types is arising in the jazz popularity peaks on TikTok. In order to examine and contextualize these findings in greater depth, further qualitative empirical steps are necessary.

5.5   Interviews and Conversational Analysis

The corpus analysis facilitated the identification of the specific types of jazz-related content that are particularly popular on TikTok. However, the question of why this content is so successful on the platform remains unanswered. As outlined in chapter 3.7, qualitative research on the production logics of successful TikTok creators represents a suitable approach to gaining a deeper understanding of the platform-specific processes of popularization. In light of the secrecy that pervades platform companies and their sporadic bans on research projects that delve into specific platform logics (see Eriksson et al., 2019), it is logical to conclude that researchers cannot expect to acquire direct insights into the operational mechanics of algorithmic systems or the mechanisms through which specific platforms gain traction. One fruitful avenue of inquiry is to engage in close discourse with content creators who have achieved notable success on TikTok over an extended period. It would seem reasonable to suggest that such cultural workers have persistently and assiduously grappled with the logics of the platforms, amassed a portfolio of viral videos, and formulated well-defined notions about the logics of popularization in the context of platforms, shaped by their direct experience. Consequently, they possess a unique blend of specialized knowledge and experience that is typically beyond the reach of outsiders, including researchers.

For this reason, interviews were conducted with jazz musicians who have achieved notable success on TikTok. Subsequent to the corpus analysis, and in light of prior research on TikTok cultures, a number of specific inquiries emerged that were explored during the interviews. The following questions are of paramount importance to the research project: What are the key strategies for achieving and maintaining success in the realm of jazz on TikTok? How can jazz be effectively conveyed within the confines of a short-form video format? Which specific jazz repertoires and musical styles are particularly well-suited or ill-suited for presentation on TikTok? How should jazz musicians portray themselves on TikTok? Are there different requirements for female and male musicians, or for *white* creators and BIPoC? Additionally, it would be enlightening to understand the perspectives of musicians regarding the functioning

of the platform. Do they deliberately attempt to interact with the platform's algorithms, and if so, in what manner? Does success also depend on audience reactions, in addition to the algorithmic moderation of the platform? To what extent can musicians accurately ascertain the elements that resonate with the TikTok audience? Do they remain in the realm of assumption or fantasy, or do they develop concrete formulas for success or optimization? What is the relationship between the musicians' work on the platform and their activities outside of TikTok? Does a platform-specific style of jazz emerge on TikTok? And could the representation of jazz on TikTok potentially alter the perception of jazz beyond the platform?

As the analysis of interview data is an interpretive process, with the results being contingent on the interpretive work of the researcher, it is imperative to ensure transparency regarding the specific research procedure. The ideal procedure would be seamless and intersubjectively comprehensible (Steinke 2017). To this end, the entire process – from the selection of interview partners to the analysis of interview data – will be described in the following.

The results of the corpus analysis serve as a basis for the selection of interviewees. In the course of this step, a number of musicians were identified who can be considered as being prototypical within the chosen field of investigation. It should be acknowledged that only a relatively small number of potential interviewees has been selected on the basis of this step in the research process. However, in the context of qualitative methods, this is not problematic or unintentional, as the aim is to engage with meaningful individual cases in order to be able to address the respective research questions at the required level of detail. The selection of these musicians can be justified by the theoretical sampling approach derived from grounded theory. This sampling method involves the deliberate selection of a few prototypical individual cases during the process of data collection and analysis. The specific cases are selected for analysis on the basis of findings that have already been generated in the research process (Strübing 2022, 594). This applies to the selected musicians, as their selection was based on the corpus analysis and thus empirically grounded.

In the initial stage of the interview study, an effort was made to establish communications with the musicians identified as prototypical in the preceding chapter: Ricky Rosen (@rickyrosen), Stacey Ryan (@staceyryanmusic), Laufey (@laufey), Rachel Chiu (@rachelchiu1), Ebony Loren (@ebonylorenmusic), Sam Ambers (@sam_ambers), Stella Cole (@stellakcole), and Erny Nunez (@young_crooner). It was not feasible to establish communications with the musicians via TikTok, as the platform's messaging functionality was

limited to users who had established a direct connection. As the musicians maintained active Instagram accounts, an initial attempt was made to contact them through the platform's messaging feature, which yielded partial success. The musicians in question have amassed a considerable following on both TikTok and Instagram. Given the likelihood that they receive an overwhelming number of messages, particularly on Instagram, it was assumed that they would be unable to read or respond to them all. Consequently, efforts were made to contact them on other platforms where they had a smaller user base than on Instagram or TikTok. This is particularly the case with Facebook and X, but attempts to contact them via these platforms' messaging features were not successful. Some musicians provide email addresses on their TikTok profile or private website, and contacting them via email was successful in some cases. In other instances, multiple attempts were necessary to establish contact with musicians and arrange an interview, and sometimes involved different communication channels. As an alternative approach, efforts were made to liaise with the management or label in question if the musicians were already engaged in a comparable professional setting at the time of data collection for this study in the first months of 2022. This strategy proved effective in one instance.

However, only five of the musicians consented to be interviewed. Two of them disregarded all attempts to contact them, and one individual conveyed via their management that they were not inclined to participate in an interview. To conduct further interviews, additional musicians were contacted. The musicians in question were selected based on the results of the corpus analysis, which identified them as being among the top one hundred performers. Moreover, their videos display analogous characteristics to those of the musicians initially contacted, and they have attained a comparable level of success on TikTok: first, Brooklyn Stafford (@brooklyn.stafford), who appears on TikTok primarily as a pianist, but whose jazz-specific videos employ a similar repertoire to that of the aforementioned vocalists; secondly, trumpeter Kellin Hanas (@kellinhanas), who represents the humorous aspect of jazz on TikTok, while also performing older styles of jazz, particularly bebop; thirdly, singer Caity Gyorgy (@caitygyorgy), who is the sole interviewee not included in the top one hundred. The search for potential interviewees was expanded to include the hashtag #jazztok, which is frequently used by Caity Gyorgy. Her videos are similar in style to those of the aforementioned prototypical musicians and have a comparable reach. The following musicians were ultimately interviewed (in alphabetical order): Sam Ambers, Rachel Chiu, Stella Cole, Caity Gyorgy, Kellin

Hanas, Erny Nunez, Stacey Ryan, and Brooklyn Stafford. Some of the musicians have studied jazz at a post-secondary level, either at an undergraduate or graduate level (Caity Gyorgy, Kellin Hanas, and Stacey Ryan). One musician (Stella Cole) has pursued a degree in music and theater, also holding a B.A. in humanities. Another musician was pursuing a degree in music management at the time of the interview (Brooklyn Stafford), and one interviewee has a degree in French and Family Studies and works as an elementary school teacher (Rachel Chiu). Two of the interviewees were not engaged in a particular educational context at the time of the interview (Sam Ambers and Erny Nunez). With the exception of one individual, the interviewees had received some form of classical musical training from an early age. However, this did not necessarily extend to the field of jazz. The interviewees hail from the United States (Stella Cole, Kellin Hanas, Erny Nunez, and Brooklyn Stafford), Canada (Rachel Chiu, Caity Gyorgy, and Stacey Ryan), and England (Sam Ambers). With the exception of the Canadian musician Stacey Ryan, who currently resides in Los Angeles, they all reside in their country of origin.

Due to logistical constraints, primarily related to the considerable distances involved (the author was based in Graz, Austria at the time), the interviews were conducted digitally via Zoom and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. One interview was considerably shorter, at only 30 minutes, due to the guidelines set out by the interviewee's management. The selected musicians have considerable expertise and knowledge in the context of jazz on TikTok, derived from their exceptional success in this field. They can therefore be considered experts in their field. Consequently, the procedure was based on the expert interview approach. The designation *expert* testifies to the musicians' distinctive role-related knowledge, which is shaped by their exceptional experience and unique position within the jazz music scene on TikTok (Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2021, 155–57). However, the term *expert knowledge* encompasses more than the mere possession of specialized knowledge by certain individuals. It also encompasses the potential for such knowledge to influence the practices of others. This implies that the actions of experts and their associated knowledge can also influence the actions of other actors (Bogner, Littig, and Menz 2014, 13). When applied to jazz on TikTok, this means that those creators who reach a particularly large number of people on the platform with jazz-related content can exert influence over the jazz-specific actions of other users due to the platform's emphasis on virality. To illustrate, the promotion of other users' viral videos or the incorporation of sounds and songs from the Great American Songbook may facilitate the dissemination

of these musical works on the TikTok platform. It can be postulated that the selection of these particular pieces is based on the musicians' prior experiences and understanding of the strategies that contribute to success in this domain. The insights of successful musicians – or experts – therefore promise to elucidate the specific processes through which the image of jazz on TikTok was created and subsequently consolidated.

The structure of expert interviews is typically defined in advance and arranged in a specific order, with a set of topics provided to guide the discussion. However, to ensure a productive and engaging interview, it is essential to maintain a certain degree of flexibility and openness. It is recommended that narrative-generating questions be posed to the interviewee in order to facilitate the development of a natural flow of discourse and the potential emergence of topics that are already outlined in the semi-structured interview guide. Nevertheless, the interview can be moderated to a certain extent, with the occasional targeted follow-up question permitted, provided that a relevant topic is addressed by the interviewee in a cursory manner and not pursued any further (Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2021, 158–62).

The interviews were conducted in accordance with the aforementioned scheme and augmented by *conversational analysis* segments. This entailed watching TikTok videos – predominantly those created and uploaded by the interviewees themselves – along with the interviewees, with a view to furnishing tangible reference points for the description of their own activities on TikTok. This approach was predicated on the assumption that concrete examples would facilitate a more detailed discussion of the interviewees' own work, as well as the background and success stories associated with their videos. Moreover, the objective was to prompt the interviewees to recall the production of specific videos. The procedure was based on the video-stimulated recall interview methodology (Messmer 2015; Naujoks, Weiß and Händel 2021; Nguyen et al. 2013). In accordance with this methodology, the participants and the researchers watch videos that depict the participants in particular scenarios and subsequently speak about their behavior in these scenarios. Optimally, the participants would be able to recall the thoughts they had in these scenarios, at least in greater detail than they would be able to without the use of a concrete memory aid (Back and Klose 2018, 40). In the case of TikTok videos, the decision-making process underlying the production of the videos is already complete, or at least approaching completion. This implies that, for instance, a musical composition or the contextual setting can be selected in advance, whereas particular movements, visual elements, or

auditory effects may be introduced extemporaneously. In the context of this study, it is of primary importance to facilitate a relaxed atmosphere through the use of media (TikTok videos), to provide concrete points of reference for the exchange of ideas about specific videos, and to create overall narrative stimuli.

The topics to be discussed in the interviews were developed and refined over the course of the research process. For example, the process of identifying relevant topics began with an initial exploration of the topic of jazz on TikTok. This was followed by a step-by-step elaboration through the reading of TikTok-related research literature, the development of initial hypotheses, and the corpus analysis. Consequently, the interviews were not entirely open, given the presence of pre-established research questions. However, a degree of openness was maintained, with the interviews structured according to the previously outlined criteria for guided expert interviews.

The interviews commenced with open questions pertaining to the musicians' musical careers, with a particular focus on their individual biographical connections to jazz. This was followed by an examination of the musicians' respective beginnings on TikTok, and a discussion of their first successes on the platform. Subsequently, inquiries were made regarding the genesis of their ideas and the production of their videos. This included questions about their sources of inspiration, the technical equipment they used, and the actual recording process. While these topics were discussed without viewing any videos, specific video examples were used in the following. For example, we first watched a video that was among the most popular content created by each interviewee. Subsequently, we analyzed the production process and the factors that could potentially have contributed to its virality. This approach facilitated the reconstruction of the specific mechanisms through which content gains popularity on TikTok. We then analyzed a video of the interviewees performing the jazz standard most popular on TikTok, according to the corpus analysis, namely "Fly Me to the Moon." The objective was to work with the musicians to examine the reasons behind the popularity of specific jazz repertoires on TikTok. Additionally, the discussion encompassed the potential benefits of performing one's own interpretations of jazz standards, the relatively low importance of original compositions and virtuosity, and the prevalence of humor in jazz performances on TikTok. Furthermore, videos were selected that illustrate specific techniques for fostering engagement, such as employing particular headlines or verbal announcements, or for enhancing the visibility of musicians through algorithmic practices, including

the utilization of specific hashtags. To address the topic of body norms and associated cultural hegemony, a video by Stella Cole was presented for discussion with all the musicians (Cole 2020). In this video, Stella eschews the elegant attire and cosmetics that are hallmarks of her style on TikTok, prompting her to question the video's suitability for the TikTok platform. This video was discussed as an illustrative example of the influence of conventional beauty standards on TikTok. Subsequently, further inquiries were formulated in the absence of video footage. These queries concentrated on the role of TikTok in the professional lives of the musicians, particularly in contexts beyond the platform itself, and the extent to which TikTok differs from other platforms such as Instagram, on which the musicians are also active. The interviews were conducted in accordance with the aforementioned scheme, with the specific procedure varying depending on the individual situation. While it is possible that the interviewees were reluctant to divulge certain details, the interviews were notable for a remarkable degree of candor and willingness to share information. The fact that the musicians occasionally expressed identical opinions on specific subjects indicates that the interview data is highly reliable. Furthermore, the criterion of empirical content saturation was met, as it became evident during the analysis of the interview data that conducting additional interviews would not have yielded any fundamentally new insights (Strübing 2014, 32).

The interviews were transcribed, and as with the videos, the transcriptions were then analyzed using MAXQDA software. The utilization of qualitative data analysis (QDA) software enables the organization of coding and categories, and most notably, the retrieval of text passages and codes. This significantly facilitates the analytical process, particularly when dealing with large volumes of textual data. The objective of this phase was to construct a thematic category system that could be utilized to organize the topics that were derived from the interview data. The process of developing the category system commenced with a review of the first sentences from each interview transcript. As soon as a particular topic was identified in the transcripts, the corresponding text passage was marked to define a thematic category to which the text passage was assigned. This process was repeated, and the category system was continually revised and refined until every text passage could be assigned to a thematic category. Following the completion of this step, a period of several weeks was allowed to elapse before the interviews were reread in their entirety and the category system was revised once more. A number of changes were made, and the work on the category system was not completed

until after this step (Hurst and Mayring 2005, 439). In essence, this was an inductive process, as the categories were derived from the empirical material and were not predetermined (Hurst and Mayring, 2005, 439). Nevertheless, various presuppositions or findings already generated during the corpus analysis guided not only the development of the interview guide but also the analysis of the interview data. Consequently, a strict model of qualitative data analysis was not adhered to, such as the method of qualitative content analysis (Hurst and Mayring 2005, 439). Rather, the procedure was operationalized throughout the research process in a manner that was sensitive to the specific subject under investigation. In the course of the analytical process, the following main categories were developed, which in turn were subdivided into numerous subcategories and sub-subcategories: (musical) biography; success on TikTok; production process; jazz repertoire on TikTok; specific demands on the musicians in the context of TikTok; TikTok-specific algorithmic practices; (gender) stereotypes, body norms and ideals of beauty; the relevance of TikTok for musicians and the extent to which TikTok could potentially influence the evolution of jazz or the perception of this musical culture – even beyond the platform.

As has already become evident, the selected interviewees constitute a relatively homogeneous group. This selection is not arbitrary but is based on previous empirical work. Furthermore, it can be justified by the specific research question of this study. This study focuses on the most popular musicians in the jazz field on TikTok. Consequently, it is essential to include these musicians in the discussion to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The empirical reconstruction of their knowledge should facilitate an understanding of the processes by which a particular image of jazz on TikTok is created and of the strategies that musicians must adopt in order to become visible on the platform with jazz-related content. Nevertheless, this methodology inevitably results in the exclusion of the voices of those who are not (or unable to be) as visible on TikTok. It is possible that the selected research design may contribute to the continued marginalization of specific groups on the platform. I am cognizant of this potential issue and wish to clarify that the findings of this study are limited to the specific area of investigation that I have chosen. It is imperative that the results be interpreted with a critical awareness of the cultural power of categories of social difference, such as gender and *race*. It is recommended that subsequent studies investigate other jazz-related phenomena on TikTok in greater detail. This should include musicians who, for various reasons, were not included in this study.

The results of the interview analysis are presented in the following chapter. Not all results can be presented in detail. The aim is to present the central topics on the basis of interview passages that are as representative as possible and to coherently link the content with each other.