



Humanizing communication on Instagram: Content analysis of a B2B pharmaceutical company

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The digitalization of corporate communication and the emergence of communication channels

such as social media pose increasing challenges to Business-to-Business companies, particularly in the pharmaceutical sector. In this specific sector, factors such as trust and proximity are essential for consumer satisfaction and loyalty. On social media, Instagram stands out as a strategic platform for adopting humanization strategies, and mitigate digital impersonality.

Objectives: This study analyzes the application of humanization techniques by a Business-to-Business pharmaceutical company on Instagram, identifying the frequency and nature of these techniques, their relationship with content formats, and their impact on performance indicators.

Methodology: A content analysis of feed posts on the Instagram account of a Business-to-Business pharmaceutical company was conducted during March 2025. Ten humanization techniques identified in the literature were coded and analyzed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, with digital metrics recorded.

Results: The analyzed company applies humanization techniques in a fragmented manner, predominantly using emojis and storytelling, with limited bidirectional interaction. A direct relationship was observed between the number of techniques applied and the performance of the posts. Moreover, the Reels format stood out for its high degree of humanization and better results.

Conclusion: The study underscores the importance of a humanized communication strategy for corporate evolution and success, achieved through the integrated adoption of multiple techniques that reinforce trust, engagement, and digital reputation in the Business-to-Business pharmaceutical sector.

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RESUMO

Introdução: O processo de digitalização da comunicação corporativa e a emergência de canais de comunicação como as redes sociais impõe desafios crescentes às empresas Negócios-para-Negócios, nomeadamente no setor farmacêutico. Neste setor específico, fatores como a confiança e a proximidade são essenciais no processo de satisfação e fidelização do consumidor. Ao nível das redes sociais, o Instagram destaca-se como uma plataforma estratégica para a adoção de estratégias de humanização, mitigando a impessoalidade digital.

Objetivos: Este estudo analisa a aplicação de técnicas de humanização por uma empresa farmacêutica Negócios-para-Negócios no Instagram, identificando a frequência e natureza dessas técnicas, a sua relação com os formatos de conteúdo e o impacto nos indicadores de desempenho.

Metodologia: Análise de conteúdo das publicações do feed do Instagram de uma empresa farmacêutica Negócios-para-Negócios, durante março de 2025. Foram codificadas dez técnicas de humanização identificadas na literatura, analisadas quantitativa e qualitativamente, com registo das métricas digitais associadas.

Resultados: A empresa analisada utiliza técnicas de humanização de forma fragmentada, com predomínio do uso de *emojis* e *storytelling*, e escassa interação bidirecional. Constatou-se uma relação direta entre o número de técnicas aplicadas e o desempenho das publicações e ainda que o formato *Reels* se destaca pelo elevado grau de humanização e melhores resultados.

Conclusões: O estudo sublinha a importância de uma estratégia de comunicação humanizada na evolução e sucesso corporativos, através da adoção integrada de múltiplas técnicas, reforçando a confiança, envolvimento e a reputação digital no setor farmacêutico Negócios-para-Negócios.

Introduction

The speed inherent in the digitalization of corporate communication requires companies to constantly reinvent themselves, which means planning and implementing new ways for organizations to interact with their audiences. This paradigm shift highlights new challenges in building trust and proximity, especially when it comes to online communication platforms. Given its nature, this phenomenon is particularly significant in the B2B (Business-to-Business) context - where commercial transactions and relationships occur primarily between companies rather than with individual consumers - particularly in the pharmaceutical sector, a market segment in which communication is traditionally shaped by technical, regulatory and ethical requirements, and by characteristics that can accentuate the perception of impersonality and distance. Thus, in this sector, it is relevant and strategic to establish symbolic and emotional relationships with consumers through techniques capable of combating emotional and physical distance.

Scientific literature reveals that the humanization of digital communication is a recent phenomenon, demonstrating a notable strategic and symbolic movement. This phenomenon seeks to mitigate the barrier of purely technical communication by introducing new trends that incorporate identity and emotional traits, enabling brands to establish authentic relationships with consumers.¹ The humanisation process is

characterised by a commitment to and adoption of narratives that reinforce emotional bonds. These narratives are capable of strengthening relationships and promoting a greater sense of proximity, trust and empathy, even in sensitive and highly regulated contexts such as that of pharmaceutical companies.

In the realm of digital communication, Instagram stands out as an efficient and advantageous strategic platform for implementing the humanization process on social networks. Thanks to its visual, interactive and dynamic nature, Instagram is a highly relevant channel for studying and analysing the impact of humanisation, as it enables the creation of closer and more authentic corporate narratives. Thus, from a strategic point of view, Instagram can be considered a communication channel conducive to humanization strategies. By establishing itself as a platform that enables business entities to reveal what goes on 'behind the scenes', adopt a more accessible language, integrate user-generated content and directly involve the team, elements that are recognized in the literature as enhancers of engagement and trust.²⁻⁴

Although humanized communication is an emerging area, both in the scientific context of communication sciences and in corporate strategic practices, the adoption of this communication approach is still insufficiently explored in the pharmaceutical sector. In the B2B context of healthcare, communication still faces specific challenges

such as high levels of regulation, the sensitivity of information, and the need to preserve credibility and scientific rigour. Indeed, these factors can inhibit the full adoption of more informal and interactive strategies.

In this sense, it is important to study and analyze in depth the humanization techniques implemented in the context of a pharmaceutical company, as well as the resulting frequency and distribution of these techniques in different content formats and their impact on digital performance metrics. This analysis provided an understanding of the current state of humanization in this sector and facilitated the identification of gaps and opportunities for improvement to stimulate consumer trust, proximity and engagement.

Thus, this study aims to answer the following research questions: (i) What humanization strategies are used by a B2B pharmaceutical company on Instagram? (ii) Which techniques predominate and how do they relate to content formats? (iii) What is the impact of specific strategies on the performance of publications?

The questions posed are aligned with the research objectives, in order to respond to the need to explore, with rigour and depth, humanized digital communication practices in the B2B context of the pharmaceutical industry, contributing to the literature and to the development of more effective strategies geared towards the demands of the sector.

Methodology

The research uses a mixed methodological approach (quantitative and qualitative), as this enables a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the humanization strategies employed by a company in the sector on Instagram. This approach was selected to ensure both breadth and depth in the analysis. On one hand, the quantitative component allows for the identification and measurement of the frequency and distribution of humanization techniques. On the other hand, the qualitative component provides insight into how these techniques influence digital performance metrics.

Type of study and design

The research falls within the field of content analysis, structured on the basis of a previously defined theoretical framework, which includes ten techniques for humanizing digital communication, identified in the scientific literature and detailed in the theoretical review of this work. This methodology allows for the categorization of published content and the interpretation/analysis of its respective distribution and impact on the results (metrics) of the publications.

Context and unit of analysis

The unit of analysis consists of a total of 20 posts published on the Instagram feed of a B2B pharmaceutical company, during March 2025. This period was strategically selected

as it is the month closest to the date of implementation of the research, favouring an up-to-date and complete sample of corporate communication strategy.

Analytical framework and operationalization of variables

The analysis component of this research was developed based on a theoretical survey of specialized literature, capable of highlighting 10 indicators corresponding to humanization techniques, as illustrated in the following table.

Table 1. Content humanisation techniques.

Technique	Theoretical Summary & Author
1. Use of humor	Use of humorous content to create proximity and engagement ⁴
2. Sharing behind-the-scenes images and videos	Disclosure of content showing the internal reality of the company, promoting transparency and proximity ²
3. Team involvement	Participation of employees in publications, reinforcing the humanization of the brand ⁶
4. Integration of user-generated content	Use of content created by followers to generate engagement and authenticity ³
5. Adoption of a casual and friendly tone of voice	Use of informal and accessible language to create proximity with the audience ⁷
6. Sharing corporate content appealing to causes and social values	Publication of content demonstrating the company's commitment to social causes and ethical values ⁸
7. Integration of emojis in the content	Use of emojis to reinforce expressiveness and proximity in digital communication ⁹
8. Use of narratives and storytelling	Application of engaging narratives to create emotional connection with the audience ¹⁰
9. Interaction and active response on Social Media	Degree of company involvement in interaction with followers, responding to comments and messages ¹¹
10. Content using trends and real-time marketing	Use of current themes and trends to create relevant and timely content ¹²

After reviewing the theoretical framework, each publication was coded according to the presence or absence of these techniques and categorized according to format type (static image, video, or reels). The main analysis metrics on Instagram (likes, shares, saves, comments, reach, and views) were also collected in order to make the results of each publication tangible through directly visible quantitative performance indicators.

Collection and coding procedures

Data collection was carried out through manual analysis of the company's Instagram feed between 1 March and 31 March, in a structured procedure that followed these steps: (i) survey and recording of all posts for the month under analysis; (ii) coding of each post based on the analysis table, identifying the presence of each of the ten humanization techniques; (iii) monitoring and recording the format of the post and the available quantitative indicators (number of

interactions and views); (iv) verification and validation of the coding by the researcher in charge, ensuring the reliability and consistency of the data.

Data analysis

The research promotes a data analysis that combines interpretative qualitative analysis and descriptive statistical analysis.

The interpretative qualitative analysis was carried out through observation and recognition of the published content, in order to explore, justify and understand the context and purpose of the application of the techniques highlighted above. This analysis also promoted a more holistic inspection of the articulation between visual discourse and textual discourse. Thus, it should be noted that the qualitative analysis applied seeks to identify the symbolic and relational dimension of the strategies applied, in line with the perspective of the humanization of digital communication.

The descriptive statistical analysis focused on calculating the absolute and relative frequencies of each technique, distribution by content format and averages of performance indicators. This analysis made it possible to identify patterns and trends in the application of techniques and audience behaviour.

Ethical considerations

It should be noted that, in accordance with the guidelines of the Athena Health & Research Journal and the Declaration of Helsinki, this research did not involve the collection of personal or experimental data from human beings, being limited to the observation and coding of public content available on the Instagram social network. The company name was anonymized and all data presented is aggregated and non-identifiable. The research fully complied with ethical, legal and data protection standards, and did not require authorization from an ethics committee.

Results

This section presents the results and data from the content analysis carried out on the Instagram feed posts of a B2B pharmaceutical company during March 2025. To facilitate the interpretation of the data, a summary table (Table 2) was created based on the analysis grid used in this study. For the purposes of systematisation and clarity, the 20 posts shared were analysed and coded sequentially from P1 to P20, following the chronological order of publication. This coding convention is applied consistently throughout the study and serves as a reference for the data presented in table 2. It is worth noting that on certain days within the analysed period, no content was published, so these cases are marked with the abbreviation n.d. (no data) in the corresponding rows. In addition, the table includes a column

indicating the type of format of each publication, classified as follows: P for static posts, C for carousels and R for Reels.

Table 2. Monthly analysis of the total of techniques applied and metrics.

Day	Publication codification	Format	Total number of techniques	Likes	Shares	Saved	Comments	Reach	Views
1									n.d.
2									n.d.
3	P1	P	4	10	0	0	0	286	389
4	P2	P	4	16	0	0	0	244	329
5	P3	P	2	5	0	0	0	103	137
6	P4	C	2	5	0	0	0	217	383
7	P5	P	3	4	0	0	0	143	187
8	P6	C	5	25	0	1	5	316	571
	P7	R	6	26	2	0	0	589	1042
9									n.d.
10									n.d.
11	P8	R	6	24	1	0	0	429	714
12	P9	P	1	6	0	0	0	221	298
13	P10	R	7	48	1	3		841	1652
14	P11	P	3	10	0	0	0	221	277
15									n.d.
16									n.d.
17	P12	C	4	9	0	0	0	200	339
18	P13	R	7	21	0	0	0	435	887
19	P14	R	6	17	0	0	0	441	728
20	P15	R	4	13	0	3	0	211	378
21	P16	C	2	11	0	0	0	324	582
22									n.d.
23									n.d.
24	P17	P	4	6	0	0	0	190	261
25									n.d.
26	P18	P	4	27	0	1	3	679	1116
27	P19	C	5	18	0	1	0	429	804
28	P20	C	3	13	0	0	0	262	437
29									n.d.
30									n.d.
31									n.d.

Based on the table, it is possible to verify that there were 6 publications in carousel format (C), 8 in post-static format (P) and 6 in re-els format (R). The table also shows that, in terms of digital user action metrics, likes are the indicator with the highest volume of engagement. It is also possible to see that there were 12 days on which no content was published and that on 8 March, two pieces of content were published on the same day.

Discussion

The discussion of results are structured into four subsections: (i) frequency and distribution of humanization techniques; (ii) patterns of use by content format; (iii) the relationship between the number of techniques applied and

digital performance; (iv) a general overall discussion; and (v) limitations observed in the communication strategy.

Frequency and distribution of humanization techniques

The frequency of implementation of the ten previously defined humanization techniques revealed uneven and selective adoption, as described in table 3.

Table 3. Frequency of humanization techniques.

Technique	Static Post	Carousel	Reels	percentage use of the technique
1. Use of humor	2	1	2	25%
2. Sharing behind-the-scenes images and videos	0	2	5	35%
3. Team involvement	1	2	3	30%
4. Integration of user-generated content	0	1	3	20%
5. Adoption of a casual and friendly tone of voice	6	2	6	70%
6. Sharing corporate content appealing to causes and social values	3	1	3	35%
7. Integration of emojis in the content	8	6	6	100%
8. Use of narratives and storytelling	3	6	6	75%
9. Interaction and active response on Social Media	0	0	0	0%
10. Content using trends and real-time marketing	2	0	2	20%
Total frequency of technique applied by type of format	25	21	36	

The integration of emojis in the content emerged as the predominant technique, appearing in 100% of the analyzed publications (20 publications in absolute terms). This choice suggests a consistent focus on expressiveness and symbolic engagement with the audience, in line with the visual and informal trend of the platform.⁹ The use of narratives and storytelling also proves to be a technique with significant recurrence, being applied in 75% of the analyzed publications (15 out of 20), especially in audiovisual formats. This phenomenon highlights the company's effort to create emotional connections with the audience.¹⁰

On the other hand, it should be noted that techniques such as user-generated content (UGC) integration (applied in 20% of the publications) and real-time marketing (applied in 20% of the publications too) were rarely used, appearing sporadically and without consistent integration into the communication strategy.^{3,12} Interaction and active response on social media, considered a fundamental technique in the humanization process, proved to be practically non-existent (applied in 0% of the publications) in

the period analyzed,¹¹ limiting the potential for building two-way relationships and co-creating value with followers.

Patterns of use by content format

The analysis based on format type showed that static posts were the predominant format among all publications, accounting for 40% of the published content. This indicates a preference for fixed visual content, although these posts displayed less diversity in the humanization techniques applied.

Conversely, Reels represented the format with the highest dynamism and strongest evidence of humanization. As shown in Table 3, this format simultaneously incorporated several of the ten techniques, resulting in a total of 36 instances of humanization across the 20 analyzed publications.

It is also important to note that the Reels format stands out due to its performance in terms of digital metrics, as illustrated in table 2, which relate the volume of techniques implemented over the 30-day period.

In short, with regard to the verification of recurring patterns, it is worth noting that audiovisual content, particularly content in Reels format, was associated with greater diversity and density of techniques (as can be seen in Table 3), thus reflecting the format's evident capacity to support richer and more interactive narratives.

Relationship between the number of techniques applied and digital performance

To assess the relationship between the number of humanization techniques employed and the performance of Instagram posts, a composite index of digital performance was calculated for each of the 20 publications. This index was obtained by summing the total values of six key engagement metrics: likes, shares, saved posts, comments, reach, and views. The resulting value provides a holistic measure of each post's performance, integrating both interaction-based and visibility-based indicators.

Following the creation of this index, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to statistically evaluate the association between the number of techniques applied and the corresponding performance index. The results revealed a moderate-to-strong positive correlation ($r = 0.63$, $p = 0.0027$), indicating that publications incorporating a higher number of humanization techniques tend to achieve better results in terms of reach, interaction and engagement.

This positive association is reflected in the data distribution, where posts that employed a greater number of humanization techniques consistently achieved higher values on the performance index. These findings suggest that combining several humanization techniques within a single publication contributes meaningfully to improving its digital impact. The relationship is visually illustrated in figure 1, which displays the distribution of the 20 posts on a

scatter plot, along with a trend line confirming the positive association between the two variables.

This evidence reinforces that a multidimensional application of humanization strategies is more effective than a limited or isolated use, supporting the strategic value of integrated and symbolic communication in enhancing user involvement and digital visibility in B2B pharmaceutical contexts.

General discussion

Based on the last section, this research highlights a partial and selective application of humanization strategies on the social network Instagram. According to previous data, the analysis revealed that there are widely implemented techniques – namely the integration of emojis in the content and the use of narratives and storytelling (Table 3).^{9,10} However, other strategies, such as interaction and active response or the integration of UGC, are not expressed and are applied in a sporadic and disjointed manner. This discrepancy suggests that the approach to humanization is still fragmented.^{3,11}

Thus, as highlighted in the initial section, the scientific literature on the subject points out that the consistent and diversified adoption of these techniques is essential to build lasting symbolic and emotional relationships, promoting trust and proximity in sensitive and regulated contexts such as the pharmaceutical sector.¹⁻³ In this particular case, the predominance of one-dimensional techniques, without consistent support for two-way interaction, ultimately reveals a slight limitation of the strategic potential of humanized communication and its role in nurturing relationships with followers.

The analysis by format revealed that the Reels format, although used less frequently than static content (Table 3), has a higher frequency of humanization techniques and, consequently, has better results in digital metrics (Table 2). This finding suggests that the dynamic audiovisual format allows the company to explore the narrative and emotional dimension of communication more effectively and, at the same time, stimulates factors such as engagement and reach more effectively.^{8,10} Even so, the clear dominance of static content reveals a preference for more traditional and less complex formats, possibly influenced by internal factors such as operational restrictions, regulations or a lack of specialized resources for the production of dynamic content.

In terms of the discussion of the results, the positive relationship between the number of techniques applied in a publication and the results in terms of digital metrics also stands out. This finding corroborates the hypothesis that the multidimensional integration of humanisation strategies enhances communication performance and reinforces the value of the strategic combination of techniques.³

In turn, the absence of the technique of active interaction with followers is not only a critical limitation, especially in a pharmaceutical B2B context, but also reinforces the

evidence in the literature. Literature supports that responsive, dialogical engagement on social media reinforces public trust and human connection.¹¹

Another critical point regarding the twenty pieces of content analyzed focuses on the scarcity of the technique with a focus on user-generated content and also on the dissemination of content using real-time marketing. As already mentioned, this finding once again highlights a communication style that is overly focused on the brand and the transmission of one-way messages, neglecting the potential for co-creation and direct engagement with other stakeholders in the sector.^{3,12}

Finally, it is worth summarizing that the results obtained reveal that the content of the company analyzed shows consistency in the use of appealing visual elements and the partial adoption of techniques such as storytelling, thus revealing that a commitment to good humanization practices is in place. However, throughout the analysis period, it is possible to describe that the company's content strategy does not fully and comprehensively exploit a humanized approach. As a suggestion for improvement, based on the results analyzed, we propose a more consistent and systematic integration of various humanization techniques and a continuous effort to implement more dynamic and interactive formats, in order to contribute to the construction of more authentic, engaging and close communication.

Limitations identified in the company's monthly strategy

The analysis also identified some significant gaps in the strategy applied by the company in March, namely: (i) the absence of a structured and systematic approach that coherently integrates the different techniques; (ii) the predominance of one-way communication, with reduced interaction with followers, which limits the potential for engagement; (iii) a reduction in UGC and real-time trends (real-time marketing), which could increase the relevance and timeliness of communication.^{3,11,12}

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the understanding of humanization practices in digital communication in order to understand their contribution in the B2B corporate environment of the pharmaceutical sector. Although the research results show that, during the period analyzed, the company consistently employs various humanization techniques - namely emojis and storytelling - the application of these strategies remains fragmented and demonstrates limited potential. This is mainly due to the absence of two-way interaction and the insufficient integration of content produced by users or followers, as well as content based on real-time marketing trends.^{3,8,10,12}

The results also show that the combined use of multiple techniques in the same publication is positively associated with better interaction results, according to the performance indicator values (reach, views, interactions). This conclusion proves that humanization contributes to the strategic effectiveness of a humanized digital communication approach.

However, it is essential to mention that the predominance of static formats and the scarce adoption of other more dynamic types, such as Reels, limit the potential for engagement and authenticity. Thus, the formats analyzed reveal a communication style that remains overly focused on the brand and one-way corporate promotion, not fully exploiting the possibilities of co-creation and building deep symbolic relationships with the public.

It should be emphasized that the publications analyzed reflect an autonomous strategic decision. However, it is suggested as a future proposal to reformulate the digital communication strategy, systematically incorporating the ten humanization techniques identified, with a special focus on strengthening interaction with the public, integrating user-generated content and strategically exploiting current trends. The adoption of a more integrated and interactive communication approach will allow the organization, as an established digital brand, not only to increase the engagement and trust of its followers, but also to reinforce its credibility and reputation in the sector.

Nevertheless, the study has limitations that should be taken into account. The fact that the research focuses on the analysis of a single company's communication over a limited period of time compromises the generalization of accurate and concrete results. Future research could benefit from a focus on longitudinal analyses using comparative studies between multiple companies in the pharmaceutical sector, or even a methodological option that includes the public's perspectives for a more holistic assessment of the perception and impact of humanization strategies, based on a tool such as a questionnaire survey, for example.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the humanization of digital communication in the pharmaceutical sector – and in the context of communication in the health sector – represents a strategic opportunity to stimulate proximity and strengthen trust in the long term. Nevertheless, its implementation requires a structured content strategy capable of implementing emotional narratives, stimulating two-way interaction and constantly adapting to market trends, both in marketing and in the pharmaceutical sector.

Data availability statement

The data supporting the results of this study comes from the analysis of public posts on the Instagram feed of a B2B pharmaceutical company, collected between 1 and 31 March 2025. This data was manually and systematically coded based on predefined criteria and organised into an

analysis grid with qualitative and quantitative variables. The company analysed was anonymised to ensure institutional confidentiality and ethical compliance with scientific research principles. The aggregated and non-identifiable data used in this research (including the coding grid, analysis criteria, and quantitative values associated with each publication) are available upon request to the corresponding author. Reasonable requests for access to the data will be considered and responded to in accordance with ethical and data protection standards.

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