

From Global Brand to Digital Culture Actor: A Social Media Communication Strategy for IKEA

Context

Over the past decade, social media platforms have evolved from communication tools into complex cultural environments where identities, values, and consumption practices are negotiated. Brands are no longer evaluated solely on product quality or price, but increasingly on their ability to participate meaningfully in digital culture. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram function as social ecosystems in which users, particularly Gen Z, interact, co-create, and shape cultural trends.

Gen Z audiences demonstrate high sensitivity to authenticity, transparency, and participatory communication. They tend to reject purely corporate or overly polished brand messaging and instead favour brands that engage in dialogue, humour, user-generated content, and platform-native storytelling (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). As digital natives, Gen Z consumers expect brands to adapt to the cultural logic of each platform rather than replicate uniform promotional content across channels.

IKEA is a globally recognised brand built on the philosophy of democratic design, accessibility, and sustainability. While IKEA has successfully developed a coherent global identity and strong physical retail experience, its social media communication remains uneven. Although present on major platforms, its content often appears informational and corporate in tone, with limited participatory dynamics and weak platform differentiation—particularly on TikTok and YouTube.

In a highly competitive digital environment, where brands compete for cultural relevance rather than mere visibility, this situation raises important questions about IKEA's ability to function as a digital culture actor rather than simply a corporate communicator.

Significance

Academic research highlights the strategic importance of authenticity and engagement in digital brand communication. According to Khamis, Ang, and Welling (2017), social media environments require brands to adopt participatory and relational approaches instead of traditional one-way communication models. Similarly, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) emphasise the concept of value co-creation, arguing that consumers increasingly expect to interact with brands as active participants rather than passive receivers.

Recent studies on Gen Z further confirm that younger audiences respond positively to brands that demonstrate cultural awareness, transparency, and interactive storytelling (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Moreover, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) underline that social media platforms differ significantly in format, user expectations, and communicative norms, requiring platform-specific strategic planning.

Despite extensive literature on digital engagement and participatory communication, there remains a practical gap between theoretical recommendations and the social media strategies of established global brands. Many corporations maintain strong brand identities but struggle to translate them into culturally embedded, platform-native communication practices.

This project addresses this gap by applying academic insights from communication management and digital branding to the development of a practical, integrated social media strategy for IKEA.

Description of the Problem

Despite IKEA's strong global brand identity and widespread recognition, its current social media presence lacks a cohesive, platform-specific, and Gen Z-oriented communication strategy. The brand's activity on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube appears fragmented and predominantly corporate in tone, limiting opportunities for engagement, participation, and cultural relevance.

Rather than operating as an active participant in digital culture, IKEA's communication largely reflects a traditional corporate model adapted to social platforms. This disconnect restricts the brand's ability to build meaningful relationships with Gen Z audiences, who increasingly expect co-creation, humour, dialogue, and community-driven narratives.

Without a clearly defined and integrated social media strategy, IKEA risks losing digital relevance in a competitive environment where other brands more effectively occupy cultural space and attention within social platforms.

This situation calls for the development of a structured and strategically grounded communication product capable of repositioning IKEA as a digital culture actor.

Purpose and Objectives

Purpose

The purpose of this Applied Project is to develop an integrated social media communication strategy for IKEA that strengthens its digital identity and repositions the brand as an active participant in digital culture, particularly among Gen Z audiences.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this project are:

- To analyse IKEA's current social media presence and identify strategic inconsistencies
- To examine Gen Z communication expectations and platform behaviours
- To define the strategic role of TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram within IKEA's social media ecosystem
- To develop a coherent content system aligned with IKEA's brand philosophy and digital culture dynamics
- To establish measurable KPIs for evaluating engagement and strategic effectiveness

Type of Intended Final Project

This project is conceived as an Applied Project within the field of Communication Management. The final outcome will consist of a professionally grounded communication product in the form of an integrated social media strategy,

including strategic framework, content pillars, platform differentiation, and evaluation metrics.

Possible Mentors

Two potential mentors from the MACCOMM faculty are:

- Alberto Lempira Guevara (first priority)
- Bertran Salvador-Mata (second priority)

References

- Djafarova, E., & Bowes, T. (2021). 'Instagram made me buy it': Generation Z impulse purchases in fashion industry. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 59.
- Francis, T., & Hoefel, F. (2018). *True Gen: Generation Z and its implications for companies*. McKinsey & Company.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.
- Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191–208.
- Prahalad, C. K., & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5–14.