



# **Marketing Strategy for a Single Release of an Independent Artist**

Researching and Planning an Effective Digital Marketing Campaign for 2lyn in the Music Streaming Era

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The digital transformation of the music industry in a form of emergence of streaming platforms, has shifted the way artists reach audiences, with digital marketing, namely social media now playing a central role in music promotion, thus empowering artists to release their work without relying on major record labels and resulting in increased number of independent artists on the market. However, many independent artists struggle to navigate the current digital landscape due to the lack of access to practical, effective and cost-efficient frameworks. This thesis explores effective marketing practices for artists in the music streaming era, the golden age with great opportunities for independent artists, with a practical focus on the “fake smile” single marketing campaign of commissioning artist 2lyn, an emerging independent artist.

The conducted research with a mixed-methods approach, combines both quantitative and qualitative data from an online survey, targeting global music consumers to understand social media habits and music discovery behaviour, and semi-structured interviews with two successful independent artists that provided insight into artist practices and effective content strategies. The findings suggest that consistent posting of audience-tailored short-form video content across platform like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, as well as leveraging of playlisting and branding activities are key components for an effective campaign that aims to maximize artists reach and engagement.

This thesis highlighted the growing importance of strong online presence, visual storytelling, algorithmic timing and fan engagement. Combined with the insights from conducted 2lyn’s current brand and audience analysis, as well as the supporting data gathered from the literature review, a marketing plan for 2lyn’s single release was designed and presented. Ultimately, the research aimed to develop a comprehensive, scalable and reusable marketing strategy template that 2lyn and other independent artists can apply for any future projects. The resulting framework offers a practical guide for musicians seeking recognition and commercial success in a present-day oversaturated music industry market, while also indicating potential areas for future research.

Keywords Independent Artist, Digital Marketing, Music Promotion Strategy, Streaming Era, Short-form Content  
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# 1 Introduction

We live in an age, where independent music artists are threatening the long-standing dominance of record labels. In the past, artists needed to be signed to a company, also known as record label, to financially support their careers and thus have a chance to succeed. Studio recording sessions as well as marketing through traditional media such as radio, fliers, magazines, and live performances are costly, which is why many artists struggled in the past (Yellowbrick, 2023). The rise of new technologies, internet and MP3 sound files has paved the way towards the decline of power of the major record labels (Pastukhov, 2022). Shaun Fanning, in 1999 developed a digital music exchange channel called Napster, that allowed people to share copyrighted music files at any time, resulting in the global music industry sales drop of 5% in 2001 and then a further 9% in 2002, seriously damaging even the biggest record labels such as the big three - Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group, changing the whole industry forever. As the music industry adapted to the digital age, so did the record labels, signing fewer new artists and focusing on promotion of their top artists only, resulting in lack of variety and diversity in released music. (Hracs, 2012, p. 446-447)

The introduction of streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal, SoundCloud and YouTube Music introduced new revenue streams for the artists, while at the same time solving the issue of illegally downloaded copyrighted music files, by providing music consumers with convenient way to listen to songs online and paying back royalties from each listen directly to the track owners (Pastukhov, 2022). Shift from physical formats to digital streaming together with the help of independent music distribution services such as DistroKid, Ditto Music and LANDR, as well as numerous technological advancements, has allowed artists to produce high-quality music from home and monetize their work in ways that were previously unimaginable, providing them with a chance to reach global audiences without the backing of major record labels (Castr, 2024). This resulted in an increased number of new emerging independent artists, flooding the market with a lot of new music and threatening the big record labels even more. In 2023 more than 7 million artists were globally releasing music, from which only 5% were signed to a record label, which resulted in independent sector securing 36,09% of market share in the first quarter of that year, surpassing for example Universal Music Group's share of 29.35%. (Pinzón, 2024)

Additionally, the revenue coming in from independent music grew by 16,1% compared to 2022, which was significantly higher than the overall industry growth rate of 9%, indicating that the independent music is starting to play a more central role in the music industry (Pinzón, 2024).

Furthermore, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube have become an integral part of human daily lives (Yellowbrick, 2023). It has changed the way people communicate, as well as discover, consume and share new information, including the focus of this research - Music. With thousands of songs uploaded onto the streaming services daily, the competition for visibility and engagement has become fiercer than ever. This development is causing a decrease of the value of the music itself, making talent and good music no longer the sole determinants of artist's success. In this newly developed digital landscape artists face both significant opportunities and challenges, when it comes to the promotion of their music and gaining recognition. Utilizing the marketing benefits that the digital platforms offer has become crucial in the highly competitive music industry. Both the major record labels and up-and-coming independent artists have already recognized and started to capitalize on the potential, resulting in increased importance of an effective digital marketing, particularly on social media platforms, for all musicians. It is safe to say, that finding the right set of tools and strategies is essential for artists seeking to build an international fanbase and achieve success in the streaming era. (Yellowbrick, 2023)

The author of this project has chosen to focus on the independent music promotion topic due to the strong personal interest in singing & songwriting and with it connected marketing activities, as well as the unique research opportunity that stems from the author being an independent artist with minor industry connections, actively releasing music and constantly looking for more effective ways to promote his new releases.

## **1.1 Commissioning Artist: 2lyn**

Tomáš Hromádka is an emerging independent music artist, releasing music under the name of 2lyn and self-created record label called Broken Records. Navigating the dynamic landscape of modern music industry, 2lyn's journey reflects the challenges and opportunities faced by independent musicians in the music streaming era.

Without the backing of a major record label, 2lyn is responsible for all aspects of their music career from songwriting, production and distribution to branding, promotion and audience engagement. This hands-on approach allows for creative freedom, but it also requires a well-structured marketing strategy in order to break through the noise of the current oversaturated market.

As an artist dedicated to crafting authentic and emotional music without boxing himself into one specific genre, 2lyn released his first official solo single in July 2023 and, as of the time of writing this paper, he was able to accumulate over 45 000 streams across all of his songs on all the streaming platforms with majority of them coming from Spotify. While trying to attract both female and male listeners of all ages, not limiting himself on specific audience, and focusing on contemporary music trends, 2lyn's artistic identity aligns with the evolving nature of music consumption. Platforms such as the already mentioned Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok have reshaped the way audiences discover and engage with new music and by recognizing this and the importance of a strong online presence, 2lyn seeks to implement effective digital marketing practices into his current music promotion activities and achieve positive results.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

Development of an effective and appropriate marketing strategy is one of the key steps towards the commercial success in the modern-day music industry. Digital marketing, as previously in Introduction chapter mentioned, has become an essential part of the whole music advertising process, with digital platforms offering affordable methods, through which artists can directly reach and engage with existing listeners, as well as gain exposure among new audiences and build a loyal fanbase (Pinzón, 2024). By utilizing social media and leaning into the various digital marketing related activities including short-form content creation, playlisting, data analysis, email marketing etc. the artists can create a unique brand identity for themselves and drive their streaming numbers. The independent artists, stand to benefit from the digital age the most, as achieving commercial success without any financial support from record label is now thanks to all the affordable marketing options, social media platforms and streaming services more attainable than ever. (Indiefy, 2024)

The impact of digital marketing, particularly social media, on music discovery has been well-documented in previous studies such as the one by Nancy K. Baym (2021) or Josh Meehan (2019), with multiple artists mentioned, both independent and signed, including Lil Nas X, Doja Cat and JVKE, to break into mainstream success through short-form video content. Successful independent artist cases include, Connor Price a former actor, currently a rising star and rapper originally from Markham, Ontario, Canada (VoyageLA, 2019), who is to this day a truly independent hip-hop artist that works alongside his wife Breanna, a marketing specialist. They are one of the first that recognized the true power of social media, namely TikTok, in music promotion. He currently has 5,8 million followers on TikTok and is standing on 8,3 million monthly listeners on Spotify with around 60 million monthly streams, which by cca. \$4,000 per million streams results in revenue of roughly \$240,000 per month from Spotify alone. (Poskett, 2023) Additionally, Nicolas Donovan, performing under the name Nic D, is another well-known independent recording artist from Culpeper, VA. In comparison to Connor Price, he makes more of a pop/country music and he currently has 2,1 million followers on TikTok and as of March 2025 he holds respectful 4,2 million monthly listeners on Spotify. With around 14 million monthly streams there and another 3 million monthly streams on Apple Music, where the revenue reaches up to \$6,000 per million streams, brings the revenue amount to cca. \$74,000 per month just for the streams from these 2 platforms (Think Fresh Move Forward, 2022).

While the influence of social media is undoubtedly transforming the music industry, largely in a positive direction by levelling the playing field between signed and independent artists, it also presents several challenges that need to be addressed. The importance of consistency when it comes to creating content and maintaining of strong online presence can be overwhelming for artists, especially the independent ones in the early stages of their career (Alexis, 2024). Uploading the right content customized and aimed towards the correct target audience on a regular basis requires planning skills and a certain amount of marketing knowledge. However, despite the wealth of knowledge available on digital marketing in various fields, there is still limited research focusing on structured, data-driven marketing campaigns specifically designed for independent artists releasing new music. The effectiveness of various digital marketing strategies for independent artists therefore remains a topic of significant interest. (Yellowbrick, 2023)

Social media is widely recognized as a powerful marketing tool, however the lack of information on practical frameworks that the independent artists, that struggle with identifying the most effective promotional strategies, can follow to optimize engagement, convert new listeners into loyal fans and sustain long-term success, creates a gap.

Platform like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube have proven to be essential in modern music marketing, with studies highlighting how short-form videos and user generated content can drive songs success (Baym, 2021). While these studies, including the one by Josh Meehan (2019), explore the significance of digital marketing, namely social media marketing, and it's positive impact on the music industry, they often tend to focus on already established signed artists or general industry trends rather than offering concrete actionable strategies tailored to independent musicians, trying to navigate the digital landscape, which cannot be classified as only positive. Independent musicians, especially those without industry connections or financial backing, often struggle with identifying the most effective strategies for engagement, audience growth and long-term fan retention, as well balancing the content entertainment value with the artistic merit (Matikainen, 2018).

This thesis aims to bridge this gap by investigating effective practices in music related digital marketing specifically for independent artists, with a focus on the single releases rather than full albums or EPs. This is a topic that has received a limited attention in previous literature, but as pointed out by Marco Alexis (2024), is becoming more relevant in the current state of music industry. The research in this thesis will build on findings from previous studies by identifying how independent artists can effectively leverage social media and streaming services. While past research has acknowledged the impact of digital marketing on music promotion, few studies have provided a structured approach that independent artists can implement without significant financial investment. By addressing this gap, this thesis aims to provide a practical roadmap for independent artists navigating the competitive music streaming era. Applying the findings from this research on the case of commissioning artist 2lyn's single release serves as a practical example of how independent artists can develop an effective digital marketing strategy.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Thesis**

The general objective of this thesis is therefore development of an effective digital marketing strategy proposition for the single release of an independent artist 2lyn, and through that, eventually when applied, increase in the overall number of his listeners, as well as streaming numbers, which should consecutively result in higher revenue for the commissioning artist.

This research aims to identify the best practices, namely in digital marketing, to maximize the for-research purposes used song's reach and success. More specifically, the thesis aims to analyse the current state of music consumption, as well as consumer behaviour and the evolving dynamics of the music industry together with newly emerged marketing practices for independent artists, particularly the role of short-form content on social media platforms. This thesis serves as a strategic blueprint for 2lyn's single release, combining research and planning of a marketing campaign.

By identifying the key promotional strategies that can enhance visibility and build a dedicated fanbase, as well as by planning a structured and data-driven marketing campaign for 2lyn's single release, the author intends to put forward a set of suggestions on how to promote music in the streaming era. By analysing successful digital marketing practices and applying them in a real-world context, this study aims to create a promotional framework not only for 2lyn and his future releases, but also for other artists facing similar issues and challenges as the commissioning artist, stemming from the current state of music industry. Developing a reusable marketing plan template, should provide a scalable and cost-effective strategy in a form of practical solutions for all independent artists navigating the complexities of the digital landscape and seeking success in the current age. Overall, the author hopes to share a well-written work, so that more independent artists begin to see the importance of an effective digital marketing and strong online presence when it comes to music promotion.

## 1.4 Research Question

The rapid digitalization of the music industry has transformed how artists market and distribute their music. Traditional promotional strategies, in a field once dominated by major record labels with extensive resources, are no longer the only pathway to success. With the rise of streaming platforms, social media and algorithm-driven discovery, independent artists now have access to global audiences without the need for a backing from a record label. However, while these opportunities exist, navigating the competitive landscape of digital music marketing remains a challenge, especially for independent musicians with limited budgets and marketing knowledge. The research question of this thesis is therefore:

**“How can independent artist in the music streaming era effectively promote a single to reach an international audience?”**

This research question is crucial, as it seeks to identify the most effective marketing practices that independent artists can leverage to successfully promote their music on a global scale. While previous studies have explored digital marketing and its impact on music industry in general, there is an absence of research focusing specifically on independent artists and single releases in particular. Understanding which platform, content formats and promotional techniques are effective will provide valuable insights for 2lyn himself, as well as other independent musicians striving to establish a sustainable career. However, in order to properly answer this main research question, the following sub-questions also need to be answered:

- Who is the potential target audience for the single and what are their habits and preferences?
- Which platforms and marketing practices are most effective for promoting a single as an independent artist?
- What type of content performs best in engaging audiences and driving streams and how often and when should the independent artist post?

By answering this research question, this thesis aims to offer a practical, data-driven and scalable marketing framework that independent artists can adopt, enabling them to compete in the highly saturated streaming market. The findings from this study serve as a guide for independent artists looking to maximize their reach and audience engagement in the digital age.

This thesis containing further chapters - Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Results, Conclusion and Recommendations, presents a mix of qualitative and quantitative data, gathered mainly through primary data collection methods, in a form of survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with other successful independent artists and brand analysis, as well as additional data from primary and secondary sources such as reports, scholarly articles, scientific publications and journals. The following chapter, Theoretical Framework, will present the needed theory and the by author gathered additional quantitative and qualitative data. This dataset supports the later research and, together with the collected, in Methodology and Results chapters discussed, primary data, leads towards Recommendations and Conclusion in the final parts.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

In the following sections, the author reviews literature and previous studies in order to get a profound picture of digital marketing and its influence on the music industry and the international success of independent artists.

### 2.1 Digital Marketing

#### 2.1.1 Digital Marketing Definition and Background

The internet and digital media have been transforming marketing and business since the introduction of first website in 1991 (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2015, p. 6). With the popularity of world wide web rising, consumer behaviour and the way companies promote their products and services to both consumers and businesses has drastically changed. Digital marketing refers to the action of achieving one's marketing goals with the help of digital technologies, online channels, platforms and media. These are used to support the acquiring of new customers, as well as provide existing customers with a way to develop relationship with the brand. In general, it describes managing different forms of online presence, such as websites and social media pages. (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2015, p. 11-17)

The objectives in digital marketing can be achieved with the help of different strategies such as search engine marketing, social media marketing, influencer marketing and email marketing. Search engine optimization (SEO) describes the practice of increasing the number and quality of visitors to website. This is achieved by improving rankings in the algorithmic search engine results such as Google. Search engine marketing refers to the process of gaining website traffic through purchasing ads on the various search engines. Social media marketing refers to using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube to promote product/brand to an increasingly larger audience, simply by either paid ads or content creation. Influencer Marketing describes using someone's reputation and already established platform in order to sell products, simply by collaborating with them or getting mentioned by them. Email marketing refers to providing updates, news, reminders etc. to customers through electronic mailbox. (Sinha, 2018)

Unlike traditional marketing, digital marketing allows for precise and effective audience targeting, real-time engagement and measurable results. Benefits of this form of marketing include also global reach, cost efficiency and flexibility. However, one of its key benefits is the ability to create personalized experiences for consumers, thus improving conversion rate and fostering social currency, which in the past happened mostly through word-of-mouth recommendations, and now takes form of passing content online from user to user, eventually leading to the brand, in the case of this thesis artists themselves, going viral and creating a name for them. Through data analytics, marketers/artists can track user behaviour and preferences, which allows them to tailor content to specific audience segments. The recent shift from mass marketing to personalized one has turned digital marketing into an essential tool in today's economy for all brands, including those in the music industry. (Adobe Experience Cloud Team, 2023)

The comparison between digital and traditional marketing methods is often a focal point in the literatures. Studies such as the comparative analysis by Raj Sinha (2018) suggest that digital marketing strategies, particularly those that leverage data analytics and personalized content, are cost effective and more efficient in reaching today's consumers compared to the traditional methods such as radio, television, billboards or various print media. This is the case in music as well. Digital platforms allow for targeted advertising, enabling artists to reach specific demographic more efficiently (Sinha, 2018). Furthermore, audience can directly interact with the artist through multiple social media channels, which is a customer need that wasn't easily solvable in the past.

Conversely, it can be argued that traditional marketing methods still hold value, especially for certain demographics, in the case of music also certain genres. It is well-known that the radio still remains a powerful tool for reaching audiences and can be greatly beneficial for musicians in genres such as country or jazz, which may not perform as well among younger adults on social media. Additionally, traditional methods can provide a sense of credibility and authenticity that is sometimes lacking in the current fast-paced world of social media. However, for the purposes of this thesis, author focuses solely on digital marketing, aiming to uncover the most effective strategies within this field of advertising, as the literature suggests that this form of promotion is significantly more impactful in the modern age.

### 2.1.2 Digital Marketing in Music Promotion

From the sub-chapter above it is clear, that digital marketing practices have become a very important instruments for all businesses striving to achieve their goals. They are slowly, but surely replacing the traditional marketing methods, which is the case in music industry as well. With the decline of physical sales and the rise of streaming and other online platforms, artists and labels had to adapt their marketing strategies to the digital landscape. Social media marketing is a digital marketing strategy that has had without a doubt the biggest impact on the current state of music promotion. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube play a central role in all music marketing strategies. They have become indispensable tools for all artists, allowing them to reach global audiences without the limitations of traditional distribution through more personalized and engaging interactions, as well as providing them with direct access to their already built fan base. Artists can now foster loyal following through engaging content and mobilize fans for new releases and tours. (Pinzón, 2024)

Furthermore, social media platforms allow musicians to maintain control over their artistic and professional decisions, thus greatly benefiting independent artists, which is why the central point of this thesis, aiming to discover efficient ways of music promotion for independent artists, is social media marketing. The potential of social media is evident in the stories of independent artist who have leveraged these platforms to build their careers. For instance, Tones and I, Australian indie-pop artist, used social media to promote her song "*Dance Monkey*", which turned into a global hit, topping charts in over 30 countries and gaining billion of streams, all without the support of a record label (Pinzón, 2024). Other cases include, Connor Price and Nic D, who were previously mentioned and described in the Background of the Study section (sub-chapter 1. 2.). The transformative power of social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube when it comes to promoting music and artists themselves is further emphasized by multiple researchers. For instance, Josh Meehan (2019), focusing on quantitative research, aimed to uncover the impact of social media on listeners, which are considered the consumers in music industry. With the help of behavioural data of specific age group 18-24, he argues that social media democratizes music promotion by providing artists with direct access to their audience, making own social media profiles of the musicians the most influential force on the product purchases, in modern age - streams of individual releases. The results of his research questionnaire suggest that social media marketing can impact music artists in a very positive way when implemented correctly. (Meehan, 2019, p. 34)

They indicate that these platforms can be used to increase brand equity and loyalty through active communication with fans in a form of different communication mediums such as status updates, shorts and stories, driving customers to further purchases/streams of a product such as single/EP/album, as 66% of participants agreed that artist communication made it more likely for them to purchase a product/listen to their songs. (Meehan, 2019, p. 34)

Moreover, studies such as the one by Nancy K. Baym (2021) highlight the importance of short form content (videos under 60 seconds) in music promotion, with viral trends driving song streams. For example, Lil Nas X's "*Old Town Road*" or Doja Cat's "*Say So*" exploded in popularity on TikTok due to trends that encouraged user engagement and participation. These tend to take on many forms such as dance challenges or POV-style videos etc. Since the arrival of TikTok other social media platforms had to adapt, creating tools such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, allowing artists to create engaging and visually appealing snippets of their songs, which can then go viral. The effectiveness of short-form content stems from the ease of use and sharing, as well as the potential algorithmic boost. (Baym, 2021, p. 7-9)

An algorithm refers to a developed function on digital media platforms that automatically suggests and determines what type of content will be pushed onto users' page. Every digital channel has a different working one, but most of the social media platform algorithms tend to prioritize regular content posting, as well as high-engagement content, meaning attention-grabbing videos with high interactions (likes, comments, shares) are more likely to appear on user's feeds and reach wider audience. (O'Brien, 2023)

According to TikTok's end-of-year recap, 13 out of 14 Billboard Hot 100 Number 1 songs in 2022, were driven by viral trends that emerged and spread with the help of their platform algorithm (Pinzón, 2024). In addition to social media, streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music also use algorithm-driven recommendations and playlists that help artists reach new listeners, further emphasizing the role of digital marketing in music promotion in the current digital age.

Moriuchi (2015, p.85) argues, that it is crucial to understand that not all social media channels benefit the marketing purposes of a selected brand equally. In the case of this thesis brand refers to artist brand, namely the independent artist 2lyn. Therefore, it is essential to find the right platforms for the specific objectives of the strategy (Moriuchi, 2015, p. 85).

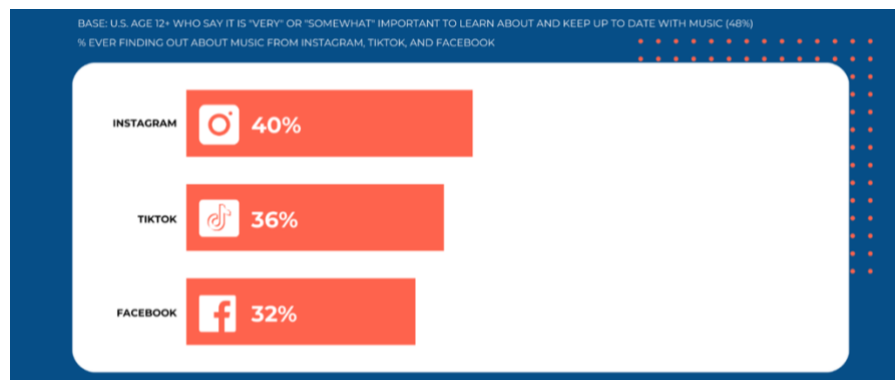
In Table 1 we can see the top 5 social media platforms with the most active users in 2024. However, it is important to note that WhatsApp is mostly a communication tool and doesn't provide option to directly post and share content, making it less effective for music promotion purposes.

Table 1. The Top 5 Social Media Platforms by Monthly Active Users in 2024 (Geuens, 2025)

Platform	Number of Active Users in Billions
Facebook	3,1
YouTube	2,5
Instagram	2,0
WhatsApp	2,0
TikTok	1,6

Figure 1 below showcases 3 most influential social media platforms on music discovery according to the Infinite Dial 2024 Edison Research. Instagram is in the lead with 40% out of the 12+ American participants that answered that it is "very" or "somewhat" important to keep up to date with music. (Edison Research, 2024)

Figure 1. Social Media Platforms Used to Discover Music (Edison Research, 2024)



On the other hand, Katriina Matikainen (2018) notes that while social media offers new budget friendly advertising opportunities for artists, it also oversaturates the market, as everybody starts to think that they can make music themselves as well, increasing the competition and making it even more difficult for existing recording artists to stand out.

Moreover, the emphasis on short form content and viral trends, particularly on Instagram and TikTok, may result in artists prioritizing the entertainment value and content performance over the music artistic merit (Matikainen, 2018). Therefore, this thesis aims to provide feasible, cost effective and efficient solutions for independent artist when promoting their music. As the above-described literature suggest, this can be achieved through regular short form content creation and posting on social media channels, while following viral trends and utilizing the algorithm and data analytics options that the various platforms offer and focusing on consistent communication. Determining the most efficient platforms, ideal posting schedule, as well as balancing the value of art and entertainment when striving towards success, is essential for all recording artists in the modern music industry, thus making it crucial part of this thesis.

## **2.2 Current State of Global Music Industry**

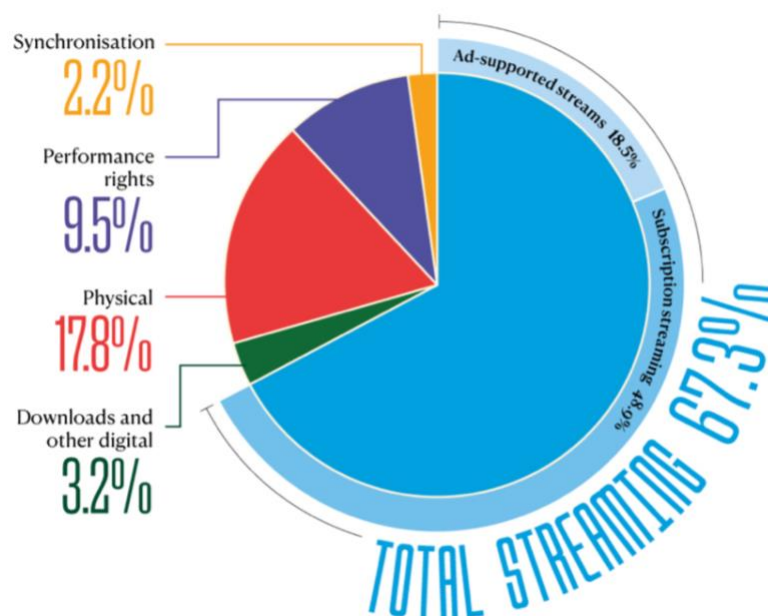
In order to fully understand the impact of the increased importance of digital marketing, namely social media marketing, on music industry the author defines main concepts and provides statistics for the current state of global music industry in the following sections.

### **2.2.1 Music Streaming Era**

As previously mentioned in the Introduction chapter, the music industry has undergone a significant transformation due to digitalization. Internet and music exchange channels such as Napster started to endanger the industry in the early 2000, by providing people with options to download free music online. International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) estimated that by 2008 approximately 95% of music was illegally downloaded from various piracy sites damaging the global music industry greatly. Something needed to be done, and streaming services such as Spotify, SoundCloud and YouTube were the answer. The first official legal streaming service, Spotify, publicly launched in Europe in 2008 and introduced a seamless access to all the music in the world, saving the industry as a whole (Pastukhov, 2022). Music streaming era refers to the rise of all the streaming services that fundamentally changed music consumer behaviour and the whole structure of the music industry, as well as the present condition of it. Unlike the traditional model of album purchases, listeners now have access to an unlimited catalogue of music on multiple platforms either for a fixed subscription fee or for free, but with ads. (Castr, 2024)

The artists/track owners earn their revenue from these in a form of royalties paid to them monthly by individual streaming services per listen/play/stream. Additionally, the price per stream differs for each of the established streaming service (Castr, 2024). According to IFPI streaming in 2023 accounted for more than 67% of global music industry revenue, while physical sales represented only 17,8% of the whole revenue in that year, showcasing the huge importance of the streaming services in the current age of music. For reference, the total value of the music industry in 2023 reached \$28,6 billion and is expected to exponentially grow in the future as well. Lastly, it is important to note that, the streaming revenue consists of both the ad-supported streams, as well as subscription-based streams. We can observe the detailed distribution in the Figure 2 below. (IFPI, n.d.)

Figure 2. Pie Chart for Global Recorded Music Revenues of 2023, by Segment (IFPI, n.d.)

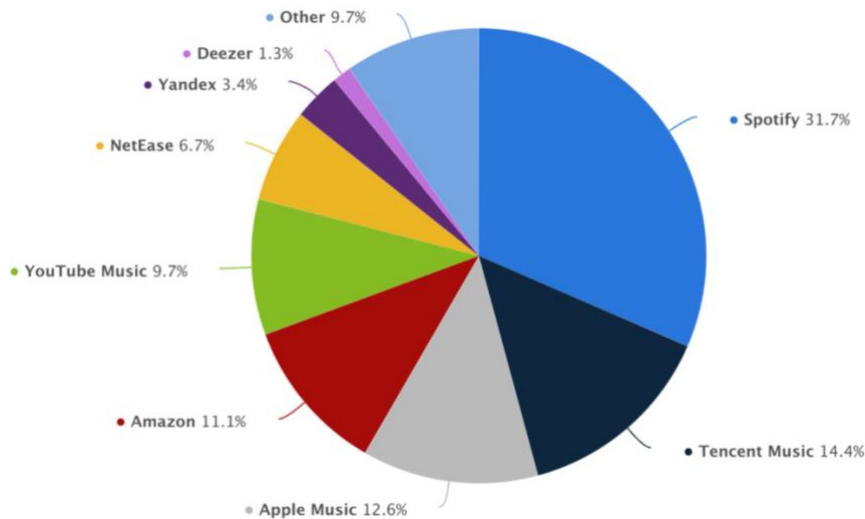


The streaming industry has experienced a rapid growth since its introduction, in both user numbers and market value. In 2023, the global user base reached 919 million, with projections estimating it will surpass 1,1 billion by 2027. Financially, the market was valued at \$15,9 billion in 2023 and is expected to expand to \$18,56 billion by 2027. This steady increase highlights the ongoing shift toward digital music consumption and underscores the crucial role that the various streaming services play in today's music industry's economy. (Castr, 2024)

Spotify, is a streaming platform with the biggest user base, dominating the streaming service industry since its launch, as none of the competitors were able to catch up with them, especially when it comes to paying subscribers (Pastukhov, 2022). It has become one of the most popular music streaming services in the world, with more than 675 million active users at the end of the fourth quarter in 2024. Out of these, 263 million were also paying subscribers. (Spotify, n.d.)

Furthermore, Spotify out of all the available streaming platforms also offers the most comprehensive promotional and data analytics tools, in the form of playlisting opportunities and Spotify for Artists App. The opportunities to gain exposure for all artists, including the focus of this thesis, independent ones, make it the obvious choice for additional marketing activities, as well as result analysis for further research purposes. Its dominance is also visible on the Figure 3, which shows that Spotify secured the first place in the third quarter of 2023 with almost 32% of global subscribers share. Tencent Music and Apple Music came in second and third place, both with less than a half of Spotify's share.

Figure 3. Pie Chart for Share of Music Streaming Subscribers Worldwide in the 3rd Quarter of 2023, by Company (Statista, n.d.)



Additionally, the rise of online streaming has altered how artists distribute their music. To get one's music on all streaming platforms like the ones visible in Figure 3, using services provided by several online distributors is required. Independent music distribution services such as the previously in Introduction mentioned DistroKid, Ditto Music and LANDR, allow all artists to share their music across available streaming platforms for either a monthly or a yearly flat subscription fee or a small commission. (Castr, 2024)

In some cases, there is even a price-per-song option. This shift has reduced artist's dependence on record labels and radio airplay, empowering them to release music on their own, while ensuring that they retain full ownership of their rights and earnings. (Castr, 2024)

Furthermore, some of the streaming services like for example SoundCloud, also provide option for unsigned artists without a distributor to upload music directly on their platform for free. This democratization of the whole music industry has enabled artists from any particular genre or background to showcase their music to international audiences and connect with other users and fans directly, allowing them to achieve global reach without the need for a record deal, shaping the music streaming era into a golden age with great opportunities for independent artists, including the author of this thesis.

### **2.2.2 Changes in Music Consumer behaviour**

Consumer behaviour by definition, refers to the study of individuals, organizations or groups and all their activities associated with the purchase, use and disposal of products and services. It encompasses how consumers emotions, attitudes and preferences affect their buying behaviour. Moreover, by knowing the demands of their target group, business can identify the most attractive product and effective marketing options, which can help them close the gap between customers' intention and their actual buying action. Generally, it represents the key towards driving of product sales, in music - song streams, and the overall company/brand revenue. (White, 2024)

The development of music streaming era has among artists also greatly affected the consumers, in the case of music industry listeners or fans, and their behaviour. One of the key changes in consumer behaviour that we can observe is the shift towards playlist-driven music consumption. Online streaming services use sophisticated algorithms to analyse user's habits and preferences and then suggest new tracks and artists that align with their taste in a form of curated or algorithmic playlists. This personalization enhances user experience by consistently delivering relevant and engaging music content, influencing the majority of listeners habits, which often leads to playlist placements determining artists success, making playlisting one of the most important actions for independent artists when it comes to promotion of their new releases. (Castr, 2024)

Furthermore, social media is another, already multiple times mentioned, crucial player affecting the music consumer behaviour. By changing the way listeners discover and share new music, while simultaneously shortening their attention span as a side effect, they have established an essential role in driving streaming numbers and songs overall performance. Following viral trends or using influencer endorsements can significantly impact artists overall revenue. This is especially important for independent artists. (Indiefy, 2024)

By understanding these behavioural shifts and optimizing one's presence on streaming platforms through playlist placements, as well as engaging in social media marketing and constantly adapting to the listeners demand through content creation that aligns with audience preferences, artists can foster their commercial success. Therefore, the research in this thesis dives deeper into the music consumer behaviour and preferences connected to the social media music discovery and engagement.

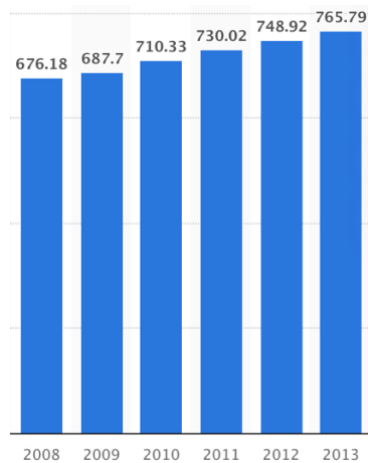
### **2.2.3 Rise of Independent Artists**

In definition, independent artist describes a musician, who creates and shares their music without being signed to a record label. Instead of relying on traditional label structures for financial support, marketing and distribution, independent artists maintain full creative and business control over their music career. They either operate completely on their own or collaborate with independent distributors and management teams. While the term independent, primarily refers to a label status, it also represents artistic and financial autonomy, allowing musicians to decide how their music is produced, promoted, and monetized. On the other hand, label artists, typically sign a contract that grant the label ownership of their music and a significant share of revenue. Record label, represents companies that manufacture, distribute and promote the recording of affiliated musicians. The biggest and most influential three being Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group. (Icon Collective, n.d.)

The technology advancements in the past years and opportunities that the music streaming era presented, in the form of streaming platforms and digital music distribution, available for anyone, as well as the rise of social media and with it connected digital marketing tools and algorithm-driven discovery, is making independence a viable and increasingly popular career path in the modern music industry.

This development has resulted in constant growth of independent artists number in the past years, which can be seen in Figure 4, depicting the development of number of independent performers, artists and writers in the United States between year 2008, the year of launch of Spotify, the first streaming service, and the year 2013.

Figure 4. Column Chart for Number of Independent Performers, Artists and Writers in the United States from 2008 to 2013 in Thousands (Statista, 2016)



As previously mentioned in the Introduction chapter, out of all the 7+ million artists globally releasing music only about 5% are signed to a record label. In 2023 they secured 36,09% of the market share beating even the shares of the big three record labels. As the industry is also expected to positively grow in the following years reaching \$45,6 billion by 2029, this development underscores the expanding opportunities for independent artists. (Pinzón, 2024)

However, as already multiple times noted the increased competition on the market calls for effective digital marketing solutions, thus underlining the importance of this thesis and research focusing on creation of a set of suggestions for independent artists aiming to stand out and achieve their marketing objectives.

#### 2.2.4 Increased Single Release

In the music industry, releases are categorized into album, EP (Extended play) and single. An album is a full-length collection of songs, typically consisting of at least eight to ten tracks with runtime of 30 minutes or more. In contrast, EP is a shorter release that usually contains three to six tracks with runtime under 30 minutes. (IFPI, n.d.)

Lastly, a single refers to a release that features only one main track/song, often accompanied by alternate versions such as instrumentals or remixes (IFPI, n.d.).

As a side effect of the rise of streaming and social media, as well as the changes in customer behaviour, the emphasis has shifted from albums and EPs towards singles. Other researchers suggest that singles have become the most effective way to capture audience's attention in the digital age, as the short-form content on platform like TikTok and Instagram favours quick and catchy songs with hook that makes them go viral, making singles the preferred and more strategic format for emerging independent artists looking to maximize engagement and algorithmic exposure, thus supporting the choice of this thesis marketing strategy, to focus on a single release (Alexis 2024). It is no longer sufficient to release an album every few years and build a career based on that. Constant stream of new content on social media and shortening attention span of listeners, require artists to release new music regularly in order to stay relevant. According to Spotify, artists should release new music every 4-6 weeks, which is not easily feasible when creating lengthy Albums or EPs with a high number of songs and deeper layers on it, especially as an independent artist taking care of everything during the whole process (Spotify, n.d.). Albums and EPs are therefore getting shorter, and frequently uploaded singles are taking the front place in music releases, as they allow artists to release content frequently and keep listeners engaged. (Alexis, 2024)

### **2.3 Digital Marketing Practices for Independent Artists**

Independent artists face unique challenges in marketing of their music, primarily due to limited budgets, resources and industry connections. However, digital marketing offers cost-effective strategies that help them build their brand, and grow their fanbase without requiring traditional label support, allowing independent musicians to compete with artists signed to a major label. The literature review concludes in a set of digital marketing practices that have been observed from other studies and have proven to be effective when it comes to promoting music to international audiences, namely a single, as an independent artist in the music streaming era.

### 2.3.1 Branding

Branding represents a crucial element of music promotion. It refers to the process of getting people to recognize the ownership of a product just by looking at an image or a sign. If business wants to achieve positive results in their marketing initiatives and stand out on a competitive market, it needs to be recognizable. It can be achieved in different ways, for instance through intriguing and attention-grabbing logo, text or a mark connected to the company. (Gronlund, 2013, p. 2)

In the case of artist, brand represents their visual identity, musical style, personality and storytelling, all of which shape how audiences perceive them. A strong and consistent brand enables artists to attract loyal listeners, build a recognizable presence and create a cohesive narrative across digital platforms. Key elements of artists branding include logo typography and colour scheme on their social media profiles, websites and merchandise. Additionally, visual aesthetics of their release artwork, music videos and promotional content, as well as personal and authentic approach that's consistent and engaging for audiences, tend to have positive results. Example of successful independent artists leveraging branding to create a memorable identity that resonates with their target audience is Billie Eilish. She was able to establish a distinct visual and sonic identity across digital platforms early in her career, which contributed to her rapid rise even before signing to a label. (Pinzón, 2024)

### 2.3.2 Social Media Marketing

Social media is one of the most powerful tools for independent artists, offering a direct-to-fan connection without intermediaries. Furthermore, all the different platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, provide unique cost-effective ways to promote music and grow artists audience organically, making social media marketing the most impactful strategy out of the previously in sub-chapter 2.1.1. described digital marketing. It includes practices such as regular posting and engagement in a form of different kind of content, replying to comments, posting updates, live Q&As etc. The focal point is utilizing the right platforms in connection to marketing objectives, as well as using all the different platform-specific features such as Instagram Stories, TikTok trends etc. in the right way. Additionally, the social media platforms provide opportunities for collaborations with influencers and other artists or even targeted paid ads. (Meehan, 2019)

All of these practices result in creation of community-driven fanbase, as well as expansion of artists reach that drives traffic to their pages on various streaming platforms, ensuring long-term success. (Meehan, 2019)

### 2.3.3 Short-form Content Creation

Short-form video content is a social media marketing action that has revolutionized music promotion, turning the practice of content posting in a form of catchy and visually appealing music clips into indispensable tool for independent artists promoting their new releases. This can take a form of behind-the-scenes footage, lyric videos, dance challenges etc. As the social media platforms utilize engagement-driven algorithms, artists can now achieve the phenomenon of going viral even without a large following. By prioritizing short-form content creation independent artists can increase their visibility, audience engagement and build loyal audience. If the content posted by artist is sharable and posted frequently and consistently, it increases the algorithmic reach. This practice can eventually lead to increased overall reach on international audience and drive streaming numbers of artists releases. The surge in streaming numbers, thus higher revenue, stemming from songs traction on social media platform such as TikTok and Instagram, is visible on previously mentioned cases such as Lil Nas X's "*Old town road*" or even JVKE's "*Golden Hour*". Due to the virality of their content, these at that time independent artists were able to achieve mainstream success. (Baym, 2021, p. 7-9)

### 2.3.4 Playlisting

Playlisting is another component of digital marketing that has become critical for music promotion in the streaming era. Securing placements on editorial, algorithmic and user-generated playlists can lead to exponential growth both in streams and exposure. Editorial playlists, refer to playlists curated by the different streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer etc. Algorithmic playlists, describe playlists based on personalized recommendations. They are made by the algorithm function on each of the streaming services. Lastly, user-generated playlists, are playlists curated by individuals or influencers. Pitching independent artists music to playlists curators, especially on Spotify, as it represents the largest amount of world listeners and provides great and equal opportunities of playlist placement for all artists, is one of the best ways to get one's music heard. However, to get one's music on Spotify editorial playlist isn't just a simple adding process. (Alexis, 2024)

Artist must send application for each individual song, advisably 3 weeks prior to their release, to Spotify playlist curators. The application consists of pitch describing various track specifications. The curators then consider adding the track to different playlists according to that application. The playlist placement is therefore not certain. If the artist is able to land the Spotify editorial playlist placement, the results are hugely impactful on the overall release performance, thus making process of playlisting crucial for independent artists success in the modern age. (Alexis, 2024)

Spotify claims that the placement cannot be bought. Additionally, according to the Rolling Stone magazine only 20% of pitched songs actually end up on the by Spotify curated editorial playlists. However, even if the pitched song is not accepted, Spotify developed a Release Radar playlist, that pushes the pitched releases to all of artist Spotify followers, meaning that the playlist pitching is never a waste of time. (Spotify, n.d.)

### 3 Methodology

This thesis builds on the previous research suggesting that digital marketing is an effective tool when it comes to music promotion in music streaming era, aiming to determine which platforms and marketing practices are most efficient for independent artists trying to promote their music to international audience. To fulfil the objectives of this thesis and answer the research question, both primary and secondary information sources were utilized.

The primary data collection adopts a mixed methods research-approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative research focuses on measuring, testing and analysing of variables using numerical data, while qualitative research focuses on understanding of concepts, meaning, opinions and experiences through non-numerical data (National University, n.d.). The mixed methods research therefore provides a more complete picture than just a standalone quantitative or qualitative study (George, 2025). In this thesis the selected approach includes an online survey, semi-structured interviews with successful independent artists, as well as brand analysis of 2lyn, providing a comprehensive understanding of effective marketing strategies for an independent artist's single release. Given the dynamic nature of digital marketing and audience engagement, integrating both data-driven insights and qualitative observations ensures a more holistic perspective and allows for a well-rounded understanding of successful promotional tactics.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was chosen for this study, as the overall assessment of digital marketing effectiveness involves both measurable results, in the case of artists audience growth, engagement rates and streaming numbers, as well as subjective experiences, such as artist perspective, strategic decision-making, branding choices and balance between art and entertainment value.

Quantitative research, achieved through online survey, which is a data collection method conducted electronically allowing for flexible data transmission, capture, and analysis, provides a statistical insight into audience behaviour, preferred social media channels and the impact of different promotional tactics (Tanner, 2018, p. 159-192). By collecting structured data from a broader sample, the survey helps identify patterns and correlations that contribute to a single's success in the music streaming era. This particular method ensures that the thesis is grounded in objective, measurable data rather than anecdotal evidence alone.

Additionally, the qualitative research in a form of semi-structured interviews, a data collection method that relies on asking questions that are not set in order or phrasing, but are based on beforehand prepared framework, allows for an in-depth exploration of how independent artists navigate digital marketing challenges, which strategies and practices they find effective and how they build their brand in a competitive market (George, 2023). Unlike the quantitative data, these interviews provide rich and detailed insights that capture the personal experiences and strategic thought processes of successful independent artists in the music streaming era. This makes them well suited choice for this study, aiming to uncover efficient, cost-effective and proven marketing strategies for independent artists, while addressing the challenges of the current music industry and focusing on practical solutions.

Lastly, 2lyn's brand analysis, a process that one can use to review and refine the current company brand, in the case of this thesis artist brand, offers a real-world case example, bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical application (Indeed Editorial Team, 2025). Examining how 2lyn currently implements marketing strategies and presents himself online, serves as a starting point for the later proposed marketing strategy. By applying the gathered findings from both survey and interviews to one specific artist and consecutively in Recommendations chapter creating marketing strategy for one particular single release, the author aims to showcase how the mixed-methods approach leads to a more nuanced and actionable understanding of effective digital marketing practices for independent artists in the streaming era.

This approach aligns with the need for both statistical validation and qualitative depth in order to assess real-world music industry practices. Furthermore, in this approach an inductive reasoning must be used for theory development, due to the idea that the research project will use pre-existing data and knowledge to construct a framework on which to test new conclusions to build upon and fill in gaps within the topic (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2015).

The data collection process went as follows. Firstly, the questionnaire was created using Google Forms, designed to gather insights on consumer behaviour, music consumption habits and social media engagement, as well as influence of digital marketing on music discovery. The survey included a mix of yes/no, multiple choice and open-ended questions. To minimize respondent fatigue and encourage completion, the questionnaire was limited to 12 straightforward questions that can be seen in the Appendix 1, ensuring that the participants could complete it within approximately five minutes. The survey was then distributed online through various social media channels, including Facebook groups dedicated to music discussions and Instagram stories. The sampling method followed simple random sampling, allowing respondents to participate voluntarily. Since the research focuses on digital marketing's impact, the target group consisted of active social media users without strict demographic constraints, thus making online distribution a suitable choice. However, the study aimed to attract a diverse range of participants that actively listen to music across different age groups and geographical locations to ensure a representative international sample, aligning with the thesis goal of global audience reach.

All responses were anonymous, allowing participants to share their thoughts freely. The questionnaire was available during the period of March 24th, 2025, to April 2nd, 2025, and during this time a total number of 98 responses were collected. The total sample size consisted of a diverse respondent pool from different gender and age groups, as well as countries of origin, representing the desired international audience. The quantitative data from the survey responses were then analysed using descriptive statistics identifying trends in music consumption, social media habits and user engagement with different type of music content. The open-ended survey responses were examined using thematic analysis, where key themes and patterns were identified to complement the numerical data.

Secondly, the semi-structured interviews were conducted during March 2025 with two successful independent artists, who have effectively utilized digital marketing strategies to promote their music. The artists were selected based on their independent status, experience with digital marketing and notable success in building an audience without major label backing. Each interviewee had a history of releasing music and leveraging social media, short-form content and playlisting strategies to reach a wider audience. The interview process followed a semi-structured format, meaning that while a set of 12 open-ended questions prepared by the author that can be found in Appendix 2 guided the discussion, the interviews remained flexible, allowing for deeper insights and spontaneous discussions based on each artist's unique experiences. Seeing that each artist has a distinct business model and approach to their marketing, a few questions were skipped depending on the situation and answers of interviewee. The interviews were conducted via video call, as well as face to face, depending on the availability and preference of the interviewees. With interviewee's consent, their artist names, occupation, country of residence, demographical information and business-related insights were incorporated into the research. The gathered personal data are listed in the Table 2 below.

Table 2. List of Interviewees (Hromádka, 2025)

<b>Artist Name</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Country of Residence</b>	<b>Current Number of Monthly Listeners on Spotify (1. 5. 2025)</b>	<b>Date of the Interview</b>
Naits	Independent Emo Rap Artist	Norway	563 000	27. 3. 2025
fawlin	Independent Pop Artist	Norway	166 800	29. 3. 2025

These interviews led to comprehensive conversations with artists that have been using digital marketing strategies, namely social media marketing, to achieve their professional goals and both lasted around one hour. They provided detailed qualitative data, offering first-hand insights into the challenges, opportunities and effective practices in independent music marketing. The qualitative data were transcribed and coded based on recurring themes, including branding, social media marketing, content strategies, playlisting approaches and timing. This helped identify commonalities and effective practices among the interviewees. Furthermore, the insights from the semi-structured interviews complimented the gathered survey data and together contributed to the presented marketing strategy as a recommendation for commissioning artist 2lyn and the thesis conclusion.

Lastly, a brand analysis of the commissioning artists 2lyn was conducted to establish a foundational understanding of his current online presence, audience demographics and digital marketing efforts. This analysis involved evaluation of 2lyn's existing social media presence (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube etc.), review of streaming performance metrics on his most influential streaming platform - Spotify, as well as audience engagement. This provided fundamental data that served as a base for the creation of a specific and data-driven marketing strategy for 2lyn.

The secondary data from reliable sources selected by the author and presented in Theoretical Framework chapter, combined with the findings from all three above described primary data collection methods, resulted in a practical application in the form of development of a tailored marketing campaign, ensuring that the recommendations given, are both evidence-based and actionable. By integrating survey results, independent artist semi-structured interview insights and the data from brand analysis, this research concludes in a real-world, data-driven, specific single release marketing campaign for 2lyn. The in Recommendations chapter presented digital marketing strategy, provides a tangible example on how independent artists can utilize the by this research identified effective marketing practices. This contributes to academic discussions on music marketing, but also offers a set of suggestions and a practical and scalable marketing framework for 2lyn himself, as well as other independent artists seeking commercial success in the current age.

## **4 Results**

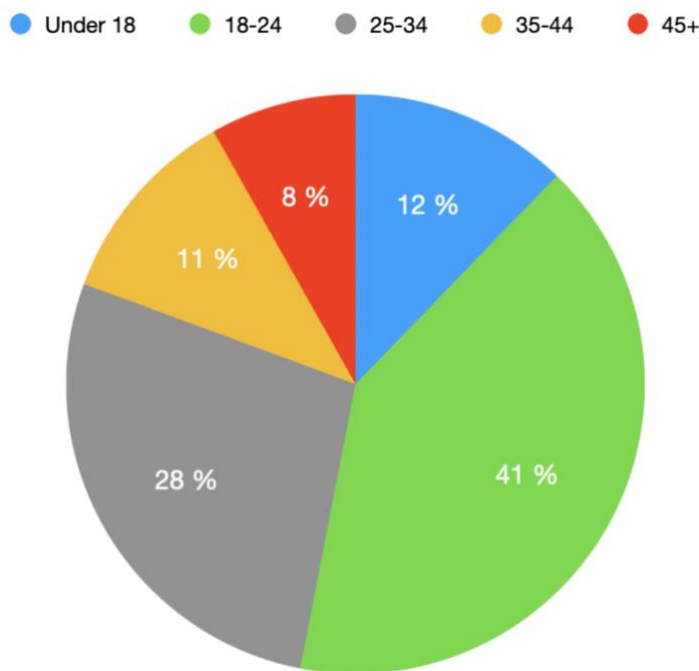
### **4.1 Survey Analysis**

In this sub-chapter, the author examines the results from the online questionnaire and formulates findings.

#### **Demographics of Respondents**

As can be seen in Figure 5 below, the majority of the conducted questionnaire respondents, precisely 41%, were within the 18-24 age group. This was followed by 28% share of 25-34 age group and respondents under 18 at the third place with 12%.

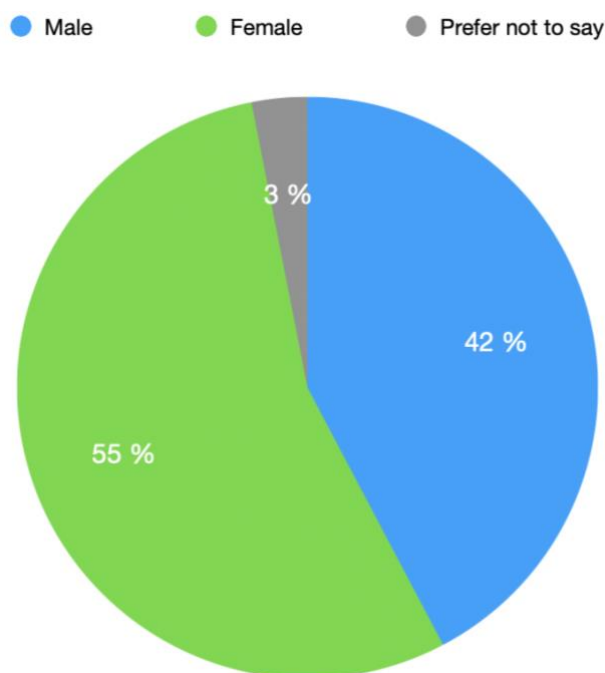
Figure 5. Age Classification of Survey Participants (Hromádka, 2025)



The results from Figure 5 indicate that younger adults are the primary audience consuming music through digital platforms, making this research build up on and line up with the previous study conducted by Josh Meehan (2019), focusing on the 18-24 age group when talking about the role of social media in music promotion and stating that digital marketing can enhance artists career and increase their reach especially among the Gen Z (people born between 1995-2010). Additionally, we can observe that the 35-44 age group accounted for 11% of the respondents, while participants 45 and older outlined 8% of the sample, suggesting that the following formulated findings are not fully applicable for these age groups. It is important to note that the age played a substantial role in identifying the main segments when choosing the ideal target audience for one's single release marketing strategy and as the survey gathered the most responses from the younger adults, the later presented marketing strategy that is based on the research results, was made with them in mind. Stemming from the by other researchers previously conducted research and the survey results it can be argued that Gen Z is the core customer/listener base in the music streaming era, making them the ideal target group for independent artists aiming to achieve commercial success and indicating that the proposed marketing practices are the most effective among customers of age groups under 35. Additionally, this aligns with 2lyn's current target audience that will be more thoroughly discussed in the 4.3. sub-chapter.

Furthermore, Figure 6 showcases the quite equal gender distribution of this survey respondents with 42% of them being male, 55% female and 3% preferring not to answer. This together with the answers from open-ended Question 3, where participants answered that they are from more than 15 countries, including United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Brazil, Norway and Slovakia, makes the gathered dataset representative of the desired international audience, further supporting the idea that the later proposed marketing strategy and with it connected set of recommendations for independent artists have the potential to reach global audiences.

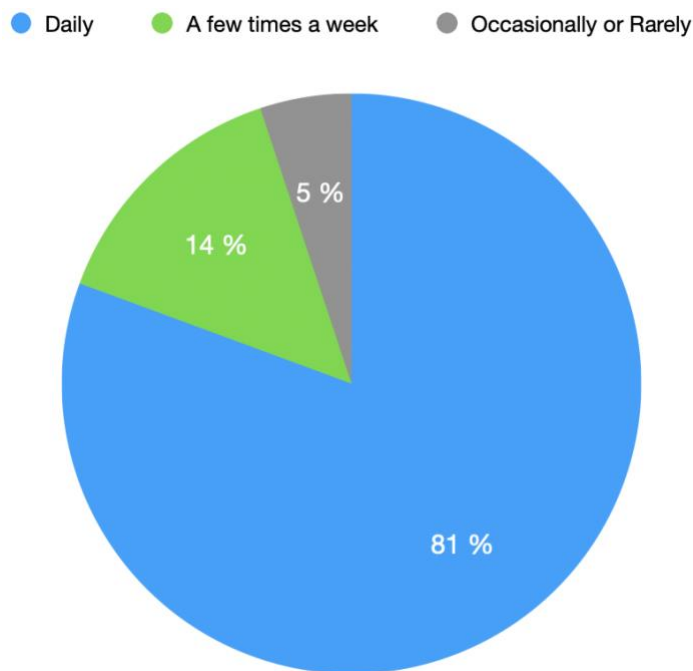
Figure 6. Gender Distribution of Survey Participants (Hromádka, 2025)



### Music Consumption Behaviour

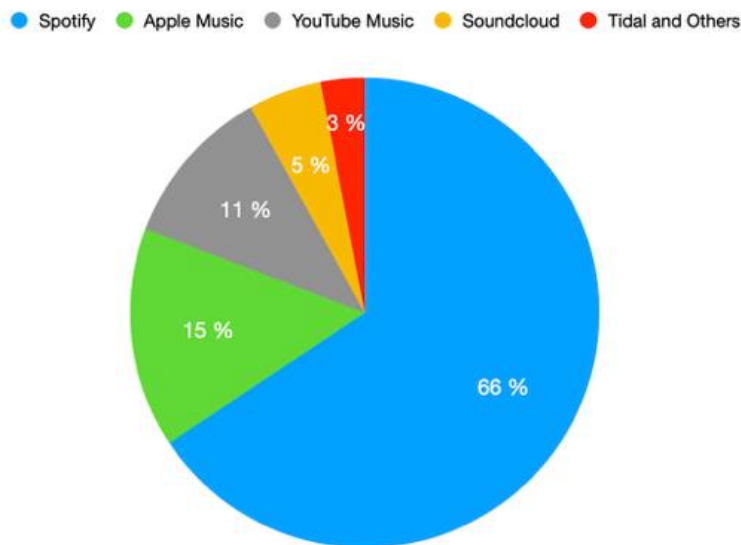
The distribution that can be seen in Figure 7 confirms that listening to music, namely in the form of music streaming, is deeply embedded in daily routines of all people, with majority of respondents, specifically 81%, streaming music every day and 14% streaming music a few times a week, leaving only 5% to occasional or rare music streamers. This showcases the importance of music streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube Music etc. when reaching new audiences as an independent artist and further emphasizes the effects of music streaming era and its influence on consumer behaviour that were previously discussed in sub-chapters 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

Figure 7. Music Streaming Frequency (Hromádka, 2025)



Moreover, as can be seen in Figure 8 below, Spotify dominates as the most-used platform, with 66% of respondents selecting Spotify as their primary streaming service. Apple Music and YouTube music also hold significant shares, with Apple Music taking second place with 15%, while YouTube Music secured third place with 11%. This aligns with the previously, in Music Streaming Era section of Theoretical Framework (sub-chapter 2.2.1.), mentioned studies, illustrating Spotify's superior market share. It also suggests that the main streaming platform relevant for digital marketing strategies and with it connected data analysis, referring to both the initial brand and audience analysis, as well as strategy result analysis, is Spotify, which is why the later presented marketing strategy will focus on this platform in particular, making it overall more specific. Moreover, other streaming service platforms such as SoundCloud were chosen by 5% of participants and Tidal and others such as Deezer, Amazon Music and Tencent secured only 3%, indicating lower usage among the targeted respondents, making them niche platforms, not critical for independent artists success in the music streaming era, therefore insignificant for the purposes of this study.

Figure 8. Preferred Streaming Platform (Hromádka, 2025)



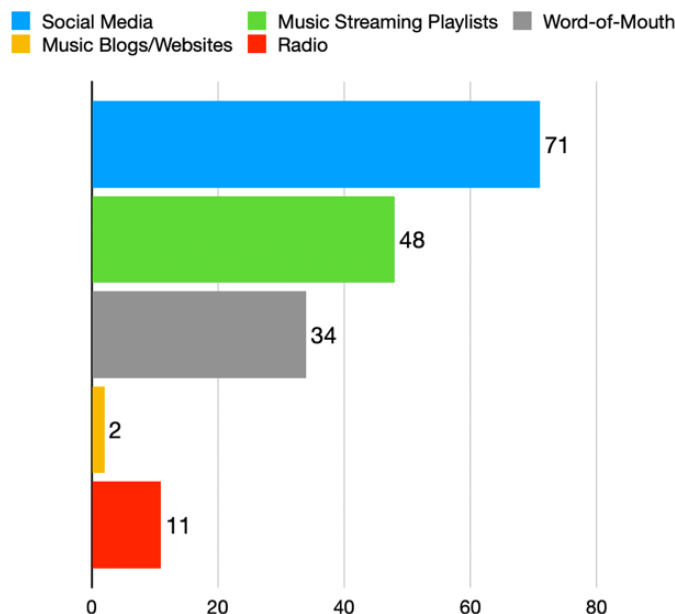
The results from Figure 8 highlight the importance of optimizing marketing strategies with mainly Spotify and its userbase in mind, while it remains the most influential platform for music streaming in the current age. As previously mentioned, music streaming corresponds to 67% of global music industry revenue (IFPI, n.d.), making it one of the most important revenue streams for all artists, including independent ones. Together with the earlier observed changes in music consumer behaviour (explained in sub-chapter 2.2.2), namely the shift towards playlist-driven music consumption, this also underlines the importance of algorithmic discovery features and playlisting power that Spotify provides (explained in sub-chapter 2.3.4.), supporting the idea of playlisting as one of the main digital marketing practices, effective for all musicians, turning Spotify and the Spotify for Artists App service into a key marketing tool for independent musicians in the music streaming era.

### Music Discovery Trends

Figure 9 demonstrates that social media is the most influential channel when it comes to music discovery among the provided options for all the survey participants, as 71 out of 98 respondents (68%) selected this answer as one of the ones that apply when asked to answer the multiple-choice question: “How do you usually discover new music?”. It surpassed the option of by streaming services curated and algorithmic playlists that 48 respondents selected, accounting for 47%. However, this can still be considered a key discovery method, further emphasizing the role of above mentioned playlisting and the overall importance of securing playlist placements in editorial and algorithmic playlists on streaming platforms such as Spotify.

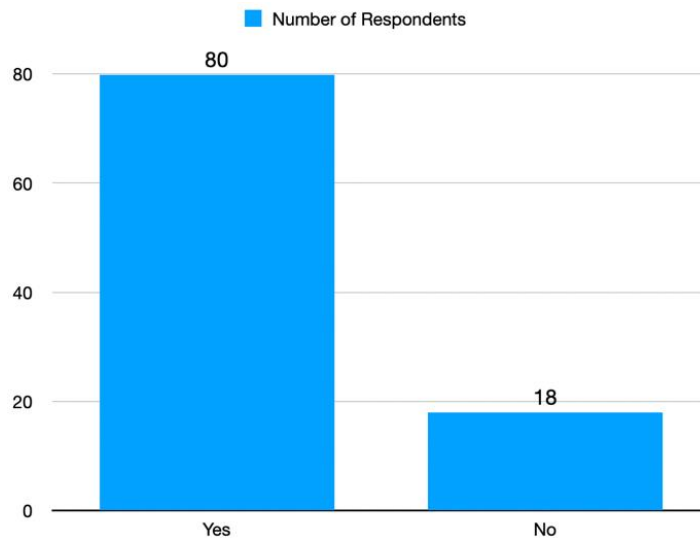
Additionally, Word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family secured third place with 34 participant (33%). It is important to note that the respondents might have understood the word-of-mouth option also in reference to sharing content with other users online, describing the social currency which replaced the word-of-mouth recommendations in the digital age and is more thoroughly described in sub-chapter 2.1.1. If this was the case, it would emphasize the role of social media in music discovery even further. Music blogs and radio were part of only a minor number of survey responses, showcasing its lower impact, reinforcing the shift from traditional methods toward digital music promotion which was previously elaborated on in sub-chapters 2.1.1. and 2.1.2. Lastly, none of the survey respondents added any other options even though they had the option, indicating that the provided selection covered all the important music discovery channels.

Figure 9. How Respondents Discover New Music (Hromádka, 2025)



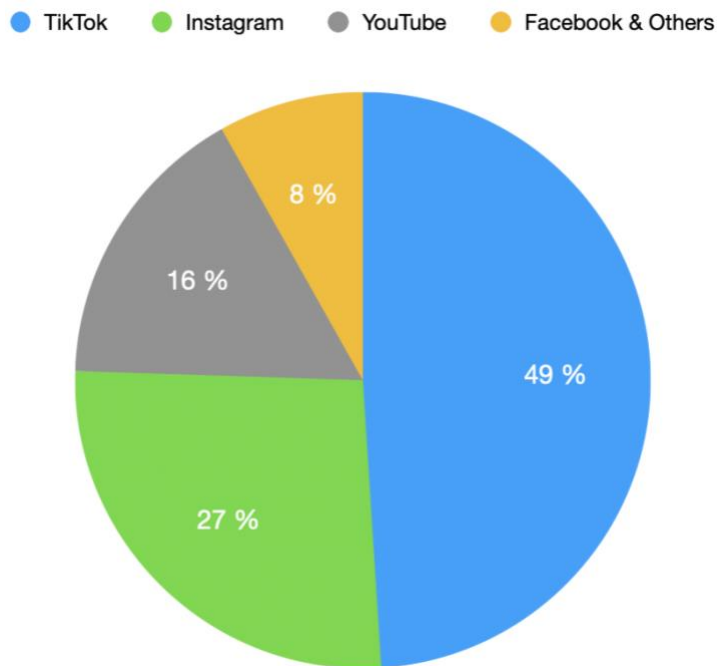
The results from Figure 9 represent the growing impact of social media-driven music discovery, emphasizing the need for independent artists to leverage the marketing options that the social media platforms provide. The high percentage of respondents discovering artists through social media highlights why independent artists must optimize their presence on these platforms to gain exposure. This is even clearer on the Figure 10 below, which shows that 80 out of 98 asked, cca. 78% of respondents, have previously discovered an artist through social media, supporting the argument made by other researchers that social media marketing is one of the most powerful tools for independent artists when it comes to music promotion.

Figure 10. Answers to Question 7: Have You Discovered an Artist Through Social Media? (Hromádka, 2025)



Additionally, the Figure 11 shows answers to Question 8 of the questionnaire that further elaborates on the previous survey question - Question 7, visible in Figure 10, determining that TikTok is the most influential social media platform when it comes to music discovery among the respondents, securing 49% share of the respondents that previously answered that they discovered an artist through social media in the past. TikTok was followed by Instagram with 27% and YouTube with 16%. These results line up with and support the existing Edison Research discussed in sub-chapter 2.1.2., indicating that TikTok and Instagram are the most effective platforms for artists promoting their releases while trying to reach global audiences, as these two take the two top spots in both the Edison Research and the survey in this thesis. As previously mentioned in sub-chapters 2.1.2. and 2.3.3 these social media platforms offer artists access to tools for short-form content creation, while also allowing them to easily follow viral trends and utilize algorithmic functions, thus increasing their reach. It also suggests that independent artists that strive towards commercial success in the music streaming era should focus their promotional activities particularly on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube.

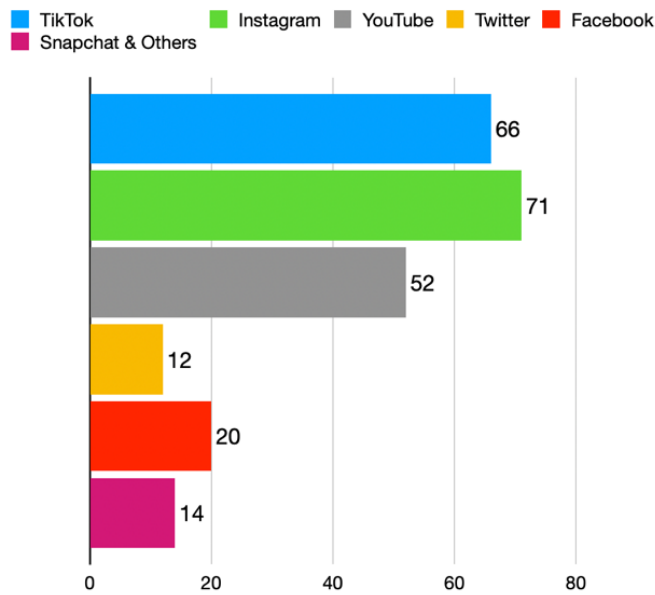
Figure 11. Platforms that Helped Respondents Discover New Music (Hromádka, 2025)



### Social Media & Music Engagement

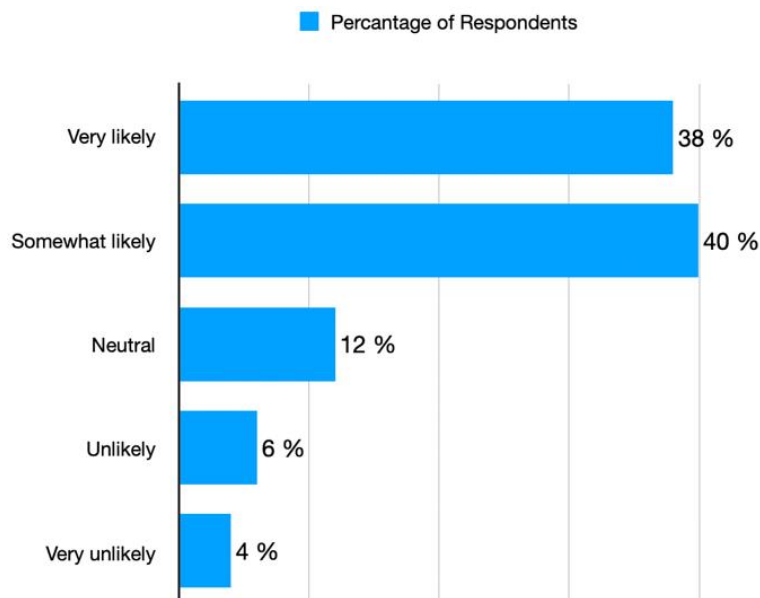
As presented in the Figure 12, 66 respondents (67%) selected TikTok as one of their top 3 used social media platforms. Instagram secured 72% and YouTube accounted for 53%. Other social media platforms such as Twitter with 12%, Facebook with 20% and Snapchat & others with 14% represent significantly lower engagement. Given the overwhelming preference for short-form video orientated video platforms, it is clear that the independent artists need to prioritize content strategies tailored to TikTok, Instagram Reels and arguably even YouTube Shorts in order to maximize their reach and engagement. Additionally, Figure 12 and the previous findings related to music discovery further emphasize the fact that TikTok, Instagram and in some aspects also YouTube are the right platforms for objectives of a marketing strategy that promotes a single of an independent artist in the music streaming era, answering the essential need for finding the right platforms for the specific objectives of the strategy (Moriuchi, 2015, p. 85).

Figure 12. Most Used Social Media Platforms (Hromádka, 2025)



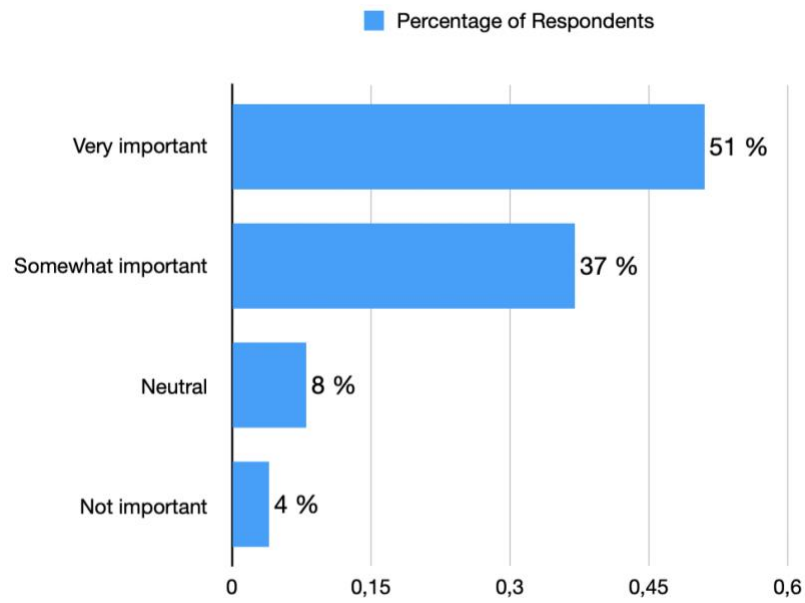
Moreover, in Figure 13 we can observe that 78% of respondents are at least somewhat likely to listen to a song after seeing it on social media, proving that digital marketing, namely social media marketing, directly influences streaming behaviour, thus drives sales in current music industry - song streams, and consecutively increases revenue.

Figure 13. Likelihood of Listening to a Song After Seeing It on Social Media (Hromádka, 2025)



Furthermore, Figure 14 showcases that the majority of respondents, namely 88%, believe that an artist's social media presence is at least somewhat important, reinforcing the idea that independent artists need consistent branding, more thoroughly described in sub-chapter 2.3.1. and correct audience engagement strategies in order to grow their fan base.

Figure 14. Importance of an Artist's Social Media Presence (Hromádka, 2025)



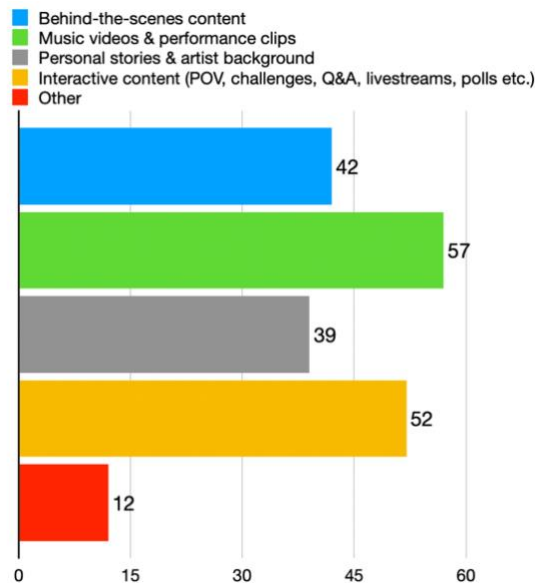
The results from Figures 12,13,14 support the argument that the social media has democratized music promotion, turning artist social media profiles into the most influential force on the product purchases in the music streaming era, when utilized correctly with consistent and active communication with fans, as well as using its promotional tools in a form of short-form video content. (Meehan, 2019)

### Preferred Content from Artists

The high engagement with music videos and performance clips (57 responses/58%) and interactive content (52 responses/53%) visible on Figure 15 suggests that fans respond positively to both more professionally produced content and participatory experiences. Furthermore, behind-the-scenes content with 42 responses and personal storytelling with 39 responses indicate that audiences appreciate authenticity and deeper connections with artists. Among other content types that the respondents filled out themselves with 12 responses were memes, lyric videos and text and photo posts.

This broad division suggests that independent artists need to mix higher quality music visuals with personal storytelling and fan engagement strategies to truly optimize their engagement and increase their chances for success. It also aligns with the industry trends of short form video content and viral challenges/trends playing crucial role in music promotion, which was thoroughly described in sub-chapters 2.3.3. and 2.1.2.

Figure 15. Content Types That Drive Engagement (Hromádka, 2025)



Overall, these results validate the significance of social media when it comes to music promotion. Together with the strong reliance on platform such as TikTok and Instagram, which stems from the previous sections, they highlight the necessity for independent artists to develop engaging, shareable and relatable content on these platforms in order to increase their visibility and foster audience growth.

### Key Survey Findings

After examining the results from the questionnaire, author lists the main findings and takeaways in Table 3 below. These insights will later be applied in Recommendations chapter to create and present effective digital marketing strategy for the independent artist 2lyn's single release, as well as the reusable template and need to be therefore kept in mind.

Table 3. Key Survey Findings (Hromádka, 2025)

Social media is a dominant music discovery tool, making platforms, particularly TikTok and Instagram, or even YouTube essential for independent artist marketing.
Spotify dominates streaming, therefore playlisting on this platform is still a key to reaching its strong user base, as editorial and algorithmic playlists remain a powerful discovery option.
A strong and consistent social media presence directly influences audience growth.
Short-form video content in a form of mix of high-quality music visuals, interactive content and authentic personal storytelling can be highly engaging, suggesting that independent artists should prioritize these formats over the other types.

Overall, the survey provided valuable insights into current age music consumer behaviour, music consumption habits and social media engagement, as well as influence of digital marketing on music discovery. The formulated findings help to answer the main sub-questions when answering how independent artist in the music streaming era can effectively promote a single to reach an international audience. The results suggest that the chosen target audience for one's release in the current age should be among younger adults and the promotional activities focus should be on various short-form video content posting on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, as well as playlisting on Spotify as these were proven to be the most popular, as well as most influential on music discovery among participants, representing mainly Gen Z.

## 4.2 Insights from Artist Interviews

The semi-structured interview conducted with two successful independent artists, Naits and fawlin, provided valuable insights into the digital marketing strategies that have been most effective in promoting music of the interviewees. Despite differences in their musical styles and career trajectories, both artists emphasized the same idea, significance of digital marketing in their success, particularly in leveraging social media, branding and playlisting to reach wider audiences. However, it is important to note that the specific practices that worked for the interviewees might not work for others. The obtained qualitative data from both interviews was categorized into several common themes to formulate the following points.

## **Key Takeaways Common in both Interviews According to Theme**

### **Branding**

Firstly, it is important to note that both of the interviewees mentioned adapting, and releasing mainly singles instead of Albums or EPs to keep their fans engaged, lining up with the choice of this thesis to focus on a single release. According to fawlin singles work better, as modern fans are starting to expect regular content. Additionally, Naits stated that it is much easier for him to market one song at a time making his release strategies structured and much more effective. The artists also highlighted the importance of adapting release and marketing strategies based on the artist branding choices, song's theme and target audience. The interviewees suggested that the cover art of the release, as well as all the marketing content related to the release should be in line with one's brand, to ensure instant recognition among existing fans. According to fawlin the cover art needs to 100% reflect the artist. Naits also stressed that if the short-form video that pops out on social media doesn't fit the artists vibe, people will scroll past it. However, both of them also implied that no single approach guarantees success, so experimenting with different content styles and engagement techniques is necessary to identify what resonates best with one's fanbase.

### **Social media marketing**

A common theme was the critical role of social media and short-form content in today's music promotion landscape. The interviewees had a shared belief that social media is the most powerful tool in today's music marketing landscape. Both artists agreed that TikTok is the most influential platform on their current music careers, with Instagram identified as complimentary to the music discovery power of TikTok by Naits, and as an additional superior fan engagement tool by fawlin. They mentioned that the algorithm on these two social media platforms is designed to increase visibility and engagement even without a large following. To quote fawlin "TikTok changed everything for me, ever since I started uploading daily on there my streaming numbers have been steadily growing". Additionally, the consensus was that paid advertising on social media alone is not a substitute for a well-planned content strategy, but it can be beneficial if utilized correctly, as Naits mentioned investing in paid ads in the past and having success with it, but regular posting making a real difference in reaching wider audiences.

### **Content strategies**

Both interviewees agreed that short-form content promotion was a massive success for them greatly boosting their listener and streaming numbers. They stressed that posting content consistently, daily or at least every other day, is essential for maintaining audience engagement and ensuring algorithmic favourability, making it a priority for an effective single marketing strategy, while also aligning with previous studies suggesting frequency and consistency are key in social media-driven music marketing. “You gotta post daily or every other day if you want the algorithm to do its work” said Naitis. Each of them also suggested that posting various type of content on all short-form video orientated platforms (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube or even Facebook) even if it’s the same on all platforms can have multiple benefits, as one can never predict what will work and how the content will perform on different social media. Fawlin described experimenting with different formats within one’s brand as a necessity in the beginning. Overall, Short-form content creation was the one essential strategy for a successful single release that both artists agreed on, which lines up with the industry trends and current music consumer needs.

### **Playlisting approaches**

In addition to content creation, both artists identified playlisting as a major driver of streams and audience growth and its importance for exposure. Getting featured on Spotify editorial playlist, or any number of user-generated playlists was described as a game changer by Fawlin, suggested to help international artists reach listeners beyond their existing fanbase. Pitching song through Spotify for Artists was defined therefore as a must by Naitis, even though he himself has never got an editorial placement he believes the initial push that comes with inclusion in Release Radar by Spotify is always helpful. Both also mentioned pre-save campaign that lets their already existing fans pre-save the upcoming release, so that it automatically gets added to their playlists when released. According to Naitis pre-saves help with Spotify’s algorithm, where songs with a lot of pre-saves get pushed to more people after the release.

### **Timing**

Regarding the schedule of promotional efforts, both interviewees agreed that the pre-release phase should start at least three weeks before with playlist pitching, content preparation, planning and scheduling, as well as few, maybe 2-3 posts as noted by Naitis.

However, fawlin mentioned that content on social media tends to perform better after the actual release, as the audiences can immediately go and stream the song after engaging with a particular song related post. Naitis agreed with this, by saying that while the pre-release marketing can build hype, his posts tend to get way more traction after the release. This suggests that while pre-release marketing can build anticipation, the post-release phase, especially the first week after the release, is more impactful in driving actual music consumption and should be the main priority. Both also noted that there is no specific length for their promotional activities on social media, but it tends to last around 1 month after the release for Naitis and 3-4 weeks for fawlin. Moreover, the interviewees agreed on not posting only the promoted release during the post-release phase. Naitis suggested trying to mix in content from previous releases or potential future release teases in order to keep his fans engaged, while fawlin mentioned something similar by saying that he likes to also post covers of other songs or different versions and live takes of the promoted song to sustain engagement.

### **Additional Takeaways from Interview with Naitis**

- Naitis mentioned struggling with constant need for posting, but now that he shares content related to his music across all of his platforms every other day even if not connected to new releases, the results of regular uploading cannot be denied. However, as a perfectionist he still has trouble releasing new music every month, which according to him would be ideal. It takes longer for him to finish a song, which he suggested is lowering his overall potential. He is currently actively working on turning his release cycle from one song every three months into at least one song every two months, but the fact that he is still very successful even with less releases suggests that his branding and marketing activities are the reason behind his strong numbers, which indicates that having an effective marketing strategy adapted to one's brand even with less frequent releases is crucial for independent artists success.
- Additionally, to playlist pitching on Spotify Naitis mentioned having his own successful playlist that he curates and adds his releases to. This is a smart way for independent artists to subtly increase awareness of their new releases.
- Naitis mentioned investing in paid advertising on social media in the beginning of his career, giving him a significant boost, but he also noted that the results could never compare to the practise of a simple and consistent short-form content posting that he is using now, while following trends and putting one's own twist to it, underlining the fact that paid marketing can be beneficial, but is not a must.

- The most effective content formats for Naitis include POV-style videos (point of view), combined with picture slides and behind-the-scenes snippets of the artist's creative process and songs creation, as well as simple attention-grabbing videos of him performing the song with a strong written or in the beginning spoken hook.
- Advice given, was to listen to one's fans, post different type of contents and see how it resonates and then try to replicate elements that worked. He also suggested collaborations are the way to go and perfectionism is a bad habit as a perfect song or piece of content doesn't exist.

### **Additional Takeaways from Interview with fawlin**

- Challenges fawlin faced was finding out what type of promotional content is effective for him. It was suggested that this is a longer process and even though posting short-form content has proven to be beneficial for him, it took him some time to figure out what works and what does not.
- fawlin mentioned collaborations with independent curators to secure playlist placements, emphasizing that playlisting activities in addition to Spotify pitching might be a good idea.
- Posting before the release to increase traction and song pre-saves was defined by fawlin as more beneficial for already established and widely recognized artists with broad followings.
- Effective content for fawlin include sped-up versions of his releases with movie/series clips in the background, raw authentic performance of the songs and interactive content like duet options and comment reply video content on TikTok.
- Advice by fawlin for independent artists trying to break into the current music industry was to stay true to oneself and prioritize the art over the actual results, suggesting that the results will come with it as long as the branding is consistent.

Overall, the above formulated findings provide an authentic perspective on successful marketing strategies for independent artists, reinforcing the necessity of social media engagement, strategic playlisting and consistency in content creation. The insights gathered from these interviews complimented the survey findings and helped shape the later presented marketing campaign of 2lyn's single release.

### 4.3 2lyn's Current Brand Analysis

In this sub-chapter, the author examines how the commissioning artist 2lyn presents himself online and uses digital promotional activities, as well as looks into his current audience and performance metrics.

2lyn, as an independent artist has cultivated a brand that emphasizes authenticity, emotional connection and creativity. His music does not conform to a single style, allowing for a diverse audience appeal. When it comes to social media, 2lyn utilizes Instagram as his primary platform and recently he also established a page on TikTok and YouTube. These serve as key tools for current audience interaction and content marketing. However, his posting is irregular, with last post on his Instagram being 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2023, which was around the time of his last single release "hate this town". From this it is clear that his music content upload and the usage of these platforms is not active and the online presence he established is therefore inconsistent, underlining the need for a stronger upload and marketing strategy for his next releases, as his activities do not fully align with shortening attention span of music consumers, as well as current digital marketing trends for independent artists observed in this study that suggest that consistency across all the different channels is pivotal for building recognition and connecting with fans on a deeper level as an artist (Pinzón, 2024). The irregular posting can have multiple long-term negative effects including reduced visibility, reach and engagement, as the social media algorithms tend to prioritize accounts that post consistently (O'Brien, 2023). Additionally, it can cause loss of audience interest and trust, as well as weaker brand recognition (Baym, 2021).

The following Table 4 showcases 2lyn's current follower numbers on the main 3 platforms identified in this research as the most effective when it comes to music promotion, with Instagram leading (969 followers). These metrics are one of the key performance indicators (KPI) that should be used for result analysis in the later created single marketing campaign.

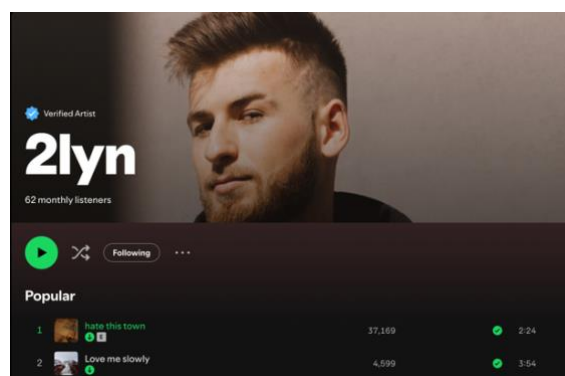
Table 4. Current Follower Numbers for Different Social Media Platforms of 2lyn (Hromádka, 2025)

Social Media Platform	Number of Followers
TikTok	14
YouTube	19
Instagram	969

Even though 2lyn's marketing approach aligns with some of the effective practices identified in this research, there is still a room for improvement and optimization. His current content strategy includes short-form videos such as performance clips, lyric videos and POV-style videos, which mirrors some of the techniques mentioned by other independent artists in interviews, as well as lines up with survey respondents content preferences. The main improvement areas include consistency, content tailoring for each release cycle and engagement strategies. Being consistent and having a well-thought-out release strategy that ensures that new content always builds upon previous releases, reinforcing the artists brand narrative and making sure that the audience is invested is a key to keeping fans engaged and increasing one's reach (Pinzón, 2024). The later recommended marketing strategy for 2lyn aims to improve specifically these areas to maximize conversions from casual listeners to dedicated fans.

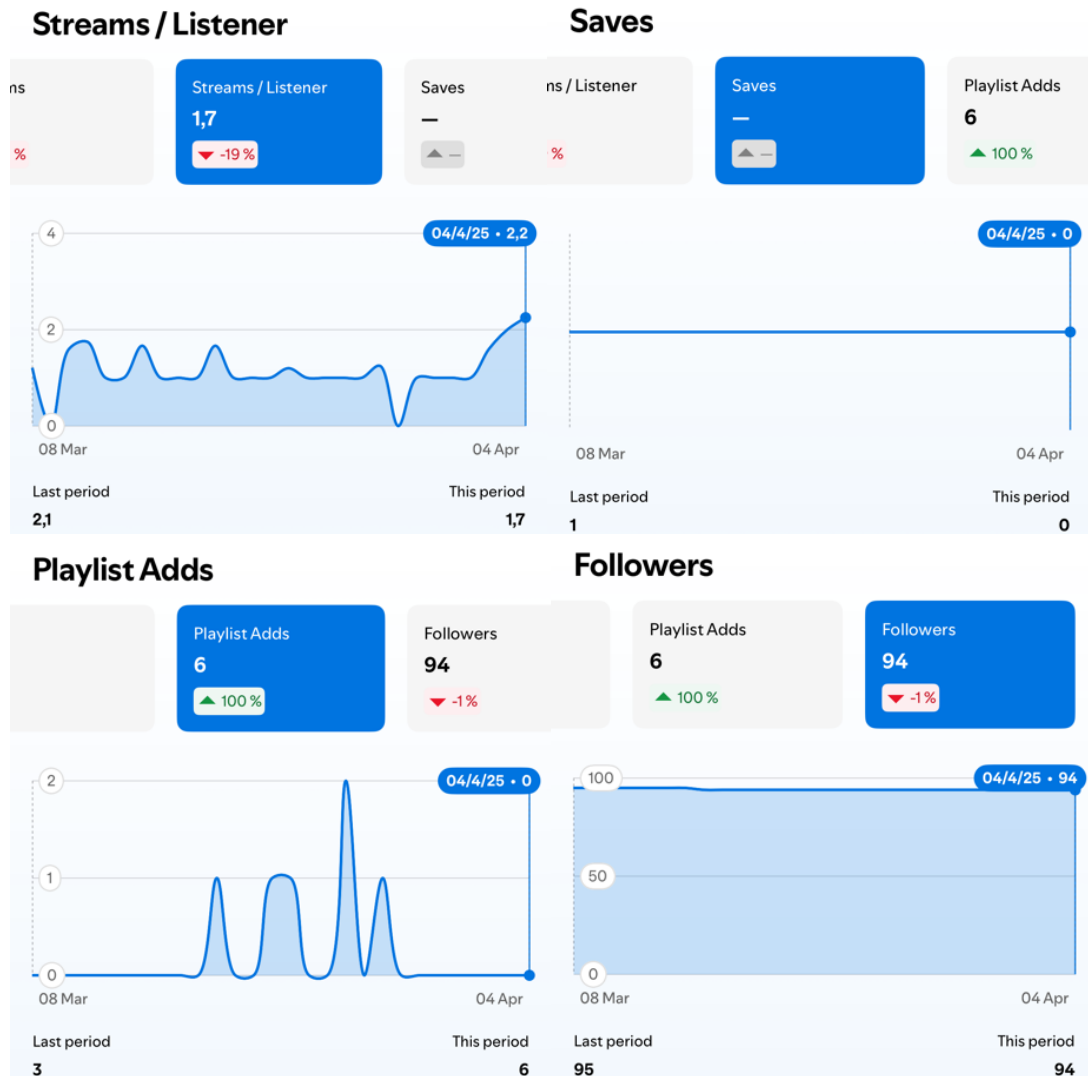
The data from streaming platforms, provides insight into demographic trends, listener retention and engagement levels, which are essential for shaping future marketing strategies. These need to be constantly reviewed and the marketing strategy should be optimized and adjusted according to the gathered findings. As most of 2lyn's so far accumulated streams across all the streaming platforms (over 45 000) are coming from Spotify, it naturally represents most of his listener base. It was also proven in the research that Spotify is the most used platform, making it a great progress tracking tool. The current overall streaming performance metrics can be observed on the Figure 16 below, which showcases his Spotify artists profile that the audience can access as well. Furthermore, it showcases his current monthly listeners number, which changes every day and as of writing this paper stands on 62 and moves in a range of 50-150. This together with the overall streaming numbers on Spotify, serve as additional KPIs for the in chapter 5. presented marketing campaign's success, as this strategy is expected to boost not only the promoted single but other songs performance as well.

Figure 16. 2lyn's Spotify Page (Spotify, n.d.)



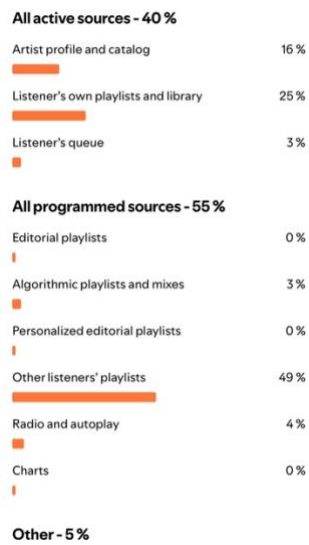
Further Spotify related KPIs include Streams/Listener, Song Saves, Playlist Adds and Follower numbers, of which current stagnant development can be observed in Figure 17. These indicate that 2lyn's inconsistency of new music uploads is diminishing his potential for sustainable success.

Figure 17. 2lyn's Spotify Streams/Listener, Song Saves, Playlist Adds and Follower Metrics (Spotify for Artists, n.d.)



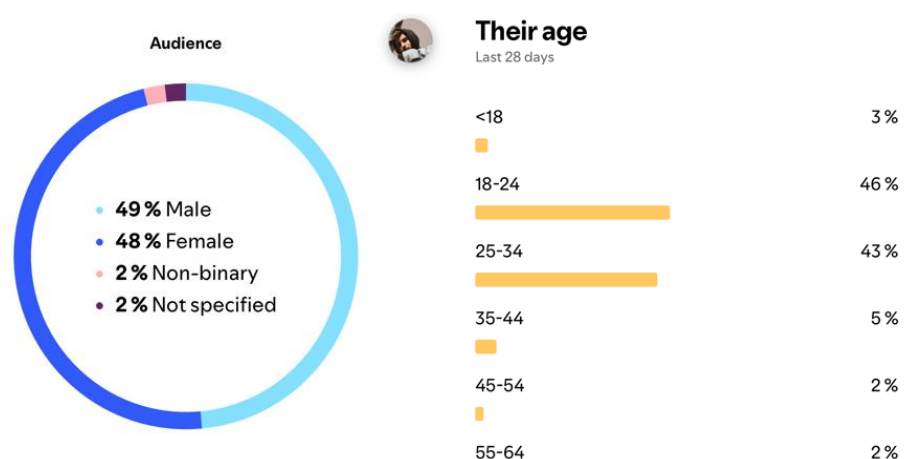
Additionally, Figure 18 presents the various sources of 2lyn's streams on Spotify for the past 28 days (numbers for March 2025). The distribution suggests that most of 2lyn's streams are coming from user-generated playlists. The editorial playlists curated by Spotify are responsible for 0% of 2lyn's streams, underlining the crucial need for playlist pitching suggested by the previously conducted research.

Figure 18. Sources of 2lyn's Spotify Streams (Spotify for Artists, n.d.)



2lyn's listener base consists of almost equally distributed gender, with most current fans being in age groups 18-24 (46%) and 25-34 (43%). This can be observed on Figure 19, which shows the gender and age distribution of 2lyn's audience on Spotify during March 2025. This aligns with the survey results, that indicate that the younger adults are the primary audience consuming music through digital platforms and suggests that these two age groups should continue to be the target group of 2lyn's single releases and with it connected marketing strategies. Additionally, 2lyn's listener base already represents international audience with 28+ reached countries, indicating successful audience outreach beyond local markets, supporting the idea of this thesis that independent artists can reach international audiences without the backing of record labels as a consequence of the music streaming.

Figure 19. 2lyn's Spotify Audience Gender and Age Distribution (Spotify for Artists, n.d.)



While 2lyn has successfully established an initial digital presence, the key challenges for him include scaling his reach, increasing engagement and achieving sustained growth in an increasingly competitive music industry landscape. As the previously conducted research indicates the opportunities for 2lyn's improvement as an independent artist striving to achieve success on a global scale in the music streaming era include:

- Implementing a structured pre-release and post-release strategy with focus on promotion through personalized content.
- Leveraging playlisting strategies to increase streams and reach.
- Enhancing audience engagement tactics to strengthen fan loyalty.

This brand analysis provides a foundation and serves as a base for following marketing strategy, ensuring that the recommendations are tailored to 2lyn's brand and market positioning.

## **5 Recommendations**

### **5.1 Recommendations for the Commissioning Independent Artist**

In the following sub-chapter, the author gives recommendations to the commissioning independent artist 2lyn in the form of data-driven marketing strategy proposition tailored to a selected upcoming single release – fake smile. These recommendations are given based on the findings from in this thesis previously conducted research stemming from the survey results and interview findings, while also building up on the previous suggestions made in other in Theoretical Framework chapter described studies.

#### **Overview & Objectives**

This strategy leverages the effective marketing practices identified in this research from audience survey analysis and artist interviews and is based on the fundamental data from conducted brand analysis. The key areas of this strategy include branding and leveraging consistent posting schedule for short-form content particularly on social media platforms TikTok, Instagram and YouTube to drive the music discovery. The study by Nancy K. Baym (2021) showcasing multiple successful cases suggests that short-form content creation can indeed be greatly beneficial for independent artists in the music streaming era.

Moreover, as highlighted by Sara Pinzón (2024), consistent branding is not just a strategy it's a fundamental aspect of artists success in the music industry, as it ensures that every touchpoint with fans reflect the same core message, values and aesthetics, enhancing brand recognition and emotional connection over time. Additionally, utilizing playlisting and interactive audience engagement activities to maximize reach, discovery, streaming performance and fan retention is another aspect of the proposed strategy, which aligns with the suggestions from Marco Alexis (2024). By following this structured plan 2lyn's single "fake smile" can reach a wider audience, convert casual listeners into loyal fans and increase his revenue.

To make the objectives specific and achievable, this strategy aims to gather at least 1 500 streams on the "fake smile" single in the first month after the release and 2 000 streams on Spotify combined from all of 2lyn's releases in this period. Furthermore, this strategy should result in increased numbers of followers on the main three social media channels (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube), the expected increase is by 200 on each individual platform. Additionally, Spotify followers are expected to increase to 150, thus increasing the overall monthly listener numbers range to 100-200, and the strategy also aims to secure at least 350 saves and playlist adds for the selected "fake smile" single.

### **Target Audience**

The primary audience of "fake smile" single and with it connected proposed marketing strategy consists of age group 18-34 years old, as this was identified as the main streaming demographic. The targeted listeners specifics include, using social media channels on a daily basis and utilizing platforms like TikTok and Instagram or even YouTube as their music discovery tool. Furthermore, most of them use Spotify as their streaming service option, therefore editorial and algorithmic playlists on this platform are another discovery tool for them. They are looking for sad, relatable and emotional songs without a specific genre in mind, but prefer acoustic, singer-songwriter, indie pop/melodic rap style of music with deeper meaning in the song's lyrics and theme, as this describes the "fake smile" single. Moreover, they are also looking for relatable storytelling, behind the scenes content and interactive formats that connect them with the artist.

### Pre-Release Phase (3 Weeks Before Release)

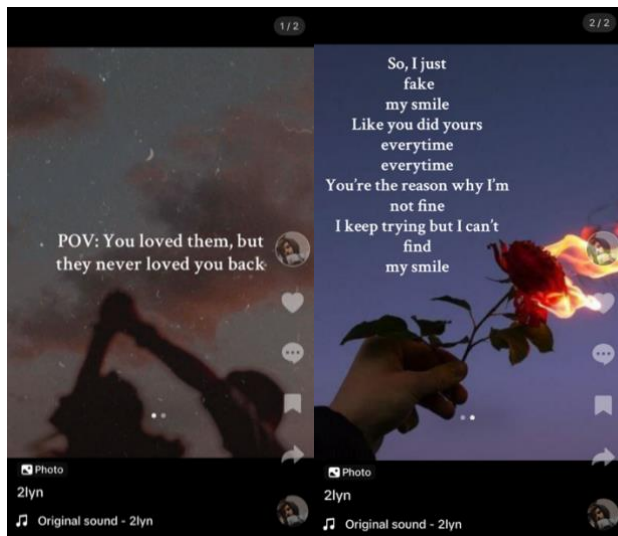
Creating an artwork for the single “fake smile” that lines up with the established brand of 2lyn, which can be described as authentic and simple but stylistic, reflecting raw, emotional and intriguing theme of the song lyrics, related to coping with heartbreak. This should align with the previous release artworks as well to promote consistency of branding (Pinzón, 2024). The proposed idea for artwork can be seen in Figure 20 below.

Figure 20. Proposed Cover Artwork for 2lyn’s Single “fake smile” (Hromádka, 2025)



After uploading the song with created cover artwork through independent distribution service DistroKid and scheduling its release 3 weeks ahead 2lyn can submit his track through Spotify to their curators in order to be considered for inclusion in editorial and algorithmic playlists. Additionally, 2lyn needs to create a lyric/music video for YouTube and at least 20 different pieces of short-form video content that aligns with the message and theme of “fake smile” of various types such as performance clips, POV-style videos or picture slides, storytelling, behind-the-scenes, lyrics with thematic clips etc and can be shared on multiple social media platforms, while also covering the first month after release posts. The Figure 21 introduces a potential content idea that can be used in a form of POV-style picture slide with song hook lyrics that could be shared on TikTok.

Figure 21. Content Idea for TikTok (Hromádka, 2025)



One week before the release 2lyn should start posting first snippets featuring the catchy hook from “fake smile”, that announces the release date and encourages listeners to pre-save. It is advised to post 2-3 short-form content materials in this week and save the rest for the release week and post-release phase. The posting of the created content throughout this whole campaign should happen on all selected platforms including TikTok, Instagram and YouTube with minor variations, as these are the most influential on music discovery, and the repetition of content across multiple platforms is suggested to not be damaging to a brand.

### **Release Week (The First 7 Days after Release)**

This week consists of high-frequency content posting on the selected platforms (TikTok, Instagram and YouTube). On the release day 2lyn should also release created lyric/music video on YouTube and post drop announcements on all platforms. On days 2-7 there should be an ongoing promo, where the content needs to be uploaded daily to maximize the impact. The content posts should showcase different parts of the song (verse, bridge, chorus) and can take form of the previously mentioned storytelling content – posts explaining the inspiration and meaning behind “fake smile”, behind-the-scenes clips showcasing the recording process, movie/series clips that fit the song theme combined with the lyrics, simple performance videos with catchy and interesting parts, lyric or music video clips etc. and if possible should include current industry trends that align with the song’s theme. The focus should be on call to action, for instance “Go stream fake smile now on all platforms!” or “Add it to your playlist”.

### **Post-Release Phase (2-4 Weeks after Release)**

Posting can be lowered to every other day, but is advised to keep being daily if possible. Adding content showcasing results (number of streams) and new promotional materials for both future and old releases, as well as introducing the alternate sped-up version of fake smile into the content mix ensures that the audience stays engaged. Furthermore, 2lyn needs to keep interacting with fans, thus focus on engagement tactics. This is a crucial part throughout the whole release process not only post-release phase, and includes replying to all comments, creating polls and Q&A on Instagram stories, going live and encouraging users to create their own content by duet-friendly clips on TikTok and direct replies to Instagram DMs and TikTok user comments in video format, which promotes the with brand aligning personal approach and maintains the songs lasting effect. Something similar was also suggested to work in the study by Josh Meehan (2019).

### **Performance Tracking & Adjustments**

Monitoring social media engagement metrics to see which content is performing the best and adjusting the content themes accordingly should happen even during the promotion phase. To assess the marketing campaign success tracking all the social media related KPIs (social media follower numbers, content performance metrics) and Spotify for Artists data related KPIs (streaming numbers, monthly listeners development, streams/listener, song saves, playlist adds and follower numbers, as well as streaming sources) after the end of post-release phase is recommended.

After the result analysis 2lyn should optimize the presented practices and content styles based on what resonates and works for future releases, as the ending of the performance analysis should kick off the next release cycle.

## **5.2 Reusable Template**

Based on the findings, derived from the conducted research and the created marketing strategy for the release of a single by 2lyn, this thesis concludes in a set of suggestions that serve as a guideline for 2lyn's future releases, as well as other independent artists navigating through the landscape of digital marketing, striving to achieve commercial, sustainable success on an international scale in an effective and cost-efficient way during music streaming era. This framework is designed to maximize engagement, audience growth and streaming numbers.

## General

1. Focus on creating Singles instead of lengthy Albums and EPs as this lines up with the current industry trends and changes in consumer behaviour such as the importance of consistency when releasing music content and shortening attention span of listeners and social media users. Momentum matters more than perfection.
2. Conduct a brand and audience analysis, examining current marketing strategies, listener preferences and online presence, looking to identify strengths and original leverage options in one's visual identity, music style, personality and storytelling and own it. Treat music like a business, lean into marketing and being strategic instead of just hoping to go viral one day.
3. Optimize Spotify profile and all other artist pages to fit the desired brand.
4. Set specific and achievable objectives for the marketing activities.

## Pre-release Phase (3-4 Weeks before Release)

5. Identify the key elements of the release such as genre, theme, feelings, lyric ideas and mood.
6. Create artwork that aligns with the artists brand and releases message.
7. Use independent distribution services to get your song published on all available streaming platforms.
8. Define target audience and their habits for the release based on genre, age group and preferences. Leverage insights from past engagement (Spotify for Artists, social media analytics) and the previously conducted brand analysis to refine ideal listener profile.
9. Submit the song to Spotify editorial playlists via Spotify for Artists, as this streaming service is the most popular and editorial and algorithmic playlist remain powerful music discovery option among the international listeners. If desired reach out to playlist curators across other platforms as well.
10. Identify platforms where the target audience is most active on. The results of this study indicate that TikTok, Instagram and even YouTube are the most influential for music discovery, thus it is recommended to focus on these platforms and leverage short-form content creation opportunities that they provide, as these are suggested to be beneficial and more cost-effective for independent artists in comparison to paid ads on social media.
11. Create a variety of content that fit the release's theme, enough to cover at least a month after the release with consistent posting of daily or every other day uploads.

Focus on creation of short-form content in a form of high-quality visuals, interactive content (POV-style videos, challenges, following trends) and authentic personal storytelling and behind-the-scenes footage of the creative process, as these are suggested to be highly engaging.

12. Make sure that all the elements including the release artwork, music video/lyric video (if created) and promotional short-form content materials line up with your branding choices and represent your personality to keep it authentic, consistent and engaging for audiences.
13. Post a release snippet teasers with catchy part of the song and countdown content (e.g., "1 week until new single drops!"), but it is advised to save most of the created video content for the release week and post-release phase.
14. Engage with fans daily throughout this whole process in order to build anticipation. Encourage them to pre-save the track before the release.

### **Release Week (First 7 Days after Release)**

15. Maximize the impact by post announcement (e.g., "It's finally out!") and short-form videos encouraging fans to add the song to their own playlists and share it with others.
16. Ideally post daily in this first week, use the in pre-release phase created engagement driven videos such as lyric/performance/mood based to the brand authentic content with different parts of the song (hook, bridge, verse) to keep engagement fresh or various interactive posts like polls asking about fans favourite part of the song.
17. Focus on call to action (CTA). Always remind people to stream share and add to playlists.
18. Engage with the community, answer all the comments, messages, host lives, Q&As etc.

### **Post-Release Phase (2-4 Weeks after Release)**

19. Maintain post-release momentum to extend the lifespan of the single by continuing consistent content posting of the prepared materials. Short-form video is the fastest way to get attention. Test different content styles, to see what connects.
20. Reshare all the user-generated content with the release and through that encourage fans to create their own videos with the song.

21. Share early streaming stats and reactions, as well as engage in trends or challenges related to the song's theme.
22. Diversify by introducing and releasing alternative versions (acoustic, sped-up) through attention-grabbing snippets and through that keep engagement high.
23. Keep a strong and consistent social media presence that represents desired brand throughout the whole process as this can directly influence audience growth. Always interact with audience to build a loyal fanbase.
24. Include content related to other previously released music to change it up and increase their performance as well. Start already introducing new releases as the ending of this release cycle should be either followed up with another one beginning right after or intertwine with one with this ending point in strategy being the release date for another single.

### **Performance Tracking & Optimization**

25. Monitor KPIs such as follower numbers on social media and streaming numbers across all streaming platforms with focus on Spotify, as this represents largest listener base.
26. Identify which content type performed best and adjust the strategy with that in mind for future releases.
27. Additionally, track playlist additions, saves & audience/listeners growth to understand the releases long-term reach and to see if the strategy is working or if something needs to be changed.

### **Additional Long-Term Promotion Strategy Ideas**

28. If the budget allows run low-cost social media ads (even just 5\$ a day), namely on TikTok and Instagram.
29. Leverage collaborations with other artists and feature in each-other's content in the form of duet or just a mutual shout out to cross-promote and increase both artists' reach.
30. Create an artist's playlist on Spotify with mix of the promoted artists songs and mix of similar artists. Actively promote it to drive streams of both your new and old releases, while also networking with other playlist curators.

This simple and scalable template ensures that every future single release of 2lyn and any other independent artists that also struggle to navigate the music related digital marketing landscape can follow a structured, high-impact plan tailored to ones needs. The benefit of this simple template is that 2lyn and other independent artists can repeat and refine this framework according to results for every new song, making it a sustainable, cost-effective long-term strategy.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore effective digital marketing strategies for independent artists navigating the complexities of the music streaming era, with particular focus on creating a marketing strategy for the single release of one particular upcoming track from 2lyn called “fake smile”. Recognizing the rise and influence of music streaming and the pivotal role of social media, the research aimed to determine which platforms, tools and types of content independent musicians can leverage to reach and grow an international audience in a cost-effective and scalable way. In doing so, it examined the challenges faced by unsigned musicians, the evolving digital landscape and the role of branding, playlisting, social media and the short-form video content in promoting music on streaming platforms. This study aimed to research and plan a tailored data-driven marketing campaign, ultimately leading to a creation of a later presented reusable template for 2lyn’s future releases, as well as other independent artists striving to achieve commercial success.

With the Introduction chapter outlining the motivation behind this thesis and Theoretical Framework chapter providing the needed context, the Methodology chapter explained the adapted mixed-methods approach used in this study. This approach aimed to answer the formulated research question, through survey targeting music consumers (98 respondents) and semi-structured interviews with two successful independent artists. The survey provided qualitative insight into consumer streaming habits, social media usage and content preferences, while the interviews added depth by uncovering promotional techniques, strategies and challenges faced from real-world experiences. Additionally, brand analysis of 2lyn provided a foundation for designing a tailored release strategy. This gathered primary data, combined with in Theoretical Framework chapter conducted secondary research, informed the strategic choices made for the above in Recommendations chapter presented marketing campaign and reusable template, as well as helped formulate the following conclusion in a form of answer to the research question.

## 6.1 Answer to the Research Question

**“How can independent artist in the music streaming era effectively promote a single to reach an international audience?”**

The predispositions of the current state of music industry have created conditions favouring the chances for commercial success of independent artists. However, with the opportunities it also presented several challenges, which this study aimed to navigate through. To answer the formulated research question, it is indicated that selecting the right target audience and understanding their habits and preferences, as well as identifying the right set of platforms, practices, content types and schedule for the strategy is needed. The music streaming era influenced music consumer behaviour and changed the way international listeners discover and interact with music. Findings from the conducted research suggest that younger adults are the main target group when it comes to music consumption and its discovery through digital platforms, making them the right base demographic choice for independent artists that want to achieve their marketing objectives in the current digital landscape. The more detailed specifications for the target audience of selected single should always stem from the single characteristics and the independent artists branding choices.

Furthermore, the results also indicate that short-form video content on social media platforms, particularly TikTok and Instagram, but also YouTube, as well as playlisting, mainly on Spotify, and engagement with fans on social media, are one of the most impactful strategies that can drive sales/streams, thus increase potential for artists success in the current state of music industry, where music streaming represents the biggest revenue stream. While social media is suggested to be the most powerful tool for exposure, playlisting is also essential. Moreover, a well-developed brand can help distinguish artists in a saturated market, making branding important part of an effective music promotion too.

Content suggested by results to work include performance clips, interactive POV-style videos and challenges, as well as storytelling posts and behind-the-scenes content. Additionally, interviews with artists confirmed that consistent content output, posted daily or every other day, especially after the release date, is an effective way to boost singles streams and overall artists visibility, maximizing the algorithmic potential and audience conversion. It is suggested that the strategies are adapted to each individual release, with planning starting at least three weeks in advance, and all choices lining up with the established brand.

Moreover, building and nurturing a core fanbase remains a long-term effort, requiring persistence beyond the initial release window. Releasing singles instead of albums and EPs to ensure the ability to regularly drop new music with consistent branding, followed by authentic content posting and adjusted specific strategies, is crucial for cutting through the noise. Planning and preparation are essential, but adaptability is just as important in a fast-moving digital environment. Additionally, it is important to note that the audience insights should guide the content strategy, as the focus should be on content personalization, rather than following one's assumptions or trends alone.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that independent artists can, with the right tools and strategy, compete in a saturated digital music market. While the path is not easy, it is increasingly accessible to those who are strategic, data-informed and creatively authentic in their approach.

## **6.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

While this thesis offers a valuable insight into effective marketing strategies for independent artists, several limitations need to be acknowledged. The conducted survey gathered responses from 98 participants, which provided a desired sample, but may not be fully representative of the entire global music consumer base.

The demographic consistent of mainly younger age groups and social media users, which for the purposes of this study could be seen as positive, however it influenced the findings to represent habits common mainly among Gen Z and Millennials, leaving room for the research considering preferences of other age groups. Additionally, both the survey and interview data rely on self-reporting, which can sometimes be biased. Participants might not always recall their behaviours accurately or might provide answers they believe are expected, which might have affected the results.

Furthermore, the qualitative data was based on semi-structured interviews with only two independent artists and although their insights were rich and relevant for the purposes of the study, a larger sample size or broader variety of the artist genres could have provided more diverse perspectives and potentially reveal additional effective strategies.

Moreover, the created marketing strategy was tailored specifically for commissioning artist 2lyn's single release. While a scalable and generalized template was created, it is still based mainly on the unique characteristics of 2lyn's brand and audience, which can drastically differ among other independent artists. The results and effectiveness may therefore vary for artists in different genres, regions or with different resources and brand identities. Expanding this research across different genres, artists or geographic regions could also help determine whether the strategies observed here are universally applicable or artist specific.

Most importantly, this thesis stops at the strategy development stage and does not measure or test the performance of the proposed campaign. A post-release analysis would therefore be necessary to assess the actual impact of the presented strategy and in it included propositions. Longitudinal study measuring the long-term success and accordingly refining the framework of in this thesis presented campaign across multiple single releases is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of introduced digital marketing practices on a full scale.

Lastly, social media and streaming platforms tend to frequently update their algorithms and features. What works today in terms of content strategy or discovery may evolve rapidly, which makes some part of the research time sensitive. In-depth analysis of short-form content algorithms and its influence on music discovery, as well as further exploration into how AI and automation tools can enhance independent artists promotional efficiency are therefore another potential topics for future research that could enhance the presented work.

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## Appendix 1. Survey Questions

1. How old are you?
  - Under 18
  - 18-24
  - 25-34
  - 35-44
  - 45+
2. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Prefer not to say
3. Which country are you from? (Open-ended)
4. How often do you stream music?
  - Daily
  - A few times a week
  - Occasionally
  - Rarely
5. Which platform do you primarily use to stream music?
  - Spotify
  - Apple Music
  - YouTube Music
  - SoundCloud
  - Tidal
  - Other (please specify)
6. How do you usually discover new music? (Select all that apply)
  - Social media (TikTok, Instagram, etc.)
  - Music streaming playlists (Spotify, Apple Music)
  - Word-of-mouth (friends, family)
  - Music blogs/websites
  - Radio
  - Ads
  - Other (please specify)
7. Have you ever discovered an artist through social media?
  - Yes
  - No

8. If yes, which platform helped you discover new music the most?
- TikTok
  - Instagram
  - YouTube
  - Facebook
  - Other (please specify)
9. What social media do you use the most? (Select up to 3)
- TikTok
  - Instagram
  - YouTube
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - Snapchat
  - Other (please specify)
10. How likely are you to listen to a song after seeing it on your page on social media?
- Very likely
  - Somewhat likely
  - Neutral
  - Unlikely
  - Very unlikely
11. How important is an artist's social media presence when deciding to follow their music?
- Very important
  - Somewhat important
  - Neutral
  - Not important
12. What type of content makes you more likely to engage with a post from an artist?  
(Select all that apply)
- Behind-the-scenes content
  - Music videos & performance clips
  - Personal stories & artist background
  - Interactive content (POV, challenges, Q&A, livestreams, polls etc.)
  - Other (please specify)

## Appendix 2. Interview Questions

1. What were the biggest challenges you face in getting your music heard?
2. What digital marketing strategies have worked best for you in promoting your music?
3. How important do you think social media is in today's music industry?
4. Which social media platforms have been the most effective for engaging with your audience and why?
5. Have you ever used short-form content to promote a release? If so, what was the outcome?
6. What role does playlist placement (Spotify editorial/user-generated playlists) play in your success?
7. Do you invest in paid advertising (Facebook/Instagram ads, YouTube ads), or do you rely more on organic reach?
8. How did you build your fanbase, and what strategies helped you grow your audience?
9. What type of content do you find resonates most with your fans and how often do you usually post?
10. How do you optimize your releases before they are published to increase streams on platforms like Spotify and Apple Music?
11. What advice would you give to independent artists trying to break into the industry today?
12. If you had to recommend one essential strategy for a successful single release, what would it be?

## **Appendix 3. Thesis Data Management Plan**

### **1. Description of thesis research data**

The data for this thesis research consists of both qualitative and quantitative data collected through self-administrated online survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey will be conducted online. It was created with the help of Google Forms, and includes a mix of yes/no, multiple choice and open-ended questions. It targets music listeners to gather data on music discovery behaviour, platform preferences and attitudes toward short-form content. The data took form of number and text-based responses, which will be analysed with the help of graph image files containing survey results. Personal identifiers such as names, e-mail addresses and other contact details were not collected, making the data anonymous, which will be kept throughout the whole thesis writing process. The interviews conducted with selected independent artists to understand effective marketing strategies and gain insights into promotional techniques, content performance and audience engagement will be transcribed, making the collected data take a form of transcriptions and notes.

### **2. Management and storage of the research data**

The data will be stored and processed on the thesis author's own password-protected personal computer. Backups of the data will be saved in separate folder on external hard drive and kept apart from the primary working folder with files that are being analysed. No cloud services will be used to store any sensitive or confidential information. Moreover, access to the data is limited to the thesis author and the thesis supervisor.

### **3. Processing of personal data and sensitive data**

Only minimal personal and no sensitive data will be collected or processed in this thesis research. The online survey participants will remain anonymous throughout the whole questionnaire process, as the survey does not collect any personal identifiers such as names or contact details. It only records age range, gender and country of origin, which was collected for easier customer segmentation and analytical purposes.

Consequently, all the responses will be kept anonymous throughout the thesis writing and the data will be processed according to GDPR-compliant processes. From the interviews the author will collect and utilize personal data related to the independent artist careers such as their artists names, country of residence and streaming related data, which will be agreed on with the research subjects. This personal data is being collected to define the interviewees and to showcase their success as independent artists. Overall, the data processing will be based on the privacy notice by HAMK, which will also be used for informing participants before start:

[\[https://www.hamk.fi/en/privacy-policy/\]](https://www.hamk.fi/en/privacy-policy/)

#### **4. Ownership of research data**

The ownership of both collected data and the results of the conducted thesis research belongs to the thesis author, Tomáš Hromádka. The data was independently collected and not sourced from or commissioned by any third-party organization as the commissioning artist 2lyn is the author Tomáš Hromádka himself. The results and materials produced during the research are therefore original and fall under the author's intellectual property. All additional data and materials utilized in this thesis follow HAMK's citation guidelines.

#### **5. Further use of research data after the completion of the thesis**

The research data of this thesis will not be reused after the thesis is completed. The thesis author will securely store the anonymized data for one year following the date of official thesis approval to ensure that the results can be verified if necessary. After this period, all data will be securely destroyed.