The Impact of Tik Tok on the Music Industry

In 2020, Covid-19 shook the world in the most unprecedented manner, it disrupted businesses, institutions, and industries like we've never seen before. But none more than the music and entertainment industry. Who were forced to navigate their way through uncharted territories, from cancelling shows, events, major concerts and tours. Artists, producers, and record labels had to revisit the art of live streaming and depend solely on social media to stay connected to their audiences. The entire music industry shifted to being predominately online. Tik Tok emerged as undoubtedly one of the fastest growing social media platforms to arise out of the pandemic. It quickly became the pinnacle of apps downloaded in 2020, outperforming the top performers like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Tik Tok transformed music consumption patterns and increased the market for artists.

So, what is Tik Tok? Tik Tok created in 2016, is a social media platform, offering a wide range of discovering, creating, and sharing short videos with a user's smartphone. Videos that consist of dancing, singing, lip-syncing, and comedy. The short one-minute videos and the algorithmic virality, drove the constant production of content displayed. Users generated creative content from video sharing which revolutionized the standard of entertainment and music in the industry. (Khosravian 2021) Tik Tok became a platform for various types of genres to be heard, and rediscovered. A space where old music and new songs can be discovered whether created today or twenty years ago. It also became a platform for new and amateur artists to release their music. By doing so, many record labels such Columbia, Interscope, Warner Brothers, Sony Music Entertainment, etc, discovered and signed just under a hundred different artists from exposure to Tik Tok. One of the biggest artist to emerge from Tik Tok was Olivia Rodrigo with her song "Driver's License"; who went from an average actor on Disney to having a number one global hit single in her debut. Since then, she released her album "Sour", which basically generated a viral trend on Tik Tok for every song made.

The music industry has long resisted modernity and held firm to their conventional standards. Conventional standards in which records labels invest thousands of dollars into unknown artists with the hopes of a return on their investment someday. The rise of Tik Tok and technology has since changed the scope of the music industry and how business is done today. For a better understanding of the impact Tik Tok has on the music industry I will critically unravel distinct aspects as to why Tik Tok has forever altered music as we know it. From its relationship among artists, producers, users and more.

Literature Review

        In this paper, I will answer the question how the music industry has transformed since the emergence of Tik Tok from a theoretical perspective focusing on four main points. Firstly, I will explore the concept of affordances through understanding social media and technology, from a historical perspective. By expanding on the advancement of technology in music, from vinyl to live streaming. This section pre-sets the timeline of Tik Tok as it relates to the transitions in the music industry. Secondly, I will aim to discuss the benefit of Tik Tok among artists, users and the industry. The listening, advancing, and rediscovering of music. Thirdly, the aim is to focus on the inescapable relationships between the user and producer, the creator, and its audience as it relates to technology. After which, expand on Tik Tok's impeccable algorithm from a theoretical perspective, and its creative user content. Then delve into a case study detailing the interest of music for users utilizing the technology with common interests. Lastly, analyze the futuristic direction and possibilities for the music industry. Where does the music industry go from here, what is the next step in the industry and how will it possibly evolve.

The Historical Perspective

        In this section, we will analyze from a historical viewpoint, how Tik Tok emerged as the leading app in the music industry. Music consumption prior to digitalization were through vinyl, cassettes, tapes, and CDs (compact disc). Although CDs are considered ancient in today's world, it was the first step in digitalization in the process of transformation. The functional and relational characteristics of affordances of these technologies framed the possibilities of 'agentic action' in regard to an object. (Hutchby 2001) The user relationship to previous music consumptions, allowed the existence of CDs. In 1982, CDs were created and it literally eliminated vinyl records overnight. Users had control over how the music was played, the option to skip tracks, sound quality improved, and the convenience in size made music more appealing. (Andreeva 2021) In 1999, Napster invented a free online digital (peer-to-peer) music sharing service. The company came under major scrutiny for allowing users' access to copyright songs which was illegal and essentially caused a decline in record sales. (Khosravian 2021) In 2001, Napster was eventually sued, and the company went out of business. Then in 2003, iTunes launched and became the number one leading retailer in online music. The first week, it sold over one million songs due its accessibility. Although it was made for Apple users, all users had access. The price point was the ultimate turning point that dismantled the CD industry. At the time, CDs were selling for $14, iTunes sold single tracks for 0.99 cents and an album for $9.99. Throughout the years, iTunes unfortunately lost its popularity due to a new wave of music consumption services. But we cannot deny the level of essential influence iTunes had on the music industry.

Sweden in 2006 created Spotify and introduced it to the United States in 2011. Spotify eventually began to challenge iTunes business model essentially making them a huge competitor. Although iTunes gave access and ownership to songs and albums, Spotify offered a library of songs, playlists and a variety of subscription plans that gave a better music experience to the users. In 2020, when Tik Tok became this new phenomenon, due to the level of creativity in music and its diversity in genres, the music industry grew by 7.4%. Its innovative approach for new and unknown artists reshaped the music industry due its viral-based algorithm. Hutchby argues, in this manner technologies are considered artefacts that may shape or shapes the interaction of human practices. (Hutchby 2001). Tik Tok in this case is identified as the technological artefact that fashioned the correlation of social conduct and technology.

For decades the music industry has held to their traditional methods of acquiring artists, promoting music and revenue sales. In 2018, *Rolling Stones Magazine* wrote an article, titled "How Musicians Make Money — Or Don't at All — in 2018" dissecting in depth how every person in the music industry, from copyright owners, sound recording owners, record labels, licensees, to lyricists, etc get a piece of the pie. The record label is divided up into two main categories, 'distribution & promotion' and 'creation & production' of which has specific duties. The 'distribution & promotion' division is responsible for distributing the music at a time it can receive the most traction. (Andreeva 2021) The 'creation & production' division role is to find new artists, write songs, record, choose repertoire and create music activities. (Andreeva 2021) This was how the music industry earned money producing music. Too many people, too many factors, and not enough revenue for the artist. As Hutchby argues, the work in this area it is not about the abstract in technology but rather the multifaceted relationships amidst technology and the interactional and social circumstances that exist and how they achieve their meaning. (Hutchby 2001) The dichotomies of these relationships must be fundamentally challenged.

The Musical Perspective

In 2019, "Old Town Road" was independently released by Lil Nas on Tik Tok, which would become the second most highly ranked song on the platform. Over 6 million users reenacted countless videos, wearing cowboy hats and boots; not to mention the signature dance moves. From this, the song went viral topping charts in ten different countries. (Khosravian 2021) This unknown artist was later signed to Columbia records and became monumental in revolutionizing cross cultural music. This was one instance in which an individual utilized the platform to boost their music career, there are many more. *The Business Insider* reported Canadian rapper Tiago Garcia- Arenas also known as Tiagz, wrote songs directed at popular memes and trends on the app. In doing so, he grew his following to 4.2 million. Essentially mastering the content recommendation and search algorithm. Trending songs on Tik Tok, due to its virality end up ranking on the Billboard top 100 list. The platform later incorporated music marketing deals among the influencers and music

marketers for Tik Tok creators to generate income. As a result, all parties such as the record labels, artists, and influencers benefit. Artists gain more exposure and influencers are able cash in.

According to The Brown Daily Herald, researchers have found that 75% of users in the U.S.A, have utilized Tik Tok for discovering new artists. Coincidentally, older songs have benefited from this platform as well. Songs that users would not otherwise listen too, have resurfaced, drawing attention older artists. 67% report they would look for a song on an app if heard on a streaming platform. With this new method of searching for novel talent, executive producers have made probing Tik Tok a habit in finding new artists. Kline and Pinch would argue that is why it is vital to not only show how technology is shaped by social groups but exactly how the identities of the social group are reconstructed in the process. (Kline, R. Pinch, T 1996) Essentially, we cannot neglect or overlook the reciprocal relationship amid technology and social groups. The days of picking unknown artists and starting from the ground up to build their popularity are gone. Artists now must come polished, having their own followers, creating their own music, and creating their own image. In a sense, artists must prove themselves worthy amidst their competitors.

The Theoretical Perspective

When life as we knew it came to a sudden halt, Tik Tok for the public became a network of inclusion. People from all walks of life clung to social media due to its 'imagined community' set forth by the discourse interruption in society. According to Danah Boyd, the computed design of communication along with the features of a network site are properties that define the construct within a bounded system. (Boyd 2010) Meaning that the properties and features of Tik Tok captivated the gravitation of users so much, it literally bonded them to the platform. It also allowed users to connect with other users and their followers for further interaction and gain followers rapidly more than other platforms. The expression of digitalized music was a creation of activity established through the rapport of music and the audience. Khosravian would argue when the audience and performers met in the past it was due to marketing or a product promotion. However, since the cancelation of social gathering, proto – markets, in which the two are commodified together without a product, distinguished the value of an artist. (Khosravian 2021) Hence coming together without ulterior motives, became more meaningful. Evidently, artists learned the value of truly connecting with their audience.

Unlike other platforms, Tik Tok affordances became relatively appealing due to its two types of content feeds. One section shows the video accounts of celebrities, friends, and creators they follow. The other section, known notoriously as the "For You" section that not only featured videos from content creators, no matter how much followers they have or not, but it indorsed most viewed, most liked, or most commented on videos. (Sainsbury, C. 2021) The goal of the content creator is to impart a 'vibe' or 'mood' to the audience that signals the seriousness or lack thereof in the content. The primary structure of the platform

is heavily dependent on video- blogging or 'vlog-ing', in which the user facing the smartphone impose their act. Tik Tok is the only platform that has exceeded in utilizing the user's interface front camera. (Guinaudeau, B., Munger, K., & Votta, 2020) In hindsight, users formed a relationship not only with an artefact but with the mindset of staying relevant on the app. Oudshoorn and Pinch would argue when it comes to technology, there is more than one way of utilizing it. The issue is that technology and users are viewed as two separate entities of research whereas they should be viewed as two sides of the same issue for the social construct of technology. (Oudshoorn, N. Pinch, T 2003). Without producers, technology does not exist, without users technology does not advance and without technology society does not exist. It is clear, that there is a correlation between the growth and development of technology as it relates to users' functionality and interpretation of technologies.

The Algorithmic Perspective

The algorithm recommendation of Tik Tok can draw from the entirety of users on the platform from accounts that have liked, shared, commented, created, or followed a post. The content feed ultimately is what distinguishes Tik Tok from its competitors. In 2021, the *New York Times* wrote an article titled "How Tik Tok Reads Your Mind" detailing how Tik Tok's algorithm consists of four main goals to the user that makes the app so addictive. The goals consist of platform value, creator value, user value and long-term user value. Researchers have argued that the app is designed to collect data information from each video viewed and direct users to content of their interests. Thus, allowing hours and hours of time spent on the app, in hindsight, this makes the app dangerously addictive. The algorithm is more central to the experience of the user, hence more contingent on following behavior. Sorting pieces of the content to determine what will be shown to the user. (Guinaudeau, B., Munger, K., & Votta, 2020) It is evident, that structural affordance was the driving force in amplifying social acts on Tik Tok. Although Boyd would argue that affordances does not determine societal practices, however they can affect social life assumptions. (Boyd 2010).

This discussion also highlights the role of users in the advancement of technology. Ways in which technology is consumed, modified, designed, and reconfigured. Ultimately, what users are doing with technology. The social construct of technology better known as the SCOT approach was consisted of users in a social group that played a major role in constructing the use of technology. Various groups would construct as researchers noted, radically dissimilar meanings of technologies. (Oudshoorn, N. Pinch, T 2003). Take for example this small case study on Tik Tok and user content, based on interests. This study concentrates on popular music challenges on Tik Tok. In particularly sound and audio memes, and how it is communicated through different communities. Verdu referenced a study consisting of 150 music challenges with the hashtag #musicchallenge only in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese. This research was particularly for users that engaged in

the challenge not commentaries. The study displayed four different findings through music affiliation. (Verdú- Abidin 2021) First, it found that users united from musical preferences through common interests and audio memes. Users with similar interests in the music from the 1960's and Generation Z. Second, users expressed emotions from a specific genre by storytelling. Users united more from a cultural standpoint. Third, music affiliations were essential to culture, by generation or musical genre. This was directed towards generational years and musical tastes. Lastly, analyzed that some patterns on Tik Tok are used more commonly than others. For example, the app limits transitions to just one straight take. (Verdú- Abidin 2021) This method would be described as 'interpretative flexibility' which distinguishes the SCOT approach from every other social constructivist methodology in the account of technology. (Kline, R. Pinch, T. 1996)

The Futuristic Perspective

Will business practices in the music industry change? As technology develops so will the music industry. Streaming services will probably remain at the forefront of the industry as the primary method of music consumption. However, such feature will continually be expanded upon. Even on the technical side of the industry, the very art of creating the sound, tempo, beat, is much simpler. Audio tunes now more than ever have been critical in the development of new music, giving listeners a better 'sound' experience. Tik Tok now has a new mode of storytelling through audio memes, which music threads are produced through duets and reactions. Verdu's case study also described a 'musical peer group' that produces a plethora of music mixes such as urban tribes, experiences, and emotions through song- mixing that lasts only a few seconds. As well as a new feature that gives users a unique experience in the instrumental portion of the technology in which users showcase their skills and talent video music video. (Verdú- Abidin 2021) Oudshoorn and Pinch would question, the future of Tik Tok as well as the next new technology that would arise on the social media platform. How are designers thinking of users? Who represents these users and how? Are users' part of a new social movement? (Oudshoorn, N. Pinch, T 2003). What do we foresee for the future of music, technology, and social media?

The idea of virtuality would become more prevalent in the music industry. Virtual concerts would continue to be incorporated with the music industry and on social media platforms for consumer experiences. Nothing compares to live concerts; however, this would be a great strategy for marketing artists and their popularity. Recently, we have seen a rise in music artists like Lil Nas recognizing non fungible tokens (NFT). The token represents proof of ownership, as it relates to the music industry one example would be ownership of albums. Researchers believe the NFT industry's potential is limitless. Unique music collection concerts, access and comparable things can apply as NFT's. The beauty with these tokens is that ownership does not involve a third party. It is the consumer and their possession. (Varvara. Andreeva 2021) For example, purchasing a vinyl record at the store it nothing compared to buying an album directly from the artist. NFT's allows for a

win-win situation for all, artists, and consumers. The music industry will continue to advance and evolve with the growth of technology. Technology will continue to progress and develop into new and exciting systems.

Conclusion

From the time Tik Tok entered the United States until now it, the music industry exploded! There is no question, it altered the very essence of music via artists, record labels, videos, consumers, and the business portion of the music industry. From this paper, we have learned what Tik Tok is, how it functions and how it emerged as a leading social media platform in 2020. From a historical perspective we analyzed the way Tik Tok strategically mastered an algorithm unlike we have ever seen before. Evidently, the algorithm is unmatched, so far it has not been duplicated and arduous to replicate. The many artists that have been able to capitalize from this technology continues to rise. From a musical perspective we have learned a great of artist and numerous individuals that have benefited because of Tik Tok. As well as rediscovering older music, and users being able to listen to various genres. Theoretically, users and creators' content have increased because of the algorithm and its virality. We now have a better understanding of the relationship amidst the user and technology. One cannot separate the concept of user and technology but rather link them together for data, research, and the like. From a futuristic perspective, it will be interesting to observe what will transpires because of 'sound' and the influence of NFT's in the industry. How will music be purchased and is there still more room for artists to acquire more income? Will record labels and producers restructure their business model as technology advances? Looking beyond the music, we know for certain technology will continue to develop and reshape society.

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