



NEW MEDIA STUDIES

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Examine the role that Social Media can play as part of a strategy for an Arts

Organisation.

The way we consume music could not be more different than how it was 20 years ago. What began as a performed service, became a physical product with the inventions of record players, cassettes, and compact discs. Now, music is mostly consumed in digital form through subscriptions of audio streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music. As Jim Griffin pointed out in his piece, *Evolution of Consumption: A Psychological Framework*, 'Truly, music has traveled from service to product and back to service, adapting to new technologies as they appeared.'¹ Previously, physical sales of albums and singles was a way for record labels to measure the success of their musicians. To increase sales, record labels would make their musicians do album promotions by doing interviews on tv, radio, or a feature in a magazine. This practice is still seen today, but it is not as effective in this digital world where spontaneity or the illusion of it, is what catches audience's attention most of the time. This essay in particular, will examine the popular social media platform TikTok which launched in 2016, its role in making songs go viral, and how record labels can utilize TikTok to promote new music. Furthermore, this essay will also discuss how nostalgia has become a popular trend in social media and how record labels can use this opportunity to revive old hits and introduce artists to younger audiences.

As much as TikTok is still such a new platform, it is clear that the app should be considered as part of a record label's marketing strategy to ensure their tracks make

¹ Griffin, Jim, 'Commentary: Music's Digital Dance: Singing and Swinging from Product to Service', *Journal of Marketing*, 85.1, 223-226 (p. 223).

it to the mainstream charts. On Spotify, there are approximately 4 million users altogether following playlists curated for users who want to listen to songs that are popular on TikTok. Jeff Vaughn, senior vp of A&R at Artist Partner Group [APG] further proves how TikTok is a beneficial force for the music industry when he explains, 'if you think of the music consuming demo as 11[-year-olds] to 24 [-year-olds], you reach the bottom half of that audience through two platforms: YouTube and TikTok'.² When the algorithm observes videos that are performing well, the platform makes sure to elevate these clips which other users then reference in their own tiktoks by using the same audio, music, or copying a dance routine which then creates a trend. Once an audio or a song makes it to TikTok's internal playlist, this is a signal 'that a new trend is a bandwagon worth jumping on.'³

Evidently, TikTok is a major player in what songs make it to the global music charts and it seems that major labels are beginning to notice this. At the end of 2020, TikTok struck a short-term licensing deals with Universal Music Group [UMG], Sony Music and Warner Music Group which gives TikTok the rights to use 30 second clips of any of the record labels' songs.⁴ A deal that benefits both parties and especially the artists signed to these labels who will gain more exposure. The music business should consider adapting its marketing strategy in this digital world and this is especially important to consider when it comes to establishing pop artists into the mainstream. Arguably, TikTok is the best platform for marketing these artists. One record label that should be commended for their marketing strategy is Geffen Records, an American label owned by UMG who early this year gained success with one of their artists, Olivia

² Leight, Elias, 'If You Can Get Famous Easily, You're Gonna Do It': How TikTok Took Over Music', *RollingStone*, 12 August 2019. <<https://www.rollingstone.com/pro/features/tiktok-video-app-growth-867587/>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

³ Leight.

⁴ Stutz, Colin, 'TikTok Now Has Short-Term Licensing Deals With the Major Labels', *billboard*, 31 March 2020. <<https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/digital-and-mobile/9347970/tiktok-now-has-short-term-licensing-deals-with-the-major-labels/>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

Rodrigo whose song *Drivers License* caught the attention of millions of TikTok users and got her a record-breaking title as most streamed debut single in a week on Spotify.

Olivia Rodrigo, *Drivers License*

The marketing plan prepared by Rodrigo's label is a perfect example of how record labels can successfully promote their artists if they learn and understand the language and online behavior of their target market. To begin with, Rodrigo already 'came with a built-in audience thanks to her Disney roles'⁵ and the majority of this audience are also on TikTok. As music has adapted with new technologies, the music industry must also adapt with the new rules of marketing and PR in which it is no longer necessary for organisations to depend on media outlets to get the word out: 'with social media, we communicate directly with our audience, bypassing the media filter completely.'⁶ What sets TikTok apart from other media platform is that you do not need a strong following to gain a strong engagement, if enough people are producing content on the same topic as you, the more likely you will come up on people's FYP page. Similar to how companies depend on influencers to promote products on Instagram, Geffen Records depended on TikTok users familiar with Rodrigo to get the word out. As a result, fans of Rodrigo became the base behind what made *Drivers License* the hottest topic on TikTok and thus expanding Rodrigo's song to a wider audience. Ultimately, what made Rodrigo's debut single appealing to those unfamiliar with the young Disney star is that the song came with a 'ton of X-factor': the gossip, the lyricism, and the star power which Erlich, Spotify's executive explained was, 'the perfect storm'.⁷ Fans of

⁵ Coscarelli, Joe, 'Olivia Rodrigo's 'Drivers License' Hit No.1 in a Week. Here's How.', *The New York Times*, 19 January 2021. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/arts/music/olivia-rodrigo-drivers-license.html>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

⁶ Scott, David Meerman, *The New Rules of Marketing and PR: How to Use Social Media, Online Video, Mobile Applications, Blogs, News Releases, and Viral Marketing to Reach Buyers Directly*, 5th edn (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2015), p. 8.

⁷ Coscarelli.

Rodrigo creatively promoted the song by posting TikToks discussing theories about who the heartbreaking ballad was dedicated to and suspecting a possible love-triangle story between her and her co-star Joshua Bassett and fellow Disney star Sabrina Carpenter. Eventually, other users participated in the '*Drivers License phenomenon*'⁸ by making their own rendition of this catchy ballad through humour or POV style tiktoks where users open up about their own interpretation of the song. Users of the app who were curious about the theories made about the song streamed it on audio streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music to further dissect and analyse its hidden meanings. According to research made by Borah et al on improvised marketing, 'people in general and internet users in particular have a desire to engage with events as they happen in a spontaneous manner.'⁹ In this digital world where meme culture and participation culture is thriving, online users generally want to be 'in the know' and the fact that millions of users on TikTok are engaging with Rodrigo's song only helps get the word out beyond the app: 'Heightened interest by social media users has been shown to kick-start new online discussion...'¹⁰ According to an academic journal published by California State Polytechnic University, 'a survey study finds that track and artists popularity can play a dominant role in the automated playlist generation process'¹¹ this study can be further proven with the popularity of Rodrigo's debut single which has been added in 150 official Spotify playlists. The song's success on TikTok led to a domino effect which situated her at the No. 1 spot in the Billboard Hot 100, 48

⁸ Kornhaber, Spencer, 'The Breakout Pop Song of the Year Is a Cinematic Universe, *The Atlantic*, 27 January 2021. <<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/01/drivers-license-olivia-rodrigo/617837/>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

⁹ Borah, Abhishek, Banerjee, Sourindra, Lin, Yu-Ting, Jain, Apury, Eisingerich, Andreas B., 'Improvised Marketing Interventions in Social Media', *Journal of Marketing*, 84.2, 69-91 (p. 73).

¹⁰ Borah et al, p. 73.

¹¹ Al-Beitawi, Zayd, Salehan, Mohammad, Zhang, Sonya, 'What Makes a Song Trend?: Cluster Analysis of Musical Attributes for Spotify Top Trending Songs', *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, 14.3, 79-91 (p. 80).

countries on Apple Music, 31 countries on Spotify and 14 countries on YouTube, according to Rodrigo's label.¹²

Rodrigo's track gained even more momentum when Taylor Swift, her long-time idol who she credits as an inspiration for her own songwriting style showed support for her debut single. Music marketing is similar in ways with influencer marketing in which they both leverage the reach of an existing individual in the public eye 'who has built a large following and strong brand reputation in a particular niche to support your brand, [...] with the intent to increase brand awareness and drive sales.'¹³ In this case, Taylor Swift is the 'influencer' and Olivia Rodrigo's debut singing career is the 'brand' being promoted. What Swift and Rodrigo have in common is how they sell the 'empathetic fantasy' with their evocative point-of-view style of writing, those familiar with Swift's works are then naturally drawn to this young emerging artist. *Teen Vogue* writer, Aiyana Ishmael highlights another reason why the ballad was so marketable to a broader, more adult audience when she points out that 'the song resonates with everyone who has survived a hard breakup and it goes over in excruciating detail how miniscule moments can become monumental parts of your story.'¹⁴ Nostalgia marketing is an effective strategy to gain traction as it 'may be capable of prompting nostalgic thoughts and pleasant memories in consumers and resulting in more favorable brand attitudes and purchase intentions.'¹⁵ Other artists besides Rodrigo have also gained attention on TikTok and made significant impact in the charts because of nostalgia marketing.

¹² Coscarelli.

¹³ Patel, Sujana, 'How You Can Build A Powerful Influencer Marketing Strategy in 2021, Big Commerce. <<https://www.bigcommerce.com/blog/influencer-marketing/>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

¹⁴ Ishmael, Aiyana, 'Olivia Rodrigo Song "Drivers License" Sparks Fan-Made TikTok POV Covers, *Teen Vogue*, 12 January 2021. <<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/olivia-rodrigo-drivers-license-sparks-fan-made-tiktok-pov-covers>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

¹⁵ Muehling, Darrel D., Spratt, David E., Sultan, Abdullah J., 'Exploring the Boundaries of Nostalgic Advertising Effects: A Consideration of Childhood Brand Exposure and Attachment on Consumers' Responses to Nostalgia-Themed Advertisements', *Journal of Advertising*, 43.1, 73-84 (p. 73).

Nostalgia Marketing: *Simple Plan* and *Fleetwood Mac*

With the COVID-19 keeping everyone indoors and looking for entertainment online to keep them preoccupied, the number of users on the popular platform has only increased. Haenlein et al further proves this point by stating that 'cursory evidence suggests that the use of TikTok especially has exploded during this period, triggered by the confinement of millions of teenagers around the globe.'¹⁶ During this time, audio streaming services such as Spotify have also thrived due to the changes in people's daily routines prompted by the pandemic with 299 million monthly active users, a 29 percent increase compared to 2019, and subscribers increasing by 27 percent to 138 million, according to *the Verge*.¹⁷

In the early weeks of quarantine, a TikTok challenge quickly turned into a huge trend where users re-created a childhood photo with their parents or siblings in the most creative and endearing way and the clips were then accompanied by Simple Plan's 2002 track, *I'm Just a Kid*. With everyone confined with their relatives at home during lockdown, it is no surprise that the challenge gained high engagement rate with currently over 3 million videos uploaded and shared on the app of people participating on the challenge. The song was given another life by being introduced to a much younger audience who may not be as familiar to the pop punk classic. Platinum status is given to a record or album once it reaches one million sold copies and today, in a much more digital music consumption, 'One hundred fifty streams are equivalent to one unit sold.'¹⁸ As a result of the viral challenge, *I'm Just a Kid*, by Simple Plan is now

¹⁶ Haenlein, Michael, Anadol, Ertan, Farnsworth, Tyler, Hugo, Harry, Hunichen, Jess, Welte, Diana, 'Navigating the New Era of Influencer Marketing: How To Be Successful On Instagram, TikTok, & Co.', *California Management Review*, 63.1, 5-25 (p. 22).

¹⁷ Porter, Jon, 'Spotify podcast consumption doubles as overall listening recovers', *The Verge*, 29 July 2020. <<https://www.theverge.com/2020/7/29/21346339/spotify-q2-2020-earnings-podcasts-coronavirus-covid-19-consumption-recovery>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

¹⁸ Rose, Laetare, 'TikTok Turned Simple Plan's "I'm Just A Kid" To Platinum', *Music Times*, 29 May 2020. <<https://www.musictimes.com/articles/81716/20200529/tiktok-turned-simple-plan-im-kid-platinum.htm>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

certified platinum 15 years after its debut according to the Recording Industry Association of America.

Another catalog song that gained viral status on TikTok is Fleetwood Mac's dreamy hit, *Dreams* which earned 16.1 million US streams in October 2020¹⁹ thanks to TikTok user, Nathan Apodaca who posted a clip of himself skateboarding down a road while sipping an *Ocean Spray* branded cranberry juice and lip syncing to the Fleetwood Mac track. The viral video helped launch Apodaca's TikTok career who previously worked at a potato factory and is now a social media influencer, booking commercials with TikTok, Ocean Spray, and Snoop Dogg. The video's success was not only a blessing for Apodaca and his family but was a great marketing opportunity for TikTok and Fleetwood Mac. Band members Mick Fleetwood and Stevie Nicks posted their own versions of the video on the app with Fleetwood gaining 17.9 million views and Nicks with 26.9 million views on her TikTok. The band's support for Apodaca's video only added to its popularity and their decision to join TikTok gave the artists a platform to interact with younger audiences, 'a move that pleases TikTok's music team because of its potential to turn those musicians into frequent, high-profile content creators.'²⁰

Nostalgia has become a popular trend in the media, from vintage camera filter apps to aesthetically retro shows like *Stranger Things* and *Riverdale*. For this reason, the success of these catalog songs is encouraging for other labels and their artists to leverage their older works especially during the pandemic when people have more time to slow down and reminisce at home. In Borah et al's article on nostalgia

¹⁹ Garvey, Marianne, 'Fleetwood Mac's 'Dreams' returns to the charts, thanks to viral TikTok video', *CNN*, 22 October 2020. <<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/22/entertainment/fleetwood-mac-dreams-charts-trnd/index.html>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

²⁰ Millman, Ethan, 'The Biggest Old Music Hits Resurfaced by TikTok', *RollingStone*, 6 November 2020. <<https://www.rollingstone.com/pro/features/tiktok-old-hits-fleetwood-mac-jack-johnson-aly-aj-1086232/>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

marketing, they explain that people ‘consider “the past” as a time from one’s own youth or childhood and specifically the time spent “at home.” Home is often considered a key element in reference to nostalgia, as are family and friends.’²¹ Record labels would benefit from applying nostalgia marketing in promoting their artists’ catalog following the success of other artists and the best platform for this is on TikTok. In a statement made Danny Gillick, TikTok’s senior manager of music content and label partnerships he says, ‘Catalog is my bread and butter’, further proving his awareness of the potential of catalog songs, ‘there’s so much opportunity out there for all these legacy labels, even for songs that are out of cycle to have another life.’²²

Conclusion

Authenticity, humour, and spontaneity is engrained into TikTok’s DNA. For a video or a trend to be able to perfect all three is a guaranteed viral trend. Although Simple Plan and Fleetwood Mac’s newfound success on TikTok may have happened by a random stroke of luck, other record labels can still apply the main elements of the viral trends that these songs are associated and apply it in how they market their artists. Arguably, the success of Rodrigo’s debut single Drivers License could be a result of her label understanding the power of TikTok thus, succeeding in creating a pop-culture moment. Evidently it seems that TikTok is a major player in today’s music business and for this reason, record labels should consider including the platform in their marketing strategies.

²¹ Haenlein et al, p. 74.

²² Millman.

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