

An Analysis of Effective Social Media Use by Music Artists in the Digital Age

by

Paul Howard

Submitted to the Department of Arts Management

School of Humanities

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College

State University of New York

December 2021

Sponsor: Professor Maria Guralnik

Second Reader: Professor Janis Astor Del Valle

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
The Industry Model Prior to Digitization.....	3
Impact of Digitization on Industry Model.....	5
Impact of Digitization on Artist Revenues.....	7
Introduction of Social Media Platforms for Artists.....	10
Analysis of Major Artist.....	15
Analysis of Intermediate Artist.....	17
Analysis of Small Artist.....	19
Conclusions.....	21
Works Cited.....	25
Addendum.....	28

Introduction

The introduction and expansion of digital technology at the onset of the twenty-first century has allowed for nearly anyone to create and release their own music to the public. New technologies promised unique and exciting opportunities to artists who were able to use the new tools to their advantage. When used properly, the new platforms allowed artists an unprecedented opportunity to achieve levels of fame and success that had never been seen before. Low costs of entry, ease of use, and the ability to cultivate relationships with potentially millions of existing and new fans and professional peers generated an influx of traffic to social media sites that would become the central hub of artist promotion and growth in the 21st century.

The rapid shift to digital technology that occurred in the early twenty-first century caused the prior industry model for music to effectively flip on its head. Revenue from physical sales of recorded music plummeted as a result of new file sharing services, leaving artists guessing as to how they would make a living from digitally distributed streams and downloads. Streaming services replaced record stores, becoming the new home of recorded music sales, and per unit royalties to artists from digitized streams through major services such as Spotify represented a fraction of the amount artists formerly collected from the sale of physical format recording including long playing records (LPs or Vinyl recordings) or compact discs (CDs). Meanwhile, the ease of market entry for anyone with a portable recording device led to an explosion of supply of those aspiring to succeed in music.

The need to boost ticket sales for events and recording streams has placed increased pressure on performers and producers to build a large and dedicated fan base. While formerly, industry gatekeepers such as labels, managers and publicists were responsible for ensuring

visibility of artists through traditional print and broadcast media, today, artists ability to build a large and engaged following of fans and professionals is essential for success.

This paper aims to detail a list of effective social media strategies for aspiring music artists and managers seeking to expand and increase engagement and support from existing and potential audiences. An analysis of the use of social media by music artists at different career stages will be used to locate effective strategies for advancing a diverse range of marketing goals.

The Music Industry Business Model Prior to Digitization

Preceding the digital era, musical artists who attracted the support of industry influencers (labels, managers) enjoyed a simpler and more consistent path to financial success. According to industry expert/author Seth Godin, there were certain advantages for artists that existed in this time, such as having “entire chains of retailers devoted to selling your product. In malls they’re paying the rent, not you. Sure they’re extracting shelf space allowances from you, but isn’t that really cool? Whole stores you don’t even have to own, devoted to promoting what you sell” (Godin 2008). The goal for recording artists in the pre-digital age was to find room for their physical products on the limited shelf space that already existed. Physical sales of recordings peaked in 2000, with 2.455 billion CDs being sold worldwide (Lynskey 2015). With the demand for physical recordings being at an all time high, artists were more easily able to find shelf space in retail locations if they could prove their product would sell. This was by no means an easy

task for them, but knowing that these retailers only job was to sell the exact product that they were creating provided a sense of stability for artists.

In addition to the retail spaces that existed prior to the digital age, there were also fewer but more widely known spaces where the general public could listen to recorded music. When people got in their cars they would listen to whatever the local radio station was playing, whether they knew the songs or not. Sometimes they would find music that they loved and this would lead to the creation of a new fan, and other times the song would end and that was that. This platform offered an incredible amount of potential success for artists who were able to get their music played on the radio or television both mediums which facilitated broadcasting to mass audiences who tuned in and trusted the authorities behind the programming to cater to their tastes. The relationship between artists and radio stations was mutually beneficial in the same way as retail stores. The radio stations needed songs to fill their airtime, and the music artists needed airtime to play their songs. This was yet another solidified goal for any artists who were looking to make a living in the pre-digital age music industry.

If artists were successful at getting their music played on the radio and showed potential with their record sales, they stood a chance at being noticed by major record labels. It took a large sum of money to record, produce, and distribute projects in this era, and the majority of artists were not able to pay the bills themselves. Record labels were essentially the backbone of the music industry, and in many cases, provided the capital needed to fund exorbitant costs associated with producing, promotion and distribution. Labels hired employees known as Artists and Repertoire (A&R) representatives to scout for promising talent in the industry. A&R representatives spent a lot of their time paying attention to radio stations and record sales. Once an artist was discovered and signed by a major label, there was no expectation for them to

distribute or promote their work to the public except as directed by label managers or publicists. Rather, artists were expected to produce new work and show up for the occasional press briefing or broadcast or print interview

Impact of Digitization on Industry Model

The introduction of the Internet changed the makeup of the music industry revolutionized the methods used by artists to record, perform and earn a living from their music. The digital age offered a new and exciting opportunity for hopeful music artists who might not have prospered in the older system which depended on control by a few industry “gate keepers” to advance the careers of a few supported by mass audiences. As a result of the cost of entry to the music industry dropping, the numbers of music artists who are producing and distributing their own music have increased exponentially.

In the early 2000s users were able to use the Internet to download and stream music files, primarily through programs such as Napster and iTunes. Napster was a file sharing service released to the public in 1999 that quickly began to be exploited by music fans, as they could use it to download music for free. Free music was an unfamiliar commodity at the time, and this rapid change in cost did not go unnoticed by the industry. Legal action was taken against Napster by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) leading to the program’s end in 2001. Despite only operating for two years, the program showed just how high the demand for digital streaming was, peaking at 21.4 Million active users before it was shut down (Brewster 2021). Another program called iTunes was released by Apple in 2001, which charged only ninety-nine cents per song and allowed for users to burn CDs from their library for free.

A new offering that tipped the scales in favor of digital sales was the ability to burn CDs at home via iTunes. Fans no longer were required to wander their local record shops in order to find copies of their favorite artists' new music. They could now purchase the album on their own computer using iTunes and burn it onto their own CD. If they were interested, they could even create a custom mix of songs from different artists and burn all of them onto the same CD for free. This new freedom meant that music fans were no longer limited to the selection of music carried by their local record stores. They could purchase any music that was uploaded to iTunes from anywhere around the globe and own a physical copy of it.

The impact of digital music sales on the number of physical recordings sold annually can be followed very closely throughout the beginning of the twenty-first century. CD sales peaked in 2001, with a total of 942.5 Million CD sales in the United States. Following the introduction of digital streaming services such as iTunes these sales trended negatively, resulting in only 31.6 Million copies being sold in the United States in 2020 [See **Figure 1**].

As time progressed and digital sales continued to become the center of recorded music, new platforms called streaming services gained popularity among fans of the music industry. Streaming services offer users a monthly subscription that allows them unlimited access to any music on the platform for as long as their subscription is active. In addition to listening to individual albums and songs, these platforms are often used by music fans to create playlists that they can share with friends. While there are many streaming services available to the public today, the most dominant platform is Spotify, followed by the likes of Apple Music (a derivative of iTunes), and Amazon Music (Dredge 2021).

Many of these streaming services also feature “curated playlists”, which are playlists run by the platforms themselves that are updated on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. These playlists

tend to be very popular amongst subscribers, so many artists hope to have their newest works featured on them in hopes of being discovered by new fans (Tunecore). Spotify hosts a number of playlists that cater to each individual subscriber's tastes, providing a unique mix of music each time they listen. One such playlist "Your Daily Drive" even features short news updates that are meant to keep listeners up to date with current events while enjoying a personalized collection of music (Moscaritolo 2019). The curated playlists offered by streaming services serve a very similar function for subscribers to what radio stations offered listeners in the late twentieth century.

A major change was introduced to the music industry with the rise of streaming services, as artists had the ability to upload their own music to these platforms for an incredibly low cost. The only service that artists must pay for to get their music on streaming services is that of a Digital Service Provider (DSP). There are many DSPs available for artists to use, and they charge different amounts for their services. Some DSPs allow for artists to distribute their music to streaming services for free in exchange for a percentage of the royalties (generally about 15% of the cut), while others charge a flat rate per song or album and do not collect any percentage of the royalties (Banton 2020). No matter which DSP artists choose to distribute their music to streaming services, the cost of these services is a fraction of what artists had to spend to release music prior to the digital age. This reduction in cost has led to many more artists recording and releasing music on streaming services such as Spotify.

Impacts of Digitization on Artist Revenues

The difference in cost between early digital services such as iTunes and the physical CDs that had led the industry in sales just one year prior to iTunes' release as well as unprecedented convenience in purchasing/owning recordings caused a major decrease in the amount of revenue recording artists earned from their projects. Prior to the new digital music platforms, music fans were required to pay an average of \$16.98 to own a CD of their favorite album, while iTunes charged an average of \$9.99 per album. According to a 1995 New York Times article, "When a CD is sold, 35 percent of the retail price goes to the store, 27 percent to the record company, 16 percent to the artist, 13 percent to the manufacturer and 9 percent to the distributor" (Strauss 1995). At this rate, artists were making roughly \$2.72 per CD sale, which is nearly three times the total cost of a song on the new iTunes platform. Financial expert Paul Tracy reported that for every album sale on iTunes (\$9.99), artists would take home only around 94 cents (less than 10%) after the record label and Apple take their cut (Tracy 2021). With fans being incentivized by cost and convenience to purchase digital music rather than physical recordings, recording artists were beginning to see profits drop.

This drop in profits from recorded music became even more apparent to recording artists after streaming services took the place of early digital music platforms such as iTunes. As of the Fall of 2021, Spotify, the leading music streaming service with close to 400 million monthly subscribers worldwide, serves more than eight million artist accounts who create music across all genres including Hip-Hop/R&B, Pop, Rock, Jazz, Electronic Dance Music, Folk and Classical. These artists collectively release roughly 22 million tracks a year. Of these 8 million artists, only 57,000 (.7%) are responsible for nearly 90% of all streams on the platform. This means that

almost 8 million artists or more than 99% share the profits from the 10% of Spotify streams that remain.

For the majority of artists on the platform, the goal is to make a living by creating and releasing their projects to the public. According to an article published by the New York Times in 2021, Spotify is “nowhere close to its stated mission of ‘giving a million creative artists the opportunity to live off their art’” (Sisario, 2021). “Loud & Clear” (a website created by Spotify), states that 13,400 artists made \$50k or more from streams in 2020. This only makes up one quarter of the less than 1% of artists who benefit from 90% of the streams on the platform. Therefore, only the top .002% of all artists on the platform make more than the average household in the United States. According to Ben Sisario of the New York Times, 184,080 artists earned more than \$1,000 in 2020 from Spotify, with the other 7,815,920 falling far below the \$1,000 earnings mark (Sisario, 2021). Considering the fact that only a select few of the most successful artists on the platform can make a living from streaming royalties, an immense amount of competitive pressure is placed on aspiring artists to build their fan bases in order to increase their stream counts and earn themselves a spot in the .002% of recording artists or depend on other means for monetizing their creative work.

The recent impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic further affirmed recording and streaming based work as an inadequate source of revenue for the majority of artists in the music industry. The 2019 International Federation of the Phonographic Industry’s (IFPI) Global Music Report showed that recorded music sales (including digital and physical mediums) only made up roughly half of the industry’s income, with the rest being sourced from live music. In the Spring of 2020, music artists across the industry were forced to rely on digital sales and streaming to make a living when live performances ceased due to COVID-19. This sudden dependence on

income from streaming live events as well as recordings proved that artists who were not among the top .002% of artists on streaming services such as Spotify would be unable to survive on streams alone. Nadine Shah -- a British Singer/Songwriter -- shared with Ben Sisario of the New York Times that without the income from live shows, she was forced to move back in with her parents at 34 years old (Sisario, 2021). Without contributions from other sources of revenue such as live performances and merchandise sales, a large majority of artists in the music industry would not be able to make a living in such a competitive market.

As a result of the increasing competition on streaming platforms such as Spotify and the recent pressure to make a living through recorded music, music artists are increasingly dependent on making effective use of innovative tools that provide options for growing the size and increasing support from their fans. If artists are successful in increasing the size of their audience, they are more likely to be noticed by the curators of major playlists on streaming services such as Spotify (Gatekeepers), which can have a major impact not only on their monthly revenue, but their careers as a whole. Folk musician Paul Johnson claims that his music was averaging a few thousand streams per day before his song “Firework” was added to a Spotify playlist, where it jumped to 20,000 streams per day, eventually growing to around 200,000 per day after a year of additional playlist support (Danton 2019).

While in some rare success stories music artists become overnight sensations more or less by luck, the odds of this happening are so low that hopeful artists cannot rely on this occurring for them. Strategic use of social media tools to connect with and galvanize potential fans as well as industry influencers who can extend their value and reach offers a viable chance at making a living through recorded music.

Introduction/Explanation of Social Media Platforms for Artists

Quickly following the mass popularity of the Internet in the early 21st century was the introduction of Social Media websites, which in their earliest form were forum based platforms where internet users could connect with each other. The first of these platforms to gain popularity was MySpace, which featured customizable profiles for users who would connect with others and discuss common interests such as music and art. MySpace was the fifth most trafficked website on the Internet in 2005, peaking at 25 Million active users that year (Samur). Shortly following this success however the platform began to decline in popularity due to poor business moves as a result of the site's ownership changing.

Within the same year that MySpace reached 25 Million active users, the latest social media to be introduced at the time "Facebook" had its 1 millionth account created. Facebook was very similar to MySpace in that it allowed users to create public profiles and connect with each other to share photos, videos, articles, and music. This platform was quick to become the most popular social media, and by 2019 they claimed to have 2.45 Billion active users (Ulch).

Twitter was the next social media platform to gain popularity, featuring a more simplistic approach to connectivity as users were given only 140 characters to share their current thoughts with followers. Users of the platform were originally unable to share any types of media content, but in recent years this was changed, and users are now able to share photos, videos, and links to webpages. As of 2019 Twitter claims to have more than 300 Million active users, making it the smallest of all major platforms (Ulch).

Instagram was introduced to the internet in 2010, and took a very unique approach to social media compared to platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. For the first few years of its

use users were only able to post photos for followers to view, without having the option to include captions on posts or comment on other's posts. Similar to Twitter, Instagram has made many changes to its functionality -- now allowing users to share photos and videos with captions, comment on other user's posts, direct message with other users, and even post pictures and videos to "Stories" (Posts that disappear after 24 hours). According to Jancy Ulch, Instagram had 500 million users at the end of 2019 (Ulch).

As of the writing of this research, TikTok is the newest social media platform that has become massively popular with younger music fans and artists. . Officially released in 2018, the platform allows for users to record and post videos of themselves lip-syncing, dancing, and reacting to "Sounds" (Music, Movie/TV scenes, and user-created sounds). These videos have evolved over time, and now many users forgo the sounds feature altogether and simply post videos of them singing or playing instruments, as well as skit-type content. Though being released in 2018, TikTok has achieved massive success on the internet, surpassing 1 billion users in 2021 (Smith).

Social Media Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok allow for more direct communication between artists and their fans. Due to the mass popularity of these platforms for communication and marketing and an expectation of authenticity, there are now more artists than ever before who are actively and directly engaging with their core and potential fans online. Music fans on social media platforms look forward to interacting more directly with their favorite artists and building genuine and intimate bonds with them. If artists are not successful at satisfying this need for direct interaction with fans, they may lose them to other artists who are more interactive with their audience. With this immense amount of competition for attention on the platform, artists are always looking for creative new ways to reach untapped

audiences. These new tactics and even the underlying tools are evolving rapidly, and often change so fast that trends often lose popularity within days or even hours due to overuse.

This constant change has resulted in artists being required to put the same amount of time --if not more-- into studying trends in the market and developing their brand as they do bettering their actual music and creating songs and projects that potential fans would be interested in listening to. According to *The Death of the Artist* by William Deresiewicz, “There’s no such thing anymore as secluding yourself in your study or studio. You have to stay in constant contact with the market. It’s not enough to practice your craft every day, you also need to practice ‘Networking, bookkeeping, and watching trends’” (Deresiewicz, 2020).

In addition to focusing on strengthening their relationship with fans, artists also rely on social media as a tool to build their professional network including artist peers as well as managers, producers and media professionals who can offer or facilitate career opportunities. The size and quality of an artist’s network has a major impact on their social capital, which was defined by researcher Tristan Claridge as “the aspects of social context that have productive benefits” (Claridge). Artists can use the relationships they form with other artists to promote each other and build their followings. A common example of social capital benefitting music artists takes place in live performances. When artists are planning concerts they look for smaller artists that share their music style to “open” their shows, or play before the headline set. This can be a wonderful opportunity for aspiring artists to introduce new audiences to their work, and very often results in new artist-fan relationships being developed. Collaborations are another common result of artists building their network with peers. Many artists will work together on songs and albums and “feature” each other on their work. This is a great way for artists to not only create high quality music, but also expose their sound to fans of other artists.

Social capital also plays a role in an artist's ability to be recognized and approached by record labels. Artists who are able to build their social capital effectively may be afforded opportunities that aren't available to those with smaller networks, as one of the criteria considered by record labels is industry influence. When labels are searching for new talent to sign they are more likely to seek out artists who will bring positive attention to the label. One of the best ways that artists can prove to prospective labels that they are able to create positive relationships with potential audiences, is to have an established network of successful peers. In many cases it is not enough for an artist to have good music if they have not developed their social capital to a level that would benefit the record label. Every relationship that an artist is able to foster with their peers increases their chances of being sought out by establishments that will help them to grow their following.

Though social media platforms have provided music artists with many tools to expand their outreach to new audiences, they have also increased the amount of work required to remain connected with fans. Many aspiring artists are unsuccessful in their efforts to make a living off of their music because they are unable to meet these demands. In order for artists to capture the attention of potential audiences and build relationships with them, they are required to be constantly active on social media platforms. Sharing new and unique content, interacting with peers, and connecting with their followers -- all while writing and recording quality music and performing it is a nearly impossible task. While many artists are unable to manage all of these responsibilities, there are a few examples of artists successfully using all of the tools at their disposal to build their audience and make a living in the music industry. The social media strategies of three music artists at different stages of their career will be examined in the

following case studies to determine the most effective use of social media based on available resources and goals.

Analysis of Major Artist

Tai Verdes

Tai Verdes is a 26 year old California-based Singer/Songwriter who has amassed an enormous fan base, boasting close to 3 Million followers across his social media platforms. After dropping out of college to pursue music as a full time job five years ago, Tai Verdes released his hit “Stuck in the Middle” which has amassed a total of 88 Million streams on Spotify alone. He continued on to release several singles following “Stuck in the Middle”, with “A-O-K” reaching a whopping 148 million streams on Spotify to date. The strategies used by Tai Verdes on the social media platform “TikTok” to grow his following from ground level to massive heights should be paid attention to by aspiring artists.

TikTok is the platform that Tai Verdes first achieved success on, and remains to have the largest following of all his social media. Tai capitalized on the music-friendly environment of the platform by posting a video of him singing the then unreleased “Stuck in the Middle” in his car with the caption “If this video gets 1,000 likes I’ll release the song tomorrow”. This inspired his already invested fans to share the video with their friends, which helped to boost the video in TikTok’s “potent” algorithm. In an interview with BBC, Tai stated that within just a few hours of posting the video achieved more than 80,000 likes (Savage 2021). Capitalizing on the momentary attention he was receiving, Tai released the catchy and relatable track to all streaming

platforms, which went on to reach the #1 spot on Spotify's U.S. Viral Charts. He continued to update his TikTok fans on his post-release journey by posting videos discussing his album-art decisions, revealing plans for an upcoming music video, and teasers to new songs. Involving his fans in the entire process allowed for them to feel personally involved in his music, which helped to inspire them to follow his journey to stardom.

Over the course of TikTok's reign of popularity among the masses, there have been many music artists who achieved momentary success. They would have one video promoted by the algorithm that receives hundreds of thousands or even millions of likes, but their other videos would fall flat upon posting. Tai Verdes was asked by Mark Savage of BBC how he managed to avoid this "one hit wonder wall", to which he responded "Something I've realised is that every artist's new song starts with zero views. Billie Eilish's new song started at zero. Tyler, The Creator starts at zero, and my songs start at zero. So in terms of streaming, you have to make sure people notice. That's why I picked Drugs as my second single - because I thought that lyric, "*Sometimes I do drugs, but not the hard ones,*" would catch people's attention" (Savage 2021).

Tai's strategy of using attention grabbing titles to keep fans wondering what would come next played a major role in his ability to capitalize on his moment in the spotlight. This highlights a major difference between the typical downfall of music artists on TikTok and what Tai Verdes managed to accomplish. When most artists have a video or song that blows up on TikTok they attempt to create duplicates of the content that first got them attention, but in the fast paced environment that TikTok hosts, creating new and exciting content is what will help artists to stay relevant.

Analysis of Intermediate Artist

Lawrence the Band

Lawrence the Band is an eight-piece band based in New York City. Siblings Clyde and Gracie Lawrence are the figureheads of the soul-pop group that released their first LP *Breakfast* in 2016. This first project went on to achieve praise from a variety of well respected sources, including NPR's radio magazine "All Things Considered". After touring *Breakfast* around the world, Lawrence returned to the studio where they created and released their second LP *Living Room* in September of 2018. *Living Room* quickly achieved success upon its release, reaching #2 on the iTunes R&B/Soul chart, as well as being placed on Spotify's "New Music Friday" playlist. Shortly following the release of their second project Lawrence the Band became the first group to sign with Beautiful Mind Records, the label of Grammy award winning producer/songwriter/artist Jon Bellion. In the period following the release of *Living Room*, the band toured the world once again as the opening act for Bellion's "Glory Sound Prep" tour, an opportunity which allowed them to spread their name and increase attention to their social media pages. In the fall of 2021, Lawrence the Band continued to release their third studio album *Hotel TV*, and began their headline tour for the album shortly thereafter (Lawrence). Throughout their career as recording artists, Lawrence the Band have placed an emphasis on building their relationship with fans, often by interacting with fans one-on-one after shows, taking pictures, and directing new fans to their social media pages in order to stay in touch.

Lawrence the Band have proven their ability to satisfy and retain their fans through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter. One way in which the group utilizes these platforms is offering opportunities for collaboration to their fans. This primarily takes place on TikTok, as Lawrence have posted videos of band members playing and/or singing parts of

their songs and inviting followers to “stitch” (a feature on TikTok that places videos side by side) videos of them harmonizing with the band members. They have also posted behind-the-scenes videos of their writing process on TikTok, and invited fans to come up with their own ideas to add to the work in progress. While they haven’t added any of these ideas to the final recordings of songs, they do feature their favorites on their social media pages. This is a great way to incentivize fans and aspiring artists to interact with their posts and build hype for upcoming projects while also making fans feel involved and appreciated.

Another way that Lawrence the Band has excelled on social media is their ability to convert their fanbase into a community through several techniques and annual events. The first technique that Lawrence uses is telling fans to share their concert pictures to Twitter with hashtags that are specific to the city in which the concert took place. This allows for people to scroll through hashtags from their city to find other fans in their area, and in some cases they may befriend these people and even attend future shows with them. The band also has utilized popular forum-based social media such as Reddit to create a space for fans to chat with each other and share their love for Lawrence. The most effective technique that Lawrence the Band uses to build and support a community for their fans is their annual Secret Santa that they host on Twitter. They provide fans with a form to fill out that entails their name and address, and after promoting it for a few weeks they randomize the list and each fan is given a random person to send a Lawrence related gift. These gifts can range from merchandise to handmade art, and in addition to the hidden benefit of boosting the bands’ merch sales, they also allow for fans to connect with each other in a very intimate way. By using these techniques year round, Lawrence the Band is able to help their fans to connect not only with the band, but with their peers as well.

Analysis of Small Artist

Raffaella

Raffaella is a Brooklyn-based Alternative music artist in the early stages of her career. She released her first song “Sorocide” in October of 2017. The song featured high production quality and a catchy melody that repeats throughout the course of the song. Raffaella quickly focused her efforts on social media to promote the release of the song to her followers on Instagram and Facebook, and at the same time created a Twitter account to increase her outreach. Shortly following the release of “Sorocide” she signed to indie record label “Mom + Pop Records”, with whom she has released all of her following projects. In the 4 years since the beginning of her career Raffaella has built a following of close to 61,000 across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. She has also placed an emphasis on using touring to expose her music to as many audiences as possible, directing new fans to follow her social media platforms to stay up to date.

Instagram is Raffaella’s second most popular social media page with 13.2k followers, following Facebook which has 44,000 followers. She has utilized both of these platforms in a similar manner, posting pictures that primarily consist of artwork for upcoming projects as well as pictures of herself creating music. She captions these posts with information regarding upcoming shows and music releases on a regular basis (3-4 posts per week on average). Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Raffaella was using the combination of her constant stream of live performances and social media posts to build her following quite successfully. As a result of the pandemic however, she was forced to put a pause on all live shows and focus 100% of her attention on connecting with fans through social media. She began posting videos of her performing covers of popular music, as well as acoustic versions of her originals. Consistently

posting these types of content in addition to her already established photo regiment has helped her stay closely connected with her already established fanbase.

Raffaella has also used Facebook and Instagram to host several virtual concerts in an effort to make up for the lack of in-person shows. She allowed fans to “enter” and view these concerts for free, and often collaborated with other music artists in the space to create a lineup of performances. While these virtual shows limited attendees mostly to her already established fanbase, the fans of other artists in these performances were directed to follow all of the performers in the lineup. This strategy was very helpful for Raffaella in a time where she was unable to perform to new crowds in person. Towards the end of 2021, she was finally able to perform live in a few shows, opening for more popular artists *Hippo Campus*, *Kacy Hill* and *Gully Boys*. After these live performances she looked to return to her previously successful live performances in smaller venues around NYC, but these plans once again were shut down by a spike in the COVID-19 Pandemic. It should be noted that while Raffaella has managed to stay connected with her established fanbase during a time without live performances, it has been incredibly difficult for her to interact with new audiences through social media alone.

Conclusions:

The music industry is an ever-evolving environment with new tools constantly increasing the potential level of success for aspiring artists. With the requirements for entry being lowered by advancements in technology in the 21st century, the number of creators using streaming services and social media to release and promote their music has been increasing exponentially. This exponential increase in aspiring creators has been outpacing the number of openings for success available to artists, making it imperative for those who hope to make a living off of their music to effectively utilize all of the tools at their disposal. When considering the strategies demonstrated by the three artists who were evaluated in the case studies, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1. Content:** Creation and Release of content on social media platforms is the most important need for artists to satisfy in order to retain fans. The subject matter of content that is most successful varies by fanbase and genre, meaning it may take time to find the right mix. For example, artists who release music composed of heavily-produced instruments and vocals might find that acoustic versions of their most popular songs attract audiences who are uninterested in more complex instrumentations. In other cases this may not be effective, and they may find that videos focusing on their creation process are more successful. In Tai Verdes' case, posting acoustic versions of his upcoming songs caught the attention of many TikTok users and introduced them to his unique sound. While there is no exact formula to creating content, there should always be an importance placed on remaining original and unique in order to stand out from other artists.

- 2. Consistency:** Content should be released in a consistent manner in order to keep fans interested. In the case of content such as cover videos, photos, and general status updates, artists should aim to follow a consistent schedule of releases. This allows for fans to know when to expect new content, and also fosters an environment for excitement to build between fans. Artists should be as transparent as possible with their fans as to when they will be releasing new content, and what can be expected. Keeping fans up to date removes the barrier placed between creators and their audiences, which allows for deeper connections to form. Though artists should always aim to release the highest quality content they can, focusing on quantity over quality can be effective at keeping a fan base satisfied in the fast-paced environment that is social media.

- 3. Collaboration:** In an effort to reach new audiences and build their social capital, artists should make an effort to create content with other artists. Collaborating with artists that share a similar music style would be most effective, as the fans of both artists may be inspired to listen to the work of collaborators. *Raffaella* demonstrated a great use of collaboration by hosting live concerts with other artists on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a strategy that should be utilized by artists of all sizes who are looking to reach new audiences, especially those who are still at the beginning of their career. In addition to expanding their fan base, collaboration also helps artists to form relationships with their peers that can be utilized to access new opportunities for growth.

4. Response: Upon releasing new content, artists should pay attention to the feedback given by their audience. This feedback plays a crucial role in helping creators to find which content types are enjoyed most by their fans. Artists may find that releasing acoustic covers is very successful, but after time fans may begin expressing interest in new subject matter. Noticing these suggestions from fans can help artists not only to satisfy their current audience, but also to reach new audiences. Responding directly to feedback from fans can also make them feel seen and involved in the creation process of an artist, which helps strengthen bonds tremendously.

5. Interaction: The final area that artists should focus their efforts on when using social media is interacting with their fans. These interactions can vary in scale, from simply liking/responding to comments to hosting question and answer sessions (Q&A's) that connect the artist to their fans. Social media platforms offer many tools that make this easier for artists, including a polling feature on Twitter and a Q&A feature on Instagram. A perfect example of interaction between fans and artists is *Lawrence the Band's* Secret Santa. Fans have the opportunity to send or receive gifts from their favorite artists or peers. This strategy creates a fun and welcoming environment for fans to enter, and has been very effective for artists who successfully implemented it on social media.

As the relationship between the music industry and social media continues to evolve over the course of the 21st century, music artists should pay attention to the new ways they can utilize

these tools to their advantage. Though the level of competition continues to increase with a lowering cost of entry, the potential for growth is constantly expanding as a result of rapid technological advancements. If aspiring artists (at any stage in their career) are able to find unique ways to cultivate relationships with potential audiences through social media, they will be able to make a living from recorded music.

It is recommended that aspiring artists and managers who are seeking to expand and increase engagement and support from existing and potential audiences through social media refer to the following supplementary sources:

- *The Death of the Artist: How Creators are Struggling to Survive in the Age of Billionaires and Big Tech* by William Deresiewicz
- *1,000 True Fans* by Kevin Kelly
- *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More* by Chris Anderson

Works Cited

- Anderson, Chris. *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More*. Hyperion, 2006
- Aydin Ozturk, Tugba. “Social Capital, Relations and Music World: Networks in New Media .” *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, Dec. 2018, pp. 91–103
- Banton, Joelle. “How To Upload Music To Spotify - The Complete Guide.” *Music Gateway*, 22 Aug. 2019
- “Bio — Lawrence the Band.” *Lawrence*, 2022
- Brandle, Lars. “U.S. Vinyl Album Sales Up by 53% in Q1.” *Billboard*, 17 Apr. 2015.
- Brewster, Will. “Musicology: The History of Music Streaming.” *Mixdownmag*, 18 Oct. 2017
- Claridge, Tristan. “Guide to Social Capital: The Concept, Theory, and Its Research.” *Social Capital Research*
- Danton, Eric. “Streaming Success? How Some Artists Are Building Their Careers Through Spotify Playlists.” *Fortune*
- Deresiewicz, William. *The Death of The Artist: How Creators Are Struggling to Survive in the Age of Billionaires and Big Tech*. First Edition, Henry Holt and Company, 2020
- Dredge, Scott. *How Many Users Do Spotify, Apple Music and Streaming Services Have?*
- Godin, Seth. *On the Future of the Music Business*, 2008
- Jacob, Ennica. *How Much Spotify Pays Per Stream and How to Earn More*. 24 Feb. 2021
- Hall, Stefan Brambilla. “This Is How COVID-19 Is Affecting the Music Industry.” *World Economic Forum*
- How COVID-19 Exposed Music Industry Fault Lines and What Can Be Done | UNCTAD.*

“How Many Artists Actually Make Bank on Spotify?” *IGroove | Push Your Music*, 3 Mar. 2021

“Intro to Burning CDs and DVDs in iTunes on PC.” *Apple Support*

Iqbal, Mansoor. “Spotify Revenue and Usage Statistics (2021).” *Business of Apps*, 20 Dec. 2018

Kelly, Kevin. “1,000 True Fans.” *The Technium*, 2008

Le, Amy. “Tai Verdes Is No Longer ‘Stuck in the Middle’ / Ones To Watch.” *Ones To Watch*, 2020

Leight, Elias. “TikTok Is a Lottery, and Tai Verdes Is Winning.” *Rolling Stone*, 23 July 2020

“Loud and Clear by Spotify.” *Loud and Clear*, 2020

Lynskey, Dorian. “How the Compact Disc Lost Its Shine.” *The Guardian*, 28 May 2015

Musicians and Singers : Occupational Outlook Handbook: : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Ovide, Shira. “Streaming Saved Music. Artists Hate It.” *The New York Times*, 22 Mar. 2021

Samur, Alexandra. “The History of Social Media: 29+ Key Moments.” *Social Media Marketing & Management Dashboard*, 22 Nov. 2018

Savage, Mark. “Meet Tai Verdes, the Rising Star Who Funded His Career by Winning a Dating Show.” *BBC News*, 2 July 2021

Seawood, Lauren Wirtzer. “What Instagram Discovered in Our First Nielsen Music Study.” *Cuepoint*, 11 Apr. 2016

Sisario, Ben. “Musicians Say Streaming Doesn’t Pay. Can the Industry Change?” *The New York Times*, 7 May 2021

Smith, Georgina. “The History of TikTok: From Musical.ly to the Number 1 App in the World.” *Dexerto*, 8 May 2021

“Social Media’s Critical Role in the Music Industry | Musician’s Institute.” *Musicians Institute Hollywood*, 14 Apr. 2021

Sparrow, Mark. “Sales Of Physical Music Media Slump As Consumers Move To Streaming Services.” *Forbes*, 2019

“Spotify Playlists 101.” *TuneCore*, 2021

“Spotify’s New ‘Your Daily Drive’ Playlist Is Like FM Radio.” *PCMAG*, 2019

Strauss, Neil. “Pennies That Add Up to \$16.98: Why CD’s Cost So Much.” *The New York Times*, 5 July 1995

Tracy, Paul. *How Much Does iTunes Pay Artists?* | *InvestingAnswers*, 2021
Twitter Verification Requirements - How to Get the Blue Check

Ulch, Jancy. “The 2010s: The Decade of Social Media.” *KPS3*, 31 Dec. 2019

“U.S. Sales Database.” *RIAA*, 2020

Verified Badges | *Instagram Help Center*, 2021

Whitefield, Janie. “Why Artists Should Be Invested in Their Social Media.” *Venture*, 2021

Addendum

Figure 1: CD Sales in the United States from 1990 to 2020 (RIAA)

U.S. Recorded Music Sales Volumes by Format

1990 to 2020, Format(s): CD

Source: RIAA

