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# Exploring the Impact of Social Media on the Music Industry—From Music Consumption and Discovery to Health and Wellness—And Developing a More Sustainable Future

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## Abstract

Social media has ushered in transformative shifts in the music industry, reshaping artist-fan dynamics, music discovery, promotion, and the very role of artists and their teams as content creators. While platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube provide artists with unparalleled opportunities for reach and branding, they simultaneously impose pressures for continuous content generation and engagement. These digital demands, juxtaposed against the backdrop of traditional industry challenges, have heightened concerns around artists' mental health, inducing stress, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy. As the intertwining of a successful music career and active social media presence deepens, there's an imperative to cultivate more sustainable practices. This article delves into the multifaceted impacts of social media on the music world, emphasizing its potential toll on artist well-being. Proposing both industry-wide and artist-focused solutions, this research advocates for a balanced approach that prioritizes artists' mental health as the digital era advances.

Keywords: social media, music industry, music business, TikTok, Instagram, Reels, mental health, wellness, well-being, online presence, engagement, content creation, music discovery, music promotion, A&R, record labels, recording contracts, artist branding

## Introduction

In an era of rapid digitalization and interconnectedness, the profound impact of social media on the music industry is increasingly apparent. As platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and others have reshaped the way artists create, share, and promote their work, the ever-present demand for online engagement can have significant implications on mental health and well-being. This article seeks to analyze these implications, shedding light on a subject that merits both academic scrutiny and practical attention.

Research on the convergence of social media and the music industry has been extensively conducted, illustrating the transformative role these platforms play in artists' careers. Numerous facets of this impact are examined, including how music is consumed and discovered, the paradigm shift in artist-fan interaction, and the advent of new promotional strategies, among others. However, the flip side of this digital revolution—its potential toll on musicians' mental health and wellness—is an area that warrants particular emphasis.

The omnipresence of social media in musicians' lives presents a dual-edged sword. On one side, it affords unprecedented reach and direct communication with fans. On the other, it ushers in an era of relentless self-promotion, constant content creation, and high susceptibility to public scrutiny, which can precipitate stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges.

This article is divided into nine sections, each serving a distinct purpose within the overarching narrative. Section I establishes the theoretical groundwork, delving into the rise of social media and its impact on digital media consumption. Section II explores the transformation of the artist-fan relationship, including how fans discover new music. Sections III through V build on this by exploring the resulting impacts on the relationship between artists and record labels, including how artists are discovered and signed, the new deal structures, as well as the pressure put on artists to stay active on social media and constantly create new content. Next, Section VI discusses the resulting changes in the role of musicians and their managers as content creators. Section VII then examines some of the potential impacts of social media on musicians' health and wellness, both as content creators and users.

The final two sections provide recommendations for a more sustainable way forward. Section VIII proposes innovative business practices

that can be implemented by music industry organizations (e.g., record labels and music publishers). Section IX offers strategies that artists and their teams can implement to ensure safe and healthy social media usage.

By unearthing the hidden costs of the digital revolution in music, this work aims to foster a critical dialogue around the intersection of social media, music, and mental health. The primary objective is that this research will contribute to healthier practices within the industry, empowering artists to leverage the potential of social media while safeguarding their well-being.

## I. Social Media and Digital Media Consumption

The music industry has always been characterized by its dynamic nature, continuously evolving and adapting to new technologies. Going all the way back to the early days of radio and the advent of the phonograph, to the current streaming ecosystem, there has been constant flux in how music is created, consumed, and distributed.

However, a few key disruptive technologies that emerged at the turn of the millennium brought about a significant increase in the rate of change, leading to some major inflection points in the music industry. For example, the proliferation of the internet, combined with the ability for people to store digital audio files (e.g., MP3, WAV, or AIFF) on personal computers, led to the development of online file-sharing technologies, and ultimately widespread music piracy. The effects of this disruption were dramatic. According to the RIAA (2011), in the decade after file-sharing and Napster emerged, music sales in the United States dropped by 47 percent. In the years following, the traditional systems of brick-and-mortar retailers and physical music formats (e.g., vinyl, cassette tapes, and CDs), were nearly completely supplanted by digital alternatives (Tronvoll 2019, 7).

The early 2000s marked another significant inflection point that would radically transform the music industry—the advent of large-scale social media platforms. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines social media as “forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).” Taken one step further, it has also been defined as “a honeycomb of seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups” (Aichner et al. 2021).

As of early 2023, over 4.8 billion individuals, or approximately 60 percent of the world's population, have some form of social media account (Petrosyan 2023), using applications such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat, and TikTok (Dixon 2023a). Globally, the overall daily average time users spend on social media is 2 hours and 27 minutes, skewing higher with Gen Z users. This is not to be confused with the global daily average of time spent online (e.g., social media, internet browsing, online shopping, or streaming), which is 6 hours and 58 minutes (Kemp 2022).

The statistics for the individual platforms are equally staggering. TikTok, the video-sharing social media app owned by Beijing-based tech company ByteDance, reached an audience of over 113.2 million users in 2023 in the United States alone. All that after launching in only 2017—as the international version of the popular Chinese platform Douyin—and then quickly rising to global popularity after the acquisition and rebranding of the Musical.ly app in 2018 (Ceci, n.d.).

TikTok allows users to create, edit, and share short-form video clips that are often accompanied by the latest music trends (Ceci, n.d.). Its immense popularity reflects recent changes in internet user behavior, such as shorter attention spans resulting in short-form video content becoming the dominant format. The platform has changed the way consumers are entertained, and its prevalence represents a “shift in the way consumers interact and absorb media content” (Broadhurst 2022, 8).

Facebook, founded in 2004 and owned by Meta Platforms, had almost three billion monthly active users worldwide as of early 2023 (Dixon 2023b). Instagram, launched in 2010 and also owned by Meta Platforms—which focuses on photo and video sharing (Meta, n.d.-a)—had a reported 143 million users in 2023 in the United States alone (Dixon 2023b). The platform's Reels feature is a direct competitor to the short-form video content on TikTok.

YouTube (n.d.), the popular video hosting platform owned by Google, boasted more than 2.6 billion active users at the beginning of 2023. One of its more recent features, YouTube Shorts—which enables users to create short-form video content (and thus compete in the same space as TikTok and Instagram Reels)—surpassed 50 billion daily views in early 2023 (Broadhurst 2022, 4).

Bearing all of these usage statistics in mind, it is easy to start seeing all of the potential ways that social media has radically impacted how peo-

ple consume digital media. Moreover, studies show that there is a strong connection between social media and music consumption—the most passionate music fans (i.e., those who stream music the most and spend the most money on it) are among the most active users of social media platforms (Cirisano 2023b).

Finally, the impact of social media on music consumption is further accentuated when analyzing the related revenues. Music streaming royalties from social media platforms such as TikTok and Meta/Instagram—separate from revenues generated by digital service providers (DSPs) such as Spotify and Apple Music—were estimated between \$0.8 and \$1.2 billion in 2021, a number that is only growing as the user base grows (Wasserman 2022). In the twelve months from July 2021 to July 2022, YouTube reported having paid over \$6 billion to music rights holders (Cohen 2022).

## II. Social Media's Impact on Fan Engagement and Music Discovery

Social media has not only transformed how artists and their fans engage with each other, but also the manner in which people discover new music. The advent of platforms such as TikTok and Instagram has reshaped the music listening and content consumption experience, altering consumer behaviors and expectations in the process (Tronvoll 2019, 7).

Given the immense user numbers and expansive content-sharing capabilities, social media has become an absolutely essential tool for artists to promote music, as well as build and engage a fanbase. It provides opportunities for artists at every level, from emerging artists releasing their first songs and building an online community, to legacy artists reviving their catalogs (and sometimes careers) when an old release goes viral.

Michael Nash, EVP and Chief Digital Officer at Universal Music Group, stated that social media continues to present a golden opportunity for creative growth (IFPI 2023, 20). With 47 percent of listeners following artists they admire on social media, these platforms provide artists with opportunities to reach new audiences and explore uncharted territories in their careers (Wasserman Music 2022, 5).

Although traditional mediums such as radio, word-of-mouth recommendations, and film soundtracks maintain their relevance in new music discovery, digital avenues, including video games, commercials, and most notably, social media, play increasingly crucial roles in attracting new listeners. According to YouGov's research in seventeen global markets, mu-

sic streaming apps such as Spotify lead in new music discovery, boasting a 36% popularity rate. Radio is still a viable source for a third of global consumers, although primarily those over 35 years old. Social media platforms, with a global utilization rate of 32%, are particularly influential among the 18-34 age bracket, with TikTok and Instagram being the key players (Bruce 2022).

Key differences between Millennials and Gen Z are underscored by the diminishing influence of DSPs (e.g., Spotify and Apple Music) and radio on music discovery in younger generations, with platforms like TikTok becoming increasingly popular, as evidenced by the fact that 38% of Gen Z users discover music on TikTok (Cirisano 2023a).

This trend of social media redefining music discovery is not showing any signs of slowing down. TikTok, for example, served as the primary launchpad for contemporary superstar artists such as Lil Nas X and Doja Cat, as well as a hub for viral memes. The platform's significant role in introducing youthful audiences to fresh talent and diverse musical styles is indisputable, making it the foremost social media tool for music exploration. In fact, 45% of individuals aged from 18 to 24 discover new music via TikTok. Meanwhile, the 25 to 34 age demographic gravitates toward Instagram for their musical discoveries. Older enthusiasts aged 35 and above, however, prefer Facebook. These preferences not only reveal the demographics of each social network's user base, but also demonstrate that people are turning to the platforms with which they frequently engage to find new artists and tracks (Wasserman Music 2022).

Many of the social media platforms are also getting actively involved in breaking new singles and artists using discovery tools. For example, TikTok released its #NewMusic hashtag feature, which has garnered an astounding 18 billion views on the platform, demonstrating its influence in recent years. The hashtag serves as a springboard for emerging releases and "studio fresh" sneak peeks from global artists who elect to debut their latest singles primarily on TikTok. Notable songs such as Sam Smith's & Kim Petras' *Billboard* number-one hit "Unholy," Charlie Puth's impromptu "Light Switch," and Ed Sheeran's "Eyes Closed"—which inspired over a million video creations even before its official release—were first introduced to audiences through the #NewMusic hashtag (TikTok 2023).

In addition to people discovering new music via social media, it is also a place where catalog songs can go viral (the general industry consensus is that a "catalog" title is a release more than eighteen months old,

but is most often associated with legacy recordings). Perhaps the most famous example of this happened on September 25, 2020, when TikTok creator Doggface (real name Nathan Apodaca) posted a video of himself cruising down the road on a skateboard, sipping Ocean Spray cranberry juice, and singing along to Fleetwood Mac's 1977 hit "Dreams." Within one month, the video had amassed 51 million views on the platform, as well as receiving a shout-out from Mick Fleetwood and Stevie Nicks. In the three-day period following the post, "Dreams" racked up 2.9 million on-demand U.S. streams and three thousand digital download sales, up 88.7% and 374%, respectively, from their totals in the prior three-day periods, according to Nielsen Music/MRC Data (Aniftos 2020). Catalog does not have to be over thirty years old. A study conducted by *Billboard* of the leading ten thousand on-demand audio streaming tracks during the initial six weeks of 2022 revealed that TikTok propelled numerous songs from relative obscurity into the top 100. Notably, this included The Neighbourhood's "Sweater Weather" from 2012, The Walters' "I Love You So" from 2014, and Steve Lacy's "Dark Red" from 2017. While these songs were not new releases, they may have been perceived as such by listeners who had not encountered them before, especially when they were placed alongside newly-released music in DSP playlists after trending on social media. Speaking on this trend, Mike Tierney, Amazon Music's global head of music programming, stated, "We're seeing music that's chronologically older than 18 months that's trending as current music in a major way" (Knopper and Peoples 2022).

The new reality of fans using social media as the primary means of engaging with music and artists, is that the artists must be active on the platforms to facilitate that engagement. More and more evidence suggests that it is essential for artists to maintain a presence on social media in order to promote their brand and create a cohesive fan base in today's environment (Fryberger, Besada, and Kanga 2022). Being active on social media enables artists to connect directly with fans, promote their music, build anticipation, showcase their brand identity, and facilitate collaborations.

Platforms such as TikTok are now broadly recognized as the most powerful catalysts for streaming activity and fanbase development, leading many marketing strategies to focus on leveraging its user base to trigger the success of a release (Leight 2022). Staying active on the platforms and consistently engaging with fans is now "part of the work of being a creative individual" (Fryberger, Besada, and Kanga 2022).



### III. Social Media and Artists & Repertoire (A&R)

Labels have been finding new artists online for years. Some of the biggest names in music launched their careers after being found on the internet. Justin Bieber was discovered by Usher and Scooter Braun after posting videos on YouTube in 2007. Shawn Mendes was discovered by the A&R team at Island Records after posting cover songs on Vine. Other examples include Calvin Harris—one of the highest paid DJs in the world—who was discovered after posting his solo recordings on Myspace. Charlie Puth, 5 Seconds of Summer, and Troye Sivan started as YouTube creators, and the list goes on (Magliola 2022).

With that being said, the number of artists getting signed to labels based on viral moments or large followings on social media in recent years has exploded. In 2020 alone, TikTok (2020) reported that over seventy artists who have broken on the platform have received recording contracts from major labels, and those numbers are only growing.

Some examples of artists who blew up after going viral on TikTok include Olivia Rodrigo, the little-known Disney actor who began a breakout career by creating on the platform. Within a period of less than three years, Rodrigo amassed over a billion streams of her music, received seven Grammy nominations, and was named Time’s 2021 Entertainer of the Year (Chow 2021). In 2022, she had the eighth hottest album, *Sour*, which saw a 1.438 million total album-equivalent consumption (Luminate 2023). Katie Gregson-MacLeod, whose song “Complex” went viral practically overnight on TikTok with a 45-second clip, was offered deals by three record labels (Campbell 2022). In 2019, Rhode Island artist Arizona Zervas was an independent artist who posted a short black-and-white clip of him dancing to his new song “Roxanne” on TikTok. The audio of the post went viral—getting featured in over 320,000 TikTok videos within months of getting posted—eventually leading to the song amassing over 50 million streams on Spotify, appearing in the top 40 of Billboard’s Hot 100 chart, and landing Zervas a record deal with Columbia (Harris 2019).

One of the common themes in label signings based on social media success has been that the decisions were primarily data-driven, and not necessarily based on the merits of the music or the preparedness of the artist to launch a sustainable career. Specifically, many of the deals have been offered based on a song going viral or an artist building a substantial following on one of the platforms. There have been several consequences to this—namely, an increase in both “one-hit wonders” and turnover of

signed artists (Leight 2023)—which will be explored further in the following section.

#### IV. Social Media, Labels, and Recording Contracts

With social media playing such a significant role in how music is consumed and discovered, as well as how artists engage with fans, there have consequently been some major shifts in how the record labels conduct business. More specifically, social media has changed how music is released and promoted (both new and catalog titles), the record labels' expectations for artists to create content, the types of recording agreements offered to artists, as well as an expansion of the record labels' rights to control an artist's online presence.

With the advent of digital music in the 2000s, which meant that consumers no longer had to purchase entire albums for one or two songs, combined with the more recent phenomenon of the “viral hit,” the music industry has become more singles-based than ever before. As a result, the trend has been for many of the major record labels to sign a string of short-term deals, based on songs that have already proven to have market potential. One of the consequences of this is that the music industry is witnessing a trend where platforms like TikTok are leading to an increased number of “one-hit wonders,” raising concerns about artist development and sustainability. A *Billboard* analysis of top charting songs from 2002 to 2019 showed that the annual percentage of artists classified as one-hit wonders (i.e., an artist who breaks into the top 40 but never returns) remained relatively constant, averaging 54%; although in 2020, this number rose to 70% (Leight 2023).

Several emerging artists have publicly shared how the industry's relationship with platforms such as TikTok has negatively impacted their ability to have a sustainable career that is aligned with their artistic integrity. For example, Sizzy Rocket, an up-and-coming singer-songwriter, tweeted that labels want her to write for their “viral artists” but do not support her solo project because her “numbers aren't high enough” (Rindner 2022). Singer-songwriter Vérité, who has chosen to maintain autonomy and release music independently for almost a decade, stated that it is “really disheartening when technology and culture shift in a way that ... is so blatantly focused on pure consumerism” (Rao 2022).

Diving deeper into the specifics of how recording contracts are changing—and considering the necessity for most artists to be present on

social media to build a fanbase and promote music—labels are now seeking assurances that their artists are active on the platforms. To receive such assurance, labels contractually provide protection for themselves in record deals by requesting some level of control over the artist’s online presence.

For example, the following sample language from a recording agreement contains longstanding language regarding the label’s ability to control an artist’s website:

Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, we and our Licensees will have the exclusive right during the Term throughout the Territory to, and to authorize other Persons to, create, maintain, administer, and host one (1) website relating to Artist or Artist Recordings, which shall be designated the so-called “official website,” and to register and use the name “[ARTISTNAME].com” (the “Official Site URL”) and any variations thereof as Uniform Resource Locators (or “URLs”), addresses, domain names or any other site identifier (whether now or hereafter known) for each website created by or for us or our Licensees with respect to Artist (each, a “Company Artist Site”). The Company Artist Site and all rights to or derived from the Company Artist Site will be our exclusive property in perpetuity throughout the Territory. During the Term, Label will obtain your reasonable approval regarding the “look and feel” and content of any Company Artist Site, and you will cooperate in any applicable assignments or transfers of Company Artist Sites. *Artist shall retain full control of Artist’s social media sites; provided, that during the Term, Artist shall grant Label mutual access to such accounts during the Term in connection with any exploitation of the Recordings, Audiovisual Recordings, Merchandise and/or Merchandise Rights hereunder.* For the avoidance of doubt, Label shall not have any rights to post to Artist’s social media accounts without Artist’s prior written approval. (emphasis added by authors)

Despite the quoted language above regarding social media posts, most labels take the position that they should in fact have the ability to

control an artist's social media, as evidenced by this sample contractual language:

*In the event Label or its licensees reasonably requests that Artist post content (including, without limitation, textual, graphic, trademark, video, audio-visual and/or audio content) in connection with this Agreement or Artist's services as a recording artist (including, without limitation, in connection with Records hereunder), Artist will consider in good faith posting such content on each and every website under Artist's control (including, without limitation, so-called "social media" sites and Artist dedicated pages and accounts on any website) throughout the Territory relating to the Artist (each, an "Artist Controlled Site"). Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained herein, during the Term, upon mutual agreement by both Label and Artist, Label will have the right, throughout the Territory, to authorize other Persons, to create, post content on (including, without limitation, textual, graphic, video, trademark, audio-visual and audio content), and maintain all video webpages related to Artist, including, without limitation, YouTube, VEVO and Vimeo, and to use Artist's name and any professional name of Artist heretofore or hereafter adopted, and any variations thereof in connection with and on such video webpages. Promptly upon Label's reasonable request during the Term, Artist will create links on all Artist Controlled Sites to Label's website and/or websites owned or controlled by third parties that sell, license or otherwise exploit Records hereunder. Label may use in perpetuity the name of Artist set forth on page 1 above, any professional name of Artist heretofore or hereafter adopted, and any variation thereof solely in connection with or as part of any address or domain name owned or operated by Label. (emphasis added by authors)*

In addition, record labels have demonstrated a willingness in recent years to fund the creation of social media content:

During the First Contract Period, Label will establish a development fund for costs related to development and marketing of Artist and Artist's Recordings in an amount not to exceed XXXXXX Dollars (\$XXX,XXX) ("Development Fund"). *The Development Fund may be used, by way of example, for developing Artist's social media following, Artist's imaging, rehearsals, and content creation.* Such Development Fund will be administered by Label subject to good faith and on-going consultation with Artist. If used, the Development Fund will be deemed an Artist Advance hereunder. (emphasis added by authors)

As evidenced above, record labels place a high importance on social media and require contractual protection in the digital world in which they operate, where artists are beholden to algorithms, follower counts, video views, and streaming trends. Even if the label signs a highly sought-after, viral artist and pays such artist a considerable advance, the label is accepting the risk that the artist's following will fail to translate into continued streams, ticket sales, and sponsorships. Labels have acknowledged that virality has led to short-term thinking, where labels find themselves in a bidding war to sign an artist and end up paying arguably more than they should (Lebeau 2021).

Despite potentially giving up certain areas of control within a record deal as it relates to social media, signed artists conceivably have resources available to them that unsigned artists do not. Labels, especially those who have paid high advances to sign a viral artist, are typically willing to invest in the artist in meaningful ways to see a return on investment. However, if the number of social media impressions was the only reason a label signed a particular artist, it could also be the reason a label drops that same artist when numbers decrease. Even if a viral song causes an artist to get signed, if the label releases a single that does not achieve a certain chart position, then many labels cut ties.

Not only do labels use social media as a way to ensure fans know about new releases, they also use various platforms that allow users to preview new music to gauge consumer interest and they sometimes even pay influencers to market songs by posting videos to the songs (Dever 2022). Many record labels hire team members specifically for the purpose

of monitoring TikTok so they can certify that measures are taken to help a trending song climb the charts once it starts to take off (Whateley 2023). Andy McGrath, the Senior Vice President of Marketing at Legacy Recordings, a division of Sony Music, stated, “Our entire music catalog is effectively tracked on a daily basis . . . We’re constantly monitoring actions, reactions, and trends that happen on TikTok.” Tarek Al-Hamdouni, RCA Records’ Senior Vice President of Digital Marketing, acknowledged that the label relies on a series of criteria, including an increase in streams on Spotify or changes in views on YouTube to track the success of a TikTok song campaign (Whateley 2023). “If I see that in the course of a week our audience [on YouTube] went from being primarily 25-to-34-year-old male and a week later the majority is 13-to-24 female, then that’s a pretty easy bridge to connect between those two platforms,” shared Al-Hamdouni (Whateley 2023). With TikTok’s proven success as a marketing tool, labels are now adding line items to their marketing budgets to fund salaried positions focused on managing and running TikTok (Chow 2022).

Besides monitoring TikTok and helping fan the flames on a song as it starts to take off, some labels and artists take a more proactive approach and work directly with TikTok’s team to host private listening sessions with influencers and creators to devise a plan to promote a song before it is released (Whateley 2023). For example, before Miley Cyrus released her single “Midnight Sky,” her team partnered with TikTok and participated in two private Zoom meetings with over a dozen creators and influencers to allow them to listen to the track first (Whateley 2023).

Additionally, because remixes have gained substantial popularity on TikTok, many record labels are collaborating with remix and mashup artists in connection with song campaigns and release strategies (Whateley 2023). A remixed song allows the song to appeal to a wider array of consumers, and according to Nima Nasseri, the A&R lead for Universal’s music strategy and tactics team, “You want to be able to have your record get discovered in spaces that it normally wouldn’t be discovered in” (Whateley 2023). With the music industry’s prioritization of TikTok in launching artists and songs, TikTok has an internal music team led by former Warner Music digital chief Ole Obermann, who handles artist and record label relations, licensing deals, and other music-specific initiatives on behalf of TikTok (Whateley 2023).

While the value of a record deal and the resources of a label are recognized and welcomed by many artists, some artists prefer to release their

music independently, given the current digital landscape and tools available to them via social media. Before social media, record labels determined an artist's fate. The accessibility of streaming platforms and social media have created new opportunities for artists to build their fanbases and manage their careers, without the need for a label.

## V. Pressures on Artists to Create Social Media Content

With social media playing such a crucial role in connecting with fans, promoting music, and building a brand, there is significant pressure on artists—both self-imposed and externally from labels or brand partners—to be active on the platforms and constantly create new content.

Many notable artists have spoken out publicly about this pressure. In a TikTok video that has been viewed more than eight million times, pop artist Halsey expressed frustration that her label, Astralwerks, which is distributed by Capitol Music Group, pressured her to use the app to promote her music (Rindner 2022). She stated, “Basically, I have a song that I love that I wanna release ASAP, but my record label won’t let me. I’ve been in this industry for eight years and I’ve sold over 165 million records, and my record company is saying that I can’t release it unless they fake a viral moment on TikTok. Everything is marketing” (Rindner 2022).

FKA twigs similarly shared her dismay with receiving pressure to post, stating, “All record labels ask for are TikToks and I got told off today for not making enough effort” (Rindner 2022). Florence Welch of Florence and the Machine posted an a cappella video last year with the caption, “The label are begging me for [lo] fi TikToks so here you go. Please send help” (Rindner 2022). Ironically, videos like these often become one of the artists’ most viewed posts (Rindner 2022).

While Adele was working on her 30 album, her label encouraged her to make music for TikTok to gain the attention of a younger generation (Rindner 2022). She refused to do so, saying, “It was like, if everyone’s making music for the TikTok, who’s making the music for my generation? Who’s making the music for my peers? I would do that job, gladly” (Rao 2022). Adele acknowledged that her goal was to make music for her own generation, but very few artists have the leverage to take a stand like she does (Rindner 2022).

Even after landing songs in the Top 40 charts, artist Raye struggled with her record label, Polydor, to get her debut album released, despite having a record deal for six years (Williams 2022). She stated that her

label needed the last single, “Call on Me,” to go viral in order to release the full album. Raye now releases music independently (Williams 2022).

Charli XCX also let her frustrations be known by lip-syncing over a sound clip of Naomi Campbell, saying, “Well, I didn’t really wanna be here, so I was made to be here, so obviously I’m just, like, wanting to get this over with and get on with my life. It’s a big inconvenience for me” (Williams 2022). She captioned the video as follows: “When my label asks me to make my 8<sup>th</sup> TikTok of the week” (Williams 2022).

Rebecca Lucy Taylor, professionally known as Self Esteem, stated publicly that the pressures surrounding TikTok and social media are particularly acute for women. Writing in *The Guardian*, Taylor stated, “I think it’s no coincidence that the recent examples of artists who say their labels have forced them to get on TikTok are all women. My pub-psychologist theory is that the music industry thinks of social media as an inherently female thing—it’s just another patriarchal idea that women and gay men are interested in the minutiae of other women, while men are just too busy and important to be interested in that stuff” (Taylor 2022). She went on to say, “There is something darker and more invasive in the way that women are encouraged to use it. It only furthers the nagging feeling that as a female artist your music and art aren’t taken as seriously” (Taylor 2022).

## VI. The Artist and Manager as Content Creators: A New Paradigm

While it is now easier than ever to record, distribute, and promote music—as well as connect and engage with fans through social media—the result has been a highly saturated market, making it increasingly difficult to cut through the noise. In 2022, it was reported that over 100,000 songs were delivered to DSPs every single day (Ingham 2022). Speaking on the challenges of this new reality, an independent artist (choosing to remain anonymous) shared:

Independent artists are compared, often to signed artists, but in order to compete on a fast-moving global stage, the artist has to become media manager, publicist, graphic designer/art director, administrator/accountant, Booker/plugger/promoter, marketing director, playlist coordinator, Spotify manager, etc. etc. etc. I estimate if I spent a week just doing “band stuff” and cut out family/



friends, and all my other work commitments, less than 5% of that week would go on actual creative art, songwriting, practice etc. The rest is on promo, gig bookings, management, and all the other extraneous shit that 20 years ago, we'd have a legion of label people to do for us. Now, indie artists have to do all that stuff because it is expected – if you don't, you fall behind the curve of signed artists and the other artists who either DO do it, or have the money or people behind them to help them do it.” (Vandergast 2023)

Coming back to the discussion on inflection points in the early 2000s, the advent of social media completely changed how artists—and their teams—manage their time and resources, as well as the tools and skills needed to succeed in the new market environment.

Social media has blurred the lines between professional musician, content creator, and influencer. Many artists have expressed frustration that these new responsibilities are taking them away from the core of their artistry—which is making and playing music. This was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, where the primary means of connecting with fans was online via social media, and changed the artist-fan relationship dynamics and expectations for engagement (Majewski 2022).

In an op-ed, writer and music fan Lark Morigan (2022) stated the following in connection with artists becoming content creators and influencers:

But not all artists even want that. Making something hastily and bombarding it with hashtags for the sake of “pleasing the market” feels like a chore to them. Also why is there the rush to get famous? There are more worthwhile things to do than gaining popularity overnight with some TikTok trend.

Doing both and doing them equally well is also not a guarantee.

**An artist who refuses to partake in influencer culture shouldn't be shamed for being lazier or less ambitious than those who do.** (emphasis in the original)

Eventually, you will lose yourself and your art. You'll start making things that will disappoint your real fans, the ones who actually favored your eccentricity and original self-expression over something catered to people who never valued you or your individuality in the first place.

You'll probably get fake fans who only liked the fact that you went viral with some trending post that you felt obligated to make. (Morrigan 2022)

Not only are artists feeling the pressure to constantly create social media content, allocate tremendous amounts of time and resources, as well as learn the necessary skills and tools, but so are their managers. The Music Managers Forum (MMF), a U.K.-based trade organization that represents the interests of over 2,700 managers based in the United States, conducted several roundtables in 2022 after noticing at the NY:LON Conference that digital burnout among artists and their managers was a major issue (MMF 2022). Managers on the roundtables discussed the tremendous pressure applied by labels for artists to “generate a continuous stream of content” and how labels “judge an artist's value based on social media numbers rather than the integrity of their music” (MMF 2022). Other key takeaways from the roundtable include the following:

- Artists and managers are expected to become social media experts, in addition to their existing workload. “Managers and artists now need to master Photoshop, video editing, knowledge of algorithms and behaviors and other digital skill sets.”
- Some labels fail to recognize that each artist is different and not everyone is suited for the same social media platforms. Moreover, many artists prefer not to engage on social media at all and would rather delegate this responsibility.

- It is becoming increasingly difficult for emerging artists to gain visibility on social media platforms when competing with record labels that have larger marketing budgets and staff. This also results in fewer opportunities for brand partnerships and other financial support when they are unable to generate consistently high engagement metrics.
- Managers noted that “too much time and resources were needed for social media, which compromises mental health, commercial decisions and—most importantly—reduces the time and space needed for artists to be creative .... Labels insist on increased engagement, meaning artists rarely have ‘time out’ from social media. This leads to stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues.”
- Some managers noted that while taking responsibility off the artist’s shoulders can be helpful, hiring staff to help artists manage social media accounts can also pose a risk as the potential exists to lose authenticity with the artist’s fan base.
- Increasing pressure from record labels and other partners, coupled with the never-ending need for authentic fan engagement and interaction, is leading to a huge strain on the artist-manager relationship. Artists want to create and perform music, not engage digitally. Managers should learn to “say no” and push others to understand that not every artist feels comfortable in the role of an “influencer.”
- Record labels should provide a 15 to 25 percent social media management budget, in addition to the artist advance, to help artists cover the cost of administration and management of their social media accounts (MMF 2022).

## VII. The Impact of Social Media on Musicians’ Health and Wellness

Human beings are inherently social creatures who have a fundamental need for connection with others (Young 2008). It is an essential contributor to health and wellness. Although social media can offer a means

for artists to connect and engage with fans directly—fostering a sense of community and enhancing their overall well-being—there are also negative aspects of social media’s impact on musicians’ health and wellness. One of the main challenges is the pressure to constantly maintain an online presence and the need to project a carefully curated image. This can lead to feelings of anxiety, stress, and self-comparison, as musicians may find themselves frequently comparing their success and popularity to their peers or struggling to meet unrealistic standards (Meshi, Tamir, and Heekeren 2015). There are also the adverse health effects of having to constantly create content (e.g., planning, production, editing, publishing, and promotion), in addition to the numerous other responsibilities of being a professional musician (e.g., writing, recording, releasing, and touring). Managing all of these tasks can be overwhelming, which is causing several artists—and their managers—to experience mental and physical burnout (Music Managers Forum 2022).

In recent years, there has been growing concern about the impact of social media on health and wellness, leading to some pioneering studies from both the private and public sectors. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, even some large platforms like Facebook have been conducting internal research on the impact of their product on the state of mind of its younger users. One of these studies found that a large proportion of teenage users blamed Facebook’s very own platform, Instagram, for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression (Gayle 2021).

Numerous other studies are now supporting these findings—that social media usage is one of the primary causes of mental health problems among the young (Gayle 2021). According to Claude Mellins, a professor of medical psychology at Columbia University, “Social media platforms are important sources of socialization and relationship-building for many young people. Although there are important benefits, social media can also provide platforms for bullying and exclusion, unrealistic expectations about body image and sources of popularity, normalization of risk-taking behaviors, and can be detrimental to mental health... Young people’s brains are still developing” (Columbia 2021).

In a study performed by psychologist Melissa G. Hunt et al. (2018) at the University of Pennsylvania, it was determined that high usage of Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram increases rather than decreases feelings of loneliness, whereas reducing social media usage often leads to significant decreases in both depression and loneliness. These effects were

particularly pronounced for individuals who were more depressed when they came into the study (Hunt et al. 2018, 751).

Some of the most common negative emotional effects for excessive users of social media include depression, frustration, and social comparison (Social Media Victims Law Center 2023). New research also indicates that digital technologies can expose users to bullying, contribute to obesity and eating disorders, trade off with sleep, encourage children to negatively compare themselves to others, and lead to depression, anxiety, and self-harm (U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory 2021). A direct correlation exists between heavy social media usage and an increased risk for other negative behaviors, such as increased anxiety, feelings of inadequacy about life or appearance, fear of missing out (“FOMO”), social media addiction, isolation, cyberbullying, and self-absorption (Robinson and Smith 2023).

In addition to mental health issues faced by many users, with the increased use of social media, “problematic social media use” or “social media addiction” has also developed (Buda et al. 2021). Generally, this is the “inability to control one’s use of social media sites, displaying a range of behavioral addiction symptoms.... These symptoms may include mood modification, salience, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse” (Buda et al. 2021). These issues are particularly concerning for young people as they tend to use social media more frequently, and the more frequently young people use social media, the more they develop addictive behavior.

Additionally, extensive use of social media is also associated with a less healthy lifestyle, such as not getting enough physical activity and poor habits, often leading to a lower quality of life and feelings of fulfillment (Buda et al. 2021).

## VIII. Proposing Healthier, More Equitable Industry Business Practices

In the dynamic sphere of the music industry, artists’ well-being is often compromised because of the need to be constantly active on social media and create content. As delineated in the previous section, the ubiquity of social media has only heightened these pressures, acting as a catalyst for higher levels of stress and anxiety. Beyond the digital landscape, elements like touring, the unpredictability of income, creative pressures, and public scrutiny can also contribute to the undermining of an artist’s health and wellness. This section aims to propose solutions for the industry to

this escalating issue, focusing on comprehensive onboarding programs for new artists, facilitating access to therapy and wellness services, reevaluating existing industry practices, and offering social media content creation and management services.

1. *Onboarding Programs:*

A critical starting point for addressing mental health concerns involves thorough onboarding programs for new artists. Much like how corporations onboard new employees, the music industry can incorporate programs designed to equip new artists with the necessary skills and knowledge they need to navigate their careers, covering everything from health and wellness education to social media training. Take the approach of Sony Music Entertainment; in 2020, Sony launched the “Artist Assistance” wellness initiative designed to “educate and empower” their artists with resources focused on mental health and overall well-being (Stassen 2021). Incorporating modules on mental health awareness can empower artists with knowledge about potential risks and preventative strategies. Furthermore, providing education on industry workings, such as contract literacy and financial management, effective content creation and time management strategies, and more, can reduce stress and foster a sense of control over one’s career.

2. *Access to Therapy and Wellness Services:*

Another essential measure is providing artists and industry staff with accessible therapy and wellness services. One example is the work being done by Love Renaissance (LVRN)—a creative agency, management team, and record label—which launched a division focused on psychological wellness for its staff and artists. LVRN’s founders have been vocal about prioritizing and promoting mental health, working with therapists for team building and communication exercises. This move comes amid increasing awareness of mental health challenges within the music industry where rates of depression and anxiety are significantly higher than in the general population (Rocque 2020). Another example is Sony Music Entertainment’s Artists Forward Initiative (part of the Artists Assistance Program referenced earlier), where “on-roster Sony Music Entertainment artists can connect with a dedicated, licensed therapist at no cost to address stress, anxiety, depression, grief, family and relationship matters and more. Support is available in over 70 languages, and use of the program is completely confidential” (Artists Forward 2022). Additionally, providing services like regular mindfulness training, yoga sessions, and stress

management workshops can help individuals in the industry cope with their demanding lifestyles.

3. *Reevaluating Industry Practices:*

The industry must also critically examine and amend its own practices to cultivate a healthier environment. A common problem is the demanding and irregular working hours that come with content creation, touring, and studio time, which can be detrimental to mental health. A proposed solution could be for labels to strive for increased transparency when it comes to communicating their expectations for social media content creation, ideally leading to constructive dialogue with artists and their teams to ensure that it is aligned with their values and brand. Another could be implementing fair scheduling practices that respect artists' need for regular downtime and sleep. Furthermore, the industry can strive to normalize discussions around mental health and digital burnout. In 2019, the Swedish company Epidemic Sound implemented "health hour," an initiative where employees were encouraged to take an hour out of their workday to focus on their health. This endeavor demonstrated a significant step toward creating a healthier industry culture, showing that mental and physical health should never be secondary to career demands.

4. *Offering Social Media Content Creation and Management Services:*

Now becoming a lot more common because of its effectiveness, record labels should all consider offering artists access to a team that specializes in social media content creation and management (or alternatively, additional financing to outsource these services). This team would handle the editing, refinement, and posting of raw content provided by the artists, reducing the pressure on them to constantly create and manage content. Additionally, they could offer production services to facilitate batch content creation, enabling artists to focus more on their music and less on the constant demand for new content.

5. *Investing More Attention and Resources Into Artist Development:*

Although an obvious solution to this would be to change the current short-term deal structures for labels to commit to more long-term investment, this is likely too drastic and unrealistic. An alternative could be for record labels to create programs or talent-nurturing teams dedicated to artist development (brand development, social media management, performance skills, financial literacy, etc.), thus supporting those artists to create sustainable, long-term careers.

Through these strategies, the music industry can play an active role in fostering a healthier and more supportive environment for artists. Such an approach would benefit not only the artists, but also the industry as a whole by promoting sustainable, long-term success for all involved parties.

## IX. Strategies for Artists and Their Teams to Ensure Safe and Healthy Social Media Usage

Considering the deleterious effects of social media use on health and wellness, as well as the pressures of having to constantly create content and engage on the platforms, navigating the digital landscape successfully while staying healthy and avoiding burnout is a challenging balancing act. With social media playing an indispensable role in an artist's career, it's crucial for artists and their teams to adopt strategies that marry constant content creation with overall health and wellness. The following are some general strategies collected from various sectors of the music industry, directly from social media platforms, and wellness resources:

1. *Conscious Use of Social Media:*  
It is important for artists to set boundaries and establish mindful habits around social media usage, which may include setting daily time limits to avoid overconsumption, turning off notifications, and engaging with positive content to improve the algorithm (Radian Health 2022).
2. *Use of Digital Well-being Tools:*  
Social media platforms themselves offer resources for maintaining balance. For example, TikTok's "Digital Well-Being" features include daily screen time to help control how much time is spent on the platform each day, screen time analytics, and prompts for taking breaks, as well as a restricted mode to limit specific types of content.
3. *Batch Content Creation:*  
One effective strategy for relieving the pressure of constant content creation is batch producing and scheduling posts. This not only reduces the daily demand for new content, but also provides more time for artists to engage in other activities vital to their well-being and creativity.
4. *Utilizing Social Media Management Tools and Resources:*  
Making use of services like Later, Hootsuite, and Sprout Social, or hiring a social media manager or agency, can assist in effectively scheduling and managing posts across various platforms. By



delegating these tasks, artists can reduce their workload and minimize the risk of burnout (Barnhart 2018).

5. *Distributing Responsibility:*  
For groups or artists with a team, distributing the responsibility of content creation can significantly reduce individual pressure. This promotes a more manageable and balanced approach to online engagement.
6. *Prioritizing Authentic Engagement:*  
Authentic connections with an audience can be more fulfilling and less mentally draining than merely chasing likes or followers. By focusing on genuine interactions, artists can cultivate a healthier relationship with social media.
7. *Safeguarding Online Security:*  
Protecting personal information is crucial for artists on social media. Enabling two-factor authentication and being conscious about the data shared online can help secure accounts and contribute to peace of mind (Meta, n.d.-c).
8. *Protection Against Online Negativity:*  
Using tools like Instagram’s “Hidden Words” feature can shield artists from offensive words or comments, thus creating a healthier online environment (Meta, n.d.-b).
9. *Incorporating Wellness Practices:*  
Regular wellness routines that include activities such as yoga, meditation, journaling, and nature walks can help alleviate stress and promote mindfulness. A well-rounded wellness routine can “fill their cup,” providing the necessary energy and resilience for demanding careers.
10. *Seeking Professional Support:*  
It is important to recognize when professional help is needed. Engaging a mental health professional can provide artists with tools to cope with the unique pressures of their profession, promoting their overall mental and emotional well-being. There are several organizations that specialize in offering counseling to artists and industry professionals including the Music Industry Therapist Collective, Music Minds Matter, Backline, Behind the Scenes, and HelpPRO (Billboard Staff 2021).

In sum, maintaining mental health and wellness amid the demands of a digital music career requires comprehensive, mindful strategies. With this holistic approach, artists and their teams can strive for success while preserving their well-being.

## X. Conclusion

This article has offered an in-depth examination of the complex relationship between social media, the music industry, and artists' mental health and well-being. At its core, this exploration has illuminated the profound transformation of the music industry catalyzed by social media and digital technology. By enabling unprecedented access to global audiences and transforming artists' interaction with fans, social media has indelibly shaped the way musicians navigate their careers. However, these advancements are not without their drawbacks, presenting unique challenges that can exert significant pressure on artists' health and wellness.

The omnipresent demand for online engagement has introduced a new form of digital labor for artists, requiring continuous content creation, personal branding, and constant availability. While these endeavors can cultivate a strong online presence and foster deeper artist-fan connections, they also contribute to an intense culture of competition and comparison, manifesting in amplified stress and anxiety among artists.

This pervasive digital pressure, compounded by the industry's traditional stressors such as irregular income, public scrutiny, and the inherent unpredictability of a music career, has underscored the pressing need to address mental health within the music industry. The mental strain induced by these pressures can lead to various adverse effects, including depression, social comparison, feelings of inadequacy, and even social media addiction. These impacts are particularly pronounced among younger users, who form a significant part of both artist and audience demographics.

Despite these challenges, the industry is not bereft of solutions. A strategic approach to improving artists' well-being can include comprehensive onboarding programs, therapy and wellness services, fair scheduling practices, and social media content creation and management services. For artists and their teams, mindful social media usage, batch content creation, prioritizing authentic engagement, and seeking professional support can contribute significantly to maintaining a healthy balance between online engagement and mental well-being.

The intersection of social media, the music industry, and mental health presents a multifaceted landscape, one that demands ongoing scrutiny and adaptive strategies. As the digital era continues to evolve, it is incumbent on the industry, artists, and their teams to continue to reassess best practices and forge a path that safeguards artists' mental health while leveraging the potential of social media. By doing so, the music industry

can nurture a more sustainable, supportive environment that enables artists to thrive both creatively and personally.

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