Independent College

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LEARNER NUMBER	51738091
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COURSE	BAM
REPORT TITLE	How Social Media Supports Independent Musicians in Building Their Careers
SUPERVISOR NAME	Gareth Leech
WORD COUNT	6678
DUE DATE	12/05/2025
DATE SUBMITTED	12/05/2025

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How Social Media Supports Independent Musicians in Building Their Careers

Compiled by:

Quezia Israela da Silva Amorim

How Social Media Supports Independent Musicians in Building Their Careers

Applied Project presented to Independent College Dublin as a partial requirement for the bachelor's degree in marketing. Supervisor: Gareth Leech

This research could not have been possible without the support and guidance I received from my supervisor, Gareth Leech and my lecturer, Dr. Daniel O'Sullivan. I therefore want to thank both for this. I would also like to express my gratitude to independent musicians who kindly gave their time to be interviewed. Their contribution was important for this study. Lastly, I thank my family and friends for their constant support during the journey.

Abstract

This study presents an analysis of the influence of social media on the music industry, with a focus on how independent musicians use platforms such as Instagram and TikTok for self-promotion and audience engagement. To meet the research goals, we conducted both a literature review and a few qualitative interviews with five musicians. According to research findings, social media is essential for new music discovery, artist promotion, and musical trend formation. However, the study reveals dire obstacles that musicians face, predominantly those concerning algorithmic trends, unmanageable feelings, and poor financial compensation. Despite these challenges, musicians continue to alter their strategies to make them visible and relevant in the continuously changing digital music world.

Key Words: social media, music promotion, independent artists, algorithms, digital trends.

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Chapter I

1. Introduction

The last decade has witnessed social media changing the way that users consume, engage, and affiliate themselves with brands dramatically. As a result, there has been a critical transformation in how music reaches, is sold to, and is accessed by the audience. Currently, numerous independent musicians count on social platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to effectively promote their music and build their fan base and careers.

The evolution of digital platforms has created expectation for artists to deliver music while at the same time taking on roles as content creators, marketers and brand managers. Even though social platforms give artists incredible visibility, they also make them face algorithmic pressure, emotional pressure and issues with monetization. My research deals with the ways in which artists react to these challenges and rely on social media to stay current and improve professionally.

1.1. Background of Research

As a product of communication, creativity, and cultural production. The background of this research has inspired to explore how technology changes people's social interaction. It interesting to watch independent artists create their careers independently through social media platforms. With TikTok and Instagram, musicians now have an immediate path to communicate with audiences and leverage the mainstream music trends around the world, while such platforms historically served mainly for advertisement. This has motivated the interest in learning about how social media platforms are changing music sharing and listening, and what that change means for the future success of independent artists.

1.2. Rationale for the Study

Traditionally, the success in the music was traditionally equated with the mass broadcasting on radio, signing in with the record companies and the distribution of music in physical formats. However, social media has created other ways of gaining recognition that does not involve the usual industry influencers. Now that releasing music on their own is possible, artists now need to

balance algorithm-powered attention with the continuous work to continue engaging with their communities.

This study seeks to explore how independent artists are changing their ways of promoting music in a world of algorithmic preferences and constantly changing needs for content. It is intended to investigate the way social media affect artists – especially in the emotional, creative, and financial aspects of their careers.

The research question is:

"How are independent musicians using social media platforms to promote their work and build visibility in a highly competitive digital environment?"

1.3. Statement of the Research Objectives

To analyse the research problem effectively, the main question was broken down into sub-questions and organised into six key themes that guide the investigation and structure the triangulated analysis.

Themes:

1. The shift from traditional to digital promotion in the music industry
2. The impact of platform-specific features on musical visibility
3. The role of algorithms in shaping visibility and opportunities
4. Artistic pressure and adaptation to trends in digital platforms
5. Career benefits and community building through social media
6. Challenges and financial limitations in the digital music space

Sub-research questions:

1. How has social media changed the way independent musicians promote their music compared to traditional methods?
2. Which social platforms are most advantageous for independent musicians, and how do they affect how music is promoted?
3. Do social media algorithms support or restrict the visibility and growth of independent musicians?
4. How do social media trends influence musicians' creative decisions, and what compromises do artists make to stay visible?

5. What are the professional advantages that independent musicians gain from using social media?
6. What difficulties do independent musicians face in using social media for promotion and income generation?

1.4. Information Gathering and Data Collection

The study required an interpretivist approach, given how it was conducted. Both the methodology and the approach are qualitative and exploratory, utilizing a synthesis of literature analysis and semi-structured interviews with five self-promoting independent musicians who are active on social media. This method was selected to obtain a thorough understanding of how musicians negotiate the challenges and benefits of digital media. Through the interviews, participants were able to discuss both their obstacles and techniques for using social media in music promotion.

1.5. Expected Outcome

This research seeks to analyse systematically how social media influences the promotional strategies and career advancement of independent artists. The study investigates how musicians adapt digitally, manage how they are seen by audiences, and ensures artistic authenticity while operating within the constraints of algorithms. It is anticipated that this project will identify and examine the positive aspects as well as the obstacles facing musicians who use social media for promotion, particularly the pressures of continual engagement, the uncertain capabilities of digital monetization, and the increasing role of artists in producing and marketing their own content. The research is aimed at adding to our knowledge of how independent musicians can develop sustainable careers as the digital music ecosystem evolves.

Chapter II

2. Literature Review

The music industry has been transformed, along with all others, by the digital revolution. Independent artists have been compelled to adjust their strategies for promotion as well as encouragement of professional career to digital platforms. Social media has become a critical component of the processes of sharing, accessing, and monetizing from music. With the increasing dominance of TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube on digital connections, independent artists are forced to change all the time to become both recognizable and successful in an oversaturated digital world.

Technology has traditionally threatened established industries yet in music the measure of the artist now lies more in algorithm-based engagement, digital activity and the success of the short form material. Although technological developments are of great importance, the creative process is essentially human nature. Keeping up with consistency, visibility, and authenticity is getting more challenging for musicians as they work under the rules of a system that prizes algorithm-based, short-format content and influencer recommendations.

Independent artists must now have a wide range of skills, which are the combination of artistic creativity and branding, marketing and digital strategy. Major topics discussed in this study include digital promotion, new listeners outreach, algorithmic exposure, collaboration with influencers, fan engagement, and evaluation of positive and negative effects of social media on the careers of artists.

2.1.Social Media and the Changing Nature of Music Promotion

Music promotion is conducted nowadays very differently than a few years back. Zucker (2016) emphasizes that the shift away from traditional promotional strategies, including In line with Datta,

Knox, and Bronnenberg (2018), attention has shifted from the management of distribution and copyright to the algorithmic exposure of content on digital spaces. Currently, digital platforms are in the spotlight, which define the access and visibility of users by algorithms, streaming and social networks taking the leading position.

This change has resulted in the appearance of a new kind of independent artist who is a creator as well as a digital entrepreneur. The material must be adjusted to the distinctive styles and rhythms of social media, and it is necessary to define constant communication with the audience and use the platform strategies, while maintaining the authentic voices.

While new avenues are being created, musicians encounter new obstacles toward achieving them. Digital discovery provides a special emotional experience, but, however, it lasts only for a short period of time (Nowak 2016). These platforms encourage quick consumption, rather than deep engagement, from musicians, who are forced to adopt short content that captures listeners' interest in the quickest time possible, and without coming up with intricate musical ideas.

Borelli (2022) further underlines this trend emphasizing that musicians more and more alter song structure according to the platform requirements, trying to increase popularity of their songs. Such changes outline how social media goes beyond mere dissemination, and in its very essence, transforms the process of production, presentation, and distribution of music.

2.2. Social Media and Independent Music Careers

In the last decade, digital platforms have become the enablers of the establishment of new roads to the career of independent musicians. As the old gatekeepers of the media such as radio stations, record companies and agents have weakened, musicians have resorted to social media as a central tactic in getting exposure, culturing their fan base and taking their careers to higher levels.

Social media have become key venues for engaging fans and marketing music, beyond their earlier being regarded as outlets for content distribution. As Radovanović (2022) points out, social networks use user activity and data to decide on promotion, which places visibility in the hands of algorithmic behavior and not the artistic value of content. According to Zhang (2024), special features on platforms – such as TikTok's algorithm-determined "For You" page or Instagram's Reels – are an important aspect in determining who is visible and who is not on these platforms.

Consequently, independent musicians are to become savvy creators managing their music, branding, online identity, ways of engaging with fans. This is what Cesario (2015) mentions in

strategic human resource management — workforce actions and corporate culture that align with the organization's overarching goals. Similarly, artists should change their social media strategies to align with emerging needs in the social media that they use and the audiences that they want to address.

As Jorgenson (2022) explains, musicians now often create songs or clips designed for digital virality, adapting music production to platform structures rather than to traditional musical forms. In essence, social media is no longer just a promotional channel; it is part of the music-making process itself.

While visibility and reach are essential for career growth, artists must also navigate platform fatigue, algorithm pressure, and the need for constant adaptation. Just as companies are advised to view employees as long-term assets (Barnes & Adam, 2017), artists are now challenged to build sustainable careers in a space that often rewards short-term virality over long-term growth.

In conclusion, transforming a social media presence into a career-building strategy requires musicians to adopt a best-of-breed approach — selecting the right platforms, tools, and content types that align with their identity, goals, and audience.

2.3. Strategic Approaches to Music Promotion in Digital Platforms

Each social media platform provides unique tools and engagement mechanisms, which means there is no universal formula for success in music promotion. Like employee engagement strategies in HR, promotional strategies in music must be context-sensitive and tailored to each artist's audience, genre, and resources.

According to Wares et al. (2023), platforms like TikTok and Instagram influence not only how music is discovered, but also how it is structured, performed, and shared. In this sense, social media is both the stage and the audience. Cinjakov (2021) adds that influencer partnerships and audience trust are essential to drive exposure — much like how employee engagement is tied to trust and motivation in organizations.

As Armstrong and Stephen (2014) point out in the HR context, engagement is built through culture, motivation, and leadership. Translated to the music space, engagement comes from authenticity, consistent interaction, and emotional connection with the audience. Developing enduring audience

appreciation is mainly supported by artists' use of direct interactions, for example comments, live broadcasts, and customized content.

CIPD (2019) points out that successful engagement depends on linking strategies closely to company culture and aims. Much like this, musicians must plan their promotion in line with both their artistic self-image and their overarching career planning. Long-run achievement is best attained by shaping strategies on a deep grasp of audiences and by fostering sincere communication, more so than by simply following trends and numerical metrics.

Ahmed et al. (2020) reinforce that engagement must be part of the culture — a continuous process of reflection, experimentation, and adaptation. Musicians, too, must constantly evaluate their strategies: What content resonates with their audience? What platforms suit their genre? How much personal exposure is sustainable?

CIPD (2017) points out that well-being and engagement are interconnected and important. Specifically, protecting against burnout and safeguarding artistic values becomes necessary even as musicians meet pressure to promote their work. The artist's mental health, creative satisfaction, and relationship with their audience are all parts of a sustainable promotional strategy.

In conclusion, just as HR strategies must be bespoken and people-focused, music promotion strategies must be artist-centric, adaptive, and purpose-driven. Success comes not from volume of content alone, but from alignment between message, medium, and audience.

2.4. Assessing the Impact of Social Media Strategies in Independent Music Careers

As each independent musician adopts different strategies to engage with their audience and promote their music, the methods used to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies will also be unique and dependent on their goals, genre, and audience.

Metrics such as video views, follower growth, streaming numbers, audience interaction (comments, shares, likes), and engagement rates are commonly used indicators to assess digital success. However, the reliability of these metrics in reflecting true artistic growth or financial return is debated. Armstrong and Stephen (2014) – writing about employee engagement – state that 'feedback and evaluation tools are essential for developing long-term engagement strategies'; the same principle applies in music, where artists change their direction based on what their fans say and do. Therefore, many artists consult platform analytics services (e.g., Instagram Insights,

TikTok Creator Tools, Spotify for Artists) to improve their content strategies and scheduling. Still, these data points often lack emotional depth — they show reach, but not necessarily resonance.

Additionally, no formal academic framework exists yet for assessing the long-term effectiveness of social media promotion in music, especially among independent artists. While marketing tools offer insights on performance, many musicians also evaluate success based on qualitative indicators, such as live show bookings, fan messages, collaboration requests, and personal artistic satisfaction.

2.5. The Digital Acceleration of Music Careers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The music industry on a global scale was greatly changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. When venues closed and the gigs were cancelled, musicians — especially those not signed to labels — had little choice but to shift most of their activities to the internet.

While some artists had already started using platforms like Instagram and TikTok before the pandemic, many others were pushed into digital spaces out of necessity, not strategy. Live streams, acoustic sessions, virtual concerts, and interactive online content became the main avenues for visibility and survival.

According to Borelli (2022) and Zhang (2024), the pandemic accelerated the centrality of algorithm-driven platforms, reinforcing the importance of digital presence and adaptability. Independent musicians who could not shift quickly to social media faced declining visibility, while others found success by experimenting with content formats and digital branding.

However, the transition wasn't smooth for everyone. Just like companies had to re-engage remote employees, musicians faced emotional and logistical challenges: lack of performance energy, absence of feedback, increased screen fatigue, and the pressure to produce viral content while coping with the uncertainties of a global crisis.

While the online environment enabled musicians to maintain and even grow their audiences, it also introduced new stressors. As live venues reopen and the world transitions into a post-pandemic phase, many artists are now reassessing which of their digital strategies are worth continuing, and which survival tactics rather than long-term plans.

Because this phenomenon is still ongoing, there is limited academic literature on the long-term effects of COVID-19 on music promotion strategies, particularly for independent artists. This

research aims to fill that gap by identifying what new approaches musicians have adopted, and whether these approaches are expected to remain relevant beyond the pandemic period.

2.6 Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media for Musicians and the Business

The music industry and musicians face the favourable pros and cons of social media implementation. Meehan (2019) ascertains the benefits of social media marketing especially to the young people, the young adults between eighteen and twenty-four. This is because it delivers proper feel which the convergence of the fans and the artist feel of togetherness brings. This is the reason why targeted music marketing has such a powerful effect on this audience driving music streaming, as well as increasing it on live performances.

Social networks have proven to be helpful with the help of making it possible for the musicians to take their work to audiences across the world and in the process help them with promotion of their work at a scale that has never been witnessed before. And as stated in the work of Siles et al (2024) it is not perfect and has its drawbacks such as, constant attraction of fans, and lot of competition in digital media that does not allow some artists to have years-free-of-activity.

In the same manner, the study by, Bhandari & Bimo (2022), stated that marketing via social media specifically through the recently popular application such as TikTok, was the future of music promotion given that the algorithms would promote the creativity of the users' choices, but some questions were raised In her analysis about social media as a strategy in the digital music marketing, Laaksolahti, A. (2010) notes a shift whereby social networks are now centre in propagating and distributing of music.

Although social media democratizes music for it can enable musicians to communicate directly with their fans, without the need to previously bargain with middlemen such as record companies, this platform, however, challenges audiences and musicians to apply strategic skills in audience analytics and music production. Moving forward, Andreeva (2021) also assumes that while such shifts open new opportunities for promotion using innovative methods, they also tend to have drawbacks, such as relying on unexpected algorithms or data privacy problems."

Chapter III

3. Methodology

The objective of this chapter is to outline the methodology applied in this research, including the philosophical approach, research method, data collection tool, and sample used. This study adopts a combination of primary and secondary research to investigate how independent musicians use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to promote their work and develop their careers.

Secondary data was collected through academic literature, books, journals, and relevant online sources that discuss the role of digital platforms in the music industry. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with independent artists, which are detailed below.

3.1. Philosophy Employed

Given the nature of this study — which explores personal experiences, perceptions, and creative strategies — the philosophical approach chosen was interpretivism.

According to Oxford Reference, interpretivism is:

"A sociological approach that emphasizes the need to understand or interpret the beliefs, motives, and reasons of social actors in order to understand social reality." (Oxford Reference, n.d.)

Because this research investigates how musicians navigate social platforms to gain exposure and build careers, an interpretivist framework is ideal. It allows for the interpretation of rich, subjective data through the voices of the participants themselves, capturing their thoughts, challenges, and perspectives.

3.2. Method

Based on the objectives of this study, a qualitative approach was adopted for the primary research. The aim was to explore the motivations, strategies, and emotional realities of independent musicians using social media.

According to the University of Texas:

"Qualitative research is an investigative method guided by naturalistic observation, aiming to deeply understand social life as it occurs in its natural ecosystem." Its core interest lies in explaining the reasons for social phenomena and making sense of lifeworld experiences as presented by participants." (Anon., 2021)

In this study, the semi-structured interview provided a way for participants to explore their experiences freely and for the researcher to guide the conversation to the central research themes. The core themes of this study were content creation, selection of platforms, algorithmic influences, approaches to engagement, and monetization, each aligned with the sub-research questions. The questionnaire was created in an open-ended format so that participants had room to explain further, while also letting the researcher go deeper as needed. This method supported the acquisition of detailed, thoughtful, and manageable insights concerning musicians working in the digital music arena.

3.3. Sample

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, meaning that relevance to the study topic — independent musicians who make central use of social media in their music promotion and career growth — was the main inclusion criterion. Instead of aiming for statistical representativeness, the study focused on obtaining depth and variety in the participants' experiences. The participants varied in terms of genres they wrote in, gender identity, level of their careers developed, and the promotional platforms used the most. All had a different view of the challenges and opportunities for the independent artists that social media presents.

To preserve anonymity and facilitate analysis, codes were assigned to each interviewee:

Codes	**Gender**	**Primary Platform(s)**	**Music Genre**
M1	Female	Instagram	Pop/MPB
M2	Female	Instagram, Facebook	Soul/Pop
M3	Male	Instagram	Pop
M4	Male	Instagram	Folk/Rock

M5	Male	Instagram, Facebook	Pop

The interviews were conducted remotely through phone call or face to face during March and April 2025. Each interview lasted approximately 12 to 45 minutes. Prior to each session, participants were provided with information about the study and gave their informed consent to participate.

3.4. Thematic Coding

Thematic coding was applied during data organization and analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews on a qualitative basis. Thematic coding enabled the researcher to extract applicable patterns and categorize responses based on the six cardinal themes of this research. Each interview was transcribed and manually reviewed; keywords were extracted which were directly linked to the themes and sub-questions of the present study. Below is a summarized table of the major terms, phrases, which were used in responses of the five interviewees, categorized under their respective pseudonyms:

Theme	**M1**	**M2**	**M3**	**M4**	**M5**
1. Social Media and Music Consumption	CDs, live gigs, audience reach, faster connection	old promo, digital necessity, flyers vs. Reels	traditional vs. digital, autonomy, performance	before vs. after social media, word-of-mouth	algorithm impact, show-to-feed transition
2. Discovery and Trends via social media	TikTok trends, fast discovery, reels reach	platform exposure, discoverability	content consumption, fan discovery via short clips	new ways to reach, viral songs	algorithmic discovery, TikTok as radio
3. Influence of Influencers	reposts, visibility boost, local influencers	influencer reposts, follower spikes	trendsetters, influencer-controlled virality	influence = exposure	creator economy, brand vs. music

and Producers					
4. Audience Engagement and Interaction	DMs, stories, fan response, interaction	consistent posting, comments, followers' engagement	live sessions, YouTube chat, direct engagement	polls, reactions, being present	replying, algorithmic reward for engagement
5. Algorithmic Impact on Visibility	timing, reach, paid ads vs. organic, randomness	platform inconsistency, discoverability	algorithm changes, strategy shifts	low reach unless trending	planning content to "fit" TikTok/Instagram
6. Pros and Cons of Social Media for Independent Musicians	burnout, pressure to stay relevant, income limits	useful for growth, mentally exhausting	performance fatigue, unstable income	visibility vs. artistic freedom	not sustainable alone, overwork, music diluted by trends

3.5. Ethical Section

During this research development various ethical considerations were fulfilled to ensure that all proceedings were transparent, fair and respectful. Initially, the researcher remained neutral, when carrying out the interviews in order to avoid any form of interference or personal influence. Prior to conducting interviews, all interview questions were subject to peer-review to be sure they were proper, respectful and consistent with research objectives.

For confidentiality purposes, the names of the participants were replaced by pseudonyms (M1, M2, M3,M4 & M5) and no identifying information was recorded about their locations, platforms,

or professional networks. All the participants volunteered spontaneously and received proper information about the research.

Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees through signed digital forms. Participants were informed that they could discontinue from the research at any time without any consequence. This research fully complies with GDPR. All interview recordings and consent forms are kept safe and no one apart from the researcher and the supervisor will access them. That said, the interview transcripts will be saved in a protected digital archive for another two years, as in accordance with the institution's academic policies.

Chapter IV – Findings and Discussion

This chapter analyses the findings from the primary research — five semi-structured interviews with independent musicians — and compares them with the academic literature. The data has been grouped under six thematic areas, each aligned with a specific sub-research question. The discussion triangulates the secondary research with the actual experiences to present a complete picture of the role social media plays in the visibility, discoverability, engagement, and sustainability of independent music careers.

4.1. The Impact of Social Media on the Consumption of Music

The literature suggests that social media has transformed how audiences consume music and how artists promote it. Zucker (2016), and Datta et al. (2018) document the transition from old media (CDs, flyers, radio) to algorithmically based platforms, in which artists self-promote and distribute music online. This transition was reflected clearly in the interviews. All participants indicated that their current digital strategy has replaced earlier, more traditional approaches.

M1 explained:

"Before social media, I would go to events, sing live, give out CDs, business cards… Now I just post a short video and it reaches a lot more people."

M2 confirmed this shift, stating:

"It used to be word-of-mouth or performing live. Now, without posting regularly, people forget about you."

M3 added:

"Promotion used to be through local contacts or little ads. Now everything is based on your feed — and how much people engage with it."

M4 acknowledged that the tools made it easier to promote independently, but highlighted a downside:

"You feel more independent, yes — but you're also responsible for everything: design, engagement, captions, timing. It can be exhausting."

M5 shared a business-oriented comparison:

"What used to cost us over a thousand euros in posters or radio ads — now we get more results just posting and boosting on Instagram."

The findings reveal that social media has created even open doors for the easy marketing of music especially to musicians who are lacking in the industry. Nevertheless, the autonomy it provides also requires novel proficiencies and constant self-promoting, as the literature reveals, that artists today are acting as their own marketing units.

4.2. The Role of Social Media in Music Discovery and Trend Creation

The listening audience has also changed: from radio through to curated playlists to algorithm-based discovery. That said, in the words of Wares et al. (2023), new platforms, such as TikTok, now serve at the core of presenting new tracks to massive audiences via challenges, trends, and viral content. Nowak (2016) further says that this is a passionate process but provisional most of the time.

M1 reflected on this shift:

"The algorithm doesn't care if the song is good — it cares if it's entertaining. It rewards creators, not necessarily musicians."

M2 said:

"If you're not using trending sounds or formats, your content won't even be shown. That affects how we write and structure music."

M3 offered a critical view:

"A song can go viral and be forgotten two weeks later. Discovery today is fast — but superficial."

M4 agreed, sharing:

"I've tried using viral hashtags and editing my content to match trends, but sometimes it just doesn't work. The platform is unpredictable."

M5 added:

"Many people found my music through a video someone else posted — they didn't even know it was me singing."

These comments validate growing role of platforms towards influencing discovery but also hint at the frustrations of temporal and impersonal nature of viral success. The literature warns of the same: whereas social media provides instant exposure it does not necessarily promise artist recognition and long-term investment. As revealed by the findings, artists are often forced to modify their content for visibility rather than art presentation.

4.3. The Role of Influencers and Music Producers in Shaping Visibility

According to Nieborg and Poell (2017), influencers today wield a lot of power to determine which music emerges in visibility on such systems as TikTok and Instagram. This is a turnaround from the label focused virality to the creator-focused promotion. Cinjakov (2021) goes on to report that influencer marketing has the potential to derail the distribution and listening behavior of an

audience to a great deal. It was found in the interviews. Several such musicians recognized the need for influencer amplification – but also limited access to the networks.

M1 shared:

"Once, a small influencer used my audio and I gained almost a thousand followers in a week. But it's not something I can control or predict."

M2 reflected on how influencers can accelerate reach but remain inaccessible: *"Unless you already have numbers, most influencers won't collaborate. It's like a closed circle — you have to be visible to become more visible."*

M3 added: *"The people who set trends are not musicians — they're content creators. Sometimes they use your music, but they don't even tag you."*

M4 noted:

"You can spend months producing something, but someone dancing to it in 15 seconds gets all the attention."

M5, although critical, also admitted to following influencers' formats to stay relevant: *"Sometimes I feel like I'm not being a singer — I'm acting like a creator. It's part of the game now."*

These ideas are in keeping with the work on the subject: whereas the use of influencers can increase the potential of a song's reach, their participation is hit-and-miss, and based at times on algorithmic preference, and at others on the personal branding of the individual. Authenticity vs. trend adaptation, independent musicians must consider this balance without resources for guaranteed exposure.

4.4. Audience Engagement and Music Dissemination

According to Li (2023) and Sugiana & Hafiar, (2021), continuity in engagement is important in the process of music dissemination. Such elements as comments, DMs, livestreams and story interactions are the part of this digital relationship between an artist and an audience. Participants agreed that interaction with audiences is now a necessity, both for an emotional pay off and for algorithmic reckoning.

M1 explained:

"When I reply to people's comments or messages, they stay. They engage more. But it's hard to keep up."

M2 said:

"If I don't post or talk to my followers, I lose reach. It's like I disappear from the feed."

M3 shared:

"I've done Q&As, polls, and live videos. The more I interact, the more my content gets shown."

M4 described how interaction influences his decisions:

"Sometimes I choose what song to post based on what people comment or ask for. It's not just about what I want anymore."

M5 added:

"It feels less like an audience and more like a community — but I'm also working nonstop to keep it alive."

Such insights indicate that even though the digital platforms enable musicians to stay connected to their audience directly, this connection is always dependent on constant emotional work and time investment, which conforms to Mannay (2019). The results strengthen the understanding that music propagation is no longer passive – it relies on two-way interaction that crosses the line between performance and marketing.

4.5. Algorithmic Influence on Visibility

Borelli (2022), Zhang (2024), and Radovanović (2022) explain how algorithms decide which content gets to be viewed depending on the conduct of the person viewing instead of artistic merit. This means that visibility is usually time-dependent, length-dependent, hashtag-dependent or engagement-pattern-dependent – not necessarily talent-dependent.

M1 explained:

"Sometimes the best content I make doesn't go anywhere. And then something silly takes off. It's luck and the algorithm."

M2 reflected:

"We're always trying to figure out the system — when to post, what to write, which sound is trending."

M3 added:

"I plan content thinking about the first few seconds. If it doesn't grab, it dies."

M4 stated:

"Even when you do everything right, it can flop. That makes it hard to stay motivated."

M5 shared:

"I tried paying for ads, and it worked. But I can't afford to do that all the time."

These responses validate that, algorithmic visibility, offers both opportunities and frustrations. Although platforms provide exposure gratis, the terms are astoried, fluid, and never favorable. Musicians believe they need to tailor their work to the system instead of their artistic ends — expanding Jorgenson's (2022) understanding of algorithm-driven creativity.

4.6. Pros and Cons of Social Media for Independent Musicians

Social media provides visibility, at least some degree of creative control, but burnout, irregular income, and unceasing demand to create are all part of the package. This double-edged reality — one which grants access to audiences but also requires constant presence and energy (Meehan 2019, Andreeva 2021) – is described by Meehan (2019) and Andreeva (2021).

M1 admitted:

"I've gotten opportunities because of social media, but it also gave me anxiety. I had panic attacks trying to keep up."

M2 reflected:

"It opens doors, yes. But if you stop for a few days, your reach drops and it feels like starting over."

M3 said:

"I don't make money directly from the platforms. They help me get gigs — but they don't pay the bills."

M4 shared:

"Being independent means doing everything. Sometimes I spend more time editing videos than making music."

M5 concluded:

"Social media gave me a career — but it also eats up my time, creativity, and sometimes my joy."

These testimonies explain that although social media is indispensable, it has no future if it is not bounded, strategized and supported. The emotional and financial risk is high, particularly for independent artists who have little money. The results corroborate the conclusions by Siles et al. (2024) and by Laaksolahti (2010) that the digital music space is empowering — but also exhausting.

Summary of Findings and discussion

Theme	Summary of Findings	sample Quotes
Impact on Music Consumption	Shift from traditional promotion (CDs, flyers) to social media platforms. Artists self-promote and distribute online content.	M1: 'Now I just post a short video and it reaches more people.' M5: 'We get more results just posting and boosting on Instagram.'
Music Discovery & Trends	Discovery via TikTok, trending content. Viral success is short-lived and emotionally driven.	M1: 'The algorithm rewards creators, not necessarily musicians.' M3: 'Discovery today is fast — but superficial.'
Influencer & Producer Roles	Influencers play a major role in music visibility, often favoring creators over musicians. Access to influencer networks is limited.	M2: 'You have to be visible to become more visible.' M5: 'I'm acting like a creator. It's part of the game now.'
Audience Engagement	Artists rely on interaction (comments, DMs, livestreams) to build audience and maintain visibility.	M3: 'The more I interact, the more my content gets shown.' M5: 'It feels less like an audience and more like a community.'
Algorithmic Influence	Algorithms determine content reach, often unrelated to artistic quality. Strategy is necessary but unpredictable.	M1: 'Something silly takes off. It's luck and the algorithm.'

		M4: 'Even when you do everything right, it can flop.'
Pros & Cons of Social Media	Social media offers exposure and independence but causes stress, burnout, and demands constant content production.	M1: 'I had panic attacks trying to keep up.' M5: 'It eats up my time, creativity, and sometimes my joy.'

Chapter V

5. Conclusion

This study examined the effects of social media on the professional career of independent musicians. The study examined the way TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have evolved into valuable assets for artists trying to promote their music, reach out to fans, and build a career. The results showed the benefits and challenges independent artists face in trying to adjust to the algorithm- and trend-oriented music world.

After reviewing the primary data, researchers obtained an understanding of how musicians accommodate the lack of traditional industry support by using social media, while living with the pressure to remain relevant and competitive. It became apparent that participants are extremely sensitive to the ways in which digital platforms shape how music can be found, how artists make creative choices, and how they manage their own emotions.

The study showed that social media, although it provides necessary exposure, pressures artists to take on the roles like content creator, community manager, and marketer – without the help or time and mental energy. Furthermore, the results showed how algorithms had positive and negative effects: even though platforms may push unknown musicians into stardom, an erratic system is likely to favor style over depth.

The study also showed that artists place more importance in audience engagement than just visibility, they also aim at creating loyal communities through these engagements. The artists involved in the research demonstrated a willingness to experiment and to change, and concentrated their efforts on those methods that were already known to resonate with their fans online. Burnout, unpredictable income, and temporary fame were all problems mentioned by all participants.

The research gave clear insights on how independent musicians use social media to build their musical careers. Also, the research showed that often in order to achieve digital success, significant sacrifices are necessary in the personal and professional life**.**

Limitations of the Study

Despite achieving its objectives, the study faced several limitations, including:

- A lack of academic literature that is directly related to the convergence of independent music and platform-based career development.
- A relatively small number of respondents because of time and availability of the participants.
- The scope of study restricted to a total of five participants, thus making it quite hard to generalize.
- The type of project, being part of an undergraduate research programme while subject to resource and time limitations.

Recommendations for Further Research

Given the findings and limitations, future studies could explore:

- A comparative analysis between self-reliant musicians and signed musicians in utilization of digital platforms.
- How the change in algorithms and the models of monetization of platforms impact sustainability of artists over the long run.
- Best practices for healthy social media usage among musicians, such as content planning, the management of audiences, and mental health strategies.
- The contribution of live performances and hybrid promotion systems in post-pandemic digital environments.

Finally, broader research towards music promotion within the creator economy will deepen our understanding of the ways digital trends keep transforming the music industry — not just for independent musicians, but for the future of artistic expression.

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