Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

#Runningupthathill, revival and popular music fandom on TikTok

Rafal Zaborowski & Lucy Bennett

Published online: 30 Jan 2025.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 261

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

#Runningupthathill, revival and popular music fandom on TikTok

Rafal Zaborowski[a] and Lucy Bennett[b]

[a]Department of Digital Humanities, King's College London, London, UK; [b]JOMEC, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

ABSTRACT

The fourth season of *Stranger Things* (2022) used Kate Bush's 1985 single 'Running up that Hill' for a key narrative moment, propelling the song back into the charts. This resurgence also inspired new generations of listeners who turned to TikTok to perform covers, analyses or parodies of the song. While TikTok has been discussed as an emerging player in the music industry and as a space of agency and expression, there is still limited understanding of how audiences use the platform to express and negotiate their musical affinities. To investigate this, we conducted a content analysis of TikTok videos tagged with the hashtag #runningupthathill ($N =$ 442). We identified two primary themes which fostered musical meaning on TikTok: (1) platform dynamics and possibilities for creativity, and (2) affective nostalgia. Our findings show that these factors cultivated a two-fold sense of musicking: a renewal of communal, fandom practices alongside a reflective engagement with music cultures and their cyclicity. The analysis reveals a convergence between platformisation and the role of music in identity formation, self-creation and self-maintenance. Ultimately, this research offers empirical insight into how digital spaces reshape and renew music fan practices.

Introduction

In May 2022, Netflix released the fourth season of *Stranger Things*, which prominently featured Kate Bush's 1985 single 'Running up that Hill' during a pivotal narrative moment. This use of Bush's song propelled it back into the charts (Khomami 2022), introducing the singer and her catalogue to a new generation of listeners. In the UK, the song achieved a peak chart position of Number One, surpassing its original 1985 placement at Number Three.[1] This resurgence occurred amid a broader trend of songs gaining new and/or renewed attention via the video-sharing platform TikTok, which has been making deeper marks into the music industry (Klein 2022): TikTok's use of key songs as video backdrops has led to notable shifts in chart ranking and streaming numbers. It was within this landscape that listeners turned to the platform to communicate and share their connection with 'Running up that Hill' through covers, tributes, analyses, parodies and sketches.

While TikTok has been explored as a new space for agency and self-expression (Kennedy 2020; Sadler 2022) there is still limited understanding of how audiences use the platform to express and negotiate their musical affinities. To investigate this landscape further, we conducted a content analysis of TikTok videos tagged with the hashtag #runningupthathill ($N = 442$), exploring patterns of user engagement and creative expression. We argue that there are two primary themes which fostered musical meaning on TikTok: (1) platformed possibilities for creativity where audiences can adapt the song to connect with their personal interests, investments and desires and (2) affective nostalgia and connection to the song itself. Our findings show that these factors cultivated a two-fold sense of musicking (Small 1998): a renewal of communal, fandom practices alongside a reflective engagement with music cultures and their cyclicity. This study, therefore, offers new insight into music fandom by investigating how TikTok users engaged with 'Running Up That Hill', revealing how music, TikTok platform dynamics, and audience emotions can converge.

Music fandom, nostalgia and online affect

As Simon Frith has argued '...the issue is not how a particular piece of music or a performance reflects the people, but how it produces them, how it creates and constructs an experience – a musical experience, an aesthetic experience – that we can only make sense of by *taking on* both a subjective and a collective identity' (Frith 1996, 109). Building on this thread, DeNora (1999) has framed music as an 'aesthetic reflexive' activity, a tool for self- creation and maintenance, integral to one's personal identity. These standpoints are essential for understanding how audiences and fans connect with a particular song, especially when revived from another era to resonate with new generations of listeners. Such connections often fuse strongly with nostalgia, providing fans a means to bridge past and present. Through contemporary technological tools and platforms, fans can recontextualise past music and infuse it with new affective meanings.

Affect, interpreted as a 'strong feeling of attachment' (Lamerichs 2018, 207) is closely tied to fan communities where engagement often involves 'regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text' (Sandvoss 2005, 16). Music, as a particularly emotive art form, can tap into core human emotions with distinct intensities and focus depending on the listening context (cf. Ball 2010; Sloboda 2010). Martha Nussbaum (2001, 254) emphasizes this connection, describing music as 'profoundly connected to our emotional life, indeed perhaps more urgently and deeply connected to that life than any of the other arts.' As such, for Nussbaum music unveils 'hidden movements of love and fear and joy' (254), highlighting its unique emotional depth.

In online contexts, this affective power translates into fan practices such as YouTube reaction videos, which allow fans to share and build communities around their listening experiences (McDaniel 2020). TikTok, similarly, enables users to convey their musical connections through brief, creative formats that sit between reaction videos and personal vlogs, allowing fans to express their attachment and respond to music in visceral, visual, and textual ways. For instance, the use of on-screen text in TikTok videos allows fans to verbalize internal feelings and personal stories connected to the music, giving viewers a glimpse into the depth of their connection. The text function, combined with the platform's short video format, enables users to communicate affect concisely. While

platforms like YouTube have popularized music reaction videos, TikTok's unique features, including shorter video length and text overlay, foster a distinct mode of engagement where affect can be shared quickly and succinctly. Melissa Avdeeff's study on TikTok and Twitter responses to Taylor Swift's 'You Need to Calm Down' (Avdeeff 2021) demonstrates this, noting how TikTok users often go beyond the original themes to overlay culturally and historically embedded meanings on the song, transforming it into something universal and familiar.

This is particularly so in the context of affective processes linked to nostalgia and revival. As Kayla McCarthy (2019) argues, *Stranger Things* relies on a similar use of diegetic and cinematic styles to evoke the 'feeling of watching a film like *Alien* or *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* for the first time,' a nostalgia specifically crafted for 1980s 'geek' subculture. On TikTok, creators can tap into this same nostalgia, generating content that appeals to the contemporary 'geek' audience with a love for retro pop culture references and shared 'insider' knowledge about the era's iconic details.

This nostalgia is not, however, homogenous in kind. Svetlana Boym (2002) distinguishes between 'restorative nostalgia' which idealizes symbols from a bygone era, engaging with them in a largely sentimental way, and 'reflective nostalgia' which critically considers the past's complex narratives. Jones (2023), exploring the vectors and contexts of mediated nostalgia, identifies its three main forms: 'textual' (nostalgia for specific content), 'spatiotemporal' (nostalgia for how it was originally consumed), and 'communal' (nostalgia for the collective fandom experience). These taxonomies are important, as they as they enable a nuanced understanding of the different ways nostalgia operates within contemporary digital fandoms, particularly on platforms like TikTok.

At the same time, there is a notable gap in academic research specifically examining how short video-sharing platforms shape music fan engagement, especially in the context of nostalgia-driven music revivals. Existing studies have yet to fully address how TikTok's unique platform dynamics influence users' engagement with older songs that gain new relevance, particularly in terms of how fans use the platform's tools to connect emotionally with music from past decades. While some emerging works have begun to address this (for instance, Avdeeff 2022, on TikTok's music ecology and; Biasioli 2024, on the memeification of music on TikTok), research on TikTok's impact on music fandom remain limited, leaving considerable room for further exploration.

Methodology

In this study, we extend this body of research by examining how TikTok users engage with a nostalgic music revival, offering insights into how the platform facilitates new expressions of music fandom and fosters intergenerational connections.[2] We examined TikTok videos tagged with the hashtag #runningupthathill to explore patterns of user engagement and creativity. A total of 442 videos were analysed as part of the sample. The content analysis was designed to address the central research question: *How do TikTok users engage with and creatively respond to the viral resurgence of 'Running Up That Hill' through video production?*

To obtain the initial sample, the most-liked TikTok videos with the hashtag #runningupthathill were scraped via Apify Console using the TikTok web scraper, generating an initial pool of 500 videos. Our initial web scrape yielded 970 videos, from which we

examined those with over 10,000 likes ($N = 842$) and over 150 shares ($N = 604$), limiting the sample to top 500 videos. Of this set, 58 videos became unavailable during the coding process due to factors such as account deletions, content removal, or privacy restrictions, leaving a final sample of 442 videos. For each TikTok we collected metadata (such as video creator, length, number of likes or shares) as well as two top user comments on each video in order to capture audience reaction.

The videos were first coded and analysed through content analysis, driven by the overarching research question on user engagement, creativity, affect and nostalgia. The codebook was developed with these dimensions in mind, capturing variables such as the presence/absence of the creator on screen, themes used in the videos, references to other content or the type of audio used in the video.

Prior to full-scale coding, a pilot study allowed us to assess the reliability of the codebook though intercoder reliability test conducted independently by the authors on a subset of the sample (10% = 50 videos with comments). Items which did not meet the 80% reliability criteria were removed from the study and coding ambiguities were resolved. The revised codebook was used to code all 442 videos and comments in the sample. After identifying prominent trends in TikTok videos through frequency analysis, a subsequent, qualitative analysis was conducted on a purposive sample of videos, representative of the most frequently observed trends.

Findings and discussion

The TikTok videos in our sample displayed significant diversity in terms of length, popularity, and engagement metrics. Videos received between 40,000 and 2.6 million likes, with an average of 184,000 likes, and between 150,000 and 41.2 million plays (with an average of 1.5 million plays). The number of shares ranged from 16 to 40,000, with an average of 2,600. Video length also varied, from as short as five seconds to as long as 224 seconds, with an average length of 38 seconds and a median of 23 seconds. While some the videos featured the creator appearing on camera, this was less common than we had anticipated, with only 17% of TikToks in the sample including on-camera appearances by the creator. This finding is noteworthy in light of discourses surrounding 'selfie culture,' often informed by psychology studies (cf. Seidman 2020), which associate the self-presentation aspects of social media content production with frivolity and narcissism. The focus on content over overt self-presentation indicates a potentially more complex set of motivations among users engaging with nostalgic music on TikTok. We will now discuss in more depth the two key threads that emerged from the analysis: platform-enabled musical creativity, and affective connections with music.

Platform-enabled musical creativity

TikTok's structure encourages users to experiment with music creatively, using tools like duet, stitch, and sound overlays to interact with songs in unique ways, allowing them to adapt the song to connect with their personal interests, investments and desires. In our sample, users reinterpreted 'Running Up That Hill' through cover versions (14%), mash-ups (8%), and imaginative videos tied to *Stranger Things*' plot or mood (8%). For example, users crafted creative tributes that interwove their personal narratives (for instance,

personal milestones, life updates, challenges, or aspirations) with scenes from *Stranger Things*. Such visual storytelling allowed users to explore elements of their identities and fandoms, merging the original song's meaning with personal narratives and experiences.

In the sample, three distinct types of creativity emerged

Creativity related to Stranger Things content

A significant number of users creatively linked the song to *Stranger Things* through fandom-related content. This category includes skits inspired by popular characters or plot elements from the series (such as the monster Vecna), analyses of favourite episodes with the song as an emotional underlay, or recreations of pivotal scenes from the series. These videos reflect the cultural power of *Stranger Things* as an anchor for fan expression; references to the series assumed the audience familiarity with the themes and built on them for dramatic or comedic effect.

Creativity related to the song itself

Here, creators focused directly on the song, producing content such as cover versions, mash-ups, and translated or genre-shifted adaptations. In such videos the performance was the main creative outlet, allowing users to engage with the song's musicality through original vocal or instrumental arrangements, remixes, or visuals linked to the lyrics. These performances amplified personal interpretations of the song, often adding elements of contemporary context to add new layers to the song's cultural meaning.

Unrelated creativity and algorithm gaming

Some users employed popular hashtags like #StrangerThings or #RunningUpThatHill to gain visibility for unrelated content. This 'system-gaming' approach demonstrated how TikTok's algorithm rewards strategic hashtag use, allowing creators to leverage trending topics – even without a thematic connection to Stranger Things or the song – as a means to maximize engagement.

The range of *musical* creativity in the sample showcased diverse ways of interacting with 'Running Up The Hill'. While many videos used Kate Bush's vocals unchanged (36% of TikToks), focusing instead on visual editing and the use of overlay text. Cover versions by TikTok creators were common (14% of the videos featured creator-produced covers while 5% included covers not done by the TikTok creator) yet diverse. Nine percent of the videos were covers using new vocals and instrumentation whereas mash-ups made up eight percent of the videos. Less common but nonetheless present were videos featuring acapella singing (4%), instrumental-only versions (3%) or new lyrics over Bush's original melody (2%).

In addition to musical creativity, we observed a strong trend of intertextuality, in which videos referenced other cultural texts, integrating elements from diverse sources and fandoms. Drawing on Kristeva's (1984) concept of intertextuality, this demonstrated how music – and fan texts more broadly – gain meaning through their relationship to other media or texts. A prominent trend in the analysed videos involved referencing other artists, multimedia franchises or genres. Here, creators designed audiovisual mash-ups or layered visual references that connected the song to narratives, characters or aesthetics not directly related to Kate Bush or *Stranger Things*. For example, videos included

recreations of *Stranger Things* scenes using Roblox or pairing a summary of an anime narrative with Running Up That Hill as background music. Needless to say, audience familiarity with all the referenced media was a prerequisite to full enjoyment of such TikToks; appreciation for 'Easter eggs' or unexpected twists embedded in the content by the creators was enhanced by specific lore knowledge. As such, TikTok videos referencing *Stranger Things* or 'Running Up That Hill' often functioned as collaborative works in progress, in line with the concept of fandom as a multi-authored, iterative phenomenon. This resonates with Stein and Busse's (Stein and Busse 2009) and Booth's (2010) exploration of fan texts as fluid and multi-authored 'works in progress', echoing Hellekson and Busse's (2006) insights on the dynamic nature of fan creation.

Affective connection with the music

The second prominent thread in the sample was the strong affective connection creators and audiences expressed to the song. Affect lies at the heart of music fandom on TikTok, where 'Running Up That Hill' has prompted profound emotional investment among fans, blending personal sentiment with collective expression. The platform's tools allowed users to creatively explore and share their emotional responses to the song in both visual and sonic formats through TikTok's duet, stitch, and audio-mixing features. By creating covers, sharing reaction videos, or accompanying the song with imagery that reflects their personal experiences, fans communicated deep affective connections with the music.

Many videos revealed a deep-seated emotional attachment to the song, heightened by its association with *Stranger Things*. TikTok's text-overlay feature allowed users to add captions, personal reflections, or backstories related to the song, giving viewers insight into their individual connections. This technique allowed users to articulate nostalgia, emotional vulnerability, or personal anecdotes, effectively making the song a medium for affective expression. For instance, some users used the song as a backdrop for introspective storytelling, sharing memories or emotions tied to themes of love, struggle, or resilience that they felt the song captured.

The most prominent categories where the song was used in affective ways were connected to *Stranger Things*. In this sense, the song was used as a key theme connecting with the show and as a shorthand to connect with the characters and narrative. This also appeared as stirring strong emotion, evoking the particular scene where the song was used in the show as a key plot device to defeat the evil Vecna, and consequently connecting the fan more deeply with the character of Max and the diegetic use of the song in the narrative of the series. A common trope in such videos was creators using the character of Vecna to explore personal struggles of Stranger Things protagonists but also to highlight the broader theme of music as a tool for coping with adversity. Others used Vecna as target for comic relief, humorously questioning Vecna's behaviour and abilities or imagining alternative reactions if Vecna had heard a different song instead of 'Running Up That Hill.'

In addition to TikToks that used *Running Up that Hill* to more deeply connect with the *Stranger Things* universe and characters, we also found that some fans used the song and its placement within the narrative as a bridge for introspection and connection to their personal story. In these instances, fans connected with the lyrics of the song and applied these to personal experiences and situations. For example, two videos in the sample

focused on the illness of a family member, with the specific lyrical fragment conjuring a visual plea to swap places with the other person. One of the videos featured scenes assembled perfectly alongside the lyrics, affectively connecting to them: 'it's you and me' is illustrated with a scene of the TikTok creator and their wife together, which then shifts to a shot of the creator in front of a church with the words 'should have happened to me, not her!' appearing as text on the screen, as the 'if I only could, I'd make a deal with God' lyrics are sang. As the song shifts to the next line ('we'd be running up that road, running up that hill, be running up that building') we see shots of the video creator running, screaming, then kneeling in front of a church. All of this is affectively aligned, visually and textually applying and connecting the song and its lyrics to the emotive personal situation of the video creator, who labels the video with 'my take on this song'.

Another theme we observed in our analysis of the videos and comments was TikTok as a space where intersecting fandoms come together for affective expression. Analysis of the top comments under the TikToks shows that reactions to the TikTok creator, cover, or video dominated (52% and 57% for the first and second most popular comments, respectively). These reactions often highlighted the personal affective connections, whether through engagement with the performance, or acknowledgement of creative efforts. Additionally, comments frequently focused on the music itself or specific scenes from *Stranger Things* (19% and 18%). Other types of comments indicated viewers' role in adding factual information or context to videos (8% and 7%) or making requests (10% and 7%), such as asking creators to perform specific covers or engage with other fandoms.

Overall, commenters generally focused on the primary area of interest associated with the TikTok creator's community. For instance, comments under musician-created videos often centred on aspects like vocals or arrangement, whereas comments under videos by Stranger Things fans or film enthusiasts tended to discuss cinematography or the emotional tone of a scene. However, this separation was not absolute, as cross-fandom interactions frequently emerged in the comments, leading to discussions that bridged these interests. One notable tactic observed was 'commenting to stay,' where users left comments to keep the video in their feeds or to enhance its algorithmic ranking.

Nostalgia and affect in music revival

The resurgence of 'Running Up That Hill' illustrates not only the return of a classic 1985 track to contemporary charts but also highlights the role of digital platforms such as TikTok in fostering cross-generational narratives and re-contextualizing iconic works. Through *Stranger Things*, the songs re-entered the cultural landscape inspiring younger audiences unfamiliar with Kate Bush's music. On TikTok, this resurgence expanded across various creative communities, from DIY and cooking creators to performance artists, media critics, Roblox and Minecraft fandoms. Such convergences underscore TikTok's capacity for intertextuality through its interface and affordances, allowing users from diverse fan communities to remix content across contexts and engage in cross-thematic storytelling.

A notable trend among TikTok creators observed in the sample was the playful evocation of 1980s aesthetics celebrated in *Stranger Things*, but often without the era's cultural or political complexities. In such videos, creators frequently re-created the decade's visual markers – denim jackets, bedroom decor, vibrant make-up,

cassette tapes – in line with what Boym (2002) calls 'restorative nostalgia': an uncritical, sentimental celebration of markers of an era. For example, one video was framed as a 'summer day in 1986' and invited viewers to imagine themselves experiencing a carefree 1980s moment. The creator used 1980s video aesthetics by adding a VCR 'play' symbol in the top right-hand corner of the screen and showed scenes of themselves in 1980s clothing, applying make-up, using a cassette player, and getting an ice-cream. The visuals, paired with "Running Up That Hill' as the soundtrack, were designed to evoke an immersive 1980s summer day experience, further enhanced by the point-of-view filming style, which places the viewer within the scene. In a similar vein, some creators used grainy filters to mimic vintage media, evoking the sensory quality of older formats and enhancing the nostalgic effect. Certainly, this mode of nostalgia aligns with what Hassler-Forest (2020) discusses as *Stranger Things*'s general tendency to idealize the period without critically engaging with the neoconservative politics of the 1980s, which it instead portrays as a romanticized fantasy setting. For TikTok audiences, this revival of nostalgic aesthetics offered content that blended a vision of the past as imagined by both the series and the TikTok creators themselves, who reconstruct its visual allure without delving into historical critique.

Returning to Jones's (2023) three forms of nostalgia—*textual*, *spatiotemporal*, and *communal*—we see now how these categories further refine our understanding of users' affective ties, revealing them to be nuanced and shaped by both personal and collective experiences. Textual nostalgia and the focus on the song itself appeared prominently among creators who either experienced Running Up That Hill when it was originally released, using their TikToks to recall this connection to the song, or who bridged the past and present through creative music arrangements. Spatiotemporal nostalgia captures those recreating the song's original listening context, with symbolic use of cassette players, radio, or other retro sound equipment, evoking the ways music was once primarily consumed. This emerged in videos that highlighted modes of listening and referenced a time when pop chart placements held heightened cultural significance. Through this lens, nostalgia was expressed not only towards the content or genre of the music but also for an older medium through which it was originally played. This affective engagement with the past reflects the findings by van der Hoeven (2018) on sensory and sound-based memory and by Lepa and Tritakis (2016) on the embodied experience of vinyl listening, indicating that musical nostalgia is shaped as much by sound as by the sensory specifics of its original medium. Communal *nostalgia*, meanwhile, addresses TikTok's social dynamics, where fans in comments may bond over shared memories and collectively construct a digital fandom experience that revives and reinterprets the past.

Reflecting on nostalgia's role in identity formation, Tia DeNora (2000, 63) has noted that music serves as a powerful tool for 'the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is,' allowing listeners to anchor their sense of self through music's symbolic qualities. For some TikTok creators, 'Running Up That Hill' represented not only an emotional tie to Stranger Things and the 1980s but also an exploration of identity through digital music fandom. By incorporating 1980s-style elements and remixing 'Running Up That Hill' within new contexts, creators engaged in a hybrid identity performance, blending personal histories with new cultural artefacts and themes. Nostalgia here flew in two directions: one tied to *Stranger Things* and its evocation of the past, and another anchored

more specifically to the music itself and the material culture through which it was once experienced.

Conclusion: creators, audiences and TikTok

This study has discussed TikTok as a dynamic and participatory platform where music fans engage in visual and sonic forms of creative expression. We have seen that TikTok allows users to explore personal investments through 'Running Up That Hill' through the platform's creative tools. Specifically, we have argued that two main threads impacted and fostered meaning for music audiences on TikTok: (1) platformed possibilities for creativity where audiences adapt the song to connect with their personal interests, investments and desires and (2) affective nostalgia and connection to the song itself. Our analysis reveals a convergence between platformisation (Poell, Nieborg, and van Dijck 2019) and music understood as a link between identity, self-creation and maintenance (DeNora 1999). As an interjection into popular music audience studies, the research contributes needed empirical work on music and TikTok users, outlining new patterns about the relationship between popular music and digital spaces for fandom, creativity and affect in a digital society.

This convergence between platformisation and musicking was particularly visible in instances where the platform enabled users to apply the meanings of a song not only within the context of the music itself but also to broader contexts, such as other media franchises or personal life experiences. Such flexibility allowed users to embed their own interpretations and emotions into their content, forming intertextual layers that connect the music with diverse narrative contexts. For instance, as discussed in the article, users recontextualised 'Running Up That Hill' in fan edits connected to film or television franchises, or used the song to express personal emotional struggles. Such example demonstrate the platform's capacity to foster intertextuality, blending audio and visual storytelling to create new, culturally resonant meanings with audiences. As a result, music fandom on TikTok emerges as a complex intersection of affective engagement, personal creativity, and self-expression. This fluidity encourages fans to explore multiple layers of meaning within their content, positioning TikTok as a space where audiences can interact through shared, negotiated and occasionally contested cultural references.

The re-emergence of Kate Bush's *'Running Up That Hill'* on platforms like TikTok exemplifies the evolving dynamics of music revival in the digital age. The song's resurgence, spurred by its prominent inclusion in *Stranger Things* Season Four opened new creative opportunities for both audiences and content creators on TikTok. This revival highlights how digital platforms can bridge temporal and cultural gaps, as well as fandoms, blending genre and time to generate innovating forms of audiovisual engagement and creativity.

For creators, this kind of revival offers significant opportunities. TikTok's diverse user base enables creators to engage multiple demographics – young audiences drawn to *Stranger Things* and older fans nostalgic for the 1980s. The popularity of '*Running Up That Hill'*, as noted by Avdeeff (2022, 11), can be attributed to Millennial and Gen X nostalgia for the music of their youth, as well as the imagined nostalgia of Gen Z for the late 80s and early 90. In our study, we observed how such cross-generational appeal creates a cyclical relationship

between past and present as younger users react to older music, often performing their first-time responses in formats that engage fans from both demographics. This intertextuality allows creators to bridge generational gaps, engage with multi-faceted audiences, and capitalize on the revival's resonance with both music fans and *Stranger Things* viewers. The intertextual nature of the song's revival allows different groups – whether fans of the original track, *Stranger Things* enthusiasts, or niche TikTok communities – to find points of entry into the conversation. These affordances democratize content creation by offering diverse avenues for participation, ranging from emotional expression to fannish creativity.

However, our analysis has also revealed tensions between TikTok's creative potential, platform infrastructure, and audience expectations. While TikTok provides a wide range of tools to facilitate user creativity, these same tools also impose constraints. For instance, the platform's algorithm has been noted to exert a significant influence on content visibility and engagement, often favouring specific types of content that align with its predefined patterns of popularity (Simpson and Semaan 2023). This algorithmic specificity can limit the diversity of creative expression, as users may feel pressured to conform to viral trends to increase their visibility (Bhandari and Bimo 2022). These constraints pose challenges for users seeking to explore more niche or personal interpretations of songs, as the platform's infrastructure may not always align with the creative freedom desired by its users. The razor-sharp precision of the algorithm, while beneficial for boosting visibility, can disrupt the user experience by limiting the diversity of content they are exposed to. Thus, while the revival fosters creative intertextuality, it may also challenge audiences by shaping their interactions in unintended ways. This tension between artistic freedom and algorithmic incentives reflects a broader issue in digital media ecosystems, where creators may compromise their creative vision to remain visible.

Here, it is important to note that our approach followed the #runningupthathill hashtag, which may not represent the primary mode of interaction for all TikTok users. While hashtags provide a useful tool for categorizing and discovering content, TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system plays a larger role in shaping user experience and content dissemination. This means that while hashtag-based content is significant and allowed us to capture various ways fans reinterpreted the song through covers or remixes (which would not have been captured by following a single sound), it does not fully encapsulate the richness of user engagement with a particular song or trend on the platform. Consequently, future research might consider alternative ways of tracking user interaction on TikTok to capture a more holistic view of platform dynamics.

Ultimately, this research highlights emerging patterns that expand our understanding of the relationship between popular music and digital spaces for fandom, creativity, and emotional expression in a digital society. Future research could build on these findings by incorporating qualitative interviews with both creators and audiences to explore the nuanced ways they engage with revivals like 'Running Up The Hill'. Additionally, further investigation into the role of the TikTok algorithm in shaping both creative production and audience experience would offer a more comprehensive view of the platform's influence on digital music revivals.

Notes

1. We will set aside a detailed discussion on how chart calculations work, including the Standard Chart Ratio system, which calculates the streaming-to-sales ratio as higher for older releases, unless a manual reset is applied, as was the case here. Suffice it to say, 'Running up that Hill' experienced a significant surge in streams after a lengthy hiatus.
2. We consider fans as individuals who have an affective tie to the song, the artist, or the television programme and may possess fan knowledge. However, recognizing the heterogeneity of the platform's user base and that, using our approach, not every user can be presumed to be a fan, we incorporate the terms fan, user and audience throughout the article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

Avdeeff, Melissa. 2021. "TikTok, Twitter, and Platform-Specific Technocultural Discourse in Response to Taylor Swift's LGBTQ+ Allyship in 'You Need to Calm Down." *Contemporary Music Review* 40 (1): 78–98. https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2021.1945225.

Avdeeff, Melissa. 2022. "'The Music Ecology of TikTok' Popular Music Climates." *Proceedings from the XXI Biennial Conference of IASPM*, Daegu, South Korea, 5th –. 9th July 2022. https://iipc.utu.fi/iaspm2022/.

Ball, Philip. 2010. *The Music Instinct*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bhandari, Aparajita, and Sara Bimo. 2022. "Why's Everyone on TikTok Now? The Algorithmized Self and the Future of Self-Making on Social Media." *Social Media + Society* 8 (1). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221086241.

Biasioli, Marco. 2024. 'It Wasn't Our Song Anymore': Molchat Doma, the Death of the Reader and the Birth of the TikToker." *IASPM Journal* 14 (1): 151–171. https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871(2024)v14i1.10en.

Booth, Paul. 2010. *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*. New York: Peter Lang.

Boym, Svetlana. 2002. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

DeNora, Tia. 1999. "Music as a Technology of the Self." *Poetics* 27 (1): 31–56. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(99)00017-0.

DeNora, Tia. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambriodge University Press.

Frith, Simon. 1996. "Music and Identity." In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by S. Hall and P. du Gay, 108–127. London: Sage.

Hassler-Forest, Dan. 2020. "'When You Get There, You Will Already Be there': Stranger Things, Twin Peaks and the Nostalgia Industry." *Science Fiction Film and Television* 13 (2): 175–197. https://doi.org/10.3828/sfftv.2020.10.

Hellekson, Karen, and Kristina Busse. 2006. "Introduction: Work in Progress." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 5–32. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

Jones, Bethan. 2023. 'I'll See You Again in Twenty Five Years': Life Course Fandom, Nostalgia and Cult Television Revivals." *Open Cultural Studies* 7 (1). https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2022-0169.

Kennedy, Melanie. 2020. "'If the Rise of the TikTok Dance and E-Girl Aesthetic Has Taught Us Anything, it's That Teenage Girls Rule the Internet Right now': TikTok Celebrity, Girls and the Coronavirus Crisis." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23 (6): 1069–1076. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420945341.

Khomami, Nadia. 2022. "Kate Bush Reaches UK No 1 with Running Up That Hill After 37 Years." https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/jun/17/kate-bush-uk-no-1-running-up-that-hill.

Klein, Bethany. 2022. "TikTok's Use of Music Poses a Threat to Artistic Diversity – an Expert Explains Why." https://theconversation.com/tiktoks-use-of-music-poses-a-threat-to-artistic-diversity-an-expert-explains-why-196314.

Kristeva, Julia. 1984. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lamerichs, Nicolle. 2018. *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Lepa, Steffen, and Vlasis Tritakis. 2016. "Not Every Vinyl Retromaniac is a Nostalgic: A Social Experiment on the Pleasures of Record Listening in the Digital Age." *Medien & Zeit* 31 (4): 16–30.

McCarthy, Kayla. 2019. "Remember Things: Consumerism, Nostalgia, and Geek Culture in *Stranger Things*." *Journal of Popular Culture* 52 (3): 663–677. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12800.

McDaniel, Byrd. 2020. "Popular Music Reaction Videos: Reactivity, Creator Labor, and the Performance of Listening Online." *New Media and Society* 23 (6): 1624–1641. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820918549.

Nussbaum, Martha C. 2001. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Poell, Thomas, David Nieborg, and José. van Dijck. 2019. "Platformisation, Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society, Berlin." *Internet Policy Review* 8 (4): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1425.

Sadler, Olivia. 2022. "Defiant Amplification or Decontextualized Commercialization? Protest Music, TikTok, and Social Movements." *Social Media + Society* 8 (2). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221094769.

Sandvoss, Cornel. 2005. *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Seidman, Gwendolyn. 2020. "Personality Traits and Social Media Use." In *The International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology*, edited by J. Bulck. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119011071.iemp0295.

Simpson, Ellen, and Bryan. Semaan. 2023. "Rethinking Creative Labor: A Sociotechnical Examination of Creativity & Creative Work on TikTok." *Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '23)*. Association for Computing Machinery, 1–16 244, New York, NY, USA, Article. https://doi.org/10.1145/3544548.3580649.

Sloboda, John. 2010. "Music in Everyday Life: The Role of Emotions." In *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications*, edited by P. N. Juslin and J. A. Sloboda, 493–514. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover: University Press of New England.

Stein, Louisa, and Kristina Busse. 2009. "Limit Play: Fan Authorship Between Source Text, Intertext, and Context." *Popular Communication* 7 (4): 192–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/15405700903177545.

van der Hoeven, Arno. 2018. "Songs That Resonate: The Uses of Popular Music Nostalgia." In *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music History and Heritage*, 238–246. Routledge. http://hdl.handle.net/1765/106586.