derlying agenda behind TikTok's content moderation practices. Kellin Hanas, for instance, hypothesizes that TikTok may, on occasion, deliberately impede the success of specific content creators. Despite having generated multiple viral videos over an extended period, she suddenly found herself unable to replicate this success and failed to maintain her usual level of engagement with her followers:

> For a while I was getting millions of views over and over. I was, like, this is great. And it really gives you that high. It's amazing. And then all of a sudden, one day, TikTok just ends it. They're, like, no more for you, which doesn't make any sense. I have 155,000 followers right now or something. They do this thing where they kind of cut you off from the views and so you go, oh, well, I got 5 million views on my last video, but this one only got 30,000. What happened? […] I mean, pretty much unless you're one of those very few TikTok creators that just blows up and keeps going and going and going and going, TikTok is just, like, alright, you had your month of fame, now we're done with you. So it kind of stinks. (Kellin Hanas, interview)

Stella Cole articulates a comparable perspective, yet she also delineates the specific circumstances of relying on platform algorithms to disseminate her musical compositions:

> It can be frustrating when you have, like, 100,000 followers, but because of the algorithm, only 10,000 people are seeing your stuff and you're, like, I know that all 100,000 of these people or all now 275,000 of these people chose to follow me and want to know when I have music coming out. But I can't reach them. I can't reach out to every person because this is an algorithm and this is an app. Only, you know, 10, 20% of my followers are going to see this video. (Stella Cole, interview)

6.4 Professionalizing on TikTok

The pursuit of success delineated in the preceding section also signifies that the interviewees began professionalizing their work on the platform at an early stage of their TikTok careers. This may involve purchasing specialized equipment and software for audio and video recording and editing, formulating customized staging techniques on the platform, and developing a meticulous approach to the creation of new videos. Some of the interviewees derive income

from their music or are pursuing studies in music. For these individuals, it has become a matter of course that professional and long-term work in the music industry necessitates, among other things, effective self-presentation in digital spaces. Consequently, the standards for their own TikTok videos are frequently exceedingly high.

6.4.1 Producing Multiple Versions of Single Videos

Despite the common perception of TikTok as a platform for frivolous content and a lack of association with professionalism, the results of the interviews indicate that content creators often invest significant amounts of time and effort into their videos. In discussing the production process of the videos, the majority of interviewees recalled the frequently lengthy procedures that precede the final published videos. It is uncommon for musicians to complete a video recording in a single take. Typically, multiple versions of a video are produced, with the number of versions varying considerably. In some cases, up to fifty versions may be created. The interviewees emphasize their rapidly increasing quality standards, such as Rachel Chiu with regard to her viral video of the Ellington song "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got that Swing)" (Chiu 2021a). Although Rachel initially indicated that she was reluctant to post the video and that the quality could have been better, she needed numerous attempts before achieving a satisfactory outcome: "I think I've filmed it probably 20 times before I posted the one I liked." Sam Ambers articulates a comparable viewpoint regarding his inaugural viral video (Ambers 2021a). He was acutely aware of the possibility of achieving success with this video, which is why the video is founded upon a certain degree of quality:

> I could pretend and say that this video was completely just off the cuff, but we did about 15, 20 takes. […] There was a little bit of thinking behind it and it would take a long time to do because I'd either blink or the singing would be bad or there'd be something off with the recording. And so I remember I was getting really frustrated with that particular video. It took a long time to do it. (Sam Ambers, interview)

It is noteworthy that these two videos rank among the most popular jazz videos on TikTok, and both are included in the top one hundred videos that form the basis of the corpus analysis for this study. Upon initial observation, the production appears relatively straightforward, as no discrete audio tracks were

recorded and no specialized lighting, such as a ring light, was utilized in the respective rooms. Nevertheless, even ostensibly straightforward videos can conceal a considerable amount of effort and a particular vision of the final outcome. In some instances, a sense of aspiration has led to the development of a relatively sophisticated system of video production. Rachel Chiu delineates the processes she has developed over time to create her TikTok videos:

> I film on TikTok with three minutes because you could choose 15 seconds, 60 seconds and three minutes. I always do three minutes in case it goes over time, so it doesn't cut me off. And then afterwards, I will trim it down but usually I record it before looking at it, I just keep recording it. I record maybe 30 times, sometimes. Nowadays, I don't have enough time. So I usually just record it once or twice, but back then I would record it up to 30 times. And then I will review each video and think, okay, I didn't like this part. Let's see if I can fix it in the next part. And then I slowly delete the ones I don't like, that I know for sure I don't like. I usually reduce it down to three options. And then with those three, I really sit on it and then I pick the one that I really like. (Rachel Chiu, interview)

Rachel is not alone in this regard. Brooklyn Stafford, for instance, delineates her production process in a comparable fashion. In particular, her description reveals the rigorous standards she sets for her musical and instrumental performance:

> I take a lot of takes when I do these TikToks. Sometimes I could take 50 takes just to get the right one because you only see the good, the end result. But I make a lot of mistakes. When I do takes, I mess up here and there. I don't have the energy right. I don't feel confident in a video. […] I make a lot of mistakes, you know, and you have to do those takes until you get it right. (Brooklyn Stafford, interview)

It is evident that this high standard extends beyond the domain of musical performance. Brooklyn's delineation of the production process highlights the role of non-musical elements in the long time it takes to record a TikTok video. According to Brooklyn, the first step is to come up with a basic musical idea, with this initial idea usually coming from "screwing around on the piano." Subsequently, a preliminary version is recorded on Snapchat, as this application provides the required storage capacity. Only then does the actual production process begin:

> And then the third step is I kind of wait a day. Usually, I do not record the day that I come up with the idea because first of all, I need to practice it over and over and over to make sure I know it. So it usually will take maybe a day, tops two days for me to actually record it. Rarely, I do it the day that I actually come up with that idea. It's very, very rare. And then the fourth step is getting ready for playing the piano, right? So I do my makeup, I do my hair, I get my outfits together, and then I go to the practice room. […] I get my ring light and my tripod and then I start doing the takes. […] It can take three hours for me to get a take that I want because at the same time, I'm practicing it. Sometimes I make mistakes and I have to retake it. And then every single time I have to keep that same energy, right? […] I can be really frustrated with the take. You'd be like upset, but then I'll be, like, smiling and be happy in the video, right? And it takes a lot of – I would say acting, but also, like, make it kind of, like, a meditation in a sense, where you have to not be angry or upset or frustrated when it's, like, an hour or two and you're not getting the takes you want and you're, like, oh, screw it. I was so close to getting that perfect take. You have to just, like, get your energy back up and do the same take again. And you're doing that process for three hours and it can be kind of grueling sometimes. But you have to find what works. Every single take could be the take, right? And you have to make sure that the energy is there. (Brooklyn Stafford, interview)

The objective for Brooklyn is to establish a specific ambience or emotional tone in her videos, conveying the impression that the instrumental performance and production are effortless despite the demanding and occasionally stressful production standards. This is a specific challenge inherent to the production of TikTok videos, a sentiment that is echoed by numerous other musicians. Kellin Hanas, for instance, underscores the significance of precision in timing, particularly in the context of her comedic videos. According to Kellin, when a video contains a punchline, it is of particular importance to time the delivery of the punchline with precision while simultaneously conveying a sense of relaxation and humor. In her most successful video, titled "depressive episodes? no. j a z z," which had been viewed over five million times at the time of the interview, Kellin plays a fast bebop lick over a stock instrumental track of the jazz standard "Cherokee" before the video concludes with her emitting a scream (Hanas 2021b). Kellin delineates the production process of the nine-second clip as follows:

> I remember doing like 30 takes of that video. […] Because it's such a timing thing. And you have to do it in the right way. […] I just remember being, like, ok, where is the right time to come in on the backing track? Do I like what I played? Because, you know, every time it's going to be different and I'm going to be, like, well, I hated that. Let's try something else. You know, I was very self-conscious about the playing part and then also with the scream. If the scream is the comedic part of the video, then that has to be timed correctly and it has to sound right. And, you know, I would scream and I'd be, like, that was not the scream, that was too loud of a scream. That was too high pitched of a scream. You know, because you also don't want to annoy people. And I was very aware of that. I was, like, this has to be done in a specific way or people are going to get annoyed. But I don't want it to come off as annoying. I want it to come off as funny. […] I just remember doing it over and over and over again and I felt so bad for the people around me. They were probably listening to me play over "Cherokee" and scream for twenty, thirty minutes. (Kellin Hanas, interview)

A similarly meticulous approach is evident in several of her humorous videos. In another highly successful video (Hanas 2021a), titled "bop dooba doo da bwiada women in jazz babyy 👼🎺," Kellin is initially seen without her trumpet, addressing her TikTok audience with a spoken announcement: "Hi, my name is Kellin, I'm an eligible single lady looking for an eligible single man. I can cook, I can clean, and I can…" This is followed by a cut to Kellin performing a rapid bebop lick on the trumpet over a jazz instrumental track. The video offers an ironic commentary on certain gender stereotypes that persist in the discourse surrounding jazz. Kellin underscores the importance of timing, particularly in the context of such a combination of verbal and musical elements:

> It took me a little bit to record that. It had to have been at least an hour or an hour and a half, just because of the playing. Well, and even the acting at that point at the beginning, […] there were a lot of subtle things that I was doing, just in the way that I was standing, my tone of voice, my inflection, my phrasing. I did a little wink at one point and I was just, like, how do I get all these things? That stuff is calculated because I want to make sure that the joke lands, you know? So I filmed that one in two parts. This one had to be tiny bit edited. I filmed the first part by itself and then once I was happy with that, then I got the backing track out and started to record the trumpet part. The trumpet part always takes the longest because I'm so self-conscious about my playing. (Kellin Hanas, interview)

Producing TikTok videos can thus be a time-consuming process, not just due to the high expectations placed on the final result. Several interviewees noted that they create a significantly greater number of videos than they ultimately choose to post. Rachel Chiu, for example, points out that she has "400 drafts right now that I haven't posted," and that she only records these videos for personal use. Nevertheless, there are instances when copious quantities of videos are produced with the objective of ensuring the continuity of professional-grade content. When producing new videos, musicians are also sometimes dependent on certain external conditions, such as lighting, which have a not insignificant impact on the production of professional videos. Caity Gyorgy describes her production routines:

> On a typical day […] I will usually make quite a few TikToks. I rely on natural lighting in my apartment, so there's, like, between the hours of around, like, 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. when I have really nice light coming into my window. And I will create content for those few hours, and then put them in my drafts, and save them for later for the next week. (Caity Gyorgy, interview)

Concurrently, the production of multiple videos on a single day can be regarded as a strategy for balancing the demands of TikTok with the obligations of a career as a professional musician. Stella Cole emphasizes that TikTok represents merely one facet of her professional endeavors, which must be aligned with her other commitments:

> I'll usually film my content because of the way that an artist's schedule works or just anybody's schedule works. It's definitely difficult to film a new TikTok every day. So most of the time what I'll do when I'm posting really consistently is film a lot of TikToks in one batch and then sort of post throughout a week or so. (Stella Cole, interview)

While the aforementioned processes illustrate a degree of professionalization and formalization, some quotes indicate that spontaneity is also a significant factor in video production. For instance, Rachel Chiu states that her video, "My phone was at 1% ☹" (Chiu 2021a), which was exceptionally successful, was essentially spontaneous. In this video, Rachel accompanies herself on the keyboard. After a brief interval, the keyboard is augmented by a drum pattern stored on the device. Following the AABA form of the song "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got that Swing)," Rachel performs on the *mouth trumpet*, which

is to say, she imitates a trumpet with her voice. Although the selection of songs was spontaneous and the recording process was largely improvised, as previously described, the artist did not determine the precise musical interpretation of the song until the final stage of the production:

> [It was] a lot of experimentation. It definitely started very different. It was in a different key. It was in a different tempo. I sang different parts of the song to see which one I liked. And then I did up to posting the whole thing. And then I added mouth trumpet in the end. And the mouth trumpet parts are never written. It's always improvised. So you can see sometimes it's a little, like, I scoop notes because I'm not actually knowing where I'm going. I'm, like, oh, okay, I guess I'm going to this note. So that one was just improv. Which is really fun to me. So I ended up posting that one. I actually have another version that I loved a lot but I didn't like the trumpet part because I messed up on that one. So I ended up posting that one. (Rachel Chiu, interview)

Additionally, other interviewees assert that spontaneity is a crucial factor for creative ideation. "The ideas just come to me randomly," says Kellin Hanas, and Caity Gyorgy points out: "It's not really planned, it's pretty random, I guess." Consequently, although the production process may occasionally be protracted, spontaneous ideas and flashes of inspiration continue to exert a significant influence.

6.4.2 Recording Equipment

As indicated by the interviewees, the process of professionalizing production procedures on the TikTok platform entails acquiring a certain degree of technical proficiency in the utilization of software and hardware for audio and video recording and production. This occasionally gives rise to particular methods of utilizing the equipment that extend well beyond merely filming with a smartphone. In certain instances, the interviewees provide a comprehensive account of the actual processes involved in recording and editing. For instance, Stella Cole delineates how the production process has become increasingly intricate over time:

> It is a kind of a complicated process because I'm recording the video and audio with my phone, but also recording the audio linked up to my computer to GarageBand. And so then I have to edit them together and get the sound

> sync up to the video and then export that back to my phone and back to TikTok. So a lot of them might use a little bit more of a longer editing process, but I think it is worth it for the better sound quality. (Stella Cole, interview)

The use of audio software for post-production is a common practice among the interviewees, although not all of them adhere to a specific editing routine. Instead, they employ different recording methods on a case-by-case basis. Caity Gyorgy outlines her diverse approaches to this process:

> It really varies from video to video. Sometimes I use my iPhone. However, I have an iPhone 8 plus, and it's, like, quite a few years old. And now my microphone is starting to not work. So, I think I might get an upgrade to a better phone so I can make better TikToks and also just have more space. Because I keep running out of storage on my phone, but I use my iPhone camera and microphone. […] I have a few microphones that I will use. Like, if I'm feeling particularly adventurous than I will hook up my audio interface. I've got one I got at the beginning of the pandemic, a Behringer. […] And I have a really beautiful Neumann microphone that I absolutely love. […] I've got a really nice handheld that I'll use for videos. […] I have an Audio-Technica microphone that I've used before. […] And I'll just use that through the interface and then I'll go into Final Cut and I'll edit that way. I do a lot of stuff in Final Cut. I've gotten pretty fast at Final Cut over the past couple years actually, which is a very good skill to have. (Caity Gyorgy, interview)

Erny Nunez states that he initially used a karaoke machine to create his videos, particularly during the nascent stages of his TikTok career, before transitioning to alternative audio recording techniques. He recalls that the recording process was particularly time-consuming during that period:

> When I first started, I didn't really have any equipment at all. And so I used to get this karaoke, like, speaker thing and I used to connect my other phone to it. […] This took like 30 minutes to an hour every time to make a video back then. And I used to play the music recorded, like, over 20 times and find the perfect take. That's when I first started. As I got better and progressed, I got contacted by a fellow friend of mine […]. He called me and said: "Hey, kid, I really want you to be successful. And so come down to my place." […] I went down and he gave me this this whole entire, like, almost studio worth of equipment. […] That was the first time I ever started using equipment. I was still so used to using karaoke machines because I'm not that good with technology. (Erny Nunez, interview)

Other interviewees emphasize that they deliberately keep the recording process as simple as possible. "I've never used a mic, I don't think, on TikTok," says Kellin Hanas, while Rachel Chiu asserts that her relatively straightforward recording process facilitates the production of new videos, which she perceives as a benefit:

> I think I got very lucky that I don't have to put in a lot of effort in my video process. And I think there are shortcomings to it but there's also advantages to it because it makes it more easy to do anyway, but I don't have a crazy technical process. I literally balance my phone on my piano. […] And sometimes I have to stack up books and then just pop it up to whatever angle. (Rachel Chiu, interview)

6.4.3 Optimizing the Visual

While the aforementioned statements primarily address the audio recording process and its impact on video sound quality, the interviewees also highlight the significance of visual elements. Brooklyn Stafford, for instance, attributes her initial lack of success to the perceived lack of professionalism in the visual appearance of her videos: "A lot of them didn't get a lot of views in the beginning. I noticed my lighting setup was bad. I didn't clean up my look. It was a different look back then." While Brooklyn's primary focus here is on her appearance, she also provides detailed insights into the technical aspects of production, particularly in relation to lighting. She subsequently began devoting attention to the visual aspects of her videos, investing in equipment with the objective of enhancing the overall professional quality of her output:

> I purposefully changed it up. I got a tripod, I got an LED light, because I wanted to make sure my face was fully in cover. And if you'll notice from the very first TikTok that I did to that one that would go viral, I did, like, a few things that were different, right? The lighting was different. I made sure to clean up my look because whether we like it or not, TikTok and social media is focused on whether you look good. (Brooklyn Stafford, interview)

While Brooklyn discusses certain concepts of physical attractiveness that are pervasive and socially prevalent in the context of social media, other interviewees also note the importance of visual details that are not directly related

to aspects of physical attractiveness. Kellin Hanas, for example, describes how the camera angle can be a significant factor in the production of TikTok videos:

> Probably the most time-consuming thing is figuring out the angle that I want it at. People kind of underestimate what a difference the video angle makes. And I think, you know, obviously I want to present myself in the best way. I also want to make sure that the framing is good. So it takes a lot of me if I'm filming in my dorm room, I'll take a music stand and put my phone up on a music stand and just move it around different places and see where is the most desirable place to film this. (Kellin Hanas, interview)

In this context, Stella Cole discusses her experience in the entertainment industry outside of TikTok. According to Stella, looking professional is a standard expectation in the acting and music industries, and she incorporates this into her work on TikTok, which contributes to the perceived level of professionalism in her videos:

> I think maybe they're more professional because I come from a background in acting and musical theater. And when you're auditioning and sending in a self-tape, professionalism and looking professional is very important. Like, the way that your video is set up in the theater and the TV film world is very important. And so I've just sort of applied that same mentality to TikTok, I think. I have, like, a ring light that I use and sometimes if I'm feeling more creative or have more time than I'll, you know, set up a couple of different lights and get some colors going. […] Yeah, I care about how it looks. I think that matters. And I think it adds to the whole vibe and experience. (Stella Cole, interview)

6.4.4 Critical Perspectives on Older Videos

In light of the aforementioned professionalization processes and musicians' quality requirements, it is unsurprising that some of the interviewees retrospectively criticize their earlier videos. The TikTok platform facilitates specific learning processes, whereby early uploads may appear inadequate to the interviewees after a few months or a year or two. The reasons for this critical perspective vary and can be linked to the vocal or visual quality of older videos, for example. Referring to his first viral TikTok video (Ambers 2021a), Sam Ambers acknowledges: "Looking back now, I cringe massively. I think anyone would cringe, to be fair. But, you know, in those earlier days, I didn't care what

I posted. There was no real-life implication to what I posted. So, you know, I didn't understand really what TikTok was back in the day." In contrast, Stella Cole offers a critical assessment of her earlier work, particularly with regard to her vocal performance:

> Watching that video, my first response is, like, oh my God, I sound horrible. […] I've grown so much as a singer in the last couple of years. So TikTok is definitely an interesting way to, like, keep track of your progress. And it's interesting to look back at videos from a few years ago and be, like, I'm phrasing that so weird, why am I singing that up-tempo like a ballad, you know? (Stella Cole, interview)

6.5 Interacting with Users and the Algorithm

The process of professionalizing one's output on TikTok entails the development of a nuanced understanding of the platform's unique requirements. This encompasses not only navigating the intricacies of the platform's algorithmic system but also engaging with users. The musicians thus generally have both algorithmic and human actors in mind.

6.5.1 Trying to Identify Patterns for Success

All of the musicians interviewed described their focused and long-term observations of the platform's logic. Over time, as the interviews illustrate, certain patterns are discovered that are believed to make success more likely and which are then continuously repeated in a similar way. Consequently, the creation of platform-specific content is frequently predicated on specific assumptions regarding the functional logic of TikTok. The musicians interviewed individually identified disparate potential patterns of success, thereby demonstrating the impossibility of establishing a universal recipe that can be applied as often as desired in the context of jazz.

Kellin Hanas describes her experience in identifying patterns of success based on her previously discussed video captioned "depressive episodes? no. j a z z" (Hanas 2021b):

> A girl playing the trumpet, that's the first thing that catches their eye. They go: this is weird, because there's not a lot of us. […] Then they go: oh my God,