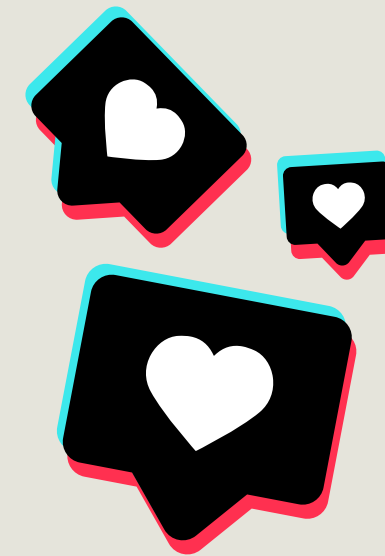




The TikTok Effect: ***TikTok's Impact on Music*** ***Diversity and Homogenization***

Anna Kuell | CMNS 300 | Music Futures Project

Despite its benefits for music discovery and artist promotion, TikTok's algorithm and focus on virality pose a serious threat to music diversity and are unintentionally homogenizing music, which has unknown long-term effects.



Brief Background of TikTok



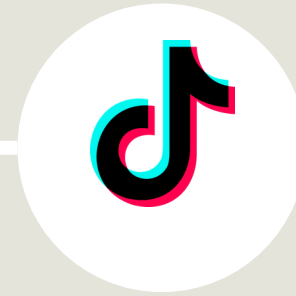
2014

A short form video app called Musical.ly debuted in Shanghai



2016

Douyin is released by Chinese tech giant ByteDance, amassing 100 million users in its 1st year in China and Thailand



2017

ByteDance bought Musical.ly and rebranded it as TikTok, gaining global popularity



2024

UMG removed their artists' songs after licensing deal expired. This included ALL songs by artists such as Billie Eilish, Drake, Harry Styles, and The Beatles. One month later, a new deal was reached & UMG music returned.



2020-2025

On and off threats of Congress/Trump administration banning TikTok in the US due to security concerns

- 170 million Americans (over a third of the US population) use TikTok
- TikTok has over 1 billion active global users per month & is track to reach 2 billion by late 2025 (cementing its place as the fastest-growing & 4th most popular social media app worldwide)

Over 176 songs surpassed 1 billion video views as TikTok sounds in 2020 alone. 90 of those songs climbed onto the Top 100 charts in the U.S., with 15 of those reaching #1 on Billboard.

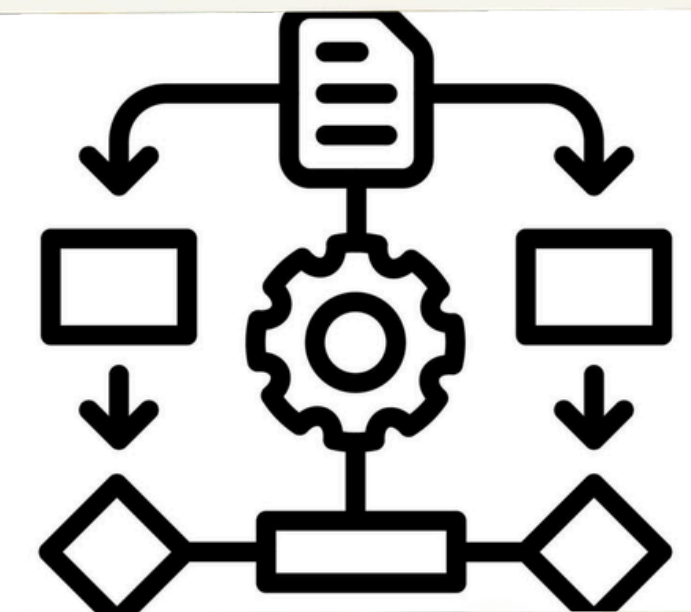
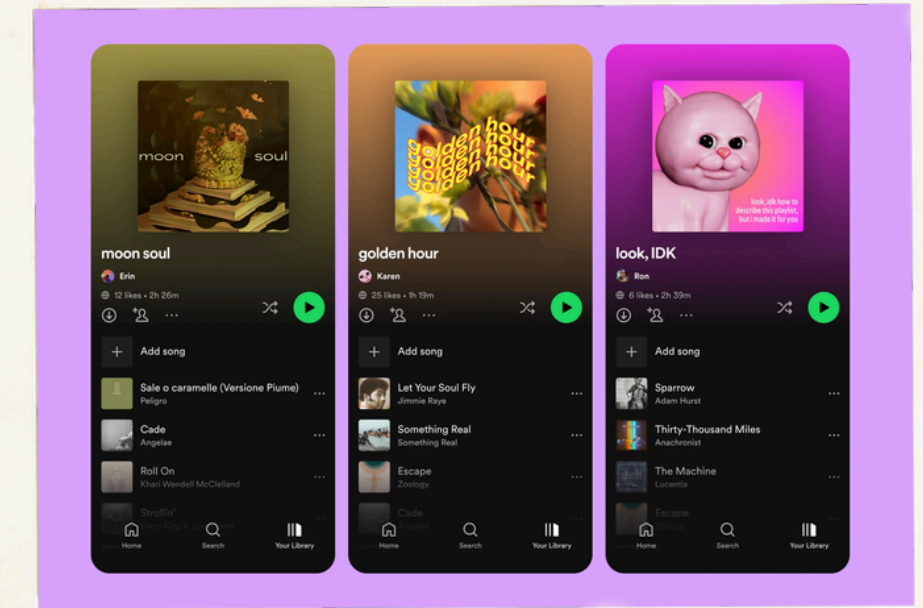
Over 70 artists who have broken on the platform have received major label deals, and dozens more have charted on Rolling Stone's Breakthrough 25.

The New “Gatekeeper”

Those who decide what music gets exposure and what remains unheard. They control access to platforms, airplay, and promotional opportunities, which can ultimately make or break an artist's career.

- Program & music directors at radio stations
- Writers (freelance & staff)
- Retail buyers (indie & chains)
- Promoters
- Talent buyers
- MTV

- Influencers
- Playlist curators
- Algorithms
- Streaming platforms
- Shazam
- Syncs
- Social media



Statistics

2023 Survey | (Music impact report confirms: Tiktok Fuels Music Discovery - newsroom: TikTok)

TikTok Fuels Music Discovery

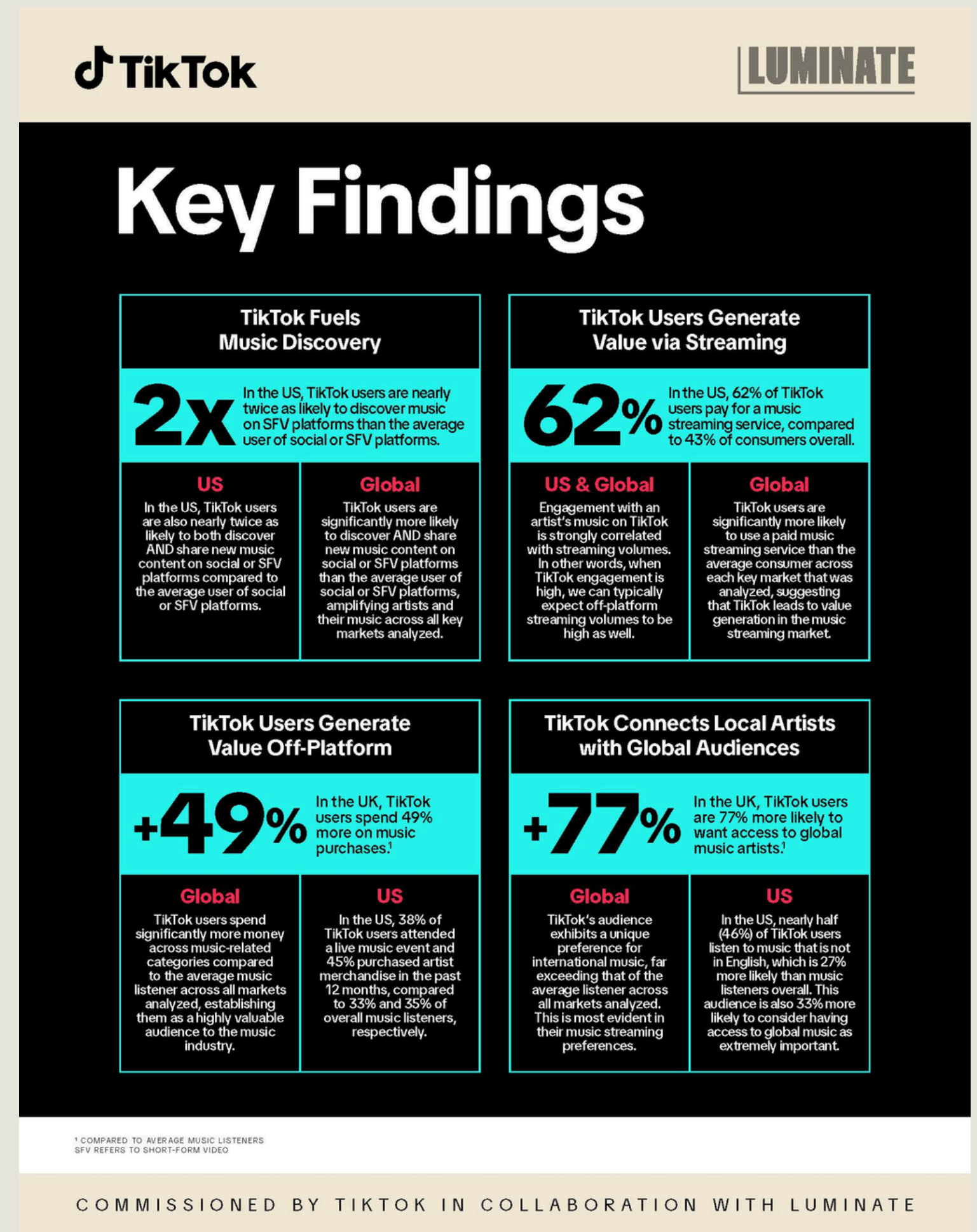
- Globally, TikTok users are significantly more likely to discover AND share new music content on social or short-form video (SFV) platforms than the average user of social or SFV platforms
- In the US, TikTok users are TWICE as likely to discover music on SFV platforms than the average user of SFV or social media platforms

TikTok Users Generate Value via Streaming

- Globally, TikTok users are significantly more likely to use a paid music streaming service than the average consumer
- In the US, 62% of TikTok users pay for a music streaming service, compared to 43% of consumers overall.
- Globally, engagement with an artist's music on TikTok is strongly correlated with streaming volumes.

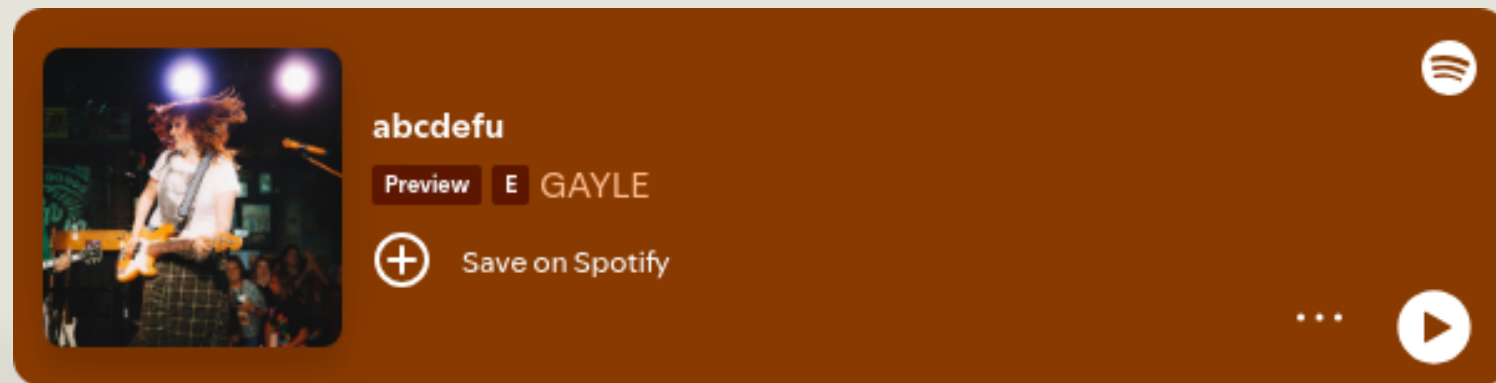
TikTok Users Generate Value Off-Platform

- Globally, TikTok users spend significantly more money across music-related categories compared to the average music listener across all markets analyzed
- In the US, 38% of TikTok users attended a live music event and 45% purchased artist merchandise in the past 12 months, compared to 33% and 35% of overall music listeners, respectively.



(Music impact report confirms: Tiktok Fuels Music Discovery - newsroom: TikTok)

Songs Made Popular by TikTok



"A-B-C-D-E, F-U

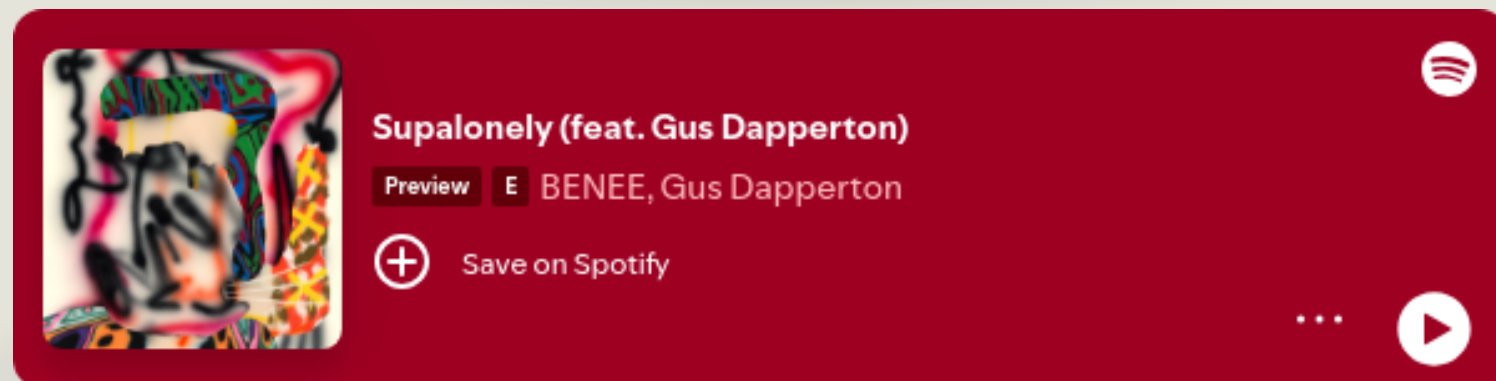
And your mom and your sister and your job

*And your broke-ass car and that sh*t you call art*

*F*ck you and your friends that I'll never see again*

*Everybody but your dog, you can all f*ck off"*

1.2B streams



*"I know I f*cked up, I'm just a loser*

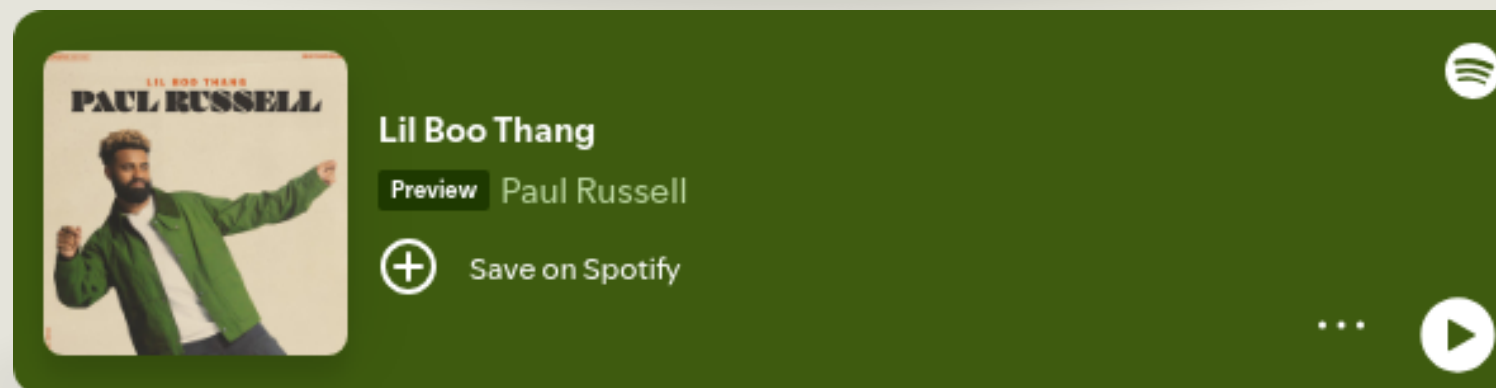
Shouldn't be with ya, guess I'm a quitter

While you're out there drinkin', I'm just here thinkin'

'Bout where I should've been

I've been lonely, mm, ah, yeah"

773Mil streams



"You my lil' boo thang

So I don't give a hoot what your dude say, girl, I know

You a lil' too tame

I'll be shooting that shot like 2K, girl, I know

Tell 'em I'm, tell 'em I'm next"

398Mil streams



"Please stay

I want you, I need you, oh God

Don't take

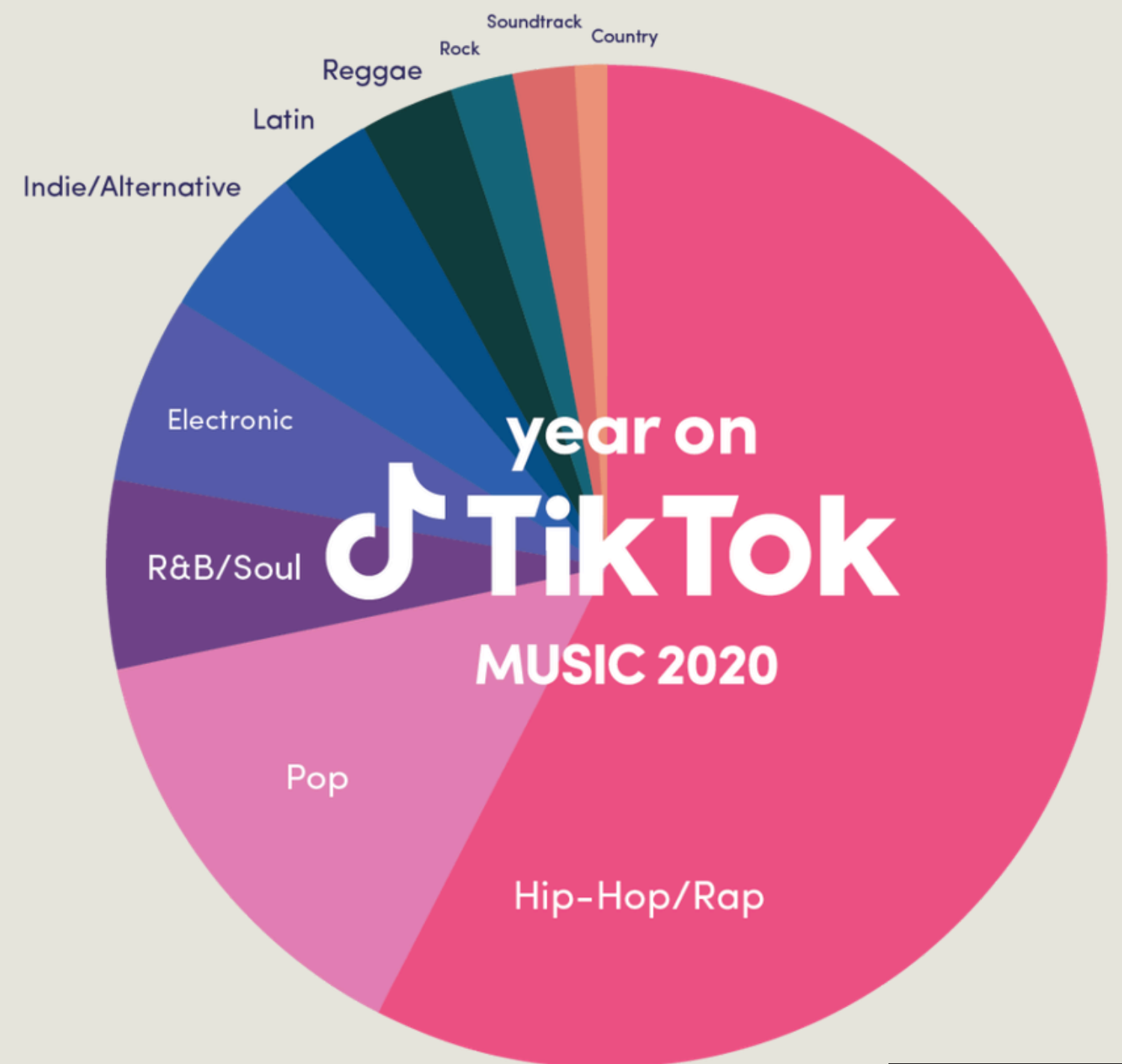
These beautiful things that I've got"

2.1B Streams

**Based on Spotify streaming #'s as of 06/05/25*

***As more artists break on TikTok,
emerging artists have begun to
tailor their songs & to specifically
target the TikTok algorithm.***

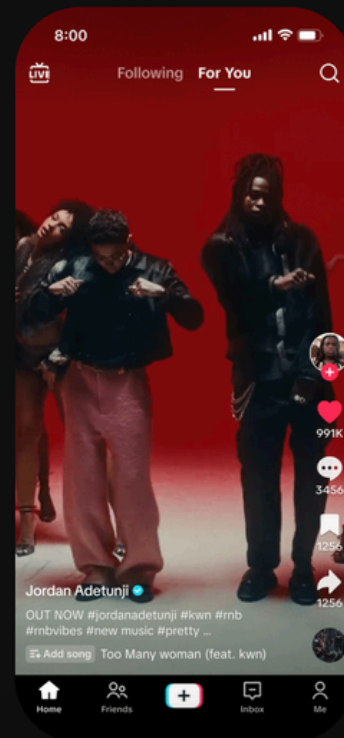
*→ This data is extremely accessible, meaning it
is easy for songwriters & producers to
mechanically engineer a TikTok hit by
interpreting the algorithm.*



TikTok for Artists

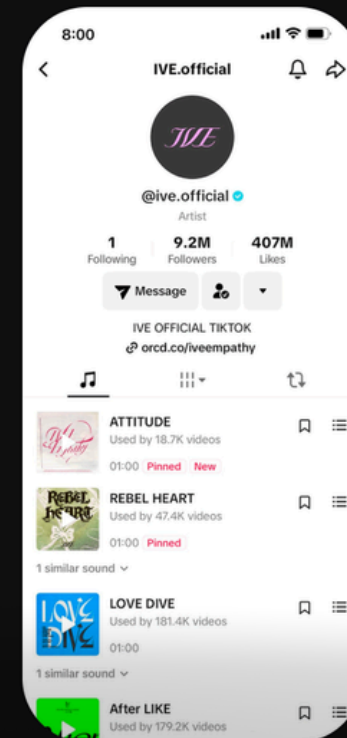
Increase exposure

Reach TikTok users through the For You feed, music detail pages, and more.



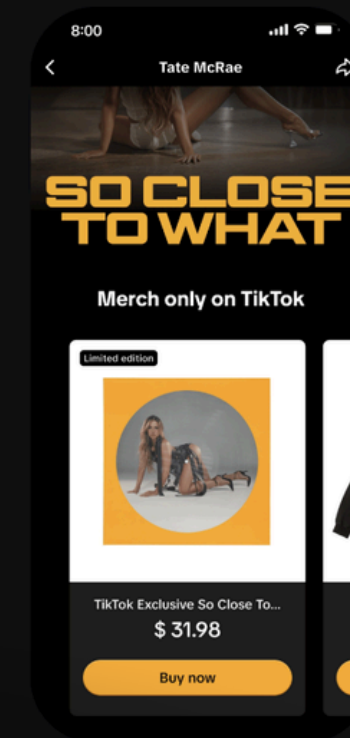
Build connections

Highlight fan videos and build your community.



Drive engagement

Launch engagement and monetization campaigns.



“TikTok for Artists offers musicians daily updates on how their songs are being used and which tracks are generating the most engagement. Metrics include the number of views, posts, and creator interactions per song, as well as insights into each post’s performance. Artists also gain access to demographic data about their followers, such as age, language, and self-identified gender. [...] Alongside the analytics tool, TikTok has launched a pre-release feature that lets artists promote upcoming music on the platform. Fans can pre-save unreleased albums directly to their Spotify or Apple Music libraries, making the music instantly available when it drops.”

(Tiktok for artists)

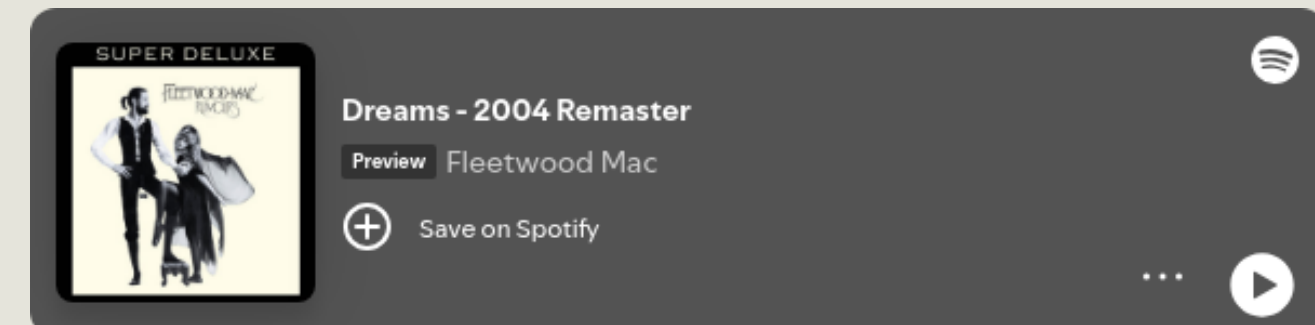
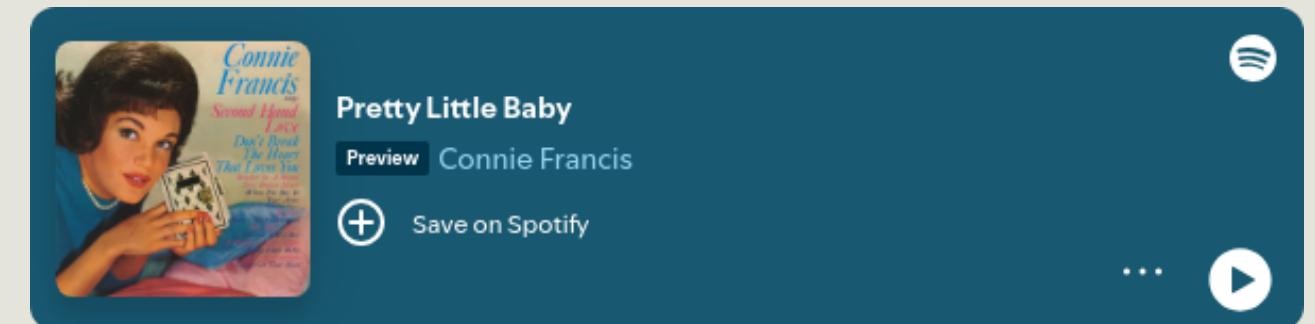
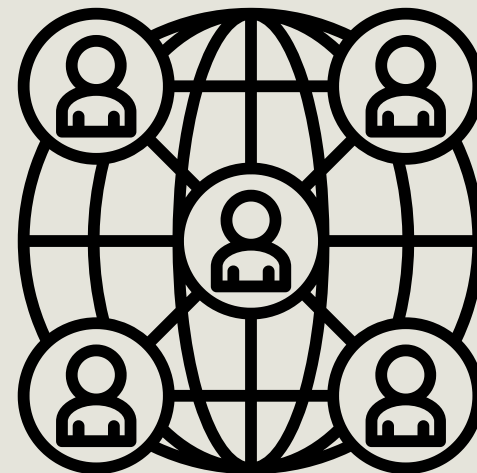
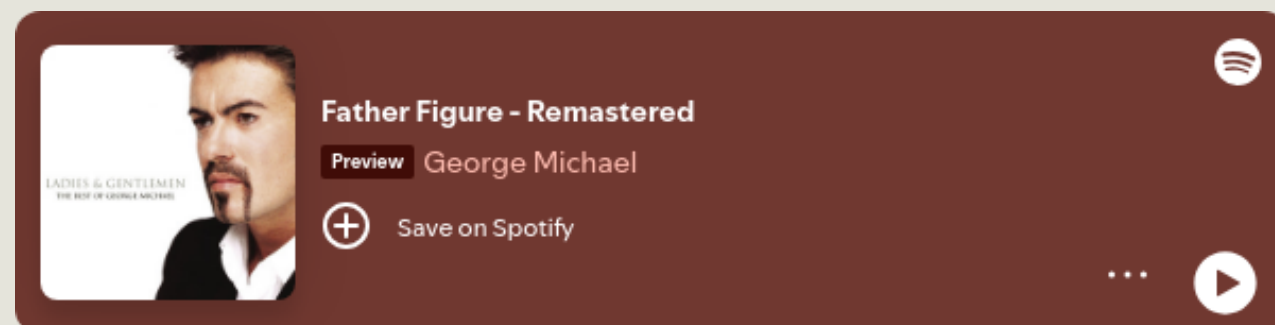
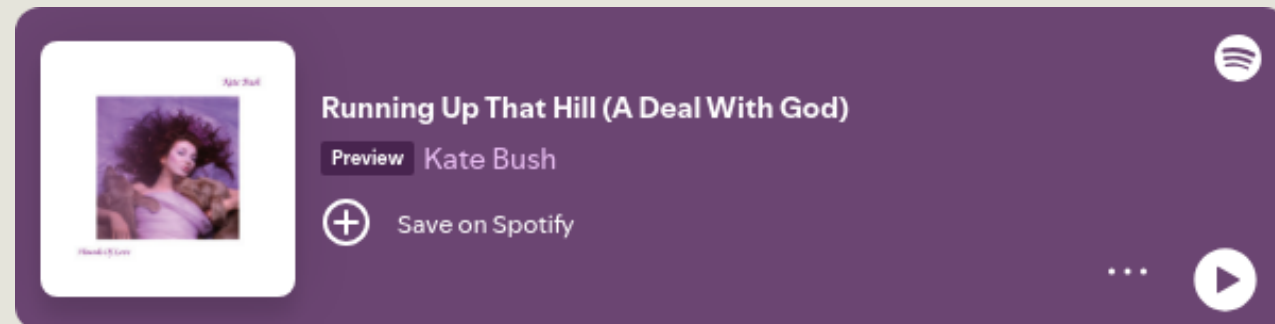
So...What's the problem?

- **Algorithmic Homogenization:** TikTok's algorithm tends to favor catchy, popular snippets that go viral, potentially leading to a homogenization of musical tastes & limiting exposure to diverse genres and artists.
- **Focus on Viral Trends:** The emphasis on viral trends may incentivize artists to create music tailored for the platform's format (short, catchy hooks) rather than focusing on artistic innovation or deeper musical themes.
- **Formulaic Production:** Record labels and artists may feel pressure to produce "TikTok-friendly" tracks with predictable elements, potentially stifling creativity & leading to less diverse music overall

$$m = \frac{f(x_2) - f(x_1)}{x_2 - x_1} = \text{Popular tiktok song}$$

On the other hand...

- **Democratization of Music Discovery:** TikTok has provided a platform for unknown & independent artists to gain exposure & reach a global audience, letting them bypass traditional industry gatekeepers.
- **Connecting Local Artists with Global Audiences:** Statistics show that TikTok users have a strong preference for international music, potentially increasing exposure to diverse cultural sounds and artists.
- **Revival of Older Songs:** The platform has helped rediscover & popularize older songs through viral challenges & trends, giving them new life & introducing them to younger audiences.



In conclusion, while TikTok offers significant opportunities for music discovery and artist promotion, concerns exist about its potential to inadvertently contribute to musical homogenization due to its algorithm and emphasis on viral trends. The long-term effects on music diversity are still being debated and will likely depend on how artists, labels, and the platform itself continue to evolve.

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