

That Song from TikTok

How Independent musicians develop their careers through the short-video platform.

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Abstract

Through my master's thesis I have explored the relationship between TikTok and the music industries, through the interactions of independent musicians. With a qualitative approach through conducting semi-structured interviews with four independent musicians who are active on TikTok, this thesis has discussed themes such as TikTok's place in the music industry, algorithms and music discovery, and potential revenue streams. These themes have been discussed throughout the thesis based on established theory within participation culture, digital disruptions, artist health, and Do-it-yourself social media marketing. The thesis argues for TikTok's place within the recording industry and explains how the platform creates new, albeit small revenue streams. TikTok is simultaneously an essential tool for independent music marketing, while also posing a threat to the mental health of artists who are unprepared to manage the harsh reality of the internet.

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Introduction

Through this thesis I seek to uncover the role of TikTok and short-video in the world of independent music marketing, using in-depth semi-structured interviews with musicians who actively participate in marketing activities on the platform. Even though there is a risk of change within the discussed technology, which may result in some of the information in this thesis becoming outdated, the primary goal is to give insight into the opportunities of a platform such as TikTok for up-and-coming musicians with limited budgets.

TikTok has taken the world by storm, now boasting a user base of more than 1 billion users (Geysler, 2022). Several studies have been conducted within the fields of Social media marketing (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a; Klein et al., 2017; Suhr, 2012; Sun et al., 2022),

Albeit to the author's knowledge, there have been few, if any attempts at understanding the effects of the short video platform on how independent musicians conduct their business and plan their music business-related activities.

If you are an independent musician today (2022) and you Google the words "How to market your music in 2022" you will undoubtedly find a wide variety of Youtube videos and articles recommending the popular short-video app TikTok. They give a brief outline of why you should utilize the app for marketing purposes, often reasoning with the fact that "everyone is on Tiktok" These videos and blog posts that teach independent musicians how to thrive in the music industry also represents an entrepreneurial venture into the supplementary industries, which will be elaborated on further (Haynes & Marshall, 2018, p. 463).

The motivation behind the study:

As the artist manager of an independent artist, and a marketing coordinator, I have personally been behind the camera, and created several TikTok videos. I have thought of exciting video descriptions and hashtags, researched other artists' videos, and posted videos with varying degrees of success. TikTok and the short-video format has interested me since I first downloaded the app. As an avid user, I can now, perhaps not proudly, show off Tiktok as my most visited app, with an average of 20 hours a week. I have discovered several new songs and artists on the platform, which made me wonder what the true potential of TikTok could be within the music industries. Was virality for musicians all pure luck? Would having a TikTok profile become as essential as having a Facebook page once was? I, therefore, took it upon myself to explore the TikTok landscape through the bottom-up perspective of an independent artist.

Research Question:

How do independent musicians utilize the short video platform Tiktok for marketing, audience development, and career growth?

Sub question 1: How does TikTok fit into the music industries?

Sub question 2: How does TikTok content creation affect independent artists mentally?

Sub question 3: How has the fast-paced environment of TikTok affected the time management of artists and has it taken creative priority from the music?

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

1.1 The Music industry

Before delving into the theme of this thesis, we must first establish the circumstances and environment that surround the topic at hand. By explaining the fundamentals of the music industries we can better understand how TikTok could be positioned in the music business, and discover how the short-video platform affects and creates opportunities for Independent artists. At the very core of the music industry lies the relationship between the artist and the fans, the supplier and the consumer (Nordgård, 2018, p. 5-6). Bridging the gap and forming the connection between the two core parties, the musicians and the audience, we find what is often labeled as the music industry, but which Nordgård and several other scholars argue should be interpreted as a set of music industries (Nordgård, 2018, p.6). Exactly what is to be included in the definitions of each of these industries is under debate, and there have been several models created to encapsulate and map the core activities and related activities. Patrik Wikström references David Hesmonhalgh's segmentation of the music industries, which differentiates between the recording, live performance, and publishing industries (Wikström, 2019, p. 52-53). Among the multiple other segmentations, we find Fran Healy's, which along with recording, live, and publishing also lists merchandising as its own separate industry. Nordgård points out that dividing them into four industries is somewhat unusual, and the perhaps most common definition uses three industries (Nordgård, 2018, p.6.).

The Recording Industry: The recording industry according to Hirsch's model from the 1970s consists of four subsystems, which describe the journey the artist must go on to reach the audiences. Subsystem 1 encompasses the artist, the producer, and the A&R agent. A&R agents are the first gatekeepers the artists face on their road to commercial success (Wikström, 2019, p.59-60). Gatekeepers are generally used to describe the individuals that make decisions as to who gets through a set filter (Rutter, 2011, p.34). These agents are tasked by the record companies with continuously discovering new talent, in a sea of artists. After being accepted by the A&R agent, the Artist progresses to the second sub-system (Wikström, 2019, p.59-60). Subsystem 2 is the policymakers within the record companies. These people control which records the artist releases, but has little power to affect the media and the exposure of the release. (Wikström, 2019, p.60). Subsystem 3, promoters and distributors, is a filtration system that selects the songs with the highest commercial potential out of everything that passes through subsystem 2 (Wikström, 2019, p.61). Subsystem 4 is defined as the "gatekeepers", originally a reference to radio stations, but also

applicable to modern media outlets such as playlists. (Wikström, 2019, p.61). Because it is relying on prerecorded music, Tiktok could arguably find its place in the recording industry, something which will be discussed later in the thesis.

Live Performance Industry: The live music sector has traditionally had a lower revenue than the recorded music sector, although this changed when digitalization introduced piracy, which heavily damaged recorded revenues. Live performance encompasses everything from busking at subway stations to large festivals, which makes it hard to analyze in detail. (Wikström, 2019, p.64). Within the core of the live music sector, we find the music venues and their administrative staff, along with concert promoters, tour staff, and ticketing agencies (Rutter, 2011, p.44-46).

Adjacent to the core there exists several support services that are often subcontracted or part of the in-house staff. Security, catering, and logistics are argued to not be integral to the live-music sector and therefore fall into the definition of supporting services (Rutter, 2011, p. 64-65).

The Publishing Industry: The role of the publisher is to license the works of lyricists and composers for use in recordings, background music, and sheet music. Licensees pay the publisher royalties for the use of the works, these royalties fall into three categories. Performance royalties cover stage performances, radio plays, and other public performances. Synchronization royalties include all usage in combination with moving images such as video games and movies. Mechanical royalties are paid upon sales of sheet music or physical copies of the audio recording (Wikström, 2019, p. 62-63).

1.1.2 The effects of digitalization

Several of the concepts that TikTok relies on are consequences of digitalization in the music industries. Before we delve into how digitalization affected the music industries, it is important to give a brief introduction to exactly what is meant by digitalization. Digitalization in the music industries defines the entry of new technology which enabled digital options for tasks previously solved with analog technology's solutions (Brusila et al., 2022, p.8).

Alan B. Krueger attributes streaming as having a revolutionary effect on the sales of recorded music, finally achieving an increase after years of decline (Krueger, 2019, p.31).

Patrik Wikström uses the term connectivity to describe how the music networks between companies and audiences have been affected by technological developments. Traditional music networks had a low level of connectivity, where the music companies could control the flow of information to the

audiences. The increasing importance of internet media has led to an increase in the information flow within the network, resulting in a decreased amount of control for the music companies (Wikström, 2019, p.7). For several years one of the main threats/opportunities of digitalization was the possibility of artists becoming self-sustained, thereby no longer dependent on the record labels and music companies (Haynes & Marshall, 2018, p.460). The increase in connectivity paired with lowered barriers of entry for amateurs in music production and content distribution enabled fans to remix, create and engage with their idol's content. Based on his previous research on other cultural sectors that revealed a considerable share of audiences participate in content creation, Wikström suggests that music firms should strive to maintain a good relationship with their creative audience, and encourage content creation (Wikström, 2019, p.8). Wikström summarizes the new music industry dynamics as having little control and high connectivity due to the recent evolution of communication and digital information technologies (Wikström, 2019, p.9).

Although digitalization led to lowered barriers of entry with bedroom artists creating their own home studios, Hendrick Spilker (2012) argues that the home studios of semi-professionals did not replace the professional recording studios (Spilker, 2012, p.773). Spilker points out that artists in 2012 were experimenting and demoing their music on the internet, on websites such as YouTube and Myspace, due to its seemingly unlimited reach. However, through interviews with several artists, Spilker found that the artists saw it as ineffective due to the difficulties of establishing a large reach on the internet, as well as their efforts did not contribute to increasing their revenue. (Spilker, 2012, p.788). Spilker conducted this study more than 10 years ago, and whether his findings around the effects of internet marketing are still true will be discussed later on in this thesis.

Nordgård (2018) further elaborates on how digitalization has affected the relationships between the music industries and the technology industry, through integration and mergers. Through the 80s and 90s technology conglomerates such as The Sony Corporation and Philips acquired large music firms Island Records, and CBS Records to expand the markets for their software and hardware (Nordgård, 2018, pp.34-45). The relationship between music and tech has since evolved from the tech companies acquiring and vertically integrating music companies, to the tech companies now operating from a distance (Nordgård, 2018, p.42).

Digitalization has additionally had a disruptive effect on the income and revenue streams in the music business (Waldfogel, 2012, p.337). The technological innovations that led to the Mp3-format, and CDs, also resulted in a rise in music piracy that had a large and negative effect on the recorded

music industry's revenue. (Nordgård, 2018, 124). Piracy in this sense means copyright infringement, through illegal file-sharing described by (Spilker, 2012, p.774). What is argued to be the solution to piracy came in the form of subscription-based - on-demand streaming, through music streaming services such as Spotify, and iTunes (Now Apple Music) (Nordgård, 2018, p.70). As streaming became a preferred listening method, discussion arose on the topic of streaming revenues, and payouts amongst music business professionals at the Kristiansand Roundtable Conference, on which Nordgård bases his study (Nordgård, 2018, p.70). The effects on industry revenues caused by the cannibalization of other distribution channels by streaming were the topic of examination in a research project conducted by marketing professors Nils Wlömert & Dominic Papies (Wlömert & Papies, 2016, p.1) Their findings show that the adoption of streaming led to a decline in revenues from other distribution channels, although simultaneously having a positive overall effect on the industry revenue by providing a new revenue stream (Wlömert & Papies, 2016, p.1). Streaming has also been compared to radio, in the sense that it could operate as a means to promote music and lead to physical sales. One aspect that separates streaming and traditional radio is the freedom that streaming offers which allows users to choose songs, while Traditional radio exposes the audience to a broad and to some degree unknown curated playlist (Aguiar & Waldfogel, 2018, p. 283). Aguiar and Waldfogel argue that streaming could therefore be seen as a substitute for recorded music sales. (Aguiar & Waldfogel, 2018, p.284).

1.1.2.1 Music Fans: Participatory culture

Participatory culture is a phenomenon where the audience actively participates in the production of culture. This phenomenon is observed in several cultural industries, such as written fan-fiction or franchise themes vlogs. (Wikström, 2019, p.152). Within the participatory culture, we find a more music-focused phenomenon, remix culture. With amateurs now having access to affordable production tools, creators are now taking snippets of the existing culture and combining them in new ways to create new artifacts (Wikström, 2019, p.159). Examples of remix culture are Mashups, where instrumentals and vocals from different songs are combined, and Anime Music videos, fan-made music videos consisting of clips from Japanese Anime. Wikström references a more recent format of remix culture "lip-sync short-form video", where fans post short videos of themselves lip-syncing to popular songs, which has been made popular on platforms such as TikTok. Remix culture has led to a boom in user-generated content (UGC) (Wikström, 2019, p.161-162). An early example of participation culture could be seen within the Swedish music scene, where international fans made written content and promoted the music internationally for free (Baym & Burnett, 2009, p. 434).

1.1.2.2 Introducing Virality

Viral marketing is described by musician and music lecturer Paul Rutter as when a wide conversation about a topic happens through personal communication such as blogging or email (Rutter, 2011, p. 28). Wikström emphasizes the loss of control in music promotion as a consequence of social media platforms. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, WeChat, and LinkedIn have become popular communication platforms where users discuss various topics, including music. (Wikström, 2019, p. 165). Several social media platforms have developed their own music features that enable users to create and post content to better show their identity. The display of identity through culture has traditionally been through bookshelves at home, where one could show off a record or book collection to close friends. Through social media, this bookshelf has been made public and reflects your current favorites. (Wikström, 2019, p.166). As this information is now shared in real-time, the influence you have as a tastemaker for your friends is strengthened which in turn decreases the power of influence from the record labels (Wikström, 2019, p.166). In the current music economy, firms are becoming dependent on the media presence created by the fans. The process in which a piece of content becomes viral is unpredictable which makes it problematic to use as part of a communications strategy. (Wikström, 2019, p.168) A case of virality on TikTok will be presented later on in this thesis.

1.1.2.3 Online Gatekeepers

As previously mentioned the gatekeepers in subsystem 4 also include modern playlisters. These modern digital gatekeepers differ from radio in the sense that they have a global reach. The effects of this global reach can arguably be seen in the “local repertoire share”, which measures the share of a country’s recorded music market that was generated by local artists. The local repertoire share in 2007 indicated that listeners increased their consumption of international music at a time corresponding with the entry of social media platforms (Wikström, 2019, p.171). The aforementioned lowered barriers of entry have resulted in lowered costs for artists, and according to Nordgård the increase in supply has increased the cost of discovery from the audience’s perspective (Nordgård, 2018, p.39). This increase in cost has created a need for gatekeepers, such as streaming playlist creators who can affect tastemakers through marketing and promotion, although at the expense of the direct relationship between artist and listener (Nordgård, 2018, p. 39). These gatekeepers have been described as the new elite within the music industries, as they work in

tandem with curation algorithms to decide the global listening agenda (Bonini, & Gandini, 2019, p.8).

1.1.2.4 Algorithms & Music Discovery

Algorithmic culture is a term coined by scholars, that encompasses the marketing of cultural materials such as films, and music conducted through software recommendations (Werner, 2020, p.78). These types of recommendations are conducted by all companies offering cultural commodities, such as series on Netflix, books on Amazon, and music on Spotify. Their software algorithms are protected by property rights and recommend content to users based on several dimensions such as gender, nationality, and sexuality (Werner, 2020, p.78-79). Further expanding on how the algorithms make decisions Robert Prey uses the term *Algorithmic Identity* to capture how the algorithm views a person. The algorithmic identity is constantly evolving based on user interaction as the identifiers and preferences are not given from the get-go, but rather picked up and understood along the way (Prey, 2018, p.1088). With Spotify, these algorithms influence three main functions in the user experience. The *related artist* function, which recommends artists who are similar to those you already listen to, *discover* that recommends music based on the songs you listen to and *browse* which combines different features (Werner, 2020, p.82). Such algorithms are sometimes criticized for their recommendations, as arguments can be made that the algorithms make it seem like the users are in charge, but in reality, the algorithm has an elaborate system of choices (Werner, 2020, p.81). In a 2020 study, Werner observed the representation of dimensions of the *related artist's* section of Irish Folk Rock artist Damien Rice. By mapping the *related artists* in 2013 and their relations in three steps, Werner discovered that the artists recommended by Spotify were predominantly white, male, and within the Folk-rock genre. This observation argues that the recommendations from Spotify were largely based on the dimensions of the genre, gender, and race (Werner, 2020, p.83-84).

Pre-digitalization, radio and TV had been the predominant platforms for music discovery. In today's market, the process of music discovery is more fragmented. Social media has had increased importance in the discovery of music, with artists such as Troy Sivan, Justin Bieber, and Shawn Mendez launching successful careers after being discovered on the platform Youtube (Halperin, 2011; Hughes et al., 2016, p.VI). Complex music recommendation algorithms have become an essential tool for music discovery among listeners (Celma, 2010, p. vii).

Oscar Celma has studied how recommendation systems affect The Long Tail principle presented by Chris Anderson. The Long Tail describes the relationship between the *hits* and the *niche* content,

through a graph (Celma, 2010, p.87). As physical shelf space was no longer a limiting factor for music exposure, the niche content has now been made available, though it has to be found. The long tail describes the relationship of how the current economy is transitioning away from the head of the demand curve, where you find a small number of hit songs, to the tail of the curve, where a large number of niche products are found. (Anderson, 2008, p. 52) Anderson has two main criteria for enabling the exploitation of the niche market, namely; (1) making the niche content available, and (2) helping the audience find it. Celma raises the question of whether the recommender systems of the time can showcase the hidden gems of the niche markets. He further suggests that systems discounting popularity might increase the exposure and sales of niche content (Celma, 2010, p.87).

1.2 Independent

An Independent musician is most commonly defined as an artist not directly affiliated with one of the three major labels (Sony Music Entertainment, Warner Music Group, and Universal Music Group), by both the industries and scholars (Wikström, 2019, p.67). Albeit there exists controversy regarding whether or not an Independent musician can be affiliated with an Independent label or be unsigned (Haynes & Marshall, 2018, p. 1979; Hracs, 2015, p.462) Major labels have a high degree of vertical integration, often controlling; production, distribution, publishing and manufacturing (Strasser, 2010, pp.77-78). Another general consensus is that Independent musicians operate with a high level of DIY (Do-it-yourself) in their projects, this can be both on the creative and business side.

Independent musicians and indie labels have seen solid growth in the last few years according to WINs (World Independent Network) 2018 WINTEL report. The indies have a year-on-year growth of 11,3% compared to the majors having an increase of 10,2%. Additionally, the independent labels saw an increase in streaming revenues by 43%. (Worldwide Independent Network, 2018). Part of this growth is attributed to the streaming services such as Spotify, where the opportunity to pitch to playlists evens the playing field, this has been especially helpful to artists operating in niche genres. The success of streaming services has also resulted in international growth, with the average indie label receiving 31% of its revenue from foreign markets (Worldwide Independent Network, 2018). The notion of independents gaining power is reflected in the IFPI 2022 Global Music Report, where Austin Daboe, Executive Vice President of Atlantic Records UK is quoted saying that it has *“never been easier to run a campaign as an independent artist as it is today”* (IFPI, 2022). As early as 2012 in an interview with professor Timothy D. Taylor from the Department of Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Sean Bohrman from Burger Records said that in order to stay in the

game, a presence on social media was needed. He also pointed out that being personal on social media was something they could do, that the majors were lacking, which resulted in a better connection to the audience (Taylor, 2016, p.127).

As this thesis aims to explore the marketing potential through DIY methods on TikTok, we follow the definition of Haynes & Marshall, where the musicians are not signed to the three major labels or to large global Indie labels such as Beggars Group or 300 Entertainment (Hracs, 2015, p.1979). The reasoning behind excluding the largest minors is their access to marketing resources, such as creative teams, which relieves pressure around the DIY process. Haynes & Marshall also reason their research sample by them not being financially secure, which made them dependent on their own entrepreneurial work (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p.1980). This definition of Independents creates the foundation for the interview subjects selection, which will be explained in more detail later on in chapter 3.6.2

1.3 Music Marketing

1.3.1 Marketing of Independent artists

In order to understand how TikTok has affected the marketing landscape for independent artists, we must first seek to understand how these artists historically have performed marketing activities and the process behind them.

Allan Dumbreck highlights the importance of entrepreneurship and DIY in the music business even before the digital era by referencing Hesmondhalg's paper on how Punk music networks encouraged DIY. Punk music's tight-knit communities began distributing fan magazines, promoting events, and even establishing small music-related businesses (Dumbreck & McPherson, 2015, p. 49). Shops such as Beggar's Banquet, which also functioned as record labels, distributors, retail shops, and meeting places. These shops provided a platform for smaller non-mainstream genres to expand their reach, and for customers to experience musical innovation. Developing these necessary non-musical skills may according to Dumbreck have a negative effect by distracting the artists from songwriting and performing (Dumbreck & McPherson, 2015, p. 51).

Non-musical skills have become essential as the main form of currency in the online environment is content. Therefore artists must be able to produce pictures, videos, blog posts, vlogs, comments, etc to take part in the conversation. These conversations take place on various social media platforms such as Instagram, and Facebook where marketing and PR are done directly towards the fans, and

the value of the artist's content is quantifiable through interactions such as likes, views, shares, and comments. As social media does not directly facilitate sales of music, to capitalize the artists must learn how to utilize marketing and promotional techniques to increase their following (Dumbreck & McPherson, 2015, p.61). In their 2018 study, Haynes & Marshall (2018b) discovered through interviews with musicians, that the highly saturated market was a result of the low barriers of entry and artists had it difficult gaining attention when lacking financial support. This led to innovative thinking among musicians to develop cost-effective marketing strategies. The study also revealed that the artists were reluctant to label themselves as entrepreneurs, even when participating in activities of an entrepreneurial nature, preferring the term DIY. (Haynes & Marshall, 2018b, p.468). The artists interviewed mentioned that the increased pressure from the industry required artists to already have an established fan base before entering contracts. As a result, the artists performed entrepreneurial activities, not because of a burning entrepreneurial mindset but out of necessity and expectations, as there was no one to do it for them. (Haynes & Marshallb, 2018b, p.471).

Dumbreck talks about how digitalization has brought the creative industries closer together, where music was previously exclusively sold as its own product, it is now more often connected to other entertainment media such as Films, videogames, advertisements, and Youtube videos. This trend paved way for several new opportunities for exploiting recordings for labels, publishers, and artists. This new environment riddled with new digital platforms for marketing and possibilities has required all artists to develop an entrepreneurial mindset with a high degree of DIY. To maintain a presence on platforms such as Bandcamp, the artist must develop skills in writing, copyright law, design, and marketing. (Dumbreck & McPherson, 2015, p. 56).

1.3.2 The DIY Marketing Process

By comparing how the artists utilize Tiktok, to traditional marketing models, we can gain insight into how Tiktok has affected these practices, as well as if the practices of DIY artists have undergone significant change as a result. One traditional model of describing the marketing process of DIY musicians is created by Music business professional, Bobby Borg in his book "Music marketing for the DIY Musician: Creating and executing a plan of attack on a low budget", where he divides the marketing process into several steps, among them: (1) Describe your company's vision, (2) Identify profitable opportunities and needs, (3) Analyze your customers, (4) Learn from your competitors, (5) Demo your products or services, (6) Set your marketing plan goals, (7) Develop your company's brand strategy, (8) Develop a brand strategy for your products or services (Borg, 2014, p.1-8). Borg bases his model on a combination of the fundamental concepts of innovation and his experience in the music business (Borg, 2014, p. xvii).

1. Describe your company's vision

This section revolves around developing an identity and creating a career guide for this identity through a period of 7-10 years in the future. Without a vision, you risk getting lost in the marketplace and confusing your audience by being unpredictable (Borg, 2014, p.11). A clear vision gives purpose to the project and helps project the desired identity to the marketplace (Borg, 2014, p.16-17).

2. Identify profitable opportunities and needs

When the artist's project has a defined image, one must see how that image matches with marketing opportunities. Through research tools such as a SWOT analysis that establishes the Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, one can match the internal strength with external opportunities (Borg, 2014, p.21). Borg lists several strategies for identifying potential opportunities, such as examining social trends to capitalize on the next movement and looking out for technological developments to configure your music to fit interactive formats. Additionally, Borg recommends examining opportunities that others have taken (Borg, 2014, p.23).

3. Analyze your customers

By identifying and segmenting the potential customers, artists are able to customize their marketing strategies in order to fit the target segments. By examining the audience demographics, such as age, gender, education, etc, one can create a more personalized marketing strategy. (Borg, 2014, p.32). One important customer dimension that Borg recommends analyzing is the technographic dimensions of the target audience. When analyzing these dimensions one should consider their reasons for using new technology, their time spent using it, and their outlook on using it. (Borg, 2014, p.33). The technographic dimensions are especially important for this thesis, as some music genres arguably have audiences that are more active on TikTok, thereby making it a more effective medium in terms of reach in those segments.

4. Learn from your competitors

By analyzing competitors, you as an artist can identify their weaknesses, and areas where you can have an advantage. These competitors can be both direct and indirect, as even artists within other genres compete for time. (Borg, 2014, p.41). In terms of locating your competitors, Borg recommends locating them online through social networks and analyzing their strategies for branding, placement, and promotion. (Borg, 2014, p.43).

5. Demo your products or services

Production and promotion are costly in terms of money and time, therefore it is imperative to pick your projects with care before investing heavily. By presenting a demo, an artist has the opportunity to test the product on potential fans and make the appropriate adjustments before committing a large number of resources. (Borg, 2014, p.51).

6. Set your marketing plan goals

Establishing goals lets the artist divide the vision into short-term milestones, which in turn makes it easier to allocate the appropriate resources based on the task's importance. Borg recommends setting up your goals according to the SMART model (Specific, measurable, attainable, road-mapped, time). SMART goals allow for a fusion of the SWOT analysis and the vision resulting in concrete goals that align with the long-term strategy (Borg, 2014, pp.65-71).

7. Develop your company's brand strategy

How you reach the SMART goals is determined by which strategy is employed. At the core of the strategies, we find company branding. This strategy determines how the company presents itself to create a long-lasting image inside the heads of its fans. This image creates the fan's expectations for future messages from the company, along with its values. The brand is created through everything your company releases and expresses, such as personality, look, musical style, and associations with other companies (Borg, 2014, p.73). The brand's personality is determined by factors such as its attitude and the vibe it is giving off, which is often best summarized by adjectives like; *diva*, *gangsta*, *down to earth*, *flirtatious*, *etc.* How the brand is projected needs to be consistent, and according to the vision. Another important factor for identity is the *look*, often identified by clothing, and visual style (Borg, 2014, pp.74-81). A Similar list of branding factors is identified by associate professor Paul Allen in his book "Artist Management For the music business". Allen also sees blogs as a key element, as it provides a personal experience with a sense of intimacy with the artist. (artistmanagementonline, n.d.; Allen, 2018, p.115).

Having defined the brand's identity, Borg finds it imperative to correctly position the brand to exploit the differences that separate you from your competitors. Borg lists four different techniques for positioning (1) *Position yourself based on your identified need and on being first*, (2) *Based on specific characteristics of your target audience*, (3) *as being the direct opposite of your competition*, and (4) *based on a strength and unique benefit* (Borg, 2014, pp. 83-84).

8. Develop a brand strategy for your products or services

Closely connected to the brand strategy, we find the strategy for products and services. All products offered by the artist contribute to shaping the brand, be it the lyrics, album name, or merch design. It is therefore important to create concepts that align with the desired identity (Borg, 2014, p. 87).

Borg defines the marketing process for DIY artists as *“the self-starting journey of creating music and merchandise to win over loyal fans, entice industry execs, and make money”* (Borg, 2014, p.1). As 2014 is almost 10 years ago, the DIY framework could arguably have changed and adapted to digitalization in a way that Borg had not predicted. His DIY marketing process does nevertheless provide a historical framework for how DIY has been adapted into the music industries characterized by digitalization.

1.4 Social Media

This subchapter presents theory and examples of how music marketing has been conducted through early social media, as well as introduces some of the essential factors of social media marketing. The theories and aspects presented in this chapter will be revisited in the discussion chapter.

1.4.1 Beats and Tweets:

Researchers Jo Haynes and Lee Marshall from the University of Bristol analyzed the effects of new internet technologies on independent artists in South-west England (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p. 1973). Although their research was primarily focused on earlier social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and user-generated content sites like Youtube, their findings create the foundation for research on the social media impact on indie music practices. Haynes and Marshall explore the optimistic discourse around how new technology has led to opportunities for independent musicians to promote and sell their music, and communicate directly with their fans. Through interviews with independent artists, the article uncovers criticism and the role of social media in their daily lives (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p.1973-1974).

Haynes and Marshall's base summarizes the opportunistic outlook on digitalization with three central pillars, (1) the internet provides a platform for independent musicians to release their music to a global network of existing and potential fans; (2) The internet facilitates direct communication between the artist and their audience, which in turn affects engagement; (3) The Internet provides a platform for artists to sell their music and other products. (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p. 1976). These three pillars explain how digitalization has had a positive effect on the independents by

transferring power from the traditional gatekeepers of the music business such as major record labels (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p.1977).

In their pilot research, Haynes and Marshall interviewed independent artists about their thoughts on social media. Their results show that several artists were unsure of exactly how social media helped and that it was hard to quantify the results. Haynes & Marshall's study has two areas of primary focus: how social media affected their relationship with audiences, and how social media is utilized for networking purposes (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p.1981-1982). Their interviewees said that social media gave them the ability to instantly communicate with their existing audience, and a platform to reach out to new audiences. In addition, social media was seen as a communicative tool that enabled instant feedback from the audience (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p. 1982).

in the book "Internet Marketing: a highly practical guide to every aspect of internet marketing" by Alex Jones, Anna Malczyk, and Justin Beneke, the authors describe the three of the most essential components of social media marketing; Advertising, building a brand presence, and word of mouth (Jones et al., 2011, p.152). These components are presented for general marketing, but the connection to music marketing will be discussed in chapter 5.

Advertising: Jones, et al describe social media as being less accepting of traditional advertisements and promotional materials. Users of social media are against imposed advertising, which creates a challenge when using these platforms for marketing (Jones et al., 2011, p.152).

Building a brand presence: This component is presented as the "soft sell" part of the marketing communication. By being present, a company can utilize features such as events to communicate and engage with the users (Jones et al., 2011, p.152).

Word of mouth: Word of mouth is mentioned as the aspect where the company has the least amount of control, especially on social media. By harnessing this component and maneuvering it in the desired direction, the company can capitalize on a social group's ability to recommend products amongst its members. (Jones et al., 2011, p.153).

1.4.2 Social media, Social pressure

Industry veterans George Musgrave and Sally Anne Gross discuss how being a musician in the digital era has affected the artist's mental health in their book "*Can music make you sick? Measuring the price of musical ambition*". One chapter is of particular interest for this thesis, as

they examine how artists receive and seek validation online (Musgrave & Gross, 2020, p.64). Digitalization has given the audience the option of providing online validation to the artists and their creative works, through comments, likes, shares, etc. These tools are not exclusive to positive feedback but can be used to provide criticism. Musgrave & Gross call attention to the fact that this sort of feedback can produce strong emotions and anxiety, based on where it falls between praise and hate. (Musgrave & Gross, 2020, p.65). In addition, musicians now need to share more of their personal life, as being vulnerable and putting yourself out there is now key for the audience to be able to relate. (Musgrave & Gross, 2020, p.66). The musicians are no longer just creators of music, they are creators of content, content which leaves them both exposed and vulnerable. Musgrave & Gross interviewed several musicians about their experiences on social media, where the consensus was social media was a source of both empowerment, opportunities, and damage (Musgrave & Gross, 2020, p.66). In addition to producing content, musicians are also under constant pressure to produce music. The sheer abundance of music caused by both the easy access to music through streaming and the lowering of the entry barriers due to the means of production becoming cheap, has led to a continuous need for new music (Musgrave & Gross, 2020, p.68). Nordgård (2018) also brings forth an issue raised by David Hesmondhalgh his book “The Cultural Industries”. Whereas social media leads to a higher degree of involvement from the fans in both promotion and consumption of music, this, in turn, blurs the lines of who is an intermediary and who is considered to be a fan, resulting in difficulties discerning who is a consumer, prosumer and producer (Nordgård, 2018, p.10)

1.4.3 Hashtags

Hashtags are defined keywords, indicated by the symbol #, which makes the word searchable on social media / social networks such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Through the use of popular attention-seeking hashtags, users can increase the exposure and reach of the content, which in term makes it an important tool for marketing (Sun et al., 2022, p.1). Sun et al., analyzed the hashtag usage of 232 nano influencers, influencers with 1.000-10.000 followers on Instagram, and categorized the hashtags into groups depending on which hashtags had the highest reach in descending order from Q1-Q4. They discovered that within the top category, Q1, hashtags related to travel destinations and regions appeared frequently, thus having a high volume of searches which resulted in a high reach (Sun et al., 2022, p.3)

Chapter 2: TikTok - Make every second count

In this chapter the thesis seeks to explain how the Tiktok ecosystem works, how it came to be, and how the platform is adapted to musicians, revenue, and overnight superstars. In the following sections, the term; *Creator* will be used to describe people who create and publish content on the platform, while the term; *User* is used to describe those who watch videos, post comments, etc. To clarify, as an individual can be both a creator and a user at different times, the creator is the person creating the discussed real or hypothetical video.

2.1 TikTok - History, background, and reach

Tiktok is a video-sharing application available on mobile and desktop. Upon opening the app, the users are greeted with a video selected by TikTok's algorithm, upon which they are given the options like, comment, and share by tapping the appropriate icons. By swiping upwards the users are sent a new recommended video, this task can be performed indefinitely (Herrman, 2019). This chapter delves into the how and why of TikTok and aims to explain its capabilities, connection to music, and how it has been used to spread information on global issues.

2.1.1 The Background

Before we look at Tiktok itself, we must establish the market in which TikTok exists. To gain a clearer understanding of why the short-video platform has become such a success, we have to understand the popularity of the mobile video format. A 2007 study on video consumption on mobile devices discovered that mobile videos were being consumed in a large variety of places and settings. Their findings pointed to solitary viewing as the predominant form, where users would watch videos in otherwise mundane, lonely, or boring situations such as public transport, lunch breaks, and waiting areas. In this type of situation, the effect of immersing themselves in the mobile videos gave them the possibility to reclaim ownership of both their space and time (O'Hara et al., 2007, p. 857-859).

Now having established the popularity of mobile videos, it is important to understand how and why these videos were shared and distributed among viewers. O'Hara et al., (2007) shine a light on the sharing of video content, especially among school children. peer-to-peer exchanges of video content were common and based on trust, reciprocity, and exclusivities. Having videos to share represented high social value and resulted in kids downloading content to portable mediums such as USBs or CDs, for the sole purpose of exchange (O'Hara et al., 2007, p.864). Additionally, the sharing of mobile videos was also a means to spark discussion about certain topics, as well as to

reflect the person's own interests and “*Understanding of what her friends find cool*” (O'Hara et al., 2007, p.863).

2.1.2 The history

In September 2016 the Chinese IT firm ByteDance launched their video sharing and social media app Douyin, exclusively on the Chinese app market (Big 3 Media, 2020). In December of 2017, ByteDance purchased the social media platform Music.ly which since its conceptualization in 2014 had gained over 200 million users worldwide. Music.ly was a short video platform, which allowed its users to upload 15-second clips with popular songs playing in the background. (Big 3 Media, 2020). Upon acquiring Music.ly, Bytedance launched its services on the global market through TikTok, while maintaining Douyin as a separate Chinese entity (Dean, 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic is attributed as one of the key catalysts of TikTok's rising popularity, as the video app offered easily accessible entertainment for its users while they underwent national lockdown (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1070). According to Statista, TikTok has increased its monthly active user base by 38% between 2019-2021, ranking first in social media monthly growth. Compared to other popular social media, TikTok outgrew both Instagram and Snapchat which had an increase of 16% and 17% (Statista, 2021). As a result, at the beginning of 2022 TikTok had more than 1 billion active users globally which according to the marketing blog Backlink accounts for 22% of all active social media users (Dean, 2022).

2.1.3 The App

As previously stated, the original time limit for TikTok videos “*Tiktoks*” was 15 seconds, this maximum time limit has gradually increased over time and as of July 1, 2021 users could post videos of up to 3 minutes in length (Kirchhoff, 2021). And during the time of writing this thesis, the time limit was confirmed to increase to 10 minutes (Hutchinson, 2022). TikTok's Chinese equivalent, Douyin has since 2019 allowed its users to post videos with a length of up to 15 minutes (Zhang, 2019). TikTok is based on video trends, where users recreate, reinterpret or react to anything from dance choreographies or food recipes to humorous sketches and book reviews (Kennedy, 2020, p.1070; Stewart, 2021, p.6).

In the app, users have the ability to post different types of videos, that are divided into several different categories that differ in the way they are created and their purpose. Additionally, TikTok

offers other features such as Voice-to-text (Krutrök, 2021, p.6). Below is an introduction to two of the most relevant Tiktok-functions for use within the music community.

|
Duets: A duet allows for users to post a video side-by-side with another video that has previously been posted by another user. Both videos are played simultaneously and have their audios combined (TikTok, n.d.a). In music, the duet feature has been utilized by users to add their own vocal or instrumental harmonies on top of the original audio of another musician. One popular case of the duet feature in music is through the sea shanty “Soon May the Wellerman Come”. In 2020 TikTok user Nathan Evans posted a cover of an old whaling song originally stemming from New Zealand. Other music artists created duets, in which they sang and performed alongside Evans, resulting in the hashtag #Seashanty amassing over three billion views before February 2021 (Zimmer, 2021).

Stitch: Much like a duet this feature lets users combine their video with part of an existing video posted by someone else. The difference is that the two videos are not played simultaneously, but one after the other. (TikTok, n.d.b)

TikTok Live: Along with videos, TikTok also features a live-streaming option for its creators. By going Live, a creator can record themselves in real-time. They also have access to a live comment section, where viewers can communicate with the creator and each other (TikTok, n.d.c) The potential revenue streams connected to TikTok Live will be described later on in section 3.3.

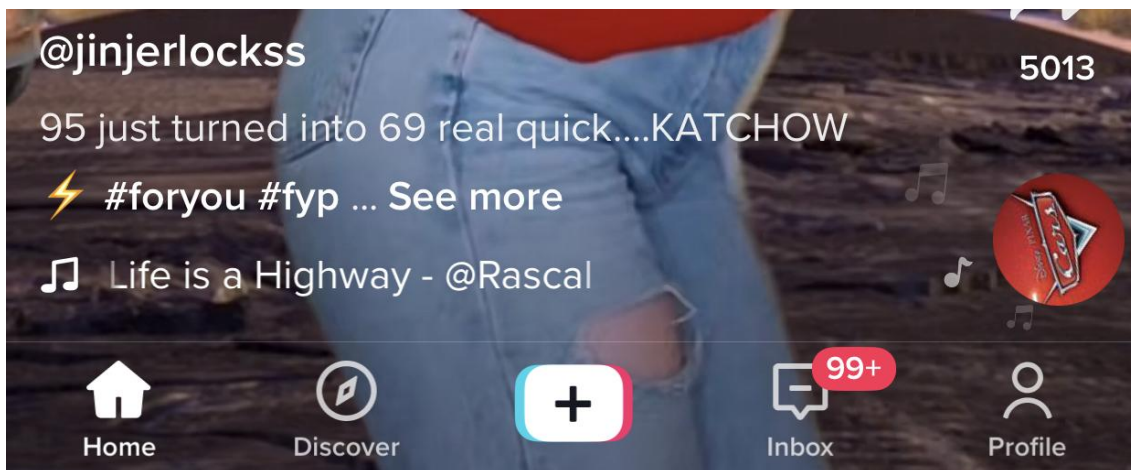
2.1.4 The Reach:

With a potential reach of over 1 billion users, like many other popular platforms before it, several communities arose within TikTok (Dean, 2022). The majority of the content of Tiktok is user-generated content (UGC) divided into several categories, often distinguished by the use of hashtags (Meiselwitz, 2020, p.108). Within the Tiktok universe, some hashtags have sprouted into their own communities, centered around specific themes or topics. TikTok themselves have recognized this phenomenon in their yearly summary “Year on TikTok: 2021-one-of-a-kind” where they list the most popular communities in 2021, with the top 3 being: **#BookTok**, **#SportTok**, and **#LearnonTiktok**. (TikTok, 2021a). Particularly #BookTok which revolves around another part of the cultural industries could be an indication of the potential TikTok has for music. On BookTok, creators post book-related content such as reviews and recommendations as well as engage in discussions in the video comment sections (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021, p.221). The 2016 book “It Ends with Us” written by Colleen Hoover had initially stagnated after just a month, with 21.000 sales. In November 2020 It Ends with Us saw a huge spike in sales, which resulted in more than

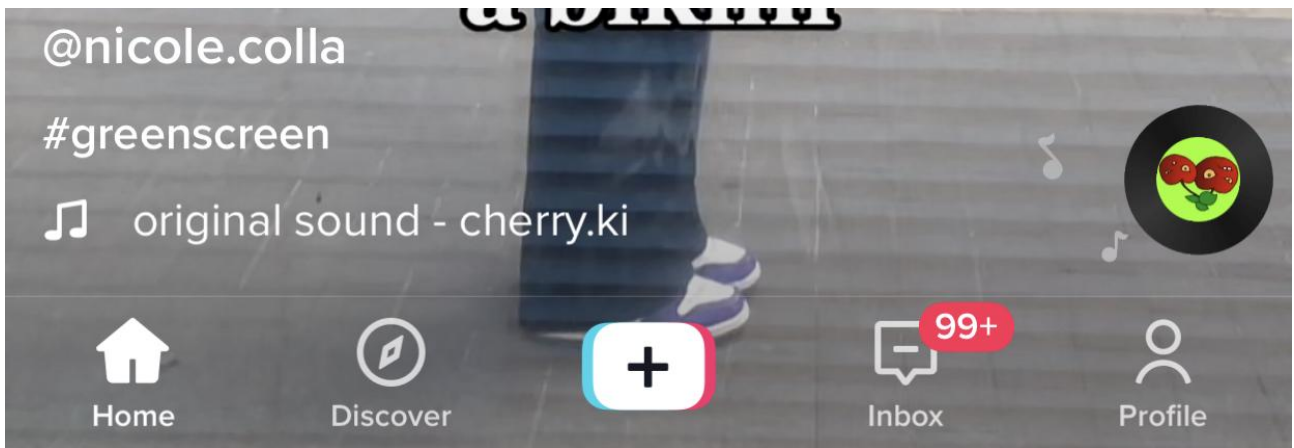
450.000 sold copies before 2022 (Stewart, 2021, p.6). BookTok and TikTok’s algorithm has received much of the credit for the success of *It Ends with Us*, as videos using the hashtag #ItEndsWithUs has a combined total of more than 73 million views (Stewart, 2021, p.6). In addition to hashtags, TikTok allows for a short text description limited to 300 characters (Zote, 2021).

2.2 TikTok - Music: Attribution and licensing

Music and audio on Tiktok are roughly defined by two different categories, audio content uploaded to TikTok’s internal audio library, hereby referred to as “TTAL”, by distributors, or *original sound* that is directly uploaded by TikTok users. Creators can use one of these two in addition to adding their own audio when creating content. (Valdovinos et al., 2021, p.3197). When using audio from the TTAL the video lists both artist and song name (see Picture 1), and when using an original sound from another user, the original creator is accredited (see Picture 2) (Valdovinos et al., 2021, p.3197).



Picture 1: Screenshot from video by TikTok user @jinjerlockss. The creator @Jinjerlockss uses the sound “Life is a Highway” by the band Rascal Flats (jinjerlockss, 2022).



Picture 2: Screenshot from video by TikTok user @nicole.colla

The creator @Nicole.colla creates a TikTok using the original sound of another TikTok creator, @cherry.ki (Colla, 2022).

The recognition of copyrighted audio material is now done automatically through TikTok so that if a video uses a piece of copyrighted work, the platform automatically recognizes and attributes the audio to the appropriate source (Valdovinos et al., 2021, p.3196) (See Picture 3 and Picture 4). Valdovinos et al., (2021) criticize this system as similar systems have previously been seen as inadequate, often leading to misattribution if the copyrighted work is not identified. Especially in instances where creators record live music or when uploading TikToks using music remixes. (Valdovinos et al., 2021, p.3204).

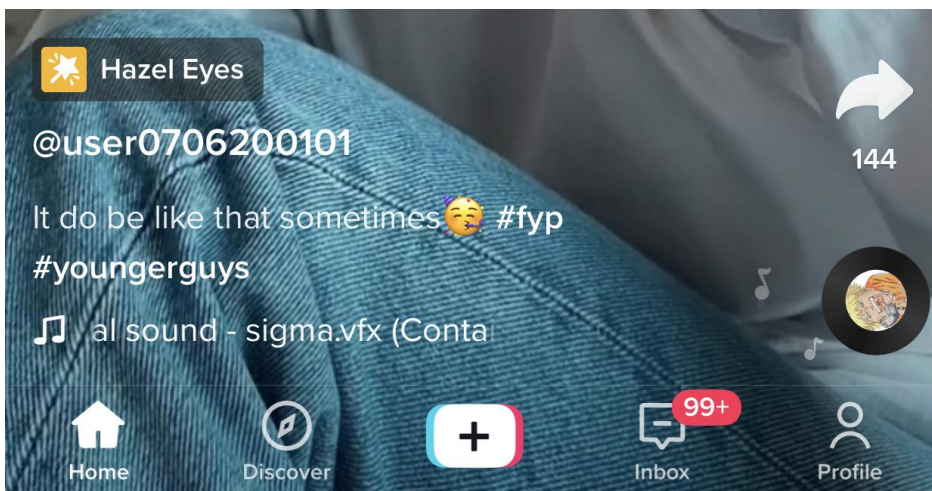


Figure 3: Screenshot from TikTok user @user076200101

Creator @user076200101 uses the original sound from creator @sigma.vfx (@user076200101, 2022).



original sound - sigma.vfx

Σ.VFX >

49,4K videos

🔖 Add to Favorites

Contains music from: **TITAN - KIM THE PHANTOM**

Picture 4: Screenshot from original sound - sigma.vfx

Original sound by creator @sigma.vfx used in 49.400 videos contains music from the song TITAN by KIM THE PHANTOM. (Sigma.vfx, n.d.).

Licensing:

The licensing of copyrighted audio material on TikTok is done through a set of deals made between TikTok and several rights holders. In February 2021 TikTok, UMG and UMPG expanded their global alliance which incorporated the catalogs of UMG and UMPG into the TTAL. (TikTok, 2021a). Similar long-term licensing agreements are made with both Sony Music Group and Warner Music Group (Millman, 2020a; Stassen, 2021).

The independent distributors and aggregators whom many Independent Artists rely on for the collection of royalties from TikTok have their own licensing deals with the platform. Tunecore informs openly that artists that utilize their services are paid per video created using their music (TuneCore, n.d.). DistroKid also provides its artists with the same information regarding revenues from TikTok (DistroKid, n.d.).

In its *Intellectual Property Policy*, Tiktok states that it does not tolerate copyright infringements on the platform and that any infringement by a creator is a breach of TikTok's Terms of service. Any such breach will result in the removal of the infringing content. Creators can submit takedown requests directly to TikTok when discovering copyright-infringing content (TikTok, 2021b). According to official numbers published by TikTok, from January 1. to May 2. 2021, TikTok received 78140 Takedown requests due to copyright infringements, of which 16662 were successful, leading to the removal of the infringing content (TikTok, 2021c).

2.2.1 SoundOn - Tiktok's music venture

On March 9, 2022 during the writing of this thesis, TikTok announced the launch of its music distribution service SoundOn (TikTok, 2022d). SoundOn allows artists to distribute their music to ByteDance's own platforms Resso and TikTok, as well as 90+ global streaming services, such as Spotify, Tidal, and Apple Music (SoundOn, n.d.a). As of the terms listed 23.04.2022, the artists would keep 100% of royalties generated from ByteDance platforms, and 100% of royalties collected from other services during the first year, decreasing to 90% from year two.

SoundOn follows the same royalty model as other independent distributors on TikTok by having the amount paid to artists based on the number of videos using their music (SoundOn, n.d.b).

2.3 TikTok - Popstars and niche groups

This subchapter will explain how TikTok has led to international music superstars, this will be exemplified through the artist Erica Banks. Additionally, the subchapter will present the concept of virality, and introduce the TikTok algorithm.

2.3.1 The TikTok Algorithm

TikTok recommends content to users from its front page, known as the For you - page, often abbreviated to Fyp and 4U. Through the Fyp, TikTok serves its viewers an unlimited amount of videos that the algorithm has determined to be within the viewer's interest, based on their interactions with other content. Over time the algorithm will have amassed enough data to custom tailor the Fyp to the perceived interests of the user (Simpson & Seman, 2020, p.8; Valdovinos et al., 2021, p.2).

Even though this thesis does not primarily revolve around TikTok's complex algorithm, the software creates the foundations of TikTok and has received praise for both its ingenuity and effectiveness at forming communities (Hiebert & Kortes-Miller, 2021, p.14), as well as criticism for recommending kids harmful content (Tracy, 2021). In their 2020 article, Simpson & Semaan discuss both the pros and cons of this algorithm, as the algorithm decides what content the users see, resulting in both increased discoverability for content, and decreased control for the users as to what types of content they are exposed to. (Simpson & Seman, 2020, p. 8-9).

2.3.2 Going viral

For TikTok creators, the sheer abundance of video content produced daily results in using hashtags, participating in trends, and using popular audio having a considerable effect on the success of the content (Valdovinos et al., 2021, p.3197). Several creators have experienced virality on TikTok by

having one of their videos reach a large audience. Once having experienced virality, many see it as difficult to keep this momentum going (Wells, 2021). YouTube played an important role in removing the risk when publishing audio-visual content. This was due to the high potential rewards of content achieving virality, which reignited discussions about quality vs quantity (Dumbreck & McPherson, 2015, p.59).

Erica Banks - Buss it: The rapper from DeSoto, Texas, released her album “Erica Banks”, containing the song “Buss It” on June 19, 2020, through the independent label 1501 Certified Entertainment. “Buss It” gained popularity on TikTok after Tiktok user Erika Davila posted a video of herself dancing to the song, which later sparked the #Bussitchallenge. The challenge revolves around the transition from casual clothing into a club-ready outfit, where the transition in clothing follows a transition in the music from Nelly’s “Hot In Here” to Erica Banks’ “Buss it”. The switch in both attire and music happens when the individual in the video squats down and assumes to perform the popular dance move known as “Twerking”. (McKinney, 2021)

As of 01.02.2022, the #Bussitchallenge hashtag has more than 4 billion views, with the audio of “Buss it” being used in 4.1 million unique videos.(See picture 5) (TikTok, n.d.d)

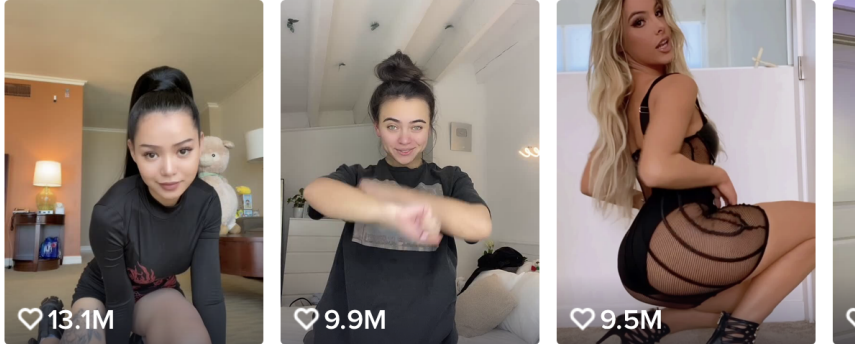
Looking at Banks’ Spotify numbers, we find “Buss It” as her most streamed song at 108million plays, with her second most-streamed song “Toot that” at just below 8 million plays. At the time of writing, Banks has 57.000 followers on Spotify. (Banks, n.d.)

Top Users Videos Sounds LIVE Hashtags

Hashtags

See more >

bussitchallenge 4.0B views

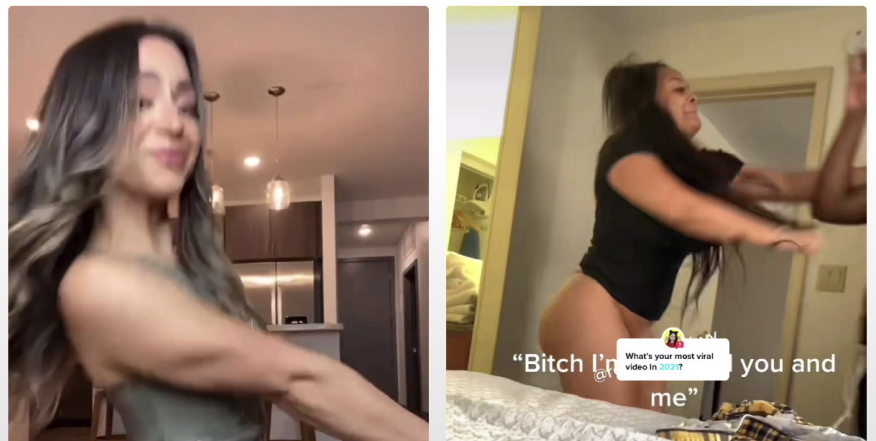


Sounds

See more >

 **Buss It**
Erica Banks
01:00 Popular 4.1M

Videos



Picture 5: Screenshot from TikTok in-app search of the keywords “buss it challenge” (TikTok, n.d.d)

2.4 TikTok - Revenue streams

In addition to the revenue generated from licensing your music to TikTok, mentioned in chapter 2.2, the content creators on TikTok have several other possible revenue streams that allow them to generate money on the platform. Creators can earn money through TikTok's creator fund, and through Livestream donations. Access to these revenue streams is restricted by several factors such as age, location, and followers. (TikTok, 2021b) To be able to apply for *The creator fund* and have access to *Live gifts*, *Tips*, *Video Gifts*, and *The creator marketplace* the creator must first join *Creator Next* which is the program that offers access to the revenue streams. In order to join, a creator must have at least 1000 video views in the last month as well as having posted at least 3 videos within the time span of that month (30 days). (TikTok, n.d.e)

The creator fund is a fund created by TikTok to give creators an opportunity to generate revenue from their video content on the platform. In order to be able to apply for the fund, the creator has to meet a set of requirements such as; being aged 18+, having 10 000 followers, and more than 100 000 video views in the last month. The video views and video engagement are also among the factors TikTok takes into account when determining the funds a creator is entitled to. The creator fund is also geographically limited to users in the US, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and UK. (TikTok, n.d.f)

Live- and video gifts: When hosting a TikTok Live, a creator can receive gifts from users watching the Live. These virtual gifts pop up on screen during the Live in the form of animations or stickers, which are visible to everyone connected to the Live. <https://www.tiktok.com/legal/virtual-items> TikTok has two types of internal currency; coins and diamonds. *Coins* are purchased by users for real money in order to purchase gifts. When receiving a gift, the gift is converted into a set value of *diamonds*, which the creator can withdraw and convert to an external currency (TikTok, n.d.e)

Tips allow users to tip a creator directly through a button on the creator's profile. TikTok limits its users to only being able to tip a maximum of 100\$ per transaction, and 500\$ total per day, through a daily maximum of 100 unique transactions. The tips feature is restricted to US creators with at least 100 000 followers (TikTok, 2021d).

The final possible revenue stream is the ***TikTok creator marketplace*** hereby TTCM. The TTCM is a platform to connect creators with brands, in order to facilitate for collaborations such as paid ad

campaigns. Brands can approach creators, who can then create branded video content to advertise the brand's products (TikTok, 2020).

2.4.1 How TikTok earns money

According to Whatsthebusinessmodelof.com TikTok has three sources of revenue; advertisements, E-commerce, and in-app purchases (Qadri, 2021). TikTok facilitates for brands to purchase placements for video advertisements with custom audiences to reach target demographics on the platform (TikTok, n.d.g; TikTok Editorial Team, 2021). The in-app purchases involve the purchase of the coins mentioned in chapter 2.4. (Mishra, 2022). Through partnerships with e-commerce platforms Shopify and Square (now Block), TikTok has launched a pilot project which enables brands to provide its audience with direct in-app shopping (TikTok Editorial Team, 2021).

2.5 TikTok - VS. other Social media

In order to explore the potential of TikTok, we must compare the platform to other services that perform similar activities and target the related audience. The video-sharing site Youtube and the social media Instagram have been instrumental to the development in Music marketing and have now launched similar services to TikTok. TikTok has been described as more laid back and less formal than Facebook, unfiltered compared to Instagram, and short when stacked against YouTube (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021, p.219).

2.5.1 Youtube

Associate Professor of Humanities and Creative Arts at Miami University, Cecilia H. Suhr describes Youtube as having critical significance to unsigned artists, as it offered an accessible and free platform for reaching a wider audience. Among the unsigned artists, who have risen to success through being discovered on YouTube we find the aforementioned Justin Bieber (Suhr, 2012, pp.56-57). Even though Youtube is not considered to be a social media, it is both resemblant and comparable to TikTok, as they are both video-sharing platforms, relying heavily on UGC, with a strong connection to music-related content (Suhr, 2012, p.55-56). As a music consumption platform, Youtube is considered a major player, accounting for 1 billion USD in payouts to rights holders in 2016. When compared to streaming platforms, the Youtube revenue-share paid out to rights owners is considerably lower (Krueger, 2019, p.33). The video-sharing platform YouTube requires a sync license for the use of music in music videos (Krueger, 2019, p.33). YouTube has been heavily criticized as being a safe harbor for copyright infringement, as it is covered by the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). The DMCA protects the platform from liability

when UGC infringes copyrights, as long as the UGC is removed within a *timely fashion* upon YouTube receiving a takedown notice from the rightsholder. Therefore Youtube does not have to pay for the use of the copyrighted material. Unlike Youtube, traditional streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music are required to pay, as their content is not uploaded by the users, therefore not UGC (Krueger, 2019, 226-227).

A different view comes from Valodnios et al., who highlight the content identification system of YouTube as a superior automated system compared to that of TikTok, as it both punishes copyright infringement and hinders misattribution (Valdovinos et al., 2021, p.2-3).

2.5.1.1 YouTube Shorts

In addition to the well-known concept of YouTube videos, YouTube has launched a short-video service called YouTube Shorts. Creators can now post up to 60-second clips in a vertical, phone-friendly format. The functionality on YouTube Shorts is very similar to that of TikTok, as you go to the next video by swiping and have access to buttons for liking, commenting, sharing and commenting. Additionally, YouTube shorts offer a dislike function, in the same way as on long-form Youtube videos (Google, 2022b). One factor which distinguishes between Youtube and Youtube Shorts is the maximum character length in the description. On Youtube, this is capped at 5.000 characters while Youtube Shorts has limited creators to only 100 characters, equal to that of a Youtube video title (Das, 2022; Molenaar, 2021). Creators are able to generate revenue from the YouTube Shorts Fund, a \$100M fund made to award creators with high engagement and original content. One thing that is particularly interesting is that YouTube specifically states that channels uploading watermarked videos from third-party social media platforms are not eligible for the fund. (Google, 2022b) Creators on Shorts have access to a unique audio library as well as the option to sample audio from any long or short-form video on YouTube (Google, 2022b).

2.5.2 Instagram

Instagram is a Facebook-owned photo-sharing app, launched in 2010. (Blystone, 2022). Instagram also features a Live function where creators can interact with audiences in real-time. Music producers Swizz Beats and Timbaland have regularly invited other artists to go head-to-head on their Instagram Live show, where they amassed over 280.000 live viewers in an episode with rappers T-Pain and Lil Jon (Dandridge-Lemco, 2020). In addition to photos, Instagram also allows creators to upload videos of between 15 seconds and 10 minutes (Still, 2019). Additionally, Instagram restricts video and photo posts to use a maximum of 30 hashtags and 2200 characters in

the video description (Hashtag Expert, 2021; Zote, 2021). Music on Instagram is uploaded from distributors to the Instagram music library, for use in Instagram Stories and Instagram Reels (Instagram, 2020). According to independent distributor Symphonic, Instagram uses the Facebook Rights Manager to identify and monetize music used on its platform, and to distribute royalties to rights owners. (Zimmerman, 2022).

2.5.2.1 Instagram Reels

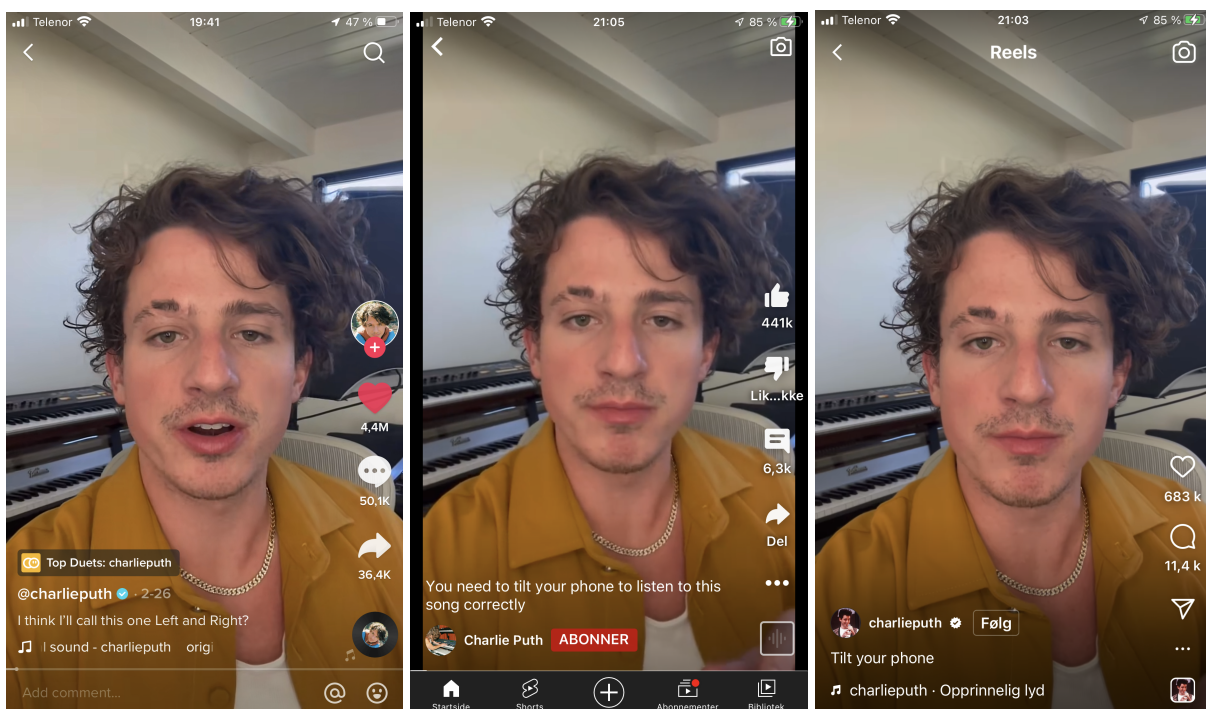
On August 5, 2020 Instagram launched its Instagram Reels, a short-video service in direct competition with TikTok. Instagram Reels offers creators the ability to make short videos, using popular songs and a large variety of filters (Instagram, 2020). Reels currently allows users to post videos between 15-60 seconds. (Delfino, 2022)

2.5.3 Comparison:

Below is both a visual comparison and a functionality comparison, meant to summarize the main differences and similarities of TikTok, YouTube, YouTube Shorts, Instagram, and Instagram Reels explained in the previous paragraphs. This comparison is not meant to cover the entirety of the three short-form services, but to give an insight into how they may be used differently and how they compare to the features on TikTok.

Visual comparison

TikTok - YouTube Shorts - Instagram Reels



Left to right (Picture 6), (Picture 7), (Picture 8)

Picture 6: Screenshot from TikTok video creator @charlieputh (Puth, 2022a).

Picture 7: Screenshot from YouTube Shorts video creator @Charlieputh (Puth, 2022b)

Picture 8: Screenshot from Instagram Reels video creator @Charlieputh (Puth, 2022c)

Similarities:

- Buttons to Like, comment and share are placed on the right side.
- Subscribe buttons, different placements.
- Creator's name and video description are visible.

Differences:

- YouTube Shorts has a dislike button
- YouTube Shorts does not show the name of audio
- YouTube Shorts has shortcuts to other YouTube functions
- TikTok places the subscribe / Follow button above the like button.

Functionality comparison

*Functionality comparison is based on TikTok's features. Other platforms may offer features that are not listed in the comparison. This comparison separates between Youtube/ Youtube shorts and Instagram/ Instagram Reels, even though they are integrated services. This is done to provide a perspective on the features of the short-video services

	TikTok	Youtube Shorts	Youtube	Instagram Reels	Instagram
Max video length	15 min	60 sec	12 hours	60 sec	10 min
Character limit	300	100	5.000	2.200	2.200
Live Broadcast	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Video Revenue	Fund	Fund	Monetization	N/A	N/A

2.6 TikTok - Media discourse

TikTok has been both criticized and praised in the media, as it has provided everyone with a voice that could reach millions. In the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, TikTok and other social media have been used to spread propaganda (Hutchinson, 2022a). TikTok has been labeled as a key platform in the conflict and the New Yorker has even described it as "The first TikTok-War" as

fighting soldiers from both sides have actively been uploading content to the platform, documenting the situation and exposing each other's whereabouts (Chayka, 2022). A similar war on information can be seen in the information vs disinformation conflict around COVID-19, in which TikTok has been heavily involved. Health workers have been actively fighting misinformation campaigns aimed at scaring audiences away from getting vaccinated (Law, 2021). Tiktok and its moderators have been accused of suppressing creators deemed “ugly” or “poor” from the For you page, in order for the content to be more appealing to new users (Biddle et al., 2020).

Chapter 3: Methodological review

This section seeks to explain and provide the reasons behind the choices made in terms of research design, and research methods used to explore and describe the relationship between the short-form video application TikTok and the Music Industries, as well as its use for Independent musicians. Additionally, the main ethical aspects regarding the research method chosen, as well as potential sources of error for this thesis will also be discussed. The primary research methods for this project are semi-structured interviews and secondary data research.

3.1 Research objective

The primary objective of this research is to explore the field of TikTok marketing for independent musicians by answering a set of predetermined research questions, mentioned in the introduction chapter. By exploring the experiences of musicians as well as the tools and services of Tiktok, this thesis seeks to serve as a guide for how to develop tools for independent musicians, as well as give insight into how the artists themselves interact with and think about the tools that are already available.

3.2 Research design

The research design is to be seen as the “*How*” when trying to figure out how to answer a research question. The design decides the approach in addition to describing the framework and procedures for the anticipated research. Which methods of data collection to use, as well as how data is analyzed and presented are based on the selected research design, which establishes the plan for the research project (Mligo, 2016, p.32).

In order to reach the aforementioned research objective, the first logical move was to delve into prior research on similar related topics such as *independent music marketing*, *social media marketing for musicians*, and *TikTok marketing*. Examining secondary data from sources such as theses and dissertations by other researchers both quantitative and qualitative is known as *secondary data research design* (Mligo, 2016, p.34). As opposed to primary data which is collected for the specific research, secondary data is acquired by other researchers for their own projects (Mligo, 2016, p.56).

As this research seeks to explore the marketing potential for independent artists who are active on TikTok, I saw interviewing the artists themselves as the optimal method for acquiring first-hand information/ primary data from their experiences. By researching a sample of people's experience of a phenomenon, such as the concept of TikTok for marketing, this thesis applies a phenomenological research design (Mligo, 2016, p.36).

Collectively this thesis would be categorized as a phenomenological research project, conducted through semi-structured interviews, supplemented by data from *secondary data research*, and nontechnical literature.

3.3 Qualitative approach

As opposed to a *quantitative research approach*, which is primarily used for examining the relationship between several variables in a hypothesis, professors of Nursing, Jane Mills, and Melanie Birks define the purpose of *qualitative research* as examining phenomena that have impacted the actual reality of either a group or an individual within a certain context defined by either culture or social aspects (Mligo, 2016, p. 33; Mills & Birks, 2013, p. 8). Qualitative research is mainly used when describing or interpreting a phenomenon, situation, or issue when trying to obtain new knowledge or establish a theoretical perspective. Should the research require the use of both *quantitative* and *qualitative* methods, they can be combined into what is known as a mixed research approach (Mligo, 2016, p.33). Qualitative research centers around open-ended research questions that provide a broad scope. Research questions attempting to examine an experience or phenomenon are usually phrased as “How”, or “what” (Mills & Birks, 2013, p.10). Given that the primary objective of this research is to explore how TikTok has affected DIY independent marketing for musicians, the methodology of this thesis gravitated towards a qualitative approach. Another determining factor in the choice of research approach was the given time constraints, which made it unrealistic to gather enough data for a quantitative approach to the aforementioned

research question without having access to, and an understanding of sophisticated tools for data mining.

3.4 Data collection methods

3.4.1 Interviews

One popular method of data collection in the field of social science is *personal interviews* in which the researcher gathers information directly from an interview subject, by asking them a set of predetermined questions regarding a certain topic (Kothari, 2004, pp.97-98). In terms of how the interviews are carried out, they are further divided into *structured interviews*, with a standard form and rigid procedures, and *unstructured interviews* which are less rigid and have a higher degree of flexibility. In exploratory research, the unstructured interview form is often preferred, as the interviewer has a greater opportunity to ask supplementary questions as well as respond and adapt to stories from the interviewees (Kothari, 2004, pp.97-98; Kvale, 2007, p.65).

The choice of using personal interviews in this thesis was made due to the many benefits of this method, which for the given purpose outweighed the weaknesses. Among the benefits summarized by Kothari, the most important ones that affected the choice of research method were;

1. The possibility to obtain in-depth information.
2. The ability to control the sample and decide who to interview.
3. Flexibility to restructure questions and the order in which questions were asked.

(Kothari, 2004, pp. 98-99).

Kothari lists several weaknesses to be considered, those deemed to pose the highest level of threat to this particular research were;

1. That this is a time-consuming method, which involves transcription and interviewing subjects from different geographical locations.
2. Certain types of interview subjects, for instance, important officials are not easy to approach which can result in inadequate data.

(Kothari, 2004, p.99).

Kothari further defines three types of *unstructured* interviews; *Focused interviews*, *Clinical interviews*, and *non-directive interviews*. This thesis uses focused interviews as they revolve around the experiences of the respondent, and the interviewer is free to explore motives and decide the

sequence in which the questions are asked, in order to capitalize on the aforementioned benefit, of possibly obtaining more in-depth information through supplementary questions. *Clinical interviews* are more focused on the underlying motivations and feelings behind the respondent's experience, while *non-directive interviews* encourage the respondent to talk freely about a given topic, with limited directions from the researcher. (Kothari, 2004, p.98). Kothari's definition of a focused unstructured interview is also known as a semi-structured interview, in which the researcher does not have fixed questions, but rather a set of categories with possible questions. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017, p.63).

3.4.1.1 Interview Guide

Although the interviews conducted in this study were unstructured in the sense that not all interviewees were asked the same questions in a particular order, It was semi-structured in the sense that all questions asked were from 4 predetermined categories. Within these categories the wording of the questions and the follow-up questions varied by the interview subject. When deciding on categories and possible questions, I followed the reasoning from Brinkmann & Kvale, that **Why**-questions should be asked first in order to facilitate for the **how** or **what**-questions mentioned by Mills & Birks that allow for examination of a phenomenon (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017,p. 65; Mills & Birks, 2013, p.10)

Category 1: About you - Questions within this category was aimed at exploring the artist's professional goals and aspirations, as well as providing the necessary background information to provide a proper introduction of the artist.

Category 2: Why do you use TikTok? - Category 2 sought to uncover the purpose of their entry on TikTok, as well as their initial thoughts on the platform.

Category 3: How do you use Tiktok? - This category concerns the actual utilization of the platform and is aimed at deciphering the thought process of a TikTok creator/music artist.

Category 4: Your experience on the platform - Here the questions tried to dig into how they as artists and creators had experienced success on Tiktok, and how the platform had affected their work routines and time management.

3.4.2 Secondary data research

To locate prior research I used The University of Agder's online library service Oria, as well as the physical library at campus Kristiansand. Reading different journal publications and books on the topic at hand and related subjects gave me a foundational understanding of music marketing and DIY culture. Through this literature, I found areas that required further research, which I actively used to narrow my research questions and develop my interview questions. Additionally, surveying the existing literature made the process of placing my research within the academic field easier.

3.4.3 Nontechnical literature

Given the rapid changes in the digital environment that is Social media, trends, strategies, and concepts are constantly evolving, which often gives little time for proper research before losing their relevance. In order for the data in this research to be of timely relevance, some information has been retrieved from non-academic sources such as music industry blogs (Musicbusinessworldwide.com), Social media industry publications (Socialmediatoday.com), and News outlets (Rollingstone.com, Flowjournal.com). Another important nontechnical literature source for this thesis has been the NDPNDNT Podcast hosted by Independent artists Nic D & Connor Price, as they interview independent artists with TikTok experience (D et al., n.d.a). The NDPNDNT podcast released its first episode on December 30th, 2021 as I was writing my thesis. The emergence of such a podcast further illustrates the development of independent music marketing and supports the need for research in this field. These sources fall within the data category known as nontechnical literature, along with other material such as; diaries, catalogs, and memoirs. Nontechnical literature can be used as primary data, but will in this thesis be used to supplement data from interviews and secondary data research (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, pp.38-39).

For illustrative purposes, I have opted to provide screenshots of the various functions within TikTok, as a written description is insufficient and less optimal when describing the user interface on a mobile application.

3.5 Ethical concerns

Steinar Kvale lists several ethical concerns regarding interviews in all stages of the research. In designing and thematizing the interview, the researcher should only seek information that could improve the situation that is investigated, and obtain the appropriate consent from the interview subjects. (Kvale, 2007, p.24).

Kvale describes informed consent as providing the necessary information about the research purpose, design as well as risks, and obtaining volunteer participation from the interview subjects (Kvale, 2007, p.27). Informed consent was acquired by sending the interview candidates an information sheet based on the NSD (Norsk senter for forskningsdata) standard information sheet for interview candidates. The information sheet was edited to fit the research and was approved by NSD.

Another important stage where several ethical concerns arise is during the post-interview work, such as transcription, analysis, and reporting of the interview data. The transcribed text should stay loyal to the interview subject's statements, while also protecting their confidentiality. During the analysis, the researcher must determine how active the interview subjects are allowed to be in terms of the interpretation of their statements. Lastly, the reporting of an interview publicizes the information shared in private, which might lead to consequences that can affect the interviewees. (Kvale, 2007, p.24).

For this research the ethical issues regarding reporting were the most prevailing, seeing as the interviewees would be mentioned by name in the thesis, and therefore be fully recognizable. As they were asked to share information regarding their wellbeing, their feelings, and experiences, the potential consequences could affect the artists professionally and harm their careers, therefore all interviews were sent back to the interviewees after transcription and in some cases translation, in order for the interview subjects to be able to edit, remove, and comment on statements.

3.6 Credibility and Generalization

In a qualitative setting, the number of interview subjects is small due to the focus on the quality of the acquired data but should be representative of a larger population (Mlilo, 2016, p.51). The need for global generalization through representation has been debated, where Kvale points out that one must ask the question of whether the findings of the interview can be transferred to similar relevant situations instead of assuming that all knowledge is valid everywhere and forever (Kvale, 2007, pp.126-127).

In interviews where the subjects are selected at random, there is a higher chance of the results being statistically generalizable and for quantification of the results. In studies where the interviewees are self-selected, such as in this research, analytical generalization is more feasible. Analytical generalization judges the ability of the findings in a study to act as a guide for future situations, although it relies on the researcher's arguments for transferability and how the reader interprets the

rapport (Kvale, 2007, pp.127-128). Closely related to generalization we find reliability as it is determined by the ability to recreate the research findings. Through interviewing a diverse range of artists at different points in their careers, and with different sized fanbases the study seeks to increase the potential for the results to be recreated.

3.6.1 Research credibility and validity

Tracy (2010) defines credibility as the trustworthiness and plausibility of the findings resulting from the research. The credibility of a research study's results is determined by the researcher's ability to have control of the entire research process. (Mills & Birks, 2013, p.222). A means for increasing credibility is a thick description that illustrates the behavior within a context in detail. The author should provide this thick description in order for the readers to be able to form their own conclusions (Tracy, 2010, 843).

By providing an entire chapter dedicated to dissecting TikTok in terms of history, functionality, and functions related to music, I seek to provide the reader with sufficient information to create their own conclusions, thus improving the credibility of my findings. To ensure a high degree of validity in the thesis and ensure that the research findings provided answers to the research questions, all interview questions were created with the main research question and sub-questions as a basis.

3.7 Interview

Parts of these interviews are based on the issues presented by Musgrave & Gross regarding the additional mental pressure from social media that artists have to endure. As TikTok is a platform that encourages user content production, and that heavily focuses on short content, it would be interesting to see how the artists on the platform cope with the aforementioned issues.

3.7.1 Intervju subjects

For this thesis I have interviewed three different candidates. Two American males based in the USA, and one Norwegian female based out of England. The aim of the interviews was to gain insights into the artist's mindsets and discover their thoughts and experiences from using TikTok to develop their artist careers and to market their music. Below is a short introduction to each of the artists, which establishes their size as well as their experience on TikTok.

3.7.1.1 tone october (TikTok - @toneoctobermusic)

tone october is a Los Angeles-based pop artist, with 5744 followers on TikTok.

(DRINKWATERSHANE, 2022). tone released his debut single “Why don’t I Feel the same” on October 9, 2020, hence the name tone october. Before its release, tone posted several videos with snippets of the song to Tiktok to encourage viewers to pre-save his upcoming song. (october, 2020a) Upon release, tone continued to post videos where he encouraged his audience to use his song in their videos, and create duets with his own videos with the song. On November 11th tone posted a video showing his Spotify streams at 5640 within November 12th (october, 2020b). He has continued to post similar videos, with updated amounts of streams with 15.000 on December 10th, and 20.000 on December 29th (october, 2020c; october, 2020d). tone’s most-watched TikTok video has reached 74.000 views (october, 2020e). He has continuously encouraged listeners to use his sound, to which several users have followed up on his request, and “Why don’t I Feel the same” now has 96 videos using the sound (october, n.d.a). At the time of writing 03.03.2022, the song has amassed 636.000 streams on Spotify (Spotify, n.d.).

Followers on TikTok: 6212 (october, n.d.b)

Followers on Spotify: 494 (october, n.d.c)

3.7.1.2 Andrea (TikTok - @Andrea.tnl7)

Andrea is a Norwegian singer, songwriter, and music producer currently studying at the BIMM institute in London (*Andrea – Singer-Songwriter and Female Music Producer*, 2021).

Her first Tiktok video “making a beat” was posted on September 27, 2020, just prior to her debut release, and showed Andrea creating a beat accompanied by text explaining her dream of being a producer (Andrea, 2020a). She released her first single “Dumb” in November 2020, which has amassed more than 25k streams (Andrea, 2020b; Andrea, n.d.a). After her first release, her family established the Norwegian independent label, Bubblebunny Records, where she was promptly signed (Lindal, 2021). As of 12.04.2022, Andrea has posted 103 unique videos on TikTok, with her most popular video has reached 14,3k views. (Andrea, n.d.a)

Followers on TikTok: 761 (Andrea, n.d.a)

Followers on Spotify: 570 (Andrea, n.d.b)

3.7.1.3 West (TikTok - @Soundslikewest)

West is an American artist working out of Los Angeles who released his first song in 2019.

West posted his first TikTok on 2021-04-10, using his song “A-list” and telling the story of how he got to where he was. At this point, he had 20.690 monthly listeners on Spotify, which has since evolved into 77.799. (West, n.d.a) His most viewed TikTok video has 2.6 million views, which shows a self-produced beat, where he asked the audience if he should release the project (West, 2021). This beat resulted in the song Euro\$tep which was released on April 8th and has 68.000 streams on Spotify (West, n.d.b)

Followers on TikTok: 20.200 (West, n.d.c)

Followers on Spotify: 5.287 (West, n.d.a)

3.7.1.4 The Change (TikTok - @Thechangeiscomingg)

The Change is an American pop artist, based out of Orlando, Florida. Change posted his first TikTok on November 26th, 2020. On the 5th of December 2020, Change teased his debut “Lay Your Love” for the first time on TikTok. He has since his debut released 18 songs, and amassed 132.400 monthly listeners (The Change, n.d.a). From 330 videos The Change has gained 62.200 followers (The Change, n.d.b)

Change’s greatest success on TikTok has been with his newest single “my home”, first teased on march 5th 2022, in his video series “A song a day”. The video received 39.700 views surpassing the other songs in the series (The Change, 2022). Following the initial interest in the unreleased song Change continued posting snippets of the song, with several videos amassing more than 500.000 views each, and one surpassing one million. Change encouraged people to “send this to your home” in all videos he posted using “my home”. This resulted in a trend where creators would post videos and pictures of their loved ones, with “my home” playing in the background. The trend resulted in more than 24.000 unique videos (The Change, n.d.c). “my home” was released on April 14th, 2022, and at the time of writing, 16.05.2022, “my home” has 1.000.000 streams on Spotify. (The Change, n.d.a)

Followers on TikTok: 63.700 (The Change, n.d.b)

Followers on Spotify: 19.298 (The Change, n.d.a)

3.7.2 Subject selection

The definition of Independent is described in chapter 1.2. creates the foundation for the subject selection. When selecting the interview subjects I first established a set of requirements for potential interview candidates; (1) The artist must be independent (2) The artist could not have had a major

following prior to starting their TikTok account (3) The artist must actively post TikTok videos about their music, and (4) The artist must operate out of a location where all TikTok's services are available. I discovered artists by browsing TikTok, using my personal TikTok profile. Upon discovery, I would search through their profile to establish if they met requirement 3. As most artists have linked their TikTok and Instagram accounts, I could easily progress to their Instagram to further analyze. On their Instagram I was able to cross-reference with their TikTok profile to establish if they had major success prior to TikTok, thereby assessing whether or not they met requirement 2.

In either their TikTok or Spotify profile biography they would have a link to their official Spotify page, where I could assess requirement 1 through the *Show credits* function. This function allowed me to see whether they released their songs through a major or major affiliated label. Once all requirements were met, I contacted and arranged the interviews with the artists through Instagram, as TikTok does not allow for personal messaging with people who do not follow you back. Due to my requirements for the candidates, the selection pool was limited to primarily Anglophonic artists.

3.7.1 Limitations

Considering the algorithm that will be discussed later on in the thesis, the selection process has largely been affected by TikTok. All the content that appears on my TikTok is shown to me because of the data the algorithm has collected from my previous interactions. I, therefore, assume that I am predisposed to certain content because of variables such as my location, age, gender, and musical interests. Such an issue could perhaps have been avoided by creating a new TikTok account for the sole purpose of this thesis, albeit the personal preferences of the researcher and potential variables such as location, age, and gender, would arguably still contribute to the TikTok algorithm's choice of recommendations. This could have a further limiting effect on the generalizability of the research beyond what is mentioned in chapter 3.6, as several of the interviewees are found in the same geographical location.

3.7.3 Conducting the interviews

As all my interviewees were scattered around the globe all interviews were conducted by phone. Having geographically spread interview subjects, and conducting interviews in several languages opened for the interviewees to freely express themselves in their native language, although making the interview-analysis process requires both transcription and translation. Albeit a time-consuming

process, the appropriate time was allocated, as it had already been considered due to Kothari's listing of interview weaknesses.

Chapter 4: Findings

The goal of the interviews was to gain insights into how Independent artists used Tiktok, explore TikTok's position in the music industries, as well as to discover how Tiktok affected the artist's mentality and time management. This section will present the primary findings from the semi-structured interviews. The findings from interviews with the four Independent artists; The Change, tone october, Andrea, and West are categorized into three categories based on the research questions; (1) How artists of today use the tools of tomorrow, (2) Revenue and value creation, and (3) Staying on the grind; Stress and pressure.

4.1 How artists of today use the tools of tomorrow

One of the first questions I asked the interviewees was why they started using TikTok. By asking the **why** I hoped to establish how they primarily viewed the platform, whether they saw it as an income source, marketing platform, or a communications channel to their audience. The answers from the interviewees pointed toward them seeing it as a growing marketing platform, that had the potential to expand their audience.

Andrea: "I use TikTok in order to try to reach a new audience that I would not have been able to reach through friends of friends. Tiktok is genius in the sense that the algorithm is so random. It can go either in your favor or really not in your favor."

tone october: "I saw it as undeniable, everybody else was on it. I guess not everybody was on it, but I could quickly see like, people were gonna be. (...) and it was the only thing that was giving people who didn't have a platform a chance."

This question was followed up by asking what the main benefits of Tiktok were when compared to other platforms. The consensus seemed to be that the seemingly random exposure potential of the algorithm was the main attractive feature when compared to platforms like Instagram.

tone october: "Well they share you with like a different set of people every time. you're not just going out to your audience so that's my favorite part. like you can you have no idea if your next video is gonna make 100 new fans or 1000 or 0."

Andrea: *“It has to be that it is so random. You have the potential to blow up or find a niche crowd that you would never have discovered you on Instagram. On Instagram its harder to get on the explore page and gain a new audience.”*

The Change: *“I think the only separator right now on TikTok is just organic reach like the fact that no matter how big, or how small of an account you are, every single video you post has an equal opportunity as anyone else on the platform to go viral. “*

All interviewees were then asked if they were active on any other social media than TikTok and Instagram, in order to explore their relationships with other marketing platforms. All artists were active on multiple platforms to different degrees and had experienced varying results.

tone october: *“Well YouTube, yeah I wanna keep going on YouTube. I posted seldomly but yes there every once in a while 'cause I wanna keep that one kinda high performing that's like the I don't know that's the top creator paid platform so. “*

Andrea: *“I have a Facebook profile, but I don't control it. Instagram is the one I'm doing, Instagram and Tiktok. We also have Youtube, which could absolutely be updated, it's been a long time since anything has happened there.”*

The most surprising finding in terms of social media usage came from The Change, who has been active on Instagram Reels. He estimated that Instagram Reels had been more effective than TikTok lately, and requires significantly less time as he re-uploads his content from TikTok.

The Change: *“(...)Instagram reels organic reach is crazy right now. like im getting triple. same content, triple maybe even more than reach. (...)and it's me just again re-uploading from TikTok(...)”*

After having established the why, I wanted to know the **how**, in the sense of how they decided on content and where they drew inspiration. Additionally by asking them whether they analyzed other TikTok creators, one could get a sense of their thoughts on the competitive aspect of the platform and their view on TikTok creation as a business. When asked about this the response tended to lean towards getting inspiration from other creators such as friends and trending content.

tone october: *“yeah definitely like I try to get a sense for what's going on in space. (...) in terms of trends and how well it worked for them. (...) if I was inspired to watch the video I*

imagine that other people would be too, whether or not whether or not perform well. 'cause that's another thing that you might lose a good idea based on like the one-time result of a video that just didn't get pushed outright. so that's 'cause I know this happened on my own profile so I wouldn't do that, in judging potential inspiration from other people's profiles. because um yeah like one of the examples I said earlier was the remix for one of those songs it got me 1000 video views on Tiktok. for me it was a Doja Cat remix and then it got half a million on YouTube (...)

Andrea: “ Yes, absolutely. I have several friends who are artists, that are active on TikTok. One of my friends recently went viral, she is very cool and her name is Lana Lubany.(...) The video that blew up was of her showing her mom the new song, and that went viral. That is the type of content I want to make more of. Homemade videos based on a story is cool for Tiktok and create engagement.”

Once again, The Change had a different approach to competitor analysis. He worked methodically to understand the virality of successful videos, by analyzing both the video and its comments, and additionally examining what drew his own attention.

The Change: “I study every single TikTok I see. I'm scrolling my for you page like I'm on Tiktok way too much. but it's in part because I'm sucked in and I'm addicted to social media right, but also 'cause I'm studying like “why did this go viral?”. like in my head I'm taking notes. I'm like “how did they hook me in the beginning?”

Another interesting aspect that was worth investigating, was how TikTok was integrated into the artist workflow. The artists were therefore presented with the question of how TikTok had affected their time management in their artistic projects. Their answers showed that

Andrea: “Well, for me it had to come further down on the list, which I feel is reflected in the quality of what I post. My main priority is music production and being an artist, meaning the music comes first. Then comes Instagram and everything like that, and of course school, with being in my final year I have essays and stuff. Tiktok comes further down on that list, below practice and everything related to having a good show. So yeah, the first priority is always the music and its quality. Social media follows close behind, and Tiktok is at the bottom of the list. “

tone october: “Yeah. that's still something I'm trying to figure out. the biggest thing that I've been trying to optimize time management-wise has been the songwriting process. but I

recognize that for me a content creator, it's a whole different thing that you have to realize. Like, I should patch all my content on Monday to get everything posted throughout the week and then I can just have a regular day and time to do that sounds nice but for a lot of people, it's not realistic. and might lead to kind of like not stale content but the thing with TikTok is trends move so quick so I tried to reevaluate that every once in a while. in terms of like sticking to a regular content plan that would help (...)

In regards to whether the time spent on TikTok was taking time away from other important activities the answers were divided as tone october seemed to have a defined schedule, while West had a more flexible time management schedule.

tone october: "I'm like trying to spend all my time making a new song, there's still needs to be something keeping the engagement flow."

West: "no, my time management has been the same. it's like I shift priorities to things that take more priority so like not really. most of my day or she is just working on music anyway."

In order to assess whether the artists had any particular skills that had helped them progress on TikTok, they were asked about their backgrounds. There were no common themes found in their backgrounds, but the most relevant skills for TikTok were found in The Change and West. West has a background from studying business at UCLA (University of California) and The Change had previously worked as a videographer.

4.2 Revenue and value creation

In order to see how TikTok had affected their streaming numbers, I asked the interviewees if the countries that viewed their videos on TikTok corresponded to their most popular countries on their primary streaming service. Based on the answers provided by the artists themselves there seemed to be a correspondence between the two. Andrea's correspondence was not necessarily due to TikTok, but perhaps due to other factors, considering her size. For tone october there was a more clear correspondence in location, although there was a significant difference in audience gender.

Andrea "Yes. I do the best in Norway, the UK, and the USA on both platforms. On Tiktok Norway and England are on top, on streaming I'm also doing better in the US. I see a small effect from Tiktok, I don't think I've had enough time to achieve any major effect."

tone october: *“Yeah it's basically the opposite, for my gender audience it's 64% female, 36% male on TikTok. (...) 60% male 40% female on Spotify. For Spotify it's USA, Canada, UK Australia, for TikTok it's the US, UK, Canada, and Australia. So pretty similar, just in terms of the gender is really the thing.”*

The Change and West had a slight correspondence between TikTok and Spotify audiences, but as they are both active on Instagram, it was harder to prove that the Spotify audience had a direct correlation to TikTok. Additionally West was also funneling traffic through advertisements, which further may have clouded the correspondence.

The Change: *“(...) there's two different places they're coming from it's either Instagram or TikTok (...) top country by like a landslide is the United States, and then second is Germany, then it's India, then it's Canada, and the UK, Australia, Philippines(...) My biggest video is like 61% of the views are in the US and then 11% United Kingdom (...) Canada 6%”*

West: *“a little bit, not really. because at this point I have so many things feeding into Spotify (...) it is also the demographic that is also based on you know like Spotify algorithms, or YouTube and Facebook ads,. if we tour if I target liked or touring audiences or global audiences. I would say, a soft correlation.”*

The soft correlation on TikTok and Spotify mentioned by West was primarily in the US, where the majority of his listeners are from. West further stated that all his other popular countries except the US equalate to roughly the same audience sizes, as seen in the following statement.

West: *“(...)but once you get to Canada, Indonesia and Taiwan and Australia, those are kind of like neck ain neck. it's almost like a eight-way-tie for second and third (...)”*

After having established their primary views on the usage of the platform, it was important to access their opinion on TikTok as a potential revenue source. When asked about their thoughts on this the response was leaning toward a negative attitude toward TikTok as a revenue stream.

tone october: *“uh personally no. because I haven't been able to see any return from it. but even the stuff that I've seen from other creators where it's like, they are on the creator fund. they aren't getting paid anything considerable unless they're going viral every single video. which big accounts will tell you like it's just not a ton of money. you can't just like replace a nine to five for example with the creative fund budget. but what you can do is get brand deals. and a lot of those people get sponsored posts and stuff where like for example if they're an influencer some music artists will pay them to dance to their song or whatever. all*

of those in tandem brand deals, sponsorships creator fund, all that is considered from TikTok, I guess so that would be a pretty viable source of income all added together. yeah, but from TikTok itself, I feel like if we're talking creator fund and live donations I don't think that that is necessarily sustainable”

Andrea: “In the future maybe. I want to work for it to become one, why not? It makes sense for me both as an artist and for income.”

Andrea was then asked to elaborate on how she saw herself earning money from TikTok.

Andrea: “Well, you have the brand deals, which are cool. I don't think I would partner with any type of brand, It would have to be more music-oriented. For example, Ableton, the software I produce on, it would be cool to have a partnership with someone like that. Analog instruments or something along those lines would also be really cool. I am also getting more and more into fashion, so something fashion-related could be nice. A mix of both.”

To assess if there were any common video themes or topics that had success, all artists were asked whether they had noticed which category of their TikToks was the most successful. Several of the interviewees mentioned that several of their most successful videos revolved around sharing a personal story or intimate moment. This was observed by both Andrea and tone.

Andrea:” I've noticed that the videos where I talk about my story, or mine and my brother's story as musicians moving to London, are doing better than the rest.”

tone: “texting my girlfriend my lyrics video” some people got like upset about that on YouTube and were commenting. (...) so I did the song is based on a real situation of course. it's all written from a real experience where I did get cheated on. all of the story and narrative within the song is real, but promoting it clearly that was just kind of a way to relate the song to more people, in a way that actually happens.”

tone posted a video of himself texting the lyrics to his girlfriend on both TikTok and YouTube, and received negative feedback on YouTube, as the audience claimed the content of the video to be fake. This indicates that authentic personal content is effective on YouTube.

4.3 Staying on the grind; Stress and pressure

Among the artists I interviewed there seemed to be a consensus of trying to avoid being affected by the negative comments. The artists are aware of the possibility of negative comments and stated a

need to be prepared to handle the negative mental aspect. tone october states that artists and creators can do this preparation by themselves, or possibly with the help of others.

tone october: *“if you're in the right hands, or whatever, I think people can help a young developing artists or a content creator realize like «hey this is what the world is like online don't worry about this, this is what you should be focused on» because other people eat themselves alive.”*

Keeping a positive attitude is also brought up by several interviewees, Andrea explained her attitude towards negative comments in the following quote:

Andrea: *“I read a quote “Great art divides” so as long as I spark any emotion, good or bad, im pleased.”*

Similar thoughts about seeing the good in the bad is also brought up by tone october who argues that even negative comments have a positive effect on engagement, as seen in this quote:

tone october *“the comments that are just like kind of hate make me laugh because it's like you are literally you know that this is just getting more engagement.”*

The Change also talks about how the variation in video views affects him. He displays the same mindset as tone october and Andrea in the sense that he tries to distance himself from negative inputs.

The Change: *“the numbers don't affect my mood, but I suppose I try to do not let it affect my mood”*

He also brings up an interesting dilemma where even when trying to not be bothered by the numbers, it is still the primary way to measure growth.

The Change: *“I really try not to get caught up in the numbers but at the same time the numbers are the only thing that matter in terms of if my dreams are ever going to become a reality so it's hard contradiction“*

West's answer resembles the contradiction described by The Change, as he distances himself by not viewing the numbers, while at the same time using TikTok purely for business. West describes his relationship to the video view numbers with the following:

West: *“TikTok to me is purely a promotional tool. you could literally open up Facebook ad manager and I would treat it the exact same way (...)’ I could post 100 times and get lower views on 98 of those videos and I get viral twice and it doesn't matter. because those viral videos are the only ones that really count.”*

West’s opinion on quantity was also reflected by Andrea who stated that she felt TikTok preferred quantity over quality to a certain degree, albeit high-quality quantity is still optimal.

Chapter 5: Discussion:

5.1 TikTok’s position in the music industries

As an Independent musician, one has the ability to release ones music through the independent distributors such as TikTok’s SoundOn, which enables the artists to bypass subsystem 1 and subsystem 2 in Wikström’s model for the recorded music industry. There are no A&R filters to pass through, and not being signed to a record label allows the artist to skip the record label policymakers. This also resonates in an interview with Norwegian artist Victoria Nadine conducted by Verdens Gang (VG). Victoria says that artists previously had to rely on funding from labels to afford marketing, whereas on TikTok, the audience is in charge of deciding the popular songs, regardless of label affiliation (Nilsen, 2022). Even those artists who are signed to independent labels will have a higher chance of getting their music through as smaller labels tend to take higher risks (Wikström, 2019, p.67).

Three pillars mentioned by Hayes & Marshall (2018).

- 1: A platform to publicize their music
- 2: Continually engage with fans
- 3: A platform to sell their music and other wares.

We find further support for TikTok’s positive effect on Independent musicians by analyzing the case through the lens of Hayes & Marshall’s three opportunistic pillars. Through the variety of services offered, TikTok arguably touches upon all three pillars to a varying degree. Until the launch of TikToks music distribution platform SoundOn, it did not offer artists a way to publicize their complete musical works in the sense of distribution, albeit being able to publicize 60-second snippets. Through SoundOn, TikTok now offers full distribution, which contributes to a transfer of power from the gatekeepers to the artists (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p.1977). This transfer of power is also noticed by the artists, as The Change states that TikTok took down the gatekeepers of

the industry and that artists no longer require teams. While the control of the music companies has decreased, it is debatable whether the power has been transferred to the artists or elsewhere. A music industry representative at the roundtable conference argues that the control lies with the pipes to the people, such as the ISPs (Internet service providers) and tech companies (Nordgård, 2018, p.60). This argument indicates that the power lost by the music companies now lies with TikTok, which could cement them as a player within the industries and create potential dependencies.

By engaging in the second pillar, TikTok allows the artist to directly engage with their fans. These engagements happen through text in the comment section of their videos, and through video replies to audience comments. Haynes & Marshall pointed out that social networks facilitating for two-way communication, instead of just one-to-many, were the source of deeper and more rewarding audience relationships (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p.1977).

In terms of the third pillar, a platform to sell music and other wares, there is no obvious connection to TikTok. TikTok's primary platform does not offer any form of direct music sale, although SoundOn's TikTok commercial library can be viewed as a sales channel, as it introduces an additional revenue stream through sync licensing (SoundOn, n.d.c).

Daniel Nordgård (2018) describes how the current developments in music streaming have not followed the developments in film streaming services, where companies such as Netflix have diversified into producing its own content, thereby taking on core activities within the industry as well as the attached risk. Nordgård further suggests that based on current developments, such as investment by a music streaming company is likely (Nordgård, 2018, p.110). With SoundOn Tiktok has followed the logic presented by Nordgård and diversified into the music industries by creating a distributor. Further parallels can be drawn between the case of TikTok and a discussion held during the Roundtable conference where participants were skeptical towards outside businesses diversifying into music, as they were often built on models where subsidizing from the non-music related core activities was essential. Apple was used to describe this, as iTunes used music in order to drive up sales of their primary hardware, thus creating a market where non-subsidized actors cant operate (Nordgård, 2018, pp.65-67). SoundOn could in light of this example be seen as TikTok's way of keeping artists active and loyal by offering better deals than other independent distributors, as well as unique services on the platform. This could result in hard competition for other independent distributors such as TuneCore and DistroKid as SoundOn presumably receives subsidies from TikTok.

5.2 TikTok In Bobby Borg's DIY Marketing process

The argument can be made that TikTok's features work directly into steps 4, 5, and 6 of the DIY Marketing process presented by Bobby Borg in chapter 1.3.2. which could provide an explanation as to how Independent artists can utilize TikTok for marketing purposes. According to Borg, in step 4 the artists need to analyze both their most likely customers and likely customers, through segmenting by factors such as demographics, behaviors, and geography (Borg, 2014, pp. 31-32). Information about the audience based on several of these factors can be found in the TikTok analytics, which could assist artists with identifying patterns and customer segments. The value of the TikTok analytics for artists is demonstrated through the correlations presented in the findings, where both tone october and The Change saw similarities in the audience on TikTok and Spotify. This could further suggest that analyzing the video statistics from TikTok could provide an indication of the most likely customers for an Independent Artist on Streaming platforms. Based on the findings from West, the information from TikTok could become clouded when Spotify draws traffic from several other sources, perhaps indicating that using the TikTok analytics is more helpful for low-budget artists, who do not use paid advertisements.

In terms of step 5: *Learning from your competitors* the artists interviewed all participated in a form of competitor analysis, albeit to different degrees. While not necessarily viewing other artists on TikTok as competitors, the interviewees still analyzed content that had success and that they themselves found interesting. Through exploring hashtags such as #Londonartist frequently used by Andrea or other TikTok communities, artists on TikTok can identify appropriate competitors and inspect their strategies. One of the benefits of analyzing competitors described by Borg is to identify their strengths and weaknesses, of the artist for then to adapt and improve upon for their own use. (Borg, 2014, p.45). A potential issue with competitor analysis on TikTok has come to light through the interview with tone october as he highlights how a good video idea can have a low effect due to being pushed out wrong, perhaps due to the algorithm. This could perhaps lead to artists not identifying relevant content due to low views on competitor videos, as they might gravitate towards videos with high views.

Step 6 of the DIY marketing process is to demo your products or services, often through a small focus group (Borg, 2014, p.55). The free-to-use model of Tiktok essentially allows musicians to post "marketing material" for free, while additionally providing statistics on viewer demographics. By eliminating the cost factor, the difficulty of the step decreases, thus making Tiktok a helpful tool for low-budget DIY artists. Additionally the ease of posting, through the mobile medium lets the

artist provide sneak peeks of ongoing works to their fans, through short videos. This is supported in Bob Baker's book "Guerilla music marketing handbook", where Baker tells the story of when he and his team came across a tape with 8, 30-second recordings of different songs, which let them quickly explore the artist's repertoire. Baker's case of the tape closely resembles TikTok, where artists can show off 60-second clips. Through short videos, the artists can demo song ideas and musical works in front of larger audiences, where the work could potentially resonate with a new, previously undiscovered audience. This is exemplified on TikTok with how the song "my home" by The Change came into fruition. As mentioned in chapter 3.7.1.4 "my home" was tested along with multiple other songs, and upon receiving the most positive feedback became a full song. The mindset of Baker also resonates in a quote by The Change:

The Change *"It's my song a day challenge, let's just write the song that is just really true and personal and honest to me, and then see if other people resonate"*

This notion of "testing" the music on TikTok is further supported by Wölmert & Papies (2016). With music being an experience, good audiences would want to sample the music before marking a purchase.

During the interviews The Change stated that right now is the best time in history to be an independent artist, this corresponds with the quote mentioned above by Austin Daboe, Executive Vice President of Atlantic Records UK from chapter 1.2 about Independent campaigns being easier to run than ever. This could support a claim that tools, such as TikTok that are at the disposal of Independent artists, have the power and potential to create a sustainable career. This in turn falls back to the threat mentioned by Haynes & Marshall (2018b) of artists becoming self-sustained and no longer in need of record labels, perhaps indicating that this threat is at an all-time high. An important distinction that must be taken into account is the difference between *needing* and *wanting*. Anita Elberse's theory of the Iron law of distribution dictates that any part of a value can be changed, albeit the essential functions still need to be performed. Nordgård (2018) problematizes this within the setting of digitalization as new services enable DIY activities and provide artists with increased power, but on the other hand, leave them with all the responsibility.

TikTok facilitates collaboration through its varied features. which features such as the duet function have contributed to trends such as the case with the modernization of sea shanties mentioned in chapter 2.1.3. This could arguably be a contributing factor in decreasing the power of record labels as it can be seen as an opportunity for networking. Access to networks has according to (Bagley et

al., 22, p. 444) traditionally been one of the benefits of creating a partnership with labels, which could be under threat due to the ease of connectivity from Tiktok and other platforms.

5.3 Internet celebrity; negative feedback and personal life

At the center of the music industry is the relationship between the artist and the fan (Nordgård, 2018, p. 5-6) Drawing on the statement by Musgrave & Gross (2020) where the artists of today need to be more personal in their interactions, it raises the question of how artists on TikTok handle being vulnerable and possibly receiving negativity. In the findings, we see that both tone october, Andrea, and The Change have experienced success by posting more intimate and personal TikToks, such as when Andrea told the story of her and her brother moving to London. This gives an indication that Musgrave & Gross' statement holds true on TikTok, and that artists should be aware that they could benefit from being personal. This can also be seen in relation to the second pillar by Haynes & Marshall (2018b) whereas the platform creates opportunities for communication, it also creates an arena for negative comments. In addition to negative comments about the quality of the music, being personal on the internet could also pose a challenge. One of Musgrave & Gross' interviewees describe sharing music as difficult, as "*music is you, stark naked in the street*". This is further used this to argue why musicians are protective of their works (Musgrave & Gross, 2020, p.65). The argument can be made that sharing a personal story in a video could leave the artists equally if not more vulnerable, which creates a possible downside to sharing intimate moments on TikTok.

An interesting aspect of the artists within the DIY space is their need to develop skills outside of their primary activity in order to operate on social media (Dumbreck & McPherson, 2015, p.61). This is reflected in the findings, as all four artists are in charge and produce all the content for their TikToks, where they use skills such as video and photo editing. The Change and West possess skills that would be beneficial to have when creating videos and doing analytics. Having these skills when starting out on TikTok could be an advantage, as learning new skills is time-consuming. This could further argue as to why they both have experienced consistent success on the platform. Dumbreck & McPherson (2015) stated that the need to develop skills in other creative areas could have a negative effect by being a time-consuming activity that distracts the artist, which in this case would argue that TikTok could be harmful to music creation. Similar issues have been highlighted by other artists engaging in DIY activities, who say that it takes time away from music creation (Hughes et al., 2016, p.25) The interview findings argue that this phenomenon is present with TikTok as tone october explained that he was still trying to balance time management between content creation and music production. The findings from the interview with West also suggest that a conscious

relationship to time management and not getting hooked on numbers can mitigate the experienced negative effect. This preparedness for varying results resonates with an interview from The NDPNDNT podcast with Independent artist JORDY. JORDY is an avid creator on TikTok with more than 400.000 followers, and several TikToks with more than 1.000.000 views (JORDY, n.d.) In the interview JORDY describes TikTok as an unreliable journey in the following quote:

JORDY: *“TikTok isn't always reliable. its a constant journey, you cant like bank on every song being a viral long-distance story.”* (D et al., 2022a).

Here we can also see a possible parallel to the quantity vs quality debate, as JORDY’s quote can be interpreted to imply that not every song will achieve high success. Through constantly producing more content the chances of a viral story increase, although the journey lengthens. JORDY also highlights how not achieving virality on TikTok can have negative effects on artists.

JORDY: *“It's created this like, as I said, mental game for artists now. It is like “if it didn't blow up on TikTok there is no chance it will blow up”. ”* (D et al., 2022a)

This relates directly to the potential issue of being too addicted to the high view count described by Indian psychologist Perna Kohli. Kohli raises the issue of TikTok potentially having a negative effect on self-esteem, and self-worth, and warns that this type of platform should be used with restraints, as it could result in anxiety or depression (Joshi, 2020).

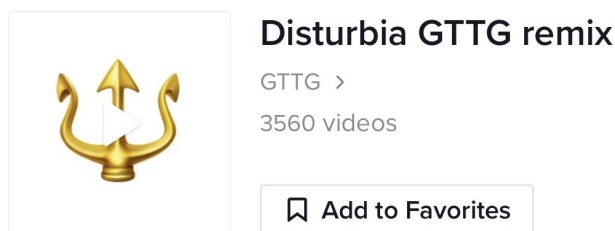
5.4 Marketing platform or a source of revenue?

Based on the interview findings, the artists were somewhat skeptical of TikTok as a viable source of revenue for the time being when looking at revenue derived directly from TikTok, such as through the creator fund and live donations. The findings argue that Independent artists do not view revenue generated as rightsholders of music on TikTok as comparable to revenue from traditional streaming. This is due to several of the artists prioritizing driving traffic from TikTok to Spotify, due to low or not noticeable revenues generated from their songs being used in other creators' TikTok videos.

Although the details of the licensing agreement remain shrouded in secrecy, Marc Cimino, the Chief Operating Officer of UMPG is quoted saying *“ This alliance sets an industry-wide example of social media companies acknowledging, respecting and compensating the music creators whose songs are instrumental to their platforms. (...)”*. This could indicate that the majors and indies have different remuneration agreements with TikTok. This is further supported by Michael Nash, the

UMG's Executive Vice President of Digital Strategy, who describes the payments from TikTok as “(...) equitable compensation to our recording artists and songwriters(...)”. (Universal Music Group, 2021). Based on the findings presented in chapter 4.2 the artists say that they don't view TikTok as a sustainable revenue source, thus indicating that the compensation for Independent artists is not equitable.

A possible reason for artists experiencing low revenue from TikTok could be due to misattribution by TikTok in cases of participatory culture explained by Wikström (2019) where other creators have either remixed or created mashups. An example of participatory culture leading to possible misattributed music on TikTok can be seen with the creator @GTTG (Go To The Gym). This creator is known for creating remixes of popular songs, where they are reused in genres such as hardstyle that are deemed more appropriate for gym sessions. GTTG has created a remix of Disturbia, originally by Rihanna, which has been used in more than 3560 unique videos on TikTok (GTTG, n.d.).



Picture 9: Screenshot of Disturbia remix on TikTok by creator @GTTG (GTTG, n.d.).

This image shows the number of unique videos created using the sound, what is not listed is the “contains music from” section shown in picture 4 from chapter 2.2, where the original source is mentioned. Should this be a case of misattribution, Rihanna would miss out on revenue from 3560 videos. While 3560 videos do not constitute an important percentage of revenue for Rihanna, a similar case of misattribution with a smaller artist could have bigger consequences. Misattribution also touched upon another aspect of copyright not necessarily related to revenue, namely moral rights. Moral rights are not recognized in areas such as The US, but in areas that recognize them, secure the artists the rights to have their work attributed to their name. Albeit not being a right with financial incentives, this is still a predominant motivation for TikTok creators (Valdovinos et al., 2021, p.3318),

In cases where the algorithm recognizes and correctly attributes a song to the artist, TikTok plays directly into Wikströms (2019) audience-media engine model. The audience-media engine describes the dynamics between media presence, audience reach, audience approval and audience action. Briefly, this dynamic can be explained as when a music firm improves its media presence it can reach and engage a larger audience. The audience approval of the music presented can then lead to audience action, such as a purchase or stream (Wikström, 2019, p.88). Wikström states that some audience actions such as creating fan-made music videos, don't result in revenues for the firm, but are rather seen as infringements. TikTok as a platform encourages participation culture such as the creation of fan-videos, and additionally facilitates for both the fan and the music rights holder to earn revenue from the action.

As pointed out in chapter 2.3.2 digitalization and YouTube with the possibility of going viral had reignited discussions around quantity vs quality. The reduction of risk described by Dumbreck & McPherson (2015) had led to a surge of musicians seeking to capitalize on the opportunities of Youtube. The same phenomenon can now be seen on TikTok, as the platform offers a seemingly higher chance of achieving virality. Andrea is an indication that this trend of quantity is noticed by musicians, while West is an example of an artist seeking virality through quantity. This could be seen in relation to subsystem 3 presented by Wikström (2019) as this was described as a filtration system for songs with high commercial potential. With no active filtration system for potential success, every artist could be the next Erica Banks, and every song the next “Buss it”. This paired with the complexity of the TikTok algorithm could incentivize quantity. An implication with the viral potential on TikTok is seen in how “Buss it” is 100 million streams above Banks’ second most-streamed song, which indicates that virality happens on a per-song basis (Banks, n.d.). This could provide reasoning for artists to continuously produce content in order to maximize the chance of several songs reaching virality.

5.5 Algorithmic recommendations & Discoverability

Based on the interview findings regarding where the artist had experienced the most success on TikTok, all artists reported that their home country was at the top. Compared to Werner’s argument that Spotify’s algorithm preferred variables such as gender, age, and race, the findings in this thesis could indicate that TikTok’s algorithm is more dependent on the variable of location when providing video recommendations to its users.

Among the factors that could argue against such a claim is the fact that location defining hashtags # could carry significant weight in the recommendation process. Especially in the case of Andrea as

she frequently posts TikToks with hashtags such as #Londonartist, and #norwegian. Should the TikTok algorithm more closely resemble that of Instagram, this possibility would have support in the findings from Sun et al., (2022) which lists location-based hashtags as effective amongst smaller influencers. Should location be a heavy weighing factor in the algorithm, it could be further argued that TikTok is a platform best suited for local marketing.

By comparing the case of TikTok to Chris Anderson's three driving forces of the Long Tail we can arguably see how TikTok could benefit the Long Tail of music's demand curve, where the majority of Independent artists are located. Anderson uses the example of the PC providing access to movie editing and music production to illustrate the force 1; *democratizing the tools of production* (Anderson, 2008, p.54). TikTok has provided users with both an audio library (TTIL) and an in-app editing software, which enables content production, and should according to Anderson's description of force 1, lead to a lengthening of the Tail. (Anderson, 2008, p.54). His second force; *cutting the costs of consumption by democratization distribution* is exemplified through how the internet made it cheaper for content to increase their reach, compared to paying for storage and shelf space (Anderson, 2008, p.55). A similar concept can be seen both in TikTok and SoundOn, as distribution on both platforms is free, and enables creators to publish their content, whereas SoundOn additionally distributes to regular streaming platforms. By increasing the access to content, the Long Tail should increase in thickness (Anderson, 2008, p.55). The final force; *connecting supply and demand* enables consumers to find the niche content, through means such as recommendation software, word-of-mouth and customer reviews (Anderson, 2008, p.55). On TikTok, we can see this force come into play through the TikTok algorithms recommendations, as well as through other users working as guides by using the duet and stitch features to raise awareness of a sound or music artist on TikTok. These features arguably work as a form of customer review or word-of-mouth, which Anderson highlights as effective for driving business to the niches (Anderson, 2008, p.56).

Haynes & Marshall describe the opportunities of participatory culture as having an amplifying effect on the music audience's tendency to form taste communities. (Haynes & Marshall, 2018a, p.1976). This amplification can be seen in the previously mentioned phenomenon of hashtag communities on TikTok such as #BookTok. These communities have proven potential and by comparing the case of "It Ends with Us" to the potential of music discovery on Tiktok, it can be argued that TikTok presents opportunities for not only new releases, but also back catalog. This is further supported in a Rolling Stones article which highlights music hits that has resurfaced through TikTok (Millman, 2020b). Participatory culture on TikTok turns the consumers into prosumers,

which contributes to the expansion of a value-added network within music marketing (Tschmuck, 2017, p.188).

5.5.1 Increased discoverability through TikTok

In his 2012 article “*Copyright Research in the Digital Age: Moving from Piracy to the Supply of New Products*” Professor of Business, Joel Waldfogel raises the question of how discoverability at the time was affected by the surplus of music being uploaded as a result of the barriers lowered by digitalization. Waldfogel referenced that music had to be discovered and experienced in order for the audience to want to purchase it, and he saw it as a major challenge that had not yet been solved by digitalization (Waldfogel, 2012, p.340). Although Waldfogel (2012) referenced purchasing the song on iTunes, which is perhaps an outdated measurement of a sale, the question of how to reach and gain the attention of the audience is still a relevant issue. This is reflected in the varying number of views on the videos of all four artists.

TikTok enables for the components of social media marketing by Jones et al., (2011) such as in the case of tone october building a brand presence by using TikTok live as an event where he can both communicate and engage with both existing and new audience. The third concept, word-of-mouth can be seen ironically in written form when users tag each other in the comment section of a TikTok. The Change experienced huge success through word-of-mouth on TikToks where he marketed his track “my home”, something he attributes to the song being sharable.

The Change: “Again this song is very shareable, so people are just sending it to their loved ones, and then they're commenting their loved ones.”

In a 2017 study on music sharing, professors Anja Hagen and Marika Lüders interviewed 23 focus groups with 124 Spotify and Tidal users, and 12 one-on-one interviews on their sharing habits. Their findings divided these individuals into three groups based on how likely they were to share music with others; Share all (21/124), Share selectively (80/124), and non-sharers (30/124). (Hagen & Lüders, 2017, p.649). With 101/124 individuals open to sharing music on Spotify, these findings create a foundation for the potential of sharing of music on TikTok. Hagen & Luders (2017) conclude that the social features of streaming contribute to building connections between listeners, which can also be seen in connection to Wikström’s bookshelf analogy from chapter 1.1.2.2 where individuals can display their identity through sharing (Wikström, 2019, p.166). As TikTok rose to popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic where social distancing characterized everyday life,

expressing personal identity and feeling a sense of belonging in a community was perhaps more important to listeners than before. This in turn may have led to a higher willingness to share on TikTok than usual, which could have set the standard for sharing higher than that of other social media, possibly supporting an argument that TikTok is more suited for sharing. This argument also gains support from an exploratory study on young adults' gratifications on TikTok, conducted by Mitchell Vaterlaus & Madison Winter. Their findings show that sharing and co-viewing TikToks contributed to improved relationships and relational closeness (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021, p.9). Through sharing music, individuals also increase their influence as tastemakers, which contributes to further decreasing the power of record labels and other gatekeepers (Wikström, 2019, p.166).

Drawing on the debate of whether streaming services offered a fair remuneration for the artists, the streaming services' argument for their remunerations was that they were primarily a tool for discovery. Aguiar & Waldfogel describes this argument by referencing early statements made by Spotify and Pandora, where they claim to be “a neverending experience of music discovery”, and Spotify making it “easier than ever to discover (...)” (Aguiar & Waldfogel, 2018, p.283). The authors further suggest that if the record labels were to force streaming services to increase the customer fees, it could potentially lead to them reverting back to piracy (Aguiar & Waldfogel, 2018, p. 305). This raises an interesting question of how far the users on TikTok could be pushed with advertisements and price increases before leaving the platform for its competitors. Seeing as TikTok is a free application unless a larger percentage of Tiktok's budget gets dedicated to musician's remunerations, the only other option would be to increase the total revenues. Based on the revenue sources presented in chapter 2.4.1 this would require TikTok to either increase advertisement costs for brands, raise the price of internal currency purchases, or expand on their e-commerce pilot project. Increased prices of in-app purchases, would likely result in a decline in Live Gifts, as audience purchasing power would decrease. Another possible development that could affect musicians' revenue would be through the aforementioned brand deals. As the musicians interviewed in this thesis showed interest in participating in such programs with music-related companies, it could indicate that influencer marketing is still an unexploited opportunity within the music industries on TikTok. Pulling back to the argument that TikTok limits music snippets to 60 seconds, which does not constitute a full song, the counterargument can be made that Spotify counts a stream when a user has listened for more than 30 seconds (Spotify, n.d.). This further raises the question of what is to be defined as a stream, and whether the option to play the entire song should be considered a prerequisite.

Based on Aguiar & Waldfogel's (2018) scenario where streaming could be seen as a substitute to recorded music sales, the argument can be made that a marketing activity that results in increased streaming could be seen as having a positive effect on recorded music sales. As the TikTok Algorithm is said by several of the interviewees to level the playing field, giving everyone an equal opportunity to be discovered, it supports the argument by enabling a comparison between the traditional radio and TikTok by following the description of Aguiar & Waldfogel (2018) where radio exposes audiences to a broad and unknown playlist. Playlists on Spotify have had nicknames as “the new radio” due to their power to introduce new music and artists (Pray, 2020, p.2).

As with most new technology that emerges in the music industries there also emerges a question of how it will affect revenue streams (Wlömert & Papies, 2016, p.314). Previously in Chapter 3, I mentioned the time restrictions TikTok has put in place for music. With a maximum of 60 seconds, this argues for TikTok not being a viable substitute for a streaming platform, in the sense that users won't be able to seamlessly access the entire song. Wlömert & Papies' findings show that free streaming, such as Spotify's ad-based model has an insignificant yet negative result on revenue (Wlömert & Papies, 2016, p.324). This further support a claim that TikTok, as of now with its free model does not pose a significant threat to steaming. Through the interviews, several artists also expressed how they actively seek to convert the Tiktok viewers to Spotify listerners. An example of this is seen in the interview with The Change,

The Change: “(...)you gotta push them off the platform though. I think that's what's cool about Tiktok, they don't mind if you leave the platform.”

Following the quest to lead the viewers over to Spotify, an interesting issue was brought up in Episode 6 of the NDPNDNT podcast. The producer Kato On The Track mentions how when music producers get known on TikTok for remixing other artists' songs, it creates difficulties when trying to transfer their audience to Spotify. As the audience knows them best for their remixes they are not interested in their original songs. Kato describes this with the following statement:

Kato On The Track: “People don't give a fuck once they start dropping their own music” (D et al., 2022b) Here we can draw a parallel to the “art vs. commerce”-debate, in where the term *selling out* is used when an artist becomes what the audiences view as someone who leaves their ideals and compromises their ideology to become more commercialized (Bridson et al., 2017, p.1654). When engaging in cover songs, and remixes to capitalize on TikTok trends, the artists might be viewed as “selling out” due to them leaning towards a type of content that primarily facilitates for growth. It has also been argued that the phrase “selling out” is no longer relevant in today's day and age, due to the abundance of music uploaded due to digitalization. The developments in the digital sphere

have forced artists to develop and utilize new marketing techniques in order to combat that competition (Klein et al., 2017, p.223). As duets and cover songs have been popular on TikTok, this could support the argument of selling out being outdated. On the other hand, several of the artists interviewed showed there are still limits, as they would only partner with brands that they identified with, which indicates that giving up on ideology is still frowned upon.

The idea of unfair revenue distribution on TikTok could further be seen in the context of a debate from the Kristiansand roundtable conference about the effects of the “Feels like free” model. During the roundtable conference concerns were raised about how these models rely on external industries such as the subsidies example discussed previously, as well as how they diminished the bargaining powers of the music industries (Nordgård, 2018, p. 58). Two interesting quotes from Nordgård’s (2018) findings can be directly transferred to Tiktok “*They control the attention*”, and “*We’re no longer selling music to people, we’re selling people to companies.*”. As TikTok revolves around keeping audiences continuously watching short-videos, the music can be seen as an important tool utilized to keep audiences engaged in the content. This argues TikTok follows the “feels like free” concept, where audiences pay with their time, and the devaluation of recorded music remains a threat.

6. Conclusion

The overall ambition of this thesis was to explore and explain how TikTok is making its way into the music industries, and outline some of the possibilities that up-and-coming independent musicians have to utilize the platform for marketing purposes. The intent of this research was to provide insight into possible answers for the following research questions:

Research Question:

How do Independent musicians utilize the short video platform Tiktok for marketing, audience development and career growth?

Sub question 1: How does TikTok fit into the music industries?

Sub question 2: How does TikTok content creation affect independent artists mentally?

Sub question 3: How has the fast-paced environment of TikTok affected the time management of artists and has it taken creative priority from the music?

Based on TikTok's abilities as a distributor and the possibilities to bypass subsystem 1 and subsystem 2 in Wikström's model for the recorded music industry, TikTok's capabilities would place it within the recording industry, as first suggested in chapter 1.1. The platform is a continuation of the trend in development which fuses the music industries with the technology industry, additionally, TikTok follows a business model potentially funded through subsidizing which could disrupt competition.

Through the interviews, all the independent artists seemed to express a high level of DIY in their promotional work, in which TikTok was an essential tool. TikTok has through the last few years (2017-2022) amassed a large population and developed an algorithm which according to this research has proven potential to assist artists in reaching international audiences, in addition to solidifying them amongst local audiences. The artists interviewed did not see a sustainable economic potential in TikTok, but rather saw it primarily as a marketing platform to draw audiences to Spotify. TikTok's potential as a marketing platform has been examined through Bobby Borg's DIY marketing process, in which the platform can contribute to simplifying the following DIY activities; *Analyze your customers*, *Learn from your competitors*, and *Demo your products or services*. When compared to other social media, the primary benefit of TikTok lies in the potential for free organic reach which has made it ideal for Independent artists, something the artists themselves highlight as the platform's main benefit.

The independent artists have different approaches to using TikTok. The primary difference is shown in the degree of analysis used when drawing content inspiration from other successful creators. The artists seem to all strive to be true to themselves even in an environment heavily defined by competition. TikTok seems to be a continuation of the quantity over quality trend that arose with YouTube, which leaves artists balancing between authenticity and quantity.

To summarize TikTok's qualities, they offer distribution services for independent musicians through SoundOn, a meeting place facilitating for collaboration through duets and other features, and a stage for non-mainstream artists in smaller genres, such as Sea Shanties to grow their audience. These qualities are comparable to the record shop Beggar's Banquet mentioned by Dumbreck & McPherson (2015), thereby placing Tiktok as what can be viewed as a modern digital equivalent. By facilitating the discovery of niche music TikTok contributes to the expansion of the Long Tail, which could have a positive effect on all the music industries. The findings indicate a positive effect on streaming, and do not show any immediate signs of cannibalization of music sales.

In the context of sub-research questions 2 and 3 regarding the mental effects of content creation and the effect on time management, the findings imply that Musgrave & Gross' (2020) issues with social media leading to stress amongst artists are apparent on TikTok. This paper indicates a need for artists entering TikTok to be aware of these factors and come prepared. Prepared in the sense that they should have a conscious relationship to time management, as TikTok demands a constant flow of new content. Additionally, the research recommends that artists should be prepared to share personal and intimate stories, as this content category has a higher probability of success for musicians on TikTok.

The findings of the study do not find TikTok to be a sustainable source of revenue for artists, due to their current payment model, as it favours video creators above music rights holders. Albeit not sustainable, the revenue stream generated by TikTok is a new stream which allows artists to capitalize on fan made content generated through participation culture.

“Records are the means why which an artist gains or enlarges his following” is a quote by Paul Morris Hirsch, mentioned in (Wikström, 2019, p.60). In a world affected by digitalization, where TikTok has blurred the line between artist and content creator, this thesis raises questions about the relevancy of this quote. Perhaps content is the new means for artists to gain or enlarge their following. Should the artist be unsuccessful in transferring their fans from TikTok to streaming, their music may perhaps only be known as “That song from TikTok”.

7. Recommendations for further research

Seeing as Celma (2010) lists advanced recommendation algorithms are essential for music discovery, there is a high incentive for music marketers to conduct further research on this topic. This is further supported by the results of this thesis, as the foundation for success on TikTok lies within the algorithm. I recommend further research, especially in the realm of hashtags and metadata, as little information is available around the effectiveness and weight of hashtag usage in the TikTok algorithm.

Further research is also required into the remunerations model used by TikTok, as a video view on TikTok does not equal a full stream of a song such as on Spotify. As previously mentioned in chapter 6 a new definition of what is to be considered a stream is perhaps needed. As copyrighted music has become an integral part of short-video on both TikTok, Instagram Reels and Youtube

Shorts I anticipate the audio samples to increase above 60 seconds. Therefore the copyright licenses will be the topic of important discourse in the near future.

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