

Francesca Rigoni, student number 1916335

Essay for Development Assignment

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For any emerging artist, whether signed to a record label, having a publishing deal or especially being a do-it-yourself type, to get your music out on the market in the best, most organised and productive way possible is key to start your own branding with the right tools and vision. In a world where all the knowledge and tools you need to accomplish your goals are given to you in the palm of your hand the margins for mistakes and a slack jobs are very little. Nowadays making good music is just not enough as it ends up sinking in a pool of thousands and thousands of other artists' works that, just like everyone, are trying to reach the top of the mountain. How to climb it then? Marketing. All artists need to create a marketing strategy that works for their music, image and audience, they need to be able swim up to the surface of the pool and grab a lifesaver.

Delivering a brand to the audience is very simple but quite competitive so "to make sure you set your business up for success, you'll need to do a deep dive on the current competitive landscape" (Estay, 2020), understand what digital or physical platforms work for your audience, your business and your following. For an independent artist all social media platforms are the main tools and the starting point to share music, even before having a recorded track to upload on a DSP. They are used to create an image around brand, art, talent and persona because of the direct access to the biggest amount of audience possible and a global reach. What's needed then is an attentive look at what each platform can do for a brand and decide which one to target the most. Normally all artists are on most social media at the same time but there is always one that has more following, engagement and where a potential growth strategy is going to work better. The biggest platforms nowadays where emerging independent artists should start promoting their music are **Instagram, Twitter and TikTok.**

Analysing them and understand what each of them can and cannot provide for a DIY artist is the final goal to be able to redirect the work on the best platform and optimise streams, selling and following. Depending on the type of music, age, the content produced each platform can give an artist's work a different value.

Instagram

“With more than 1 billion users and 500 millions daily active users, Instagram is the most popular visual marketing platform in today's social media landscape. Digital marketers must be able to master Instagram marketing to connect with Millennials, tell their brands' visual stories, and stake out a presence on visual media”. (Alton, 2019).

“Instagram is a free photo and video-sharing social media application that was launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom. From the beginning, the primary focus of the app was to feature photographs, specifically those taken on mobile devices. It focused on the photo-sharing experience. The intention for the app was that it would be minimalist and require as few actions as possible from the user.”. (Blystone, 2020)

From the release of the app in iOS Store in two years Instagram became a global trend and was bought by Facebook in 2012. After that the growth was exponential and as a consequence it turned out to be the most popular app of these days.

How it works

With an account you can post pictures or videos (no longer than one minute), share your location, comment and like other profiles' pictures, follow other users and be followed, exchange direct messages between accounts. When it comes to upload pictures and videos to the app, there are image filters and edits available to use, sounds can be removed from videos these can be trimmed to one's liking. An account can be verified or not. The verified badge is a blue check visible next to the username of the account and it

indicates that Instagram has certified that the above-mentioned account belongs to a public figure, a celebrity or an influencer.

One of the app's most popular features is called "Instagram Stories": with the aim to document an instant or a snap of your daily life, they are simply clips and/or pictures lasting a maximum of 15 seconds and available to watch for 24 hours only and you can upload a maximum of 100 per day.

On a Story you can ask questions to your followers, create polls, use GIFs, stickers, backgrounds and fonts to decorate it, share your location, and even the music you are listening to either from the app music library or through a direct, two-ways link from Spotify. When recording a Story filters are a great feature, they appear over one's face through a face-recognition system on the phone's camera or can simply expand to the whole size of the camera.

Another feature is the "IGTV" channel. Since the length allowed per video on a profile is of only one minute, Instagram, in 2018, has created a channel dedicated to the share of videos only. "They need to have a duration which is a minimum of 15 seconds long up to a maximum of 10 minutes long. This is different for verified Instagram profiles or IG accounts with larger followings who can post videos that are up to an hour long". (Gotter, 2020)

The last addition to the features is Reels, an in-app channel where users can make videos using different edits, very similar to how TikTok works.

Instagram, just like the other platforms, works with an algorithm. The more you keep your following interested and active on your profile the more chances you have to work the algorithm at your favour and, with that, gain more visibility. This trait of following is called engagement. Based on your popularity between your audience, Instagram makes your posts and stories available more easily to your following so you have a better chance of having your content noticed by a broader number of people and appear on their "Explore

page” a sort of Home Feed where Instagram puts what an user might like based on where his/her clicks and visits go.

Instagram offers the possibility of two different types of accounts, either “Personal” or “Business” depending on the use and aim of an account.

The business account has features that help analyse an audience, giving you metrics and KPIs about the engagement happening on a profile, insights you can work with to make your brand grow. Sponsored ads although, are the biggest opportunities on a business profile. You can either pay for posts to be sponsored or Stories, you can choose what audience to target, how long your campaign will run for, what is the budget for it and more.

Instagram KPIs:

1. Engagement per follower

This measures the performance of a profile, how many likes, saves and comments per post. This information is vital for a business as it gives a clear idea of how interested the audience is to a brand, what they like, what they want to keep seeing on their feed.

2. Impressions and reach

Metrics that measure how many users have seen a post (reach) and how many times a post or a story were seen by users. Both are important to understand if a business’s content is being put in front of its audience.

3. Follower growth rate

How quickly a profile gains followers over time, vital for a business to see if what is being shared is attracting audience or doing the opposite.

4. Best time to post

Another important feature that allows you to understand the period of time during a day where followers are active the most so posting during those times means more visibility.

5. Traffic to website

How many followers click on the business' website link on the bio. The more clicks, the more chances to sell.

6. Hashtag engagement

It helps a user to understand what hashtags work best within the following.

7. Branded tags

Most businesses create a personalised hashtag that makes them recognisable. Through this feature it is possible to see if the audience is reacting to it or not.

8. Mentions

A very important metric to define whether a business is doing it right, it allows a user to see if other users have mentioned their profile on their posts or stories and what they say about it.

9. Stories metrics

All there is to know about an IG Story: how many people saw it, engaged with it and more.

When it comes to what artists can do to promote themselves on Instagram the possibilities are plenty. The reach an artist can have through sharing his/her/their work, music, image, brand is enormous but the competition is fierce due to the amount of people using it.

The majority of musicians and artists have a profile on Instagram and in most cases it is the social media platform they utilise more and where most of the following is. Taylor Swift is the perfect example, her Instagram profile has 140 millions of followers, her Twitter account has 87 million and her TikTok only 140K.

For a DIY musician it offers the great asset of visuals, which is what attracts audience the most. Nowadays people are looking for an overall audio/video experience so quality music

seems to not be enough. The same importance needs to be given on the imagery and content around it to impress and keep the audience anchored to the brand.

This platform is all about images so, if the content is of high standards, unique and interesting, catching a follower becomes easy.

Stories are the number two promotional tool on this platform. They are a great feature to reach your audience with your music and news related to it almost live everywhere. If an artist has a song on Spotify, a story is the easiest and quickest way to promote it to the audience, not only for instant visibility but also for the direct link to the Spotify artist page through it. Not to mention a story can be sponsored, so it reaches not only your following but also accounts with similar interests and taste, from a specific country, of a certain age etc..

Many artists use also IGTV as it much easier to post music related content (trailers, lyric videos, music videos, BTS, Q&A, visuals, covers and more) and it is in-app so all the content is in one place and easily accessible to their audience.

Reels is now just been introduced but it is a great marketing tool. People create dance challenges for their own songs, record a video for the audience to duet with and share a diverse type of content that inevitably gives more insights on the brand and the face behind it to the audience.

As mentioned, visibility and growth are a strong possibility but since the amount of content uploaded daily is that much it is complicated, without a proper marketing strategy, to see some results. Given that the app is completely free Instagram is to great value for a DIY artist, all the insights and metric Instagram gives help building a personal campaign that works for every type of following and content without the need of a marketing team behind.

Twitter

Born in the midst of a scandal between its founders in 2006, Twitter was originally a podcast platform called Odeo, a fairly small company with around fourteen employees. When that year Apple announced that podcasts were going to have a space on iTunes the company had to change direction and through a group effort and inspired by the idea of “status”, Twttr was born.

“It was a system where you could send a text to one number and it would be broadcasted out to all of your friends: Twttr.”.(Carlson, 2011)

The name became Twitter with time and the app developed as well in years rather than have a viral reach when it was launched. The platform started growing exponentially in 2009 and in 2012 it had around 100 millions or users. The app can be considered, with Facebook and Myspace, one of the pioneers of social media. It is an online microblogging service where you write a “tweet”, a short message of no more than 140 characters, on your profile and it is visible publicly and reaches all of your followers. You can follow and be followed, you can send direct messages to any user, have a verified profile in the case of a public figure/celebrity/influencer. On a tweet you can share URL links, tag other users, attach an image. You can “like” a tweet, “retweet” it, which means sharing it on your own profile, reply to a tweet which will then start a thread of responses between users.

On a profile, you can upload a bio with links to other platforms, a profile image and a cover image. If a tweet has a specific relevance it can be “Pinned on Top” which means that when viewing on a profile, that tweet will be the first visible and on top of the feed. It is a platform designed to share news in the fastest way possible and it maintained this utility also through hashtags. On this social media hashtags were invented.

“A word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media websites and applications, especially Twitter, to identify messages on a specific topic.”.

(OxfordLanguages, 2020)

By pressing on an hashtag, a different feed of the app opens up with all the tweets and news related to what the hashtag was made for.

When it comes to organising a following and navigate better through it Twitter has a “List” feature that allows to divide followers into manageable groups sorted by area, genre, business and more.

Twitter has the chance to ad sponsor single tweets, targeting audience and set a specific budget of choice. On this app the Trending and News pages are the most popular and important to follow to be up to date to what is going on in the world and of course what concerns the music industry. It has 330 million active users everyday from all over the world, 500 million of tweets are uploaded on a daily basis.

Why is Twitter valuable to a DIY artist?

Even though the most popular platforms nowadays are Instagram and TikTok, Twitter has a completely different approach to sharing and and a business to customer experience.

“Twitter is essentially a content distribution tool, the network primarily consists of people sharing links or live updates. It’s about following what’s going on in real time. The value of Twitter comes from the content you discover on other sites.” (Jackson, 2015)

Being a DIY artist means doing your own marketing around your music, it means growing a connection with your audience without, in most cases, the help of a team. What a brand needs to thrive is the following, an audience that is loyal and Twitter is the best platform to create that. The virtual interaction through the app between an artist and their fanbase is so easy and instant that it creates a much stronger connection.

Tweets can be seen as direct messages sent out to a following and every single user can respond to them instantly, it is sort of a conversation. The interaction and relationship between artists and fans on this app are much deeper than other platforms because tweets act like direct contacts.

Vital for a DIY artist is also redirect the audience to other platforms where different content is being shared, to Youtube, for example, when a music video is being uploaded or to a ticketing website to invite them to come to a show. Twitter does it, it spreads audience to different socials increasing and building the engagement. This feature is valuable to utilise if there are people who come across an artist's profile for the first time, it gives them more options and platforms to get to know their music.

On the other hand, it is harder to reach an audience on Twitter because, in this new era where visual experiences and images are leading on social media, Twitter has very little of it. When posting videos or visualisers to market music it is harder to keep the following anchored to a profile, simply because it gets redirected to a different platform and an user has then more chance to follow a different platform rather than an artist's Twitter feed.

It can be said that Twitter is for die hard fans who want to have a straightforward interaction with their idols so it is harder, for a broader audience to be interested only in this platform.

Twitter is also not the most popular social media so the probable reach is less. Since its nature is to share live content and most of its audience's age varies between 35 to 60 years the topics being talked about on the app are more leaning towards cultural and global news so you wouldn't have as many people interested in the music industry. The link sharing can also be damaging a business because it creates the opportunity for an audience to move from platforms so some content can be overseen.

TikTok

This invention is a new entry on the social media market but it doesn't make it less valuable for an emerging artist right now. This platform, in the last year, has reached a global audience and devotion that changed the game for the all music industry landscape. Initially being very popular in China, the United States and South America it has now landed in Europe thanks to its interactivity and new and interesting approach to social media. Another reason for its growth was nonetheless COVID-19 and a worldwide lockdown that forced people in their homes and have them look for new ways to pass time. TikTok became the virtual place to be. BBC defines it a "social Media giant", having surpassed Instagram for number of downloads and daily users (2 billion subscribers and 800 million active users).

"TikTok's secret lies in its use of music and an extraordinarily powerful algorithm, which learns what content users like to see far faster than many other apps.

Users can choose from a huge database of songs, filters and movie clips to lip-sync to.

Many people will spend most of the time on the For You Page. This is where the algorithm puts content in front of users, anticipating what they will enjoy based on content they have already engaged with.

It's also where it shows content it thinks could go viral. The idea is that if the content is good it will travel, regardless of how many followers the creator has." (Tidy & Smith Galer, 2020) .

TikTok runs also sponsored ads for its users with the chance to target audience, countries and set a budget.

On this platform any type of content goes as long as it can be filmed in a 60 second video, voiced over or danced. The most followed content are the “Challenges”, in most cases short choreographies of impact on sections of new released music. Businesses also started to adopt the Platform making videos of their products, telling stories through them or collaborating with the so called “TikTok Stars” which are young teenagers posting daily and creating new trends for and on the app and having millions and millions of followers.

TikTok also is linked to the other social media platforms, especially Instagram, every video uploaded can be instantly shared on a user’s Instagram Story.

Has recent news report, TikTok has signed a distribution deal with independent artist distribution platform UnitedMasters, “TikTok users will be able to distribute their music directly to other music streaming platforms from within the TikTok app.” (Stassen, 2020)

This new feature is still not available as the deal was signed on August the 17th 2020 between the two platforms.

It could be a great reason to promote music on this platform but the way this music will be distributed is still to be known.

TikTok is considered an app for teenagers even though it has lately reached a broader and older audience.

From the looks of it, at this moment a DIY young artist could really use this app to share music as it is at the very core of it. Many hits went viral in the last two years thanks to this app and a lot more will. To promote new music through the platform, big artists will invite fans to participate on challenges and create contests, whether they are dance routines, duets or anything creative for a prize, often being an appearance on their music video or a repost. TikTok’s ability to get a user viral is one of the main reasons why a DIY artist should use it.

The length of the clips, which can't go over 60 seconds, can be counterproductive for an artist as a full length lyric/music video cannot be uploaded.

TikTok is trend driven and cannot be considered a customisable app so it lacks tools for artists to promote their brand with their own vision, the only way known to reach a high number of following and views is by creating a trend or completing a challenge.

Little is known about how the app works so the chances of building a winning campaign are lower.

Business to business comparison

By Numbers

Twitter Stats

- 330 million monthly users
- 145 million daily users
- 77% of users outside the U.S.
- 500 million Tweets sent per day

Instagram Stats

- 1 billion monthly active users
- 40 billion photos shared
- 80 million photos on average per day
- 3.6 billion likes per day

TikTok Stats

- 2 billion subscribers
- 800 million daily users
- 1 billion videos viewed everyday

As seen from the stats, Instagram has more monthly users than Twitter but Twitter has more tweets per day. TikTok has more daily users and subscribers than both the above apps due to its newness.

By Audience

63% of Twitter users are between 35 and 63 years old. 66% of the audience is male with a 77% of users from outside the US.

Instagrams' audience ranges from 25 to 34 years old (71%) followed by users on the 18-24 age range, as per location Instagram is spread and balanced globally. Most businesses selected Instagram as their main platform (71% of US businesses use the platform).

As for TikTok, is it mostly used in China and India (661 millions of downloads only in India) and the majority of the audience are teenagers, 41% being between the age of 16 and 24. The app has, from the beginning, targeted audience of under 18 years old even though, over the last year, the age range is getting higher with more adults using the app.

By Engagement

An Instagram user spends an average of 53 minutes on the app per day, this is happening because there are no clickable links on it so the audience is focused on the app's content. Twitter has a lower engagement of 3.39 minutes per session per user given that a lifespan of a tweet is between 15 to 20 minutes.

TikTok has a daily engagement per user of 52 minutes with 90% of its audience entering the app at least once a day.

In conclusion, each of these platforms create different opportunities when it comes to branding. The strategy should be using all three, study an individual marketing campaign per app and when applied, monitor them to understand where the audience relies and engages more. As said most artists have a profile in different platforms but they choose the most convenient app that allows them to grow their vision, audience and music.

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