

DL838 Creative Music Production

Professional Project

Garvan Molony

How Can a Debut Artist Produce & Market Their Music on Social Media
(TikTok, Instagram)?

27/04/26

Peter Jones (Mentor)

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Abstract

This project was undertaken to explore the world of music marketing, specifically through the lens of a debut artist.

Today, music creation and publication have never been more accessible to the public. Various areas of the music industry such as distribution and marketing which were once guarded by behemoth record labels have now been blown open, allowing for talented unknown artists to go from bedroom productions to stadiums sellouts.

It was for this reason that an interest grew pertaining to the process of taking an aspiring musician with no prior experience of recording or publishing music to their first release date.

This was done by the production, recording, mixing and mastering of a song, collection of video content, qualitative research via focus group, social media campaign and finally release on digital streaming platforms.

The social media campaign was run specifically on the platforms Instagram and TikTok due to their huge rise in popularity among major demographics and their power in current day music marketing. The focus group was utilised to better inform choices made in the marketing process to examine if users' opinions on what they say they would interact with translated into the digital realm. Interestingly, in practise, it didn't.

This project is eye-opening for anyone aspiring to release a debut in the near future, highlighting the extremely competitive nature of the current media landscape and the unfortunate truth that not every release will result in commercial success.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all my classmates and tutors first and foremost, for a wonderful four years making music and memories, it is truly remarkable how fast the time has passed.

I express my sincerest gratitude to my mentor, Peter Jones, who guided me through all questions and problems I had along the way, his guidance allowed me to undertake the project with confidence and clarity.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, friends and family for their unwavering support throughout not only the completion of the project, but the last four years of my life.

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Introduction

The music industry and how artists market their music has fundamentally changed over the last decade with the advent of short form social media platforms. For new artists, these platforms grant unprecedented reach to both mass and niche audiences, bypassing the traditional avenues to success previously guarded by record labels and major outlets of the press. Among the myriads of platforms available to musicians today, TikTok and Instagram have emerged as particularly pertinent tools in the pursuit of music promotion and discovery. TikTok's emphasis on short-form content and distribution of algorithm-heavy content has numerous times demonstrated the ability to take artists from going unknown to viral seemingly overnight.¹ For new musicians this shift evidently presents unprecedented opportunities for growth. However, it also presents a new set of challenges. As the barriers to entry in the industry have lowered, the challenge of standing out in an ever-increasingly saturated digital market has become more difficult.

Platform features (such as short vertical videos and remixing tools) and the advent of the attention economy² (companies providing free platforms while selling user data to advertisers extracted from attention) now demands songs to be able to be captured in short snippets. It has also changed the process of marketing, now turning towards recurring posting to retain attention rather than a one-off post³. Approaches now demand strategic, informed decision-making based on content creation and engagement of users.

The TikTok section titled “For You Page” is, as described by the company, “a personalized feed of content based on your interests and engagement”.⁴ This algorithm was the catalyst for the above-mentioned unknown artists successes as it has the ability to expose the content of creators to potentially millions of users, irrespective of follower counts, in effect levelling the playing field between new and established artists.

¹ “TikTok “Has given New Artists a Chance.”” BBC News, 11 Sept. 2020, www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-54059334.

² McCann, Mahon. “What Is the Attention Economy - and Why Is It Such a Problem?” *www.rte.ie*, 3 Apr. 2024, www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2024/0403/1441388-what-is-the-attention-economy-social-media-addiction/.

³ “Music Marketing: 5 Proven Strategies to Engage and Grow Your Fanbase.” Berklee.edu, 2025, www.berklee.edu/berklee-now/news/music-marketing-strategies.

⁴ TikTok. “For You | TikTok Help Center.” Support.tiktok.com, 2024, support.tiktok.com/en/getting-started/for-you.

Instagram's "reels" feature offers a similar potential, whilst also offering an established virtual ecosystem for curating and sustaining connection with followers due to its broad scope of content types (single photo posts, stories, broadcast channels, carousel posts).⁵

Due to these two social media platforms having such characteristics, this goal of this thesis is to explore the question: "How can a debut artist produce & market their music on social media (TikTok and Instagram)?"

The project is multifaceted. It combines practice in the form of the production, mix and mastering of an original piece of music, creation of video and photo content, qualitative pretesting by way of focus group in order to inform content decisions made on TikTok and Instagram respectively and finally a research-applied marketing campaign in which results will be evaluated via quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (words) methods to explore what strategies best support the discovery and engagement of new artists' music.

By creating an original piece, creating promotional content, using focus groups and analysing the results of the marketing campaign, this thesis aims to produce findings that are actionable and grounded in empirical evidence. It is implied that the research carried out will aid both the academic understanding of music marketing on social media while also delivering valuable guidance to fledgling artists navigating these platforms. It would be important also to note that through the discussion of the production process both in the literature review and methodology that music producers working with new artists will also stand to benefit from the synthesis of the information gathered below.

The following literature review will refine the scope of the project, discussing academic papers on various topics such as marketing, focus groups, social media and production.

Proceeding the literature review a detailed methodology will be provided expanding upon the roadmap of the project discussed above.

⁵ *THE MAIN TYPES of INSTAGRAM CONTENT Instagram Offers a Variety of Content Options for Users, Including: • Reels.* learninginsight.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Download-Social_Media-Instagram-Types-of-Posts.pdf. Accessed 7 Dec. 2025.

Literature Review

Introduction

Social media now stands as one of the most pertinent channels of music marketing with more than 5.7 billion user identities across the globe as of April 2026⁶. As discussed above, the goal of this thesis is to provide both an academic understanding of the realm of social media marketing and provide actionable steps for new artists to take who are looking to release their work in the near future. In order to cover all bases of the project, academic literature will be examined to aid both the production, focus group study carried out and finally the marketing elements of the project.

Music Production: Theory and Practice

As the production of a single is one of the core facets of the project, it is important to explore what production entails and how it must be approached when working with an individual with no prior experience of recording or releasing music.

In “*The Art of Music Production: A Theory and Practise*”,⁷ Burgess discusses in fine detail what it means to be a consummate producer. The widely cited and referenced text covers every area of importance in music production, such as elements of hit music, lawyers, relationships and label recruitment.

Burgess describes the nature of the artist producer relationship and how it has shifted since commercial music's inception to the present day. He notes that the diminishment of apprenticeship programs coupled with the rise in audio engineering courses and programs offered by colleges have led to soft skills such as interpersonal techniques and studio etiquette to fall by the wayside (31). He describes how many overzealous graduates enter studio environments and quickly become frustrated, expecting to be hands on with equipment while instead be made complete menial tasks such as making tea or coffee for studio personnel. This particular point is extremely important to consider when working with artists, especially a debutant. Producing is a privilege, not a right.

⁶ Datareportal. “Global Social Media Statistics.” DataReportal – Global Digital Insights, July 2025, datareportal.com/social-media-users.

⁷ Burgess, R.J (2013)

The Art of Music Production: The Theory and Practice

Following on from this, Burgess provides a framework when dealing with an artist for the first time. It is detailed that the first meeting is to be conducted in a relaxed manor, ideally in person (61). This initial meeting is crucial for the producer to gain a wholesome understanding of the single or album that is going to be produced. It is emphasised that assessments are made in relation to interpersonal chemistry and the artists' commitments to both the production and promotion of the work. Particular attention must be paid to potential conflicts that could derail the project, such as musical, personal or philosophical incompatibilities. Ultimately, the producer's role is to guide and realise the vision held by the artist, rather than dominating it.

Aside from relationships, Burgess discusses the "timeless ingredients of a hit". He describes how all elements must work together and serve a purpose in the mix, remarking that producers can rearrange and polish performances all they want, but if there is a fundamental weakness in the song, its commercial success will be limited (93).

Speaking of commercial success, Burgess describes a study carried out by *American Songwriter* which analysed 17 number one records from Billboard's hot 100 chart using the Flesch-Kincaid (F-K) readability test. The test measures metrics such as words per sentence, average number of syllables of a word and word length. Out of the 17 songs analysed, 16 had lyrics rated at a reading level of first grade (1st class in Ireland) or below (94). In saying this, it must be admitted that the F-K test is calibrated for prose not songs, and that this by no means constitutes a guaranteed repeatable formula. However, it does show a strong correlation between lyrical simplicity and a song's potential commercial success.

On the topic of lyrics, Burgess suggests that

"Greatness in a vocal can often have less to do with technical performance or recorded quality and more to do with communicating the intangible emotional content of the song and the unique character of the artist" (94).

This highlights the importance of fostering a good relationship with the artist one is working with so that they can feel open to perform their lyrics in recording sessions without holding back for fear of judgement. Burgess agrees with this sentiment, noting that top level producers have the ability to create an environment that unlocks artists' "imaginative and emotional energy".

Another important "ingredient of a hit" is the arrangement. Burgess breaks arrangement into two parts; orchestration and structure (95). Orchestration is the culmination of instrumentation (both real and virtual) and how they interact sonically and rhythmically. It is stated that good orchestration is one which maintains balance in the mix of the song, ensuring that each element occupies its own space on the spectrum of sound without clashing with the other elements, such as instruments and or vocals. It goes without saying that good orchestration features unique sonic qualities that excite and keep the listener engaged.

On the other hand, structure is how the song is formed and how it occurs over the duration of the track. Burgess stresses the importance of structure, claiming that no matter how good orchestration is, subpar structure will cause listeners will be "confused" and loose interest thus greatly affecting the replay ability of the song (96). A song of good structure is a song which delivers "maximum impact" upon the first listen whilst also maintaining listeners interest throughout repeated plays. This is done through elements such as engaging introductions and a chorus that appears early in the song. Burgess recommends the first chorus to start no longer than a minute into the song as a general rule of thumb (95). Another important facet of song structure is a pre-chorus or bridge. In his words,

"The bridge is usually a single, non-repeating section of a song that contrasts with previous material, moves the song forward and, in many cases, introduces new lyrical information." (97)

Bridges can sometimes be crafted by different iterations of chords or melodic elements present in the other parts of the song but must feature a new sonic and or rhythmic focus in order to lead into the proceeding chorus with energy. Bridges are not required in all songs and are of course genre specific, however in the right context, a well-executed bridge can elevate a song to the next level.

As a closing remark on structure, the golden rule is "balancing immediacy with repeatability" which Burgess remarks as a "major challenge" of music production in the modern day.

TikTok & Instagram: Platform Design, Repeated Exposure, User Generated Content

In 2024, global music revenues grew by 4.8%, marking a tenth-consecutive year of growth⁸. Within this, total streaming revenues accounted for more than two thirds of the market share, recently breaking the twenty-billion-dollar mark for the first time. One of the biggest reasons for this is the explosion of social media in the process of marketing music. In the words of the CEO of Sony Music and Entertainment China, Andrew Chan, “in today’s digital age social media isn’t just a promotional tool, it's a vital channel for authentic artist-fan connection.” (39)

A key factor that has placed social media in the front and centre of music promotion is the design of the platform themselves. For example, TikTok treats sound as a primary focus rather than being secondary to visuals – the music being more than just a background element and often times being the anchor of a video. In the context of marketing music, this means hook-driven, short audio snippets can serve as potential seeds for viral user created content.

This view is supported in academic research. In “*Marketing Agile Artists: How Labels can Leverage TikTok’s virality*” Coulter argues that the structure of TikTok’s platform encourages artists and labels to adopt, as in the title of the paper, “agile” marketing based around user-generated content⁹. This is because rather than traditional controlled releases, success on TikTok often appears from fans (not the original creator) creating their own content as an off shoot of original content (143-144). For example, remixes, dances and lip-synchs. In effect, the users become co-creators with the artists. For this reason, Coulter emphasises that focuses should be honed on building “strong relationships” with fans as this will ignite their “participatory power to stimulate new cultural ideas”. Hence, artists should take steps to encourage fans to collaborate while fostering a community based around the music.

In terms of overall content types, not specifically music, previously gathered empirical analysis of TikTok video content aids in identifying potential common features of viral

⁸ IFPI. Global Music Report 2025. 2025.

⁹ Coulter, Andi. “MEIEA - Marketing Agile Artists.” Wwww.meiea.org, 2022, www.meiea.org/Journal/Vol22/Coulter

content. For example, in a mixed-method study of 400 TikTok videos comparing both viral and non-viral videos titled “*Slapping Cats, Bopping Heads, and Oreo Shakes: Understanding Indicators of Virality in TikTok Short Videos*” Ling (et al. 2021) discuss that although the most important determinant of a videos’ virality is the creator’s follower count, (as one would assume) other important features must be considered¹⁰. Framing (medium or close-up shot rather than a wide shot), the presence of text on-screen, the point of view of the shot and recency of the video all influence user engagement and video completion rate (7). It is reasonable therefore to assume, in the interest of the project that as a debut artist, that thoughtful video production could substantially increase the odds of their posts reaching wider audiences.

On the idea of reaching wider audiences, Wares (et al.) explore the importance of hashtags in relation to outreach and engagement of new users in “*Exploring the Impact of Social Media on the Music Industry*”.¹¹ They describe how the addition of Tiktok’s #NewMusic feature garnered over 18 billion views in 2023 on the platform, showcasing its influence in driving music discovery (18). The hashtag serves as a ”springboard” for new releases and sneak peeks, successfully used by global artists who elected to debut their singles primarily on the TikTok platform. Since the addition of TikTok’s #NewMusic feature, various genre specific hashtags have emerged as pertinent tools of music discovery, in relation to this project, (a song in the RnB genre) hashtags such as #RnbVibes and #RandB have over 1.5 million posts and 330k posts respectively using these specific hashtags at this time of writing.¹² These genre specific hashtags allow TikTok’s algorithm to sort the content and distribute it to audiences active in those communities who are engaging with said content. Utilisation of hashtags are crucial for further potential exposure to target audiences and new potential fans.

Aside from the production and video characteristics, repeated consumption and exposure behaviours also play an important role. In “*Discovery Dynamics: Leveraging Repeated Exposure for User and Music Characterization (2022)*”¹³ Sguerra (et al.) discuss the

¹⁰ Ling, Chen, et al. “Slapping Cats, Bopping Heads, and Oreo Shakes: Understanding Indicators of Virality in TikTok Short Videos.” ArXiv:2111.02452 [Cs], 3 Nov. 2021, arxiv.org/abs/2111.02452.

¹¹ Wares, Christopher, et al. “MEIEA - Exploring the Impact of Social Media on the Music Industry.” www.meiea.org, 2023, www.meiea.org/Journal/Vol23/Wares_Smith_Teague.

¹² “TikTok - Make Your Day.” Tiktok.com, 2026, www.tiktok.com/tag/rnbvibes
“TikTok - Make Your Day.” Tiktok.com, 2026, www.tiktok.com/tag/randb

¹³ Sguerra, Bruno, et al. “Discovery Dynamics: Leveraging Repeated Exposure for User and Music Characterization.” ArXiv (Cornell University), 13 Sept. 2022, pp. 556–561, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3523227.3551474>.

dynamics of music consumption. They illustrate that when new songs are exposed to listeners repeatedly, (whether through any different content forms, repeated clips, recommendations or background listening etc.) the interest of users tend to rise, plateau and eventually fall. This creates, in effect, an inverted U-shape of data in which the top of the shape represents peak listener interest (7). This follows the concept of what psychologists describe as the “mere exposure effect” (the phenomenon of individuals gaining a liking for something purely based on familiarity)¹⁴. This concept can be observed practically by how individuals may know the lyrics of popular songs while not having an affinity for the piece anymore simply because they have been exposed to it so much through various medias.

For marketing, this research heavily implies that strategic repetition (e.g. posting multiple clips over time, posting specific catchy parts of a song repeatedly) could maximise listeners familiarity and favourability before saturation occurs. As this is a phenomenon present in all areas not just music, it can be applied to the marketing strategies on both Instagram and TikTok.

In saying this, it must be stressed to debut artists that TikTok success will not guarantee streaming success as cross-platform dynamics are complex. In “*Examining Platformization in Cultural Production: A Comparative Computational Analysis of Hit Songs on TikTok and Spotify (2024)*” Ta (et al.) observed that within the two-year observed period, their data set of hit songs on the TikTok and Spotify Top 100 charts rarely appeared together on both platforms, most of which “entered and exited the daily top 100 charts on Spotify before they did on TikTok” (24). They also describe in certain cases popularity on TikTok “negatively predicted their subsequent popularity on Spotify”.¹⁵ Although this dataset was comprised of primarily record-label produced music, it is important to note that streaming and social medias are not directly correlated in terms of success. This will influence how the data will be evaluated with both social media success and streaming success being examined separately.

Focus Groups: A Practical Approach

Focus groups are widely used in qualitative research to understand how people interpret media, cultural products, and social experiences. Academic studies describe focus groups as a

¹⁴ Sagepub.com, 2025, sk.sagepub.com/ency/edvol/socialpsychology/chpt/mere-exposure-effect. (1)

¹⁵ Ta, Na, et al. Examining Platformization in Cultural Production 1 Examining Platformization in Cultural Production: A Comparative Computational Analysis of Hit Songs on TikTok and Spotify. (24)

method that allows researchers to observe not only individual opinions but also how participants collectively negotiate meaning through discussion and consensus, in particular “*Doing Focus Groups*” (2011)¹⁶. As participants respond to one another directly, focus groups generate insights that would not typically emerge through individual interviews, especially when the topic concerns shared cultural practices such as music consumption or social media use.

Scholars emphasise that focus groups are particularly effective for exploring audience reactions to creative content. In the influential article that is still widely cited and openly accessible “*Qualitative Research, Introducing Focus Groups*” (1995), Kitzinger argues that the strength of focus groups lies in their ability to reveal how people collaborate and form interpretations while building upon and challenging each other’s ideas (299, 302). Similarly to Barbour’s findings, Kitzinger remarks that focus groups fill in the gaps interviews leave by facilitating “the expression of ideas and experiences that might be left underdeveloped in an interview”¹⁷, the setting of a focus group can illuminate not just what participants think but also how they arrive at shared preferences regarding media, aesthetics, or emotional impact.

Kitzinger suggests best practices while conducting these groups. They emphasise that sessions should be relaxed and in a “comfortable setting”, with the participants sitting around in a group in order to “establish the right atmosphere” (302). Care should be taken to ensure the researcher explains that the participants are to discuss ideas amongst the group and not address the researcher directly, thus encouraging group engagement. It is recommended sessions first start by the researcher taking a “back seat” and letting the discussion flow. Once it is observed that discussion may be ceasing it is important the researcher has the ability to recommence debate, for example by highlighting inconsistencies in lines of thinking between participants. Pointing out disagreements within the group may allow participants to expand on why they hold the viewpoints they hold. This highlights another strength of focus groups in the fact that it clearly details differences between participants opinions rather than theorising differing opinions between multiple one-off interviews. Sessions can last one to

¹⁶ Barbour, Rosaline. *Doing Focus Groups*. 2007, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208956>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2020. (16)

¹⁷ Kitzinger, Jenny. “Qualitative Research: Introducing Focus Groups.” *BMJ*, vol. 311, no. 7000, 29 July 1995, pp. 299–302, www.bmj.com/content/311/7000/299, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.311.7000.299> (302)

two hours assuming there are breaks to keep attention on the subject from waning or can be shorter. Ideal group size may range from 4-8 individuals.

In the context of the project in terms of marketing and music promotion, focus groups will allow the artists to test prototypes such as early drafts of songs or short-form promotional videos all while receiving receive immediate, nuanced feedback, far more detailed than that of a multiple-choice survey.

Methodology

Introduction

The goal of this project was to explore the process of production, marketing and eventual release of the single of a debut artist. This was achieved via a mixed methods approach of both practical and theoretical work. The literature review above informed decisions made throughout the process, from the choices made in preproduction, to the types of content that was created, edited and released on social media. Within this, a focus group was carried out in order to gather opinions on mock content styles and formats to aid with the campaign on both Instagram and TikTok. In order to illustrate the methodology in a clear and concise manner, the process has been split into four main sections below; song & content creation, focus group, marketing campaign and finally research and analysis.

1. Song & Content Creation:

In line with Burgess' protocol, the artist was met in early January in a relaxed environment to discuss the project and the release of the single in detail. Care was taken to ensure the artist felt comfortable with the overall roadmap of the project and that they would be kept up to date with timelines and any advancements on the project. The artist was also made sure that their participation within the project was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time, informed consent was obtained. In the first meeting, ideas were discussed pertaining to genre, content types and how the music would be released. The artist expressed their interest in recording a song in the genre of RnB. References were provided by the artist to steer the direction in which they wanted the production to take. Once the meeting concluded, production of instrumentals in the vein of the artists' vision were created. The instrumentals were created with the artist's requests in mind and the advice provided by Burgess as discussed in the literature review. Special attention was brought to the orchestration and structure of the instrumentals to ensure they fit not only genre norms but also fell within Burgess' "timeless ingredients of a hit". They were produced on the music production software "Fl Studio" and exported to the artist to get their feedback. Once the artist decided on an instrumental, they began to think about lyrics and how it would fit the arrangement of the song. The artist was met once more before beginning recording to tweak the arrangement of the instrumental to fit singing preferences. The vocal recording was completed over two six-hour sessions. The first session was the recording of the main vocal

sections e.g. verse, chorus while the second session focussed on secondary vocal elements such as background vocals and ad-libs. The artist was made comfortable in both sessions and was provided a smooth first-time recording experience. During the production of the piece, attention was given to incorporating elements that would be suitable for short form content creation (hooks, catchy vocal phrases) in line with Sguerra's findings. A VHS camera was used to capture in studio footage to provide engaging content for the respective social media accounts. After recording, the song was mixed and mastered to fit streaming thresholds. Content was created largely in the form of in real life skits and lyric videos. As well as the recording of skits with the artist, personal videos taken of aesthetic scenes were used for some of the content, specifically the lyric videos. The content was edited and processed through the app Capcut, a native platform for TikTok. This allowed for edits, the addition of on-screen lyrics and transitions in the style of trending music content on the platform. A photoshoot was carried out following the completion of the song and the album cover was shot in Bray, Dublin.

2. Focus Group:

After the song and content were created, a focus group of four individuals were gathered. Before the focus group was recorded, participants were given a detailed information sheet about the purpose and procedure of the project. Informed consent was received from each participant through a tick on the information sheet, this confirmed their understanding that their participation in the focus group was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Those who took part in the focus group will remain anonymous and their data securely stored. The age range was 15-56 and consisted of all active users of social media. The focus group began with introductions and an explanation of the project. Following this, the song was played to provide context for the marketing campaign. Then, mock content such as lyric videos, skits and behind the scenes footage were presented to gain an understanding of what the group would interact with on either Instagram or TikTok. After this, participants shared their own ideas of potential concepts of content to be posted. Final ideas were presented and the group session concluded.

3. Marketing Campaign:

Following the focus groups, the information gathered was used to inform the content decisions made on each platform. Each piece of content promoted that featured the song was centred around the final chorus of the track, the catchiest part. This was done purposefully in

line with Sguerra's findings to promote saturation and familiarity of the song. On screen text was used in behind-the-scenes footage and lyric videos in line with Ling's findings to attempt to improve video completion rate. The framing of each piece of content was also considered, making sure that videos were posted in an aspect ratio¹⁸ native to that of phone users on both Instagram and TikTok. Research into trending hashtags were carried out to aid with reach and audience targeting, outlined by Wares in the literature review. These hashtags were used in the captions of each post. The campaign operated as a pre-release promotion running for 14 days before the eventual release of the song. Insights from TikTok for Artists and Instagram Business were used to collate insights and will be presented in the analysis section as these gather data on different factors such as watch time, engagement, comments, likes.

4. Release and Analysis:

The artist was registered to the distribution company "Distrokid" in order to release the song on streaming platforms. This allowed for the performance on streaming platforms to be measured once again analysing factors such as play time, age of listeners and the country's of listeners.

¹⁸ An aspect ratio is a proportional relationship between an image's width and height. Essentially, it describes an image's shape - <https://support.squarespace.com/hc/en-us/articles/115008538927-Understanding-aspect-ratios>

Analysis

Introduction

The following analysis aims to clearly illustrate the of the results of the marketing campaign. This will be achieved first through the findings of the focus group and how it was applied and finally through the analytics collated on Instagram, TikTok and Spotify.

Focus Group

The four individuals who took part in the focus group all remarked that they had an affinity for RnB music. This is important to note as it adds a layer of validity to the feedback as it is the direct target audience of both the song and marketing campaign, it is a group familiar with music within the genre. Three of the focus group participants said they enjoyed the song, particularly the instrumental, while one felt that the song was too crowded, saying “to me a lot of things are going on”. When asked about whether they would interact with the song if they were to come across it on social media, two of the focus group participants responded positively saying that they would.

One participant described how they would've liked to hear rap elements in the song, however due to the artists' vision for the single this was not advice that could be applied.

There was a consensus that the bridge into the chorus was the strongest section of the song. This influenced how the content was edited and resulted in nearly all content that had music in it to featuring this part of the song.

One participant came up with the idea of an individual standing in the rain as the chorus played. This idea was expanded upon and made into a lyric video, which subsequently was one the best performing pieces of content on both Instagram and TikTok.

When shown different content types, the group were overwhelmingly positive in reaction to the lyric videos, specifically a video shot of a dark street with a flickering streetlamp above. This style of content was expanded on and became the centre point of the campaign; it was ultimately the best performing content on TikTok.

Behind the scenes style content was also well received, as one participant explained how it makes the audience “feel a part of the whole production journey”.

Skits were the worst received content type with only one of the participants expressing interest in the style of content. Despite this, an important point was made by one of the participants who remarked that “you don’t really know what’s going to go viral”, and that a holistic approach should be taken in relation to the posting of all content types to cover all bases.

Instagram Insights

Account insights

Views ⓘ

4,107

Views

Followers	26.3%
Non-followers	73.7%

Accounts reached **1,392**

By content type

All Followers Non-followers

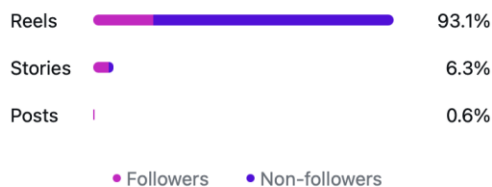


Figure 1: Instagram account final overview

The picture above shows the total number of views (The number of times that the content was played or displayed, content includes reels, posts, stories, videos, live videos and ads) the account received since its inception to the writing of the thesis. The numbers presented would be considered unsatisfactory. This overview details that majority of interactions with the page have happened by accounts who were not following the page and majority of exposure to said accounts occurred through the reels content type.

Interactions ⓘ

182

Interactions

Followers	66.5%
Non-followers	33.5%

By content interactions

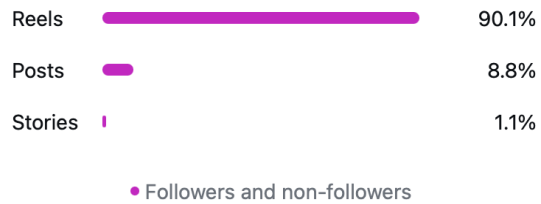


Figure 2: Instagram account interactions

The figure above details the total number of interactions (The total number of post interactions, story interactions, reels interactions, video interactions and live video interactions e.g. the total number of likes, comments, shares and saves) and how it differs to pure views accumulated on the account. This data suggest that followers of the page were more likely to engage with the content rather than non-followers who passively viewed it.

Content insights

All ▾ Views ▾ Highest ▾

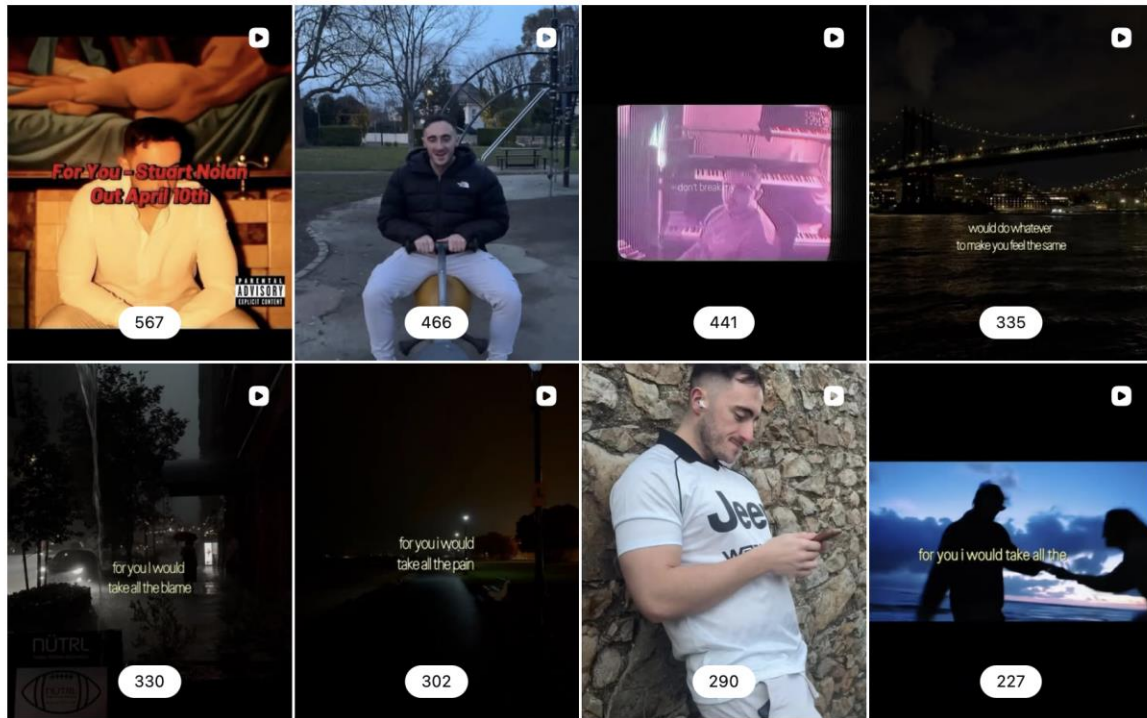


figure 3: Highest performing content posted on the account

Highest performing content (views, likes, comments, shares, saves) featured each different type of content style produced. The two highest performing pieces of content featured the artist front and centre, highlighting the importance of the artist to fan connection on Instagram. Lyric style content was also popular as it featured in half of the top eight performing videos.

TikTok Insights

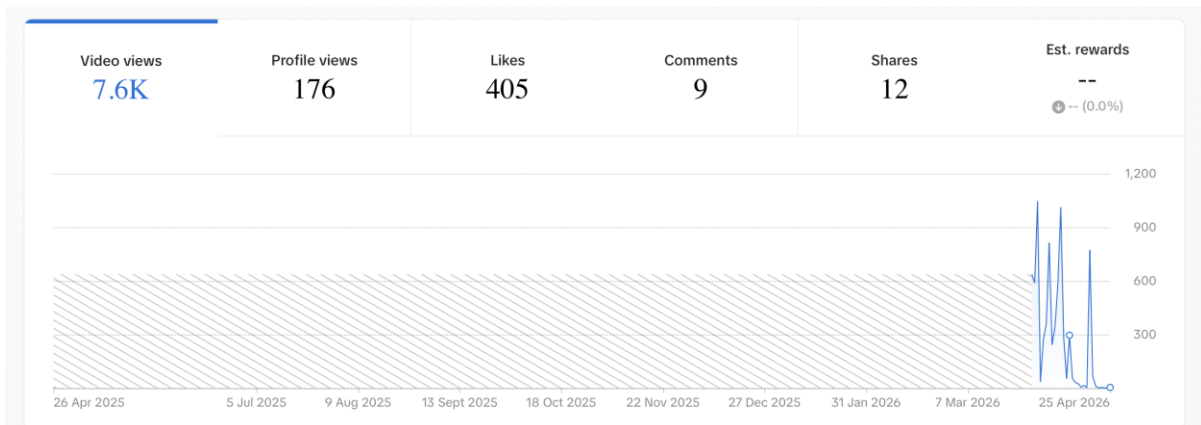


figure 4: TikTok account final overview

The picture above details the account benchmarks reached on TikTok during the completion of the marketing campaign. The numbers are nearly double as much as the Instagram account in nearly every metric. Each spike on the graph represents user interactions following the posting of each piece of content. Interestingly, a sharp decline in user activity follows shortly after. This highlights the extremely fast paced nature of content consumption on TikTok and emphasises the importance of regular posting to keep users engaged. The only metric in which the Instagram account outperformed the TikTok was in the follower category.

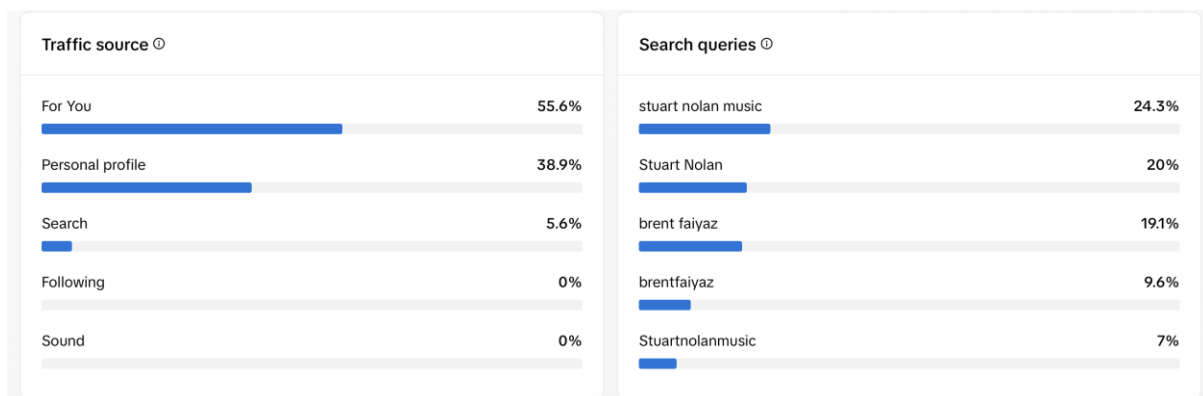


figure 5: A breakdown of traffic source and search queries of the account

Figure 5 details the sources of user interaction and how users found the account through search results. Unsurprisingly, more than half of interactions with the account came from TikTok’s “for you” section. The other large portion of interactions came from users who were already present on the account, for example someone who landed on the page and scrolled through different videos.

On the other hand, the search queries table presented very interesting findings. Again, unsurprisingly the two main search results were the account name itself. However, making up nearly 30% of search queries was the term “brent faiyaz”. This is in direct response to hashtags used in the captions of the posts. Using Hare (et al.’s) findings, genre specific artists (like brent faiyaz) were mentioned in the captions through hashtags to expand reach into audiences who consume a kind of music similar to that which was produced for this project. This demonstrates that new artists stand to benefit from using hashtags of already established artists that they sound like in order to tap into new audiences and grow their fan base.


























Content (Created on)	Privacy	Views	Likes	Comments	Actions
 Everything to lose, and nothing to gain #fyp #newartist #brentfaiya... 31 Mar, 8:29 pm	Public	952	73	0	   
 Out Friday #rnb #newmusic #fyp #brentfaiyaz #lyrics 8 Apr, 8:32 pm	Public	779	58	0	   
 For you i would, take all the pain #fyp #newartist #newmusic... 3 Apr, 6:28 pm	Public	433	46	0	   
 For you #rnb #fyp #newartist #newmusic #brentfaiyaz 30 Mar, 10:10 pm	Public	658	35	2	   
 Another snippet, DROPPING FRIDAY #fyp #newartist #rnbvib... 7 Apr, 7:17 pm	Public	727	30	0	   

figure 6: Top performing TikTok videos

Strikingly, each of the top five best performing videos on the TikTok account were lyric videos not featuring the artist. This suggests a difference in the way in which users interact with music content between the two apps.

Video views 952	Total play time 0h:53m:2s	Average watch time 3.18s	Watched full video 2.6%	New followers 0
Data chart is only shown for 21 days from the date your video is posted.				
Video views 779	Total play time 0h:44m:32s	Average watch time 3.32s	Watched full video 1.5%	New followers 0
Video views 658	Total play time 0h:38m:16s	Average watch time 3.3s	Watched full video 3%	New followers 1
Data chart is only shown for 21 days from the date your video is posted.				
Video views 433	Total play time 0h:26m:52s	Average watch time 3.56s	Watched full video 3.5%	New followers 1

figure 7: Shows the watch statistics for the top four performing videos

The statistics above highlight the importance of an engaging hook right at the beginning of your content posted on TikTok. If users are not engaged within the first 3 seconds, they will simply scroll to the next page. This is apparent with the average watch time of the four videos being a mere 3.3 seconds long. If users are not familiar with your content, they must be given an engaging reason to stay and watch.

Spotify Insights



Daily Streaming Stats

The number of times your tracks were streamed in the last year

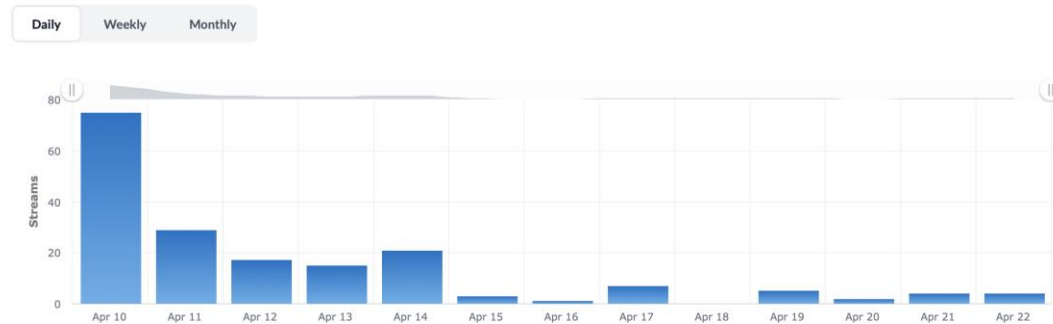


figure 8: Details number of Spotify streams per day post release

Figure 8 highlights the similarities between Spotify and TikTok in relation to the fast nature of modern media consumption. Users must be constantly reminded of new music or else they will move on to the next release.

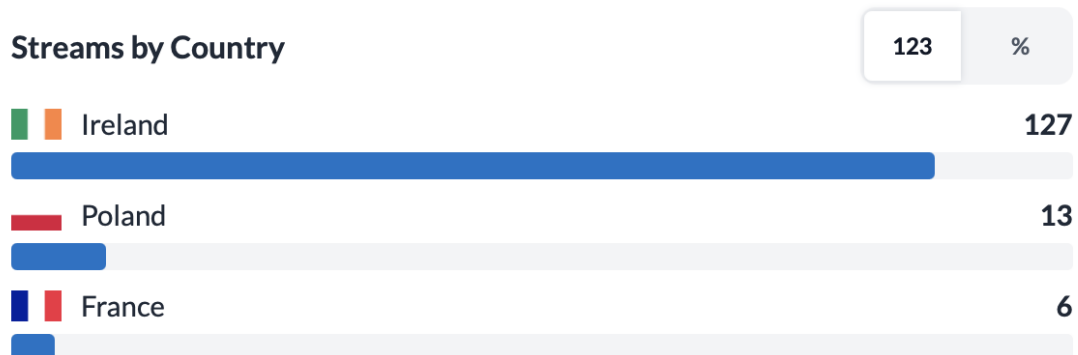


figure 9: Details top countries of listeners

Overall, the total number of streams on Spotify did not reach the expectations held prior to the completion of the project. This could be due to a myriad of factors. In saying this, Ta (et al.) discussed the very idea that cross platform performances between TikTok and Spotify is not correlated and that expectations of streaming performance should not have been tied to TikTok and Instagram results. Ultimately the project is experience gained and lessons learnt which will be expanded upon in the discussion below.

Discussion

Although the final release results were unsatisfactory, many positives could be drawn from the experience. The production of the song went smoothly and provided an artist who had previously never stepped foot into a studio with a platform to share their creative ideas to the world.

Within the production, strong elements were the instrumental arrangement, and vocal recordings of the bridge and choruses as influenced by Burgess' "hit ingredients" protocol. Upon reflection, the audio mix of the vocals in the introduction have let the track down, as they are buried in the mix. This was caused by intense background static during recording which was not noticed. Some time passed without the mistake being rectified and soon the artist's busy schedule prevented the opportunity to re-record the damaged vocal recording.

As a result, during mixing, large parts of the vocal content had to be carved out to salvage a usable take. This is an issue that will be addressed in future production work, as special attention will be given to recording techniques and sonic quality during tracking and live performance to ensure a situation like this does not happen again. In retrospect, a professional mix engineer could have potentially rescued the interfered vocal take due to experience rectifying such problems. The track could also have been mastered by a professional in order to maximise competitiveness in both the streaming market and social media environment.

The focus group carried out provided actionable steps which aided in the curation of the marketing campaign. This was greatly benefitted by the fact that the individuals chosen for the study were all interested in the genre of the produced song. Despite this, the process of the focus group could have been more refined in its questioning and promoting of conversation between participants, majority of the discussions were directed toward the individual conducting it. The focus group was also quite short in duration, below that of the recommended time duration discussed by Kitzinger in “*Qualitative Research, Introducing Focus Groups*”. A second focus group could also have been conducted to gather more actionable information to provide a more informed view of the decision-making process during the marketing side of the project.

Although the outcomes of the marketing campaign were not what was hoped for, overall, it can be viewed as a success. Confidence to post freely on social media is an extremely important factor in the success and longevity of not only a musician but anyone looking to put themselves online in the present day. Along with this, valuable insights into user behaviour such as average watch time, importance of hashtags and other important discoveries were made. Looking back on how the campaign was conducted, the simple act of posting consistently after release would’ve more than likely made a big difference on sustained streaming and listener interest. Content types could have been more thought out, particularly in relation to Instagram and creating that artist fan relationship that was discussed in Coulter’s “*marketing Agile Artists: How Labels can Leverage TikTok’s virality*”.

Conclusion

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the aim of this thesis was to explore the question “How can a debut artist produce and market their music on social media, specifically TikTok and Instagram?”. This was done through a tiered approach including the production of an original piece of music, the execution of a pre-release marketing campaign aided by a focus group study and finally the synthesis and illustration of qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the course the project. Despite numerical outcomes of the project not reaching initial expectations, the depth of learning across each of the aforementioned areas offers a meaningful context to the academic understanding of independent music marketing whilst providing a useful roadmap for emerging artists to navigate both the TikTok and Instagram platforms.

From the production standpoint, application of Burgess' "timeless hit ingredients" framework proved to be quite valuable. The guidelines to navigating initial artist meetings and sessions created a comfortable setting which, in turn, allowed an artist with no prior studio experience to curate and release an original piece of music. The pitfalls identified in the vocal mix that were discussed in the analysis serve as an important lesson for ensuring due-diligence and quality control during recording in studio. It could be suggested that future production work would benefit from the inclusion of a professional mix engineer, in this case particularly when working with an individual whose tight schedule limits the window for re-recording.

Although smaller in scale and duration relative to the benchmarks set by Kitzinger, the focus group that was carried out provided actionable insights which shaped the course of the marketing campaign. The mutual agreement in the strength of the bridge and chorus among participants directly influenced the content strategy with subsequent lyric videos emerging as the best performing content types on both platforms. This specific outcome highlights the importance of qualitative pretesting in relation to creative content with an informed audience prior to marketing or release. This is a practice that definitely warrants more investment in future projects both in terms of length of sessions and group sizes.

The campaign itself showed several key differences in user behaviour between TikTok and Instagram. TikTok boasted superior reach across nearly all metrics as mentioned in the analysis section, with hashtags playing a significant role in audience targeting, evidenced by the search queries attributed to genre-adjacent artists. Although it achieved a higher follower count, Instagram demanded a higher focus on the artist fan connection, as evidenced by artist fronted content (like skits) performing the best. This was an element which was missed during the campaign.

This project ultimately demonstrates that for debut artists, success on social media is not a onetime event but rather a constant process of consistency, learning and adapting. The frameworks explored by Burgess, Wares, Coulter, Sguerra and others have demonstrated that applied academic insight into the world of independent music promotion can yield findings of genuine value to both the artist and the wider field, even if the result is a modest first release.

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Appendices

Appendix A

OneDrive link to the mp3 recording of the focus group.

[Focus Group - Garvan Molony Professional Project.mp3](#)

Appendix B - Figures

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