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How generation Z perceive brand personality on TikTok

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Abstract

Background: Since its publication in 1997, Jennifer Aaker's brand personality model has been challenged but none of the publications have had the same seminal effect. Additionally, differences in perceptions of Aaker's personalities have been found which suggests a gap of knowledge to research. With the development of social media, customers begin to be more engaged with the brands.

Purpose: The goal of this study is to explore European airlines' brand personalities and Gen Z's perception of the personalities through brands' TikTok content by using Jennifer Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions. Additionally, social media engagement is used as a tool to investigate the significance of social media for brands.

Method: An exploratory qualitative deductive study, with an exploratory nature and an experimental design, applying semi-structured interview methods with a sample size of 25 participants.

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate that Aaker's personality traits are somewhat still relevant to Gen Z's perception of them but there are traits that could be added which have been argued for by other scholars as well before. These additional traits should include negative traits and traits that show extroversion and introversion, for instance.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this part of the paper is to provide an overview of the topic to the reader. The following chapter will introduce a general outline of the importance of social media for brands' marketing, brand personality on social media and engaging customers, airlines' social media use and a brief preface of TikTok. Further on a problem, purpose and the research question are presented along with limitations.

The development of social media to be as prominent as it is today has drastically changed the playground for brands to provide information but also to interact with consumers allowing the social media users to engage with the brand directly both on a personal level and in real-time (Garanti & Kissi, 2019; Harrigan et al., 2015). The importance of social media for companies has been found to be high which is a response to the consumers' significant use of the different internet-based platforms in their daily lives (Harrigan et al., 2015). As individuals spend many hours on social media it has been found that consumers' online spending is also significant which drives brands to create social media content directed towards consumers, and when successfully engineered, that content creates engagement as well as creates possibilities for generating a portion of that digital spending (Dolan et al., 2019). This is why managers should gain an understanding of the importance social media has for their brand such as whether the content they create and the platform they use align with their target audience and the target audience's perception of them.

As markets mature and products' physical features get easily copied, brands are looking for ways to differentiate themselves from competition by designing personality traits that can be translated to their social media marketing (van Rekom et al., 2006). These personalities create a personification through its brand name, symbols and content, for instance, that can create a long-lasting image of the brand, and that enables attention from the consumer to the brand. In addition, it has been discovered that consumers using social media develop greater perceptions of brand personality than non-users (Garanti & Kissi, 2019) and that examining consumers' brand personality perceptions and adapting to the

market changes is the key to success for brands (van Rekom et al., 2006; Garanti, & Kissi, 2019). This implies that a successful brand has efficiently examined and adopted the personification approach by presenting distinctive personality traits on their social media.

In such manner, during the past few years several Airline companies have produced viral moments in the social media platform TikTok that show unique personality traits and have built special personalities for the brands in the users' minds. It has been found that brand personalities influence peoples' emotions and their perception of the brand (Carlson, Todd Donavan, D., & Cumiskey, K. J., 2009), meaning that these TikTok videos affect the viewer's perception of these airline companies. For instance, Ryanair, is a European budget airline company that has claimed to be ahead of their game by personifying their aircraft with a filter of lips and eyes on their Boeing 737 which is usually combined with a trending TikTok sound clip (Singer, 2022). These types of videos using TikTok's eminent features personify Ryanair to have a funny and young personality that makes people relate to it which generates engagement with hundreds of thousands of views, tens of thousands of likes and hundreds of comments for Ryanair's content.

In addition, as the internet and social media are the common way today to purchase and search airline industry related products like flight tickets, seats and service (Seo et al., 2020), social media is an important factor for airline's success. Furthermore, social media plays an important role in brands' marketing strategies, and it can be utilized in many ways of which receiving feedback, providing customer service, and communicating promotions are general examples of. However, for airlines the focus lies on utilizing social media's direct nature in a way that influences the consumers perception of the brand of which a strategy with personalized content is an example of (Prados-Peña et al., 2022). In addition, as the airline industry has struggled to survive through the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic, a few companies such as the previously mentioned Ryanair, were able to create a distinguished online presence and gain great levels of engagement. Hence, the importance of social media for airlines lays in adopting new strategies to connect with consumers, this time through social media which now has become one of the most preferred channels for brands to create engagement (Prados-Peña et al., 2022).

Additionally, due to social media's increasing popularity to reach their target audience, travel companies such as Ryanair recognize that they must change their preferred social

media platform regarding where their target audience is (Plc, 2022). As such, when targeting the younger generations, such as Generation Z (further on referred to also as Gen Z), TikTok should be chosen regarding its popularity among the age group. The social media platform TikTok has been gaining popularity among Gen Z through the last few years and it has been seen as a crucial platform to create content for when trying to attract Gen Z, with its creative and even provocative video and sound content and innovative engineering of personalizing the users' content page. According to Statista (We Are Social et al., 2023) the Gen Z or "Zoomers" are the largest age group among the users worldwide. When compared to other social media giants in Europe, TikTok comes as a strong third after Instagram and Facebook with a user base of 227.81 million in 2022, as stated by Statista (2022). As such, TikTok as a platform has a remarkable prevalence to build users' perceptions of a brand and is seen to have the best engagement rates (Liang et al., 2022).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the aviation industry suffered negative effects in 2020 and onwards. The pandemic resulted in a reduction of flights offered by airline companies and restrictions on travelling, especially intercontinental flights. Additionally, Kalic et al., (2022) discussed that the full recovery of commercial flights will be anticipated only after 2024. Therefore, the airline's service demand is rising, and companies want to differentiate themselves from their competitors and establish enduring relationships with their customers. This can be achieved through numerous brand strategies, one of these strategies being brand personalities. A brand can use one fixed personality for content creation, being up to date with current trends and leaving comments on other account's content. For example, brands can express themselves as young adults that are very sarcastic and knows all new trending jokes on the internet and recreate them according to the brand's sphere. The choice of the social media platform also helps establish a brand's personality. In the case of a brand that is portraying themselves as a young adult, TikTok would be one of the platforms that brands can use to communicate their brand.

1.1 Problem

The current brand personality literature describes that the chosen brand personality theory has been challenged over the years but none of the theories or tweaks done to Aaker's (1997) model have had the same seminal effect as Aaker's brand personality dimension

model did when published back in 1997. However, the authors of this paper have found differences in the perception of Aaker's (1997) model's personalities in recent publications which suggest that individuals' perception of these personalities might have changed over the years and therefore suggest a gap of knowledge to research. Aaker's (1997) seminal paper publishing her brand personality model also reported examples of brands that were related to different personalities than they are connected to in today's world which furthered the authors' curiosity of how the model is perceived by others. This curiosity extends to social media where brands engage and perceptions with consumers are created. Due to the development and prevalence of social media platforms, brands' social media presence is now more important than ever to differentiate themselves from competition, and examining the way they are perceived is an eminent element for their brand manager to maintain. Hence, the reason to choose TikTok as a subject of research lays in the importance that social media has for brands. In addition, the motivation to investigate brands through the lens of TikTok was seen as prevalent to the authors because of its quick rise in popularity all over the globe which has led to it becoming one of the most widely used social media platforms (Zulli, & Zulli, 2022). Therefore, inspired by the largest group of the platform's users, Generation Z was observed to be the most prominent target audience for brands on TikTok and so an important element to investigate that would create to most value to gain knowledge about. Further on, the motivation for including the airline industry in the study was inspired by a few European airlines' prominent online presence on TikTok and a successful pattern of going viral that created attention to the airline brands especially during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, the literature points out that airlines adapted to the pandemic situation through social media and gained high levels of engagement during this challenging time (Prados-Peña et al., 2022), from which other brands can learn from to be able to differentiate themselves from their competition. Hence, the focus of this paper lays in understanding Generation Z's perceptions of European airlines' brand personalities within social media, more specifically on the social media platform TikTok.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore European airlines' brand personalities and Gen Z's perception of them by using airline brands' TikTok content and Jennifer Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions. The study aims to gain better understanding of two

airlines' personality profiles based on Gen Z's perception of those airlines. In order to explore the topic of the study the approach of a qualitative research is applied to provide deeper insights regarding how the brand personality dimensions are viewed and the personality profiles of the two airlines result in. In addition, the study aims to explore the importance of social media to brands, more specifically how brand personality is perceived through brands' social media content and to provide informative data about Gen Z to draw from. As such, social media engagement will be used as a tool to investigate the significance of social media for brands.

1.3 Research Questions

RQ 1 – *How does Generation Z perceive airlines' brand personality through TikTok content?*

RQ 2 – *What personality dimensions are associated with airlines' brand personality on TikTok?*

1.4 Delimitations

As social media is the focal point of the paper, other types of brand content are not considered in the exploration of perceptions. Also, as brands have different approaches to strategize the various social media platforms they operate in, they might appear to have different personalities on these platforms. For instance, Ryanair's head of social has commented on creating "unhinged" content on the brands' TikTok page but then having different approaches on other platforms which is crucial to understand as the study has narrowed down the social media platforms to only explore TikTok. This platform was chosen since Gen Z as users in their 20s tend to favor TikTok over other platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram when using social media. Also, Gen Z has been found to be more skeptical about traditional approaches of advertising and so the nature of TikTok and its non-traditional brand content is more attractive for Gen Z (Haenlein et al., 2020). In addition, the authors have been carefully excluding dimensions of other related keywords such as the broad concept of brand image that is an umbrella term for brand personality, and other related terms, which was recognized to be influential to the concept of brand personality but to simplify the study was not included as a prominent keyword.

2. Literature Review

The literature review presents a theoretical background and clarifications of the matters of the topic and further investigates the gaps in the discovered literature by defining TikTok and Generation Z as well as considering Jennifer Aaker's Brand Personality Scale, and Social Media Engagement. The addressed information has been gathered by conducting a literature collection from relevant studies and publications to build a foundation for the research paper.

2.1 Conducting Literature Review

To gather information that was explored previously in the literature, a systematic literature review was performed. The chosen theory, Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework, has been popular and academically recognized as a useful tool to identify a brand's personality. The search has focused on collecting secondary data from online academic journal databases such as SCOPUS in addition to EBSCO and Google Scholar. So far keywords such as "brand personality", "brand perception", "Gen Z" and "social media" have been used by combining them but also individually. Furthermore, the inclusion criteria for selection of the literature were peer reviewed articles and articles in English. Time limitations of 2017-2023 was applied for the literature within brand personality in connection to social media. On the other hand, there were no time limitations for other concepts such as brand personality and brand loyalty, since it is important to grasp the principles which stem from the primary source.

Additionally with the electronic search process, bibliographic mining or backward snowballing method was applied. The literature that was referenced in the paper is used. As well as forward snowballing to identify recently published literature that reference chosen scientific literature.

2.2 Aaker's Brand Personality Model

2.2.1 Personality

Human personality is defined as a distinct pattern of one's behavior as well as their emotional and cognitive processes that endure relatively stable over an individual's entire life (Jordan, 2011). For instance, the pattern that is characterized by someone being

sociable and affectionate can be referred to as being within the Extroversion personality (Mulyanegara et. al., 2007).

2.2.2 Brand personality

The understanding of human personality parallels to the understanding of brand personality which is a way to comprehend brands with the same traits as humans, as a certain type of personification, which creates a long-lasting and recognizable image (Bernritter et al, 2016). Here self-congruity comes into play. Consumers recognize personality traits in brands and tend to match the brand's image that their personality traits and demographics create, with their own individualistic self-concept. Hence, brand personality is seen to consumers as a tool of self-expression which has been argued to drive preference and choice of purchasing depending on whether the consumer's personality was congruent or incongruent, meaning how well the brand's personality matches with the consumer's personality (Aaker, 1999). Hu et. al. (2019) argues that consumers tend to attribute human personality traits and demographics to brands such as being more extroverted than introverted and having an age, like being Gen Z or millennial which is all part of creating brand personality. Brand managers then maintain this image with the intention to attract customers' attention which can form a preference for the brand that may change customers' behavior, motivation and purchasing decision (Mulyanegara et al, 2007).

There are various approaches for individuals to associate a brand with personality traits such as associating the brand in question with their typical users or user imagery, a celebrity or celebrity endorsers or a company leader, such as Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla Inc., who one could, for instance, associate with the personality traits of being intelligent and successful (Rosenbaum-Elliotter al., 2018). These approaches suggest that the traits these people, meaning users, celebrities and leaders have, transfer directly to how consumers perceive the brand's personality (Aaker, 1997). In the social media context user imagery relates to the brands' followers that creates a perception of human personality traits with the brand. Furthermore, it has been argued that a brand can also acquire a human personality by brand name, symbol, advertising content, price and their distribution channel (Aaker, 1997), which can be seen more in social media content that brands produce which then relates to a brand's communication strategy (Hu et al., 2019).

For instance, many social media platforms support companies to create their own brand accounts with which they can publish and control their own content and engagement. This has also been argued to be an element of which the company has the most direct control over, hence being the most beneficial to understand, and a reason why brand personality should not be neglected for the company to succeed (Hu et al., 2019).

2.2.3 Aaker's Brand Personality

In psychology, there has been plenty of research to grasp the insights of the human personality of which the "Big Five" trait theory is the most popular one. Inspired by the Big Five, Jennifer Aaker (1997) developed a framework, the Brand Personality Scale, BPS, by combining personality scales from psychology, marketing, and qualitative research and identified the following five dimensions: *Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication* and *Ruggedness* to comprehend the personality of brands by distinguishing it from the traits of human personality. Under these five personality dimensions, different personality traits have been identified in a facet like system. Since Aaker's (1997) universalization of brand personalities, the BPS model has been seen as the seminal work in the field of brand personality literature (Kumar, 2018). Aaker (1997) also implies that there is a correlation between the human and brand personality traits which is enough for consumers to associate the brand's personality with a human's personality, usually thinking of brands like celebrities. In addition to the previously mentioned, it has been argued by Aaker (1997) that brand personality also includes demographic characteristics, known also as social characteristics, such as gender and age that personify and build the brand's character and therefore personality.

Like mentioned before, Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale, BPS, was built to resemble the Big Five personality typology which is part of the most common trait theories of personality alongside with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, MBTI, Enneagram Personality typology and Personality Assessment System, PAS. The trait theory of personality explores human personality and seeks to measure it with traits to understand one's behavioral, emotional and thought characteristics (Jordan, 2011). This is done by segmenting personality into various traits. The studies have defined the personality dimensions and traits with factorial analysis that Aaker also used for her model, the BPS.

The aforementioned facet system starts with the five personality dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness, that divide to 15 different facets (further on referred to as factors) such as down-to-earth, reliable, and upper class which then further divide to 42 different personality traits, e.g., honest, trendy and intelligent; see Appendix B. These factors represent traits that help to understand and identify a brand's personality and like mentioned before, relate Aaker's (1997) framework to the human personality dimensions (more specifically; Sincerity, Excitement and Competence from Aaker's BPS resemble the Big Five human personality dimensions [the most]).

2.2.3.1 Sincerity

The first personality dimension that Aaker (1997) presents is *Sincerity* which includes four factors: *cheerful*, *wholesome*, *honest* and *down-to-earth,* and brands relating to this personality are seen as having traits such as being down-to-earth, real and originating from a small-town, for instance. The brand Patagonia is often associated with a sincere personality since it uses its voice in marketing to campaign for sustainable clothing, shopping and environmental activism that is perceived by consumers to create a down-to-earth, honest and wholesome, sincere personality (Moura, 2021; Bicaku, 2021). Other personality traits that Aaker (1997) found to form a sincere brand personality are cheerful, family-oriented, sentimental and friendly.

2.2.3.2 Excitement

Further on, *Excitement* combines the factors *daring, spirited, imaginative* and *up to date* that expand further to trendy, exciting, spirited, cool, and young along with unique, independent and contemporary that are traits to help explain the personality in depth. Like mentioned before, Aaker's (1997) model has been the seminal or pivotal study of brand personality framework and therefore has been adopted to several studies after. The findings from Hu (2019) applied Aaker's Brand Personality Scale and presented findings where the Apple brand was perceived as young and matched the most with the previously mentioned characteristics of the excitement personality such as cool, imaginative, independent and unique traits. However, other adaptations of Aaker's (1997) model have

found the same brand to have a more thorough match with other personalities such as sophistication and competence (Matthew, 2022; Mullan, 2022)

2.2.3.3 **Competence**

Another example of a brand personality relating to competence is Microsoft that is perceived as having qualities such as *intelligent* and *reliable* (Matthew, 2022). The factors combining the personality are the already stated intelligent and reliable traits but also *successful* which one could say matches with Microsoft as well. The rest of the traits Aaker (1997) explains to be associated with competence are hardworking, secure, technical, corporate, leader and confident.

2.2.3.4 **Sophistication**

Sophistication then expands to two factors of *upper class* and *charming* that are defined by glamorous, good looking, charming, feminine and smooth traits. For instance, in 1997, Aaker presented the brand Guess Jeans to be seen to embody the sophistication personality when in today's world luxury brands such as Chanel and Rolex are seen to resemble the upper class and charming feel of a brand with their visual aspects such as brand voice, logos, price, and other communication strategies and advertising content (Matthew, 2022; Bicaku, 2021).

2.2.3.5 **Ruggedness**

Lastly the personality dimension ruggedness presented by Aaker (1997) explains itself by *outdoorsy* and *tough* factors which further extend to masculine, western, and rugged traits. Some associate the Jeep brand with the ruggedness personality due to its outdoorsy style of product and advertisement (Mullan, 2022). Also, their masculine personality shows with its advertisement and product placement in the Superman movie as well as in the Call of Duty video game that also makes them be perceived as tough and rugged (Mullan, 2022; Bicaku, 2021). However, individuals may have various perceptions of these brand personalities.

The current state of literature implies that personality seems to be fluid in a sense that these diverse systems have set up frameworks in which they include an X number of

multidimensional traits that they have found to be the most relevant characteristics or building blocks of personality. For instance, the Big Five personality system measures personality by dominance levels where one can get a result of *openness* as a dominant characterization of their personality. In the same sense, Aaker (1997) has created her framework that has been used to mostly quantitatively measure brands' personalities with a factor analysis to see the weight of the different personality traits among the selected population.

On the other hand, it needs to be recognized that Aaker's (1997) personality dimensions were published over 25 years ago and although it is recognized as the seminal work for measuring brand personality, it has had its criticism and adjustments over the years regarding different industries, for example, such as sport brands and universities (Schade et al., 2014; Rauschnabel et al., 2016). The criticism has also acknowledged that Aaker's work is based on her own understanding of what brand personality is, which she based on transferring human personality traits to brands assuming that all traits are fit to be transferred to brands (Aaker, 1997; Kumar, 2018). However, scholars have not agreed on whether this definition and execution is problematic or not as many still agree to use Aaker's (1997) model which is based on her interpretation.

Further on, Aaker's (1997) work has been criticized about the conclusion of only including five personality dimensions to explore in addition to lacking dimensions and traits. For example, Madrigal and Boush (2008) argue that social responsibility should be recognized and included in the brand personality dimensions. Also, Aaker's (1997) trait *ruggedness* has been argued to be weak and differ regarding cultural differences between countries and additionally changes in demographics were also seen to create different results of dimensions (Kumar, 2018). Similarly, Sweeney and Brandon (2006) questioned Aaker's (1997) model to only include positive traits and lack negative ones. Sweeney and Brandon (2006) also found that brands targeting younger audiences may deliberately claim a darker personality.

While there has been some criticism and several approaches such as Bao and Sweeney (2009) and Sweeney and Brandon (2006) that have tweaked Aaker's (1997) personality framework the literature lacks (1) the social media environment of TikTok, (2) Generation Z's point of view and (3) qualitative style of research rather than using quantitative scales.

This paper will contribute to the brand personality literature by addressing the previously mentioned gaps and allowing understanding of the landscape of TikTok's usage when building brand personality. This study will investigate whether Aaker's (1997) personality framework's traits and structure is still relevant when targeting Generation Z as well as will examine the relevancy in the social media environment of TikTok. The study results have the possibility to open doors for future research to further develop and adjust Aaker's (1997) personality model to be the most valuable tool for brand personality creation and examination.

2.2.4 Brand Personality on social media

Furthermore**,** the reason why companies generate and pursue brand personalities lies in differentiation. Recently, within the brand personality literature it has been argued that digitalization has taken over and almost every brand now has an online presence and manages social media accounts on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok, which has shifted the focus of brands' personalities to the digital world (Ghorbani et al., 2022). The recent literature presents that brand personalities can increase social media brand engagement and that can positively influence the brand (Bernritter et al., 2016)

2.3 Social Media

2.3.1 Social Media Usage

Qin (2020) summarized that social media is used for four goals – information seeking, entertainment, personal identity, and convenience. *Information seeking* is when social media is used with the aim of self-education or finding guidance on how to do something. For example, a guide on how to learn a new skill or how to resolve a problem. Furthermore, social media platforms are used to gather information about events, businesses, sales, deals on products, etc. (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Entertainment is when social media is used for the pursuit of entertainment or enjoyment (Qin, 2020). The findings of Whiting and Williams (2013) highlight that people use social media for humor purposes.

Personal identity is used in the context of social media usage for establishing personal beliefs as well as obtaining validation from others. One of the motivations of using social media is to form an image of oneself on social media. A person wants to be perceived as a coffee lover because they post about coffee and follow coffee brands on social media (Muntinga et al., 2015).

Convenience signifies that social media grants a more convenient way to do a task or that it requires less effort or time (Qin, 2020). For instance, people can communicate with multiple people at the same time on one platform, or track latest updates of companies in one click (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Ko et al., 2005).

Given that social media is an accessible tool for the customers and is more interactive – through likes, comments, etc., compared to traditional advertising tools, brands pay more attention to using social media as their marketing tool (Qin, 2020).

Social media plays a big role for businesses as a platform for effective and efficient promotion (Genoveva, 2022). Social media is used by companies to obtain a competitive advantage. Social media platforms are recognized as means of a two-way communication with the customers (Meliawati et al., 2023). Through social media, brands can connect and engage with their customers (Chuah et al., 2020). By creating a brand page on social media, brands can update their customers, communicate with customers directly and strengthen their relationship (Qin, 2020).

2.3.2 Customer Engagement through Social Media

With the development of social media platforms, the customers' role also shifted: instead of being a passive audience, customers evolved into the audience that actively participates and influences brand's behavior on social media platforms (Dolan et al., 2019; see also Malthouse et al., 2013).

Social media engagement entails three main actions: consumption – viewing content, contribution – liking and sharing, and creating – writing comments (Wahid et al., 2022, Dolan et al., 2016).

Malthouse et al. (2013) proposed that there are two levels of engagement. Lower engagement entails that the customers "passively consume content" or participate in relatively low contributions, such as "liking" a post on Instagram. Higher engagement is when the customer is participating in diverse methods of co-creation, namely, a customer can create and post a video describing and/or using the product of a given brand. Although forms of lower engagement such as "liking" a video or a photo can be completed relatively fast and the consumer does not need to go into details of brand meaning, "liked" content is exposed to more people and can lead other people to a purchase.

Dolan et al., (2016) propose a construct of Social Media Engagement Behavior – SMEB typologies, which consists of several levels of engagement behavior. Content related engagement are positive contributions, for instance, comment positively on posts; like and share brand related content; tag friends in brand-related content, consumption to exemplify, viewing brand-related content, listening to brand-related audio, read posts, dormancy, when brand related content is delivered but the user has no response, plus negative parts: detachment and negative contribution. Co-creation and co-destruction entail that the consumer has written an article or a review on a different web page, or on their personal social media page, created a video about it, etc., where they either talk positively or negatively about the product or experience.

Since the authors are investigating TikTok content of airlines, consumers can engage with them by viewing, liking, commenting, and sharing. Writing reviews or creating TikTok videos for a personal page is not included in the study as a part of engagement from the participants.

Hamzah et al. (2021) mentions that brands with fresh, unique and creative posts is creating more consumer engagement with the brand's social media in comparison to posts that comply with consumer`s expectations.

By interacting with the brands on social media, consumers are cultivating significant relationships with the brand. Customers that are engaged with brand posts consider that they possess a lot of common traits with the brand (Hamzah et al., 2021).

One of the strategies for the company when it comes to social media is to share interesting information that can potentially evoke discussions on social networking platforms.

Consequently, the participants (customers) share their experiences within the brand page on social media, as well as their personal social media pages (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019).

Brodie et al., (2013) argues that social media users accept marketers on the condition that they are contributing to the community. Hence, it is important to listen to the consumers` opinions and continue to attract them to engage in brand communication. These interactions are recognized as genuine and not wholly driven by commercial motives. Therefore, companies shift towards the content where they share knowledge from their industry, educate their consumers and allow co-developing.

In the long-term customer engagement with brands through social media has influence over brand trust, purchase intention, customer retention and word of mouth (Chuah et al., 2020).

2.3.3 TikTok

TikTok is a free social media platform where it is possible to create, share, download, remake, duet and watch videos varying from a length of few seconds to a maximum of 10 minutes (Jain, & Arakkal, J. 2022; Wahid et al., 2022). The app provides various options for editing videos such as various sounds and filters that enable creativeness and has made TikTok an attractive platform for Gen Z to share their thoughts, interests and seek entertainment from (Herrman. 2019; Jain, P., & Arakkal, J. (2022). When opening the TikTok app, a video starts immediately playing on the users “For you” page, which is an essential and famous feature of TikTok. The For You page builds on videos based on an algorithmic system that determines the stream of videos that appears depending on the user’s previous engagement with the platform, such as likes, comments, shares as well as the user’s preferred video genres, of which data is drawn about during registration. Meaning that TikTok customizes users feed by observing which videos user gives attention to and the more the user swipes down the never-ending page the more personalized the For You page feels, making the app progressively addictive when the accuracy improves (Jain & Arakkal, 2022).

Further on, TikTok has other characteristics dissimilar and similar other social media. For instance, it is not required to follow other accounts to view content on TikTok as all the videos on the “For You” page is generated from various users that the user is not

following, which differentiates the app from other social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Rather, TikTok recognizes user's preferences and brings the user to different "sides", also known as subcultures or communities like "booktok" for instance, which reflect the user's interests (Smith, 2021). However, the role of hashtags is as important on TikTok as it is in other social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter (Herrman. 2019). Users can find their subculture through these hashtags, such as #booktok, that displays videos regarding literature and connects users interested in books.

One of the key features of TikTok is sound which can include voices and dialogues from movies or songs and can be uploaded by all users. How sound clips work on the platform can be compared to hashtags, by clicking on the sound link the user can discover other videos, ranked by popularity, which are using the same sound. Popular sounds can be explored on the "discovery" page which is an additional page to discover videos on the app (Wahid et al., 2022). Moreover, the sound clips heavily inspire video trends that are short lived, lasting for a few days to weeks, but which define TikTok's essence.

The content on TikTok offers a quick look into others' lives and is said to feel more private and personal than other social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram. In addition, the app has been seen as fulfilling the need of human association and being authentic is a fundamental part of the platform (Jain, & Arakkal, J., 2022; Haenlein et al., 2020).

An increasing number of companies are joining TikTok to be up to date with social media (Thompson, 2023). The tools provided by TikTok to create videos help brands' content resemble with the user generated content's style. In consequence, this will lead brand content to increase discoverability, since on TikTok content is the main priority and brands do not need to have large following to get significant number of views (TikTok for Business, n.d.). By using TikTok and platform's trends, companies can provide a more captivating way for customers to interact with the company (Karra, 2022).

2.4 Generation Z

Generation Z, also known as "Zoomers" or Gen Z for short, is the generation between millennials and Generation A. Like other social generations, Gen Z is defined by a

person's birth year which for Generation Z is between the span of 1995 to 2012 and is seen to be different to other earlier generations due to their relationship with technology (Pichler et al., 2021). Gen Z grew up with technology in a different way than others before and it has been a big part of their lives since they were born. Communication, socialization and entertainment are all easily done online and grasping all technological changes Gen Z are able to create perceptions and live through content online almost naturally. Gen Z listen to Spotify instead of the radio and watch Netflix instead of the TV which has highly influenced brands' approaches to reaching the generation as Gen Z's media consumption patterns are different from the previous generations (Haenlein et al., 2020).

3. Methodology

The purpose of the methodology chapter is to provide an overview of the qualitative research approach of how the study has been designed and conducted including the following sections: research design, multiple-case study, choice of TikTok videos, choice of sample, interviews, limitations and finally elaborates on the research quality.

3.1 Research Design

The purpose of research in the first place is to contribute to theory and progress it, which can be achieved through testing the theories that already exist or building entirely new theories. To conduct research there are multiple concepts and strategies that authors are required to choose before beginning the study. For example selection of a paradigm, quantitative or qualitative research strategy, etc. Chosen selection of concepts and strategies can help guide the authors during the research process (Makri & Neely, 2021).

A research paradigm is a set of practices, assumptions and intellectual structure that is at the base of research and development. There are set of agreed methods, theories and such to guide researchers during their research (Turyahikayo, 2021).

For this study authors chose an interpretivism research paradigm. Interpretivism views knowledge as subjective and individuals gather it through their experience and understanding. Additionally, the knowledge and understanding of the world can differentiate based on individual's culture (Collis & Hussey, 2014, pp. 43-47;

Turyahikayo, 2021). There is not only one single universal truth, however, knowledge is a social construct. There are many realities within our world, and all of them are correct (Turyahikayo, 2021).

The authors have chosen interpretivism paradigm since this research paradigm will allow to investigate respondent`s perception on airline's TikTok content according to their own view – based on their background and previous experience. And ultimately, interpret their answers from participants' perspective. Interpretivism paradigm can facilitate to discover intricateness of human experience by participants expressing their opinions.

Regarding the strategy of the process of the research, there are two main strategies: quantitative and qualitative. Whereas quantitative is using data that can be quantified and uses statistical methods in the study and qualitative approach that gathers qualitative data and interprets the words that were gathered during research. Qualitative style was chosen for this study to approach the research questions by collecting transcripts of interviews and to use non-numerical methods. Additionally, the authors wanted to frame the research to focus on how the participants perceive the topic of interest and which themes and patterns with high levels of reliability that are risen from the gathered data.

The purpose of this study is to broaden brand personality theory that brands can establish on TikTok and how Gen Z views it, therefore, exploratory research is applied for this study. Exploratory research is used when there are scarce prior studies in the field of the research, however, the study is evaluated using theories that have been established and many studies have applied those theories (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p 4).

The research is pure research since the study focuses on improving the knowledge that already exists and is not applicable to one specific immediate situation (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p 7).

The authors have chosen deductive research, meaning that theories were determined beforehand and have been evaluated with the use of empirical examination. The authors were progressing from theories to the real-life cases (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p 7).

3.2 Multiple-case study

Multiple-case study is a research strategy where one "issue" is chosen but multiple cases are provided in order to emphasize the understanding of the chosen "issue" and show different angles of the same situation (Creswell et al., 2007). For this study, the mutual ground for the cases is European airlines with TikTok. To broaden understanding of how different airlines are perceived by Gen Z on TikTok, two different types of airlines were chosen: low-cost carriers and full-service carriers. Looking at the cases of different types of carriers will give the reader the opportunity to see the contrast between the two types of carriers.

3.3 Choice of airline companies

Authors have determined to choose two airline company, where one of them was a low-cost carrier and the other one is full-service carrier.

Authors have opted to focus solely on European airline industry for this paper. By area limitation, it was possible to focus on TikTok content rather than companies origin. Additionally, by limiting to European companies' authors raised chance that study participants had used chosen airlines before, since they are currently located in Jönköping, Sweden. Next criteria were whether the airline company operates direct flight to and from Sweden (Stockholm and Gothenburg). Since interviewees live in Jönköping, they travel from Jönköping, and the two closest and biggest airports to Jönköping being Stockholm Arlanda Airport (ARN) and Gothenburg-Landvetter Airport (GOT). The company was needed to operate the flight and not provide flights of different brands.

Next criteria to identify final companies was whether the company have TikTok. Additionally, TikTok's brand pages are required to be in English. The accounts that are not verified were excluded from the study. It was done to certify that the content posted on the account page was released officially by the company and it is not a fan page of the brand.

After the criteria were applied, six companies remained. After choosing one low-cost carrier and one full-carrier, two airline companies were determined: Ryanair and Finnair. Full process of companies decision could be seen in Appendix C.

3.4 Choice of TikTok videos

For participants to gain understanding of each brand's personality, the TikTok of each brand were shown. Four videos were chosen from each airline's TikTok page. All the videos that were chosen were posted within the same time span of 12 months and of which two videos were the two most viewed videos and the last two were random. This totaled in eight videos that included four videos from each brand's TikTok page. Additionally, the brands' content was shown on the TikTok app which provided the participants with a full authentic experience of the platform where they could scroll through the eight videos freely but with no other brands' influence, four of the videos at the time categorized by brand.

All Ryanair videos were using trending sounds that had from 20 to 190 thousand posts that were using the same audios, which could identify that these audios are viral. In three out of four videos airplane with eyes and mouth is a main character of the video, and one video having a plane and an actor Timothée Chalamet in it.

In Appendix D a more detailed breakdown of video statistics and brief description of each TikTok video could be found.

3.5 Choice of sample

The sample has been chosen using purposeful sampling – the participants that were chosen for this study have engaged with TikTok content, know how the platform works. (Coyne, 2008) notes that purposeful sampling is the choice of subjects that are well informed in the chosen area of study.

The population for the interview is Gen Z that currently live in Jönköping. The age group is from 18 to 28 in 2023. Whereas Gen Z is born between 1995 and 2012 (28 to 11 years old in 2023), the age group narrowed, since the participants need to be mature to make rational purchase decisions. The choice of location of the population was justified by the fact that authors live and study in Jönköping and have better access to conduct interviews. Additionally, the inclusion criteria for the population are people that have participated in social media engagement on TikTok (view videos, like, comment, share. etc.) within last 12 months and have flown with Ryanair or/and Finnair within last 12 months. The time

restriction is crucial due to fast change in trends on social media and overall change in the world.

Final sample could be seen in the Table 1.

Table 1. The list of the participants

Participant	**Age, birth year**	**Airline(s) flown**	**Duration of interview**
Participant 1	24 (1998)	Ryanair	13 min
Participant 2	23 (2000)	Ryanair	11 min
Participant 3	20 (2002)	Ryanair	14 min
Participant 4	22 (2001)	Ryanair	9 min
Participant 5	20 (2002)	Ryanair	12 min
Participant 6	23 (1999)	Ryanair, Finnair	15 min
Participant 7	22 (2001)	Ryanair	16 min
Participant 8	19 (2003)	Ryanair	12 min
Participant 9	28 (1995)	Ryanair	19 min
Participant 10	20 (2002)	Ryanair	10 min
Participant 11	20 (2002)	Ryanair	11 min
Participant 12	20 (2002)	Ryanair	12 min
Participant 13	24 (1999)	Ryanair	13 min
Participant 14	20 (2002)	Ryanair	11 min
Participant 15	21 (2001)	Ryanair	9 min
Participant 16	21 (2001)	Ryanair	13 min
Participant 17	22 (2000)	Ryanair	12 min
Participant 18	22 (2000)	Ryanair	9 min
Participant 19	21 (2001)	Ryanair, Finnair	12 min
Participant 20	20 (2002)	Ryanair	12 min
Participant 21	22 (2000)	Ryanair	9 min
Participant 22	21 (2001)	Ryanair	10 min
Participant 23	24 (1998)	Finnair	10 min
Participant 24	22 (2000)	Ryanair, Finnair	17 min

Participant	Age, birth year	Airline(s) flown	Duration of interview
Participant 25	22 (2001)	Ryanair	12 min

3.6 Experimental Study design

When conducting an experimental study, the research design should be narrowed down to specify the nature of the study. The experimental study design was chosen by the authors to explain the nature of the study that used a mobile phone app, TikTok, and is a way to explain only the conducted interviews as the focus of the research is the multiple case study. The experimental research enabled a controlled, lab-like environment, that reduced noise and enabled the participants to focus on their perceptions without other influence from the outside world. However, the content shown to the participants was completely original and was not being tampered in any way as well as the TikTok platform experience was made to create a setting to mimic as they would be using the app in a normal setting. However, they were only exposed to multiple videos back-to-back from each of the case companies, when normally the content on TikTok would change between each video.

In person semi-structured interview are conducted to gain deeper understanding of brand personalities that companies use on their TikTok pages as well as connect that to the brand loyalty. Semi-structured interview will provide uniform framework across participants, which optimizes the analysis workflow, however, still provides space for additional questions or clarification. The interview consists of both close-ended and open-ended questions. Combination of both types of questions has a potential of gathering nuanced and rich qualitative data that captures better understanding of the research topic. Close-ended questions can enable quantifying and recognitions in patterns, whereas open-ended questions will unravel in-depths insights, beliefs and experience that impacted participant's responses.

Full interview process can be seen in Appendix E. In the entirety, 25 participants in the age group of 19 to 28 participated in interviews for the study. The interviews` lengths varied from 9 to 19 minutes.

During the interviews, online program Microsoft Forms was used to documents close-ended questions that were determined before the interview process. It was done to simplify transcribing process on the later stage as well as see summery of answers in a more agile way. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed manually by the authors. The transcribing process was done manually to avoid going several times over computer generated text as well as to understand participants' answers deeper during the process.

3.7 Limitations

When executing the research, it was found that there are airlines which flight routes expand to Sweden from the country of origin but do not offer direct flights and that would not be operated by that airline themselves but through a collaborative airline. This means that this airline can still advertise themselves towards the Swedish audience and could sell these flights but would not be operating them themselves. The authors have taken this into consideration and chose that the airlines which operate directly by themselves between Sweden and another country of origin will only be considered in this study.

Additionally, several airline companies are based in one country or region, meaning that all flights are from and to certain country, such as AirBaltic (flights from/to Sweden only to/from Latvia) and Finnair (flights from/to Sweden only to/from Finland). That leads to numerous participants of the interview has not used the airline's service, due to no need for traveling in said destinations. This can limit the perception of loyalty in participant's minds.

3.8 Research Quality

It has been found that the quality of a study can be evaluated based on certain criteria and criteria have been gathered by Collis and Hussey (2014) to be the following: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*. In this section these criteria of ethical principles and trustworthiness are explored and expanded due to the nature of the study, starting with anonymity and confidentiality required by the experimental research approach of interviews.

3.8.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Collis and Hussey (2014) explain anonymity to be a guarantee to protect the participants recognizability with confidence in the research and which is agreed on together with the people or organizations participating in the study. To assure the participants anonymity in this study only personal information where they could be identified from was their year of birth and current age that was gathered. The participants were informed of this in the beginning of the interview where it was stated that only information relevant to this study will be used and that anonymity will be ensured by guaranteeing that they will not be recognized based on the information the interviewers gather. This also means that any unnecessary information will be deleted if it appears in the interview such as their name or any other information that could be used to further identify them. This gave the participants a guarantee of confidentiality and to remain anonymous which encourages more honest opinions, open responses and freedom of expression (Collin & Hussey, 2014). By explaining participants, the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality they understood their stance of input in the interview and agreed to their data being used in the study as well as gave consent to being recorded before the interview started when only the two authors will hear the recording. From the beginning the participants have been represented by numbers, such as “New recording 1”, “New recording 2”, etc., based on the order of the interviews. In addition, how the authors were storing and processing the data was clarified to the interview participants to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

3.8.2 Credibility

Credibility is argued to be reached with transparency when correctly identifying and describing the subject of the study (Collin & Hussey, 2014). In addition, the researcher should be diligently engaged with the study for a long time to reach a higher level of understanding but also credibility. This study involved two authors that similarly associated themselves in the subject by researching diverse sources, collecting primary and secondary data as well as elaborating with each other constantly about the topic of interest. These steps such as physically researching and writing together allowed time for discussion in addition to both participating in the interviews as much as possible ensured that both authors understood the gathered data on the same level and gained similar

expertise which can increase the accuracy of the outcome, such as findings, of the paper. Further on, other researcher colleagues were incorporated to study the authors work and give feedback about the research regularly in the form of seminars which additionally made the authors debrief the topic frequently to others and created a deeper understanding of the study while the repetition developed the authors to better their identifying and description of the subject that then further enhances credibility. In addition, triangulation such as the before mentioned fact of having more than one researcher but also using data from different databases was utilized which has been found to increase credibility and eliminate bias, however one database, JU Primo, was seen as the most frequently used database among like Google scholar, EBSCO and Scopus that were utilized less.

3.8.3 Transferability

Transferability is defined as whether the findings of the paper can be generalized in a sense that they can be transferred to another similar situation (Collin & Hussey, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). As this study aimed to question Aaker's (1997) seminal brand personality model in a sense that it will be applied to brand perceptions on social media and with a new target audience of Gen Z, it's findings can potentially be generalized to be utilized as a base or reference for future study. The authors especially have the confidence that the findings can further the knowledge of Gen Z's perception of brand personalities on TikTok and that the outcome can be seen as having potential to be generalized for future research in other platforms that have similar characteristics to TikTok such as YouTube shorts or Instagram reels, for instance, and for other than the airline industry. In addition, the focus of the literature review, Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality model, was recognized as agile and so can be transferable as well to other studies like done in this study.

3.8.4 Dependability

Dependability refers to fulfilling the following three criteria in the research process: *logical, traceable* and *clearly documented* which when followed create a trail of the research process such as evidence of the decisions that were made throughout the study (Nowell et al., 2017). According to Nowell et al. (2017) this is also known as an audit trail which can be created by keeping a reflexive journal or doing field notes, for instance.

And so, the authors have kept track of the original data with progressive documents re-evaluated after a month of work of which when compared to one another the improvements in understandings and the changes in work can be seen as the word count has gone up and paragraphs have been updated. An example of traceability and clear documentation is the excel sheet of the authors' steps to motivate their choice of airlines in the study (see Appendix 4). Also, the authors kept track of the gathered literature and saw it evolve overtime with notes from the early days of research.

3.8.5 Confirmability

Collin & Hussey (2019) has explained the term confirmability to be about whether the research process has been recorded but also described thoroughly but also helps to recognize the quality of the flow of findings from the data. Confirmability can be demonstrated by showing how researchers have reached the conclusions and drawn the interpretations to the reader which is reached when all credibility, transferability and dependability are successfully accomplished. The authors of this study have reached confirmability by grasping the criteria from the three before mentioned concepts of credibility, transferability and dependability in addition to arguing for their theoretical, methodological and analytical decisions in the thesis so the reader can have a better understanding of the decisions the authors made throughout the study and how the findings became to be.

3.8.6 Ethics

The literature finds ethics as a code of conduct that is based on principles, and which correlates to ethics of research. Collin and Hussey (2014) clarify that ethics can be seen to guide the way research process is managed and how the outcome is reported. For example, the authors made decisions about ethics when preparing for the interviews as a certain degree of mutual understanding of participants' confidentiality, rights as well as responsibility and transparency from the authors' side needed to be established. This included making clear statements from the start of how the interview will be conducted and how the participant's data will be handled and that they have the right to withdraw their information from the study anytime they wish, for instance, and that the authors take responsibility for handling the retrieved data in a respectful and reliable manner by

following the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation guidelines. After the participants had agreed to these statements and gave consent to record the interview begun. Further on, all the interviews were held face-to-face where the semi-structured interview design helped the interviewers make the atmosphere more comfortable for the participant and for the interviewers as the topic could be explored further in a more conversational manner with open-ended questions that would also generate freedom of expression and honest answers.

4. Empirical Findings

The chapter of empirical findings presents the discoveries from the 25 semi-structured interviews and the two airline case studies of Ryanair and Finnair. The interviews were transcribed, coded and thematized to create a personality profile for each case study in addition to…

4.1 Case companies

4.1.1 Ryanair

Ryanair is a low-cost carrier with headquarters in Ireland that a parent company, Ryanair Holdings plc, accommodates. According to Ryanair's website its sister companies include Ryanair UK, Buzz, Lauda and Malta Air that all together reach to over 40 countries and that describe themselves to offer the lowest fares within Europe (Ryanair, n.d.). Ryanair has been seen as a pioneer of TikTok performance with millions of views, 2 million followers, 29.3 million likes and tens of thousands of comments in May 2023. Ryanair's TikTok videos cover popular memes transferred to their low-cost company strategy, filters used on their aircraft, viral sound clips and other trendy edits of content that capture loads of engagement. Ryanair's focus on TikTok has been described by the brand's head of social to be unhinged, provocative and imperfect with their posted content but also engaging such as comments (Sensi, 2023). Further on, Ryanair's marketing strategy has been explained to focus on showcasing low fares, route choice and great care.

4.1.2 Finnair

Finnair is a Finland flag carrier with flights to destinations in Europe, Asia, North America, Australia and Africa with a headquarters in Finland. The Finnish company started a brand reform in 2019 and rebranded themselves with the aim to position the brand as a modern Nordic airline with the focus on the traits of being trustful, real, kind, curious, optimistic and fresh (Lemmetyinen, 2022).

In the Finnish media, Finnair's TikTok journey has been described to be a successful example of a domestic brand growing its follower count and visibility by creating entertaining content (Meltwater, 2020). The TikTok app is recognized to be challenging for brands to gain visibility at, as they need to balance between organic content and content that is not seen as overly advertising but also the quickly changing trends that limit long-term content planning. However, in the Finnish media Finnair is seen as a success story since it started posting on TikTok in 2020 with millions of views, 88.5 thousand followers, 1.6 million likes and hundreds of comments, in May 2023, that were gained over the years (Yrjölä, (n.d.); Lemmetyinen, 2022). Finnair's TikTok content includes mostly popular sound clips, entertaining and informative footage of the cabin crew and pilots, Finnair's history, their destinations and behind-the-scenes processes in addition to few videos with filters popular in the TikTok platform.

4.2 Construction of Empirical Findings

After completing transcribing and coding process, three themes including "engagement with brands on TikTok", "Ryanair personality profile", "Finnair personality profile" were found.

Table 2. Process of Thematization

Interview extract	Initial coding	Re-coding	Themes
Participant 6: "Then there is this Estonian company that sells building tools, it's called Tööriista Market, I see them a lot." **Participant 22:** "I'm interested in cars and feed is very personal, so when it comes to TikTok, it is very different let's say mine from yours. I saw a lot of companies as well. Tesla, Polestar, Hyundai." **Participant 8:** "If I find it [videos on TikTok] super funny or something I usually share it, no comments."	Native language; country of origin; Interests; Visually pleasing; Funny; Share; Like; No comments	Tailored preferences; Entertaining content; Social Media Engagement	Engagement with brands on TikTok
Participant 7: "Quirky, the funny person [Ryanair] in a group. Always the one talking in the group, making jokes." **Participant 9:** "Hilarious [Ryanair]. That`s the kind of comedy that I like." **Participant 11:**	Funny; Goofy; Quirky; Up-to-date; Good with social media; Trendy;	Funny Social Young Honest	RyanAir personality traits profile

Interview extract	Initial coding	Re-coding	Themes
"Age around the same age as me, gen z, early 2000s."	Social; Feeling comfortable with; Young Age; Gen Z; Snappy; Honest; Passive-aggressive; Self-conscious; Self-mockery		
Participant 2: "So, I would say this person [Finnair] is someone who has job experience, is a bit more formal…and is definitely more restricted." **Participant 25:** "They [Finnair] are definitely older, millennial…but not Gen Z as Ryanair, more millennial." **Participant 17:**	Serious; Technical; Talkative; Informative; Corporate; Millennial; Older; Try hard; Boring	Serious Old Try hard	Finnair personality traits profile

Interview extract	Initial coding	Re-coding	Themes
"They [Finnair] think they are down with the kids, in reality they are adults that are boring."			

4.3 Engagement with Brands on TikTok

All participants have seen brand content on their "For You" page while using TikTok. 22 out of 25 participants have seen videos posted by Ryanair on "For You" page, however, only one participant has seen content from Finnair's TikTok. Yet, they could not recall TikTok brand content itself, but instead people that work for Finnair and their professional experience that they share on their personal TikTok accounts.

"I think I have seen them [Ryanair] the most out of…the airplane industry, I think that…I would only recall them [Ryanair] on TikTok." – Participant 7

"I have seen videos from the brand [Finnair], but mainly I have seen a flight stewardess in their private TikToks. Sharing, comment about their work in Finnair. Yeah, mainly, it was like one or two Finnair's brand TikToks, but I cannot recall what they were about." – Participant 23

4.3.1 Tailored Preferences

Participants have noticed that based on their interests their "For You" page was altered to show videos within the interests. Furthermore, participants have encountered with the brand content on TikTok that correspond to their interests. For example, participants are interested in fashion, therefore, on their "For You" page they have seen fashion brand content.

"I think it's usually tailored to your preferences, so for me, it's mostly like fashion brands." – Participant 20

"I think it is adopted to my feed, it's a lot of fashion. Food as well, like fast food, I have seen Burger King, McDonalds" – Participant 24

"I'm interested in cars and feed is very personal, so when it comes to TikTok, it is very different. Let's say mine [For You Page] from yours. I saw a lot of companies like Tesla, Polestar, Hyundai." – Participant 22

Based on participants' culture, native language or country of origin, they have gotten different content. The respondents mentioned that they have seen brands outside of Sweden, such as Serbian and Estonian brands.

"Then there is this Estonian company that sells building tools, it's called Tööriista Market, I see them a lot." – Participant 6

"I have seen a lot of Serbian brands…" – Participant 14

4.3.2 Entertaining brand content

When asked to recall the name of brands that participants have seen on their "For You" page, some participants could not recall the names, but rather what was happening in the video.

"But one time I remember there was an ad of this little toy, that you throw on a ceiling and it sticks, and they fall after some time. It was more the content in the TikTok that I actually looked at." – Participant 22

Participants tend to ignore brand content on TikTok if it is direct marketing where the main purpose of the video is to sell a product or service. Videos that gain more attention are videos that participants found funny or similar to trending videos.

"I usually ignore it when it is adds … Yeah, I view one second and then just scroll past" – Participant 24

"Most of the time I ignore it, unless it is something funny or more engaging. In a sense that it is not trying to sell the product directly. It more tries to keep up with the trends and do viral videos." – Participant 13

However, with brands making their content trendy and funny, several participants have mentioned that they do not recognize those videos as brand content but rather as entertaining content. The brand content does not feel out of place on "For You" page hence brand content blends in with the rest of the content.

"Melts together with the other content I see, so I barely think that it`s a brand. I just think o it`s funny." – Participant 17

4.3.3 Social Media Engagement – SME

20 participants have stated that they have engaged with brand content on TikTok, in a form of viewing, sharing, liking, reporting or adding video to "favorite". On the other hand, five participants claimed that they have ignored brand content and "scrolled past".

"View, not much more." – Participant 12

"Sometimes like and favorite it [brand content]" – Participant 20

"I just scroll past it [brand content]" – Participant 16

Seven respondents have mentioned that they viewed brand content, however, do not like nor share it. Four respondents mentioned that they do not want to engage with brands publicly - repost or share with other people, since this experience with the content is personal.

"Since it is a personal experience, I do not share it with anyone." – Participant 7

However, other respondents mention that if they find brand content funny, they most likely would share it with their friends. Additionally, the engagement in the form of liking or sharing with friends was done when the participants found TikTok brand content funny or inspiring.

"If it's something that I think is visually appealing even though I don`t know the brand I will probably like it." - Participant 14

Participants never leave comments below the TikTok content of the brand; however, several have mentioned that they check comments.

"I have liked them. Just viewed and liked and maybe shared with a friend, but never commenting" – Participant 23

4.4 Case Company Profiles

The following findings are based on the interviews with Gen Z which consisted of three different steps of traits identification. First, participants were asked about how they view the case company as if they were a person which generated traits without the participants knowledge about Aaker's (1997) brand personality model. Further on, the participants were asked to identify 8-9 traits from Aaker's (1997) 42 traits and afterwards 3-4 traits from 14 of Aaker's personality traits. This structure concerns both case companies' findings. The interview structure can be seen in detail in Appendix E.

Additionally, the explanations for brand personality factors, traits and dimensions can be seen visually in Appendix F.

4.4.1 Ryanair Personality Profile

After conducting interviews authors have identified Ryanair's personality profile based on Gen Z's perceptions that consist of personality factors of *funny*, *social*, *young* and *honest*.

In this section Ryanair is a person with several traits that participants have assigned to them.

4.4.1.1 Funny

When asked to imagine Ryanair as if the brand were a person, the participants agreed that this person would be funny and try to make other people laugh, uses a lot of humor in their speech. The trait "funny" is the most common trait used by the participants along with quirky and goofy.

"Quirky, the funny person in a group. Always the one talking in the group, making jokes." – Participant 8

"...goofy, funny, fun to be around" – Participant 23

"Funny friend in the group, try to get laughs. Group clown." – Participant 13

"Humorous, like a funny person [Ryanair] who uses comedy to communicate." – Participant 21

4.4.1.2 Social

If Ryanair would be a person, they would be a social person. They enjoy interacting with other people and have a vast network of friends. Two interviewees have observed that Ryanair would be an extrovert. Participants can imagine them being in a friend group, make jokes to uplift the mood. Moreover, one of the participants elaborated and stated that they would establish friendly relationship with Ryanair.

"It's [Ryanair] a social person. Extrovert; has many friends. Definitely not an introvert." – Participant 2

"I feel like they [Ryanair] would be the ones, not seeking for attention, but the ones that want to get people to laugh at their jokes. They [Ryanair] are the ones trying to be the connection of the friend group." – Participant 1

"I would see Ryanair as a person I would get along with very well." – Participant 23

In addition, five participants stated that Ryanair would be outgoing person, that attends social gatherings and likes to talk with other people at the event.

"Parties a lot. Likes to talk a lot. Engages with a lot of people." – Participant 2

"I see this person [Ryanair] at a party, but probably they are in the back just talking to people." – Participant 4

Two interviewees recognize Ryanair as a person who is comfortable to be around.

"If I imagine a friend group, they would be the once like that everyone feeling comfortable with" – Participant 1

4.4.1.3 Young

When it comes to determining the age of the person 22 out of 25 participants designated a younger age to Ryanair. When asked to identify age, it varied from 16 to 30. Eight participants pinpointed that Ryanair would belong to generation Z. Participants have compared Ryanair to themselves and mentioned that Ryanair would be their age,

However, not everyone agreed that it is Gen Z, but rather a younger millennial.

"Age around the same age as me, gen z, kind of early 2000s" – Participant 11

"20-25 years old. Gen Z and like younger millennial." – Participant 9

"I would say it's not a Gen Z, but a bit older that is trying to appeal to Gen Z. So, I don't know what's the category, but like above 25." – Participant 2

As a person Ryanair would not have a stable job, but an intern position or freelance. They are starting their career. Their job would revolve around social media.

"Working in a big group of people, probably an intern or something, haven't had the big job yet. Um, they're good with social media, interested in it to do this every day." – Participant 2

"They don`t have a stable job, they freelance between being a social media manager and marketing content for smaller agencies." – Participant 14

As an individual Ryanair would use social media platforms, where they constantly would update about their life. In addition, they would strive to be up to date with the latest trends and would try to recreate it.

"They [Ryanair] have Instagram account where they think they are mysterious, but they post every little thing about their life." – Participant 14

"Trendy in the way that they are keeping track of current TikTok trends and engaging with them." – Participant 23

In contrast, one participant described Ryanair as an old person who is trying to be young by trying to be like younger generation. They are trying to be up to date and try to grasp new trends to capture attention of the youth.

"I would describe this person [Ryanair] as an old person who wants to…bring younger people attention and to be funny. But at the same time, like trying to understand the trends but not really being into that…" – Participant 3

4.4.1.4 Honest

Seven participants stated that Ryanair would be an honest person.

"…honest, extremely blunt…" – Participant 7

Ryanair does not hide their minuses when it comes to their service, they accept them and make fun of it. As a person they would be self-aware about their negative traits, accept them and even make jokes out of it to elicit laughter from others. One participant detailed that they found self-mockery to be an attractive trait of Ryanair.

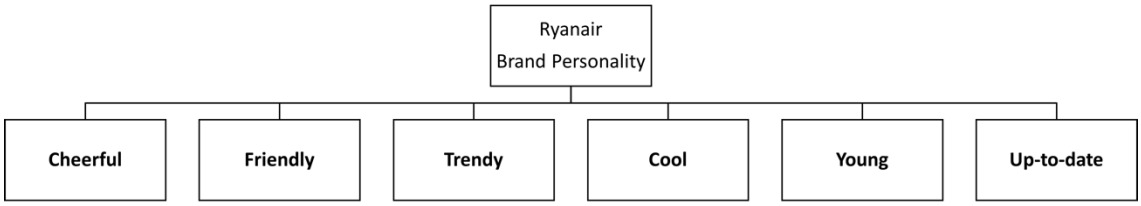
"They [Ryanair] recognize what people mostly complain about from their flight ticket to…how landing and flight can be shaky. But they [Ryanair] took it in such humoristic way, that it made it look so much more approachable. They [Ryanair] are not hiding the fact that`s why we are cheap and that`s why we are like this…That`s part of the deal, take it or leave it type of girl. And I like it." – Participant 7

"They [Ryanair] are aware of their shortcomings, and they use it into actually make it into branding… Talks down about themselves to make people laugh…" – Participant 5

4.4.1.5 Ryanair's personality - Aaker's dimensions

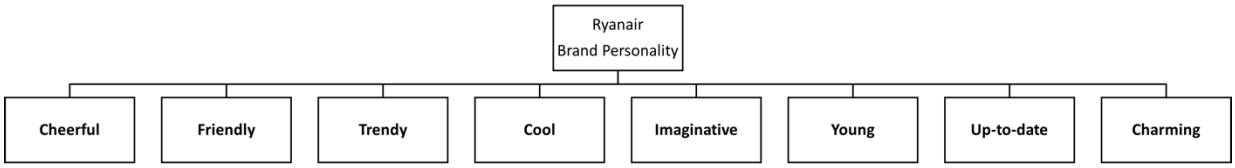
During the interview the 42 traits of Aaker's (1997) personality dimensions were displayed to the participants in a random order who then interpreted the traits based on their perceptions of the brand. The interviews generated data about Gen Z where 23 of the 25 participants matched the personality trait *young* with Ryanair in addition to *cheerful* and *trendy* which 18 out of the 25 participants associated both traits with the brand. Further on, the last three major traits that the interviewees matched with Ryanair were *cool* with the identification of 14 participants out of 25 as well as *friendly* with 12 interviewees out of 25 associating the trait with the brand in addition to *up to date* with 11 out of 25 identifying the trait with Ryanair's personality. Two of the identified traits, *cheerful* and *friendly*, belong to the sincerity personality when the rest *trendy, cool, young* and *up to date* fall under the excitement personality.

Figure 1. Ryanair Brand Personality Traits – Aaker



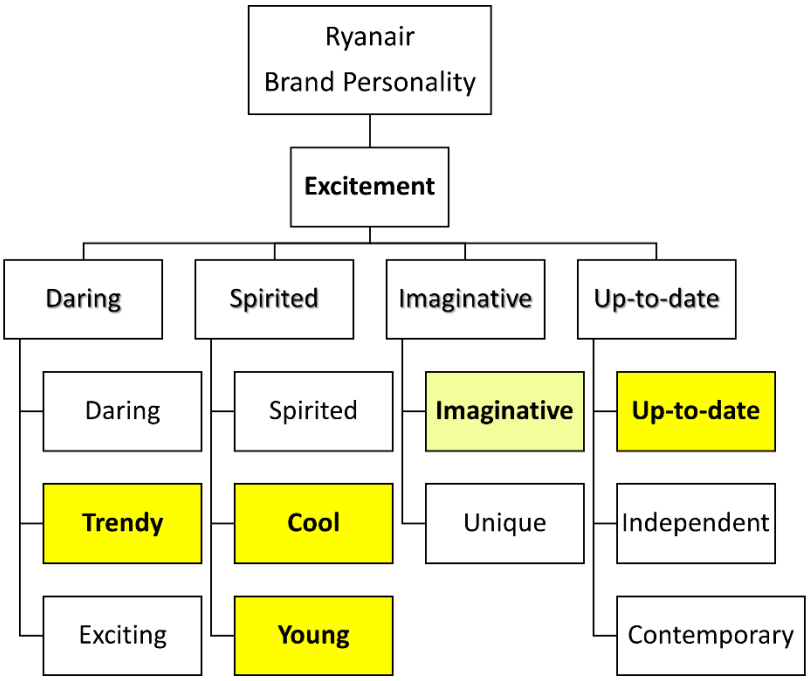
The second stage of Gen Z identifying Ryanair's personality traits based on Aaker's (1997) framework included results where the participants perceived two more traits to the personality. These were identified to be the trait *imaginative* and *charming* which both belong to different personalities, *imaginative* under the excitement dimension and *charming* under the sophistication personality dimension. *Imaginative* was identified by 13 participants and *charming* by 10 of the totals of 25 participants. The final combination of traits identified by Gen Z suggests a pattern mostly under the excitement personality dimension.

Figure 2. Ryanair Brand Personality – Aaker extended



Finally, the participants elaborated on which combination of traits they see to fit Ryanair from the five personality dimensions published by Aaker (1997). The participants mostly matched Ryanair to excitement and sincerity as 13 of the interviewees identified the brand with excitement and 11 out of the 25 participants with sincerity. One participant associated the brand with ruggedness and none with competence or sophistication.

Figure 3. Ryanair Brand Personality – Excitement



4.4.2 Finnair Personality Profile

With the gathered perceptions from interviews with Gen Z, Finnair's personality profile can be described to be *serious*, *older* and a *try hard*.

4.4.2.1 Serious

The interviewees perception of Finnair was found to be formed with the overall impression of seriousness. The participants were seen to perceive the brand having traits that show Finnair with a more professional personality with perceptions of formality, corporate, professionality and businesslike with the following comments:

"So I would say this person [Finnair] is… a bit more formal…" – Participant 2

"I would say it [Finnair] is…working in a corporate job" – Participant 4

"…seems more professional" – Participant 19

"More serious in a professional way, more professional." – Participant 23

"…business centered." – Participant 20

"I would say very business minded" – Participant 21

In addition, the participants described Finnair as informative, less goofy, technical and most prominently serious that became the main personality trait drawn from the data.

"More serious, more informative, more actual aspect about the company." – Participant 24

"So I would say this person [Finnair] is someone who is less goofy…" – Participant 2

"Otherwise it [Finnair] is more technical." – Participant 25

"It [Finnair] was… showing what they are doing and how serious they are." – Participant 10

"Overall more serious…" – Participant 16

"Serious, even if they joke around" – Participant 18

4.4.2.2 Older

When describing a brand, the participants were given the chance to describe any demographics which they associate with Finnair and some interviewees were able to identify either a specific age or a generation for the brand while others had no recognition of what age Finnair appears to them. However, the interviewees who were able to identify an age for Finnair mostly described the brand as older than the other case company, Ryanair, and so associating them with the millennial generation and sometimes even emphasizing that Finnair is not Gen Z and commonly ranging their age from late 20s to 30s. These patterns were then defined as the personality trait "older"

"Age older, late 20s, early 30s" - Participant 8

"They [Finnair] are definitely older, millennial… but not Gen Z as Ryanair, more millennial." – Participant 25

4.4.2.3 Try hard

The interviews also revealed Gen Z's association of boringness and a try hard trait when describing Finnair's brand personality. Mostly Gen Z was seen to be referring to Finnair appearing to try the popular trends of TikTok but the participants found it unsuccessful with the following answers:

"Boring… They think they are down with the kids, in reality they are adults that are boring." – Participant 17

"It's... trying out different trends but not succeeding." – Participant 12

"…they [Finnair] try super hard because you can see their content is not natural because they are trying too hard." – Participant 14

Moreover, other similar responses regarding the prior associations were that the interviewees characterized Finnair's try hard attitude as something that shows as desperation and even awkwardness to fit into a friend group or to keep up with trends. Hence, the trait try hard was seen as the most prominent answer from Gen Z's perception of Finnair.

"…they want to meet the same vibe of the group, but they do not manage." – Participant 1

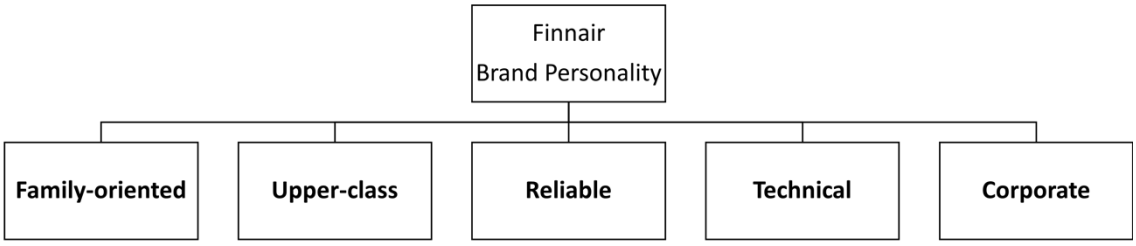
"I would definitely say… [Finnair is] kind of like one of those moms that desperately tries to stay with the trends but does it in a little bit of an awkward way." – Participant 5

4.4.2.4 Finnair's personality - Aaker's dimensions

Based on the Aaker's (1997) personality dimension framework the participants were introduced to 42 different traits in a randomized order. Based on the data drawn from the

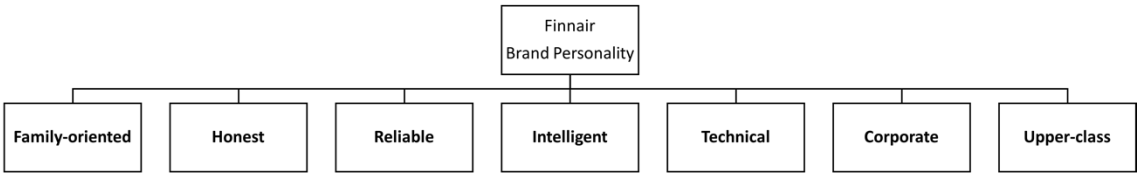
interviews 12 of the 25 participants perceived Finnair with the trait *family oriented* as well as *technical*, while 14 participants viewed the brand as *upper class* which all belong to three different personality dimensions. Further on, it was found that the two most prominent traits were *reliable*, which 18 out of the 25 interviewees matched Finnair to, and *corporate*, which 20 out of 25 participants connected the brand to. These five personality traits were the most preeminent and of which *family oriented* is under the sincerity personality and *reliable*, *technical* as well as *corporate* belong under the competence dimension and finally *upper class* under the sophistication personality dimension.

Figure 4. Finnair Brand Personality - Aaker



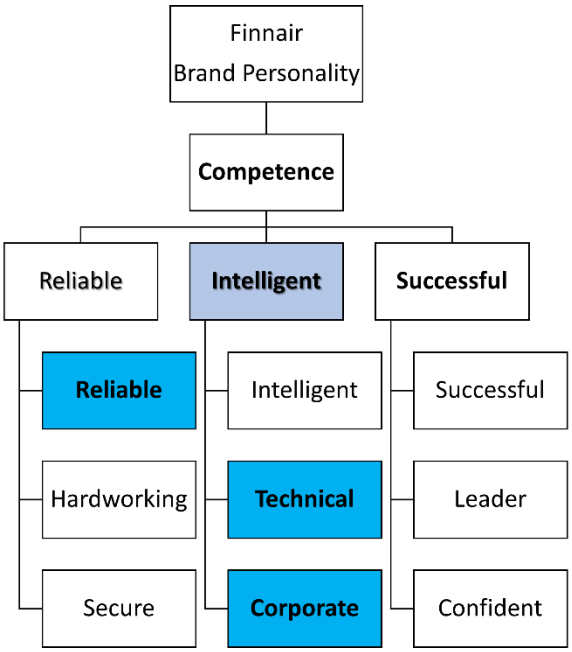
Further on, the second stage of personality matching revealed that the interviewees perceived two more traits to Finnair's brand personality: *honest* and *intelligent* that both were under different personalities. According to Aaker's (1997) framework the sincerity personality dimension is associated with the trait and factor *honest* while *intelligent* belongs under the competence personality dimension. The personality trait *honest* was associated with the Finnair brand by 11 participants and *intelligent* by 12 of the total 25 participants.

Figure 4. Finnair Brand Personality – Aaker extended



The third stage of using Aaker's (1997) model in the interview the participants pointed out the best personality match of the five dimensions that they perceived to associate Finnair with. Here Finnair was associated mainly with the competence personality with 13 out of 25 participants matching the brand with the personality dimension that combines factors of *reliable*, *intelligent* and *successful*. In addition, five out of 25 choose the sincerity and sophistication personalities and two ruggedness while excitement was not seen to match Finnair by any of the participants.

Figure 5. Finnair Brand Personality – Competence



5. Analysis

The purpose of this section is to examine the empirical findings in the connection to the topic of the research and the related theory of brand engagement as well as Jennifer Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions. The analysis section follows the structure of the findings and aims to elaborate them further to explore the connections. Hence, the section begins with brand engagement and continues to brand personalities.

5.1 Engagement with brands on TikTok

Participants have seen brand content on their TikTok “For You” page and could recall several brand names that they have encountered on TikTok. The brands that the participants have come across represented their interest or their background. TikTok provides videos that are similar to the content that the user has liked or paid attention to before to keep users on the platform (Jain & Arakkal, 2022). That signifies that brand content reach “For You” page regardless of number of followers. Since participants are supplied with the brand videos that caters to their interests, they are more likely to be brand’s target audience.

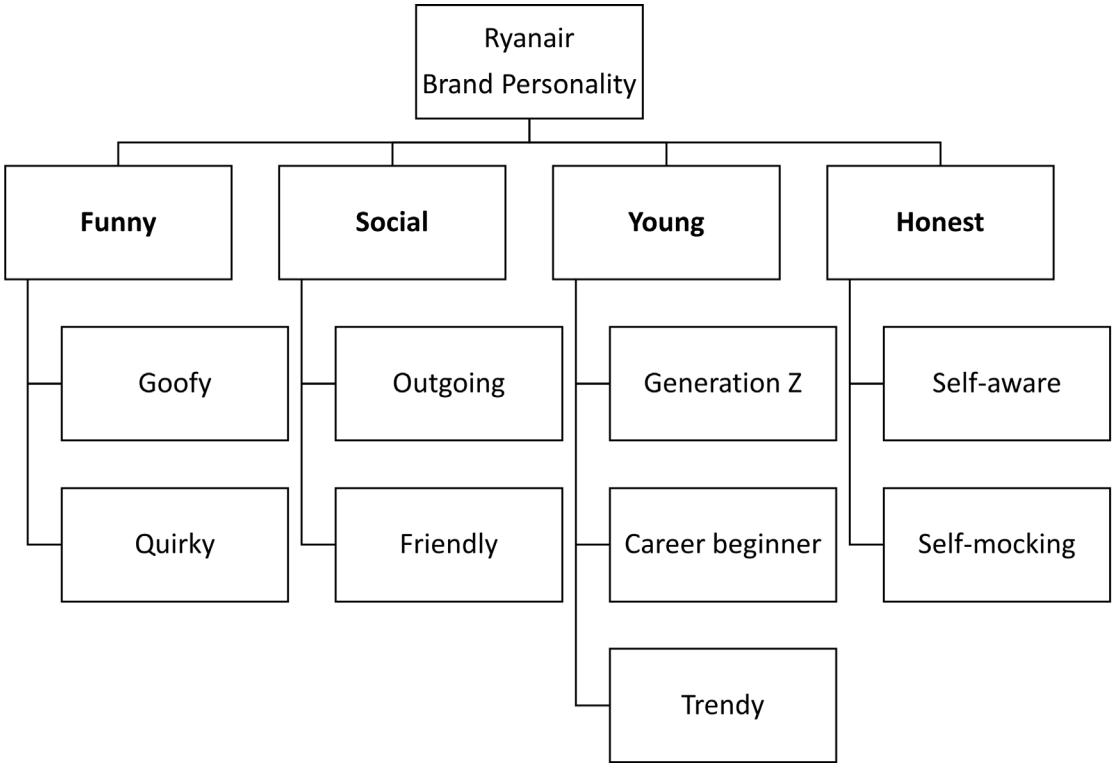
Participants engaged with the brand content on TikTok in a form of consumption and contribution, when they view content, like or share content with others. However, zero participants have wrote comments for brand content, hence participants did not participate in creation aspect of social media engagement, which is the highest level of SME (Wahid et al., 2022, Dolat et al., 2016). Therefore, participants solely participate in lower level of engagement (Malthouse et al. 2013).

Participants like and share Brand TikTok videos when they find it funny or visually appealing. According to Hamzah et al. (2021) social media posts that receive greater consumer engagement are original, unique and creative. In contrast, posts that are predictable to consumers gain less engagement.

Companies are provided with the same tools to create videos on the platform as the average users of TikTok, therefore brand content can seem like user generated content (TikTok for Business, n.d.). Subsequently, participants have observed that brand content “melts” together with the rest of the videos on their “For You” page and they seem to forget that there is an actual company behind it. Furthermore, participants engaged with TikTok videos that sole purpose was not selling a product directly but keeping up with trends. Content created by the brands that is not driven by commercial motives is recognized to be genuine.

5.2 Ryanair personality Connection to Aaker model

Figure 6. Ryanair Brand Personality – Gen Z liberated perception



As mentioned in the findings, Gen Z identified 13 personality traits that they associate the Ryanair brand with: *funny, goofy, quirky, social, outgoing, friendly, young, generation Z, career beginner, trendy, honest, self-aware, self-mocking.* These traits were recognised to create themes that the authors were able to categorize into four factors, *funny, social, young* and *honest*.

Funny

The findings demonstrated that the personality *funny* was perceived to be a prominent personality trait when Gen Z was describing Ryanair's personality. Moreover, further explanations of the trait were found to be *goofy* and *quirky* that were seen to create a category under *funny*. This furthered the personification of Ryanair regarding Gen Z's perceptions as the words *quirky* and *goofy* are not in Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework. However, these words could be interpreted as being used due to their

familiarity among Gen Z to describe themselves and so Gen Z uses to describe others such as Ryanair as a person. This is how consumers understand brand personality as stated in the literature by Bernritter et al. (2016).

Further on, when relating the three traits, *funny, goofy* and *quirky*, to Aaker's (1997) model none of the traits can be matched to the traits within the five personality dimensions. However, a related trait *spirited* can be found under the excitement personality which also suggests further approval that Ryanair has an ideal fit with the excitement personality, as the findings also suggest. Therefore, it could be argued that the three traits identified by Gen Z, *funny, goofy* and *quirky*, should be added to the excitement personality dimension to enrich Ryanair's personality description.

Social

According to the findings, the trait *social* portraited a persistent pattern and was combined with the traits *outgoing* and *friendly* that altogether improved the understanding of how Gen Z perceives Ryanair's personality. This was a perception of Ryanair being a social person who would be identified to have a large friend group and to be friendly. In addition, the previously mentioned trait funny would extend to this, as the findings state that a part of being social was to be funny. By associating a link between these traits, it could be argued that both factors, *social* and *funny*, should be under the same dimension.

Additionally, *outgoing* and *friendly* traits were seen to consistently compliment the *social* trait but could not be connected to Aaker's (1997) personality dimensions, so in the same manner as *social* the two traits should be added to the excitement personality to better describe Ryanair from Gen Z's point of view. Further on, identifying Ryanair as *social* and *outgoing* are rather extraverted qualities which highlights the fact that traits of extraversion, but also introversion, are missing from Aaker's (1997) model (Sweeney and Brandon, 2006).

Young

Based on the findings a theme around a personality trait *young* were identified with connecting traits of *Generation Z*, *Career beginner* and *trendy* that were seen to compliment the factor *young*. The participants' answers implied that they saw themselves

in Ryanair's personality regarding their age but also that Ryanair has been able to develop a personality mirroring Gen Z. This has been done with their content that can be associated with a person who is good at social media, a skill Gen Z are known for, as well as trendy as they stay on top of trends. Additionally, the traits *career beginner* was coined due to the association of Ryanair's personification extending to be described to have a job as an intern.

The factor *young* is found in Aaker's (1997) personality dimensions under the excitement personality which furthers the connection that this personality is great to explain Ryanair. This is in addition to Gen Z recognising the most traits, *trendy*, *cool*, *imaginative* and *up to date* from Aaker's (1997) list of traits. However, to fully describe Ryanair's personality with Aaker's (1997) model, Gen Z identified the two extra traits, *generation* Z and *career beginner*, to compliment the existing excitement personality.

Honest

Further on, the findings determined the trait *honest* to describe Ryanair's personality along with the association to s*elf-aware* and *self-mocking* as following traits. *Honest* can also be found in Aaker's (1997) model under the sincerity personality, indicating a level of personality aside from the excitement personality dimension. Additionally, the interview participants connected two other traits, *family-oriented* and *upper class,* from Aaker's (1997) personality model to Ryanair which were from different personality dimensions than excitement. This implies that excitement was seen as the most relevant personality for the brand but also that Ryanair's personality is multidimensional and includes different levels of dominance regarding traits. Even though there are traits outside the main personality, excitement, these traits should be recognised as building blocks for Ryanair's personality.

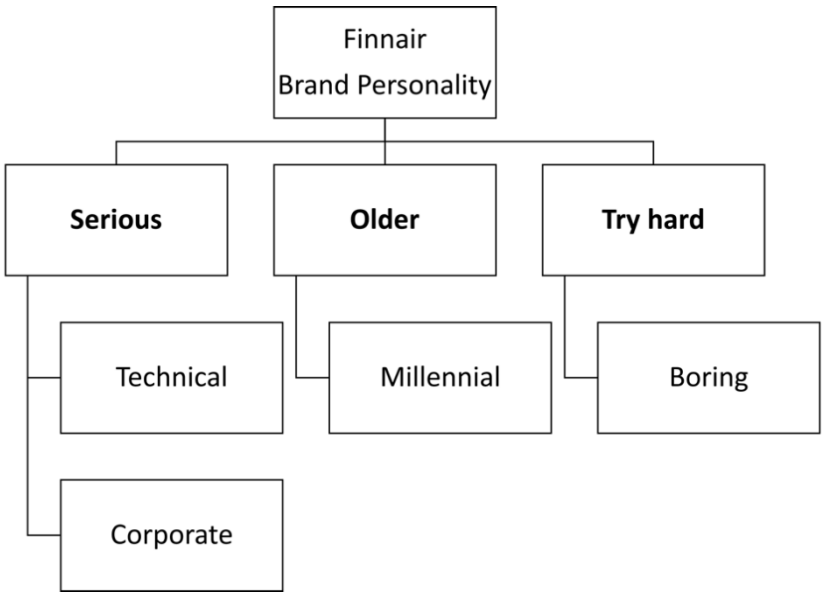
Excitement personality and the combination of traits

In the interviews the participants were first asked to freely describe Ryanair's personality which generated the previously mentioned traits*: funny, goofy, quirky, social, outgoing, friendly, young, generation Z, career beginner, trendy, honest, self-aware* and *self-mocking*. Of which friendly, young, trendy and honest are also in Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework. Further on, the interviewees were introduced to Aaker's (1997)

model and its predefined personality traits of which *cheerful, friendly, trendy, cool, young, imaginative, up to date* and *charming* were identified to match to Ryanair's personality. Then, based on the interview data five of these traits, *trendy, cool, young, imaginative* and *up to date,* are under the excitement personality dimension while three are not. This implies a pattern that Gen Z views the personality traits that combine the excitement personality as a great match with Ryanair. Also, as mentioned before, the interview answers presented that Gen Z's choice for the most suitable personality for Ryanair was excitement. The excitement personality was chosen by 13 out of 25 participants while the sincerity personality was chosen by 11 participants. The high number of participants choosing the sincerity personality can be explained by the pattern of them choosing *cheerful* and *friendly* traits to match with Ryanair which are under the sincerity personality. However, like mentioned before, more traits that were associated with Ryanair are under the excitement personality. This confirms that excitement is the most relevant personality for Ryanair, however, the traits outside of the Aaker's (1997) model, *goofy, quirky, social, outgoing, generation Z, career beginner, self-aware* and *self-mocking,* that were discovered in the interviews, should be added to understand Ryanair's personality the best.

5.3 Finnair personality Connection to Aaker model

Figure 7. Finnair Brand Personality – Gen Z liberated perception



Serious

As stated in the findings, the interviews with Gen Z revealed a total of seven most prominent personality traits: *serious, technical, older, millennial, try hard* and *boring*, which the interviewees associated Finnair's personality with. Only two of the traits, *technical* and *corporate*, are also found from Aaker's (1997) model under the competence personality dimension as well as under the same factor of intelligent meaning that the remaining five are not found in Aaker's personality dimensions.

Within the findings a theme of seriousness was established when Gen Z was describing Finnair's personality. The trait *serious* was found to be the main perception of Finnair along with the traits of *technical* and *corporate* that have a pattern of consistency among the participants and connection to serious. Hence, it could be suggested to add serious as a factor, as shown in figure 8, under the serious personality factor traits *technical* and *corporate* are used with the intention to elucidate it further. In the same manner as Aaker (1997) presented her framework.

Like mentioned before, both traits *technical* and *corporate* are recognised to be part of Aaker's (1997) five personality dimensions and to exist under the competence personality which Aaker (1997) presents to be associated with traits reliable, intelligent, successful, hardworking, *technical*, leader, secure, *corporate,* and confident. And so, the findings suggest that Gen Z would describe Finnair utmost with the competence personality, but it could be argued based on their perceptions that the generation would add the trait *serious* to the competence personality and perhaps rearrange the trait factors to fit *corporate* and *technical* under the trait *serious* as these traits were recognised to be a theme in the findings.

Older

Another theme of traits that was associated with Finnair was the perception of the brand being older and more specifically belonging to the millennial generation. However, the associated traits *older* and *millennial* cannot be identified to belong to Aaker's (1997) personality dimensions. The identification of an age can also be seen as a characteristic, or a demographic, which Aaker (1997) has argued to be included in brand personality and even in her framework a vague perception of brand's age was included with the trait

young that can be found under the excitement personality. However, Aaker's (1997) model is lacking the other side of the age spectrum and the term old is not included in the framework but is a clear association that Gen Z has of Finnair. Therefore, it could be argued that a new trait *older,* could be added to the existing framework by Aaker (1997) to update it based on Gen Z's perceptions.

However, this is a trait which the perception of would depend on the participants age, as it would raise a question whether there is such a definition as older as there is of being young, or whether it is always depending on the participants own perceptions of age. This then furthers the conversation to how much these traits are under the influence of the participants perceptions of the brand and their own being and self-congruity which then influences which traits should be chosen for the model and in this case, Finnair's personality profile. On the other hand, the prominence of the trait recognised by Gen Z cannot be ignored but it may simply be a demographic characteristic rather than a personality trait. However, the traits have been taken into consideration when drawing the frames for Finnair's personality model.

Try hard

The findings showed that Gen Z described Finnair to be a *try hard* and *boring* which was recognised to be associated together as a theme. Similarly, to the previously discussed traits *older* and *millennial* the traits *try hard* and *boring* cannot be connected to Aaker's (1997) personality dimensions.

As stated in the explored literature Sweeney & Brandon (2006) argued that Aaker's (1997) model only includes traits that are perceived as positive rather than negative. The traits identified by Gen Z, *try hard* and *boring*, can be seen as traits with negative undertones and therefore cannot be connected to Aaker's (1997) personality dimensions. This can be due to the nature of Gen Z's perceptions implying that they see Finnair in a negative light as the descriptions of someone being boring or a try hard do not communicate about likableness. Therefore, this is something Aaker's (1997) framework is missing, negative traits to describe a brand. However, this sparks a conversation whether it will be beneficial for brands to acknowledge negative traits or not.

Further on, as the identified traits *try hard* and *boring* cannot be associated with any of the five personalities from Aaker's (1997) dimensions, it could be argued that a factor of *try hard* and a following trait of *boring* could be added to the framework. However, due to the negative nature of the new traits the whole framework might need a re-evaluation if traits of negative nature would be added. But it could be argued that including negative traits could accommodate for criticism and not only praising for the brand which would help understanding the perceptions of the brand.

Competence personality and the combination of traits

The data drawn from the interviews revealed that Gen Z mostly associates Finnair with the competence personality. However, other than the *technical* and *corporate* traits, that were associated with the brand, could not be recognised by Aaker's (1997) framework but the interviewees were able to show consistency in their answers for competence being the best personality match for Finnair. Through this small study, of only 25 participants, Gen Z's perception seems to suggest a prominent association of the competence personality as the most traits, from Aaker's (1997) framework, the interviewees identified through a random order of traits, happened to be under the competence personality. Additionally, like the findings show, 13 out of 25 interviewees felt that the most suitable combination of traits which forms into personality, was competence.

However, like recognised through investigating the literature, personality is fluid and there are levels that can be recognised outside the most matched personality. Meaning that the data of Gen Z's perceptions shows competence as the most prominent personality but there are associations of other personality traits that are under other personality dimensions from Aaker's (1997) framework. The findings show that these are the traits of *honest* and *family-oriented*, that are under the sincerity personality and are usually associated with companies that are down-to-earth and original, for instance, which create a sincere personality for a brand. Also, Gen Z associated Finnair with the trait *upper-class* that regarding to Aaker (1997) belongs under the sophistication personality together with traits such as successful, reliable and secure. Implying that even though Finnair was associated with the competence personality, there is a recognition of other traits away from this specific personality in addition to the traits identified outside the Aaker's (1997) framework.

6. Conclusion

The conclusion section of the paper will use the output of the analysis and answer the paper's two research questions. This section will relate to the research purpose and create the main take aways from the research.

Gen Z's engagement on TikTok with brand content was found to be fully on a lower level of social media engagement. The engagement in most of the cases was carried out due content being unpredictable in the participants' eyes. Similarly, the findings found that Gen Z engages with content depending on its visuals and whether they find it funny. Further on, Gen Z recognized that brand content is like the average user content but when the intention to sell is clearly communicated in the TikTok content, it is likely to get less engagement by them.

***RQ 1** – How does Generation Z perceive airlines' brand personality through TikTok content?*

Ryanair is perceived as a funny and social person, that uses humor for communication. At the social gatherings they would socialize with people they already know or expand their acquaintance network. Besides, they will use self-mockery to make other people laugh about their shortcomings. They are aware of their minuses, and they are embracing them. Additionally, Ryanair would be a young person with no stable job yet, but rather an intern position that is closely related to social media. Overall, they would use social media platforms to share details about their life.

Finnair is perceived as a serious person that is corporate inclined and is argued to be technical. Compared to Ryanair, Finnair is a formal individual with a stable corporate job. Finnair is seemed to be Millennial or overall "older" than participants or Ryanair. In addition, Finnair viewed as a boring person that is trying to keep up with trends and be funny but fails to do so.

RQ 2 – *What personality dimensions are associated with airlines' brand personality on TikTok?*

The findings displayed a pattern of traits under the excitement personality dimension in addition to the most, 13 out of 25, of the participants choosing the personality for Ryanair. In the same manner, Finnair was associated the most with the competence personality, by 13 out of 25 participants matching the personality dimension with the brand. Additionally, most of the traits that the participants associated with Finnair were under the competence personality.

7. Discussion

The final chapter of the paper includes insights of practical implications, limitations and authors suggestions for future research that will be discussed further.

7.1 Practical implications

Brand personality should be researched and identified for each brand based on their strategies and goals for how they want to be perceived. Building strong brand personality can help a brand to differentiate from their competitors and gain a bigger market share. Brand personality can alter brand's image and capture consumers' attention.

Brand personality is a crucial tool to design brand's social media content that would represent their personality traits. However, when it comes to TikTok, users do not want to see direct marketing on their "For You" page. For example, if a brand would like to be seen as technical, company can provide tutorials or insights of the industry. On the other hand, if company would like to be seen as cheerful, they can create content using trending memes, filters and sounds. This type of content seems like indirect marketing for Gen Z and does not feel "out of place" on users' feeds. This leads the content to reach the "For You" page of users with similar personality, due to TikTok's algorithm function. In result, brands' TikTok posts receive bigger engagement from users that potentially could be brands' target audience.

This paper can provide an understanding of how Gen Z perceive certain brands' personality based on brands' TikTok. The perception can be connected to the brands'

content and strategy on TikTok. If examined by another company, brand personality can be applied to that brand's social media strategy if it is a personality they want to establish. For example, participating in trends by using trending sounds can make a brand be perceived as young. This is usually controlled by brand managers who aspire to create a strong brand that influences target groups behavior in addition can help with differentiation.

7.2 Limitations

It has been recognised that the research comes with limitations. For instance, the study aimed to gather a general understanding of Gen Z's perceptions but included only 25 participants. However, the data did generate patterns and results that the authors were able to draw comparative conclusions from. Regarding the data drawn from the interviews, the authors trusted the answers of participants when they explained about ignoring content on TikTok, although they might have viewed or engaged in other ways with the content. However, this could have been hard for the participants to demonstrate so the authors decided to trust the answers although the issue was still recognised as a limitation. Moreover, in the beginning of the interview participants were introduced to the relation of airline industry within the study which was information that was later recognised to possibly influence the following questions about brands they have seen on TikTok. This was realized and the structure of the interview was changed in a way that the participants would get the questions mentioning Ryanair and Finnair after being asked generally about brands they have seen on TikTok. However, there still was a possibility of creating a connection to airlines when the purpose of the interview was explained to the participants in the beginning of the interviews.

7.3 Future research

Regarding future research authors would suggest gathering a bigger pool of participants to gain a larger number of perceptions to draw dominantly coherent conclusions from. Moreover, as the results from this study implement additions to the already existing personality framework by Aaker (1997), a new improved framework could be developed to accommodate Gen Z's perceptions better. Additionally, other social media channels could be explored to gain deeper understanding of the brands' personality. Further on, a similar study could examine other industries and brands outside of Europe.

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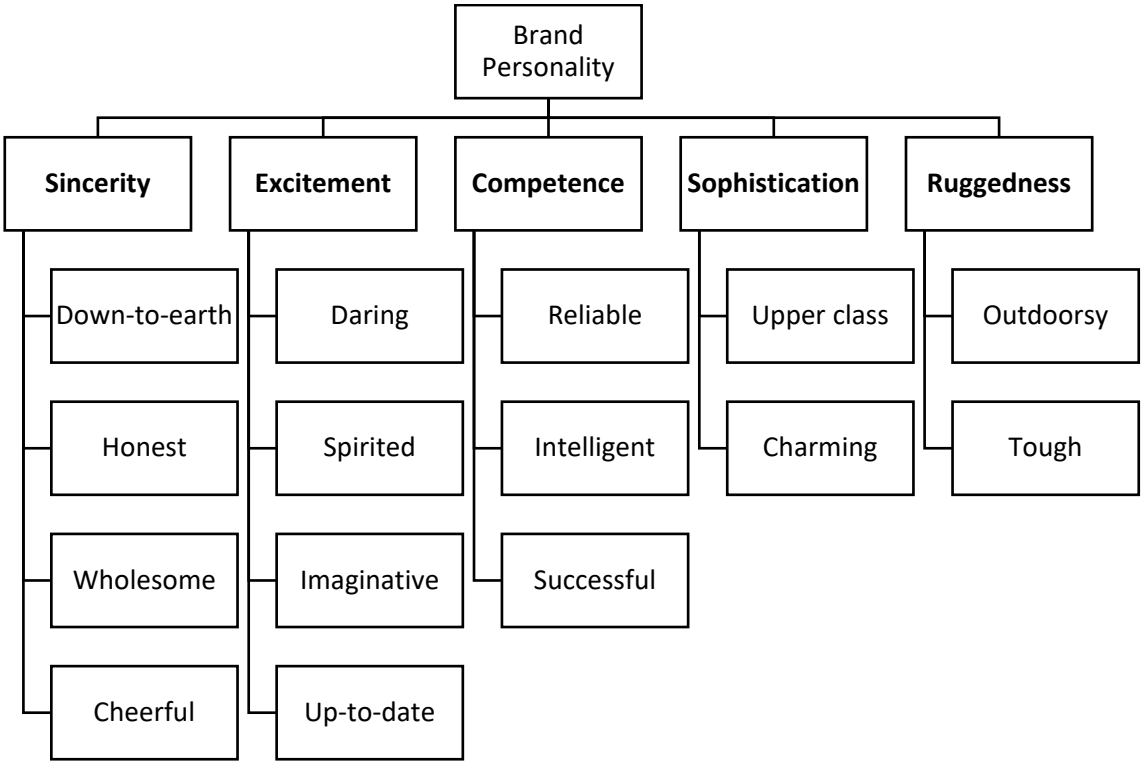
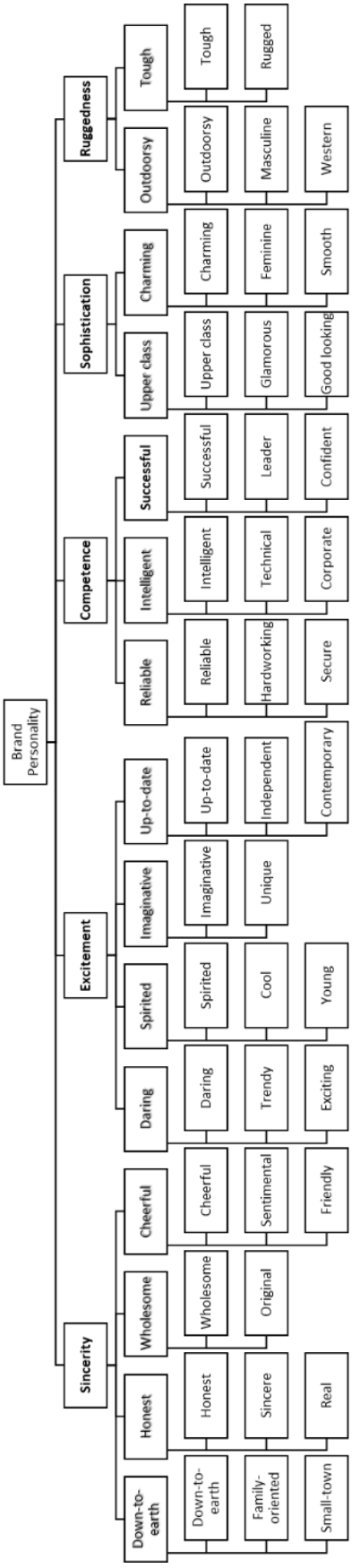
9. Appendix

Appendix A. Aaker's Brand Personality Framework facets (Aaker, 1997)



Appendix BB. Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality - Full Model



Appendix CC. Choice of airline companies

Identified Airline companies in Europe (n=19).
1. SAS
2. Iceland Air
3. Air Serbia
4. Air France
5. Croatia Airlines
6. Condor
7. Luxair
8. Ryanair
9. AirBaltic
10. WizzAir
11. Finnair
12. KLM
13. Virgin Atlantic
14. Lufthansa
15. Iberia
16. Aegean
17. Easy Jet
18. Jet2
19. Pegasus airlines
Airline companies with verified TikTok in English (n=9)
1. Ryanair
2. AirBaltic
3. Finnair
4. KLM
5. Virgin Atlantic
6. Lufthansa
7. Aegean
8. Easy Jet
9. Jet2
Airline companies with direct flights to Sweden (n=6)
1. Ryanair
2. AirBaltic
3. Finnair
4. KLM
5. Lufthansa
6. Easy Jet

Appendix DD. The list of TikTok videos from Ryanair and Finnair

No	Company	Type of video	Brief description	Views (in thousands)	Likes (in thousands)
1	Ryanair	Popular	"When you realise that no matter how much they complain, they will always fly with you"	15 700	1400
2	Ryanair	Popular	Using popular sound "sit back down" with Timothée Chalamet	13 100	2300
3	Ryanair	Random	"When you literally fly them to another country for 10EUR, but they still complain"	5 400	671,7
4	Ryanair	Random	"Did you book with Ryanair.com? I used Skyscanner… Okay bye…"	775,1	49,6
5	Finnair	Popular	Different classes on the plain with trending sound	4 400	497,8
6	Finnair	Popular	"Finnair kitchen is hiring"	2 200	11,8
7	Finnair	Random	"Biggest fan of blueberry juice"	934,9	90,9
8	Finnair	Random	"Finnair 100 special livery"	115,3	13,7

Data retrieved from TikTok.com on May 18, 2023.

Links for TikTok video were shorten using Free URL Shortener website (https://free-url-shortener.rb.gy/) to avoid long links for the videos. Link numbers are corresponding to the video numbers in the Table above.

1 https://rb.gy/9nw0e

2 https://rb.gy/9uxv1

3 https://rb.gy/ymgoh

4 https://rb.gy/4ve4r

5 https://rb.gy/flzsl

6 https://rb.gy/1174m

7 https://rb.gy/cn402

8 https://rb.gy/uw49l

Appendix EE. Interview process

Part 1:

Authors introduced themselves and the thesis topic. Permission to use the participants' data was collected as well as the consent to record to interview was permitted. The interview structure was explained simply.

1. What is your age and what year were you born?
2. Have you engaged with TikTok content within the last 12 months?

Engagement was explained to include liking, commenting, viewing, sharing, reposting or adding to "favorites". Additionally, the option to have ignored content was presented.

3. Have you seen brand content on TikTok?
4. If yes, what brands have you seen on TikTok?
5. Have you engaged with brand content? If yes, what content was it?
6. Have you flown with Ryanair within the last year?
7. Have you flown with Finnair within the last year?

Part 2:

8. Have you seen Ryanair's TikTok content?

Four TikTok videos from Ryanair's page were shown to the participant.

9. Based on these TikTok videos that you have seen, could you describe Ryanair as if they were a person?

If it was needed, the participants were asked to specifically describe personality traits and/or demographics as a clarification.

10. Have you seen Finnair's TikTok content?

Four TikTok videos from Finnair's page were shown to the participant.

11. Based on these TikTok videos that you have seen, could you describe Finnair as if they were a person?

Part 3:

The 42 traits from Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions were shown to the participant.

12. Could you connect 8-9 traits of the 42 traits to Ryanair's personality?
13. Could you connect 8-9 traits of the 42 traits to Finnair's personality?

The 42 traits were narrowed down to only include 14 factors.

14. Could you connect 3-4 traits to Ryanair's personality?
15. Could you connect 3-4 traits to Finnair's personality?

The hierarchy of traits was shown to the participant. The five personalities: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness, were explained to include combinations of the 42 traits and so create the personalities.

16. Could you choose the personality, a combination of traits, that you view as the best match for Ryanair?
17. Could you choose the personality, a combination of traits, that you view as the best match for Finnair?

FAppendix F

Figure F1. Brand Personality Dimensions

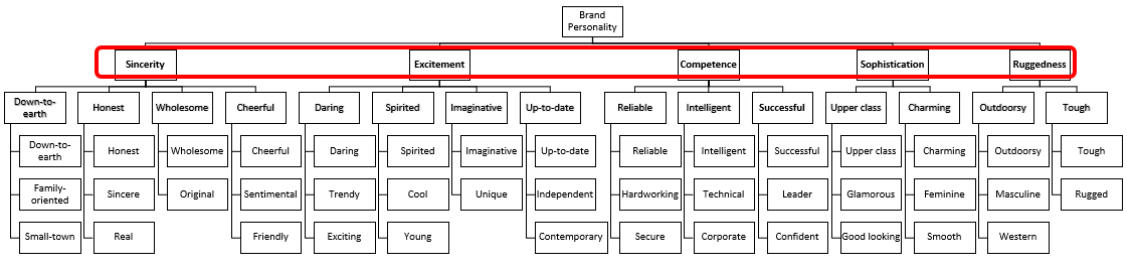


Figure F2. Brand Personality Factors

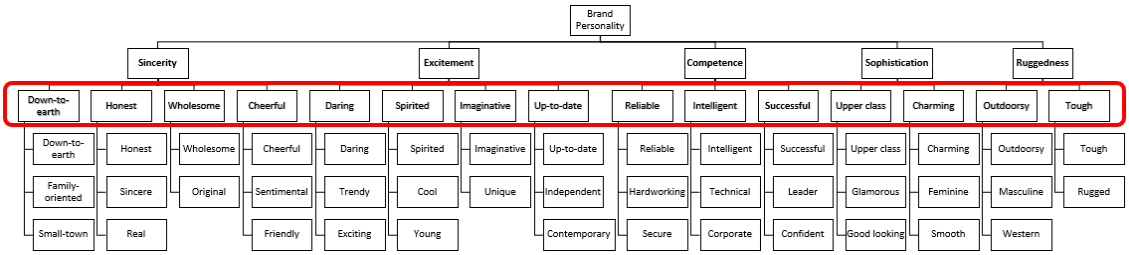
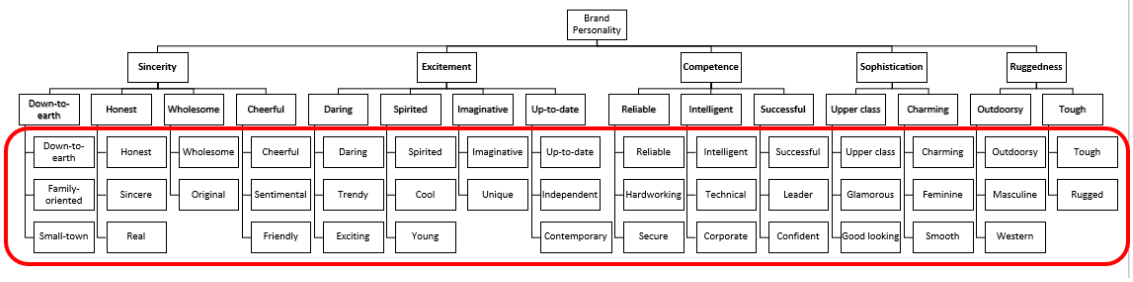



Figure F3. Brand Personality Traits