

USAGE OF TIKTOK BY LOW-COST AIRLINES IN COMMUNICATION WITH NEW GENERATION OF CLIENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine different approaches to TikTok of two low-cost Anglo-Saxon air carriers based on an analysis of their presence on the social media platform, TikTok. It seeks to the answer of the questions of how airlines are using the platform to reach new audiences, how low-cost airlines adapt their communication strategies to align with the unique characteristics and trends of TikTok and what factors contribute to the success or failure of TikTok content in capturing the attention and interest of the target audience. It assesses the effectiveness of Ryanair and EasyJet respective strategies in terms of engagement, reach and share of voice. The article also discusses the challenges and opportunities posed by TikTok for airlines and the travel industry in general.

Key words: TikTok, Ryanair, easyJet, Generation Z, airlines, social media

Introduction

TikTok is a social media platform where users can create and share short-form videos, often accompanied by music and other audio. It was created by a Chinese company called ByteDance which, in 2017 bought Musical.ly (Tran, 2017). As of July 2022, the platform had over a billion monthly active users over the world which made it the seventh-most popular social media platform in terms of users. It is a huge success because TikTok is one of the youngest social media applications (Kepios n.d.).

TikTok has gained a lot of attention from researchers as it has become an increasingly popular platform for content sharing. Studies have found that people are more likely to watch and engage with TikTok videos than they are with other social media platforms due to their highly personalized algorithm and addicting content format (Liang, 2023). It is said that TikTok's algorithm is one of the best in the industry – it requires the shortest period and examples to “learn” about the desired videos by the new use (Okraszewski, 2023). Another factor influencing users is the ease of use of video editing tools so that everyone can create entertaining content (Xing, Wu, Liu, n.d.). It accurately pushes content according to the preferences and needs of younger generations across the globe (Weimann, n.d.). Videos are often very short, trendy, funny and highly interactive which

makes them easier to digest (Mou, 2020).

Studies have also looked at the impact of interaction between users on the platform. A higher level of video interaction (comments, likes, and shares) increases the likelihood that the algorithm will promote a video to the trending area. Additionally, it was discovered that releasing videos at particular times enhances their potential for trending and growing in popularity (Klug, 2021).

One of the threats of TikTok is its competition, which can be both an opportunity to improve and a challenge to maintain the title of the leader in the industry. Before TikTok went viral there were no such things as Instagram reels, YouTube shorts or Facebook reels. Creators of other community platforms have noticed how quickly TikTok is gaining popularity so that is why they have decided on such a move. Instagram was even thinking of changing its formula to reels only and after the update, people were seeing short movies on their FYP (for you page – means, main page) but the idea was quickly rejected after protests of the users. TikTok is a platform that has gained a lot of attention from researchers due to its popularity and the way in which it encourages creative expression and meaningful interactions (McQuail, 1984).

According to Dr. M. Saravanakumar and Dr. T. Sugantha Lakshmi, social media is becoming widely used by almost every company to promote itself and the product. It is currently the most effective platform to earn recognition when used wisely. Social platforms can help in terms of raising brand awareness, increasing website visits, creating the identity and reputation of the brand and engaging with the audience (Aytan, 2021).

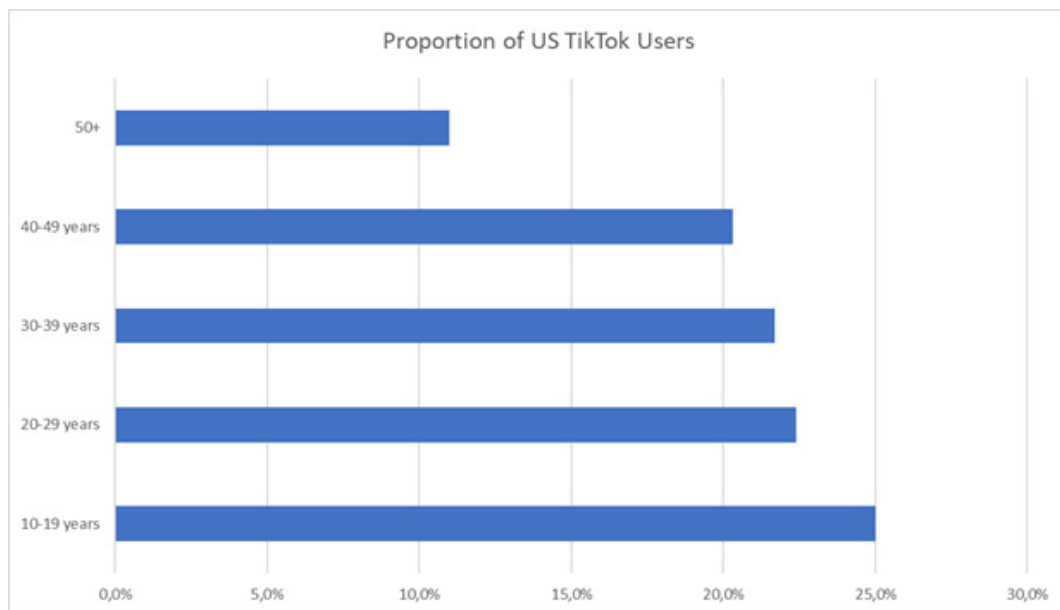


Figure 1 - Proportion of US TikTok users, Source: Howarth, 2023

Traditional models of consumer behavior are being altered by Web 2.0, particularly social media, by replacing some of the previous relationships and algorithms and by adding new variables (Pokul, Voronina, Malkova, n.d.). The last few decades changed marketing from product-centered to customer-centered which means that nowadays, a customer would like to be served individually and exclusively. As a result of that, the need for highly personalized products is rising (Peng, 2021). Profitability of a company is highly based on customers and the client base (Stanková 2022). Digital marketing can reach a wider range of users. Using AI, TikTok learns your preferences and interests and then shows you the content according to what you fancy (Xu, Xiaohui, Zhengwu, 2019). To enhance the accuracy of recommended videos, we can choose if we liked videos shown before, so the similar content is presented more or less on our “For you page”. TikTok

is quickly establishing itself as an essential component of the marketing mix, especially for those wishing to target the youngest wave of consumers. Research supports the necessity of successful integration of TikTok content into a brand's marketing strategy if seeking to target an audience consisting of members of Generation Z. These are the people who are entering adult life and starting to gain more and more purchasing power (Yang, Yuzhen, Yifang, 2019). As can be seen from the graph, more than 40% of TikTok users are between ages 10-29 and advertisements on the platform are mostly targeted at them. However, in recent years more users in the 40-50+ age group have joined the platform which indicates the need to implement the platform into the marketing strategies of most firms. According to studies, these short videos positively influence consumers' behavior by making them laugh, cry or learn something (Araujo, n.d.).

Nowadays, an extremely common way to advertise a product on TikTok is to make a video that goes "viral". This happens when a video spreads quickly and gains likes and shares. The most effective way to achieve it, is to record a TikTok which is trending at the moment, for example with a trending sound. That is what every company nowadays is trying to achieve.

Methodology

The purpose of this article was to check the differences in the TikTok of two low-cost Anglo-Saxon air carriers based on an analysis of their presence on this social media platform.

TikTok was selected for this research because it is currently one of the most popular marketing tools and platforms among the younger generation (known as Gen Z). One of their purchasing features is to travel as much as possible, while minimizing their costs, so it is a perfect place for the low-cost airline to advertise themselves in a way that appeals to their main target audience.

To examine the activeness and engagement of the airlines on TikTok, the empirical method and observation were conducted. Initially, primary quantitative data of every post was collected. It was then cross-referenced with qualitative data in order to obtain more accurate results. The process of collecting data took 1 month and the study was carried out in June, 2023. Sample consisted of 155 videos in case of Ryanair and 342 in case of EasyJet which were spread across 2 years, from December, 2020 to December, 2022. The researchers were checking and reviewing each post (so-called TikTok) on personal account of both airlines. This included quantitative data such as the number of followers, likes, comments, saved videos and shares for each airline in order to measure the audience's response to the content. This data was then compared between each other to get a better insight of the differences between their marketing strategies.

Next, the comparative analysis was carried out using data from the airlines' TikTok accounts from the dates they were created. (again by checking the TikTok accounts of airlines). Data was collected from both airlines' accounts and analyzed to determine their respective marketing strategies. What was also analyzed, is the type of content that each airline was producing and how it affected the TikTok account in terms of numbers (i.e. if the video was trending and generating high reaches).

Empirical and observation methods were used as the most accurate and precise to check the research question. In researchers option those methods were accurate, since there is no other available and free of charge tool to check the responses and engagement of the TikTok users. Additionally, number of views, likes and comments is a real reflection whether post on social media is "trending" or not. Further investigation into these phenomena and the hypotheses developed by this study can be facilitated through exploratory research in this field.

Data Analysis Ryanair

Ryanair is an ultra-low-cost airline from Ireland. It was founded in 1985 as one of the first European airlines with a low-cost business model. Currently Ryanair operates to 36 countries (mostly in Europe, but also in Africa, Asia and Middle East), 231 destinations on 2453 routes. In last pre-covid year, namely 2019, there were over 148 million of Ryanair's passengers (Ch-aviation, 2023).

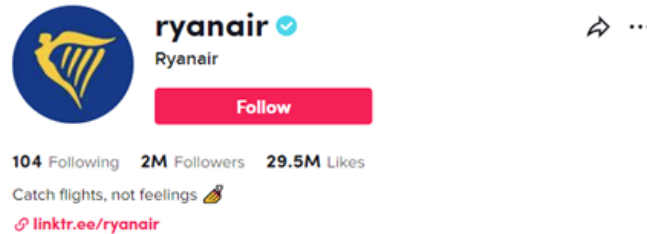


Figure 2 - Ryanair's TikTok profile, Source: Ryanair's TikTok profile.

The business model of Ryanair is a typical example of ultra-low-cost. In the basic fare the airline provides no-thrills service, such as lack of free seat allocation, checked luggage, even no standard size cabin luggage. The whole philosophy of the airline is to avoid as many costs as possible not only on on-board services, but also on the operational and sales side. Consequently, Ryanair's fleet consists of Boeings 737 only, 293 in total. Fleet familiarization gives great financial advantage in terms of crew training and maintenance savings. Whole official sales are provided only by the airline's website.

Similar approach was set in terms of marketing and advertising. Most of such activity can be found on its website and social media. Again, thanks to this solution, Ryanair does not spend resources on advertisement on foreign platforms, can target advertising to specific types of receiver and controls fully the information about the audience type. Consequently, in order to promote its services and fulfill the marketing contracts with airports, cities or regions, Ryanair needs to be very active on its social media by adding new content and increasing the number of its followers.

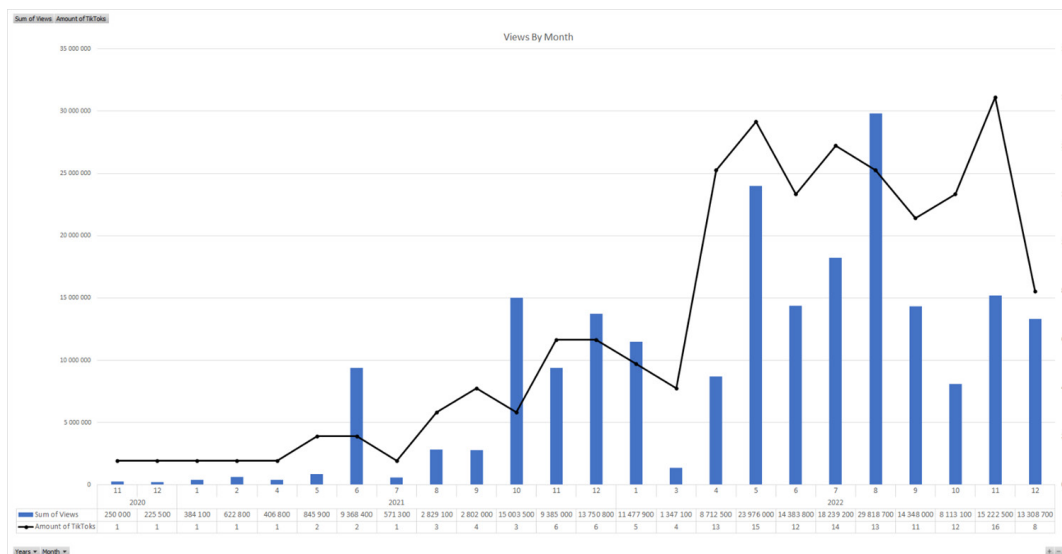


Figure 3 - Ryanair's views of TikToks by month, Source: own research based on Ryanair's TikTok profile

Ryanair's first TikTok was posted on 16th of November 2020 which was the year during which the pandemic started to spread globally. People were locked in their hous-

es, as a result they spent more time online. According to studies performed by MIT, the trend of increased usage of social media is forecasted to continue even post COVID-19 (Mou, 2020). Ryanair was seeking an opportunity to advertise itself and attract new customers, so that they could return to traveling after the COVID-19 restrictions were abolished. From the graph it can be observed that the start was rather harsh, for the first 3 months after the TikTok account of the airline was launched, it was not generating many views, the average of these months was around 300.000. It was because at the beginning the airline was posting only one short video a month and then the number was increasing which led to higher number of views. In June, their first viral TikTok was released, with the sound which was popular at that time. They started a trend where the person responsible for running the account was using a filter where the lips and the eyes were displayed on the photo of their aircraft.

Thanks to the fact that people liked it, most of their videos are kept in a very similar style. Ryanair is using controversy to gain views and popularity. In their videos they are not afraid of being controversial.

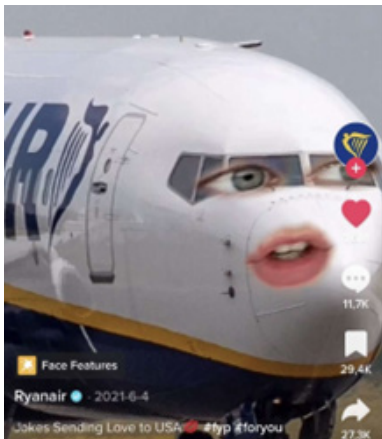


Figure 5 - Ryanair's "eye trend" example 1 on TikTok profile, Source: own research based on Ryanair's TikTok profile

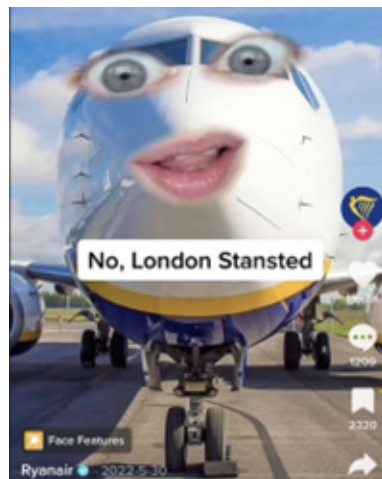


Figure 6 - Ryanair's "eye trend" example 2 on TikTok profile, Source: own research based on Ryanair's TikTok profile

They are using sounds that contain explicit words, swearing and disapproving of their competition and many destinations that are not in Europe. For example, they made a video in which they swear that they would never fly to the USA (especially to Nebraska). They are also using celebrities popular among the Generation Z, which is their main target audience. Marketers nowadays use content marketing which is more focused on consumers' interests rather than selling the product (Holliman, Rowley, 2014). Ryanair's strategy is to nurture a new generation for themselves so they can maintain their profits high. The airline is focused on transporting passengers around Europe at the lowest possible cost. It is not the most comfortable, but it is cheap which attracts young people, often without a source of income, who can thus travel cheaply.

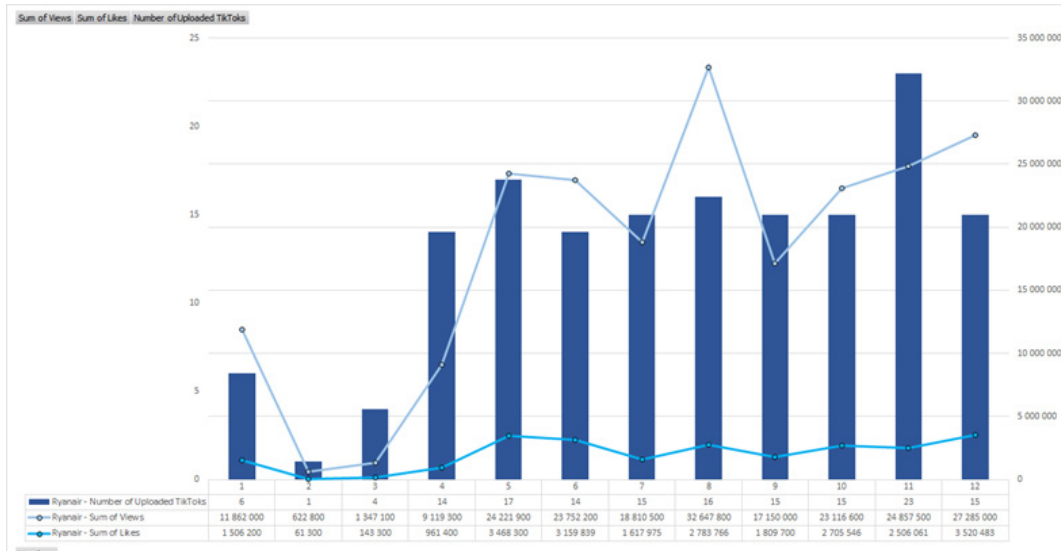


Figure 7 – Ryanair’s Like View Ratio Considering number of uploaded TikToks from 3 years, Source: own research based on Ryanair’s TikTok profile

The graph is presenting the number of TikToks Ryanair was uploading each month from all 3 years summed, it can be noted that after March they were uploading a constant number of videos. From April to June their views grew from around 9.000.000 to 24.000.000. It was also the time they generated the biggest number of likes, in May the number exceeded 3.500.000 threshold. Looking at the following months enables to observe that Ryanair has rebounded and generated higher numbers than before, August seems to be the best month for them in case of views generating almost 33.000.000, while May, June and December are the best months for them in case of likes with an average of 3.400.000. Looking at the statistics presented, we see that the Ryanair’s base of followers may be growing as they are generating more views and likes with an upward trend.

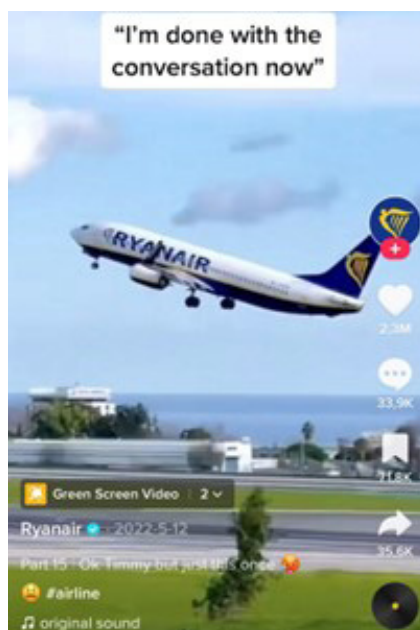


Figure 8 - Timothee Chalamet trend print screen, Source: own research based on Ryanair’s TikTok profile

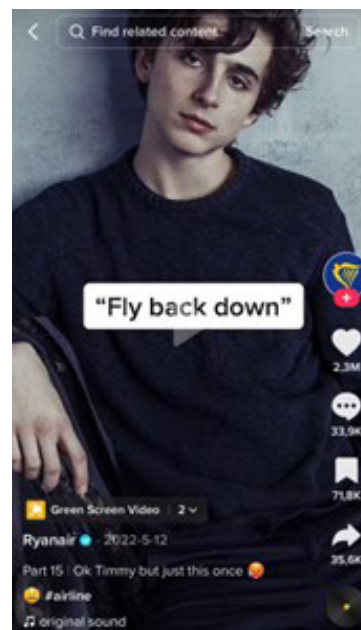


Figure 9 - Timothee Chalamet trend print screen 2, Source: own research based on Ryanair’s TikTok profile

Ryanair's strategy is quite straightforward – they are looking for the things or people that are currently trending and they are implementing them into their TikToks. For example, in May, actor Timothee Chalamet was trending because of the recent roles in movies he played. He was all over the TikTok and users were aroused by how handsome he is. Ryanair used his image to create a TikTok in their own style with a bit of their specific sense of humor. As it can be observed, just one video itself generated almost 2.500.000 of likes, 35.000 of shares, 34.000 comments and people saved the video 70.000 times. It is controversial and has made quite a stir around it, as the star's image was used in an objectifying way, and most importantly, was added by one of Europe's major airlines, which may have surprised some people.

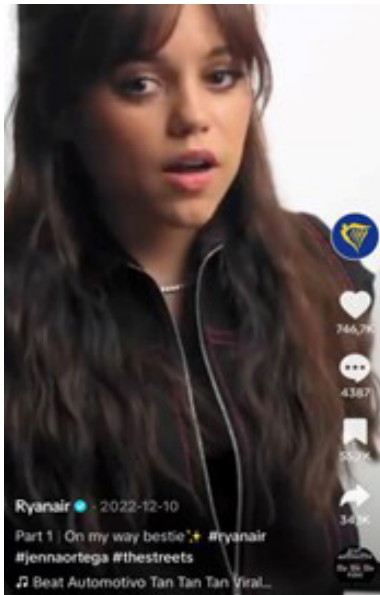


Figure 10 – Example 1 of Jenna Ortega trend, Source: own research based on Ryanair's TikTok profile

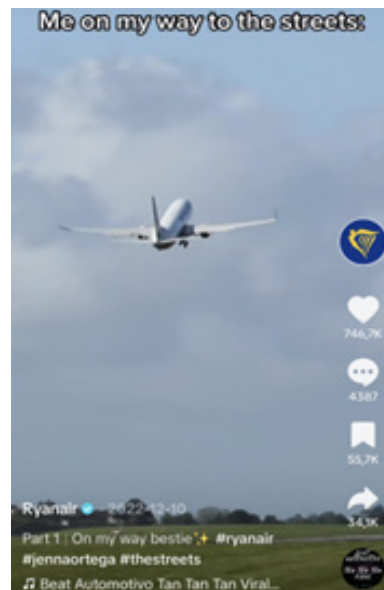


Figure 10 – Example 2 of Jenna Ortega trend, Source: own research based on Ryanair's TikTok profile

Another example of the use of a celebrity image by Ryanair is Jenna Ortega, who was popular after the role she played in the TV series - Wednesday. There was a lot of buzz around her in November and December, and a lot of people raved about her role and personality, which quickly contributed to new trends featuring her. This one TikTok alone generated 5.500.000 views and 750.000 likes.

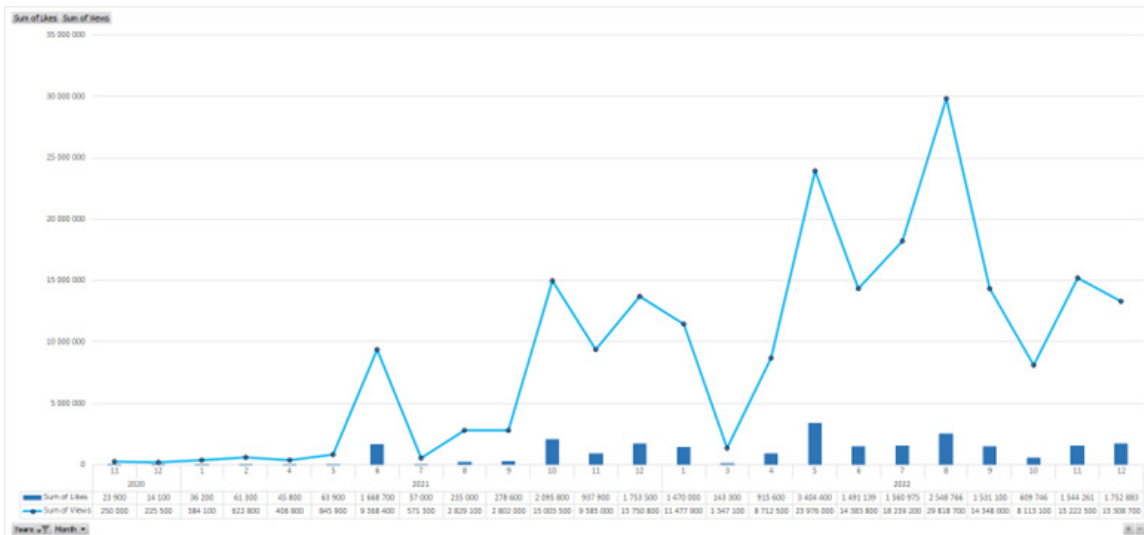


Figure 11 - Ryanair’s likes and views for each year of TikToks, Source: own research based on Ryanair’s TikTok profile

This graph represents Ryanair’s activity from when they first started their operations on TikTok platform, likes and views are shown separately taking into consideration each year individually. The number of views exceeds the amount of likes but nonetheless, the numbers they are generating each year are high. The average number of likes in 2021 is around 650.000 and views are around 5.000.000, while in 2022 the average of likes is above 1.500.000 and views around 14.500.000. It might be observed that Ryanair is expanding and due to its wider recognition around the platform their statistics are more constant. As well as from this graph and the previous ones which were analyzed, it can be seen that there is an upward trend in case of numbers, with just one month at the beginning of 2022 where the views and likes plunged. However, the like view ratio is higher in 2021 with it being at a level of 13% (taking into account average number of views and likes), and in 2022 it is at a level of 11%.

In December 2022, there was a trending word, to be precise the word “slay” (Urban Dictionary, 2023), which simply means to succeed in something amazing. Ryanair was using this word and its hashtag on their most popular video from this month. In this TikTok, Ryanair not only uses youthful words but also features curse words, and the TikTok itself can be perceived as quite controversial because the airline criticizes itself in it. In the video the airline lists things it lacks and when asked what it has to offer they show their airplane.

In October 2022 there was a trending song by a well-known rapper Lil Yachty called “I took a Wock to Poland” (Urban Dictionary, 2023). It was a sound that was used by a lot of people back then and everyone on the platform including Ryanair was focused on Poland and this song.

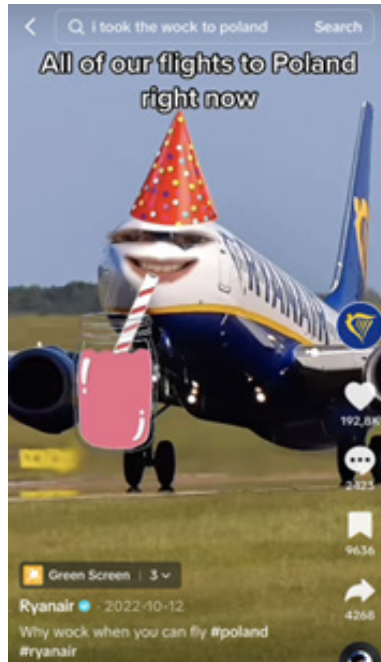


Figure 13 - "I took a wock to Poland" trend Source: own research based on Ryanair's TikTok profile

They used words "why wock when you can fly" but their TikTok shows a plane drinking the title Wock which from the slang means "a type of cough syrup containing Promethazine and Codeine which is used for its sedative effects" (Urban Dictionary, 2023). It generated around 200.000 likes, this amount could be smaller because of the certain target group, which were Poles, however it is still a good result.

From this particular example, it can be observed that Ryanair is using a lot of slang in their videos that not all of the people know, it is used among generation Z who spend most of their time on TikTok. Assumption that the majority of likes and views where slang is used, are generated by younger people that understand the language the airline is using, can be made. That might be the reason why in December the amount of likes was smaller than for example in May or August.

August which was the month in which Ryanair had 5 viral TikToks in terms of views and one that exceeded 1 million threshold we can tell that not only slang helps them to gain good statistics. As already mentioned before, Ryanair's is controversial and they are not afraid of showing their weaknesses, instead they just make fun of them and it makes people laugh.

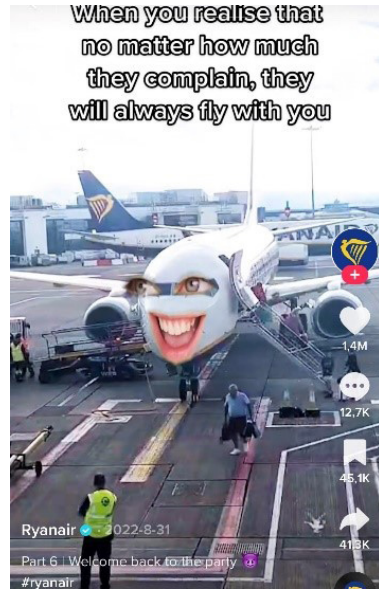


Figure 14 - Ryanair's most viral TikTok from August 2023, Source: own research based on Ryanair's TikTok profile

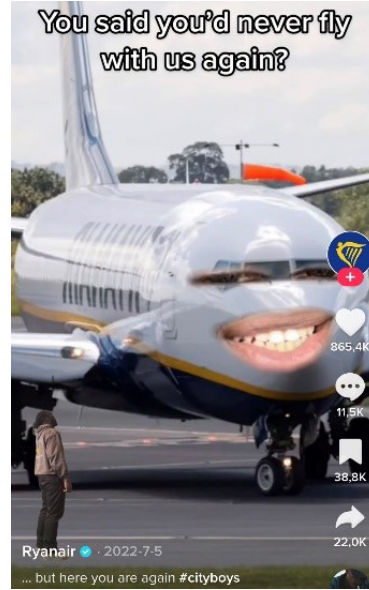


Figure 15- Ryanair's TikTok, flying trend Source: own research based on Ryanair's TikTok profile

As can be seen on the attached screenshots, Ryanair knows that people complain about them and that they say they will never fly with them again, however, as they themselves comment “ you said you would never fly with us again...but there you are again” or “when you realize that no matter how much they complain, they will always fly with you” and what they answer is “Welcome back to the party” with the usage of the devils emote which translates to being “sassy” (Urban Dictionary, 2023). It can be assumed that either the content is easy for everyone to understand and people like it, or that it has some hidden subtext that a particular audience will understand. Looking back at the previous screens of TikToks, it is shown that even though Ryanair targets different audience, their content is sometimes suitable for every age group.

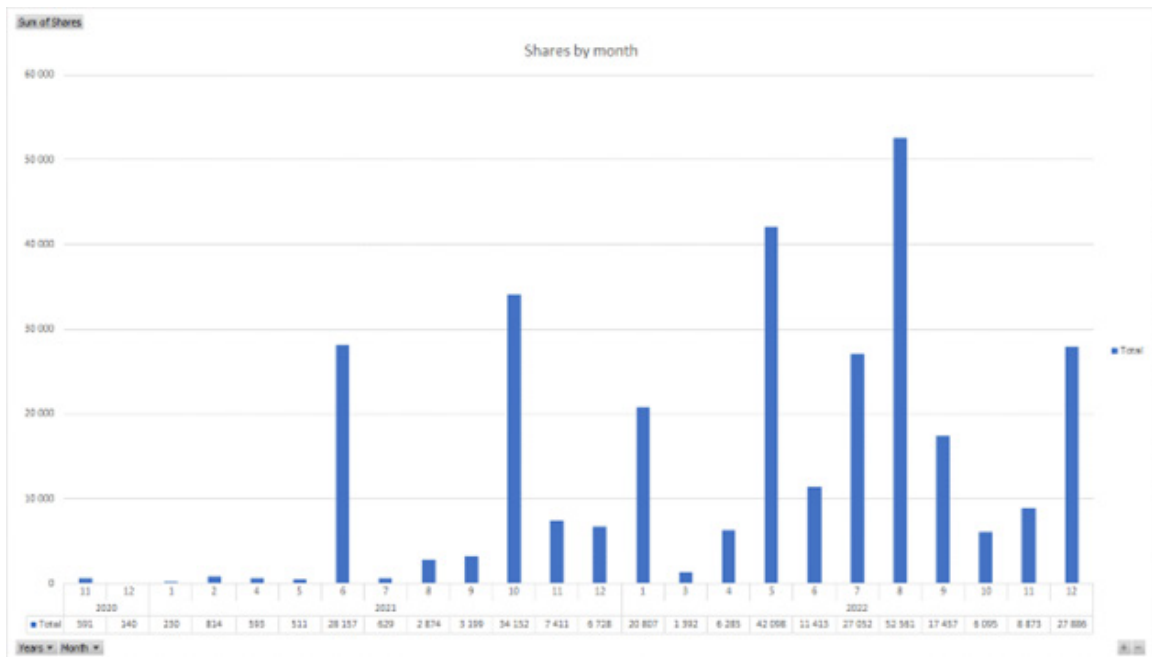


Figure 16 - Ryanair's Number of TikToks shares, Source: own research based on Ryanair's TikTok profile

This graph shows that in terms of the number of shares, Ryanair was doing well in most situations. For example, in the first months of their operations, when they were not yet known so well and they were building a base of their followers, shares were pretty low, then in June 2021 the number of shares skyrocketed, and it is connected with the amount of likes analyzed on the previous graphs. All statistics are strictly connected with each other and the higher the number of likes and views and the better the content is, more shares will probably occur. Their one of the best TikToks generated in May 2022, 13.000.000 views, 2.300.000 likes and almost 36.000 shares, while their most viral TikTok generated in August 2022 almost 16.000.000 views 1.500.000 likes and almost 41.500 shares which is 4/5 of their whole shares.

Data Analysis EasyJet

EasyJet is a low-cost airline from the United Kingdom. It was founded in 1995. Currently easyJet operates to 32 countries (mostly in Europe, but also in Africa, Asia and Middle East), 132 destinations on 453 routes. In last pre-covid year, namely 2019, there were over 96.000.000 EasyJet's passengers (Ch-aviation, 2023).



Figure 17 - EasyJet's TikTok profile, Source: easyJet's TikTok profile

The business model of easyJet has similarities and differences in reference to Ryanair. In the basic fare the airline also provides no-thrills service, such as lack of free seat allocation, checked luggage, even no standard size cabin luggage. Despite the fact that easyJet currently concentrates on the fleet of Airbus's A320 family, it is also an example of fleet familiarization. One of the main differences is that easyJet schedules many operations to main airports in Europe such as Amsterdam Schiphol or Paris Charles de Gaulle. Additionally, it has implemented the transfer solution for the passengers called Worldwide by easyJet (easyJet, 2023). Those reasons made the statement of the author of this article, that easyJet is a low-cost airline (or maybe even a hybrid one), rather than ultra-low-costs.

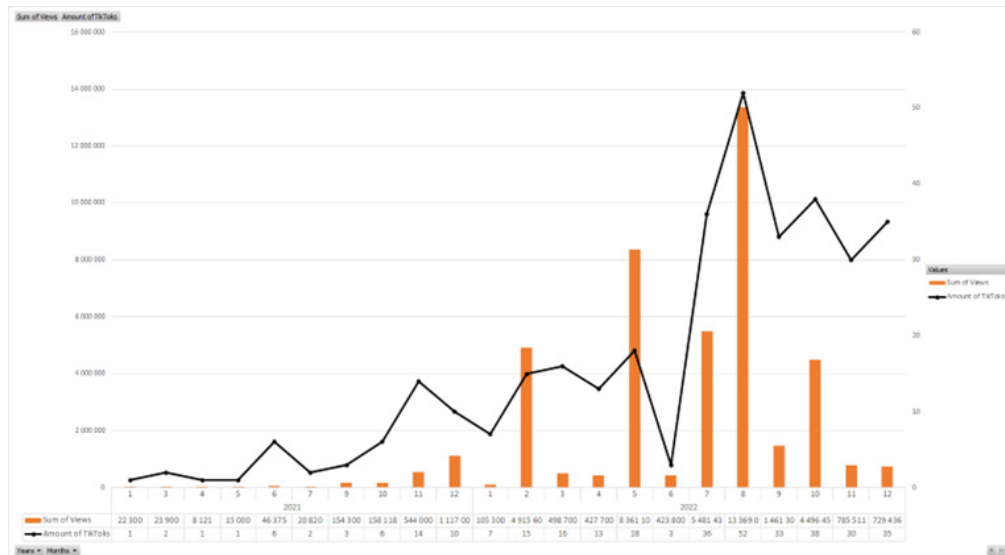


Figure 18 - EasyJet's TikToks views by month, Source: own research based on easyJet's TikTok profile

As well as Ryanair, easyJet uses its own marketing platforms. However, since easyJet might target different types of passengers, due to its network to main European airports, its activity and content on social media should be different and adjusted to its passengers' expectations and taste.

EasyJet's first TikTok was posted on 14th of January 2021, just 2 months after Ryanair. It was during the same year when the COVID-19 pandemic was already spreading globally. Hypothetically, they have seen that Ryanair already made a TikTok account and noticed that it is generating many views and decided to also incorporate TikTok into their marketing strategy.

It was the right decision, considering the fact that TikTok is the biggest app right now and it was the fastest developing app at the time. For the first 5 months of their operations, they were only uploading one short video a month, and as we can observe from the graph the sum of views was pretty low comparing it to Ryanair. It was not that bad considering they were new in the app, but Ryanair did noticeably better. Furthermore, EasyJet is almost 10 times smaller than Ryanair in terms of the number of followers.

The views were overall rather low taking into account the amount of videos EasyJet was producing. What is also worth mentioning, is the fact that in August 2022, Ryanair posted only 16 TikToks and generated almost 30.000.000 views, while EasyJet posted 52 TikToks and generated around 13.000.000 views. Only by posting a higher number of videos, EasyJet was able to compete with Ryanair in terms of views.

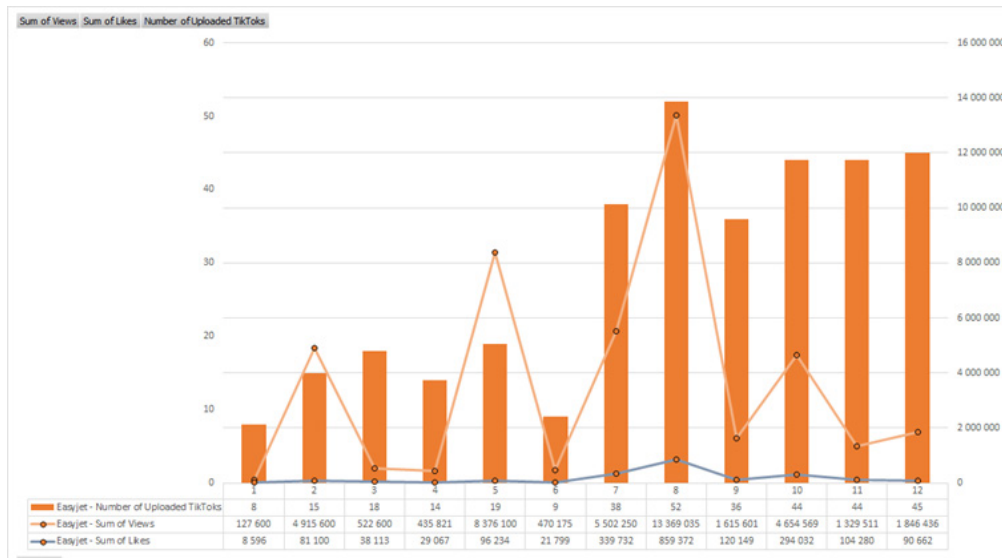


Figure 19 – easyJet’s Like View Ratio Considering number of uploaded TikToks from 3 years, Source: own research based on easyJet’s TikTok profile

The graph shows that EasyJet in the first months of their operations was trying to keep the numbers of videos at a low level but then they changed their strategy, and the average of posted videos in the year 2022 was 25, while Ryanair’s average in the same year was only 10. The number of likes per month in most cases did not exceed the 100 000 threshold.

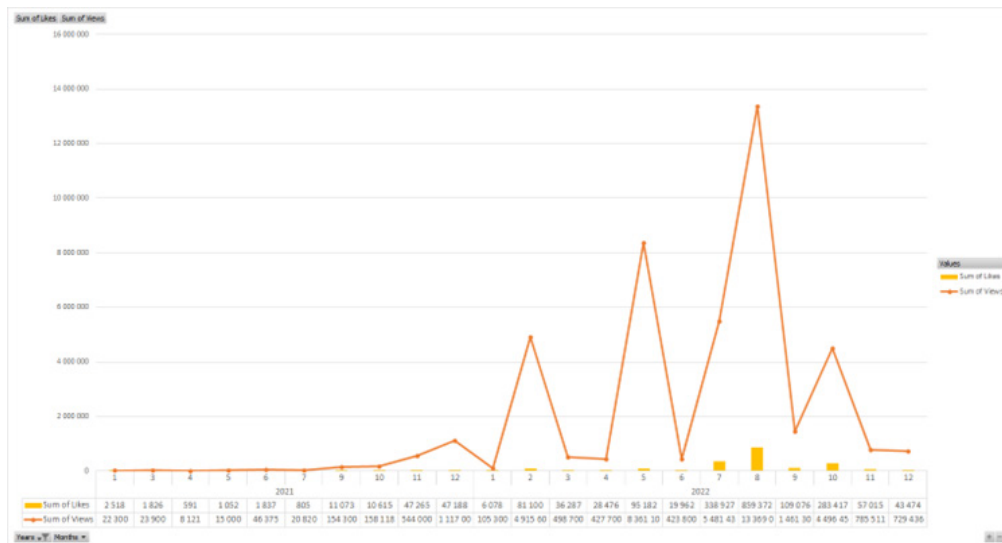


Figure 20 - EasyJet’s likes and views for each year, Source: own research based on easyJet’s TikTok profile

Graph presented above tells us that even though EasyJet was generating huge amounts of views, numbers of likes it proves that people did not enjoy their content or it did not reach the proper audience. For example, in August 2022 they had around 900.000 likes, they also posted 52 TikToks this month and they generated above 13 million views but their average like-views ratio from this month was 7%. After detailed analysis of the data and TikToks, conclusion that EasyJet is in fact missing their target audience, was made. Furthermore, their problem in comparison to Ryanair is lack of “fixed content”.

Ryanair is known from their trend with the eyes and it is generating the biggest amount of numbers, while EasyJet is struggling in terms of consistency, they are posting

many different things, without anything that stands out.

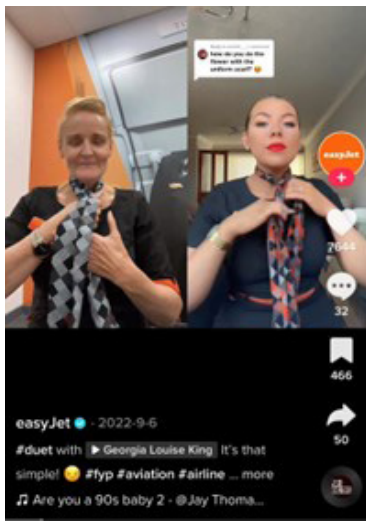


Figure 21 - Easyjet's Q&A video, Source: own research based on easyJet's TikTok profile

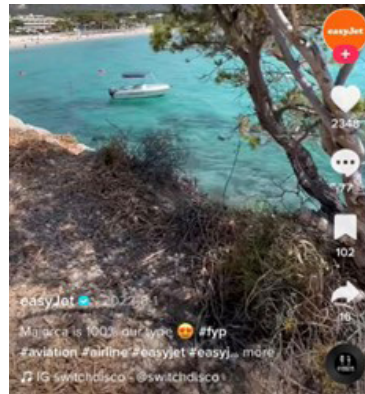


Figure 22 - Easyjet's Majorca destination, Source: own research based on easyJet's TikTok profile

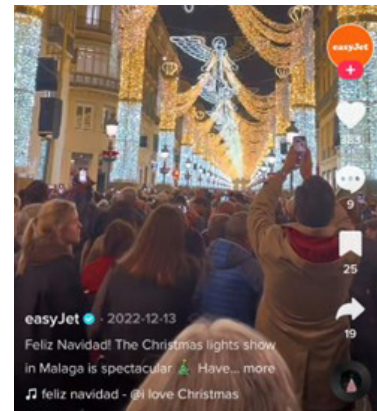


Figure 23 - Easyjet's Malaga destination, Source: own research based on easyJet's TikTok profile

EasyJet posts a lot of Q&A videos which are very informative, but they do not evoke emotions, the videos seem too long and may not interest everyone. What is also posted, is showing their destinations to encourage people to travel with the airline, but this type of videos is not as popular. This content could generate high views and likes but, on another platform, such as Facebook or even Instagram. The style and length would be more suitable for a different type of recipient which is spending less time on TikTok.

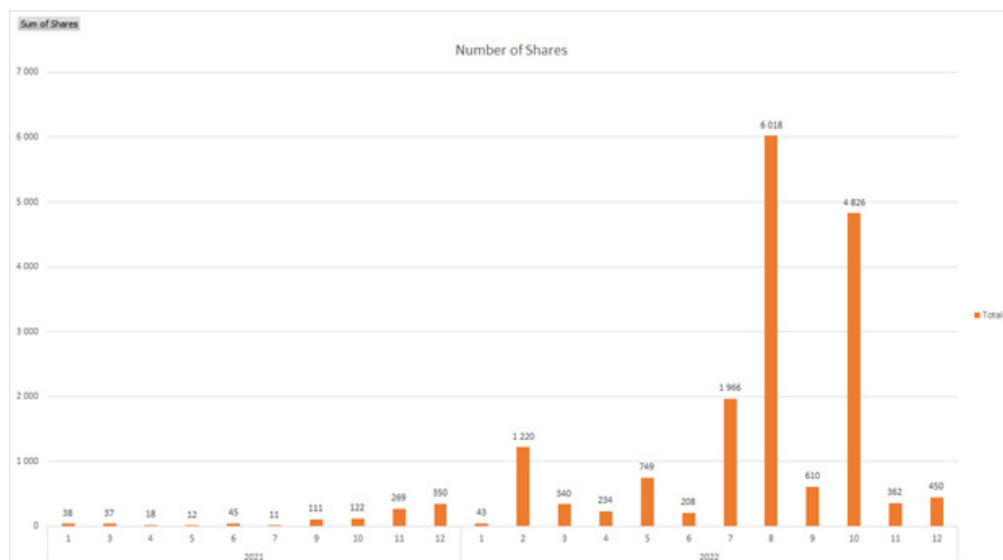


Figure 24 - EasyJet's Tiktoks number of shares, Source: own research based on easyJet's TikTok profile

Shares determine whether people like something, or something is funny for them and if it is they want to share it with their friends, in case of EasyJet the numbers of shares are usually low, the audience that they reach is not that interested in sharing their content or they just do not find it entertaining.

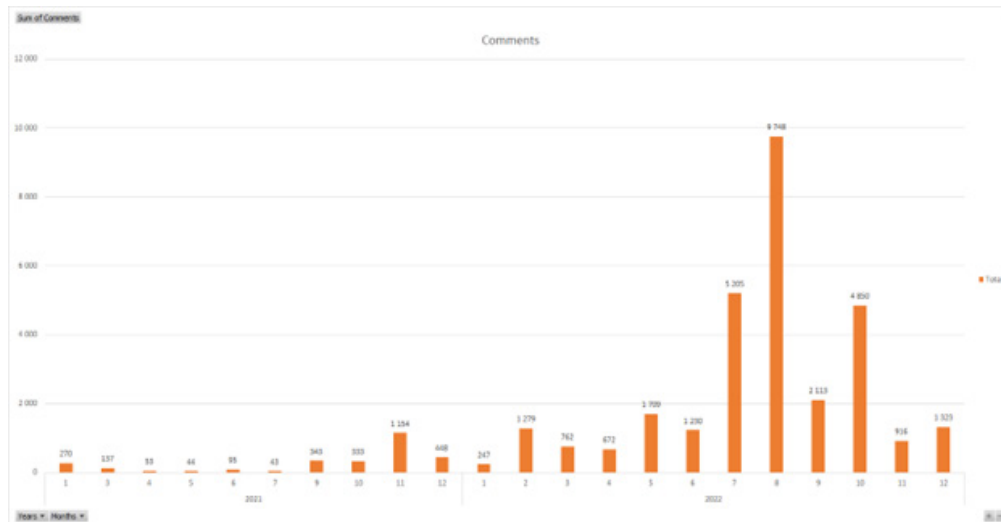


Figure 25 - EasyJet's TikToks number of Comments, Source: own research based on easyJet's TikTok profile

Number of comments is also pretty low, it may not only be due to the fact that EasyJet reaches are lower than Ryanair's, but most of their TikToks are difficult to comment. People nowadays tend to like something that follows the trends and if the topic is not engaging enough for them, they will simply resist commenting it or discussing the topic.

Conclusions

After analyzing all the data gathered, it can be concluded that both airlines use TikTok as a bridge between them and their customers, but they their content is targeting different age (generation) group. Additionally, EasyJet does not follow most of the trends, the videos are sometimes out of context and they are trying to sort of copy Ryanair but in an inefficient way. At the same time Ryanair is closely following the trends and even sometimes start them.

Almost every TikTok of Ryanair can be recognizable as a successful. They are able to reach their main audience (Gen Z) due to their controversial content filled with British humor and slang. As can be seen from the way that TikToks are posted, they first analyze what is currently trending and think of what can make people laugh or sometimes be annoyed with. The goal is to evoke emotions so that the audience will engage with videos through likes, shares and comments. If something it is controversial and not socially acceptable, it causes people to talk about it or formulate opinions. As a result, users recognize this brand and are more likely to choose it from others in the future. By matching up to Generation Z humor, it creates an image of being "modern".

EasyJet's videos are mostly very enlightening, aesthetic and polite. However, it is not something that will stand out on the platform, which is full of different, sometimes extreme emotions. With the target market that EasyJet aims at, it will be difficult to achieve recognition on TikTok app. This type of content would be more appropriate for example to Facebook.

Both of these airlines specialize in some type of content even though they aim at different groups. EasyJet has tried implementing trends into their content but it did not generate many views so that is why they decided to stick to their usual content. Many of their passengers would consider it unacceptable or even weird if they used words such as "slay", "wock".

It was discovered that Ryanair was more successful in terms of engagement with their followers and producing creative content, while EasyJet was rather focused on making as many videos as possible that were more informational and ill-considered in

our opinion. Data collected also suggests that EasyJet targets different passengers than Ryanair. U2 is focused more on upper leisure and business passengers while Ryanair is already building relationships with members of Generation Z whose purchasing power is increasing rapidly. As many of them are still in school or studying, they are more likely to cut costs as much as possible which makes them the perfect audience for Ryanair.

To put it briefly, we believe that both airlines have huge potential, but on different markets and platforms. Even though EasyJet is not as successful on TikTok, it is still a leader on the European market with a well-established reputation.

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