constituted 77%, and men 23% of the total. The largest group were respondents aged 18–20, i.e. 68% of the total. Definitely less, 25% of the total were people aged 21–32, 7% were respondents aged 24–26. Respondents with a TikTok account constitute 80% of the total.

Table 1. Values of Spearman's rank correlation coefficients

			Age	How long have you had a Tik Tok account?	How many times a day do you use the Tik Tok application?	What is your attitude towards the Tik Tok app?	How do you assess the involvement of brands on Tik Tok?	What is your attitude towards the actions taken by brands on Tik Tok?	How do you assess advertising content in recordings on influencers' profiles?	Are you more likely to buy a product advertised on Tik Tok than one advertised traditionally?	
rho Spearmana	Age	Correlation coefficient	1,000								
		Significance (two-sided)									
		N	258								
	How long have you had a Tik Tok account?	Correlation coefficient	<b>-0,270**</b>	1,000							
		Significance (two-sided)	0,000								
		N	258	258							
	How many times a day do you use the Tik Tok application?	Correlation coefficient	-0,085	<b>0,330**</b>	1,000						
		Significance (two-sided)	0,172	0,000							
		N	258	258	258						
	What is your attitude towards the Tik Tok app?	Correlation coefficient	<b>-0,130*</b>	<b>0,340**</b>	<b>0,452**</b>	1,000					
		Significance (two-sided)	0,038	0,000	0,000						
		N	252	252	252	252					
	How do you assess the involvement of brands on Tik Tok?	Correlation coefficient	0,058	-0,150	0,140	0,104	1,000				
		Significance (two-sided)	0,641	0,225	0,260	0,411					
		N	67	67	67	65	67				
	What is your attitude towards the actions taken by brands on Tik Tok?	Correlation coefficient	-0,088	0,041	0,171	<b>0,389**</b>	0,223	1,000			
		Significance (two-sided)	0,424	0,712	0,119	0,000	0,069				
		N	84	84	84	81	67	84			
	How do you assess advertising content in recordings on influencers' profiles?	Correlation coefficient	0,076	-0,091	0,075	0,215	0,050	<b>0,341**</b>	1,000		
		Significance (two-sided)	0,535	0,459	0,539	0,078	0,717	0,004			
		N	69	69	69	68	55	68	69		
	Are you more likely to buy a product advertised on Tik Tok than one advertised traditionally?	Correlation coefficient	-0,142	<b>0,200**</b>	<b>0,257**</b>	<b>0,346**</b>	-0,045	<b>0,395**</b>	<b>0,496**</b>	1,000	
		Significance (two-sided)	0,053	0,006	0,000	0,000	0,801	0,010	0,002		
		N	187	187	187	183	34	42	36	187	

Source: Author's own studies.

Respondents in the TikTok application value the most: interesting content – 256 indications, watching videos – 230 indications. The most frequently viewed content on TikTok by Generation Z is: trends – 136 responses, tutorials, and dancing and singing – 112 and 98 responses, respectively. Less than 1/3 of respondents follow brand profiles on

TikTok, and 45% of them follow 1 to 5 accounts. Respondents indicated that brand profiles on TikTok should include: presentation of products and their uses, information about promotions, interesting content and opinions of other users. According to respondents, the brand that runs an account on TikTok in an interesting way is Rossmann. More than 1/3 of Generation Z representatives have purchased products from a brand that has a TikTok account. The respondents mainly indicated brands from the cosmetics industry such as: OnlyBio, Rossmann, Garnier and Bielenda. 34% of respondents purchased products from brands promoted on TikTok after seeing advertisements on influencers' profiles. To verify the importance of TikTok as a way of communicating between brands and Generation Z, Spearman's rho correlation index was calculated.

The assumed significance level is  $p=0.05$ . All values of correlation coefficients that are statistically significant are marked in green. A stronger shade of green indicates a higher strength of the relationship. With a positive value of the coefficient, as the value of one variable increases, the values of the other variable increase, while with a negative value of the coefficient, as the value of one variable increases, the values of the other variable decrease.

Taking into account age and individual results of ordinal variables, only two statistically significant correlations were found. As age increases, the duration of having a TikTok account decreases and the appreciation for this application drops. A longer time of having a TikTok account is associated with a greater frequency of daily use of the application, a better attitude towards TikTok and a greater willingness to purchase products advertised using this application. The correlation coefficients are statistically significant, but the strength of the relationship is lower between the duration of having a TikTok account and susceptibility to advertising from this application. Moreover, several statistically significant correlations with clear strengths of relationship were demonstrated. It can be observed that a better attitude towards the TikTok application is associated with a better attitude towards the activities undertaken by brands on TikTok and with a greater willingness to purchase products advertised in the application than those advertised in a traditional way. Subjects with a better attitude towards the activities undertaken by brands on TikTok, they better evaluate the content advertised on Influencers' profiles and are more willing to purchase products advertised on TikTok. A higher rating of the content advertised on Influencers' profiles is associated with a greater willingness to purchase products advertised on TikTok than those advertised in a traditional way.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The study shows that TikTok is not an effective tool for brands to communicate with Generation Z. This is indicated by the number of respondents who follow brand profiles in the application and the number of accounts they follow (45% follow only 1 to 5 accounts). This is an interesting phenomenon that could be the subject of further research. At the same time, the respondents' attitude towards the activities undertaken by brands on TikTok is positive, as is the assessment of their involvement in their profiles. It is also worth emphasizing that young representatives of Generation Z are more inclined to make purchases of products advertised on TikTok than those promoted in a traditional manner. However, they do not choose products promoted and recommended on TikTok by well-known influencers. Businesses and Influencers should understand the wants and needs of customers and post content that engages customers and influences their purchase of products (Sharabati et al., 2022). Respondents who follow brand profiles are more likely

to purchase products advertised and recommended on TikTok by Influencers. Bart et al. indicate that there is a real possibility of using the TikTok application as a channel for Influencer marketing campaigns. This is mainly due to the characteristics of the format and content, as well as great opportunities to directly reach younger users who have important potential as consumers. Moreover, the authors also point out that companies should establish medium- and long-term relationships with TikTok Influencers to take advantage of the economic opportunities of this growing market (Barta et al., 2023). For representatives of Generation Z, interesting content is primarily important both on TikTok and on brand profiles. This may be due to the fact that young people have different media consumption patterns. They are more resistant to traditional advertising in conventional media. (Xu et al., 2021). It should be emphasized that as age increases, the time of having a TikTok account decreases and the appreciation for this application decreases. TikTok is especially popular among teenagers and young adults. The app attracts a younger segment, around 20 years old, with 40% of users being between the ages of 10 and 19 (Haenlein et al., 2020).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Generation Z is the first generation to take full advantage of the Internet world and they can easily find their way around it. Social media and the Internet have become an integral element of their communication, entertainment and a source of knowledge. Opportunity for users to take grass-roots initiatives, present their creativity, expression, self-presentation and share their work with others made TikTok popular among Generation Z. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that TikTok is not an effective tool for brands to communicate with Generation Z, but it has marketing potential. This can be confirmed by a positive assessment of the brands' involvement and the actions they take on their profiles. It is also worth noting that a longer time of having a TikTok account is associated with a greater frequency of daily use of the application, a better attitude towards TikTok, and a greater willingness to purchase products advertised using this application. It is also worth emphasizing that young representatives of Generation Z are more willing to purchase products advertised on TikTok than those advertised traditionally.

To sum up, TikTok is a platform that undoubtedly deserves the attention of brands and to try to use the application as a communication medium with Generation Z. To increase interest among Generation Z, brands should focus on product presentations, promotions, interesting content, as well as the opinions of other users.

In terms of future considerations of the TikTok application as a way for brands to communicate with Generation Z, it is recommended to conduct research on a larger, more diverse sample. There are likely other factors that may show a stronger association with Generation Z and brands running accounts on TikTok than those included in our own research. It would be worth considering inviting the alpha Generation to participate in the study. It is very possible that a greater relationship can be demonstrated between the younger Generation and the presence of brands on TikTok.

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