

## INTRODUCTION

This project explores how each stage of music creation—writing, recording, producing, releasing, and marketing—affects an independent artist’s ability to build an audience and grow in their music. It focuses on the creative and business sides of music, including songwriting, production, marketing, and legal steps like copyright and distribution. The final product will include a guide through short film showing the full process of making and sharing original music, along with strategies that can help independent musicians.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

I will write, record, and produce original songs utilizing the laguna sound recording studio and the distrokid distribution platform while testing different marketing methods on platforms like Instagram, Spotify, and YouTube as a case study. I will track social media growth and streaming numbers (quantitative data), and gather detailed feedback through interviews, audience surveys, and personal reflection (qualitative data) both before release to inform me on making a marketing plan and as I execute my project to gather feedback. Tools like Google Forms and Sheets will help organize the data, and all participants’ privacy will be protected. I will also document my process through videos, photos, and notes to better understand what connects best with audiences and what my personal experience is; Ultimately creating a full and honest guide about the experience, both highs and lows of being an independent artist.

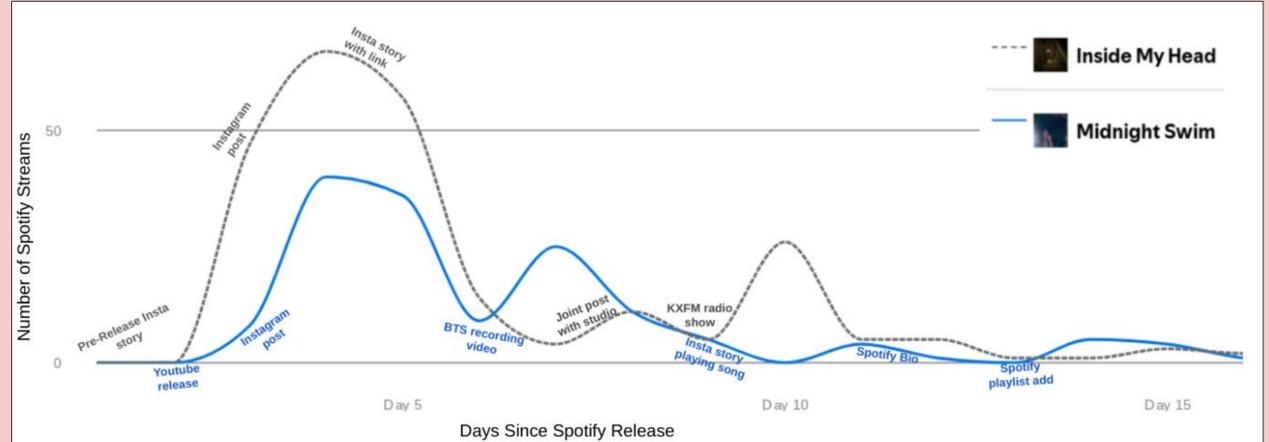
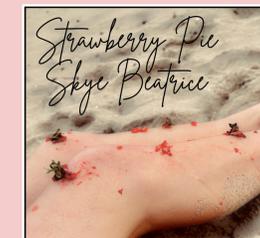
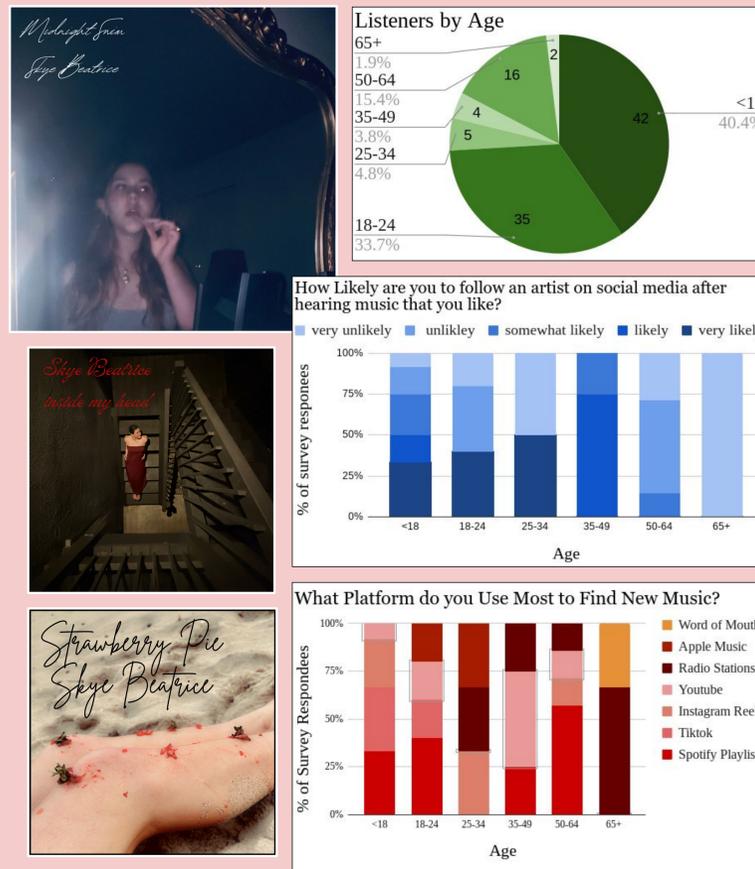
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

Special thanks to Frank Arellano, Dave Sherman, and Jun Shen for helping make this project possible!

Full Research Paper



## DATA AND FINDINGS



- **First release, *Midnight Swim*:** Built steady traction through BTS content, studio posts, and playlist adds.
- **Second release, *Inside My Head*:** Saw a sharp spike in streams after an Instagram story with a clickable link.
- **Short-form visual content (especially stories with links)** drove the most immediate engagement.
- **Playlist placement** offered long-term benefits but didn’t significantly boost initial release-day streams.
- **Traditional promo (radio, bio updates)** had minimal effect on listenership.
- The initial bulge in both songs' streams was driven by **launch-day Instagram posts** with direct links, showing that immediate, accessible promotion sparks strong early engagement.
- **Cumulative strategy works:** Learnings from the first release improved the success of the second especially with adding pre-marketing.
- **18–24-year-olds are my core audience**, making Instagram and Spotify (Reels, Stories, playlists) the most effective platforms for growth.

## DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

- Releasing my first song through DistroKid showed me how professional distribution has become super simple and accessible, removing traditional industry barriers for independent artists.
- Recording in a studio allowed for higher production quality and taught me how arrangement and sound design influence a track’s impact. However, it is important to consider that most independent artists do not have access to a high quality recording studio which is why I did additional research into at home recording technologies.
- Songwriting involved navigating the tension between emotional authenticity and audience expectations. As I progressed, I found in common with other small artists the need to keep writing and the creative process separated from comparison and pressure.
- A single Instagram post significantly boosted streams, demonstrating the reach of social media. However, the algorithm’s inconsistency made it difficult to maintain that momentum.
- In interviews, independent musicians described the constant pressure to stay visible online. Both emphasized how social media, while necessary, often caused stress and creative fatigue.
- These experiences reflected a broader issue: platforms increasingly reward content quantity and engagement over musical depth, shifting the definition of success away from the art itself.
- I found it really hard to separate myself from the social media presence which is why I had my sister take over my account so that I would be better able to focus on my music. I found that is made a big difference in both my quality of mental health and my ability to create more freely.



## CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

- While independent artists now have access to powerful tools for writing, recording, and distributing music, gaining an audience still relies heavily on understanding digital platforms and visibility tactics.
- Analyzing my listener demographics and survey data has clarified how to best reach and grow my audience. Most of my listeners are aged 18–24—both my largest streaming group and the most likely to follow artists after discovering their music. This confirms the value of focusing on Instagram and Spotify, especially Reels, Stories, and curated playlists. Since short-form visual content resonates most with this demographic, I plan to prioritize that format, maintain a strong, consistent artist identity, and create more clickable, shareable content.
- The creative process is now intertwined with branding and content strategy, placing new demands on musicians beyond their art.
- Social media can amplify reach, but it also creates unsustainable pressure. this is a common theme I saw while both researching artists like Lizzie McAlpine and Billie Eilish as well through interviews with small independent artist Maisey Rei. Mental health, boundaries, and long-term sustainability are important considerations for any artist today.
- Moving forward, I plan to release more music with a focus on clarity, consistency, and intentional marketing—prioritizing genuine connection over algorithm-driven virality.