

How has TikTok's immense popularity affected the Norwegian Music Industry

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Abstract

This Master's thesis seeks to investigate the current change happening in the Norwegian music industry, when it comes to marketing and discovering new music with a focus on TikTok.

In this thesis, I interviewed three music professionals to get a better understanding and insight into their perspectives on TikTok. They answered questions on how they work with the platform, shared their opinions on the record labels' future and current digitalisation within the music industry.

Additionally, it seeks to look into if TikTok has potentially democratised the music industry.

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1. Introduction

“TikTok has become an integral part of music discovery, connecting artists to their fans and introducing brands to every corner of the community.” Said TikTok’s Global Head of Music Ole Obermann (TikTok, 2021).

With new and older songs going viral on TikTok over the past two years, the platform has become a new way of discovering and promoting music. TikTok has opened opportunities that before only existed for more traditional music marketing. With TikTok, artists can effectively reach new audiences with little or no budget. Hits from the 80s and 90s have got a new younger generation to discover and listen to their music. Songs that have gone viral on TikTok, with teenagers and young adults creating dance challenges and short videos using their music, as a result these songs have topped the charts, for instance, at Billboard Top 100 and getting millions of streams on Spotify. With many more artists trying to go viral and get their music careers to start without signing a record deal, how has this affected the music industry and made the record labels useless? Has it become that simple to start a music career by just posting your music on TikTok, hoping it catches on.

Some key topics that I want to find out more about in this master thesis:

- Have TikTok become more influential than the other social media networks for music marketing?
- What role will the record companies have if more artists become independent, and does it benefit the artists?
- Does TikTok create a narrative that it is easier to become a global music artist in today’s music industry, or is it simply putting more pressure on the artist?

With this master’s thesis, I want to look into the digitalisation of the Music Industry, focusing on TikTok’s impact. This will be the research question for my thesis:

How has TikTok’s immense popularity affected the Norwegian Music Industry, and is it sustainable for the future?

1.1 Structure

This master thesis is divided into six chapters.

- Chapter 1 is the introduction and motivation behind writing this master thesis.
- Chapter 2 serves as the theoretical backdrop and relevant theory I found to highlight the research question.
- Chapter 3 I will go in-depth on the research method used in this master thesis, then explain the interview guide and whom I interviewed.
- Chapter 4 the responses collected during the interviews will be quoted and explained.
- Chapter 5 analysing and discussing the relevant data found in chapter 4.
- Chapter 6 the conclusion will be concluded.

1.2 TikTok brings an opportunity for new artists

In a news article from the Norwegian newspaper VG in 2022. They interviewed several Norwegian artists about their opinion of TikTok and how it helped their careers.

The Norwegian artist Ramon's hit song "ok jeg lover" went viral on TikTok before the song was released. He said that he was grateful for the opportunity the platform gave him, that he wouldn't have reached his goals without it (Nilsen, 2022).

Not only has Ramon reached a following on TikTok that helped his career. Victoria Nadine is saying that releasing a song costs a lot of money, when before, as an artist you had to depend much more on the record label to promote your songs. Today many young artists don't sign with major record labels but kickstart their careers on TikTok, hoping that the recommendation algorithm will get their songs to going viral (Nilsen, 2022).

There aren't just Norwegian artists who use TikTok to connect with their fans. International artists, such as Lil Nas X and Doja Cat, used TikTok to expand their careers, their music went viral when teenagers made dance challenges by using their songs. TikTok has created new opportunities for young up-and-coming artists. However, do these artists, these songs represent the case for the majority of the artists, or are they the outliers who released their songs at the right time, when the recommendation algorithms benefited them, or is TikTok a new platform where repertoire can be marketed at a lower cost? In that case: How do the algorithms and technology of TikTok compare to other social media platforms. Is the technology behind TikTok algorithms sustainable, and will it last into the future?

For many reasons, TikTok has become a hit-making machine where artists can go from making music at home to having millions of listeners, with more record labels and A&Rs focusing on signing “TikTok artists” to their repertoire. This is changing how the music business work in many aspects.

If a song is going viral on TikTok, and the artist is unsigned, and as a result, it’s getting a million streams on Spotify, the labels are scrambling to sign that song or that artist, They’re obsessed with expanding their market share and making sure they don’t lose any market share to independent artists. (Capoot, 2022)
Said Tatiana Cirisano, a music business analyst.

Enabling a song that becomes viral on TikTok so it gets more streams on Spotify and Apple Music is crucial for the music industry.

The possibility of short videos, with a strong emphasis on musical content, contributes to TikTok's rapid success. This has unquestionably benefited the artists whose songs have been used in popular videos by other content creators. The rest of the social media networks are now attempting to catch up to TikTok as a result of this. Meta Platforms Inc., which owns Facebook and Instagram, invested heavily in their short video format, such as Instagram Reels, to compete against TikTok (Capoot, 2022).

Only time will tell if this will be as successful as TikTok for breaking songs for the music industry. However, TikTok stands apart because it strongly emphasises music as part of its platform, a crucial component of its business model. Their technology, regarding how their recommendation algorithms work on their “for you page”, makes them unique compared to their competition—however, Meta Platforms, Inc. The well-established publicly traded company with huge capital. Meta, isn’t just focusing on music and the music business. Their audience reaches a more extensive target group not just a younger audience. But are still used for promoting artists and sharing music with your followers on their own “Story” features. In that regard, they can also be used as a promotional tool for artists and music.

TikTok has created opportunities that before were harder to reach, and it has become a vital part of how the music business promotes its repertoire and artists. This will be interesting to look into, especially with how the TikTok algorithms are working and their target audience being mostly teenagers and young adults.

1.3 Motivation

In my Bachelor's thesis, I wrote about how audiences are discovering music on social media with a focus on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. I carried out a questionnaire to better understand participants' usage of social media, and whether they had ever discovered new music there. In my Bachelor thesis, I chose to use a quantitative method to approach my research topic.

However, while writing the Bachelor thesis in 2021, I focused on social media in general rather than one specific. In my master's thesis, I want to write more about TikTok instead of focusing on all the social media networks. The main reason is that the rapid rise of TikTok, and music going viral can potentially impact the song's success. Suppose TikTok is as influential as it seems on the outside, I will have the chance to learn more about how the music industry uses it to maintain an artist's fanbase, including both challenges and opportunities TikTok bring. This competence could be of importance to me if and when I seek a position within the industry myself. Also, knowing one social media platform in-depth will give me an advantage when utilising other social media networks in the future, I will know more about how the services intend to work, how they actually work, the technology behind them and the hype around them.

2. Theoretical background

In the theoretical chapter, I will look into the relevant theory to my research question. I start to explain where social media originated from and furthermore about the digitalisation of the music industry and its economy. Then about TikTok and its features. Furthermore, end the theoretical chapter by writing in-depth about the algorithms, that help TikTok and other social media networks to have influence over consumer behaviour.

2.1 Social Media

Social media can be referred to as a tool for communication between two people or be used to reach a broader audience. Digital communication made it much more manageable and accessible in everyday life when the internet became more available. Before social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok etc., became accessible to the general public.

Computer-mediated communication between two people was first introduced over an e-mail in 1971 (Fuchs, 2017, p.6).

With the rise of technology, such as the Internet, came opportunities for other communication methods. E-mails started the way for digital communication at the beginning of the 1970s. In the 80s – 90s, these social futures became more developed and used for primarily one-way communication between two people, groups or blogs (Aalen & Iversen, 2021, p.23). The development of the internet and data technologies, increased the need for individuals to communicate with one another effectively over digital platforms.

Since social media didn't fall into then-existing classifications of media communication, such as mass media (TV, Radio and Newspapers) and communication media (e-mails, Telephone and SMS). Social media cleared the way for developing a new method of interaction on the internet that emerged in the 2000s (Aalen & Iversen, 2021, p.23). These newly established platforms didn't fit into the categories of digital communication at that time. Social media became the term that represents this new form of communication. With social media, there was the possibility of having a larger audience than ever before, not just one-to-one communication, which was more familiar with the other tools of digital communication at that time.

Due to its popularity and the possibility to interact with several users simultaneously, these platforms became very interactive. You could share content with a broader audience and receive a more significant scale of information, making communication easier. The Norwegian book “Sosiale medier”, writes that there are two ways to define social media.

1. There is no separation between the sender and the audience. Both people can produce and consume content at the same time.
2. Social media allows communication with many-to-many instead of just one-to-one or one-to-many. (Aalen & Iversen, 2021, p.23)

This is done by computer-mediated communication that enables the users to communicate with each other through messages, video calls and audio over the Internet. Social media networks are a technology that allows for computer-mediated communication. Over the decades, researchers have studied how differently we interact via communication over the internet, compared to face-to-face communication and how this interferes with our personal relationships, expressing self-identity, collaborating and making decisions at a distance from each other. (Lee & Oh, 2017)

Since the 2000s, social media companies have grown to become major corporations with significant influence worldwide. The beginning of the 2000s, multiple social media platforms became the first movers in this technology-driven era, some that created the foundation for other platforms to succeed but later failed themselves. One of them is Friendster, established in 2002, one of the first social media networks where you could create your own profile and add your friends to your contacts. First, it started as a dating site to compete with Match.com. However, the consumers instead used the platform to communicate with friends rather than a dating site (Aalen & Iversen, 2021, p.26). When Mark Zuckerberg studied at Harvard at the beginning of the 2000s, he started Facebook to target mainly college students, he was inspired by Friendster. Facebook was based on the same model, with the possibility of creating a profile and connecting with college friends. Later, Friendster failed, and they were not the only ones who did. In contrast, Facebook has grown to become a major tech company. Throughout the 2000s, several new social media sites emerged that catered to a particular demographic. like teenagers, businesspeople, college students, etc. There was a boom in the development of various networks targeted for different needs and demographics. Many countries had their own start-ups of social media platforms where digital communication where possible. Then, they later failed in their own market since they could not compete with the soon-to-be larger corporations. Now only a few giant technology corporations being present and dominating the social media atmosphere globally today.

The rise of social media networks on a global scale, has also changed how companies are creating their marketing strategy and using their budgets. Social media didn't just become an effective way of being communication tool for its users. It also became effective to use as a digital marketing platform for targeting companies' specific target groups, and social media networks could sell these types of ads and information to reach them.

Social media together with the digitalisation of the music industry, changed how recorded music is marketed, furthermore how artists also communicate with their fans. These networks have shifted consumer behaviour and the interaction between artist and fans. Swedish marketing agency Heartbeats International said this about music branding:

The same digital technology that changed the music industry is changing advertising as we know it. In a world where everyone is connected all the time and customers are in charge of the remote control, the rules of communication have transformed ... Music branding ... offers a strategic way to reach consumers in ways that traditional advertising can't. (Meier, 2017, p. 6)

With digital technology, such as social media, communication with your audience is more available. However, consumers can take more control of the information they receive. There isn't a one-way communication as it typically is with traditional advertising such as TV. For an instant, this also changes the way marketing of music function. The record industry changed how it advertised its artists. Before, they spent a significant amount on marketing on TV and Radio. Now more resources are spent on digital marketing within companies such as Google and Meta Platforms Inc. Also, social media apps enable you to promote yourself to your audience directly via your own profile. Additionally, the audience can like and share the artist's music with their followers that helps to promote the artist effectively at no cost.

2.2 The Digitalisation of the Music Industry

When considering the beginning of the music industry's digitalisation, we can look back to the 1970s. The production and recording of music became more digitalised with digital instruments such as synthesizers, sequencers and drums (Eidsvold-Tøien et al., 2019, p.4). At first, they were expensive and not user-friendly, which later changed with time. Nevertheless, in the 80s and 90s, digitalisation took off with new ways of music production and how music got consumed. When CD (compact disc) was introduced in 1982, it pioneered a brand-new technology for digital storage on a tangible disk that could easily be purchased in stores. In the 1980s, the growth of the CD sale opened up a new source of revenue for the music industry, that never existed before. Since the launch of the CD in 1982 and until 1990 it *“fuelled growth in recorded music industry”* (Tschmuck, 2017, p. 27). However, also made the ability to duplicate and archive music on a computer, which had long-term negative effects on the recorded music industry at the end of the 1990s.

When the public got access to the World Wide Web in 1993, the mp3 also became available. These two technologies boosted the development of Napster in 1999. This technological advancement started to give the audience the impression that music was “free”, by making it easier to share music illegally through filesharing. It paved the way for what would later become a significant problem with music piracy at the start of the new decade (Eidsvold-Tøien et al., 2019, p.5).

This technological transformation impacted the music industry at the beginning of the 2000s. With the rise of digitalisation in society, especially when the decline of CD sales and a boom of illegal music piracy. The transition of music into the digital age in the 2000s started slow and painful. Then in 2003, Apple launched iTunes, making it possible to buy legally licensed music digitally for the first time. Apple became one of the first companies to create technology for the music industry, even though they were not involved in the music business themselves. This increased the opportunities for other technology companies to follow the same path and get involved in the music industry. Technology companies saw an opportunity to create a digital solution for the music industry that didn't exist, the chance to expand their technology to benefit them financially or create valuable new startups. This happened because the recording industry itself could not keep up with the digital revolution, and the demand for music being digital. Which the audience desperately wanted and needed at the beginning of the new century (Eidsvold-Tøien et al., 2019, p.5). It can be said that it become an outsourcing of the music industry to ever-growing technology companies.

Apple didn't just create iTunes but also the iPod. These two became immensely popular when first released. It can be argued that Apple didn't create iTunes to establish themselves in the music industry, but this was a service to make their iPod more attractive. What made the iPod so popular, was the possibility of playing music from a portable device you could carry around. Without digital music being sold on iTunes, the technology Apple created for the iPod was not usable. They were market leaders, especially regarding digital sale of music in the US. Apple had made a licencing deal with all the major record labels that gave them an income from digital sale. This opened up possibilities for music streaming in the future, which would soon become widespread a few years later. With streaming, you pay a set amount each month or can choose the free ad version, this enables for listening to as much music as possible instead of purchasing physical CDs or digital songs.

Listening to music was designed as a rental business, so nothing you purchased belonged to you. The first streaming service that got launched was Spotify in 2008. Spotify popularised streaming and has ever since changed the way music is consumed. Later, multiple streaming services started, such as the Norwegian start-up WiMp, which got sold to Jay Z to create Tidal. Apple followed after launching its streaming service Apple Music in 2015. In Norway, streaming became recorded music's number one source of income in 2013, and became the number one globally in 2017 (Eidsvold-Tøien et al., 2019, p.5).

With the rise of digitalisation, it has never been simpler to listen to your favourite music while simultaneously discovering new songs.

At the same time, the growing number of audiences listening to the same music is increasing. This can make it hard to keep up with digitalisation, especially for new artists, since they have to compete with the ever-changing landscape of the digital music industry.

In a world of streaming, you are not just competing with new music, but also with artists that released their music before the digitalisation of the music industry in the 80s and 90s.

In many ways, it's easier to create and listen to your favourite songs today. However, at the same time, more people are listening to the same music, and music companies have the same influence over the music industry it used to have. The level of innovation is less than at the beginning of the century. In the 2000s, the music industry needed to change because it was losing financial stability quicker than ever before, hence a boom of new startups was indeed much needed. It was the right time for doing so in a music economy that was failing at the beginning of the 2000s.

2.3 Music Economy

The economy of the music industry can be divided into three sectors: the Recording Industry, Music Publishing and the Live Music Sector (Tschmuck, 2017, p.2). Even when they are separated into different businesses and cater to various markets within the music industry, these three industries altogether represent the core of the industry. Without Music Recordings, the Publishing and Live Music Industries would have nothing to sell. Furthermore, without these two, the Recorded Music Industry's revenue stream would be significantly lower than it is now. Also, part of the music economy, the secondary music market includes copyright and licensing music to other commercial usages where music is essential, such as advertisement agencies, films and game developers. When an artist is going on a tour. Essential stakeholders are critical to the live music sector that is not directly part of the music economy. This includes concert venues, parking, logistics, wardrobe, hotels, and food service. (Tschmuck, 2017, p.3).

This makes the live music industry vital for the local and the music economy, other connected businesses make a profit when a concert or a festival is being played in the region.

According to the United Nations Conference on Creative Economy Report 2010, "*music is at the core of the cultural/creative/copyright industries*" (Tschmuck, 2017, p.5). This proves how important the music economy is for the creative industries, it employs many people in different industries otherwise not related to the music economy but still benefiting from it.

During the past two decades, the income stream that comes from the music economy has changed, especially when the digitalisation of the music industry happened at the beginning of the 2000s. The decline of physical CDs, and the rise of music streaming changed how artists get paid hence changed the music economy significantly. From 2010 to 2017, physical music sales declined from 22% to 6%, and income from music streaming went from 4% to 16%, according to royalties collected from TONO (Eidsvold-Tøien et al., 2019, p.109). There has also been increased revenue from the live music market from royalties and sales of concert tickets. The combination of these have helped to increase the revenue for the music industry.

2.4 The Economy of Music Streaming

The economy of music streaming has also made it harder to create an income from copyrights and royalties from Spotify and Apple Music. When physical music sales have decreased in the past decade, fewer artists have made money on their music. The top 1% of artists account for 84% of the streams generated on any streaming platform, creating a superstar economy (Sweney, 2021). This phenomenon, where top artists and songwriters get a more significant percentage of the income has always been discussed in the streaming economy, since it creates fewer opportunities for new artists. Mark Mulligan, analyst and managing director, says:

Fundamentally, music is a superstar business. The streaming economy is working really effectively in many ways. Music is now seen as stable, so big institutional investors are flooding the space as they see streaming as a safe and predictable asset. But they want to invest in the biggest companies and the major labels have that market share, they have more artists – the biggest – they have more streams, more everything. (Sweney, 2021)

Still, the three major record labels, Universal, Warner and Sony, have massive influence over the streaming platforms and the music economy, since they own the most extended music repertoire and have signed the most prominent artists worldwide. The major record companies can manage the best deals for royalty pay-outs from Spotify. This creates an imbalance where only a handful of companies have control of the streaming economy, which have become an essential source of revenue for the music industry after the decline of physical CD sale. Also, other critics of the streaming platforms argue that music has become inexpensive and that Spotify, Apple and Amazon sell their customers too cheap or free monthly plans. Even with the rise of customers subscribing, it is not enough to make it sufficient (Sweney, 2021).

However, simultaneously, releasing your music has never been easier, making it a paradox. Digitalisation has made the music economy more globalised, with endless opportunities to expand music to an international audience.

For example, Norwegian artists are successfully exporting their music and creating a demand for Norwegian music abroad. In 2017, income from music exported abroad from Norwegian artists was estimated to be 348 million NOK (Eidsvold-Tøien et al., 2019, p.98). However, there is more competition, and making music financially stable can be more challenging for up-and-coming artists. Nevertheless, the number of Norwegian artists creating a fandom abroad is increasing.

Also, according to Spotify, they paid an estimated \$40 billion in 2022 to the music industry (Loud&Clear, 2022). This number includes recording and publishing royalties. These figures only represent one streaming platform that generates income for the music industry, but they showcase the considerable impact, and the huge potential music streaming has on the music economy. This number does not consider the income from touring, merch and sync.

One of Spotify's primary goals is to support and help musicians according to themselves. Although Spotify does not choose which artists receive the money, they pay out royalties to the record labels and publishing companies who make the decision on what get divided. It is impossible to only blame Spotify and other streaming platforms, for not making it possible for all professional artists to make a living from their music by just streaming. Since record labels take part in distributing the collected royalties. The three major record labels take a considerable percentage of the income generated from streaming and, as mentioned, significantly influence the current streaming economy. Also, this can be difficult since Spotify doesn't pay artists per stream but rather as a streamshare, that varies depending on the agreement with the licensors and how many streamed the music.

Spotify themselves indicate:

Every month, in each country we operate in, we calculate streamshare by adding up how many times music owned or controlled by a particular rights holder was streamed and dividing it by the total number of streams in that market (Mulroy, 2022).

2.5 TikTok

TikTok is a social media app available on Android and Apple Ios phones, where you can create and share videos for up to 60 seconds and longer. TikTok started as an app focusing on short video content. The advantage that made TikTok stand out from its competition, is that it's more entertainment-focused instead of lifestyle-focused.

Their mission as a company:

To capture and present the world's creativity, knowledge, and precious life moments directly from the mobile phone. TikTok enables everyone to be a creator, and encourages users to share their passion and creative expression through their videos.(Mohsin, 2022).

Since the beginning, TikTok has become a global social media platform with an estimated 1 billion monthly users in 2022, is now the 7th most popular social media app worldwide. (Mohsin, 2022). TikTok is one of the fastest-growing platforms compared to other social media networks, such as Facebook and Instagram. Which used a longer time to reach 1 billion monthly users.

Another characteristic distinguishing TikTok, is that it is one of the few social media networks focusing on targeting the Generation Z rather than the Millennial generation. 62% of TikTok users in the US are between 10-29 years old (Mohsin, 2022).

Meta Inc. and Google's focus is primarily on the millennial generation due to the potential for selling advertisements on their platforms, and the fact that the older demographic typically has more purchasing power. Because of that, many other social media networks concentrate a lot on older generations. This makes TikTok unique since its target audience is mainly younger audiences, such as Gen Z. TikTok has become this group's number one social media app.

2.5.1 The beginning of TikTok

TikTok is a social media app that is the predecessor of the short music video-sharing platform Musical.ly, established in 2014. When Musical.ly started, it allowed users to create 15-second short videos where the users could lip-sync or dance to their favourite songs. There was even the opportunity to add filters, edit the speed and play the video backward (ABC News, 2016).

It allowed the creators to be creative with this new platform. Combining short video formats with music made Musical.ly one of the most popular social media platforms for teenagers, with an estimated 100 million monthly users globally in 2016.

Because of this app's immense popularity among teenagers, it also launched the opportunity for a new type of fame for its creators and influencers to reach millions of followers. They often described themselves as "Muser" that lip-synced and danced to songs. (Wallenstein, 2016) Already in 2016, with the rise of Musical.ly, there was a discussion about the impact this could have on the music industry. Due to songs being used for short videos viewed by millions of people. It could be used as a brief music ad for a particular song, which could have more impact than music videos. According to an ELLE article, viral songs on Musical.ly could quickly receive huge exposure on streaming services like Spotify and iTunes (ELLE, 2016).

Musical.ly was a Shanghai-based company that sold to ByteDance for roughly 1 billion US dollars in 2017. When ByteDance acquired Musical.ly it changed Musical.ly's name a year later to TikTok. With a brand-new logo and layout, it created a new opportunity for the Chinese company that already owned the popular social media platform Douyin, which target a huge follower base in China (Lee, 2018).

By purchasing Musical.ly, which already had a significant user base in the US and Europe, ByteDance could break into these markets by creating a new app separated from Douyin. This was an excellent opportunity for the company to launch a new app with an already established user base. This led up to the debut of TikTok in 2018.

ByteDance changed some tactics in conjunction with creating the new app TikTok. When a large number of teens were using Musical.ly to record a 15-second lip-sync video to a hit song. TikTok had more features than that, and you could record up to 60 seconds of video with text, talking, music and special effects (Responsival, 2020).

This resulted in TikTok's colossal popularity, enabling you to do more on the platform than ever before and reach a new market of short video content. With their "for you page" the potential to reach a completely new audience was much easier. Additionally, this has expanded the platform's potential use, and audience beyond what musical.ly might have initially attracted. TikTok has since 2018 become one of the fastest growing social media platforms, and started the trend with short videos.

Since TikTok launched, music has played a significant role on their platform similar to its predecessor Musical.ly. Which transitioned from being primarily a social network where music was an integral element, so the audience could lip-sync and create dance videos.

In contrast to other social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, TikTok emphasises music significantly from the beginning and also being entertainment-focused. Due to this, TikTok focuses a lot on cementing music into its structure. This has made TikTok an essential social media platform for music discovery for younger generations, transformed the music industry's marketing strategies. As a result, TikTok has experienced enormous success, many musicians and their songs have reached millions of people with little to no marketing expense.

2.5.2 TikTok launches SoundOn, and the possibility to earn royalties

TikTok launched a feature named SoundOn in 2022. With this tool, they have created an all-in-one platform for music marketing and distribution for artists using TikTok. Their purpose, with this is to emphasise even more for new artists to create and develop their fanbase on the platform, getting their music to reach an audience worldwide (TikTok, 2022). They will also start paying royalties to artists who choose to release their music directly onto the platform. With additionally helping the artists with promotional tools and support from their own dedicated SoundOn team. With this, TikTok can help artist start their music careers and without signing a record and publishing deals. Their global head of music Ole Obermann said:

New artists and musical creators are a vibrant community within TikTok and SoundOn is designed to support them as they take the first steps in their career. Our SoundOn teams will guide creators on their journey to the big stage and bring the expertise and power of TikTok to life for the artist. We're incredibly excited about how this will surface and propel new talent and how SoundOn will contribute to an increasingly diverse and growing global music industry. (TikTok, 2022)

In 2022 the Norwegian collective rights management TONO write in a blog that they have reached a licencing agreement with TikTok, together with the other Nordic collective rights management to receive royalties to their songwriters and composers.

We are pleased that the agreement is in place. Music has great value both for TikTok and its users, and Norwegian songwriters, composers and lyricists will now receive remuneration from TONO when their music is used on the service, says CEO of TONO, Cato Strøm. (Martinsen, 2022).

This agreement and TikTok's own focus on creating a platform for artists' music careers are becoming more important. According to a study shows that 15% of the Nordic population uses TikTok to discover music (Martinsen, 2022). How much the songwriters and composers will receive from this agreement is unclear.

2.5.3 TikTok's political issues

As of writing this master thesis, issues on TikTok being owned by a Chinese company have received news attention again as of March 2023. With the news that the US government want to give President Joe Biden the power to potentially ban TikTok, because of the chance of giving away US user data to the Chinese government. TikTok has denied any accusation of this, but with strict Chinese laws, they can be required to do so if this is in the government's best interest. The opportunity for China to use TikTok for collecting data, and use it for propaganda to an international audience is one of the significant issues for US and European governments (Morrison. Et al., 2023).

This makes it especially difficult for lawmakers to decide if TikTok should be banned, because both the Chinese government and TikTok denied the accusations. Banning an app from existing in a free market is not so straightforward. This debate about TikTok is nothing new, as the two nations have been fighting over technological dominance over each other for years. In 2020, former US President Donald Trump tried to do the same and permanently ban TikTok, because of the political issues between the two nations and the threat it could face US national security. This measurement of banning TikTok has mainly been discussed in the US. However, more countries in Europe and North America have been discussing the issues regarding the leak of security when using TikTok. Recently as in 2023, the EU parliament banned all its employees from using TikTok on their work phones, so have other nations done for employees working at a government agency (Ødegård, 2023).

Since the app is owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, TikTok primarily targets an international audience in North America and Europe. In China, they don't use TikTok, but the app Douyin that are owned by the same company and based on the same technology, as two different identities under ByteDance. TikTok has taken a few measures to make lawmakers see them not as a threat to national security. In 2020 TikTok moved its headquarters to Singapore. There were also talks about ByteDance selling TikTok to a major American technology company. This, however, needs approval from the Chinese government, which most likely will not happen (Morrison. Et al., 2023).

The potential for a complete ban can have a considerable impact on the future of TikTok. If TikTok is banned, only time will tell, it will be essential to consider this for what the future holds for TikTok. However, the potential ban could have a significant impact since so many users of TikTok live in North America and Europe. Including politicians who promote their views and themselves to a younger audience, and companies using it for advertising to reach a specific generation. Not to mention how TikTok has revolutionised how new and older songs are being discovered on its app. This has greatly influenced the music industry in the past years, what could happen if TikTok gets restricted in North America and Europe. What consequences can this have for the music industry in the future, since TikTok focuses a lot on music on its platform compared to its competition. With multiple songs going viral on the app, it will be interesting to see what will happen in the future with TikTok.

2.6 Algorithms

Media organisations that want to target their audience with relevant recommendations, maintain the material relevant for their consumers have to incorporate algorithms into their platforms. This ensures the audience won't feel lost in overwhelming data, the media is giving recommendations to engage its audience.

Algorithms are data-driven systems to recommend the consumption of music, film and other media activities to their users. The primary purpose is to make sure the recommendation you as a consumer get feels personalised and fits your interest. To give these accurate recommendations, the algorithms try to predict what will be popular in the future. By doing this, content and historical data previous interacted with are crucial factors in how this technology behind the algorithms function (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2022, 6:02). The people working with this digital technology are describing it as "hooking" people up (Seaver, 2019). This is to make sure of frequent or enduring use.

The author Nick Seaver describes algorithms instead as traps, a gatekeeper of the natural flow of information, content and opposes freedom that instead coerces the users in a specific direction. However, this technology has become essential when entering the digital media field today.

The algorithms differ from one another on their own. It depends on who made them and what use they are meant to serve. This is because the algorithms' underlying technology is a formula developed to help the computer accomplish a selected task.

The creators of the algorithms choose their purpose and sensitivity for their aims, which makes the algorithms unique and complex. This information-based technology can be designed to collect as much information needed regarding the user behaviour, since this information is crucial for making the technology work. This is to favour social media networks', so they can provide accurate advertising and recommend exciting content based on consumer interest. It also keeps the users of the app to spend more time on their site. The social media networks benefit from collecting this information, to use it as the basis for their business model to sell advertisements (Aalen & Iversen, 2021, p.35).

This is relatively common given that social media platforms are free to use, selling adverts is one way for them to maintain financial stability. They sell tailored advertisements on their platform based on the data information they collect. Everything you do as a consumer is stored and managed. With digital communication increasing more than ever, it's easier to document patterns, with the possibility to search easily in this data, in many cases, not needing to search it yourself. The digital data will find the information for you. In that sense, digital data is an easy tool for reproduction, with the possibility of storing, copying and sharing (Aalen & Iversen, 2021, p.35). This allows for digital communication to spread to as many audiences as possible in a short period, while changing its audience more quickly. Something the advertisement business benefit from when implementing digital media algorithms. It plays a significant role in why this technology is ever-changing, while becoming so helpful for social media networks and streaming services. However, in this master thesis, the focus is primarily on how TikTok uses this technology, when testing consumer behaviours to give relevant recommendations on its "For you page".

A critical difference between TikTok's algorithms is how they recommend content, unlike Facebook and Instagram, which is more of a social network to interact with your followers and friends with status updates and pictures. TikTok has emerged as the most widely used network for sharing short videos among teenagers and young adults, they take full advantage of their "For you page". With this function, you don't exclusively receive content from people you follow. The "For you page" displays content from users you have never interacted with before, enabling viewers to view videos that the recommendation algorithms believe would be most interesting for your page.

TikTok's algorithms target certain video content they believe will appeal to your interest. As a result, each person's "for you page" is unique.

This work because the algorithms give these recommendations by collecting data from previous videos the user has viewed, liked, commented and shared (Hern, 2022). Also, using hashtags and trending songs are implementing to give accurate recommendations.

These criteria's are applied to the videos that are posted on TikTok. When a video is uploaded then shown to a small group of the audience, algorithms determine if it will be successful for a new audience. The more engagement, such as views, likes and comments the TikTok receives, the more likely the video will receive more exposure.

The algorithms analyse the audience to determine whether it may pop up on other users' "for you page", simultaneously being used to give similar recommendations for the future. This testing of the audience fit the premise that anyone could go viral, even without a previous large following. Because the algorithms try to predict what will be popular in the future based on the data it collects. Experienced content creators probably know have to take advantage of this to go viral by using trending songs, hashtags and shortening their videos. There are some hacks to take full advantage of the algorithms.

The principle of recommendation algorithms is nothing new, TikTok isn't the only app that utilises this. Many more service-based media networks use this technology, including Facebook's newsfeed, and Spotify when suggesting tracks you should listen to in their playlists. In a way, it appears as though the TikTok recommendation algorithms are choosing what will go viral is random. However, much work is being done to make this system function and appear to provide the audience with a solid flow of interesting content. The "for you page" is essential for TikTok, it appear to differentiates from its competition. While making it seems easier to go viral compared to other social media platforms.

2.6.1 TikTok's algorithms influence the Music Industry

The past two years, TikTok has become one of the most important social media networks for the music industry. Thanks to its "for you page" and endless opportunities to connect their audience with music in its short video format. TikTok has become the new maxim of the music industry, with new songs going viral and older hits getting a new life on TikTok (Sutherland, 2021).

With record labels, managers and artists all trying to get their recommendation algorithms to benefit them. In a digital age, where having a hit on TikTok has become the new norm. In a research paper done by ContraBrand they say this:

Not only is Artist-Generated Content (AGC) the most common method for breakout artists to go viral in 2022 (35.5%) but it is also the most cost-effective and lowest barrier to entry for artists looking to break into the music industry. 74 artists have been able to launch their own careers through posting their own organic content on TikTok in 2022, 23 of which have been able to gain at least 1 million additional monthly listeners on Spotify as a result. (Coase, & Taylor, 2022, p. 3)

With this knowledge, TikTok creates new opportunities, with a significant focus on working on their algorithms to collect data about the user. With more to analyse, it gives better recommendations for future content—and features TikTok’s “for you page” heavily dependent on. The algorithms are essential for short video content and music to go viral.

2.6.2 Criticism of the algorithm’s function and biases

The social media networks use their algorithms to make them aware of every aspect of the user's digital footprint, since this will be stored. The fact that the internet and social media are free contributes to this, since collecting unlimited user data is valuable especially for selling advertisements and information about its audience. As I've argued, algorithms have evolved into a marketing machine, not only for the music industry. The author of the book "Weapons of Math Destruction," data scientist Cathy O'Neil, is critical to how these algorithms affect us online and in our daily lives offline. Algorithms are made to measure and scale every digital footprint left behind without emotional attachment. From these, they can tend to scale every aspect of someone’s life, based on that, sort out who is better or not in an unfair situation.

Algorithms decide who gets a loan, who gets a job interview, who gets insurance and much more -- but they don't automatically make things fair. (TED, 2017)

The point O’Neil makes highlight that algorithms can make mistakes and be biased in their technology. Since it is created to find success, that can reinforce stereotypical beliefs based on gender, age and race.

Because the technology behind it thinks a selected group of people are more likely to be successful, based on previous measurements. An example of this is in a job hiring process if an algorithm is implemented to sort out the job applicants.

The algorithm has learned to see a connection between two objects, “man and engineering” and “woman and nurse” which fit together. The algorithm bases its technology on a stereotypical notion, which can result in a biased selection when used to sort out applicants (Aalen & Iversen, 2021, p.37.). As mentioned, the whole purpose of algorithms is to find success or what it thinks will be successful in the near future. It doesn’t measure if the data is based on stereotypes or not, because it is based on previous data that it has collected, which can be unfair for a group of people and minorities if it’s not regulated.

Also, the algorithms TikTok uses to suggest content on its “for you page” have drawn criticism. According to a Forbes article, TikTok's algorithms favour white creators over black creators, creating a problematic racial bias (Asare, 2020). TikTok later made a response to change its community guidelines, to improve better equality on its platform for all creators when it comes to their recommendation algorithms.

Of course, this is hardly unique to TikTok. All social media platforms that use algorithms can create bubbles where people only see content that confirms their biases. Think of, for example, how a Facebook feed may be biased toward a particular political viewpoint. (Strapagiel, 2020)

The algorithms are not perfect in any way, but it has been crucial for social media networks to keep their business model financially stable. For the music industry, the algorithms have been essential for up-and-coming artists to catch the interest of a specific audience at TikTok’s “For you page”, additionally, as a marketing tool for the music business itself to evaluate the flow of information and measure listeners in specific segments. Then again, this doesn’t mean the technology is perfect or perhaps should be regulated in some capacity.

3. Methodology

The methodology is a means of acquiring new knowledge and maintaining existing knowledge, which is necessary for any research. It will determine whether the claims made during a research project are accurate, reliable, or durable (Dalland, 2020, p.53).

To better comprehend the topic, you have chosen for your research project. You must analyse your research problem, then gather the appropriate data by selecting the correct methodology. Data collection for analysis in a research project, like a master's thesis, can be done in various methods.

Three perspectives can be reviewed as research methods and used for collecting information. The three are data collection and analysis, quantitative and qualitative research, and research strategies (Walliman, 2001, p. 226). The Master thesis is in its early stages, when the research topic has been found, it can be wise to look into the correct methodology.

For this Master's thesis and my research topic. I have chosen to get a better knowledge of qualitative method, that is the most appropriate for my thesis. Both quantitative and qualitative method approaches differ in how they receive data. I will describe them both, then explain why I choose a qualitative method to best collect data for my Master's thesis.

3.1 What is the difference between Quantitative and Qualitative research

Quantitative research is the method by receiving data in numbers and can be scaled in measurements like diagrams. It is data collected that is statistically proven from a selected area where the research has occurred (Dalland, 2020, p.54).

This can, for instance, be to show a percentage of how many people use social media in their daily life. Finding this information can be done instantly by creating a survey or questionnaire to collect data from a particular group. Selecting a demographic, you want to research can be essential since it can be challenging to do surveys representing everyone everywhere. Still, it will give the researcher an overview that prove or disprove a point made. This can be an example of how the quantitative method can be used. There can be different ways to receive data than surveys and questionnaires. Since this is number-based research collected to show statistics. Qualitative method are data collected differently. It can be described that the qualitative method work with words. The book "Your research project" says this about qualitative analysis:

By immersing him/herself in the data and then searching out patterns, surprising phenomena and inconsistencies, the researcher can generate new concepts and theory, or uncover further instances of those already in existence" (Walliman, 2001, p. 259).

Qualitative analysis helps to collect data for a chosen issue to prove or give more insight into your research. This information received in your area of study helps to develop the research project. It provides the essential knowledge, such as developing ideas, exploring hints and creating connections between the points made in your project (Walliman, 2001, p. 260).

Interviewing individuals with relevant knowledge of your research subject is one technique to gather this data. The data can provide extended material that has to be collectively divided and analysed.

Analysing qualitative data can be difficult since the qualitative method works with words, while going more in-depth on specific topics. This method is bound up to human feelings and judgements, instead of showing proven statistics and numbers collected in quantitative data. Qualitative approach cannot be codified. However, it's a great way to understand the response's character and nature, to receive a better understanding of the current topic of study. (Walliman, 2001, p. 261).

Another area that can be challenging is the amount of data that must be analysed and collected. This can be field notes, handwritten notes, observations and interviews (Walliman, 2001, p. 261). The data must be stored and categorised in the thesis's research development and put together with relevant theory. In this case, it's crucial that every claim made is respected and can be helpful to the project's future.

3.2 Interview

A crucial part of the qualitative method is conducting interviews to collect relevant information for your research. It was crucial for this master's thesis, to interview music industry professionals who could provide their opinions on how they work with TikTok. Such as those who work for record labels or artist management. To find people to interview, I searched online to find any participants who would be relevant to interview for this master thesis. When I founded a company or a person that worked in the music industry. I sent out an email explaining the purpose of this master's thesis, that I wanted to receive more information on how TikTok is influencing the current music industry, in their opinion. During this process, I had to send multiple emails to different people since a few of them did not answer my request or simply did not have time. This is understandable since I can imagine many of them have other projects to work on. However, I made a connection with three people who were willing to participate in an online interview. Two of them are working in the music industry in Oslo, and the last one in Bergen.

As the interviewer, thinking about how you want to conduct the interview can be essential. There can be different methods for how an interview is held. It is possible to ask questions you have prepared in advance and would like to be addressed. Another choice is to create topics for the discussion you wish to emphasise the conversation on (Dalland, 2020. p. 67).

During this master's thesis, I prepared eight questions beforehand, together with my supervisor, which would be the topic of the conversation. These questions were asked to all of my participants in different individual interviews kept online over Microsoft Teams. The purpose of the eight questions, was to get information from professionals in the music industry regarding how TikTok's music marketing function and their predictions for the app's future growth. During the interview, the conversation was based on these questions. I did not ask anything other than what was written in the interview guide. I estimated beforehand that each interview would take about 15-30 minutes.

3.3 Language

Since the three participants were based in Norway, the transcripts and recordings of the interviews are in Norwegian. Since writing this master's thesis in English, I needed to translate the findings made in the interviews. During this process, I decided to translate only the information that would be relevant to be used in the thesis. The transcript will be in Norwegian, with a translation into English in the chapter of the analyse.

3.4 Anonymity

During the first interview that I did, I asked her at the end of the interview if she would prefer to be anonymous when referred to in this master's thesis. She did not mind if I used her name and where she worked.

Before my second interview, the respondent emailed me to ask if she could remain anonymous. Something that I considered acceptable because, in my opinion, it wouldn't be a challenge for my master's thesis. Also, my third respondent didn't have anything against being referred to by name or where she worked.

Since each of my respondents wished to have different options considering their anonymity, also due to strict personal data protection that has to be cleared when collecting data according to the Research Council of Norway. I decided to refer to all three of my respondents with a different alias. However, I mentioned their current role or workplace accordingly.

3.5 The informants

The informants that were chosen to be contacted were working professionals in the music industry who were preferably in charge of communications, marketing, or A&R at a record label or music management company.

These three worked in different companies within the Norwegian music industry. However, all of them had extensive knowledge of social media and music marketing. They still answer with their own perspective and feeling, not their employees' point of view. Knowing this, it's essential to keep in mind that the responder in an interview conducted using a qualitative method cannot be generalised. They discuss the knowledge they have acquired over the course of their own career and experience.

- **Emma:** Is the Project & Communication manager/ A&R at the Norwegian division of the Swedish-based record label, that is today the largest Nordic indie label with offices in Malmö, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo, Helsinki, Tampere and Tallinn.

- **Elin:** Work as the manager and project leader at an Oslo-based management and PR agency representing Norwegian artists.

- **Lisa:** Helped to start the Bergen-based indie record label, where she works as the label and artist manager. They have signed Norwegian artists such as iris, Hedda Mae, Michelle Ullestad and more.

3.6 The consequences of conducting a research interview

When analysing the interviews, it's essential to give the statements given in the interviews a fair chance. However, there is not always the possibility of giving a voice to each response received. The researcher has huge control over what will be considered relevant to their research question and selecting the information needed. Also, when there is no direct quote in the text, taken from the transcription. The researcher uses their own language to describe what was found in the interviews (Dalen, 2013, p. 87). There can possibly be some bias in selecting responses in the analysing part since the researcher can have strong beliefs, or the topic they are researching affects them personally. The data collected can possibly be manipulated from the researcher's own point of view.

There can be important to look out for your own biases when conducting the analysis as a researcher. *“So, we must be wise and vigilant, critical of our interpretation of the data, regularly question our practice and wherever possible triangulate”*(Bell & Waters, 2014, p. 187).

There isn't just the researcher's own bias that has to be considered. Also, the answers given by the respondents can't be generalised since we humans create our own social reality and base our experiences accordingly. *“This implies there is not just one “true” reality or universal law. This is an overall point of view in poststructuralist ways of thinking”* (Dalen, 2013, p. 91). The answers that are given are based on the situation the respondent currently found themselves. Also, according to Dalen, who talks about the situation happening in the society discussing topics relevant to the research, can also impact the respondent's answers at the moment of the interview.

3.7 Interview guide

For each of my interviews, eight questions were asked, with two additional follow-up questions:

1. Have TikTok become essential for the marketing of artists?
Follow-up question: Has TikTok now replaced the focus that other social media platforms used to have such as Instagram, Facebook etc?
2. Are there any artists/repertoire that are better suited to TikTok than others?
3. How do you work with social media and especially TikTok?
4. How to stand out on TikTok in a market where so many artists are trying to go viral?
5. Do you encourage artists themselves to create songs that can go viral on TikTok or otherwise fit TikTok's format?
6. What do you think a record label can offer artists if it becomes cheaper and more accessible for artists themselves to create, finance and market their own music?
7. How conscious are you in dealing with the TikTok algorithms?
Follow-up question: Are the algorithms completely random, in your opinion
8. What challenges and opportunities does the digitisation of the music industry bring?

4. Findings

In this chapter, I will go more in-depth and analyse the answers that I got from my respondents during the interviews. Since the same eight questions were asked to each respondent, it will be interesting to see if there's any coherence with the answers received. I will first list the data received from each respondent. Then in the next chapter, I will have a separate discussion part in the analyses to discuss the findings and similarities.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann, the transcript made during the interview should be:

A hybrid between an oral discourse unfolding over time, face to face, in a lived situation – where what is said is addressed to a specific listener present – and a written text created for a general, distant.” (Kvale, & Brinkmann, 2009. p. 192).

Instead, the focus should be on having a dialogue with the text. It's to seek to develop, clarify and expand the answers given in the text. To deepen the meaning of what was said during the interview.

1. Has TikTok become essential for the marketing of artists?

Follow-up question: Has TikTok now replaced the focus that other social media platforms used to have, such as Instagram, Facebook etc.?

The first question I asked was, in general, whether TikTok had become essential for music marketing, with a potential follow-up question about the platform becoming more crucial than Instagram and Facebook. All three of my respondents said that TikTok has become essential for music marketing.

Emma said this about the marketing of artists on TikTok:

Yes, I have certainly noticed that—a considerable difference between releasing music now than just a year ago. Of course, it depends on the type of artist and their target group and audience. However, for the vast majority of the artists we work with who have such a broad audience, TikTok is an important and essential part of marketing. Then it is not necessarily paid marketing but just being present on the platform (TikTok).

Elin also mentioned something similar. More music industry professionals are willing to use this platform for marketing new and older songs right now, while seeing more of the potential there.

Elin: During the years I've worked here, absolutely. We see that as there are more success stories from TikTok, both new songs and older catalogues find success and get a boost, more industry people and artists have become more interested in using it and see more significant opportunities there than before.

Lisa compared the launch of TikTok to when Spotify launched in 2008, and how it changed how music got consumed and listened to digitally.

Lisa: It changed quite a lot for the music industry in a short time, a bit like when Spotify came in and revolutionised digital music consumption. TikTok came a bit like that boom, and now we have a new competitor. Then I think the music industry spent some time adjusting how to fit into that landscape, in order to use it as an advantage for artists in marketing and finance to increase income.

She also talks about trends are changing much faster now than ever before, this is because of TikTok. The other social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, trends change less often. The artists and music industry have to try to stay relevant and keep up with trends constantly to keep up with the current generation. She talks about TikTok being targeted at one generation specifically, that you have a short time to capture their attention.

Lisa: I would say that TikTok is on the user's terms, or it did so in a way that democratises power a bit. I would say that things and trends change in a faster way than what, at least in my experience, what you were used to with Facebook and Instagram...

Which I think reflects different generations. Both as an artist and as a user, as the music industry faces, things and trends move faster. There is a considerable flow of content towards one generation, which requires a short time for grasping the attention of that generation...

Nevertheless, it is pretty wise to be on TikTok as it is right now, in a way. It's not like you demand that the artists have to be on TikTok, but for many.

Yes, then there is a possibility, as it is a place you should perhaps be.

When asked the follow-up question, all three agreed that Facebook is not focused on a lot right now when it comes to music marketing. Emma: *“To a large extent, it replaced Facebook in most cases. We barely use it now.”* With Instagram, the importance of being present there is still relevant. She highlights the importance of not only focusing on just one social media platform.

Emma: Instagram, not to such a large extent, but I see a bit of a change in that as well, but I would say that it's like you see the importance of a good mix. Being present on several platforms at the same time.

Instagram is still an essential platform for marketing, the content that gets produced is different on TikTok and Instagram. Elin: *“Instagram is still as important a part as TikTok for us, but certainly Facebook I would say has been replaced by TikTok.”*

2. Are there any artists/repertoire that are better suited to TikTok than others?

With the next question, I would like to find out if some artists/repertoire have a better chance to succeed on TikTok than others.

Emma: At least, I think it's easier. It is easier to offer, and it is more natural to push young artists in the pop and hip-hop segment, to at least focus on TikTok because you see many good examples of good results in those genres.

There was also another example that she mentioned that was interesting.

Emma: You can, of course, use another example if you look at Kaizers Orchestra (Norwegian band). The example is that we also have a number of these types of artists who, in principle, are natural to focus on a slightly more mature target group who may actually be outside the TikTok segment. However, the fact that it is possible to meet a completely different target group of listeners on TikTok than what you initially

envisioned, and what the artists already have established. Nevertheless, then there is often much more focus on individual songs than familiarity with the artist.

This is interesting because older songs from artists whose target audience isn't mainly on TikTok can go viral. The music can reach an entirely new demographic on TikTok. Some older catalogues can find a new life on the app, but it doesn't necessarily lead to the development of a stable fanbase in the longer term.

Elin gave a slightly different point of view and mentioned that if the artist is comfortable using social media, they have a better chance of succeeding. They didn't focus that much on specific music genres being more successful, but instead on the artist's own experience using social media and especially TikTok.

Elin: Artists, yes, I would say that if you are an artist who is comfortable using social media in the first place. Then you are better suited to TikTok because then the threshold for sharing content is not so high, and TikTok requires a regular follow-up of content that is personal from the artist's side.

Artists who are used to social media and don't think it's scary or embarrassing, regardless of the music genre, have a significant advantage in working with that platform.

Elin ended by saying this: *"For the artists we represent, I would say that it has more to do with their personal characteristics and attitude towards using social media than the music they make."* However, she stated that their repertoire are musicians who create popular music. Added that she believed TikTok would be a better place for instrumental music from different genres to find success there, than at example streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music.

Lisa talked about finding the subculture and audience the artist wants to reach with their music. Everyone can find their niche on TikTok and reach an audience. *"I really think what you see on TikTok is that there are subcultures, meaning there are so many subcultures that everyone can find their subculture on TikTok"*. The artist has to figure out their potential and utilise this on TikTok that fits their musical style and personality. It doesn't mean that the artist has to follow the current trends, or hope someone is creating a dance challenge to one of their songs.

Lisa: Everyone can find their place, and it's more about perhaps using it for content that fits what the artists want to convey or fits the person you are, or the subculture the artist is a part of in one way or another.

So, it doesn't mean that because, in the beginning, there were a lot of people who said, no, I don't want to jump on the trend of posting these dance videos. So that's not what TikTok needs to be, in a way.

TikTok can probably be more about creating content that feels real or shows a part of yourself. Yes, it doesn't have to be these dance videos or these trends. You can create your own twist that can hit other groups.

She mentioned that at the beginning, a lot of older professionals and artists in the music industry were sceptical of TikTok, that this would fade away, and that this platform is only for younger generations. *“In the beginning, there was resistance among older generations, perhaps because older artists could not bear another new (Social media) platform or it is not for my generation”*.

3. How do you work with social media and especially TikTok?

Emma stated that they devote much of their time to building their artist's social media profiles with the help of production and strategy. *“We spend a lot of time arranging to assist in the production and create strategies to follow up”*. She also mentioned that it's essential for them that their artists use their own social media profiles to build up their fanbase.

Emma: We spend a lot of time advising and assisting the artist in managing their own channels. It is, in a way, desirable. For the vast majority of our artists should manage the most personal channels themselves in order to be able to get closer to fans, and be able to show more personality in the way they express themselves.

They spend a considerable amount of their marketing budget on social media to plan storytelling and visuals. The budget they previously spent on making cover art, they now use their resources to produce social media content instead.

Emma: After all, the expense related to the creation of social media content we provide is much more significant than it was previously.

So. Yes, there is a greater emphasis now on carefully crafting storytelling and general visual elements for each song, for instance.

It's a lot more work as a result.

Press photos and cover art may have previously received greater focus, but today the emphasis is primarily on the creation of content for social media in particular. Indeed, we spend quite a lot of time and not least the budget on that.

Also, Elin said that their focus was a lot more on building their artist's social media pages, with following up and building a long-term strategy. Nevertheless, highlights the importance of the artist themselves focusing on building their own social media presence. *«So it's a lot about both collaboration and idea dribbling together with the artist, and daily follow-up of the artists and their channels. Making sure the artist follows up on this themself.»*. They also worked together with the artist when a new single or album dropped.

Lisa started by saying that there is a difference in resources you have when working at an indie label where only she is employed, compared to a major label that has the possibility to have its own marketing teams and employ social media managers. This could affect the opportunities each of the record labels can offer their artist, when it comes to helping with their social media profiles. *“But indie labels or small companies’ kind of don't have the resources for that, so in a way. You have more of a guiding role that we at the record company bit encourage all artists to be there (social media)”*.

She talks further on that it depends on the artist they are signing to their portfolio, and if the artist themselves have already established a fanbase and created their own identity on social media before. In her case, it was more important to guide and help the artist where it was needed. Content creation on TikTok the artist had to do themselves, especially when it comes to the record label side of the business.

Lisa: It's very different if the artists you sign are already active before and have started to create an identity there. I have experience with both. That we have signed artists who have been more resistant to it and have not had it before, and then they start using TikTok and try to post content. Then we have artists who are extremely good at social media themselves and who don't need to be pushed to create content in a certain way, but who do it entirely on their own initiative.

Lisa also starts talking about she works closely with the artist when they are releasing new music. Then they plan out a strategy to promote the song and the possibility to release content to tease new upcoming music with short videos, but highlight the difference between TikTok and Instagram. That's when she started talking about something interesting to reflect on.

Lisa: TikTok enters as a new platform where you can release your music. Just like music becomes available on Spotify, Apple or Amazon, then the music is also distributed and available on TikTok so that people can use the songs.

It has become widespread to use TikTok as a kind of exclusive platform to make music or snippets available from a very early stage, either as a demo or as a sketch alert sound, so that people can start using the sound clip on a video before the song is released.

She said that this is what happened to Ramone when he released his song "Ok jeg lover" first on TikTok instead of Spotify. People started using the song in their TikTok videos, which helped build excitement for his song even before its release. When it got released on Spotify, the song received more streams than expected. Lisa highlighted that this created a change in the Norwegian music industry. Suddenly people saw that TikTok was in a position to influence streaming numbers on Spotify. After that, at least many Norwegian artists have done the same, trying to tease part of their new songs on TikTok before the official release on any streaming platform. This gives TikTok a huge potential to influence the audience's music habits and what songs that gain more streams.

Lisa: It was one of those things that you saw early on last year, for example, then maybe it became a bit like it dawned on everyone that TikTok can then affect streaming numbers. In a way, the users there (TikTok) could directly influence the listeners. So yes, the numbers, and I think that this was how they realised that TikTok had gained a position of power, or in the form of seeing that there is movement on Spotify based on what is trending on TikTok.

Something before, maybe Spotify had more of a monopoly on being able to decide playlists and what songs (are being featured). They have continued that with editorial, i.e. pure editorial playlists where they decide which songs get chosen and at what placement.

This is important for the song to do well. However, when TikTok came into contact with record companies, it was seen that TikTok could directly influence Spotify playlists. An example with Ramone, as it was a very “aha” example in Norwegian music. Considering the use of TikTok and how it affected playlists and streaming. I think from then on everyone realised, at least the major record companies, that OK TikTok was the way to go. Even though this game had been around for a long time, in a way. So many have long probed the terrain for how to use that platform here then... It made the song (Ok jeg lover) popular before it was even out. When it came out on Spotify, the streaming numbers skyrocketed and from then on, you see that x number of examples of how artists have done the same.

Lisa also said that this doesn't exclusively only apply to newer songs that are being released today, but also older catalogues can go viral on TikTok to an extent.

Lisa: The campaign started with a goal on TikTok to influence users to use and like the song and to stream the song, which in turn affects the income in a way. You also see the same thing in a way with the catalogues, as what was mentioned earlier that the relationship between being able to get an old song, Wig Wam songs, for example, was suddenly trendy.

Yes, it has created synergies on trends in a different way on TikTok.

She ended the question by saying that songs being used on TikTok could potentially interfere with copyright issues for songwriters. What if TikTok started to work with artists themselves to benefit a few.

Lisa: Nevertheless, then new platforms also create new... I don't really know too much about it. It happens in a place where it is not regulated, so it also creates questions about the songwriters' rights on unreleased demos for example, or if TikTok starts making direct agreements with artists and signing people, that will start to create a change in things then.

4. How to stand out on TikTok in a market where so many artists are trying to go viral?

Emma: It is very difficult. However, it's the fact that it's pretty much random, but building storylines and personality over time is, without a doubt, what works best on TikTok right now, at least.

Also, consistently posting on TikTok was mentioned to be helpful, creating content that reflects who you are as an artist and your music. It's all about being consistent and building up a profile that represents your artistic career.

Emma: Post frequently and create your persona (Image) on TikTok or other social media platforms. Which builds up under what is told through the music you create.

Elin said there are still opportunities to stand out on TikTok in the Norwegian market to an extent. On TikTok, it's essential to be genuine and display your true emotions in order to stand out and connect with your audience. Also, don't start using TikTok actively when having a new song to promote, but again use it consistently throughout.

Elin: Yes, in Norway, there are still good opportunities, I think, because there are not as many people who make a living from that platform as much as one might think. I think that daring to be personal and creating content that has the goal of connecting the fans more closely at a low threshold, being personal and daring to show other sides than the somehow polished and distanced, can perhaps be a clever way to do it. Use your strengths, whether it's that you sing really well or can play the guitar or have other skills that TikTok users might be interested in.

So, I think it's about having a regular flow and dialogue with the audience and not just popping in right before or after the release. Make sure they nurture the audience and fans over a more extended period of time and have that dialogue.

5. Do you encourage artists themselves to create songs that can go viral on TikTok or otherwise fit TikTok's format?

Emma: No, we try to avoid it. We have a general opinion that we don't want the artists to make the music adapt to us or our social media platforms, but we want it to be sincere and genuine in the first place. We would instead adopt the marketing and content. Without it affecting the production of the art (music) in the first place, we try to avoid that.

However, of course, we are very conscious of what kind of music has potential on the various social media platforms and TikTok, i.e. when you have to market songs on TikTok. Then there is a lot of focus from the record company's side, on which parts of the song have chorus or text lines that we think can work well on TikTok, and be interesting to the audience. So, of course, we try not to let it dominate the music. It's a bit of a tricky balancing act, but we try not to be too cynical.

Emma brought up an interesting point in the interview, about how the music industry is changing rapidly, they weren't solely dependent on TikTok because things might shift in the future. *"We won't lean 100% on it (TikTok) either because we expect it to change over the next few years."* She concluded at the end that. *"We try to avoid letting the market's pressures rule us completely"*.

Elin also said they didn't want to interfere with the music creation to fit into any social media. They work on the marketing plan with the artist after the song is created.

Elin: No. We don't do that, what we do is have a discussion after the music is finished about which songs to push as singles, then you can start to think about how it is going to fit the platform (TikTok). This never starts until after the music is finished, we don't interfere in the artistic process in that way.

All three of them didn't encourage artists themselves to create songs to go viral on TikTok, specifically. However, Lisa said she wouldn't be surprised if this happened and that some people work in that order.

Lisa: No. We've never done that, but I don't doubt that someone does it, or I don't doubt that it happens in some capacity.

That someone influences the way someone thinks artistically in order to create a chorus, that can work to create some content that can be a trend (go viral).

6. What do you think a record label can offer artists if it becomes cheaper and more accessible for artists themselves to create, finance and market their own music?

Emma replied that this was a topic that engaged her a lot, it was a complex question to answer.

Emma: I know very well that many artists can do a great job alone—both when it comes to the production of the music but also everything around. There are lots of tools and platforms that make it very easy to publish music. That can arrange for you to be able to do most things yourself without having a record company behind you. But then you see very clearly in many projects that the more people you have on the team, the more there are to build up and assist in creating hype or demand.

She acknowledges that many artists can publish music and market their work effectively on their own. However, in the long term, this could be a disadvantage for the artist.

Emma: Perhaps the most important thing is the financial burden. The knowledge and experience that a record label has is a massive value in itself.

Also, knowing if a release goes very well, being able to take advantage of all opportunities is something that the vast majority of record companies have both the ability, and a lot of experience with.

I think you miss a lot of opportunities by doing everything alone. So, of course, that has to do with strategy and contact with everything from the press to the music industry.

Elin also highlighted the advantage of experience and the network most record labels have, specifically if the artist wants an international career. Also added is that the connection most record labels have with streaming platforms is a huge advantage.

Elin: First of all, experience and network. I think, especially if there are artists who want to export their music outside of Norway, then a record company will usually sit on a relatively large international network which is difficult for an independent artist to get entirely on their own.

Then I think about the close dialogue the record companies have with streaming services, i.e., Spotify and Apple Music—services that will distribute the music to the public.

She also addresses what the artist's professional needs are, the benefits they would like to receive from their record label after they sign a contract with them, —but ends the question by saying that there is still an advantage to being signed by a record label. Especially if you want to export your music internationally.

Elin: It depends on what you, as an artist, want. Get help finding a project manager for music videos, find producers and others to collaborate with. What record labels can help with is quite varied now, so it depends on what the artists themselves want and need and who else is in the artist's team (management, etc.).

However, I certainly think there is still value in record companies, especially from a (music) export perspective.

Lisa also acknowledges that many artists today can start and manage their own careers, there are definitely artists who have founded success doing that.

Lisa: That's a great question. I think about it a lot, because the way it is now, everyone can be their own record label to release their own music. With actually quite a significant possibility of managing to get one, or at least to start a career, keeping on to your rights (copyrights).

However, she said that what a record label can offer today is a network and connection to the industry that can influence the artist's career. Also, the relationship between record labels and streaming platforms is a huge advantage, —more people to help with your career and promote your music. She also briefly acknowledged that getting financial support from a record label can help.

Lisa: How I see it is that it's often about influence, really. After all, it's about having the network or the network to be able to influence so that the music can get the extra push or the extra. The record company will still have an advantage because the record company or distribution has a closer link to influence, for example, Spotify, Apple, Tidal, Amazon and so on. This can have something to do with, yes, if you get into a playlist, and if you get advantages that can expose your (music), so basically, I would say that marketing. it's marketing and having more people on your team. You have several people on the team to speak the music's case, i.e., the music to the artist, if that makes sense.

7. How conscious is you in dealing with the TikTok algorithms?

I also added a follow-up question: Are the algorithms completely random, in your opinion? Emma said she was conscious of the algorithms of TikTok, to keep up with current trends on the app. *“Yes, we are certainly aware of that. After all, we try to keep up with trends at all times. What will have a good or bad influence on the algorithm.”* She also added that they were in contact with the music department of TikTok, where they receive information on trends they should focus on.

Emma: We also have direct contact with the music team at TikTok, where we get updates on trends, which we should jump on in order to be lifted internally in the system. Then there are a lot of statistics, of course, and then we try everything we can to follow what works among other artists, both local and international.

It was also mentioned that a lot of analysing and testing of several trends is needed to figure out what will work. She added that trends are evolving much faster today, and something that worked a few months ago can be outdated now.

Emma: So yes, there is a lot of analysis and attempts to put good strategies behind it. However, at the same time also a lot of trial and error because you see such fast development, and what worked in the campaign we did with a song release three months ago doesn't necessarily work anymore now.

Elin gave a short answer to the question. They use TikTok every day and try to pick up on what is trending. However, they did not follow every trend because their goal is also to understand what is happening on TikTok at the moment.

Elin: I think, as mentioned earlier, we are there ourselves, both personally and as a company. After all, we're all on TikTok every day, so it's a bit of our job to follow what's working and pick it up.

It's not like we necessarily jump on all these trends. However, the goal is that we know what is happening and going on, so that we can possibly include it in the planning, but it is rare that we jump on a new trend just like that without further ado.

Lisa started by saying that she wished she knew more about how the algorithms work, that technology has an impact on the music industry today. Algorithms are essential for marketing, she also said that analysing what's happening is vital as being aware of the algorithms.

Lisa: I'm thinking about it, but I can't say much about it. I would have liked to understand the algorithms. In other words, technology, I have thought many times that one should have knowledge of things like that. The music business moves very closely together with technology. So having a closer relationship with both analysis and of algorithmic analysis of trends, analysis of the music technical things that have a significant influence on how things trend.

She also highlighted that there is a difference between major record labels, since they have more resources to spend time on analysing trends and advising their artists. Since this can be very time-consuming, so with a larger team the artist has better opportunities.

Lisa: Yes, try to check out as much data as you can, but I see that there is more than that, so it's about the company. There is little time. So there again, the majors (record companies) have an advantage, in that when you have the opportunity to be many and have a larger team that can analyse. You have a more significant opportunity to guide artists to pick up on trends, or check out where it is happening and why it is happening here now. Things like that, but it's not impossible. It's just a matter of artists and the team having to spend time on it because it has a significant impact on the algorithm, trends and numbers.

8. What challenges and opportunities does the digitisation of the music industry bring?

The last question that I asked was more in general on their opinion on how the digitalisation of the music industry has had an impact, what are the positive and negative effects this has had the past two decades.

Emma said the positive side of digitalisation is that it's much easier to reach an audience now than ever. Especially for niche music, it can be easier to find and target your audience group.

Emma: The audience becomes more accessible. In particular, I think that for a specific genre of music, you have easier access to a niche audience all over the world. I think that is perhaps the most important opportunity that digitalisation has provided.

She then said the negative aspect is that it can be harder to also reach an audience because of more competition, when everyone can release music easier than ever. Additionally, since Spotify's algorithms suggest music that is in the same category you previously listened to. The audience may be less engaged in finding new music themselves, if they base their playlists on these suggestions.

Emma: Yes, you also see challenges in exactly the same example, in a way that there is much greater competition, and the algorithm also makes you. maybe if you are very interested in discovering new music, it may be easier to discover new music now. However, it is also very easy to avoid exactly that. It is very easy to sit back and just accept what you are being served, what you are served via Spotify's algorithms is all similar to what you have already listened to in a way.

She ended the question by saying it's kind of a paradox, where it has never been easier to release and discover new music. But at the same time, it's harder to make your music heard and get the recognition it deserves.

Emma: So, there are huge challenges in terms of competition since it is much easier to release music, which means that there is more music available. It also makes it more difficult to reach and get the recognition you deserve. I think that's the most important thing.

Elin started by saying that the negative aspect, for many artists today is that you have to be present everywhere at the same time. Especially on social media, which can be very time-consuming. There can be more focus on building a brand around the artist than the art of creating music. It can also put pressure on the artist to be more personal and keep up with social media more often.

Elin: I think one challenge is that the artist doesn't have enough time to create art. The fact that you have so much content available all the time, means that you have to maintain a fairly steady stream and high volume of activities on social media. More people who post and use these types of media, the more pressure it puts on the artist to follow and keep up.

So, I think that the challenge lies in the enormous information flow of both music and content and perhaps getting through it.

Another challenge. There is increased pressure on the artist themselves to be more present than perhaps before. The fact is that they have to be personal in their content. The platform has been created so that you yourself have to be present much more regularly. I think that is a challenge because you have to set aside a lot of time, that you could have spent on other things.

The positive aspects of digitalisation are the democratisation of the music industry. It is now much simpler to release your own music, many more artists and songwriters can take control of the copyrights to their repertoire. She ended by saying that is up to the artist themselves on how comfortable they are with social media.

Elin: The positive thing is increased democratisation of who can release music. It will be easier. You may not have the same large and important gatekeepers as you used to have. Perhaps, in my opinion, it is easier to take ownership of one's own repertoire today. That many artists and songwriters choose to own their own music. Something that I think is very positive.

There are many opportunities and challenges in that part (digitalisation). It is also very much down to the artist themselves how comfortable he, she and them are with those platforms (Social media).

Lisa also said that there were positive effects with the current digitalisation of the music industry. But mentioned that it takes more time to keep up and it can be consuming.

Lisa: So yes, there are challenges, and I would say that there are many opportunities. It's just that it requires more time. In other words, for artists, it is enough that there is already so much that will require an artist's time. There are more things to keep up with, in a way.

It was also mentioned that artists don't need to change their music to fit into the digital platforms, but use it to their advantage instead. Know your identity and find out what works for the artist to distribute the music to their audience.

Lisa: It's a "blessing and a curse", I should say because it's about using it to one's advantage based on what the goal and strategy are. It's not necessarily about changing your art for the digital. It's important that artists know their identity and their skills. Yes, which artist are you, and what music are you creating. Instead, how do you work together with the digital to get as many people as possible to listen to what you're creating...

However, I think you can choose to sort of work together and against the digital in a way, with artists and the artistic in focus.

Lisa also started talking about if you want your music to be heard, you need to focus on the digital, especially working with numbers and algorithms. This has become essential to consider when discussing the strategy with the artist. The digital music industry gives opportunities to analyse with numbers, if the artist is reaching their goals and connecting to their targeted group of audiences.

Lisa: You have to be somehow updated on the digital landscape as it is now. That applies to all platforms but also numbers, analysis and algorithms. Even if you don't want music to be quantitative in one way or another, you shouldn't just think of it in that sense. However, this can be beneficial to keep in mind to achieve your larger goals. In any case, I think, as a manager or as a record company, that it is very exciting to think about it in such a way that you use it as a guide for your strategy because numbers can give some answers.

(example) So, artists can play a concert, have fans come up to them say what they felt about the music and the experiences or what speaks to them, that's a huge part of it. Nevertheless, the quantitative or the physical numbers can also say something if you are in line with the vision, and target the group of people you want to reach.

5. Discussion of the findings

In this section of the interview analysis, I'll explore the responses collected and discuss them to see how they compare to my research topic. Then I will select the responses that I found most intriguing, and compare them to my theory chapter to see if there are any similarities. I will go through all of the questions but highlight only the responses that I found the most interesting to discuss further. Some of the responses received during the interviews are also connected with each other, therefore some answers will overlap.

5.1 TikTok's importance for the Music Industry

The first question asked was if TikTok has become important for music marketing: According to them, yes. This also represents the statistics that TikTok have a greater influence now than ever on the marketing of music. An interesting point that was made is that TikTok could have the same impact on the music industry as Spotify did when first introduced. Already at my first question it was said that there is a huge flow of content, therefore things are changing very fast compared to previous, which reflects the current digital society that we are living in. At the same time, TikTok targets, more specifically a younger generation compared to social networks such as Instagram and Facebook. This has something to do with the beginning of TikTok, as the platform it was based on, Musical.ly, where you could upload dance and lip-sync videos became popular with a teenage audience first.

Facebook not being used for music marketing, may not be so surprising since Gen Z don't use this social media as much as older generations. For new up-and-coming artists, it's not beneficial to use Facebook to reach a younger demographic.

Social media has become a platform where there are more opportunities than ever, at the same time, the audience can take more control of the information and content they receive to an extent.

It's a platform that has made many-to-many communication more accessible, also democratised the media landscape to not only major TV networks, Radio and Newspapers, having an influence on the information that is being distributed to the audience. Social media and TikTok open up for audiences themselves to contribute and engage with content that seems to fit themselves. At the same time, it is possible to discuss if the recommendation algorithms have become the new gatekeepers of the information flow the audience receives. This technology has a huge influence on consumer behaviour, therefore can affect what type of information we receive.

In the beginning, a few older music industry professionals and artists were sceptical of TikTok. They didn't see the point of focusing on a new social media app, will it bring any new opportunities. This may not be surprising as humans we sometimes worry when a new feature is introduced and things change, because we don't know how things will alter from where they are today. This may not be surprising, historically, the music industry tends to be sceptical of new developments, as was the case when Spotify debuted music streaming. All three of my respondents gave slightly different answers, with some coherence to the question about what kind of music and artists seems to fit TikTok better. TikTok has a large user base of teenagers and young adults, it would be more suitable for that generation to be more comfortable using social media and be present on TikTok. Especially for an artist who is creating mainstream popular music to find more success. However, there are endless opportunities to find your subculture and for older music catalogues to find the same success on TikTok. Emma mentioned that there are cases of older songs with typically an older fanbase going viral on TikTok, but most likely, it doesn't create a stable fanbase. Still, there are opportunities for both new and older catalogues to go viral.

5.2 How to work with social media and TikTok

Regarding the question of how they work with TikTok and Instagram. I got slightly different answers. It was important for all three of them to work together with their artists, to promote their music and personalities on TikTok and Instagram. However, they all mentioned that a lot of the work has to be done by the artist themselves, they have to create content to keep up their own social media profiles to be more authentic to their fanbase. This can of course, raise the question that this means extra work for the artist. Between everything else they have to navigate and now also being their own "social media manager", on top of creating music.

It depends on the resources the management or record label has to spend on content creation for each of their artists. That said, it makes sense that a small indie label with one or few employees, doesn't have a large marketing team to solely focus on creating content and producing social media campaigns as a major record label has. Artists do receive support from their management and record label on how to take advantage of their social media profile, particularly TikTok. Then again, artists have to put in a lot of work to manage their own social media presence. This can mean that younger artists who are naturally good with social media, have extensive knowledge of producing their own content can with better possibilities, manage to gain a more successful music career based on how the current digital music industry work. This can create a dilemma where maybe artists who are artistically very talented, but not so good at promoting themselves on social media can lose out on major opportunities. This can, of course, raise the question do artists today also need to become social media "influencers" to obtain a successful career. What kind of music industry does it become when building a following on social media, and for going viral is essential to getting your song heard. When marketing becomes the end goal and the music attached matters less. All three of my respondents said they didn't necessarily force artists they worked with to be present on TikTok, or any other social media app. However, not being active there give the artist a huge disadvantage. When there can be other artists and music professionals who work in that order, to create music with the purpose of trending and going viral to become a hit song.

5.3 Democratising the Music Economy

TikTok and the digital music industry have also helped democratised the music economy to some extent, as two of my respondents highlighted. Artists and songwriters can take control of their own copyrights now more than ever, then at the same time, social media removed some of the gatekeepers that existed before, when finding potential success as an independent artist is much easier.

It has never been easier for artists to create and release their own music than it is today, with the huge possibility of finding success doing it. The three major record labels, Universal, Sony and Warner, still hold a huge influence over the music industry. still, TikTok has made it easier for artists to take control of their careers, the audience has options to follow artists they prefer who are still unsigned by a record label. There have never been more opportunities for artists to start their own music careers.

However, at the same time, there has never been a period where it has been more competition for capturing the audience's attention, when trends and consumption are changing fast. When artists have to compete in a market that is overcrowded with content, it can often depend on resources their management and record labels have to help their artists promote themselves on TikTok. It can create an unfair balance between who has the most capital and resources, to employ people in their marketing team to work with their social media strategy. There is also the chance for the major record labels to buy their artist's ads and to be promoted more frequently on the "For you page". This can happen since major labels can work with TikTok to get better deals to promote their music catalogues.

5.4 Capturing the audience's attention

When asked the question of how artists today can capture the audience's attention. It was said that be consistent in posting content to your profile, don't just jump on social media when you have something to sell, such as new music. However, it may also be quite unpredictable as to what will go viral. This can also make it harder to see results if the artist doesn't use it consistently. The chance of getting views is less likely if not posting regularly, this can put extra pressure on the artist to keep up. Some people have figured out how the TikTok algorithms function and what types of music or content have the best chances of going viral. This makes some artists create songs with catchy choruses to captivate an audience instantly. It is not so much about the art of making music, but more so about getting the next viral hit for some.

5.5 Still, opportunities being on TikTok and what can happen in the future

Elin said that, there are still plenty of opportunities to make a living on TikTok, since it hasn't reached its total market capacity in Norway according to her. This could be interesting because of the moment a platform reaches its maximum capacity. When there is an abundance of information being generated, the quality of the content tends to degrade also. It gets harder to draw in an audience, and it's easier to go unnoticed. There have been a few examples of this in the music industry already on Spotify. For instance, there are millions of songs being uploaded each year to its streaming service, making it much harder to capture the audience's attention. The same can happen to TikTok when it is accessible to so many artists and content creators, but at the same time, competition is harder than ever.

It becomes a paradox that after a while, things can change, new apps can find success if competition becomes harder to break through on TikTok, with so many uploads. Perhaps the quality of the content is not good either, and people don't feel it's serving the purpose it used to. Emma said: *"We won't lean 100% on it (TikTok) either because we expect it to change over the next few years."*

The digital and technologically advanced world we live in today is changing faster than ever, they might change in a few years, since this has happened before. The political issues surrounding TikTok, at the moment, can have a huge impact on the platform and the influence they already have. If TikTok is potentially banned, it might have a big impact on marketing within the music industry. Since the digital landscape is constantly evolving, the next great opportunity might, for example, be a new social media app or other technology-advanced features. Being open-minded and on the lookout for potential new future platforms, has arguably never been more crucial than it is right now. Of course, it's hard to predict the future of TikTok as it is right now. However, TikTok is still important for the marketing of music in 2023.

5.6 The benefit and challenges with the Record Labels

Since TikTok and the current digital music economy, there have never been more opportunities for artists to release, finance and market their own music without having a record deal. Hence why I asked the question to my respondent: What they think a record label can offer artists in today's music industry and whether there are still any benefits. One keyword that all three of my respondents said, was the network and connection most record labels have within their national markets, but also in an international market they operate where it's possible to export music. They also talked about the advantage of being more people, to support the career of the artist and helping it to expand. However, two of them said the connection to the streaming platforms is a huge help. This indicates that the record labels still have an influence on the music that will be prioritised, what get pushed out to the streaming audience. It seems to help the artist when there are larger team supporting their career. The major music groups have extensive power, then the control over the music industry today and what type of artists will get prioritised.

However, this does not imply that all record labels and music conglomerates are working in favour of their artists; in fact, there are numerous proven instances of the opposite.

Artists lose the freedom to express themselves creatively, because they have to make more marketable music, while also getting limited chances to their copyrights. Also, due to the record labels' ability to exert some pressure on their artists in order to increase sales, there have been artists who have struggled with mental health issues as a result. I did not ask my respondents about the issues with major record labels, so there was not expected that they say anything about it. Since all three of them are working in a record label or management, there could be a possible bias in the answers to what exactly the benefits are with record labels. Nevertheless, considering the influence the major record labels still have and the increasing competition in the digital music industry. There is no surprise that the answers I received talking about having a record deal are important. Record labels still have a large network, the huge possibility to influence digital and streaming platforms to favour their own catalogue. Their signed artists can get a huge advantage from this network instead of being independent. Also, the financial support at the beginning of any artist's career, and many of the majors have the finances to invest in their talents if they think it will be a marketable success.

5.7 Opportunities and challenges in the current Digital Music Industry

For the last two questions, I wanted to know about their opinions of the technology that currently works in the music industry. Their own consciousness about algorithms, and also the opportunities and challenges of the current digital music industry faces. The answer I got from Emma about them being in contact with TikTok, receiving information about current trends they should focus on to be lifted internally, is interesting. That record label where she works has a connection to TikTok and potentially a benefit to their signed artists. I previously mentioned that it highlights the network a record label has as a huge advantage.

We can assume that major music labels have this connection, to also influence their own catalogue and artists being prioritised on TikTok's "for you page". It can be an unbalance there between major and indie record labels, as Lisa mentioned both in this question and the previous ones. Does this create a democratised music industry, when the major record labels still have the potential influence to control the digital platforms to benefit themselves? Will artists and the audience think that TikTok is a platform that gives opportunities that it previously did. The "for you page" was one of the key features that give TikTok an advantage in the market. The users could much easier go viral with short video content, while reach a new audience that was not their own followers. If this gets overcrowded with too much content, it gets oversaturated.

Maybe TikTok over time will lose its “It” factor, also especially when other social media networks are launching similar short video platforms, such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, which are trying to compete with TikTok. The recommendation algorithms become a vital part of their technology. Even when TikTok has received criticism based on not giving minorities the same opportunities and being racially biased. Maintaining the algorithms is how TikTok is surviving to keep its user base engaged with the content they prefer, even when it’s not perfect. Also, as my respondents said, keeping up with the statistic and analysing algorithms, on what is happening becomes very important for music professionals and artists.

The question about opportunities and challenges the digital music industry has brought, the same could be said. At the same time, digitalisation has opened many opportunities for artists, the audience to discover new music easier. The music industry has become more global, and there are no limits to distributing music everywhere in the world where the internet is accessible. However, that said, digitalisation has also created more competition in the market. Artists are not just competing against local music repertoire but with new and old international repertoire, especially if the music is made to target an international audience. So, getting the recognition the music deserves can be difficult when so many are releasing music at the same time. The digital advanced world we live in make things change faster than ever, that has happened to the music industry. Trends, hits, and marketing are constantly changing, so it can be harder to keep up. My respondent said that artists have to focus a lot more on the digital, this can take the focus away from making the art. Then again, it’s all about the team artist have to work on their strategy for social media and utilise their digital opportunities, since it can be time-consuming to do everything alone.

Still, when the music industry has been democratised and some of the gatekeepers are changing with digitalisation, having a professional support system can still play a major role in the artist’s career. Then there is still a superstar economy where the artist and their team with the most resources, also gaining the most out of using TikTok.

Perhaps the music industry has always been unfair to an extent, and the digital music industry and TikTok haven’t made any difference. It has just opened new methods for marketing artists differently than the previous music advertisement, made it seem that going viral is all it takes. For artists, it has helped them to take more control over their careers. However, maintaining an artist’s career by publishing songs on streaming and trying to go viral on TikTok, is not sustainable for a long-term music career.

So, I would have agreed that it can be difficult for artists, who try to manage their own career independent still in today's music industry. Even with the huge opportunities digital platforms such as TikTok bring.

6. Conclusion

TikTok, together with the other social media platforms have opened new pathways between artist and fans. This service has enabled a circumnavigation of traditional power structures, and widened the spectrum of gatekeepers within the music industry. For instance, the new gatekeepers could be the recommendation algorithms. These algorithms are the heart of the technology behind it, if they are nudged correctly gives the potential to provide viral success. If you establish the formula that works for the artist and the repertoire the potential to utilize effective marketing at “no cost”. There isn't hard to see why so many artists, their management and record labels strategize their time to reach the potential TikTok audience. But are there complications and issues related to creating a career build on marketing on TikTok. Even with the opportunities to gain attention without large investment, there is fierce competition.

The amount of time invested matters as TikTok is very time consuming. For it to have optimal impact, the visual design around the artist, need to be crafted. Obviously having such resources at hand will give an advantage. The accesses to such resources differ from one artist to another, there is still an unfair balance. The way I see it, it's a misconception that it is easy for artists to produce a viral hit that turns them into a superstar, there is a lot more to it. Building a long-term music career takes time and a lot of resources, when so many artists are competing for the same attention, and the audience has a much shorter attention span than previously. Having a consistent brand identity, financial support and people working for the artist have never been as important. TikTok hasn't shifted the power structure within the music industry. The same major record companies and publishers still have a huge influence over what popular music getting heard. Yes, it has enabled some artists with marketing of their music and helped advance their careers. When TikTok launched features such as SoundOn to support up and coming artists in reaching their targeted audience, it highlights this. However, the major record labels maintain its stronghold in the music industry and come out as winners in this social media as well. They also seem to be the most effective in marketing their music on TikTok.

The low threshold, open and democratic access that made TikTok so popular in the first place, is about to become much higher and more professionalised. TikTok is in danger of losing its “It” factor used to have. As highlighted during my interviews, artists and especially independent artists, have to spend a significant amount of time on strategy and be consistent in uploading content. This lead to high pressure and take away the actual time spent on creating the art.

TikTok has become an effective marketing tool for small snippets from a song generated through their “for you page”, That’s why so many find TikTok so useful in terms of an effective marketing tool, instead of a platform focusing on generating an income from the music. As I see it TikTok has to try to renew itself to stay relevant as a platform for songwriters and the music industry. It can lose the attraction as a “free marketing platform”, and it does not generate direct income to the industry and its stakeholders. Until SoundOn was established, TikTok had to start licencing repertoire from CMO and record labels as any other streaming platform. But this amount still seems to be very small or its not disclosed. Although this is outside of the scope of this master thesis, it’s an obvious thread for future research: What happen if TikTok is releasing their own streaming platform, and what will it take from TikTok to do so? What changes does it need to do in-house to be able to process copyright through royalties? Will the Chinese ownership affect this, since China has a somewhat reluctant position on copyright. How is TikTok gone be able to give the music industry a stable income for their music being used on their platform, or is this something TikTok want to achieve with their platform. The attraction of TikTok has been the chance to pull in an audience, in order to covert consumers to listen to the same song on other monetized streaming platforms, where there is a chance to see the success of the “viral hit”. As the sheer amount of content keeps growing it seems to me that the current position as a purely marketing service is unsustainable. They have to constantly change to maintain their position, updating their features to remain effective for being a go to service for record labels and managers when marketing their artists. The implosion of content, TikTok’s success within the music industry can also turn out to be their biggest problem. A crowded and impenetrable service that demands larger resources and more time consuming, is not conducive for the music industry when designing their next marketing campaigns, or for independent artists trying to be heard. They will perhaps look elsewhere in order to promote their music and artists more effectively at a lower cost, when there is a constant battle for the audience’s attention. Still, TikTok in 2023 seems to be the most effective way of marketing music to a younger audience, and where artists can kick-start their career.

But as I have argued, their position is precarious and difficult to maintain. TikTok themselves are perhaps aware of this, and it will be interesting to see how they respond, is it important for them to remain relevant for the music industry. The considerations and strategies of TikTok's business plan remains a secret and I for one have not be able to disclose them. My best guess is that TikTok is first and foremost a technology company, therefore seek to answer their own technical solutions first, but with a focus on integrating music to their platform. Perhaps improved algorithms, AI, more personalized services will be their preferred route in the future. This thesis only seeks to provide nothing more than a snapshot, from one corner of a rapidly and consistently evolving digital marketplace. New digital platforms are emerging, the established ones changing, hence the music industry have to follow. Being adaptable for change has never been as important for music professionals and artists in today's digital music industry, when everything is changing much faster.

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Transcriptions

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