big group of people who actually still appreciate jazz which I love. And that's something I'm trying to do. To keep that going, and find ways to incorporate it into my generation, and, you know, jazz isn't for old people, jazz is for everyone."

6.10 Summary of Interview Results

What facets of jazz are most visible on TikTok and why? Who is reaching a particularly large number of users on the platform with what jazz-related content? What do musicians do to be as visible as possible on the platform? What, then, is the image of jazz that emerges on TikTok? Given that the interviewees represent some of the most popular figures in the defined research field of jazz on TikTok, the results of this study are limited in their ability to provide generalizable insights into the practices of musicians in other contexts. However, the statements of the individual musicians on certain topics are occasionally strikingly similar, thus enabling the point of empirical saturation to be quickly reached during the course of the content analysis. This suggests that the findings can be regarded as representative, at least with respect to the selected research area (Strübing 2014, 32). The interview results demonstrate that jazz performances on TikTok are distinguished by particular socio-technical interaction processes between the platform, the musicians, and the TikTok users. These processes are contingent upon the algorithmic moderation of the TikTok platform, the format of the short-form video, the features and interface of the platform, the musicians' interpretations of the platform's logics, their claims to success, and the reactions of the users.

The statements of the musicians interviewed for this study can be related to the central concepts of current research on digital platforms – algorithmic culture, platform affordances, algorithmic imaginaries, and platform vernaculars – introduced in chapter 3.5. It is evident that a distinct algorithmic culture has emerged on TikTok in relation to jazz. This can be defined as a digital space in which platform algorithms and cultural workers interact closely. These interaction processes result in the formation of socio-technical constellations that could not arise in this form without the cooperation of human and non-human actors. It can be argued that the aforementioned phenomena are made possible by the typical platform mechanisms, in particular the processes of datafication and algorithmization. The specific media representation of jazz

on TikTok in its current form can thus be seen as a consequence of the informatic processes of data collection and data processing.

The results of the interview indicate that the platform affords specific courses of action to which the musicians respond. Fundamentally, the musicians must find their own way of working with the prescribed format of the short-form video and become acquainted with the core functions of the platform. Furthermore, the interviewees are all concerned with the question of which content on TikTok is most likely to achieve the widest possible reach and how they can meet these demands. In this way, the platform's affordances have a significant impact on the musicians' creative work, although they do not necessarily determine it.

Moreover, the platform is conducive to the development of algorithmic imaginaries, as evidenced by the interview results. Content creators are unable to ascertain the precise algorithmic functionality of TikTok, which introduces an element of uncertainty as to which production strategies are the most effective for achieving success on the platform. However, they develop well-defined concepts of potential avenues for success based on their experience. These concepts then exert a considerable influence on strategic video production decisions. It is crucial to acknowledge that the musicians' creative concepts are not solely derived from algorithmic processes; they are also influenced by the potential responses of TikTok users. Content creators' assumptions about the behavior of human and non-human actors are not always distinctly delineated. They frequently allude to broader activity on the platform.

As a result, a homogeneous idea of jazz or, in other words, a set of jazz-specific platform vernaculars emerges on TikTok, at least in the field of popularity peaks examined in this study. The influence of these vernaculars is such that they can, in turn, influence other content creators who also aim to succeed on TikTok, or who simply follow well-known role models. This is due to the fact that they are represented by musicians with a very wide reach. In general, it can be observed that the functional logic of TikTok tends to promote the homogenization of jazz-related content. The following section provides an overview of the various aspects of jazz that are particularly prevalent on TikTok and examines the extent to which this representation of jazz is shaped by socio-technical interactions between the platform and the musicians.

It can be observed that the majority of musicians interviewed have received some form of musical education, often spanning many years of singing and/or instrumental lessons. Additionally, many are enrolled in or have already completed study programs with a jazz focus. However, it is notable that a postsec-

ondary education in music is not a prerequisite for success on TikTok in the field of jazz, with the majority of interviewees exhibiting a diverse range of musical styles and approaches. Self-taught musicians and singers with professional training in the musical field are also active on TikTok. While there are always exceptions to the rule, jazz is generally regarded as an academic musical practice. The study of jazz is offered at a number of conservatories around the world. Jazz musicians who have established themselves in the professional music business have typically obtained an academic degree. It is evident that a considerable number of amateurs perform in big bands, for example. However, in the context of jazz, it is primarily those musicians who have received academic training who are regarded as the epitome of this musical culture today. Such criteria are apparently of lesser importance on TikTok. The musicians interviewed demonstrate a striking openness to incorporating elements of other musical genres, extending beyond the traditional boundaries of jazz. This openness to diverse forms of popular music is regarded as a crucial factor in the continued evolution of jazz. The interviewees demonstrated a lack of adherence to rigid genre boundaries or strict distinctions between jazz and popular music. This is also reflected in the musical role models they mentioned. The discussion includes musicians such as Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, and Michael Bublé, who exemplify a musical style that bridges the gap between jazz and popular music. Consequently, they are often overlooked or, at best, only briefly mentioned in established jazz histories (see McDonald 2006; Frith 2007; Burkhart 2024).

Certain facets of jazz, which are sometimes not even recognized as jazz, depending on the geographical and institutional context, are perceived as the most popular in the context of TikTok. For example, while the interviewees unanimously identify Frank Sinatra as one of the most popular and influential jazz musicians of all time, my own experiences of lectures and courses on jazz on TikTok in German-speaking countries paint a different, sometimes even contradictory picture. In these academic contexts, there is a tendency to articulate precise and well-defined concepts of the defining characteristics of jazz, the expected and permissible actions of jazz musicians, and the precise boundaries between jazz and popular music. The popular jazz performances on TikTok are, at best, considered *pseudo-jazz*, as one participant put it at an academic conference where selected results from this study were presented. The image of jazz that emerges on TikTok and the jazz-specific platform vernaculars on TikTok therefore deviate considerably from the prevailing perceptions and representations of jazz beyond the platform. This shows that, depending on the

context, there are several possible answers to the question of what specifically characterizes jazz as a musical form. For the interviewees – and most likely for many of the TikTok users who watch their videos – it seems natural to view at least certain facets of jazz as part of popular music culture. Nevertheless, within the academic jazz community, it remains a common practice to categorize jazz as art music and to differentiate it from popular music.

The results of the interviews indicate that the optimal utilization of the platform necessitates the implementation of professionalization processes that are tailored to the specific characteristics of the platform. Musicians engage in the professionalization of their TikTok-related activities by continuously observing the underlying logics of the platform and developing strategies for success that align with these observations. It is perhaps unsurprising that traditional notions of professionalism are being challenged in the context of TikTok. This is largely due to the fact that the platform is not always taken seriously in the wider public perception and is discredited as a medium of expression for frivolous content, especially content created by young adults. Nevertheless, particular forms of professionalization are emerging on platforms like TikTok, which are tailored to the specific requirements of the respective platforms. These forms of professionalization are, in essence, not significantly different from professionalization strategies that have long been common practice in the music industry. For example, YouTube was launched in 2005 with the goal of creating a platform for individuals to share their own content, regardless of the need to adhere to traditional professional production standards. The slogan was *broadcast yourself*, and the content in question was often recorded by users themselves with relatively basic digital or mobile phone cameras. At the time, there was still a relatively clear distinction between user-generated content (UGC) and professionally produced media products. However, the boundaries between the two are now blurred, and new roles have emerged that operate at the intersection of UGC and professional production. One illustrative example is that of YouTubers, namely content creators who do not necessarily collaborate with production companies. However, they have professionalized their YouTube-related activities, for instance by using high-quality cameras and microphones and sophisticated post-production processes (Jost 2017, 55–56). Similar processes can be observed on TikTok. The interviewees indicated that they frequently produce multiple versions of a single video, with some producing up to fifty versions, in order to achieve the optimal quality. The alleged spontaneity observed in many TikTok videos is therefore often an illusion. The success strategies or imaginaries that

are developed over time influence a number of factors, including the choice of which technical equipment is used to record videos. While it is possible to simply shoot videos with a smartphone and upload them without any further editing, the production process is sometimes much more complex. It is frequently assumed that both image and sound quality must meet certain quality standards, which has led to investments in technical equipment (such as tripods and ring lights) and the use of professional microphones and specialized audio software for audio tracks, rather than simply using a smartphone. Conversely, the videos that garner the most attention are often those that do not initially meet conventional quality standards, leading to the assumption that they are particularly relatable for a significant number of TikTok users. Overall, it can be observed that the interviewees draw upon their experiences on the platform in unique ways when producing their videos, thereby contributing to the evolution of a distinctive representation of jazz on TikTok.

The prevailing view is that success on TikTok necessitates sustained effort and attention to detail. It is essential to interact with the platform and its functional logic over an extended period, to upload videos on a regular basis, and to disregard initial setbacks. This approach is the most effective means of achieving long-term success, which is primarily gauged by visibility – or the number of views. It is therefore advisable that videos are created with the objective of generating as many views as possible, even if this results in a certain degree of detachment between the viewer and the content. In this context, views represent the primary currency on TikTok. This is also the primary motivation for developing algorithmic imaginaries, as the ideas generated about how TikTok functions are largely related to the question of what methods can be used to generate the highest possible number of views. Notwithstanding the extensive experience of the interviewees, individual success on TikTok can only be planned to a certain extent, even for those musicians with a considerable reach who were interviewed as part of this study. The rationale behind algorithmic prioritization remains opaque, which is why the platform has the effect of encouraging the development of speculative strategies. Failure to succeed is perceived as frustrating by the interviewees. Concurrently, failures are occasionally regarded as a catalyst for amplifying reach through the creation of new videos. This can potentially result in a form of addiction, which is arguably one of the distinctive features of TikTok and a pivotal factor in its success. As the rationale behind the platform's functionality remains opaque, the influence of

routine behavior is constrained. Content creators are persistently prompted to attempt a second attempt in order to achieve viral success.

This illustrates that speculation regarding algorithmic functional logics can be regarded as a fundamental aspect of cultural production on TikTok. The platform deliberately encourages this phenomenon through its technologically mediated prompts to action. As part of the content analysis, a multitude of topics were identified that are linked to algorithmic imaginaries and encompass statements pertaining to concrete strategies for self-presentation and musical production. The crux of the matter is that all the interviewees develop particular assumptions about the TikTok algorithm, yet they do not address the algorithm from a computer science perspective. Instead, the emphasis is on diverse methods of video production that the interviewees anticipate will afford them an advantage in the algorithmically moderated competition for visibility. As a result, the concepts that interviewees develop regarding *the algorithm* remain vague and abstract. Furthermore, these concepts often include assumptions about potential behaviors of TikTok users. The opacity of TikTok's precise functional logic prevents content creators from understanding the extent to which algorithmic prioritization or user reactions – or both in combination – are responsible for a video's success. It is often unclear from interviewees' statements whether they are referring to the platform's algorithmic moderation, user preferences, or both.

Beyond the question of the extent to which algorithms and user reactions determine visibility, the musicians interviewed identified specific patterns of video production that they believed made success more likely over time and through ongoing observation of what happens on the platform. For instance, the interviewees consistently stressed the perceived necessity of tailoring their performances to specific TikTok conventions, while simultaneously striving to differentiate themselves from their peers within the confines of what might be deemed effective on TikTok. It is of the utmost importance to differentiate themselves from the plethora of content on the platform in order to capture users' attention and to prioritize the inclusion of details that prompt users to not swipe a video, but to engage with it meaningfully, such as by leaving a comment or expressing approval through a like. This evidence clearly illustrates the aforementioned tendency to consider not only the algorithm itself, but also the users within the context of platform-related concepts. The central assumption is that TikTok users have relatively short attention spans. This is attributed to the functional logic of the platform, particularly the format of short-form videos and the principle of the For You page. Widespread hypothe-

ses on a platform-related attention economy in the field of cultural production are at least implicitly referenced in this context (Leveillé Gauvin 2018). Furthermore, it can be surmised that the imaginaries of the musicians interviewed are not solely based on their own experiences in the TikTok context, but that external sources of information or widespread theories about algorithmic prioritization on digital platforms or algorithmic gossip (Bishop 2019) may also play a role. For example, Sam Ambers suggests that the initial success of his first viral TikTok video can be attributed to its being inadvertently displayed to a select number of users on their For You pages, who then proceeded to engage with the video. Sam assumes that the video was disseminated to an ever-increasing number of users, ultimately reaching millions of views despite the fact that the creator was not yet a well-known figure, as a consequence of user engagement. The hypothesis that TikTok initially distributes individual videos to a limited number of selected For You pages to assess their potential for virality on the basis of initial reactions is a widely held theory that can be attributed to algorithmic gossip. Sam Ambers' assessment is thus not based on specific knowledge, but rather on his examination of the functional logic of TikTok at a more abstract level, which also encompasses the reception of external sources.

Similarly, the interview passages indicate that the musicians believe that any form of interaction with users on TikTok can potentially contribute to their success on the platform. This means, for instance, responding to user comments. However, as indicated by the interviewees, it is equally important for them to encourage as many user reactions as possible with their videos. This can be achieved by motivating them to comment, like, share, and so forth. In order to gauge users' opinions, questions are posed in a variety of formats, including video descriptions and text layers that can be placed directly in the video frame. These can then be referenced in the comments section. These assumptions are similarly prevalent among content creators across platforms (Cotter 2019; Cotter 2022). It would appear that the specific platform to which the imaginaries refer in detail is not a definitive factor. It is evident that in recent years, discourses on the functional logic of digital platforms have emerged across various platforms. In this regard, cultural workers do not see individual platforms such as TikTok as standalone entities. Instead, they interpret them within the context of cross-platform imaginaries. It is noteworthy that, despite demonstrating a discerning attention to the nuances of TikTok, the musicians interviewed seldom direct their attention towards the platform's defining characteristics, particularly the duet, use this sound, and stitch features. For example, they may review a significant number of comments to gain a deeper

understanding of users' interests. Alternatively, as illustrated by the case of Rachel Chiu, they may create an anonymous second account to improve how they use hashtags. However, it is notable that comment sections and hashtags are also key features of similar platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. In contrast, the interviewees use the duet feature on TikTok relatively rarely. Although they consider this feature beneficial in terms of expanding their reach, they do not prioritize it. This indicates that cross-platform algorithmic imaginaries have become entrenched, at times influencing actions to a greater extent than the specific features of individual platforms.

Nevertheless, decisions about which jazz repertoire to showcase on TikTok are significantly shaped by specific assumptions about the functional logic of TikTok. In particular, the interviewees identified considerations of what jazz-specific content can best be presented within the short-form video format, and which repertoire or musical expressions are most likely to be preferred by TikTok users, as key issues. These considerations are informed by the logic of the For You page. The results of the interviews indicate that, from a musical perspective, there are homogenization processes occurring on TikTok, which in turn strongly depend on the platform-specific concepts of the musicians.

In this context, the focus on comparatively old jazz standards that can usually be assigned to the Great American Songbook repertoire is particularly noteworthy. The fundamental premise of the interviewees is that these songs are popular on TikTok due to their initial widespread recognition. This assertion can be substantiated, at least within the context of North America. Concurrently, the interviewees indicated that it is crucial to infuse these widely known compositions with a distinctive personal interpretation in order to differentiate themselves from the vast array of content on TikTok. The interviewees believe that the ability to set themselves apart from other creators on TikTok while simultaneously aligning with the platform's distinctive norms is a pivotal factor in attaining success in the TikTok domain. This perception significantly shapes the selection of content. The interviewees' descriptions occasionally appear to be objective accounts. For example, some musicians believe that particular jazz repertoires and specific interpretive strategies are conducive to success on TikTok. Nevertheless, the strategies of repertoire selection must necessarily remain speculative. In this context, it becomes particularly evident that the musicians' imaginaries are only partially related to TikTok's algorithmic system, and that the potential reactions of users form another part of the basis of their speculations.

Most of the interviewees assert that TikTok does not provide an appropriate platform for displaying technical proficiency and musical spontaneity, despite these qualities being regarded as fundamental in the context of jazz. The emphasis on relatively brief videos precludes the presentation of more extended improvisations, which musicians assume the TikTok audience is not inclined to appreciate. The prevailing view was that original compositions were unlikely to gain significant traction on the platform. The affordances of the platform and the imaginaries of the musicians therefore exert a strong influence on the musical content that is *not* performed on TikTok in a jazz context. In contrast, humorous content appears to be particularly well-suited to jazz on TikTok, as evidenced by the videos of Kellin Hanas, Sam Ambers, and Caity Gyorgy. In this context, musicians can utilize established platform conventions, as musical content on TikTok is occasionally employed as an auditory element to help set up punchlines in humorous videos. It is notable that humorous content is pervasive on TikTok (Abidin and Kaye 2021, 58). In this context, however, the interviewees occasionally highlight that their jazz performances on TikTok are frequently distinct from their musical activities outside the platform. For instance, the style of a punchline-based short-form video may not readily translate to the context of a live performance in a jazz club. Consequently, the jazz-specific vernaculars that emerge on TikTok may deviate considerably from those observed in conventional jazz performances outside the platform.

As the popularity peaks in the field under study are largely represented by North Americans, the interview statements on the musical repertoire exhibit a certain North American-centricity, which the interviewees are acutely aware of. For example, respondents indicated that songs from the Great American Songbook constituted a fundamental component of their musical education during their formative years and were a customary feature of their Christmas celebrations. It is postulated that the association of these songs with Christmas evokes positive sentiments for a considerable proportion of TikTok users. It is also noteworthy that the choice of repertoire can be influenced by various popular media sources beyond the platform. For example, some of the jazz standards that have become popular on TikTok are featured in the soundtracks of popular television shows, films, and computer games. For example, Stella Cole is aware that some users are familiar with the song "Fly Me to the Moon" from the Netflix series *Squid Game* and do not necessarily recognize it as a jazz standard, as illustrated by the comments on her videos. It becomes evident that some of the content that gains popularity on TikTok is disseminated by traditional mass media outlets prior to its proliferation on the platform, thereby in-

fluencing the representation of jazz on the platform. Therefore, negotiations of media visibility may occur outside of TikTok prior to the algorithmic categorization procedures initiated by the platform and the user-driven promotion of specific content, and subsequently influence the platform's dynamics. This illustrates that TikTok is not an isolated entity, but rather subject to the influence of traditional mass media.

Moreover, the interview results indicate that discourses on social categories such as gender and *race* also impact the representation of jazz on TikTok. For instance, common gender stereotypes, body norms, and normative beauty ideals exert a considerable influence on the popularity of jazz on the platform. The interviewees' experiences suggest that certain body types and modes of presentation are more conducive to success on TikTok, prompting them to adapt their behavior in accordance with these perceived norms. The results of the corpus analysis conducted for this study indicate that physical characteristics are a significant factor in determining who is afforded the opportunity to become highly visible in the jazz context on TikTok. This is particularly evident in the case of *white* female North Americans, the majority of whom are younger than twenty-five and conform to prevailing beauty norms. Musicians who meet the specified criteria may then use their bodies in particular ways and customize their videos in a way that enhances their visibility.

The musicians interviewed were forthcoming and critical about this issue. It is evident that high visibility on TikTok is less likely if certain beauty practices, such as wearing makeup and certain clothing, are not followed. Furthermore, the interviewees have identified potential patterns of success in this regard. Despite their fundamentally critical stance, they adapt their strategies for video production in accordance with these patterns. Once more, it is not yet clear who or what is responsible for the popularity of the videos in question. Are they the result of the TikTok algorithm, the users themselves, or their interactions? Rachel Chiu's experience with a live stream that reached a significantly larger audience after she changed her outfit and makeup, for example, suggests that appearance plays a significant role in the algorithmic filtering process. This is due to the fact that even a live stream must initially be displayed to TikTok users on their For You pages, which are based exclusively on algorithmic selection processes. The extent to which user reactions contribute to a video being shown on an even greater number of For You pages, and the extent to which the musicians' appearance plays a role in this, cannot be definitively determined. It is evident that there is a complex interplay between algorithmic prioritization, user preferences, and musicians' actions based on platform-spe-

cific perceptions. This interplay contributes to the homogenization of musical styles and practices. Although some musicians may choose to post videos of themselves without any makeup, they nonetheless feel compelled to conform to certain standards of beauty. However, this phenomenon is more prevalent among female interviewees than among male musicians, who tend to attach less significance to this issue based on their personal experiences. Although the interviewees do discuss these issues, they occasionally assert that this issue is not unique to TikTok. The argument put forth is that certain conventions of representation based on normative notions of beauty that have long been commonplace in music and media-related professional fields (and beyond) have been transferred to the platform context. This is an irrefutable fact. Consequently, the most significant development in this regard is the involvement of algorithms in the competition for visibility on platforms such as TikTok. Nevertheless, the precise impact and homogenizing potential of these non-human actors remain opaque.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned problematic aspects, the majority of interviewees maintain a predominantly positive relationship with TikTok. However, as articulated by Rachel Chiu, they perceive the platform as an opportunity generator rather than as their primary medium for self-expression. In the course of the interviews, several of the musicians indicated that they had benefited considerably from their engagement with the TikTok platform. They observed that it had enabled them to enhance their visibility and reputation. As a consequence of their success on TikTok, some of the musicians had been presented with the opportunity to participate in high-profile television programs, including *American Idol*. This shows that traditional mass media formats retain significant value for interviewees, despite the proliferation of digital platforms. In some instances, the interviews suggest that the prestige associated with appearing in a major TV production may outweigh the influence of having a large social media following on TikTok. For the interviewees, TikTok is not a primary source of income; rather, it is a platform utilized to attract listeners and draw attention to their own Spotify profiles or upcoming concerts, for example. However, in some interviews, it becomes evident that remunerative opportunities can also arise directly on the platform, for example through collaborations. The monetization regulations on TikTok are subject to frequent alteration, which may account for the discrepancies between the interviewees' views of the present circumstances. Collectively, the prevailing opinion is that TikTok's primary objective is to facilitate the rapid and extensive dissemination of content. This, according to the interviewees,

represents the primary difference between TikTok and other platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

The interviewees also view the potential to disseminate their own content to a vast audience with minimal effort and in a relatively short space of time as a positive development for the future of jazz. In conclusion, the platform provides a valuable opportunity to disseminate jazz-specific content to a vast audience, including those who may not otherwise have access to jazz and would otherwise remain unaware of this musical tradition. This is made possible by the platform's functional logic, which is centered on virality. Users who have no or only a minimal connection to jazz are unlikely to be searching for jazz-related videos. Instead, they are exposed to this content as a result of algorithmic moderation. The user comments provide insight into how users perceive the musicians. They indicate that a significant proportion of young people who are active on TikTok are unfamiliar with jazz or exhibit a reserved attitude towards this music, which is often perceived as elitist. The interviewees unanimously agreed that their videos can facilitate low-threshold access to jazz for many users. They also asserted that this is crucial to ensure the future relevance and appeal of jazz to younger generations.

In conclusion, it can be observed that the image of jazz that is most visible on TikTok is contingent upon the affordances of the platform and the musicians' perceptions of the algorithmic functional logic and user preferences. A distinct algorithmic culture has emerged, which has resulted in the formation of platform-specific jazz-related performance conventions or vernaculars. Concurrently, the image of jazz represented on TikTok is contingent upon a multitude of external factors. This is particularly evident in how repertoire is selected, which is influenced by canonization processes that developed decades ago and are still at work today. The prioritization of normatively beautiful bodies is not a new phenomenon; rather, it has long been prevalent in popular music and media cultures, as well as other cultural domains. Moreover, the interview results indicate that established mass media, such as film and television, have not been abruptly rendered obsolete by platforms like TikTok. Rather, they influence the content on TikTok, for instance, by popularizing songs through series or movies, which then become trends on TikTok. TikTok is not a hermetically sealed digital space, but is strongly influenced by dominant cultural discourses and hegemonies. Nevertheless, the impact of platform algorithms and human engagement with these technical entities on cultural production and the associated cultural homogenization is a relatively

recent phenomenon. The next chapter examines programmatic implications of these empirical findings for music research.