

How do music fans attempt to impact charts and what are the consequences of these actions?

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**HOW DO MUSIC FANS ATTEMPT TO
IMPACT CHARTS AND WHAT ARE THE
CONSEQUENCES OF THESE ACTIONS?**

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context

Beyhive, Navy, Little Monsters, Beliebers, Barbz,... These are all names of fandoms that we can find in the music industry. The music industry has gone through several changes in time. The industry went from the physical era, where people physically owned their records, to the digital era, where they owned them digitally, and is now living in what we call the streaming era.

There is today quite a lot of documentation showing how streaming services such as Spotify, Tidal or Apple Music have changed the music industry business wise. We also know how these services have changed the way single listeners consume their music but what about the fanbases? How did streaming services change the way fans operate inside of their community?

Leight (2023) notes that it can be located on the platform X that fans give each other instructions to boost the sales of a song during a release week. Each platform has its own purchase inscription. This phenomenon becomes more common on social media and they highlight the fact that charts play an important role in the music industry landscape nowadays (Leight, 2023).

Leight (2023) recalls that superfans have taken control of efforts to enhance their favorite artists' chart performance. The goal of fans is to help their favorite artist to reach the biggest number as possible and this determination often puts fervent fandoms in direct conflict with music industry organizations responsible for tracking listener activity. Recently, passionate fans have been purchasing numerous digital downloads of the same song individually—a tactic that doesn't count towards the chart, as there is a cap on the number of purchases from a single consumer that are eligible each week. Nonetheless, this strategy contributed to Billboard altering its chart rules because now downloads from artists' web stores, which typically have fewer restrictions than iTunes or Amazon, are not going to be counted towards the charts anymore (Leight, 2023). Spanos (2017) notes that “While there is no correct or typical way to get a song to the top of the charts, fans have become astute students of the business, tinkering with strategies to help the artists they love and see them grow larger with every release.”. Sometimes, it is even possible to see several fandoms join their forces together to push the chart performances of their music idol as far as possible (Gemmil, 2018).

Before the rise of social media and the apparition of new technologies, labels were actually the ones trying to have an impact on the charts. They would try to find ways to increase the numbers of sales of their artist, sometimes even by fraudulent manners. Nowadays, a shift can be seen in the sense that this work is given to fans, reducing the cost for labels (Leight, 2023). Fandom is a crucial part of popular music idol industries, which have been reshaped by social media, digital platforms, and data visualization (Zhang & Negus, 2020).

Access to data such as streaming services has changed the way fans operate and especially for the charts. The charts can nowadays solely be influenced by actions lead by group of dedicated fans (Leight, 2023).

There are some academic papers that have been written about the fact that fans have been manipulating charts numbers thanks to streaming services mostly. These papers are mostly focused on the fraudulent aspect of this attitude. My personal goal would be to go a bit further and to not only talk about the fraudulent ways to boost streams but also identifying the other new ways fans have found to boost streams or sales without cheating the system. I want to identify more strategies that fans put in place in order to boost sales/chart numbers.

1.2. Research motivations

This research has motivations in the managerial side as well as in the literature side. Regarding the managerial, side the study aims to help management understand the motivations of the fans so that they can use them to push them more or come up with ideas to help them achieve their goal regarding chart topping performances. In addition to this, the study will also help managers to identify the different techniques that fan use and use them at their advantage. Moreover the study will help managers to use the data access that fans have nowadays as a competitive advantage for them. The study will help managers to identify the tools they can use to collaborat efficiently with the fans who want to see their favorite music idol perform well on the charts.

Regarding the literature, this research wants to push further the information given in the literature about the behavior that east Asian fans can exhibit in order to see their idols perform well (Zhang & Neus, 2020). This research wants aims to study this phenomenon in an other geographical context and see if the findings about the east Asian fans align with the findings on European or American fans. In addition, the study aims to identify the various strategies set by fans and explain them in a comprehensive way which is something that has not yet been seen in the literature. In addition, the study will highlight the impact of access to data on the fandoms and how they help fans to reach their goals. Finally, the study wil give the opportunity to see the efficiency of these strategies set up by fans thanks to a practical case.

1.3. Problem statement

The goal of the study is to answer this following question:

“How do music fans impact the charts and what are the consequences of these actions?”

In addition to this broad general question, several sub questions will be answered during the study:

- (1) What are the different strategies that fan use to help their idol on the charts?
- (2) When are these strategies used and why are they used?
- (3) What are the factors that motivate fans to act in a chart obsessive way?
- (4) What kind of relationship do fans have with charts?
- (5) How has access to data impacted the way fans behave towards charts
- (6) What are the consequences of these actions on the fans
- (7) Are these strategies effective?

1.4. Contributions

A lot of research has been made about fan community, fan empowerment and online fandom in the literature. However, very little research has been made about this regarding the music industry. There is not a lot of information given in the literature given about what links music fans and charts. In addition, a there is an existing gap regarding the impact that the access to data has had on fans and consequently on the charts. This study aims to fill this gap.

The first contribution of this study will be to identify and describe the various strategies that fans put in place to push their idols on a higher ranking on charts. By observing the behavior of different fandoms online, the study will provide a list of strategies as well as the context in which they are used and the reason why they are considered as interesting strategies for fans.

The second contribution will be identifying the relationship that fans have with charts and identifying the different motivation sources to push them to act in a chart beating way. By discussing with fans participating in fandoms strategies, the study will provide a deeper understanding on the reasons why fans in the music industry act this towards charts.

The third contribution will be understanding the impact that data access has had on these fandoms and on the charts. The interviews with the different respondent will help to highlight the shift that has happened thanks to the evolution platforms but also the access to data that they give. Understanding this will help managers or labels to use this strength in an appropriate way that could enhance the success of their artists.

Finally, the research will showcase the impact of these strategies by showing if they are really efficient and if fans can really change the course of charts thanks to their actions. All these element will provide a deeper understanding of charts, they way they function, the way the affect the fans and the way data can be used as a tool to encourage fans to push even harder for their music idol.

1.5. Approach

This research paper is structured in six chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the introduction. This part will focus on the the context, the motivations for this research, the problem statement and the additional contributions made by this work compared to what has already been done in the literature. Then, the second chapter will be the literature review. In this chapter, information will be provided regarding works already done in the fields of brand community, online fandom and fan empowerment. In addition, the chapter will address the phenomena of data fandom and explain the history and the functioning of different existing charts. The third chapter concerns the qualitative research design. The chosen design will be described and justification will be given regarding the reasons why these methods were chosen. In addition, the data collection method and technique used will be extensively explained. Moreover, the results of the study will be presented in the fourth chapter. After the obtention of the results, the fifth chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the results and their implications whether managerial or in the literature. Finally, the sixth and last chapter gives a conclusion that summarizes the results of the study and the recommendations, as well as its implications from a managerial point of view, the possible limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Litterature review

The goal of this literature review will be to gain knowledge on what has been said in the literature regarding brand communities in general. After that, we will delve into what characterizes online fandom and end with what the literature teaches us about online fandom in the music industry in general.

2.1. The concept of brand community

The goal of this thesis being able to study the behavior of fan communities regarding music charts, it is pertinent to look at what is said about communities in the literature. Thus, to answer to the different research questions this thesis will answer to, it is important to understand what a brand community is in general and its implications.

2.1.1. Definition of a brand community

Brand community is a subject that has been discussed widely in the literature review. This concept was first thoroughly explored and defined Albert M. Muniz Jr. and Thomas C. O'Guinn in 2001 in the "Journal of Consumer Research". A brand community is defined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) as *"a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand"*. According to the authors, the community shares three different characteristics which are shared consciousness, rituals and traditions and a sense of moral responsibility and obligation (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

By shared consciousness of kind, the authors mean that a brand community involves a collective sense of belonging that distinguishes members from non-members. For the rituals and traditions, they are unique to each community and foster a strong sense of shared history and collective identity. Finally, the moral responsibility highlights the mutual support and obligations that members feel towards one another. These brand communities are very important because according to the authors, these communities have an impact on brand loyalty, consumer behavior and consumptions patterns (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

An expended definition of brand communities is given in the literature. This definition englobes the fact that brand communities do not encompass just the relationship between customers and the brand, but also the interactions with the company and among customers (McAlexander, J. H. et al., 2002). McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) describe these communities as evolving entities with dynamics influenced significantly by time and social contexts. This concept suggests that the interactions and connections within a brand community evolve and change, reflecting the shifting social landscapes and cultural trends. The research also tells us that to strengthen these brand communities, it would be beneficial to companies to make it easier for their customers to share experiences among themselves and provide them platforms for interactions (McAlexander, J. H. et al., 2002).

2.1.2. Influence of the community on loyalty

Jacoby and Kyner (1973, p.2) define brand loyalty as the *"biased bahavioral response expressed over time by some decision making with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands and is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) process"*. Regarding brand loyalty in communities, communal experience is important in building brand loyalty (McAlexander, J.

H. et al., 2002). This is important because it shifts the conversation from individual transactions. In brief, the authors present a customer-experiential perspective, defining a brand community as 'a fabric of relationships in which the customer is situated.' This encompasses the relationships between the customer and the brand, the customer and the firm, the customer and the product in use, and among fellow customers.

2.1.3. Influence of the community on the engagement

The concept of customer engagement is an interesting concept to delve in in the understanding of our research. The term customer engagement is defined as “the level of a customer's physical, cognitive and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organization.” (Patterson et al., 2006 cited in Brodie et al., 2013, p106). In relation with the concept of customer engagement, the concept of brand community engagement describes the ongoing involvement of customers in activities related to a specific brand within a community. This involvement includes both direct and indirect interactions focused on the brand, potentially leading to increased repeat purchases and recommendations of the brand (Raïes et al., 2015). Community engagement is characterized by a consumer's inherent desire to engage and collaborate with fellow members of a community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). This concept implies that individuals are motivated to assist others within the community, take part and actively participate in collective activities, and behave in ways that are supported by the community, thereby enhancing its value both for themselves and others (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005).

The relationship between the consumer and the the brand community can happen to be quite complex as mentioned by Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann (2005). Indeed, the authors highlight the dual nature of brand community influence, where strong identification can foster engagement, but also leads to negative outcomes like reactance due to a pressure that can be perceived if the individual identifies itself strongly with the brand community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). We can also learn that the influence of the brand community on an individual can vary depending on the knowledge that said individual has on the brand but also by the size of the community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). A bigger community could therefore have a bigger impact on people's behaviors and this information could be helpful in understanding one of the motivations that leads people in communities regarding the music industry to act a certain way.

2.1.3.1. *Importance of interactive experiences*

Brodie's study highlights the importance of interactive experiences between consumers and various engagement objects, including the brand, products, and other community members, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of consumer-brand relationships (Brodie et al., 2013). This research also highlights the dynamic nature of consumer engagement, characterized by fluctuating intensity levels and existing within iterative engagement processes. These insights are pivotal in understanding the intricate dynamics of online fandom, where engagement is not only a response to the brand's initiatives but also a result of fan-driven activities and interactions. The study further recognizes the role of consumer engagement in fostering relational exchanges within the brand community, which is instrumental in developing loyal, satisfied, and empowered consumers. (Brodie et al., 2013) identify specific triggers prompting consumer engagement, such as a need to reduce information search costs or perceived risks, and a lack of information about the organization's offerings. Five specific sub-processes of consumer engagement are identified: learning, sharing, advocating, socializing, and co-developing. The engagement process results in various outcomes like loyalty, satisfaction, empowerment, connection, commitment, and trust. Learning involves acquiring knowledge applicable to purchase and consumption decisions. Sharing encompasses the active

contribution of personal information and experiences for co-creation of knowledge. Advocating involves recommending specific brands, products, or services. Socializing refers to developing attitudes, norms, and community language through two-way interactions. Co-developing is about contributing to the development of new products, services, or brand meaning (Brodie et al., 2013). The valuable research demonstrates in general how engagement evolves over time, transitioning through various states and intensities, influenced by specific engagement objects and community interactions (Brodie et al., 2013).

2.1.3.2. Engagement and loyalty in communities online

Finally, the concept of brand communities and engagement is also studied in communities in the virtual world. The empirical research conducted by Kumar and Kumar in (2020) presents a detailed analysis of how people engage with brand communities online. Their study reveals that factors such as the pursuit of experiential and self-esteem benefits, along with the perceived investment in community relationships, play a crucial role in driving consumer participation in these digital brand communities. Experiential benefits in the context of online brand communities refer to the positive experiences and satisfaction that members gain from participating in these communities (Kumar & Kumar, 2020). When talking about brand experience, sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral dimensions must be taken into account in order to understand the full experience lived by the customer (Brakus et al., 2019). (Kumar & Kumar, 2020) come to the conclusion that these experiential benefits increase the engagement of the customer in the community, especially in the case of online communities.

The study by Lee, Kim, and Kim (2011) delves into the dynamics of online brand communities, emphasizing how their origins - whether created by consumers or marketers - affect consumer behaviors. The research conducted by the authors highlights the stronger presence of altruistic motives in consumer-founded communities, which bolsters social identity and engagement (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2011). This research underscores the critical role of community origin in influencing consumer engagement.

The 2020 study by Kaur et al. examines consumer brand engagement in virtual brand communities. The authors show that brand community identification and rewards significantly influence consumer brand engagement (Kaur et al., 2020). The study finds that consumer brand engagement partially mediates the relationship between these factors and brand loyalty, highlighting the importance of both community identification and reward that act as big motivators in digital consumer engagement and loyalty (Kaur et al., 2020). These insights have important implications for digital marketing and consumer relationship management in virtual environments. Laroche et al. (2012) demonstrates that social media-based brand communities can significantly impact the loyalty that consumers have towards a brand by fostering a sense of shared consciousness, rituals, and societal obligations among members of the same community. These community markers contribute to effective value creation practices, which are crucial for enhancing brand loyalty (Laroche et al., 2012). The study provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between these variables. Moreover, the research emphasizes the mediating role of brand trust in translating these practices (practices such as social networking, community engagement, impression management, and brand use) into brand loyalty, suggesting that trust is a critical factor in the relationship between consumers and brands in the social media contexts (Laroche et al., 2012). This article serves as a significant contribution to the existing literature on brand management and consumer behavior in the digital age since provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of consumer engagement in virtual brand communities. The netnographic approach used in this study offers a comprehensive view of consumer interactions, emphasizing the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of engagement (Brodie et al., 2013). The research demonstrates how engagement evolves over time,

transitioning through various states and intensities, influenced by specific engagement objects and community interactions. The findings are instrumental in understanding how consumer engagement fosters loyalty, satisfaction, and a sense of community, contributing significantly to the existing literature on virtual brand communities and consumer behavior.

2.2. Online fandom

The advent of Web 2.0 technology broadened the reach, diversity, and membership of online communities, offering their members expanded avenues for participation and communication (Costello et al., 2017).

'Fan' is an abbreviation of 'fanatic' a word that comes from the Latin word 'fanaticus'. While the term originally meant, quite simply, 'of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee,' its meaning quickly slipped towards more negative connotations, including 'frenzy', 'madness' and 'obsessive' (Jenkins, 1992: 12 cited in De Kloet & Van Zoonen, 2007, p324). Fandom is a concept that is widely talked about in the literature. Indeed, (Jenkins, 2011, p.41) defines fandom as the 'ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, spectatorial culture into participatory culture'. The research made regarding the concept of fandom shows that there are different dynamics in fandoms and that the term has many implications. The advancement of interactive technologies and the rise of social media platforms have significantly amplified the visibility of fandoms and these developments offer fans a multitude of avenues to actively engage in media production and the process of creating stars (Yin, 2020).

A notable online phenomenon is the engagement in fandom activities. Here, enthusiasts of various public figures, such as celebrities, musicians, models, or TV shows, come together in virtual spaces to passionately share and celebrate their interests (de Kloet & van Zoonen, 2007 cited in Malik & Haidar, 2023).

2.2.1. Bridge between online and offline

Fandoms create a collective intelligence and emotional bond, with members crafting their self-concepts and public personas within these groups and some individuals gain recognition within their fandom, which also fosters a sense of shared identity and personal connections among members (Baym, 2007). While fandoms often have common values, disagreements can occur, but it happens that those disagreement end up being beneficial (Baym, 2007). Their creativity is notably amplified by the internet, enabling new forms of expression and community building (Baym, 2007). Teenage users effectively leverage the distinct capabilities of each social networking platform, capitalizing on their unique features to disseminate specific messages and connect with new audiences (Lacasa et al., 2016). Fans employed specialized tactics to interact with like-minded individuals.

Booth and Kelly (2013) demonstrate that while online platforms have enhanced the visibility of fan communities, core elements of fan identity and engagement remain rooted in offline practices. Fandoms therefore stay consistent. Pearson (2010) highlights how digital technologies have enabled fans to become more active participants in media production, challenging traditional consumer-producer boundaries. However, (Booth & Kelly, 2013) note that technology has pushed fans to augment the practices and methods of personal connection between them. Their ethnographic approach, which consisted of directly interviewing fans at fan conventions, offers a comprehensive view of how digital and offline worlds intersect in the realm of fandom, reaffirming the importance of interactions in the community when it comes to fandom (Booth & Kelly, 2013). This research helps to

understand how technology intersects with cultural practices, showing that new tools can augment but do not necessarily supplant traditional forms of fan engagement.

In the context of online communities, Baym's (2007) detailed study of the Swedish independent music fan community exemplifies the transition from traditional online forums that were centralized to a more dispersed and networked social structures. Her methodology, a two-year participant-observation analysis, provides a comprehensive view of these communities' dynamics, revealing how they extend beyond single websites to encompass multiple online and offline platforms. The research highlights the fluidity and permeability of these communities, showing how they are increasingly characterized by multi-site engagement, with a notable emphasis on fan-authored blogs and social networking sites (Baym, 2007). These findings indicate a significant shift in the way online communities are formed and maintained, putting the emphasize on the evolving role of digital platforms in facilitating communal connections and interactions.

2.2.2. Fan labour

In the context of online communities, Baym's (2007) detailed study of the Swedish independent music fan community exemplifies the transition from traditional online forums that were centralized to a more dispersed and networked social structures. Her methodology, a two-year participant-observation analysis, provides a comprehensive view of these communities' dynamics, revealing how they extend beyond single websites to encompass multiple online and offline platforms. The research highlights the fluidity and permeability of these communities, showing how they are increasingly characterized by multi-site engagement, with a notable emphasis on fan-authored blogs and social networking sites (Baym, 2007). These findings indicate a significant shift in the way online communities are formed and maintained, putting the emphasize on the evolving role of digital platforms in facilitating communal connections and interactions.

Online fandom has also seen the emergence of what is called fan labor in the literature. Indeed, with the continuous evolution in the technology, fans have been giving the impression that they could not only be the consumers of the product they are fans of, but they can also act like producers (Wang, 2020). Fans nowadays can produce media that are usually used by media industries without getting any type of compensation (Wang, 2020). These productions can go from fan fiction, fan art or even participating in online discussions, giving free promo to the brand and increasing the participation-based loyalty and engagement of fans in the community (Wang, 2020). Even if Wang's (2020) article debates on whether the use of fans for free productions is slightly going towards the exploitation of the people making the media, this also shows us that thanks to the advancement of technology, fans gain more power in the sense that they can get more means to impact a "brand" due to what they will produce themselves. This could be an interesting point while trying to understand the motivations fans have on adopting certain behaviors in order to impact the performance of their favorite artist on music charts for example.

It must be understood thanks to the literature that the main point in fandom is the sense of togetherness regarding a certain topic. Fans share their experience together and this therefore leads to more commitment in the community and more loyalty to the object of fandom. However, according to Hills (2018), the emergence of data-driven platforms like Netflix, which utilize algorithms to suggest content, has shifted traditional fan dynamics because this approach promotes a more individualized media consumption, leading to broader and more varied interests among fans. As a result, fan communities become more fragmented, moving away from the collective experiences that previously defined them (Hills 2018). This shift towards personalized interaction with content often leads to fans engaging with media in solitude, significantly changing the social fabric and communal aspects of fandom (Hills 2018). The evolving situation of fandoms will not be discussed in this thesis but it is

interesting to see the changes that access to data from companies causes nowadays inside fandoms and their dynamics.

2.3. Online fandom in the music industry

As for now, the literature tells us mainly that the fan experience in the music industry comes from a collective experience. However, Derbaix & Korchia (2019) challenge the traditional notion that fandom is predominantly a collective experience, emphasizing the personal and intimate nature of fan-icon relationships. Indeed, the researchers come to the conclusion that the essence of fandom lies in its individual nature, often distinct from communal or group influences. The qualitative research done thanks to semi-structured interviews delves into the varied dynamics between fans and their musical idols, showcasing the spectrum of engagement from light admiration to deeper emotional bonds and underscoring that being a fan is not uniformly synonymous with intense idolization, but instead encompasses a broad range of personal connections and interactions (Derbaix & Korchia, 2019). Individual enthusiasts express their admiration for their idols in unique and sometimes private manners. This can involve personal activities like accumulating souvenirs, attending live performances, and partaking in creative endeavors inspired by their favorite icon (Derbaix & Korchia, 2019). This different point of view could raise some questions about what has the greater impact between the commune experience fans can have inside the fandom and the interpersonal relationship fans have with the artist.

2.3.1. Hierarchy in the fandom

Technology has revolutionized the music industry just like any other industry. It has had a key role in enhancing interactions between fans and artists, primarily through digital channels like social media and music streaming services (McLean, Oliver & Wainwright, 2010). These platforms enable fans to listen to music, receive updates, and occasionally interact with the artists. However, the presence of major labels can influence these interactions, especially for artists signed with them (McLean, Oliver & Wainwright, 2010). This results in a combination of direct, personal fan-artist engagements and more structured interactions shaped by commercial interests (McLean, Oliver & Wainwright, 2010). People in the literature have made research about online fandom in the context of the music industry. Lacasa et al.'s (2016) research demonstrates the profound influence of online communities in the formation of personal relationships and collective identities especially in the case of adolescents. Abd-Rahim's (2019) study on online Korean-pop fandoms, focusing on ELF and A.R.M.Y, provides significant insights into the construction of social identities within digital fan communities. Using virtual ethnography, the research shows how fans engage in social hierarchies and identity formation through online platforms (Abd-Rahim, 2019). The author highlights the fact that fans construct their identities in these fandoms distinguishing themselves between different categories. These categories are named true fans, multi fans and successful fans. The concept of categorization of fans is also talked about elsewhere in the literature. Indeed, Edlom and Karlsson (2021) provide more valuable insights into the complex dynamics of music fandom. Their research highlights the existence of a hierarchical structure within fan communities just like Abd-Rahim. In their work, fans are categorized from ambient fans, engaged fans, superfans and then executive fans at the highest level (Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995). This hierarchy is pivotal in understanding the roles and influences different fan levels have within a community (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021). Superfans are seen as experts and enjoy a high ranking regarding their status within the group while in order to be considered an executive fan, one must have top-level access to the artist they are fan of or its management and be recognized as a community leader (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021). The most active and engaged fans may ascend to become executive fans, possibly designated by the artist (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021). Superfans emerge as key figures since they are the

ones driving engagement the most within the community culture through their deep emotional connection to the artist and active participation in both online and offline fan activities (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021). The methodologies for the research were digital ethnography and survey and interviews (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021) which seems to be appropriate in this context of deeply understanding the different dynamics in a fanbase. The paper therefore contributes to our understanding of fan behavior, especially in the digital era even. The research being done about the community of a Swedish music artist (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021) gives an opinion outside of the K-pop industry talked about previously and helps to see that the concept of non-geographically bound community is still respected here (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). As fans ascend the hierarchy, they not only gain status but also forge deeper relationships with fellow enthusiasts. This advancement leads to an enriched understanding and a higher level of fan engagement, positioning them as influential leaders within the community (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021). The more fans rise in the hierarchy of the fandom, the more they can get access to the object of idolisation. This can be used as motivation to climb faster in the hierarchy and participate more in the community. Executive fans are often used as motivators that will push fans to initiate activities and participate more in the life of the community (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021).

2.3.2. The case of stan Twitter

Malik and Haidar (2020) have conducted a research on the K-Pop stan twitter community. Stan twitter is a term that refers to a group of people gathered together by their shared interest for a personality in the social media platform X previously known as Twitter (Malik & Haidar, 2020). Using qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews and participant observations, the study revealed that such online platforms foster strong interpersonal relationships and regular communication among members. The study highlights the importance of what is called "big accounts" by one of the person interviewed. These big accounts are generally accounts with a large of following and they are the ones responsible of setting trends within the community but also update the rest of the fanbase regularly (Malik & Haidar, 2020). In stan Twitter's fandom activities, the entire community collaboratively participates by interacting and discussing. Members collectively determine the initiation, progression, and conclusion of activities, while also providing mutual encouragement throughout the process (Malik & Haidar, 2020). An activity that has been mentioned during the observation was the holding of "streaming events" where fans would watch a YouTube video in order to increase the position of a song in the charts (Malik & Haidar, 2020). This shows that some practices regarding the charts have been observed but the literature has not delved deeper into them. The authors also note that these communities tend to be goal oriented as they all work together in order to achieve a fixed, common goal.

2.3.3. Data fandom

"Data" has long been a component of how humans understand individual and collective behavior. Scholars have traced the use and manipulation of data in human societies back to markings on artifacts approximately 20,000 years old found in what is now Africa, and to Babylonian data systems on cuneiform tablets estimated to be around 6,000 years old (Holmes, 2017)

One of the goals of this research is being able to identify the different techniques fandoms put in place to strengthen the performances of their favorite artists. The literature doesn't give a lot of information about these techniques. However, the literature shows us that fans adopt a behavior of collaboration between them. Indeed, it happens that a fandom seeks the help of another fandom in order to increase the performances of their favorite idol and this behavior has been noticed while

observing fans in the Korean pop music industry (Kang et al., 2022). The findings highlight the pivotal role of external factors like album releases and awards in stimulating these collaborations, underscoring the influence of industry events on fan activities (Kang et al., 2022). Moreover, the predominance of boy band fandoms in these networks reveals the nuanced differences in fan engagement based on band attributes (Kang et al., 2022). This study is instrumental in understanding the economic and social implications of fandom collaborations, contributing significantly to the literature on online community behaviors. Atiqah (2019) notes that despite the moments of collaboration, fandoms also tend to have moments of conflicts. These findings raise questions on the different external factors that can push fandoms to behave in a particular way and in this case, we can ask ourselves what the different external factors are so that professionals in the industry can increase their fan engagement and also profit from the fandoms of different artists in order to keep increasing their performances on charts.

In their examination of East Asian pop music idol production, Zhang and Negus (2020) present an in-depth look at the rise of 'data fandom' in China, a trend where fans proactively use digital means to support their favorite idols. This shift signifies a more engaged form of fan participation, where fans are not just consumers but active players in influencing the music industry through online platforms (Zhang & Negus, 2020). By analyzing primary sources and conducting interviews with Chinese fans, the study sheds light on how digital and social media have become pivotal in shaping music charts and online content, thus altering the traditional landscape of cultural production in the music industry. In the article, data fans are portrayed as *savvy individuals who strategically manipulate online metrics and semantic information to influence the popularity of idols* (Zhang & Negus, 2020). Thanks to their research, Zhang and Negus (2020) have been able to identify that within diverse fan club structures, a key element is the 'data team', a group of highly knowledgeable and digitally adept fans skilled in understanding and manipulating digital platform algorithms. They gather data across platforms, devising strategies to guide less tech-savvy fans. This team's activities mainly consist of coordinating social media efforts and strategically altering data traffic about idols. They also orchestrate specific tasks like reposting, counteracting criticism, and controlling online narratives, often incentivizing participation with rewards like merchandise or exclusive event tickets. Their organized or informal efforts significantly shape the online presence and perception of idols (Zhang & Negus, 2020). *Chart data affords fans a visually unambiguous sense of their contribution to an idol's success, a record of their achievement in competitive encounters with fans of other idols, and a sense of belonging to a wider fan community* (Zhang and Negus, 2020., p503). This research is crucial for understanding the evolving interplay between technology, fan culture, and the global music industry. However, this article, just like most of the articles mentioned above talk about the phenomenon of fandom in the context of K-pop music & famous idols in China. This raises questions on if this type of behavior can also be seen and analyzed in music fandoms in the Western world.

In the continuity of the findings of Zhang and Negus, Yin's research (2020) provides critical insights into the emergent algorithmic culture in online fandom, specifically within the Chinese context. The study utilizes a comprehensive methodology, including multi-sited case studies, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews, to explore the nuanced interplay between digital platforms and fan culture. This research helps to understand how digital platforms, particularly Weibo in this case, have transformed traditional fandom into a data-driven phenomenon. In order to boost the popularity of their favorite idol, fans will engage in activities to generate traffic data such as views, likes and comment because they know that the platform's (Weibo) algorithm reinforces this type of behavior and will increase the visibility of the posts (Yin, 2020). Fans now choose the way they interact between them and with people on the platform in general according to the shape of the algorithm (Yin, 2020). What we get from these research basically is that fan adapt their behavior depending on the type of data they have so that they can increase the performances of their favorite artists. Again, these studies cited before put the focus on these activities in the Asian continent. It would be interesting to see if these practices can still be observed in other parts of the world and. The

literature also does not give us the context in which fans adopt these behaviors. There's a limitation in the literature regarding this information.

2.4. Music Charts

There are different charts that exist depending on the geographical position in which the consumer consumes its music. Each geographical department has its own chart rules and ways to count the points that will be attributed to a song. It is important to note that charts make a difference and use different rules when it comes to albums and singles. An album is defined by the dictionary as a musical production with several components forming an artistic unity (Larousse, n.d.). The album can take several forms such as digital version that can be bought on platforms such as iTunes or that can be streamed on streaming platforms. The albums can also be bought on physical versions such as cassettes, cds or vinyls. Singles are defined as discs that contain less than 2 songs in the dictionary but in this case, we will define the single as a single song promoted by an artist in order to push the performance of the overall album.

For the reporting of the figures, most of the charts use the reports that come from Luminate. In general, streams, buying and radio platforms report the results to Luminate and then Luminate publishes them for professionals of the industry daily.

2.4.1. History and concept

A music chart is a table that represents how different products (songs or albums) have performed in sales compared to others during a certain period. Market research organizations, sponsored by various media outlets, produce the charts by compiling weekly sales data, which is then presented as a table (Parker, 1991). In essence, music charts are designed to identify the most popular songs within the realm of popular music, representing the highest achievement in a specific genre (Parker, 1991). There is a unique consumer fascination with sales figures is almost exclusive to the music industry (Parker, 1991). Unlike other sectors, consumers typically do not seek out specialist books or magazines to track the historical performance of their preferred brands, nor do they tune into specific radio stations to find out the top-selling products (Parker, 1991).

In July 1913, Billboard Magazine published their first ever chart that was titled "Last Week's Ten Best Seller Among The Popular Song" (Grein, 1993). After that first one, many different charts were created sometimes separating songs based on their genres but all still had the same goal: seeing what the most popular songs are every week (Grein, 1993).

According to Martin Parker's article (1991), charts shape the consumption of music by acting as a barometer for what is popular, influencing listeners' choices. They create a feedback loop where chart-topping tracks receive more exposure and thus more sales, reinforcing their positions. This phenomenon impacts consumer behavior, as people tend to gravitate towards music that is perceived as popular or successful. The charts, therefore, play a crucial role in guiding the public's musical tastes and preferences, significantly influencing the music industry's production and marketing strategies.

Hakanen's article (1998) provides valuable insights into the changing nature of popular music charts. The evolution from a mere business tool to a complex cultural signifier reflects broader societal transformations. Hakanen (1998) illustrates how charts initially functioned as a marketing tool for publishers and later evolved to represent a wide array of relationships in the music industry, from business dynamics to consumer tastes. The study's historical analysis, grounded in cultural and postmodern theories, offers a nuanced understanding of how music charts, beyond being a reflection

of popular taste, contribute to shaping consumer identities and perceptions of popularity in a capitalist society.

2.4.2. Example of chart: Billboard Chart in the US

Music charts originated in the early 20th century as a means to measure the popularity of songs and albums. Billboard, one of the most renowned chart compilers, began its journey in 1940 with the launch of its "National List of Best Selling Records," later renamed the "Hot 100" in 1958. The first artist to top the chart was Tommy Dorsey with the title "I'll Never Smile Again" (Trust, 2023). Initially, the charts were compiled based on sales figures and radio airplay. However, with the digital age, the methodology evolved to incorporate digital downloads, streaming data, and social media interactions (Trust, 2023). Currently, the Billboard charts are calculated using a combination of metrics such as physical and digital sales, streaming equivalent albums (SEA), streaming equivalent songs (SES), and radio airplay audience impressions. This comprehensive approach provides a more accurate reflection of a song or album's popularity across various platforms (Trust, 2024).

The Billboard charts employ a sophisticated methodology to accurately reflect the popularity of music across various platforms. Here's a breakdown of the calculations involved (Devos, 2024):

Sales Data: Billboard collects sales data from various retailers, both physical and digital. This includes traditional album sales, single track downloads, and digital album downloads. Each sale contributes to the chart position of the respective album or song.

Streaming platforms have emerged as the primary means for consuming music. These platforms usually feature mechanisms to gauge a song's popularity through various scores and rankings (Soares Araujo, Pinheiro de Cristo & Giusti, 2019). In that sense charts, nowadays take into account the amount of streams albums or songs get to come up with their charts (Devos, 2024).

Streaming Equivalent Albums (SEA): Streaming has become a dominant force in music consumption. To account for this, Billboard introduced the concept of Streaming Equivalent Albums (SEA). This metric converts streaming numbers into an equivalent number of album sales. For instance, a certain number of streams of a song will count as one album sale. This figure is calculated based on reports coming from platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, etc (Devos, 2024).

Streaming Equivalent Songs (SES): Similar to SEA, Streaming Equivalent Songs (SES) convert streams into equivalent single track sales. This metric is particularly important for the Hot 100 chart, which focuses on individual tracks rather than full albums (Devos, 2024).

Radio Airplay: Billboard also considers radio airplay when compiling its charts. The number of times a song is played on radio stations and the size of the audience reached by those plays are taken into account. This data is collected through monitoring services and industry reports using information tracked by Mediabase (Devos, 2024).

Social Media Interactions: In recent years, Billboard has started incorporating social media interactions into its calculations. Metrics such as YouTube views, Shazam searches, and social media shares and likes contribute to a song's chart performance (Devos, 2024).

Weighting: Billboard assigns different weights to each of these metrics based on their perceived importance and impact on overall music consumption trends. For example, streaming data may carry more weight than physical sales due to its increasing significance in the industry.

By aggregating data from these various sources and applying a weighted formula, Billboard is able to generate its weekly charts, providing a comprehensive overview of the most popular music in the industry.

2.4.3. Example of chart: Official Charts UK

For the United Kingdom, different rules are used for their official charts named the ‘Official charts UK’. In their case the chart focuses on the consumption of music in the geographical territory of the United Kingdom. Their tracking week also goes from Friday to Thursday. Two main official charts exist in the UK: one that tracks the performance of albums and one that tracks the performance of singles (Official Charts Operations Team, 2023). In addition to these two charts, 47 other music related charts exist. These charts are either genre specific or specific to the form of consumption specific. The two general charts are mostly counted in the same way in the fact that the metrics used for both charts are sales (digital or physical) and streams (Official Charts Operations Team, 2023). The chart functions in the same way as the billboard chart with one exception. For the singles here, airplay is not taken into account for the official charts which is a major difference if we compare this chart to some other charts that exist in the world (Official Charts Operations Team, 2023).

2.4.4. Example of chart: Ultratop Belgium

As mentioned before, each geographical department has its specific rules and ways of counting for its charts. For example, in Belgium there are two different charts depending on the region where the consumer consumes its music. Indeed, the counting of the consumption of music is counted depending of the listener has consumed the music in Wallonia or in Flanders. Each of these regions has 2 different charts both named *Ultratop* (Ultratop n.d).

One chart has the goal to showcase the consumption of singles in the specific region of the country and the other does the same but for the consumption of albums. There are therefore, in total, 4 charts existing in Belgium. The rules are different for each chart. The tracking period ,which is the moment when the consumption of a track or an album, is one week. The songs are tracked from Friday - as it is the international released day decided by the IFPI (Ingham, 2015) – to Thursday included. The singles chart takes into account three factors in order to compute the amount of point a song gets in total for its chart position (Ultratop, n.d).

First, there is the amount of streams generated for the tracking period on the different streaming platforms available in the country. This includes platforms available in the country such as Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer, Tidal or Pandora. The views coming from Youtube are also counted as streams for the tracking period. After the streams, the amount of digital sales that the single has had on platforms are counted. This includes platforms like iTunes or the Amazonn website.

The last element that is taken into account for the chart points in Belgium are the weekly airplay that a song gets. Airplay is the amount of listeners that a song has had in a week while it was being played on radio. This information is provided to Ultratop by Radiomonitor (Ultratop, n.d).

All these elements are calculated with a specific ratio and an addition is computed the total points. The songs are therefore listed on the Ultratop website from the songs that have the most points to the 100th one with the least points. On the chart available to the public different information are given such as the chart position for a specific week, the amount of weeks a song has been charting and the position the song had the previous week. If a song is charting for the very first week it is presented as a “new entry” (Ultratop, n.d).

Regarding the albums, points are generated from two different means. The first one is streams. The streams are counted by putting together the total amount of streams that has been generated by each song of the album. In addition to the streams that an album has garnered in a given week, the sales are also computed. Sales can be coming from digital platforms like iTunes or from physical copies that can be bought on the internet or in physical shops. Both these elements will be computed using a certain ratio and will therefore give the total amount of points that an album gets for a tracking week. Once a tracking week is over, the next one directly starts. On Sundays, ultratop usually publishes the album chart at the same time as the singles chart. Both charts are published in the same way. They will present a list of the most consumed album while adding the elements such as the number of weeks on the charts and the placement on the said week. If the album appears on the chart for the first time it will also have the “new entry” nomination (Ultratop, n.d).

3. Research design

This section outlines the scientific methodology employed in this thesis. It details the selection process for the sample, as well as the techniques utilized for gathering, observing, and analyzing data, within the framework of a qualitative inductive approach. As noted by scholars, *qualitative research focuses on exploring phenomena that influence the real-life experiences of individuals or groups within specific cultural and social settings* (Mills & Birks, 2014, p.9). Consequently, this research was conducted using a qualitative method. This method is pertinent in this case as, thanks to this, data collection can very much of comprehensive and intricate (Symon, Cassell, & Johnson, 2018), and helps in understanding the perception and the interaction that people have with their environments (Ritchie et al., 2003). The flexible nature of qualitative research (Symon, Cassell, & Johnson, 2018) provides an extensive insight into the experiences of fans in the music industry.

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Identification of the techniques and motivations through netnography

3.1.1.1. Method

First thing that was conducted in the methodology was gathering information on the different techniques that stans (as they call themselves) put in place in order to have an influence on the charting position of their favorite artist. To do so, I conducted a netnographic research on the social media Twitter which is now called X. Kozinets (2002, p. 62) defined netnography as *“a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through electronic networks*. The reason why I chose this social media is because Twitter is one of the social media where fandoms are the most active and can easily share information between them (Siroky, 2023). Twitter also appeared to be a good platform to me because it is a platform where we can directly access to interactions between fans on our feed even if we don't follow them (Siroky, 2023). This can provide ease in observing people's behaviors without having to intervene. For this part of the research, the netnographic approach was chosen because thanks to it, it is possible to study diverse communities while also exploring trends and have an understanding of the user behavior (Villegas, 2023). Netnography therefore lets researchers observe how people interact online by diving into the digital spaces where these interactions happen. It helps them look closely at different online cultures as they appear (Addeo et al., 2019). Ethnography, by generating a genuine comprehension of a culture based on emerging concepts during the investigation, avoids imposing preconceived hypotheses from the researcher. Its primary strength lies in capturing the viewpoints of individuals, thereby unraveling the depth and intricacy of social dynamics, which can dispel the flawed assumptions often harbored by social scientists in their research (Addeo et al., 2019). The main advantage of using a netnographic approach is that it is a method that is less time consuming (Addeo et al., 2019). Indeed, information can be easily gathered from the internet without the need for meticulous recording and transcription. Additionally, researchers are spared the need to travel for data collection. Furthermore, Netnography allows for research invisibility, enabling observers to remain unnoticed by those they are studying.

Another advantage of Netnography is the ability to archive material. Many websites store historical data, allowing for the study of trends over time. The persistence of online content also facilitates revisiting sites at different intervals for thorough consistency checks (Addeo et al., 2019).

Lastly, Netnography provides the opportunity to analyze real-time trends. Online conversations are continuously updated, enabling the study of emerging trends as they develop (Addeo et al., 2019).

3.1.1.2. *Sample method*

The sampling technique was based on non-probability sampling, consisting of a purposive sample ((Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Indeed, the communities that were observed were selected based on the richness of the data that they could provide for the research. The communities and the members observed had therefore to be communities having active conversation on the success of their favorite artists.

3.1.1.3. *Observed Communities*

The respondents for this part of the research were online communities that could be found on the social platform X. These communities consisted of fans of artists working actively in the music industry. Another key point in the fandoms observed was that the artist who the fans were fan of had a project that was on the charts or predicted to be charting. Eleven communities were chosen initially. These fandoms were consisted of fans of artists who had already proven in their career that they could reach charts milestone which could lead to the supposition that the artist's fanbase is big enough in size.

The platform X gives the ability to observe communities thanks to the "Community" function that enables fans of a specific subject to gather together and discuss together (Regan, 2021). I therefore joined 11 different communities of artists who had released music during the time of observation in order to observe their behavior that the fans would adopt regarding the chart performances of the releases.

In addition to the communities, I wanted to observe people in the communities that would first of all identify themselves as fans of a particular artist and that shared their knowledge and information they could gather about their favorite artists. With the subject of this thesis being about charts, the first pages that I selected were "chart pages". These accounts are fan pages of artists that will explicitly mention – most of the time in their biography -the fact that the main reason why their page exists is to share information about statistics and different charts regarding their favorite artist. These pages therefore share information about charts on a daily basis and are therefore the most inclined to give information and recommendation on ways to improve their artist's chart success (Zhang & Negus, 2020). I therefore followed chart pages, making them aware that I would be observing their posts and the interactions with other fans for ethical reasons. The decision to follow these pages was made so that I could see their tweets appear on my feed instantly, the platform proposed me to follow some pages that were not chart pages or pages who had as a main goal to communicate about the activity of a particular artist. The platform also proposed pages of "regular" fans. By that I mean accounts run by individuals with no specific purpose.

The posts that have been selected as object of analysis in this phase are posts related to charts enhancements and charts placements. The tweets could be in response of another tweet, quoted tweets, or simply original tweets.

Tableau 1: Profile of the observed communities on the social platform X.

Name Of Community	Name of Artist	Number of members on X Community
Arianators	Ariana Grande	15,2k
Beyhive	Beyonce	48,5k
Barbz	Nicki Minaj	12,2k
Hotties	Megan Thee Stallion	7,3k
Bardi Gang	Cardi B	2k
Swifties	Taylor Swift	20,5k
Camp	SZA	15,7k
Kendrick Lamar	Kendrick Lamar	7,9k
Smilers	Miley Cyrus	7,6k
Tennessee Kids	Justin Timberlake	8,4k
Ovo Community	Drake	15,6k

3.1.1.4. Data collection

In order to gather my information, I first decided to create a twitter account that would only help me to gather information regarding the subject and then I had to select the people that I would observe. The choice to create a brand-new account so that there would be no possibility to mix my personal experience and the experience as an observer of a social community. This would reduce any chance of bias and also reduce the chances of being disturbed by something that is not related to the subject during my analysis.

As the goal of this part of the research is to answer the question “What are the different techniques that fans put in place to increase their favorite artists’ chart positions and numbers?”, I collected my data by simply observing the different actions that were appearing on my feed and that I would notice. The tweets that would help me to identify the different techniques had to specify explicitly the will to increase the numbers that an artist would have during the tracking week. Once a behavior was noticed, I would write it down in an observation grid ¹that would consist of the type of behavior noticed and an explanation of what this behavior consists of. I would also write down the context at which the said techniques are being used. I made the decision to bookmark the tweets that I would see portraying a strategy put in place by these pages or calling other fans of the community to act a certain way so that they can increase their favorite artist numbers so that I would have more tweets pushing fans to engage in chart activities appear on my “For you” page thanks to the X algorithm (Twitter, 2023).

To sum up the way the data was collected, tweets appearing on my feed that would have a link to the way fans behave towards chart would be bookmarked. The bookmark function on the platform gives to ability to stock the posts peaking my interest and revise them as much as I want to. For security reasons, in case an account got deleted or suspended for example, the tweets were also stocked in a file on a computer thanks to screenshots made of them. The file would serve as a back up but also the instrument used to read the posts several time. The tweets would later on be put on an excel file that would give me the ability to analyze the content of the tweets thanks to a system of coding. In order to identify the different tactics observed during the study, an observation grid was used. While reading the tweets, each tweet would be put in a category of a technique used to improve chart points. If a

¹ Available in appendix 1.

new technique was discovered, it would be added on the grid. An explanation coming from the overall feeling of the tweets would be written down to explain how each tactic is supposed to work.

3.1.2. Identification of the motivations and outcomes through interviews

3.1.2.1. *Method*

Considering the qualitative nature of this study, incorporating semi-structured interviews² alongside netnographic research could be beneficial. This choice was made because it offers flexibility and versatility, as emphasized by Cassell and Symon (2004) and Silverman (2010). Thanks to these interviews provide the interviewer has different options and can adapt the interview of what is being said to him (Cassell and Symon, 2004; Silverman, 2010). Furthermore, the guiding themes' adaptability allows for the exploration of new insights and deeper examination of the subject matter (Cassell and Symon, 2004; Silverman, 2010). Thus, the semi-structured interview method was deemed the most suitable approach for addressing the research question. Moreover, each interview started with broad questions and further advanced to more specific questions in order to get more details.

3.1.2.2. *Sample method*

In order to gather my respondents, I first put a post on my personal twitter account explaining the goal of my research and asking if people were interested to participate. As a member of a fandom in the music industry myself, it was easy for me to therefore get in contact with my followers and explain them the purpose of my research. I specified in the tweet that I needed people that consider themselves as member of an online fandom in the music industry and that participates to the discussions that happen in their community. Five answers were received after posting the message on my page. After that, I had a discussion with the participants to explain them in detail what the research was about and then also explaining them what was waited from them during the interviews. During the discussion I also asked the people if they knew other people that could be interested in taking part in the study. They therefore referenced me other people that would like to participate to the interview. After contact was made with these people, the same process took place during the discussion where I explained the objectives of my research and also explained what was expected from the participants. At the end of this process, 15 people were selected as participants for the interviews. The sampling technique was a non-probability sampling, consisting of a snowballing sample (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024)

3.1.2.3. *Respondents*

As mentioned before, there was a will to talk with fans who were part and participated in fandom communities. However, I wanted to get fans from different degrees to see here if the level of fandom was one of the elements influencing the behavior that fans have towards chart. A table describing the profiles of the interviewee can be found under this section. 15 people agreed to answer my questions during interviews that took place on Teams. 9 respondents out of the 15 consider themselves as high level based on the knowledge they have on the artist they're a fan of while the 6 remaining respondents consider themselves as moderate fans. The respondents were aged from 19 years old to 31 old. 7 fans identify themselves as males while the 8 remaining respondents identify as females. These fans are fan of American artists in the exception of one fan who is a fan of the Barbadian

² Exemples of semi-structured interviews in appendix 5 & 6.

singer Rihanna³. In terms of fandoms interviewed, 13 fandoms were represented in total. 10 fandoms were represented by female singers while 3 others were represented by male artists.

Tableau 2: Profiles of the interviewees

Name	Age	Gender	Country	Community	Self described level of fandom ⁴
Respondent 1	26	Male	France	Beyonce	High
Respondent 2	23	Male	France	Chloe	Moderate
Respondent 3	31	Female	France	Justin Timberlake	Moderate
Respondent 4	26	Female	France	Taylor Swift	High
Respondent 5	23	Male	Belgium	Nicki Minaj	High
Respondent 6	24	Male	Belgium	Rihanna	High
Respondent 7	21	Female	Belgium	Nicki Minaj	Moderate
Respondent 8	18	Female	Belgium	Dua Lipa	Moderate
Respondent 9	27	Male	US	Beyonce	High
Respondent 10	20	Female	US	Megan Thee Stallion	High
Respondent 11	21	Female	US	Harry Styles	High
Respondent 12	19	Female	US	The Weeknd	High
Respondent 13	27	Male	Belgium	Ariana Grande	Moderate
Respondent 14	19	Male	Belgium	Olivia Rodrigo	Moderate
Respondent 15	25	Female	US	SZA	High

3.1.2.4. Data Collection

An interview guide⁵ was developed prior to the interviews. This tool was used in order to give me the ability to ask all the important questions that I wanted to ask and to guarantee the precision of the data gathered. However, according to the answers given by the interviewees, some other questions could be asked to gain more insight regarding their opinion or a moment they would describe. The research question was meticulously analyzed to formulate the interview questions. The interviews consisted of four primary segments. In the first segment, interviewees were greeted and given a quick reminder on what the research was about. After that, respondents were requested to share information about themselves, including their age, and the artist they were a fan of. The goal of this part was to break the ice. Following the introduction, the second part consisted of questions regarding the way the respondents identify themselves as fans. Here the goal was to measure the level of

³ Coding-grid available in appendix 4.

⁴ Based on perceived level of knowledge on the artist.

⁵ Available in appendix 3.

implication of each fan in the community and in regards of the projects their favorite artis drops. I would also also ask questions about the dynamics in the fandoms here. The goal of the question about the fandoms dynamics was to identify if some pages in the fandom had more influence than others according to the people inherent to the community. The third part of questions were questions regarding the relationship the interviewees have towards charts. The main goal here was to know if the access to data has an impact on their responses towards strategies that could be put in place by the community itself to increase the performance of an artist. The last segment of questions regarded questions that would help me to understand if the group effect of participating to charts placement improvements tactics had an impact on the behavior of the interviewees. For most answers, I would ask interviewees to share an anecdote.

In order to collect the data gotten from the interviews, I first got the authorization from the respondents to record the interview with the microphone setting available on my phone. The interviews were held via Microsoft Teams and the application gave me the possibility to transcribe the interviews. Recording and transcribing the interviews was very important to me so that I could be able to listen and read them again. After the transcriptions of the interviews, I used a coding theme with colors representing a specific theme. I would attribute valuable quotes that would help me get insights regarding the research questions in each of these themes.

3.1.3. Identification of the outcomes thanks to numbers

3.1.3.1. *Method*

. The primary aim of the final facet of this research is to delve into the potential influence of data on fan behavior, particularly in the context of music charts and see the effectiveness of these actions. This exploration seeks to understand if and how the availability of data regarding the chart position and related analytics impact fan actions and reactions. To effectively address this question, a mixed method research was used. Indeed, to answer the research question, a qualitative analysis was carried out to identify the tactics used and, at the same time, numbers were being analyzed on platforms that gave data on the performance of songs at a given date. The mixed method chosen is the embedded design because it gives the ability to get more insights about the qualitative results we will have (George, 2023). The qualitative data will stay the principal data but quantitative data will serve as secondary data to see if the quantitative data really can have an impact. The quantitative data will give more wight to the qualitative data that will be collected (George, 2023).

3.1.3.2. *Sample Method*

The sampling technique was based on non-probability sampling, consisting of a purposive sample (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Indeed, in this part of the research, one specific fanbase was observed during a specific week. In order to get information on the techniques used, the observation was made on a community present on the social media X. In addition to the observation of tweets inside the community, I also

3.1.3.3. *Observed fandoms and figures*

In this part of the research, one specific fanbase was observed during a specific week. In order to get information on the techniques used, the observation was made on a community present on the social media X. In addition to the observation of tweets inside the community, I also observed interactions between pages giving information on the artist by looking at the answers and the quoted

posts. This choice was made so that I could also observe people posting outside of the community on the related topic.

In addition to the observation of the behavior adopted by the fandom, I also analyzed numbers. The numbers analyzed consisted of the ranking of the song that was being pushed on the buying platform iTunes. Moreover, an analyze was made on the predictions given by an account on the social Media X.

The fan community under scrutiny is that of the renowned rap artist Megan Pete, professionally known as Megan Thee Stallion. This particular group was selected based on observations made during the preliminary phase of the study, which highlighted their pronounced responsiveness to music charts and data. This responsiveness is of significant interest, especially in light of the release of the artist's new single release HISS on January 26, 2024. This event offers a pertinent context for studying fan behavior, as the initial week following an single release is typically marked by heightened activity and is often when artists record their highest sales figures, a phenomenon noted by Billboard (2013).

To conduct this part of the study, attention was centered on a specific social media account, identified as being part of what Zhang and Negus (2020) describe as a "Data team." This account also aligns with the criteria for an "executive fan page" as defined by Edlom & Karlsson (2021), in that it is wholly dedicated to promoting the artist's work and disseminating detailed statistics about her releases. The account, present on the social media platform X, commands a significant following of 86,953 individuals. Its influential status within the fanbase is further underscored by its recognition from the artist herself as a pivotal source of information regarding her music statistics. The account's practice of daily updates on the artist's statistics renders it an ideal candidate for analysis in this study. The central objective is to observe and understand fan behavior in relation to chart dynamics. This focus necessitates the examination of a page that is primarily chart-oriented rather than one that delves into subjective opinions on the music but also the examination of the other members of the community with that said page.

In addition to the qualitative analysis of the fan page, the research encompasses quantitative aspects by collecting data on the daily streams of the artist's song during the initial release week on Spotify. This choice was strategic, as Spotify provides detailed data on daily song streams, offering a valuable resource for understanding real-time fan engagement. Other platforms such as Apple Music or Tidal do not provide users this information. By examining both the fan page activities and Spotify streaming data, the study aims to provide a view of how data availability and fan behavior intertwine, particularly during crucial periods such as single launches. This comprehensive approach is expected to shed light on the extent to which data influences fan behavior, highlighting the dynamic relationship between fan communities, digital platforms, and the artists they support. A vital component of this analysis involves meticulously tracking various predictions related to the first week sales of the artist's single. The predictive data under examination is sourced from The page Talk Of The Charts on the social media X. These predictions specifically pertain to sales within the United States as I will analyze the behavior and the sales for the Billboard Hot 100 tracking week. The choice to study the album charts from the United States was made because the country acts as the biggest music market in the world (Statista,2023).

3.1.3.4. Data Collection

The focus of this segment of the study will be two-fold. Firstly, it aims to observe and analyze the reactions of the fan page and the broader community when the page reports on sales and streaming

figures. This aspect will shed light on the community's engagement and response patterns to official data releases. To do this, an observation grid will help to keep information on the reactions of the fandom after each prediction is made. The observation grid will consist of several columns. The date, if a prediction was made or not on said date and the reactions of the fans based on the predictions. To keep a track on these reactions, the posts have been bookmarked on my account on the social media. In addition to the bookmarks, screenshots of posts have been made in order to save them in a file as a backup in case the posts weren't available on the social platform anymore.

Secondly, and equally importantly, this analysis will leverage the predictive and actual sales data to assess the effectiveness strategies employed by the fans. By comparing the predicted sales figures with the actual sales data, the study will explore whether these strategies have a tangible impact on boosting the artist's sales figures. Having daily access to direct sales data is very complicated so the data regarding the sales will be collected thanks to the information provided on iTunes charts and their daily rankings. This chart gives a perception of how a song is doing compared to other songs. Regarding the data regarding the predictions, the data will come from the page Talk Of The Charts that provides predictions on the Billboard Hot 100 charts by using chart points. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time.

The data collection will be done on excel thanks to the table that will include the dates, the daily streams, the number of tweets pushing fans to act in a way that can impact charts and then the predictions for the dates they will be made available. The goal here will be to have a graph that will portray if they might be a correlation between the techniques of the fans and the success of a project, but we can also see the reaction of fans on the moment they get new data regarding the statistics of the project they are trying to defend

Table 1: Transcription of daily streams⁶, iTunes ranking ⁷and prediction numbers⁸ of the song HISS by Megan Thee Stallion

Date	Strategy observed	Streams on Spotify	iTunes ranking (Clean version)	iTunes ranking (Explicit version)	itunes ranking chopped version	iTunes ranking instrumental version	Prediction points given by prediction page
26/01/24	No strategy	1 117 678		4			
27/01/24	Streaming Party	1 248 253		3			115
28/01/24	Streamin Party	1 079 069		2			138
29/01/24	Streaming Party	1 649 483		3			
30/01/24	Streaming Party + Buying Party	1 679 387	4	2			
31/01/24	Buying party	1 639 359	4	2	6	10	250
1/02/24	Buying Party + Streaming party + stationhead	1 867 386	3	1	4	6	

⁶ Provided by the daily Spotify Charts on <https://charts.spotify.com/charts/overview/us>

⁷ Provided on the iTunes application

⁸ Provided by Chart prediction page @TalkOfTheCharts on the social media X.

4. Results

In this chapter, the findings will be displayed. These results are structured according to themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts and ethnographic studies that were carried, serving as a foundation for the subsequent discussion of the data. In the first part of this chapter, we will identify the different techniques and tactics that have been discovered during the time of analysis. These techniques will afterwards be explained in detail. After that we will analyze the data obtained after focusing the netnographic research on Megan Thee Stallion's fandom mixed with the numbers gotten by institutions such as Spotify and Billboard. Finally, we will delve into the data that we have gotten thanks to the interviews.

4.1. The different strategies observed

The first part of the analysis was to observe data that we could get was to observe the behavior of 12 online fandoms with the ultimate goal of determining a list of tactics that were used to push the performance of artists in weekly music charts. These results were obtained only via observation on how the communities behaved with little intervention of the observer like retweets and likes. Some interactions have also happened. These techniques have been separated into different categories. First, there are techniques that only serve to impact the chart directly, then there are strategies that serve to promote a project to the general public. Then there are the techniques made to inform others about charts technicality and advise to operate a certain way. The data has been gotten by scrolling through my feed. Each identified tactic would be noted on an observation grid made via an excel file. The grid consisted of writing down the strategy observed, an explanation of the strategy and the context in which it has been observed.

Before citing the different strategies that have been observed, it is important to note that most of the time the call to actions comes from pages that are chart pages. For this research purpose we will define these chart pages as pages ran by fans that have the goal to inform the community on the statistics regarding the projects of their favorite artist.

Here is a list of the different techniques identified during this first part of the study⁹:

- **Streaming Party:** This tactic consists of calling other fans to join a virtual party where each member is streaming the music on their own. The fans start streaming at the same time so that they can discuss about the album on the social media when it comes to an album. Regarding singles streaming parties, the goal is purely to boost the streams that the song will get. This strategy has been observed the most during the observation phase and happens in general without no data prediction incentive. However, when predictions come out, fans push this tactic if there's a milestone to reach.
- **Buying Party:** Fans decide a particular moment to all start buying a song on digital shops with the hope to instantly see the song or album raise in the charts but also increase the total points gotten for a given tracking week. The buying parties are generally pushed after predictions about the expected chart positions are made. Fans generally buy on iTunes first but once they start that strategy you can see the song rise and reach a new peak on other platforms like Amazon music.

⁹ Exemple of strategies observed.

- **Radio request:** This tactic is made solely for singles. In this case, fans request radio stations to play a particular song by calling them or mostly sending a request via the internet. The goal here is to increase the radio points of a single. This tactic has been observed during weeks when a song is predicted to have a chance to get the top position or if a song is doing good on streaming, but the radio airplays do not translate to the streaming success of the song.
- **Streaming on Stantionhead:** This technique is very similar to streaming parties, but the difference is that fans all tune in a listening session where one person decides of the songs that will be played. All the other listeners listen and generate streams from that. Fans have the possibility to comment live during the listening party on the platform and some artists have already taken part into these parties. During the observation, it has happened that artist themselves join their community during this phase.
- **Setting of a bank page:** This tactic consists of putting in a place a page to which fans can donate money. Once a project is released the collected money will be used only to buy digital versions of a project. This technique has been used during tracking weeks where fans wanted to have the biggest debut week during the time of observation. The other fans are provided with proofs of purchases and then selected fans agree to redeem the different copies bought.
- **Proof of purchase:** This consists of asking members of a community to post a proof that they have purchased an album or a single. This technique has been observed during release weeks or weeks a song is predicted to gain a new milestone on charts. It is important to note that this strategy has also led to conflict sometimes where some fans would be shamed because they weren't able to provide a proof of purchase.
- **Contact with the artist's management:** In this scenario fans ask to an artist or management to provide them elements such as new digital versions so that can buy them and help to increase the numbers of digital sales for example.
- **Gamification in streaming:** In this case fans set up different teams and the goal of the game is to get as many streams as possible as a team. All the streams go towards the same song at the end of the game.
- **Charts enhancement website:** It has been observed in some fanbases that have a website put in place that regroupes all the place an album can be bought digitally and how many times other fans can buy a copy.
- **Collaboration:** This consists of different fanbases working together to improve the performance of a song or an album. The fanbases use the other tactics mentioned above to do that.

These are the tactics from the first category. The second category that will be presented here are ways that have been used to promote a particular project in the eyes of the public on the social media platform:

- **Hashtag trends:** This is a technique that is used to push a hashtag at the top of trending topics on the social platform in the hopes that people would check for the hashtag and be aware of the new release being promoted

- **Tiktok Trends group:** Fans decide to engage with contents on Tiktok playing the song they want to push in hopes that the contents appear more on people feeds which could potentially increase the amount of streams of a song
- **Use of AI:** In this situations fans have made use of AI to promote a project from their favorite artist. In the case of my observation, Nicki Minaj fans, feeling that no promo was being done by the artist, created a virtual city named GAG CITY in order to promote the album of the female rapper. Days before the release of the project, corporations hopped on the trend and the city promoting the album became the top trending phenomenon on the social platform.
- **Posts of content:** In this situation fans just post typical content that promote the project. Sometimes they would post a music video of their artist under a post that has nothing to do with the project. Fans also create other type of content such as fancams (regroupment of videos portraying an artist) while telling people to go stream a song for example.

The last category of behavior identified regards strategies that consist of sharing with other fans what to do to increase numbers

- Explaining how to maximize numbers

4.2. Insight from interviews

For the second part of this analysis, semi-structured interviews were carried. 15 fans participating in the life of their fandom were interviewed in order to understand what was driving fans to behave in a way where they get chart obsessed. The sample consisted of 7 men and 8 women. Five of the respondents were citizens of the United States of America while the other respondents live in Europe (France and Belgium). Each of the participants was recorded and the interview were directly transcribed thanks to the transcript option that can be used on Microsoft Teams.

I used an inductive coding method, I began to explore with the unprocessed, genuine data from my interview recordings. The first crucial step involved deeply engaging with the data, involving repeated readings of the transcripts to gain a profound comprehension and rapport with the data that was gathered. Thanks to this first careful reading, I was able to get from the interviewees emerging patterns free from the influence of pre-existing theories or assumptions. I carefully marked segments of the text, assigning them spontaneous codes derived directly from the data. These codes were adaptable, continuously evolving as I progressed further into my analysis.

As this repetitive process advanced, specific codes started to naturally converge, forming broader categories that captured the fundamental themes of the interviews. This process of categorization proved enlightening, shedding light on the central elements and common themes in the stories. My task went further than just organizing the data. It involved interpreting and understanding it, seeking out linkages and significances that weren't immediately obvious to me. The coding was made through the comment section that can be used on Microsoft Word.

I start my coding process by highlighting the essence of the answers that were given by the interviewees. This would give me the opportunity to have a first step where general themes would

come out in the answers given by the respondents. Each paragraph of answer gave me the possibility to classify the answer in a given theme. The answers going into the same would be put together in a Microsoft excel file. After this step these were the different themes that were gathered

- Level of fandom
- Dynamic in fanbase
- Interest in charts & data
- Chart participation
- Community feelings

Moreover, another careful reading was done in order to get out different codes for each theme. This coding system gave me a good overview of what was said during the interviews in detail but also in general. At the end of this process, I had a table with list of codes classified by themes.

The main goal of this part of the research is to understand why members of online fandoms act in a way that is so data obsessed. I will present quotes from some interviewees respondents by respondent and further develop on the reasons why this phenomenon occurs. The interviews carried in French will be translated in English with the help of the Reverso translator.

4.2.1. Dynamic in the fandoms

So we have like the update accounts, that's what I'm thinking of, Beyoncé Legion. Who used to be the creme de la creme of update accounts. But then something happened to where now it's just more of like individuals who have their own accounts. They got popular from like a lot of retweets or stealing tweets and. Umm. Yeah. So I see just the big accounts, but then also we have those little accounts that you feel bad for. They have like 10 followers. They just wanna... They just want to be involved in the action. The big accounts are the most important ones. They are those who give us the information that matters and make us move – Respondent 3

Well we have these big fan accounts that are more famous than others. Generally, the big accounts are the ones with the most interactions and take a lot of initiatives. The small accounts discuss between them in general, sometimes I feel like the big accounts can act in a very snobbish way. We also have updates accounts who are the most important ones. They update us on new releases and important information regarding tour, charts, appearances, etc. They are kind of the bosses of the fanbase – Respondent 11

There are definitely accounts thinking that they matter more than others and trying to dictate how the fanbase should behave at particular moments, but I personally ignore them. I've decided to block any account that seems too negative for me. Updates pages are definitely the most important pages. We get everything we need to know from them – Respondent 14

Regarding the dynamic that can be perceived by fans in fandoms, all respondents unanimously talked about the fact that update pages are the most important ones. They are mostly the ones who will launch an action. Both type of fans who consider themselves as moderate or superfans agree on the fact that the update pages can have an impact on them and most importantly pay attention to them to gather all types of information regarding their favorite artists.

In addition to the update pages, the superfans think that other big accounts that are ran by singular people can have their importance. These accounts being the ones getting the most

interactions, the superfans generally say that they can lead to action and are of great interest. However, moderate fans on the other hand pay less attention to these accounts with huge followings being held by a singular person. Three respondents out of the moderate level fans have mentioned that these accounts were acting like they were better than the rest and that they were therefore not interested in taking part in actions they could try to activate.

To sum up this part, Update pages who are pages set up to solely update people on the news of a singer are the pages carrying more weight in the way the fandom will act and collaborate. One respondent has said that these pages act as very neutral and give a professional image which reinforces the feeling of trust that the other fans have towards them.

4.2.2. Feelings towards chart

So, we will say that I, as a fan, see Beyoncé as an artist, but we can also compare her just like any sportsman we want her to be number one. We actually want it to reflect what we perceive in the music, that it's actually reflected in the commercial performances. So, for me personally I find it important to know how much it is classified, how much it sells, because in fact we want and we have this desire that it is always the best because we consider it the best artistically. So, we want that to be reflected commercially. So, for me, there is still a strong importance to that. It doesn't play on my personal perception of the artist, but it will play on the perception that others can have of the artist and so for us, it is still something impactful and important. So, for me yes the charts are important. I will follow them. Not regularly. When it comes out of single album, we will say the first second weeks not regularly. Then maybe at the end of the year to do these annual reviews, things like that, but it's something I'm aware of -Respondent 1

Do I think that they're important? No. Do I think that they're interesting? Very. I really like the aspect of like kind of seeing what's the most popular and for how long and how many you know how many weeks was it in the top 10? How many weeks it in number one, I think that's really interesting in terms of like a personality perspective because I find the concept of celebrity to be very fascinating. And like all throughout history, I feel like every society has their own celebrities. And so, this is like a way to really track our celebrities in real time. You know you can say, oh, this song like no one liked it. Like this person? No one knew of, but it's like ohh. I don't know. You know, they had like 80,000 number ones or this song was huge, like everyone knew it. It was number one for 11 weeks on the top on the Hot 100. You know, I find it really, really, really fascinating. But in the grand scheme of things, does it matter? No. Am I getting anything from it? Not really. Is it hurting me if my if Beyoncé song flops? No, not really. Does it make me happy [if she succeeds]? Yes. Which I think honestly is pretty unhealthy, but I do think it's interesting. -Respondent 9

Charts matter a lot to me but at the end of the day the music is still the most important. I still pay very much attention to the charts and the predictions posted on social media though. I think there's a very fascinating side to how the numbers are counted and also trying to understand how artists reach their chart positions. Charts can create conflict inside the fanbase in the sense that some people might think that we care too much about them but at the end of the day whenever Ariana gets a record everyone celebrates so yeah, they're very important to me even if the focus is still on the music. Also, I tend to listen more to the songs that chart well as these are the songs I share memories with people who are not fans who listen to whole albums. -Respondent 13

Charts never really mattered to me and I've been a fan of Justin for more or less 15 years now. We used to discuss about them on blogs from time to time especially when he broke a record or something but nowadays I feel like everything is about charts on fandoms. People don't really appreciate the music anymore and I think that it's sad. We didn't care to know the chart position of a song before but unfortunately it seems like today charts determine if a song is good or not. -Respondent 4

Since Chloe is not yet the artist, we would like her to be in terms of commercial success, we will say, it will be secondary for us. we're going to want art to come first. But at the very beginning, when she released her first single, we were watching it because we really thought she was going to be successful. However, it did not necessarily work too well with the general public, so what we want is that Bah Musicalement, they like what she does and that we like it so it is really of the background rather for us. -Respondent 2

Regarding the feelings that the fans share towards charts, all of the respondents agreed to say that the music was the most important to them. However, I have noticed that older fans have the tendency to take the charts less seriously than the younger ones.

Out of the respondents who see themselves as superfans, five of them agreed on the fact that even though the music is still the most important, charts can have an impact on them in the sense that it has a repercussion on their listening habit. Indeed, these respondents mention that they tend to listen more to the songs who have performed well on the charts than other songs on an album even if the songs in questions are not particularly their favorite song. As mentioned by the respondent 13, the songs charting are well known songs, so these are the songs that connect them to the people outside of the fandom and share memories.

Another reason why are so interested in the charts is the fact that it gives them possibility to see the listening habits of other people which is interesting for them. Some respondents have mentioned that it is important for them to know if other people actually like the same things as them and charts are the most objective instruments to be able to see that according to them.

Finally, the relation that one respondent has to charts here is kind of particular because they are interested in the numbers when they are good but as soon as they see that the numbers aren't good anymore the let it go. Later on, while explaining how they supported the lead single of their favorite artist the respondent mentions that he had a chart obsessed behavior in order to increase streams when the numbers came and that they were good. The fan here simply does not consider the numbers to be good enough for him to invest time in helping the artist's success.

4.2.3. Motivation to participate in chart activities

4.2.3.1. Stan wars

Clearly, we want to prove, in fact. That's right, it's a competition. Don't forget, it's still a competition, but not a competition between artists, it's not even that. It is a competition between fanbases where everyone wants their own to be the best. So, we have the will to prove to the people who question the artist and his success that this is wrong, and therefore, as fans, it is our role to do everything to demonstrate that the artist continues to work. » -Respondent 1

I think it's just a matter of bragging rights, to be honest, cause it's not like any of us are making any money or, you know, getting rewarded in any way for it. It's just a matter of, you know, I like this artist. They like this artist more and we wanna say ohh mine is better now. Mine is better. Well, how do you know that mine is better? Well, mine has five number ones, but yours only has two. You know, just things like that. -Respondent 9

One of the reasons why I mass buy a single when Nicki releases is because I want her to beat the competition. Now that I'm saying it I realize how crazy this can sound but female rap is very competitive and numbers matter in that field so yeah I will do whatever I can to help her get a number 1. She used to be clowned on stan twitter because she only got her first number one single in 2020. This was the first time I actually took part in these actions because we were competing against the Beyhive and the hotties and we don't really get along, at least on twitter. We had to beat them and we did thanks to the predictions – Respondent 5

One of the factors that motivates the respondents to take part in the strategies set by the fandom to increase the chart points their favorite artist can get is the arguments that they can have with other fandoms. Six respondents have reported that it feels nice to them to be able to say to the other side that their favorite artist did better. Fans say that these milestones give them bragging rights as if they were the ones who accomplished something big. One of the six respondents in question also added that these arguments on charts show which fanbase is bigger and supports better their favorite artist. In addition to showing who has the bigger fanbase, respondents also mention the fact that charts are the most objective way to see which artist as had the bigger impact on cultures and fandoms very often argue about that. However, one respondent mentioned that there are songs that did not chart well at all that are well known. The most important to them is to have a moment when they can tell the other side “My favorite artist is successful while yours is a flop”.

4.2.3.2. Influence of superfans

When I see other fans post receipts and talk about "let's mass buy," "let's do a listening party," and everyone retweeting when I see these kinds of tweets with over 10K retweets or likes or comments, it definitely helps. I'm like, "Oh, there are this many people participating, I should do that also." - Respondent 10

The group has a lot of influence on me I can't lie about this. There are periods when the stanbase is pushing a song or an album a lot and I participate because I see the others dedicated fans encouraging us to do it. The more I see people interact with them and follow them in the actions, the more I want to do my part. As I mentioned previously, I'm not the biggest and most invested fan in the fandom but whenever I see the big pages sharing and pushing us to stream or buy I follow the group. In my case since I live in Belgium, I can't help for Billboard but I definitely do my part for the Spotify Charts for example – Respondent 8

The interviews have given me the opportunity to highlight the fact that one of the reasons influencing fans to adopt strategies that can enhance the performance of their favorite artist on the charts is the influence of super fans. Indeed, it has been mentioned that most of the time the actions start from them. The main reason why it starts from them is because they are the ones who are generally up to date regarding the numbers. They check the predictions and share them to the rest of the fandom while asking them to push harder if a milestone is reachable for them. A moderate fan has explained during the interviews that they wouldn't normally take part to these actions but the superfans actually motivate them enough to help the group. The superfans are actually the ones who

organize the buying parties and streaming parties for example. They prepare everything and all the rest of the fandoms need to do is to follow them. In addition to being organizers, these accounts considered as superfans also play the role of informers. They will not only inform the fandoms of the predictions, but they will also inform on the functioning of the charts and give recommendations on the easiest way to get chart points. Respondents have pointed out that the mass buying technique is one of the most commonly used because this is the way to gain points the quickest.

4.2.3.3. *Perceived level of fandom*

The self-perceived level of fandom is also one of the elements that have been mentioned by interviewees. In fact, the more they feel like they're a connoisseur of their favorite artist, the more they will feel obliged to participate to these tactics in order to prove to other fans inside the fandom that they are legitimate. This has been told by the respondents who see themselves as superfans. In addition to the impression, they want to give to other people to the fandom, they feel like participating and contributing to the artist's success gives them so type of credibility. One respondent has mentioned that as a superfan he feels very close to the artist, as if they knew each other on a personal level. As a result, they feel that they must have a huge implication in the success of the artist. The respondent compared the situation to him supporting a friend launching a new business.

Regarding the moderate fans, they say that they will take part to these strategies if it is made known to them that a milestone could be reached. Once again, the moderate fans are the ones who need an incentive from the superfans. If there's no goal that has been set they will rarely start mass buying a product released by the artist.

4.2.3.4. *Prices*

I love participating in strategies to help our artist to increase their total units on the charts but I am young and don't work yet so I only participate if I can regarding the price. If the album is sold at \$5 for example, I will definitely buy several copies but I've seen some artists putting their albums at like \$20 and I'm so shocked to see this. I would never be able to fully support them even if I wanted to - Respondent 12

The fourth incentives that pushes the fans to for example buy an album in bulk in order to increase the numbers of their favorite artist is the price of the products. One respondent has mentioned that he has been able to do so because now that he is older, he has enough buying power to do so. However, some respondents have mentioned that the price could also be something refraining them to participate in some strategies. They will mass stream to help but if the album is too pricey for them or if the singles are not discounted for example, they won't participate in some actions. The implication of pricing has been mentioned by the younger respondents the most. For example, one respondent related the moment that their favorite artist put several versions of her album at \$5 and this was something that motivated the fan to buy the album in bulk. Some older fans have also talked about the influence of pricing, but they say that they will participate in bulk buying no matter what. The price will just help them determine the amount of products they can buy.

4.2.3.5. *Fanbase size*

Chloe is a small artist who doesn't have a huge fanbase. She's brand new as a solo artist and only has released her debut album so far. The album didn't perform well at all so I don't feel like participating in fans strategies to improve her numbers because we won't be able to make a difference at all according to me. I participated for the debut single because there was a hype behind it thanks to tiktok but other

than that, never participated for her because the fanbase is small. However, I'm also a Rihanna stan and I helped in the strategies when Lift Me Up got released. The navy is a huge fanbase so it was possible for us to make a big difference – Respondent 2

Barbz are a huge fanbase. Even if Nicki is not popular among the general public, the fanbase is huge enough to keep her music charting. I will always help to make her music chart better because I know that as a group we can do it. We are not like other fandoms that will struggle to do so because they're not a big fandom – Respondent 7

During the analysis of the information received during the interviews, 7 respondents have mentioned how their perception of the size of the fanbase is an element that helps them to decide if they're going to participate or not in a strategy helping their favorite artist to chart better. For example, one respondent recalls the fact that when their favorite artist released their single, they had no intention to furnish efforts in chart enhancement because in their opinion, the fanbase was too small to make a difference. There was therefore no need for him to participate in something that he felt would eventually fail. However, the respondent thinking that their fanbase is big enough to make a difference will mostly directly take part in actions that will help their favorite artist to chart better, especially if the predictions are bad. This had also been observed in the analysis of the posts where some fans were saying that their fandom has enough power to make a difference.

4.2.3.6. Artist's behavior

During a tracking week I would say that my biggest motivation would be seeing that Dua wants the number one single. I remember during a particular tracking week Levitating was predicted to go number 2 on Billboard but then we saw her push the song on her socials but also she released additional versions of the songs. Everyone knows that different versions of a song can be combined for the charts and her doing that the exact week she was predicted to go number was clearly a sign of her wanting us to push more to be number one instead – Respondent 8

If in fact we know that it does not work with the general public, that is to say there is not necessarily a comfort reception. The general public is still the key to being able to ensure movements and actions to be even more successful. That's why for us, it's still the label to make the first action to please the general public because the fans it's already acquired and us as a fan we can not do everything, it's mainly that -Respondent 7

The behavior and communication from the artist and their team is very crucial during these said weeks. The fans that considerate themselves as moderate fans, have all mentioned the fact that if the artist shows the willingness of having a better performance on the charts this will push them into adopting a chart obsessive behavior because they want their favorite artist to reach their goal. The behaviors mentioned were first of all saying that they're close of reaching a goal and directly asking fans to stream more or buy more. The second type of behavior that has been mentioned is more something coming from the team of the artist. If during a critical tracking week the artists' team decide to release multiple versions of a song, the fans will see this as a sign that the artist wants them to boost the sales so they will start buying all versions multiple times. This indirect communication is very important to the fans. However, if the artist does nothing during the tracking week, some fans feel like the artist has no intention of being successful and will therefore not take part to strategies to enhance the chart numbers.

4.2.3.7. Possible milestone

“Yes, of course. Of course I remember. Umm. Let's see. So it was "Drunk in Love". The second we heard that it had the possibility of going number one, I remember I tried to buy as many copies as I could and I remember I tried to stream it on YouTube a lot, even though I don't even know if that helped at all for the charting purposes. But I really wanted Beyoncé to have a number one because she hadn't had one on the Hot 100 in a long time. And then also another instance I was streaming the "Savage" remix a lot because it could have given Beyonce another number one single. Before that, I streamed "Perfect Duet" a lot with Ed Sheeran because well I really did like the song. But then also that would be like the first time that she'd have a number one hit in a long time, in like almost 10 years, which is embarrassing to say for me, but I was happy whenever it went number one. Like it really made me happy. So what did I do? I streamed it constantly, had stream it in my sleep, I'd stream it in class, I'd stream it at work, I'd stream it all the time. I'd had my headphones in and I'd have the volume up just enough and I would put it in playlist and I've skipped a song. Sorry, there's no way I would skip. I'd skip a song and then do it again because I was like, oh, I don't know if it'll count. I don't know if it'll count if it's on silent, so let me put my headphones in and play it. I wasted so much phone battery and data and Wi-Fi and all that. Just trying to get this song to #1 and I was so happy whenever it did and it was the exact same situation for "Savage" remix. Exact same situation, but the "Savage" remix there was the competition between another song, "Say So" remix. With Nicki Minaj and Doja Cat. And so that was a mess. And that that brought up a lot of hostilities between the different fan bases involved.” -Respondent 3

Finally, the last element helping fans to act in a chart obsessive way mentioned during the interviews is the presence of a possible milestone that can be reached by the artist. High level fans explain that they are very much aware of the stats regarding their favorite artist. As soon as there is a possibility for their favorite to make history, break a record or reach a new milestone, fans will gather together to push the numbers. The moderate level fans say that most of the time, the superfans share the information that a new milestone could be reached and when they hear that, fans do as much as they can to help their artist to make history.

4.2.4. Impact of access to data

4.2.4.1. Predictions

One of the main data that we get are predictions based on the sales, streams and number of audience on radio. Since we get these numbers for all the artists we can see who's going to chart or not and their position on the table. Having access to these parameters, give us the possibility to know how much we have to do to reach a certain objective. -Respondent 11

At the beginning of the tracking week, the song was predicted to debut inside the top 20 of the billboard charts. We saw that the difference of points between us and the number 10 position was not that big. The fanbase decided to push the song harder so we did buying parties, streaming parties, were pushing the song to other fandoms. We even had collaborative streaming parties with other fandoms. When we did that, it was more the superfans who were participating. Due to our actions the streams increased and the rankings on the buying platforms also increased. The next prediction put us inside the top 10 and then we started pushing for the number one position because it was definitely something that we could pull and so we went really hard at the end of the tracking week. I remember everyone posting their purchase receipts and all. It was very fun – Respondent 5

The interviewees have mentioned that the access to data has given them the ability to get very precise predictions on the chart points that each song or album can get. The predictions are given by pages that are specialized in chart points. For example, when it comes to albums, fans get their predictions from Hits Daily Double and Talk Of The Charts when it comes to single. In additions to these

pages, fans get the data they need regarding charts on the daily rankings given by iTunes, Apple Music, Amazon Music, Amazon sales ranking or even radio daily airplays charts. One important element that helps in the predictions according to the fans is the Spotify daily streaming charts that lets fans know exactly how much streams a song has received during a given day. These predictions give them the ability to know the projected numbers a song or an album is predicted to do during a given tracking week. Following these number, the fans know where they are placed and can therefore know how much they have to do in order to change things. Most respondents have mentioned the fact that if the predictions are good or close enough to reach a new milestone, they would be very much motivated to participate to strategies to enhance the chart performances of their favorite artist. However, if due to the predictions, they see that it would be too hard or impossible for them to change the outcome of the charts, they prefer to not to do anything and let things follow their course organically. Some respondents who considered themselves as moderate level fans mention the fact that for them the prediction are tools that help them to decide whether they should help or not.

4.2.4.2. *Better organization*

Thanks to the data we can definitely be better organized. When we know how much we are behind we know exactly how many sales we need to have to close the gap. When we could still buy on the artists' website, I remember that we would track our sales based on the order numbers. -Respondent 5

Regarding the impact of data access in the fandoms, the respondents have mentioned the fact that they are way more organized to before thanks to the data. The access to data helps them to know how much they are behind a particular artist for example. Based on the numbers, the fans estimate how much more they have to push in order to get the expected result. A second plan regarding organization is the fact that these numbers give the fans the opportunity to know that if their ambitions are feasible. Thank to this organization, the fans can also measure what strategies are the best to use to push the numbers even though, most respondents have mentioned that the go to strategy to push the numbers is the buying parties. Fans feel like the buying parties are the quickest way to push their numbers because, according to them, people don't buy on digital platforms anymore. Thanks to the data the fans know how much points they are projected to do so with all these elements they are able to set goals and organize themselves to reach the goals that have been set.

4.2.4.3. *Motivation*

Whenever I see data such as the predictions for the charts or the spotify numbers, I feel so much more motivated to buy. It gives an euphorical feeling to see that we are doing well and we know that we are doing well thanks to the data that these companies make available to us. So yeah, I will say that the data access is a huge instrument in our motivation. I don't think that may fans would start buying stuffs if our rankings or streams weren't made available to us. -Respondent 15

Finally, the last impact that has come out during the analysis, is the fact that the access to data has an impact on the motivations of the fans. Three different cases present themselves regarding the situation.

First, there is the fact that thanks to the data the fans know that they have a clear advance compared to their nearest competition. In this case, the fans do not really actively engage in any type of strategy to push the numbers. They prefer letting things go organically because they do not feel threatened and have the assurance that their favorite artist will get the milestone that they want them to get.

In the second scenario, the numbers are good but the artist hasn't enough point to get the milestone they want him to get or the artist can get the milestone but the nearest competitor is also very close. In this particular case, fans are very encouraged and push as hard as they can to reach the set objective. This is when the fan activity can be seen the most. The source pages come up with strategies and often updates the fandom on the numbers and how to do better. This increases the motivations of the fans at most. This is when fans will really go out of their way to reach the goal and beat the competition. Respondents have described this period as very stressful and also the moment when they get the most chart obsessed.

Finally, there is the case when the numbers are not good. The projections are really bad and the gap between the reality and the expected goal is too wide. In this case, most fans explain that they feel like having a chart obsessed behavior won't change anything. The adopted behavior is therefore not doing anything due to the demotivation that comes from the numbers they have access to.

4.2.5. Consequences of these actions on fans

4.2.5.1. *Stronger fanbase*

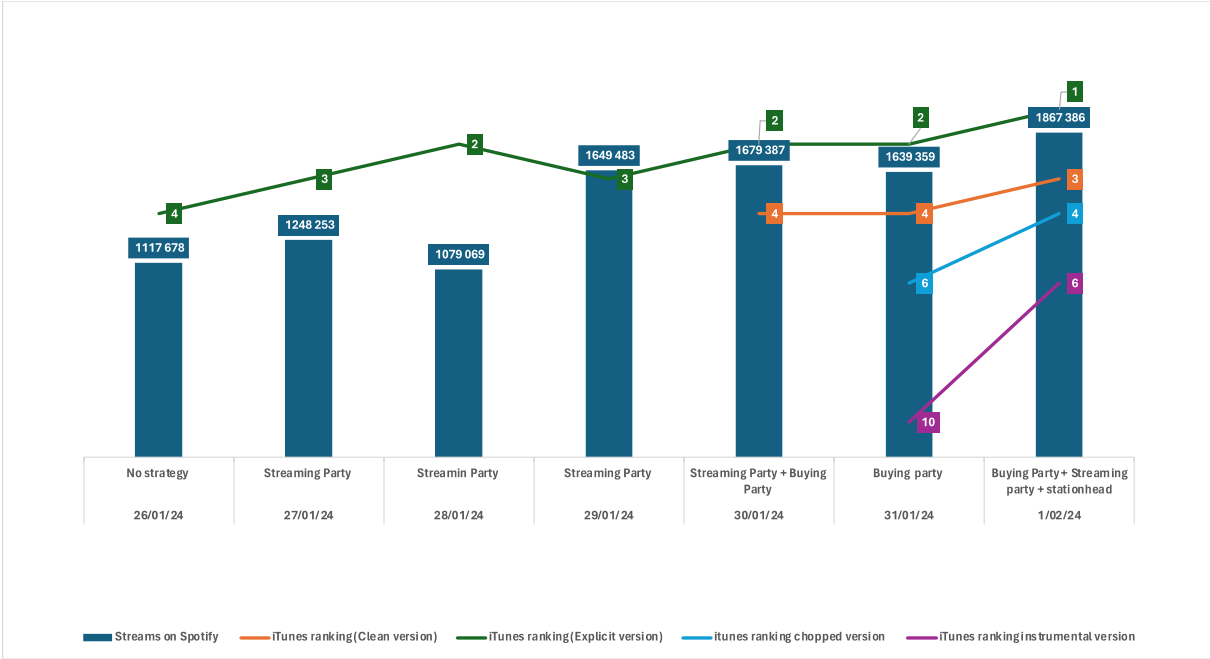
The last part of the interviews consisted of knowing the consequences of these actions on the fans. Most respondents have mentioned the fact that they had a stronger feeling of belonging in the fanbase. Indeed, when the fans manage to reach the expected there is an overall feeling of achievement that brings happiness to the respondents but also makes them more appreciative of the fandom in general and the people in it. The cohesion displayed helps them to connect even more to other members and they also note that they got more involved after these events.

4.2.5.2. *More chart obsession*

The main consequence of these actions that has been talked about by all the participants of the interviews is the fact that their interest in music charts have increased. As noted at the beginning of the part regarding the interviews and the feelings towards charts, the music is still the most important. However, due to the share of data that leads to the participation of fans in chart enhancement strategies, fans have gained more knowledge in the matter. This better understanding of how the charts work have led the fans to care more about the charts than they did previously. With this, some respondents among the superfans have mentioned that it becomes natural for them to directly try to push other members in the community to engage in chart activities as soon as they see that the song is charting on the iTunes chart for example. Another example given is a fan saying that predictions have existed for a long time now, but they have become way more precise overtime. This increase of precision has led to them developing an obsession with numbers and how their favorite artist performs even though it really wasn't their interest. It is important to note that it has been mentioned that a key factor in this obsession with charts is the fact that the streaming Spotify discloses the daily performances of songs. A fan has mentioned that this situation has really created a shift in the world of fandoms in music because ever since, they feel like fans talk about numbers every day and try to act as music executive especially if the numbers are wrong. Finally, a fact mentioned regarding the chart obsession is that this can lead to disagreement and tensions inside a fandom. Two respondents have mentioned that some people in the sphere of fandoms take numbers way too seriously for them and can therefore ruin the experience for other fans, especially if the numbers are bad.

4.3. Analysis of numbers

Figure 1: Evolution of streams on Spotify US and US iTunes ranking of the song HISS by Megan Thee Stallion



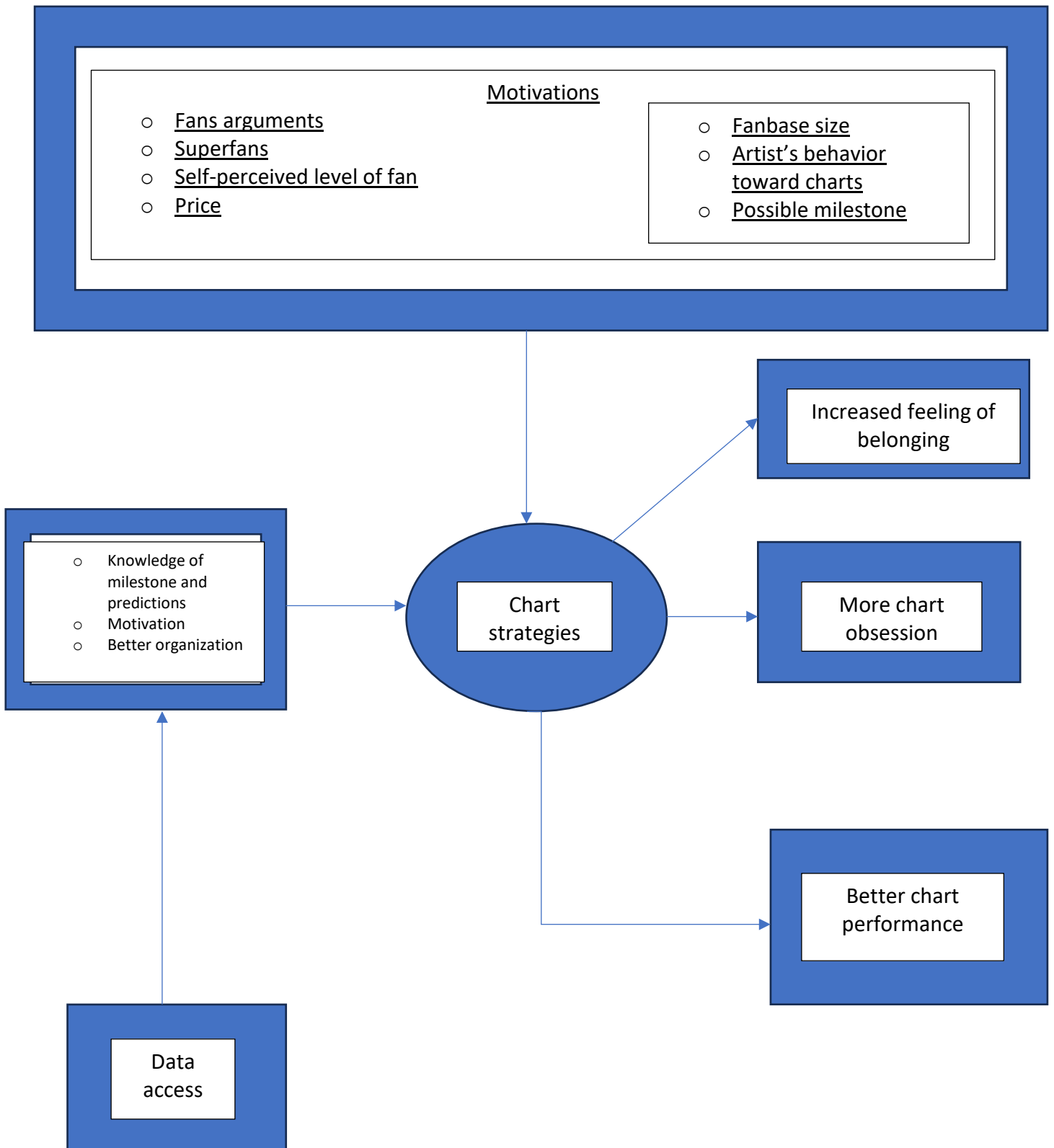
The results here show that the streams have the tendency to increase when a streaming party is organized. However, two diminutions of streams have been registered on the streaming platform Spotify during the tracking week. The first day that fans decided to launch a streaming party, streams of the song increased of 11,6% compared to the previous day when fans did not appear to have a plan to push the song to perform high on the chars. Following the first day streams, early predictions were published by an account that predicts the charts and placed the song at the #20 position with 115 points. With the increase of the streams following the streaming party, prediction points increased from 115 points to 138. Streams saw a decline on the third day of tracking which was a Sunday. Following that, fans organized again a streaming party throughout the entire day and the streams on Spotify saw an increase of 52,8%. The following day fans continued to push the streaming parties and the streams of the songs increased of 1%. The day after that, fans stopped promoting the streaming party in order to focus more on the buying parties. That day the streams of the songs saw a small decline of 2% on the Spotify counter. On that day, the prediction page posted and updated version of their predictions placing the song at the #2 position on the chart with 250 points. The gap between the #1 and #2 position was of 9 points. Following those predictions, the fandom pushed a heavy buying party for the last tracking day. For that day, fans also hosted listening parties on Stationhead where fans could buy several versions of the song on the platform. Fans also focused on streaming, asking members of the communities to push harder. Following that last day of efforts, streams saw an increase of 13% on the Spotify counter with the biggest streamed registered during the tracking week. In addition to the increase of streams, the predictions also increased from 250 points to 287 points.

The fandom started to invest massively in buying parties after the second prediction that placed the song at the #9 position with 138 points. As it can be seen on the chart, the original version of the song has charted the entire week inside the top 10 position. However, we can see that after a decline on the position on iTunes was observed, fans started the campaign for the buying party. Following the buying parties that were organized, the song reached a peak of #1 on iTunes during the last tracking day. In addition, we can see that the clean version of the song was not charting on iTunes before fans started their buying parties. The first day the fans started their buying campaign, the song made its first apparition on the chart with a peak at the #4 position. By that time, fans managed to have two songs inside of the top 10. The day after, two additional versions started charting on the

iTunes chart. Fans pushed very hard for the buying parties, especially on the last day when four different versions of the song charted in the top 10 of the iTunes chart including the instrumental version. It can also be noted that after the buying parties started, the prediction points for the song increased from 138 points to 250 points which represents an increase of 81%. In addition the final prediction increased from 250 points to 287 which represent an additional increase of 14% after the strategies held by the fandom during the last tracking day. Between these two predictions, the projected sales increased from 51k to 90k which represents an increase of 82%.

When Billboard published the official chart, the song appeared on the #1 position with digital sales of 104k with 40k sales coming from the last tracking day when fans put all the different versions of the song inside the top 10 (Trust, 2024).

4.4. Framework



5. Discussion

This part will consist of a discussion that aims at discussing the different results obtained during the qualitative study. These results will then be compared and related to the information available in the literature review. The first part of the discussions will regard the identification of the different strategies set up by fans to improve the chart performance of their favorite artists. Then we will discuss about the motivations and more precisely about the impact of data access on these fans. Finally, we will discuss on the consequences of these actions on the fans but also on the performance of artists on the charts.

5.1. How fans improve chart performances

During the durations of the study, several strategies set up by fans aiming to improve the performance that artists can get on charts have been identified. The strategies can be split in three different categories. First, there are the strategies that aim to directly increase the performance of a song or an album on the charts. In order for these strategies to be effective, fans have to first gain a deep knowledge of how the points are counted. After getting the knowledge, fans will use different tools to optimize their numbers. If we take the example of the Billboard charts, as stated in the literature review, streaming numbers, sales data and radio airplay are the factors taken into account to calculate the chart points for the Billboard Hot 100 chart. As a result, fans will adopt strategies that will impact each of these factors.

First of all, there are the strategies to improve the streaming numbers during the tracking week. In this part the strategies identified were the streaming parties, the use of the platform Stationhead, the use of gamification and the collaboration with other fandoms. These strategies consisted of mass streaming a song or an album during an organized period of time chosen by the data pages in the fandom. With these strategies fans hope to boost the streaming numbers and close or widen the gap with other competitors. Fans will check the effectiveness of their actions by checking streaming charts given by the streaming platforms. For example, Spotify releases a daily chart of the top 200 most streamed songs by region. Fans check this chart the most because Spotify appears to be the only streaming platform disclosing the daily streaming numbers of a song. Fans will daily check the performance of these actions thanks to the charts. The study has highlighted the fact that fans are even more motivated when they see that their actions have positive consequences. Other charts are also looked at. For example, the streaming platforms Apple Music and Amazon Music don't disclose the precise numbers of stream received each day but they still provide a ranking of the most streamed songs. Fans use these ranking to evaluate the impact of their strategies in the streaming numbers. The observation during the study has also shown that most of these strategies are set up by superfans. This information suits what has been revealed in the literature review regarding the implications of superfans in the daily life of online fandoms especially in the case of the music industry. This correlates the information provided by Zhang and Negus (2020) regarding the fact that fans will use chart beating strategies to enhance the performance of their idols.

Secondly, fans set up strategies to increase the sales regarding a song. These types of strategies are the ones that fans have been doing the most during the observation phase of the study. In order to reach their goals, fans will start different types of movements on social media. Regarding the sales, the strategies are mass buying, setting of bank pages and asking other fans to post a proof of purchase. Once again, fans gain a deep knowledge of the rules of the charts regarding the calculation of sales to carry these strategies the right way. For example, regarding the Billboard charts, fans know that there is a limit per customer regarding the amount of times a single version can be bought. As a result, fans therefore set the banking pages so that the fans without funds can buy a single version or an album several times. In addition to this collaboration between fans, they also check for data regarding their

performances on the sales just like they do for streaming. The study has shown that fans track their sales based on the rankings made available on platforms such as iTunes or the buying service of Amazon. These rankings don't give the exact amount sales but help fans to see how great they are performing compared to their competitors. It has been observed during the study that the better the rankings are, the more motivated the fans are. These techniques on the sales are the ones that are done the most and can be observed the easiest because the general public spends less money into buying because since the arrival of streaming platforms. Again, in this case, most of these strategies are set up by pages ran by superfans. This relates again to what has been seen on the literature review.

Lastly, the last type of strategy used to impact charts is a strategy that aims to improve the radio airplay numbers. In order to do so, fans will organize themselves and chose a given period of time to start requesting radio stations to play a song more often to increase the total radio airplay audience during the tracking week. In addition, fans hope that with the increase of requests, radio stations will give the songs they are pushing better slot times. To track the effectiveness of this strategy, the fans will start tracking the daily airplay charts given by organizations tracking the audience of a particular song on radio stations in a given territory. For example, when it comes to the billboard charts, fans take a look at Mediabase.

Moreover, in addition to these strategies that impact the charts numbers directly, fans will also carry out behaviors that aim to increase the awareness regarding the existence of a project that just came out. This has been highlighted in the literature explaining how fans know how to manipulate algorithms of social media to increase the presence of the object that has to be promoted. Making an hashtag trend on the social media X or using trends on Tiktoks are some of the strategies that have been observed during the study. The study has also shown the fact that fans now use artificial intelligence to create content that can spark conversation around a project. This has been vividly observed while observing the community of the artist Nicki Minaj when her fans created a digital city using artificial intelligence with the aim to promote her album that would be released the week the action started.

In all of these strategies, the importance of superfans has been observed. Superfans are the ones who were starting the call to action and pushing other fans to participate in these strategies. In addition, these superfans are also seen as a figure of reference in the fandoms seeing how other fans wait for them to say what they should do to improve their performance. They are the ones who teach the other fans in the fandom about the functioning of charts and guide them in order to increase the results. These characters play a key role in the development of these strategies that fans use to push their favorite artists on the charts.

5.2. Motivations and access to data

In addition to the identification of the different strategies used by fandoms in the music industry regarding chart enhancement, the study also aimed at identifying the motivations that fans have to behave in a chart obsessive way and also identify the impact of the access to data in these communities. The different motivations that have been highlighted in the study are the fan wars, the self-perceived level of fandom, the prices of the products, the artist's behavior, the possible reach of a milestone, the superfans and the size of the fanbase.

On the first hand, we have the similarities between our findings and what is mentioned in the literature. First, we have the fact that there is a hierarchy inside the fandoms. In this hierarchy, superfans are the ones having the most sway because the study has demonstrated that they are the one who will influence the most the rest of the group. Indeed, most of the times, superfans have been mentioned as catalyst in pushing fans to adopt a chart obsessive behavior. The study here shows that

the influence of this category of fans goes further than what has been mentioned in the literature. The study has even shown that some people in the fandoms won't adopt a strategy if the instructions does not come from one superfans. In addition to this, the data pages, which can be considered as a subgroup of superfans are the ones who will have the most impact regarding charts for the fandoms in the music industry. These pages will spend time tracking the numbers, teaching the other fans about the functioning of the charts and motivate the troupes. This correlates with the literature mentioning the fact that superfans a highly ranked in the fandom and motivate the other members to take part into activities (Edlom & Karlsson, 2021).

Self-perceived level of fandom is also an element that has been mentioned during the study. The study highlights that fans who perceive themselves as high level of fans are the ones who will need the less incentive to start acting in a chart obsessive manner. In addition to this fact, fans who see themselves as low level of fans have the tendency to wait to be motivated by the other fans. They wait for the information to come to them while the others go get them directly. The self-perceived level of fandom can really act as a catalyst in this context.

Last point regarding what has been said about the hierarchy in the literature is also that fandoms can be sized according to the number of members that are present in the community. In that sense, bigger fandoms appear to have bigger importance. The study has shown that fans take this aspect into consideration. Indeed, the bigger the fandom, the more people inside the community are eager to participate in strategies that would benefit the chart performance of their favorite artist. Fans have mentioned the lack of motivation that could occur when they feel like the power of the fandom is too weak because of the amount of people inside the community. A small community could therefore be a problem to the development and a successful conduct of these strategies.

On the other hand, the study has also brought results regarding the motivations outside of what has been perceived in the literature. First, there is the phenomenon of fan wars. Fan wars were described by respondents as digital wars between different fandoms in the industry. These arguments among fans push them to act in a chart obsessive way in some moments. They use these moments of disagreement as a fuel to show the other side that they can beat them on the chart game. After that, fans will use the numbers reached or the milestones to take a jab at other artists. Atiqah (2019) has noted in the literature that tension could arise between fandoms. However, the research shows that these tensions between fandoms are a source of motivation for the fans who obsess over charts.

Secondly, the price of the product is an element that can be used as a good motivator to push fans inside a fandom to act in a chart obsessive way. The study shows that fans don't have an issue with spending money to see their favorite artist chart well as long as the product proposed isn't considered as too expensive for them. In this case, it could therefore be interesting to have a deep knowledge of your fandom and do studies on how much they could spend in different variants of an album for example. According to the study, it is advised to price the products as low as possible, but some respondents have mentioned that their buying power has increased in age. Artists with older fans could therefore have the choice to price their different product in a higher price range without antagonizing the chart obsessive behavior that fans could have.

Then, the study has revealed that the artists' behavior during a tracking week can be a source of motivation in the behavior that fans can display regarding the charts. According to the study, if an artist shows that they do not have any care in the charts, members in the fandom will likely adopt the same attitude. However, when artist show that they do care, the fans will help them to reach a new goal. This point has to be nuanced because an artist showing that hey care too much about the charts could have the reverse effect in some members in the fandom while pushing even harder other members. In order to keep all fans interested, it would be advised that the artist show that they care in subtle ways. One example that has been given during the study is the fact that realizing an additional version

of a song during a period that is deemed as strategic during the tracking week is seen as a sign that the artist wants to be successful in the charts and the fans will therefore support the artist even harder and buy as much versions as they can.

Finally, reaching a possible milestone is also a factor that motivates fandoms inside the music industry. The study has shown that it is important to fans that their favorite artist reaches a new milestone. This element brings them joy according to the answers collected in the study. Making fans aware that a new milestone can be reached on a new release is an element that pushes their motivation. For the fans to be aware of the possible milestone, information could come directly from the management of the artist or from different data pages in the fandom.

5.3. Discussion regarding data access

The study has shown that data access has influenced the behavior of fans regarding the charts. Thanks to these data, fans can have more precise predictions and be better organized regarding the goals they want to reach. The access to data is also an important source of motivations for the fans to plan their strategies.

First of all, fans have different type of data accessible to them. They can gather data regarding sales, streams and radio airplay. The study has shown that most of the time, fandoms will look at prediction pages. These prediction pages will provide a hypothetical chart based on the data available for the streams, sales and radio airplay. Fans will therefore use these predictions at their advantage, especially if they are good. Sometimes fans will do their predictions without waiting for the prediction pages. They try to get an estimation of the numbers as quickly as they can to know how to move further. This is the reason why fans very often will look at the daily charts posted by Spotify or the rankings available on iTunes. Thanks to these data, fans will be able to see if they can reach a new milestone and set specific goals to reach for their favorite artist. The concept of milestone here pushes further what has been talked about in the literature by Zhang and Negus (2020). The authors mention the fact that they are fans who are very agile regarding the data that circulates for chart beating but the motivation behind the milestone is not an element that was put to light.

Then, the access to data helps the fandoms to be organized to reach their goals. Thanks to the information that they gather, fans are able prepare plans that they consider as feasible. They don't want to do something if the battle seems impossible for them to win. In addition to this, fans happen to also ask artists management to release additional versions if they feel like this could help. Then in reaching their points. Sometimes, the organization will go as far as having different teams in the fandom that will all accomplish different tasks. An example of goals that are set thanks to data, is the fact that fans know that for the billboard Hot 100 chart a 10 points difference can be closed by ten thousand sales of a single. If the single has 4 different versions and that each version can be bought four times max per customer, this makes in total 16 versions that could be bought by one singular fan. Fans know that and will start sharing the info that they only need less than a thousand people in the whole fandom to buy all the versions of a single to help it chart better. Being aware of this element can be helpful for management in the sense that it could be interesting to start being transparent to fans regarding the sales. Artists could also themselves increase the motivation of fans by setting a given feasible goal. This translates perfectly with what Zhang and Negus (2020) share in their study. Indeed, the authors mention the fact the data fans are people who become very organized and will base their organization on the data that they have

Finally, the study has shown that the access to data fuels the motivations of the members in a community, especially if the numbers are good. If the numbers are good according to the fans, this motivates them to push harder to reach a new milestone. If fans see that thanks to numbers, they can

increase their performance on the predictions they will start a call to push harder for the performance of a single on the charts. However, if the data are bad, it is important to. Note that this could have the reverse effect in the sense that fans will feel like having a chart obsessive behavior would be a waste of time since they won't be able to close the gap to reach a fixed goal. In this sense, to motivate fandoms to push harder regarding the charts, it could be advised to be transparent about the data regarding sales and streams, especially if they are good. For example, if an artist shows the stream counts of a song in the middle of the day and thanks the fans for their support, fans could instinctively start a streaming party so that the artist could have better results than the ones he would have had without the implication of these fan strategies. This gives a new perspective compared to what is shared in the literature.

5.4. Consequences on fans and charts

The participation to these strategies aiming to improve the chart performance of the object of idols have consequences on members inside communities. The first consequence that the research has been able to put to light is the fact that fans who participate to these strategies share a stronger feeling inside the fandom. The second consequence mentioned is the fact that fans start to adopt chart obsessive behavior the more they participate. In addition to this increase of interest in charts, they also gradually become charts experts who are able to give recommendations to other members in the fandoms who are less experienced. Sometimes these recommendations will also reach the management of the object of idol.

5.5. Discussion on the numbers

The results obtained during the study show that fan strategies could indeed have an impact on the charts. In the case that has been studied, we saw the predictions increase whenever fans were working harder during the tracking week by multiplying the strategies and sometimes collaborating with other fandoms. We can also note that the strategy that helps the most the fans is the buying parties. This seems to be the strategy that helps fans to increase their points the fastest. This correlates with what Leight (2023) stated regarding the fact that fans who want to push their favorite artists on the charts will focus more in digital downloads than other methods because they can buy versions of a song multiple times. Generally, songs get 4% of their chart points thanks to digital downloads ever since digitals haven't been the main driver of singles' success since 2014 (Leight,2023) but when fans gather together to enhance the chart performance of their idols, the percentage can increase above 25% with some cases going to 80% (Leight, 2023). In our case that percentage was estimated at 32% by the prediction page referencing the numbers.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Summary

This study aimed at identifying the different strategies fans put in place in order to enhance the chart performances of their music idol. In addition to this, the research also focused on shedding a light on the motivations of fans to act in a chart obsessive way and the implications of the access to data regarding charts that fans can access today. Finally, the research gives an insight on the aftermath of these actions on fans thanks to a qualitative study that consisted of a netnography and interviews of 15 respondents participating in online communities of the music industry.

Regarding the strategies identified, they could be divided into 3 sets of strategies. The first set of strategies concerns the ones that will directly impact streams, sales and radio airplays as these are the elements that are accounted for the charts. In this set we could find strategies such as streaming parties, buying parties and radio requests. Other strategies consisted of hosting events on the platform Stationhead which gives fans the ability to gather in order to buy and stream music. The research has also revealed that fandoms in the realm of the music industry will set up bank pages that solely serve as pages that will give funds to other fans so that they can purchase music. In addition to this, fans will tend to ask other fans proof of their purchase, they do not hesitate to try to contact the music idol's management team, they use the principle of gamification in streaming and even use chart enhancement websites which are websites created by fans that summarize all the different ways to support a song or an album on the charts. Finally, the study has also shown that fandoms will also use collaboration with other fandoms in order to increase the chart numbers of their music idol.

The second set of strategies used by fandoms to improve the performance of a release on the charts are strategies that aim to promote the release and therefore raise the awareness about it. In order to do so, fans will post content on social platforms, but the study has also revealed that the fans use new technologies such as artificial intelligence to promote the work of their favorite artist. Finally, the last way fans try to have an effect on the charts is by educating other fans on the charts and the way the function.

The second part of the research aims to understand the motivations the fans have when it comes to pushing the performance of their idol on the charts. For this section the study has revealed that fans are motivated by different factor such as the arguments the have online with other fan groups or the price that the artist decides to set for a product. Other source of motivations mentioned in the study is the influence of superfans in the fanbase. Indeed, superfans are the members who will, most of the time, motivate the rest of the group to act in a chart obsessive way. The size of the fandom has also been mentioned in the sense that a bigger fandom is more likely going to influence members of the community to enhance the performance of an idol on the charts. The perceived level of fandom and the artist's behavior towards chart are also elements that motivates members in music fandoms. Finally, the knowledge of a possible milestone being reached is also an element that motivates fans.

This knowledge of a possible milestone that can be reached thanks to the data that are available to the fans. Members in communities will look at daily streaming numbers, daily rankings on sales platforms or daily radio airplay numbers. All these elements helps them to predict the charts and based on these predictions, fans will adopt a strategy that they consider feasible for them. The access to data also helps fans to be better organized in their strategy and helps them to know what elements to use to help their idol. The study also highlights the fact that these strategies strengthen the feeling of belonging in the fanbase after participation and push fans to keep acting in a chart obsessive way for the following releases.

6.2. Managerial implications

First of all, an important finding of the research is the fact that superfans carry a lot of power in the online communities when it comes to the music industry. As a result, it could be advised that management look closely into some of these big pages that are chart pages or update pages. If management wants to make a piece of information known to the fandom, it could be interesting to be in contact with these pages. In addition, being in contact with these pages could give them more relevance in the fandom and their persuasion power could only increase from this. These pages are also pages that carry a lot of knowledge regarding charts and it could be interesting for labels or artists' management to look at the different recommendations these pages can give in order to help them to boost the chart performance.

Secondly, it is important for an artist to evaluate the size of his fandom even though this could be a difficult task. By doing so, the management could know if it would be more profitable to invest in traditional tools of promotions or if the power of the fanbase is enough to carry good performances on the charts if the artist is already well established. This could lead to less cost seeing that fans are the ones who start doing the promotion for the artist. If the fandom of an artist is still quite small, it would be more interesting to find ways to make the core fanbase grow rather than working actively to get hits thanks to radio stations for example. It can be disputed that having a strong core fanbase is an element that brings longevity.

Thirdly, the study has shown that the access to data helps fans a lot in their strategies. Taking this information into consideration could help management in the sense that they could be more transparent regarding their performance during a given tracking week. For example, if a song needs twenty thousand sales to reach the number one position during a said week, if the management revealed that fifteen thousand copies were already sold during the first four days of the tracking week, fans would be extremely motivated to buy the song and reach the five thousand remaining sales as quickly as possible. Being transparent could be a very interesting tool especially if the predictions are good because this just fuels the motivations of the fans as it has been seen in the study. The transparency on the data will also help the fandoms to be more organized. With this organization will come better results regarding the strategies on chart enhancement.

Fourthly, it has been mentioned that feud between fans is an element that can motivate fans to act in a chart obsessive way. In this case it could be interesting, for some artist, to strategically release a project when they know that the release would crash with the release of an other artist. This tactic could be used in the middle of a rap feud for example. Sometimes in the industry, rivalry can rise among artists and this rivalry can be translated on the fanbases. Using these moments to push the fanbases to act in a chart obsessed way could be interesting for management in both parts involved.

Moreover, the study has revealed that price is an important factor in the decision process of fans regarding the strategies they will use to push a music idol on the charts. With this in mind, management should be very aware of the type of fanbases they have and their purchasing power. Pricing a product at a high price during a given tracking week could not be helpful for an artist. However, discounting songs and albums during a strategic tracking week is a strategy that could be used to push fans to purchase more in bulks. In addition to this, these strategies help artist to increase the amount of records they actually sell especially since streaming has taken over in the music industry.

In conclusion, this research has really shown the importance of having access to numbers in fandoms in the music industry. Fans are really invested in it. There is a unique consumer fascination with sales figures is almost exclusive to the music industry (Parker, 1991) and this could be used by some companies to broaden their offer. For example, other companies could be more transparent

regarding the number of daily streams artists have just like Spotify. Another suggestion could be suggesting streaming services to launch their own magazine related to charts or launch their own official charts. This could push the fans to use their platforms even more.

It is important to note that these strategies lead by fans could help companies getting more press and more awareness whenever a new milestone is reached. This should not be neglected.

6.3. Theoretical implications

This study helps further in what has been mentioned in the literature.

The first added value of this research for scholars, is the fact the research provides a detailed list of the different strategies that fans use to push their favorite artist on the charts. This type of research had not been done yet in the literature. The research focuses on the strategies but also on a description of these strategies and an understanding of the context in which these strategies are used. The study really gives an overview of the behavior of fans thanks to the netnographic observation that has been made.

The second added value is the fact that the research shows the impact of data access on fandoms in the realm of the music industry. The study shows that the data access has had consequences on the way fans behave regarding to charts. In addition to this, thanks to the interview carried during the study, the study has provided a profound understanding on the motivation that fans have and what actually pushes them to start acting in a chart obsessive way. Some element such as the presence of fan wars were not described in the literature. Moreover, the study helps to understand more the dynamic between fandoms and the charts. Thanks to the research, there is a better understanding of how fans feel towards the charts. Finally the interviews have also permit to identify the consequences of the access of data on fans. Fans use data differently now for their own gain and the study has provide and understanding of the mechanism that happens whenever fans get access to data in the music industry. It is also better to understand the expectations of these fans thanks to the interviews. The interviews have also been able to identify the consequences of these chart obsessive strategies on the fans. Thanks to them, we understand better why they fell closer to the community whenever they participate in these actions.

The final contribution of the study is the fact the study evaluates the effectiveness of these strategies set by fans. The study has given the possibility to see there actually could be a relation between the activity of fans and the performance of music artists on charts that could be significant. This is a first step towards more detailed and quantitative studies regarding the impact of the strategies set up by fans on the numbers.

6.4. Limitations and suggestions

The first limitation of the study relies in the fact that the netnography was done following 11 communities on the social media X. This poses a limitation on the fact that only one social media was used. Secondly, the social media X is a platform that works according to an algorithm that will show on the feed type of tweets that we interact with. With this information in mind, this could cause a bias in the results of the observations. Thirdly, the communities observed were all communities of western artist so there has been no possibility to see if these practices can be generalized to all the fandoms worldwide. Moreover, the communities were not chosen randomly. This also makes it impossible to really generalize the findings of the study regarding the different strategies used by fans. A suggestion that could be given would be to carry the same type of using different social media and vary the profil

of the communities. In addition, it could be interesting to also augment the number of communities observed even if this would be time consuming. The purposive sampling can also lead to research bias.

The second list of limitations concern the interviews that were carried. These interviews consisted of a snowballing sample. This causes the issue that the respondents could be similar to each other since they come for each other's circle. This has also caused having respondent coming from only three countries during the study. This makes it difficult to generalize the findings of the study. 15 respondents participated to the interviews, this number could be higher to have more information and deeper knowledge about the subject. Moreover, the respondents were all fans who has already taken part to chart enhancing activities. It could be interesting to interview all type of fans inside a fansom and not only those who are active regarding chart participation.

Lastly, there are limitations regarding the analysis of the numbers provided by Spotify and the ranking of the iTunes charts. These numbers have permitted to give general statistical analysis by comparing them with the qualitative data that was obtained and merging both information together. However, these statistical results obtained are very basic and a deeper quantitative study could be done in order to really quantify the impact of the strategies that the fans put in place to impact charts. Moreover, this study has only been done regarding one single case. It could be interesting to make a study that would take into account several cases and see the significance of the results.

7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix 1: Table of strategies used by fans

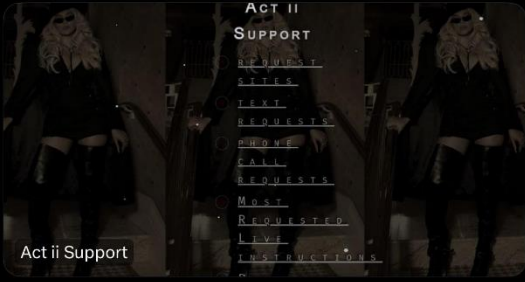
Techniques to impact charts		
Technique	Theme	Description
Buying Party	Buy	start buying a song on digital shops with the hope to instantly see the song or album raise in the charts
Radio Request	Request	request radio stations to play a particular song by calling them or mostly sending a request via the internet.
Streaming Party	Stream	consists of calling other fans to join a virtual party where each member is streaming the music on their own
Hashtag Trends	Promo	push an hashtag at the top of trending topics on the social platform
Tiktok Trends	Promo	engage with contents on Tiktok playing the song they want to push
Use of AI	Promo	use of AI to promote a project from their favorite artist.
Posting content under posts	Promo	Posting contents under posts that have nothing to do with the artist or their project
Stationhead	Stream	one person decides of the songs that will be played. All the other listeners listen and generate streams from that
Creation of explanatory websites	Explain	post typical content that promote the project.
Setting of "bank pages"	Money	putting in a place a page to which fans can donate money.
Proof of purchase	Buy	This consists of asking members of a community to post a proof that they have purchased an album or a single.
Contact with mgmt/artist	Buy	fans ask to an artist or management to provide them elements they can buy
Gamification is streams	Stream	set up different teams and the goal of the game is to get as many streams as possible as a team
Giving explanations on how charts work	Explain	Explaining how chart works to ther stans
Playlists confection	Stream	confection of playlist that fans can keep playing
Creation of chart enhancement website	Buy + Stream	Website that centralizes all the places where purchases can be made
Collaboration	Stream	Collaboration with another fandom
Shazaming	Request	Shazaming a song so that it can get more radio play

7.2. Appendix 2: Examples of fans using strategies to impact charts

BEYHIVE !! 🇺🇸

Since most of us have bought Texas Hold 'Em on every platform. Let's text and call those radio stations in the US. Some pop radio stations give a lot of audience impressions with just one spin. 800K AI = 1 chart point = 1,000 sales.

[Traduire le post](#)




Act ii Support

Depuis actii.carrd.co

HIVE ASSEMBLE! We will not let Texas Hold 'Em go down without a fight! It's 7 men going up against the Queen of Music! Let's go hard like how we did the first week it was released! We can keep Beyoncé at number 1 if we **STREAM!!!** Spotify, our stationhead parties, let's sting 🇺🇸

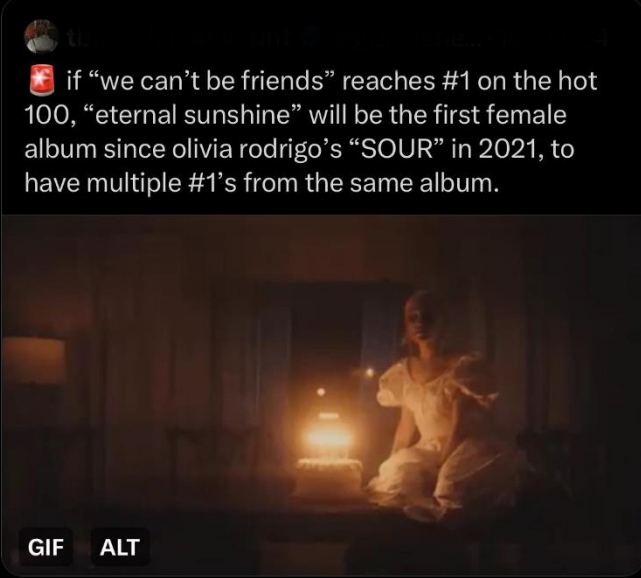
[Traduire le post](#)



Rank	+/-	Song	Points	%	Peak	WoC
1	+1	Carnival Kanye West & Ty Dolla \$ign feat. Rich The Kid &	226	-4%	1	4
2	+3	Lose Control Teddy Swims	225	9%	2	30
3	-2	Texas Hold 'Em Beyoncé	219	-8%	1	4
4	-1	Lovin On Me Jack Harlow	218	-4%	1	17
5	-1	Beautiful Things Benson Boone	210	-1%	3	7

this would be a **HUGE** accomplishment. two #1 debuts from the same album?! that's crazy. keep pushing!

[Traduire le post](#)




🇺🇸 if "we can't be friends" reaches #1 on the hot 100, "eternal sunshine" will be the first female album since olivia rodrigo's "SOUR" in 2021, to have multiple #1's from the same album.

GIF ALT

Beyoncé's "COWBOY CARTER" is in a tight race with J. Cole's "Might Delete Later" for a second week at #1 on the Billboard 200. — J. Cole is projected to sell 140-160K units, leading the race.

BEYHIVE! Let's stream and buy the album now.

[Traduire le post](#)



7.3. Appendix 3: Interview guide

Theme/ Goal of Questions	Questions	Possible probing questions
Ice Breaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greeting - Explanation of the research - Could you describe yourself in a few words? - Who's your favorite artist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How old are you? - Where do you live?
Self-identification in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you describe yourself as a fan? - Is there a particular dynamic in your fanbase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For how long have you been a fan - If you have to give yourself a level on fandom which one would it be - Do you participate a lot in the community?
Relationship towards charts and data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As a fan how do you feel about charts - Have you ever taken part into activities to boost your favorite artist sales? Why (not)? - Do you pay attention to predictions and data? Do they impact your behavior? - What impact has data on your behavior ? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where do you get the informations? - Do charts influence your behavior towards an artist or not?
Group impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What impact has the whole community on you? - How do you feel after participating to these strategies ? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would you be okay to buy an album several time if you saw your friends in the community do so?

7.4. Appendix 4: Coding grid interviews

Theme	Codes
Level of fandom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moderate ▪ High level
Dynamic in fanbase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Big fanbase ▪ Small fanbase ▪ Hierarchy
Interest in chart & data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Highly Invested ▪ Only to be informed ▪ Not very interested ▪ Music quality is better
Chart Participation motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presence of Milestone ▪ Direct participation ▪ Proving enemies ▪ Big pages encouragement ▪ Artist implication ▪ Group effect ▪ Price
Impact of data access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better organization ▪ Source of motivation ▪ Importance of predictions
Feeling towards fandom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Friendship ▪ No attachment ▪ strong

7.5. Appendix 5: Interview respondent 1

Kevin :

Bonjour Walid. Merci d'avoir accepté de donner de ton temps pour prendre part à cette interview pour mon mémoire qui s'intitule « How do music fans impact charts and what are the consequences ? » donc ici le but est juste de connaître un peu quel type de fan tu es et ta relation en tant que fan par rapport aux charts. Donc ici est ce que tu pourrais tout Premièrement me dire de quel artiste est-ce que tu es fan ?

R1:

Alors donc je suis fan de Beyoncé, voilà.

Kevin:

D'accord, très bien. Donc ici la première question est, comment est-ce que tu te décrirais toi-même en tant que fan ?

R1:

On peut-on peut me décrire comme un Die Hard fan si je puis dire. Quelqu'un qui l'a suivi depuis bien plus de 10 ans maintenant. Qui la suit à la fois. Bah dans tout ce qu'elle va sortir musicalement. Voilà qui va aller au concert, qui va consommer sa musique, qui va consommer tous les produits dérivés, qui va aussi connaître un peu sa vie privée. Parce que voilà, je considère comme le plus haut niveau de fans. Même on peut considérer ça comme un Stan. Voilà.

Kevin:

Un stan ? Est ce que tu pourrais me définir un tout petit peu ce terme, Stan.

R1:

Alors un stan ? Comment on pourrait définir un stan ? Un Stan, c'est déjà initialement, je crois que c'était utilisé par à l'époque par Eminem, si je puis dire... Si je ne me trompe pas, qui en fait considéré comme les fans obsessionnels, c'est le degré au-dessus des fans puisqu'on va vraiment être connaître limite le Day to Day de l'artiste et en fait ça va vraiment peut être dépasser l'univers uniquement artistique. Voilà comment on pourrait décrire ça. Et ouais, je pense que ça s'explique plutôt bien comme ça.

Kevin:

D'accord. Alors je sais personnellement que là Stan base de Beyoncé s'appelle la Beyhive, alors ici est ce que tu pourrais me décrire un tout petit peu une dynamique qu'il y a dans la fanbase ici ?

R1:

Alors ? Est ce qu'on on parle de la dynamique voulue par Beyoncé ou la dynamique existante au final ?

Kevin:

Existante au final, celle qui a vraiment été créé par les fans eux-mêmes.

R1:

On va se dire que les fans de Beyoncé, les stans, the Beyhive sont décrits dans comme des Beys, et donc on suit principalement une page, je dirais principale. Beylegion, qui est en fait la page qui pour nous, parce qu'on est jamais trop sûrs, qui a le plus de liens en fait avec directement l'équipe de Beyoncé et donc qui est au courant de toute l'actualité qui nous met à jour le plus rapidement possible. Et après il y a pas mal d'autres pages donc principalement sur Twitter. Après parce que je suis aussi et

je consomme sur Twitter la consommation d'autres fans de Beyoncé va être différente selon en fait leur consommation sociale. Je sais qu'il y a beaucoup de fans qui suivent en fait des pages ou des groupes sur Facebook ou sur Instagram. Nous on fait principalement sur Twitter et donc sur Twitter. Donc en plus de BeyLegion, y a beaucoup d'autres pages, donc des pages qui sont plus axées sur les charts comme j'en suis des pages plutôt donc de fans qui ont l'habitude de faire des tweets qui engrangeaient beaucoup d'engagement et donc on va suivre et donc.

Voilà, il y a, il y a, on va dire, ça a 3 typologies, la page beyhive, les pages de charts et les pages de fans qui qui sont virales on va dire. C'est principalement comme ça.

Kevin:

Tu m'as parlé des charts ici, mais alors toi en tant que fan, quelle est ta relation ? On va dire par rapport aux chartes ?

R1:

Alors on va dire que moi, en tant que fan, je on voit Beyoncé comme une artiste, mais on peut aussi la comparer comme en fait. Bah tout sportif où on veut que elle soit numéro un. On veut en fait que ça reflète nous ce qu'on perçoit dans la musique, que ça se reflète en fait dans les performances commerciales. Donc pour moi personnellement je trouve qu'il y a une importance de savoir combien elle est classée, combien elle vend, parce que en fait on veut et on a cette volonté qu'elle soit toujours la meilleure parce qu'on la considère comme la meilleure artistiquement. Donc on veut que ça se reflète commercialement. Donc pour moi, il y a quand même une forte importance à ça. Ça ne joue pas personnellement sur ma perception de l'artiste, mais ça va jouer sur la perception que les autres peuvent avoir de l'artiste et donc pour nous, c'est quand même quelque chose d'impactant et d'important. Donc pour moi oui les charts sont importants. Je vais les suivre. Pas régulièrement. Quand c'est en sortie de d'album single, on va dire les premières deuxièmes semaines pas régulièrement. Après peut être à la fin de l'année pour faire voilà les bilans annuels, les choses comme ça, mais c'est quelque chose dont je suis au courant. Donc sur voilà, voilà comment je.

Kevin:

Tu m'as parlé de la perception des autres de l'artiste. Il faut que les autres voient que Beyoncé est numéro un. Est-ce que pour toi justement la perception des autres est importante ici ? Commercialement.

R1:

Bah on normalement on devrait dire que non, parce que voilà, on a une relation personnelle avec l'artiste, mais on a quand même envie que les gens voient ce que nous on voit et on a envie que le plus grand public voie le voit. En fait l'artiste que nous on voit donc pour nous en fait, le fait qu'elle marche en fait auprès du grand public. Le fait que dans les médias elles soient reconnue comme numéro un. Oui, il y a une importance. Et oui, ça va jouer sur voilà sur la perception, ça c'est sûr.

Kevin:

D'accord, et est-ce que cette envie de prouver ou de montrer qui est numéro un pourrait aussi jouer sur le fait que l'artiste en question ait des haters, et qu'on veut justement montrer aux haters que non, regardez.

R1:

Clairement, on veut prouver, en fait. C'est ça, c'est-à-dire, c'est une compétition. Il ne faut pas l'oublier, ça reste une compétition, mais pas une compétition entre artistes, ce n'est même pas ça. C'est une compétition entre fanbases où chacun veut que la sienne soit la meilleure. Alors, nous avons la volonté de prouver aux personnes qui remettent en question l'artiste et son succès que c'est faux, et donc, en tant que fans, c'est notre rôle de tout faire pour démontrer que l'artiste continue de marcher.

Kevin:

D'accord, alors ici, prochaine question. À propos de toi, est-ce que tu as déjà pris part à des activités pour augmenter les statistiques de Beyoncé ? Si oui, lesquelles et pourquoi ?

R1:

Au début, quand je commençais cette année, pas du tout. Disons que le pouvoir d'achat n'était pas le même non plus, vu que j'étais encore adolescent, donc je n'avais pas trop mon mot à dire hormis dans les streams. Mais à l'époque, les streams n'étaient pas comptabilisés comme maintenant, donc on n'avait pas autant de pouvoir.

Mais maintenant, depuis que j'ai un peu plus de pouvoir d'achat et que j'ai un peu plus d'impact sur les ventes, oui, je participe, surtout lors des sorties d'albums ou de singles, où je vais faire l'effort d'acheter toutes les versions différentes des singles ou des albums. Même si, par exemple, il y a la version clean, la version explicite, j'achète les deux parce que ça compte pour deux ventes. Et oui, ça m'est arrivé aussi, quand j'avais du temps, surtout parce que ça demande du temps, de faire des streaming parties où je lance des abonnements en streaming en boucle, et l'effet de masse avec d'autres fans fait qu'on augmente le nombre de ventes, entre guillemets, naturellement.

Kevin:

D'accord. Alors ici, tu me parles de charte, et cetera, et dans les charts, ça sous-entend les datas. Donc, est-ce que tu fais attention à ces datas ? Le nombre de ventes ou les prédictions de ventes qui pourraient arriver, et est-ce que ça impacte aussi ton comportement

R1:

Pour Beyoncé ? Oui, je regarde les volumes de vente, les volumes de streaming, je regarde les prédictions. Et si on a des prédictions qui s'approchent d'un objectif qu'on s'est donné mais qu'on n'y est pas encore tout à fait, alors oui, je vais par exemple écouter beaucoup plus en streaming, je vais écouter en boucle une certaine chanson, je vais racheter un single. Ce ne sont pas énormément de choses, mais ce sont des petits gestes où je me dis que j'ai fait ma part d'action. Donc oui, ça joue. Et à l'inverse, si je vois qu'un single, malgré les efforts de la fanbase, ne monte pas dans les charts, je ne vais pas plus l'écouter. Je vais l'écouter comme un single que j'apprécie donc je ne veux pas me forcer à plus écouter, je ne vais pas me forcer à l'acheter. C'est sûr.

Kevin:

D'accord, merci pour ces informations. Alors tu as parlé de comptes charts, et cetera, qui donnent les informations sur les chiffres en temps réel. Est-ce que ces comptes influencent ton comportement ? Et est-ce que c'est auprès de ces comptes que tu vas chercher ces informations ? C'est une question qui me vient en tête, désolé, mais où vas-tu chercher ces informations ?

R1:

Alors, j'en avais parlé précédemment, il y a les comptes fans de Beyoncé qui tweetent uniquement par rapport aux chiffres de vente, aux chiffres de streaming que je suis. Et puis il y a les comptes globaux, comme Chart Data par exemple, qui donnent les chiffres au global. Cela va être plus facile pour comparer avec d'autres artistes, pour savoir si on est plus ou moins bien par rapport à d'autres albums. Donc je vais suivre ces comptes-là et voilà, ce sont principalement mes sources.

Kevin:

Donc maintenant, en parlant des comptes chart de Beyoncé, est-ce que ces comptes peuvent avoir une influence sur ton comportement ? Donc imaginons, s'ils disent que l'on approche d'un but que vous vous êtes donné, ça te pousse à adopter un certain comportement, est-ce que ces comptes ont un impact sur ton comportement ?

R1:

Oui, on va dire qu'ils ont une vision globale. Et en fait, ils peuvent facilement encourager la fanbase à faire la même action. Donc en général, s'ils conseillent, par exemple, d'écouter une certaine playlist ou d'acheter un certain single, il est probable que je vais suivre le mouvement. Donc ce sont clairement des comptes de référence pour ça.

Kevin :

Alors ici, tu me parles aussi des comptes, et cetera. Mais maintenant, est-ce que la fanbase en général peut avoir un impact sur ton comportement ? Donc, ce que je veux dire par là, c'est, si un grand nombre de personnes dans la fanbase adopte un comportement, est-ce que tu vas faire de même ?

R1:

Oui, ça m'est déjà arrivé. Lorsqu'on voit qu'un single a un potentiel de bien marcher, on va tous se concentrer sur ce single-là et peut-être augmenter les streams. Donc, en fonction du nombre de tweets que je vois d'autres membres de la fanbase, ça peut changer mon comportement d'achat et de consommation, pas ma perception de la chanson.

Kevin:

D'accord. Je pense que j'ai fait le tour de mes questions. Je te remercie énormément pour toutes les informations données. Et je ne sais pas si tu as quelque chose à rajouter concernant la relation que les fans ont avec les charts ou autre.

R1:

Oui, cette question peut être très intéressante car on aime les charts quand ils sont positifs. On va dire que l'on aime bien parler des chiffres et des ventes lorsque ça va dans notre sens. Lorsqu'à l'inverse, les chiffres ne sont pas favorables, même pour Beyoncé, étonnamment, on va considérer que les charts sont quelque chose de secondaire et qu'il faut mettre en avant l'artiste et la qualité de la musique avant tout. Donc souvent, les tweets vont se tourner de cette façon-là. Mais quand ça marche, on est très axés sur les chiffres.

Kevin:

Juste une dernière chose, tu m'as déjà parlé du fait que tu streamais en masse et que tu pouvais acheter plusieurs fois la même chose pour augmenter les ventes. Y a-t-il d'autres techniques que tu as vues ou prises toi-même, à part celles-ci ?

R1:

Je ne sais pas si tu considères les playlists comme du streaming, mais il y a parfois des playlists créées spécialement pour qu'une chanson soit jouée plusieurs fois. Il y a aussi des méthodes que l'on observe, qui ne viennent pas forcément de nous, mais souvent des maisons de disques ou des artistes eux-mêmes. On y participe parce qu'on connaît l'objectif de ces méthodes.

Kevin :

Par exemple ?

R1:

Les Bundles, par exemple, les différentes versions des vinyles. Quand un vinyle sort en quatre ou cinq versions alors que rien ne change dedans, ou quand certaines chansons sont poussées dans des playlists officielles sur Spotify, des playlists qui sont connues pour avoir un certain nombre d'auditeurs. Donc, on sait que souvent ce sont des démarches qui sont faites, et nous, on est clairement contents lorsqu'on voit notre chanson dans cette playlist.

Kevin:

Donc ça veut dire que les actions menées par les labels restent tout aussi importantes. Par exemple, si Beyoncé venait avec quatre versions différentes à cinq dollars d'un album, ça te pousserait à consommer encore plus ?

R1:

Je pense, parce qu'il y a un objectif. Même s'il n'est pas dit officiellement, même si elle ne nous dit pas d'acheter quatre versions pour augmenter les ventes, on sait pourquoi c'est fait, et on sait ce qu'elle attend de nous.

Kevin:

Donc, si j'ai bien compris, il y a une importance à comprendre l'objectif de l'artiste, c'est bien ça ?

R1:

Oui, parce que même si l'artiste ne dit pas d'acheter son album, on sait pourquoi il y a quatre versions d'un album, on sait pourquoi il y a une version deluxe qui sort une semaine après. Ce n'est pas pour rien.

R1:

D'accord. Et maintenant, avec ce que tu es en train de me dire, imaginons que Beyoncé dise : "Oh les gars, mon single est presque numéro un. Allez, faites le maximum pour que je sois numéro un." Est-ce que ça aurait un impact ?

R1:

Parce que c'est Beyoncé, oui, et qu'elle ne le fait jamais. Donc pour moi, il y a peut-être une importance spécialement là. Si on parle d'un autre artiste qui le fait déjà à chacune de ses sorties, même si j'apprécie beaucoup l'artiste, à un moment donné, je pense que ça serait moins impactant pour moi. Ça va vraiment dépendre de la personne en face et de sa façon de communiquer aussi.

Kevin:

Et donc, imaginons si Beyoncé ne vous demande pas explicitement d'adopter un comportement, mais subtilement remercie la fanbase en disant : "Aujourd'hui, on a fait autant de streams. Merci beaucoup." Est-ce que ça aurait un impact sur toi ?

R1:

Pas forcément sur le coup. Juste un remerciement, ce n'est pas suffisant. C'est bien, mais étant donné que c'est un accomplissement qui a déjà été fait, je ne le considère pas comme une incitation à continuer à faire plus, personnellement.

Kevin:

Donc, il faudrait qu'elle suggère qu'il y a besoin d'en faire plus, c'est ça ?

Walid :

Oui c'est ça.

7.6. Appendix 6: Interview respondent 9

Kevin:

Hello, Parker. Thank you for taking your time to do this, so let's start directly. So my first question is simply from what artist are you a fan?

R9:

I'm a big fan of a lot of different artists, specifically Beyoncé, Dua Lipa, SZA. Who else? I like a lot of Rihanna's music. Umm, some. A lot of Egyptian artists like Sherine, Lebanese artists like Nancy Ajram, I listen to a lot of different music. Oh, a lot of Maluma, J. Balvin. So a lot of reggaeton as well, just one variety.

Kevin:

Thank you for this answer, but here I would like for you to choose one artist, like your favorite one, the one you would be described as a Stan. As I've heard previously, yeah.

R9:

It's Beyoncé, Beyoncé, Beyoncé, of course.

Kevin:

So OK, so how would you describe yourself as a Beyoncé fan?

R9:

Well, I've liked her ever since I was really young. I remember I was at my neighbor's house and she was playing "Independent Women" from Destiny's Child, and I was like 4 years old. And I was like, ohh, I really like this music. And then ever since I, I mean obviously at that time I wasn't able to fully comprehend anything that was going on. But I knew that I liked her, and so I remember as a little kid, "Crazy in Love", "Baby Boy". "Naughty Girl" would come on the radio and then the next era, the B'Day era. I really liked, and then uh, same with Sasha Fierce. I really liked all the singles and stuff, so I was really a fan of the singles, but I had never really gotten into the albums or anything until I was old enough to go on YouTube around like 2011, 2012 and then I was able to discover more. And then I became active on social media in the Beyhive, we can say Twitter community, some on Instagram, but more so Twitter and yeah. So still to this day, love her.

Kevin:

OK. Thank you. So you just said that you were active in the Beyhive community, on Twitter, is there a particular dynamic in the fan base here that you see?

R9:

I honestly think that it's really toxic. It's. I don't think it's good, to be honest. There's some moments that I like, like the friendships that form, the people that you can meet online and then you can meet up at concerts or other things or even outside of the music. I think that's good, but then the online toxicity is really bad in my opinion and I think that's the same for all fan bases. Some behaviors that people will justify for some artist or some people they won't justify for others, you know, there are a lot of hypocrites that I really don't like that.

Kevin:

OK. And do you feel like there are pages that might be more important than others in the fan base or things like that?

R9:

Yes, for sure. So we have like the update accounts, that's what I'm thinking of, Beyoncé Legion. Who used to be the creme de la creme of update accounts. But then something happened to where now it's just more of like individuals who have their own accounts. They got popular from like a lot of retweets or stealing tweets and. Umm. Yeah. So I see just the big accounts, but then also we have those little accounts that you feel bad for. They have like 10 followers. They just wanna... They just want to be involved in the action. The big accounts are the most important ones. They are those who give us the information that matters and make us move

Kevin:

OK, so here next question is now, we're gonna talk about charts.

R9:

OK.

Kevin:

So my question here is as a fan, how do you feel about charts?

R9:

I mean I. Do I think that they're important? No. Do I think that they're interesting? Very. I really like the aspect of like kind of seeing what's the most popular and for how long and how many you know how many weeks was it in the top 10? How many weeks it in number one, I think that's really interesting in terms of like a personality perspective because I find the concept of celebrity to be very fascinating. And like all throughout history, I feel like every society has their own celebrities. And so this is like a way to really track our celebrities in real time. You know you can say, oh, this song like no one liked it. Like this person? No one knew of, but it's like ohh. I don't know. You know, they had like 80,000 number ones or this song was huge, like everyone knew it. It was number one for 11 weeks on the top on the Hot 100. You know, I find it really, really, really fascinating. But in the grand scheme of things, does it matter? No. Am I getting anything from it? Not really. Is it hurting me if my if Beyoncé song flops? No, not really. Does it make me happy? Yes. Which I think honestly is pretty unhealthy, but I do think it's interesting.

Kevin:

We can talk about the fact that sometimes some fan bases and some fans taking part in tactics to increase their favorite artist sales or streams. So have you ever taken part in something like that? And if you did, why? And if you didn't, why not?

R9:

Yes, of course. Of course I remember. Umm. Let's see. So it was "Drunk in Love". The second we heard that it had the possibility of going number one, I remember I tried to buy as many copies as I could and I remember I tried to stream it on YouTube a lot, even though I don't even know if that helped at all for the charting purposes. But I really wanted Beyoncé to have a number one because she hadn't had one on the Hot 100 in a long time. And then also another instance I was streaming the "Savage" remix a lot because it could have given Beyonce another number one single. Before that, I streamed "Perfect Duet" a lot with Ed Sheeran because well I really did like the song. But then also that would be like the first time that she'd have a number one hit in a long time, in like almost 10 years, which is embarrassing to say for me, but I was happy whenever it went number one. Like it really made me happy. So what did I do? I streamed it constantly, had stream it in my sleep, I'd stream it in class, I'd stream it at work, I'd stream it all the time. I'd had my headphones in and I'd have the volume up just enough and I would put it in playlist and I've skipped a song. Sorry, there's no way I would skip. I'd skip a song and then do it again because I was like, oh, I don't know if it'll count. I don't know if it'll count if it's on silent, so let me put my headphones in and play it. I wasted so much phone battery and data and Wi-Fi and all that. Just trying to get this song to #1 and I was so happy whenever it did and it was the exact same situation

for "Savage" remix. Exact same situation, but the "Savage" remix there was the competition between another song, "Say So" remix. With Nicki Minaj and Doja Cat. And so that was a mess. And that that brought up a lot of hostilities between the different fan bases involved.

Kevin:

OK. Thank you. So here, if I understand well, the fact that your favorite artist can reach like a new milestone is an important factor for you. And you also talked about the other fan bases. So here like trying to prove a point to the other fan bases is also something important, even though you might find the thing toxic.

R9:

Yes, for sure. I think it's just a matter of bragging rights, to be honest, cause it's not like any of us are making any money or, you know, getting rewarded in any way for it. It's just a matter of, you know, I like this artist. They like this artist more and we wanna say ohh mine is better now. Mine is better. Well, how do you know that mine is better? Well, mine has five number ones, but yours only has two. You know, just things like that.

Kevin:

Yeah. OK, so now do you pay attention to predictions and data and do they really impact you here?

R9:

I do if there is a song that I think has a chance of going like charting well, for example, with the "Savage" remix, I was like, Oh my gosh, there's a chance that it will go number one. And I really was watching it like every hour for every update, like trying to see how much. Umm, how many plays it was getting? What? You know what was going on? What is the? What is this daily prediction? What? What changed from yesterday, but overall I really don't. Umm, not really because I think it just it. Drives me crazy, to be honest.

Kevin:

OK, so here are the question. Is just. Where do you gather all these information? All the data you get, where do you get them?

R9:

All from Twitter. Almost all from Twitter and then supplemental data from billboard.com Official Charts UK. SEP for France, Brazil, they have their own Brazilian certifications website which I use just because I find it interesting. Like I said, it doesn't affect my life at all. I just find it interesting to learn, so I use like the official chart websites and I use Wikipedia also as like a base. But then I'd like to confirm with the official website.

Kevin:

OK. And when you gather this information on Twitter, are there like specific types of accounts that you go to to get them?

R9:

Yes, like specific chart accounts. Who I think do a good job and have quality data like "BeyCharts" I think is one, but a lot of the times they don't know what they're talking about and the information is false and I always feel the need to correct it, whether it be a positive or negative correction. And I don't think it's very appreciated, but now I've chilled out so. I've matured.

Kevin:

Hmm, OK. So here, uh, so you talked about the charts account important to you and do they happen to influence your behavior, for example, when you start having like that behavior of streaming a song or the? OK.

R9:

Yes they do, especially if I think that the song will do well and that there's a chance, a possibility that it will do well, then I'm like, OK, I'll let it affect my behavior, but otherwise I really don't because I realize it's like it's out of my control.

Kevin:

Now, OK, so now let's imagine that Beyoncé dropped the song and the song isn't doing very well. But the fan base in general is just like, OK guys, let's push the song. Do you think that the whole group and the fan base would impact your behavior? And would you like follow them into like streaming the song or buying the song several times?

R9:

Honestly, no, because I've seen this happen before and if I don't like the song, I'm not gonna wanna put an effort into helping it do well, especially if I think that the general population won't like it. For example, my house. I'm sorry but. It's bad. So I'm not gonna waste my time and money and energy trying to stream this song that I don't think will even chart.

Kevin:

No, OK did this song chart actually or not?

R9:

I have no idea. I have no idea.

Kevin:

I think it did.

R9:

Really.

Kevin:

So I don't know if you have anything more to add here about the charts and fans according to you.

R9:

Umm, I think that as I get older I care less and less. Now I'm 26. I'm like, OK, I have actual stuff I need to be worrying about and not worrying about where, like, already super rich famous person is going to be charting for a song, you know? And that's that's about it. Like, hopefully, hopefully in five years I'll just be ohh. You know, I remember that that was fun, but, I mean, it's fun. Stan Twitter, especially in the past used to be very fun. I wouldn't have stayed if it wasn't. I love the mess. I love the drama.

Kevin:

Could you like give me some tactics that you've seen other stans do like I know I've heard about streaming parties and mass buying. Have you ever seen like other stuff happening?

R9:

Streaming parties, mass buying, making playlists and sharing playlists that they can just put on automatically, like whenever you're sleeping or in class. Umm. Radio like trying to get the radio to play it during like radio request hours. Umm, there's that one app. I think it's called Shazam. Apparently

that helps with charting a trying to post the music videos everywhere, like for example in random replies, they reply with someone's music video or a clip of the music video. Uh, that is that those are some things that I've seen.

Kevin:

OK. Well, thank you again. And I think we are done now

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Executive summary

This study aimed at identifying the different strategies fans put in place in order to enhance the chart performances of their music idol. In addition to this, the research also focused on shedding a light on the motivations of fans to act in a chart obsessive way and the implications of the access to data regarding charts that fans can access today. Finally, the research gives an insight on the aftermath of these actions on fans thanks to a qualitative study that consisted of a netnography and interviews of 15 respondents participating in online communities of the music industry.

Regarding the strategies identified, they could be divided into 3 sets of strategies. The first set of strategies concerns the ones that will directly impact streams, sales and radio airplays as these are the elements that are accounted for the charts. The research has also revealed that fandoms in the realm of the music industry will set up strategies such as bank pages that solely serve as pages that will give funds to other fans so that they can purchase music. In addition to this, fans will tend to ask other fans proof of their purchase, they do not hesitate to try to contact the music idol's management team, they use the principle of gamification in streaming and even use chart enhancement websites which are websites created by fans that summarize all the different ways to support a song or an album on the charts. Finally, the study has also shown that fandoms will also use collaboration with other fandoms in order to increase the chart numbers of their music idol.

The second part of the research aims to understand the motivations the fans have when it comes to pushing the performance of their idol on the charts. For this section the study has revealed that fans are motivated by different factor such as the arguments the have online with other fan groups or the price that the artist decides to set for a product. Other source of motivations mentioned in the study is the influence of superfans in the fanbase. Indeed, superfans are the members who will, most of the time, motivate the rest of the group to act in a chart obsessive way. The size of the fandom has also been mentioned in the sense that a bigger fandom is more likely going to influence members of the community to enhance the performance of an idol on the charts. The perceived level of fandom and the artist's behavior towards chart are also elements that motivates members in music fandoms. Finally, the knowledge of a possible milestone being reached is also an element that motivates fans.

The study also shows that the access to data has changed the behavior of fans in the realm of the music industry. Thanks to the data access, fandoms are better organized, more motivated and can predict how the charts will look like and act accordingly.

Key words: fan empowerment, online fandom, music charts, data fandom, fan communities.

Word counts: 26957

