

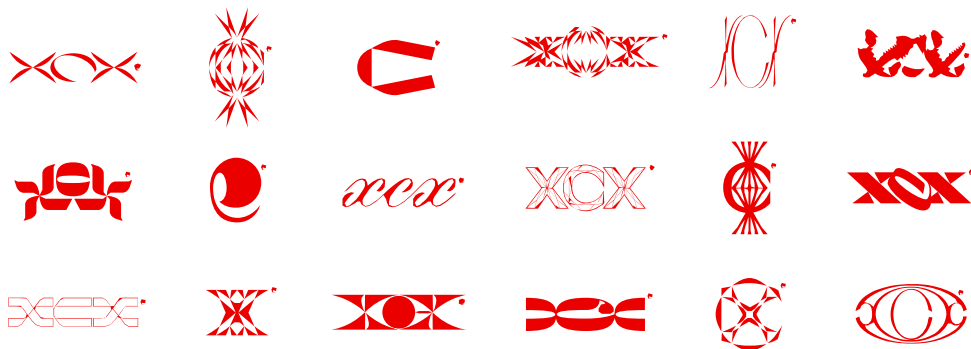


Digital Media Presence
Case Study:
Charli XCX
[signed to Atlantic Records]

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CCTP 745: Communication Technology and Organizations

ITINERARY

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Atlantic Records

Atlantic Records is an American Record Label founded in 1947 by Ahmet Ertegun and Herb Abramson.¹ Partnered with Warner Music Group, the label is undoubtedly one of the top tier record labels in the United States, holding as much as importance as similar labels like RCA, Interscope, and Sony Music. They have and continue to sign artists in various genres – Aretha Franklin, Cardi B, Kelly Clarkson, Bruno Mars, Jay-Z, and Sia, amongst other diverse acts.²

¹ "Artists." n.d. Record Label. Atlantic Records. <http://www.atlanticrecords.com/artists>.

² "Our Label." n.d. Record Label. Atlantic Records. <http://www.atlanticrecords.com/posts/category/our-label>.

Charli XCX[®]

Charli XCX is a 26-year-old pop star and song writer who has been an active artist in the music industry since 2008. Upon the release of her debut album *True Romance* (2013), she signed to Atlantic Records in 2014. After a release of singles, she showcased her sophomore album *Sucker* in 2015. *Sucker* was sonically more commercial than her debut, non-Atlantic Records release which challenged the way we think about and hear pop music. Various interviews after the release of *Sucker* indicated that Charli XCX was not at all as passionate or interested in the album compared to what she is capable of actually producing.³ After entering the social network of the PC Music community – a London-based record label that creates experimental and avant-garde music – she released the forward thinking EP *Vroom Vroom* off of her self-started record label Vroom Vroom Records in 2016.⁴

It can be inferred that the drive to release an EP that's the complete opposite of her previous album off her own label was because Atlantic Records was nervous to give Charli XCX the true, creative freedom to release bodies of work she actually cares about. The contractual obligations and commercial end-goals scribed on paper between an artist and a record label are all back-stage interactions and tricks of the trade, however Charli XCX and the general public (unaffiliated with Atlantic Records) have made it clear that whatever creative work Charli puts out is heavily monitored and regulated by Atlantic Records.⁵ This notion can also explain the numerous album delays Charli XCX experienced, as well as why her two critically acclaimed mixtapes *Number 1 Angel* and *Pop 2* (2017) were commercialized and released as "mixtapes" rather than albums.⁶ The unique sugar-pop sound of *Vroom Vroom* had not only metaphorically threatened Atlantic Records ability to judge what's best for the songstress, but also paved the sound of future releases in 2017 and 2018 between mixtapes and spontaneous monthly single releases like "Boys," "No Angel," and "Girls Night Out) – all of which were co-produced by producers that influenced the reformed brand and sound of Charli XCX.

³ Zane Lowe, and Charli XCX. n.d. *Zane Lowe, BEATS 1 Radio*. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/post/idsa.6e7474c0-9c63-11e6-944f-69d4ba052d42>.

⁴ *Highsnobiety*. 2018. "Who Is Really to Blame for the Delay of Charli XCX's Next Album?," July 6, 2018. <https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/charli-xcx-album-leak-investigation/>.

⁵ Michael Craigg. 2017. "Charli XCX: The Mixtape Mystery and a Pop Career in Flux." *The Guardian*, March 14, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2017/mar/14/charli-xcx-number-1-angel-mixtape-charlotte-aitchison>.

⁶ *Highsnobiety*. 2018. "Who Is Really to Blame for the Delay of Charli XCX's Next Album?," July 6, 2018. <https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/charli-xcx-album-leak-investigation/>.

TARGETED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

To have a better understanding of Charli XCX's digital media presence and the impact that has on her brand and artistry, data was collected and coded within a two and a half month period of time (February 1, 2019 – April 19, 2019) from the three most utilized social media platforms affiliated with Charli XCX: Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

The collected data was manually coded and attributed to the following factors: date of posting, time of posting, type of post (text, media, link), number of shares/likes/comments, motivation of the message (branding, sales, customer service/support, product development, recruiting, other), tone of message (formal or informal), link/hashtag use, conversation initiative with audience, audience acknowledgement, response to negative comment, and use of questions.

Data for certain factors, such as date of publishing and stories posted on Instagram, was unavailable to accurately track down due to the nature of the specific social media application.

To view the coded data, please see **attached excel spreadsheet**.



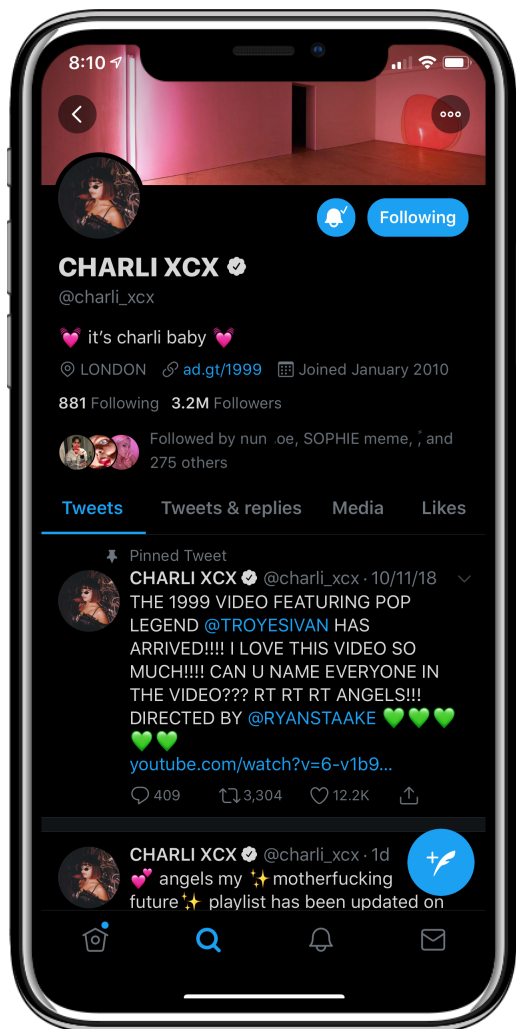
TWITTER

With 3.2 million followers, the most out of her digital/social media channels, Charli XCX is the most interactive on Twitter. During the period of time in which data was recorded, she had an average of 80% digital media activity that was made up of an average of 12,820 likes per Tweet, 1,231 retweets per Tweet, and 211 comments per Tweet.

The content on Charli XCX's Twitter account consisted of text and media that reflected Charli XCX as an artist, Charli XCX as a brand, teasing the upcoming (and highly anticipated) third studio album, relatable content, and. Two of the most dominating themes that were present throughout the collected data on Charli XCX's Twitter usage was relatable content and memes, which were the types of Tweets that gained the greatest number of retweets and likes. Relatable content was coded as Tweets that allured Charli XCX as an individual that experiences and feels the same things as regular, non-famous people. This type of content helps bring fans and

followers of Charli XCX's work to Charli XCX as an artist, creating a more natural, organic, and non-hierarchical relationship (or lack thereof). Memes, which were shown to be intersectional with other dominating themes with Charli XCX's Twitter use, garnered a lot of attention for the artist primarily considering that all of the memes that were shared were memes about herself. The sarcastic and internet-driven tone of these memes reflected her revolutionary sound that's critically acclaimed in musical releases such as the *Vroom Vroom* EP and the *Pop 2* mixtape, as well as content that reflects and relates to her brand like lavender Lamborghini's and PVC/latex.

It's important to note that Charli XCX commonly posted pictures of herself, which not only further emphasizes on the Charli XCX brand, but also makes the Twitter experience for those that follow Charli XCX more personal – This connects similarly to Charli XCX's form of Tweeting relatable content to enrich the indirect artist-to-user experience.

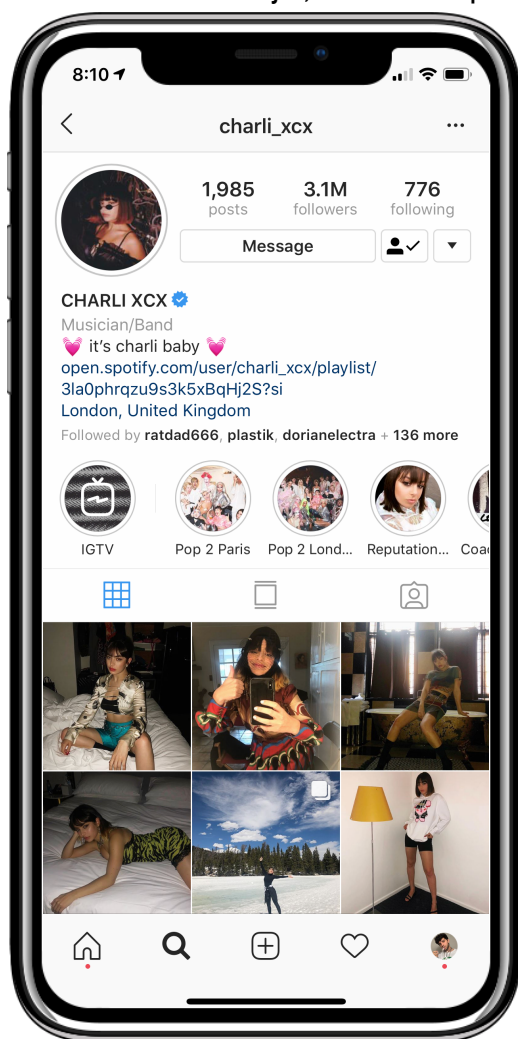


INSTAGRAM

Instagram was the second most used social media platform for Charli XCX. With 3.1 million followers, the artistic visionary used Instagram 63% of the time throughout the data-retrieval period, with an average of 72,386 likes per post and 889 comments per post. Since Instagram is designed to be a visually-led social media platform, Charli XCX's Instagram account was visually focused. Her posts consisted of content reflecting her artistry, her brand, and the upcoming third studio album. Though a picture is worth a thousand words, Charli XCX is consistent with accompanying captions along each picture, some of which vary from brief statements to lengthy narratives. Shorter captions are wittier, while lengthier captions come across as sincere and wholesome. Regardless of the caption density, it was common to see Charli XCX use an extensive amount of emojis, as well as pose questions to her audience not only to engage a

conversation, but also to use Instagram's algorithm to her advantage – Instagram's way of having accounts with large followings gain more outreach and exposure to various artists is by greater user engagement on posts, which includes comments and likes.⁷

Determining when the Instagram post was published on the specific time was difficult due to the nature of Instagram. Additionally, the algorithm of Instagram made it difficult to determine whether Charli XCX was interacting with other users that commented on her photograph, unless one were to look through the hundreds of comments under every photo. The final challenge faced when collecting data on Charli XCX's Instagram use was her use of stories – due to the user interface design of Instagram, stories could only be displayed for 24 hours. The only form of recorded data on her Instagram stories was through trusted sources like Twitter user @FckyeahCharli, a Charli XCX updates account that works with Charli's management to bring the latest news on Charli XCX. From the data that was available there (unrecorded in the coded data), most of her stories consisted of the same themes that are repeated on her public profile – narratives that reflect Charli XCX as an artist, Charli XCX as a brand, and the upcoming third studio album.



⁷ Lexie Carbone. 2018. "This Is How the Instagram Algorithm Works in 2018." Later. February 19, 2018. <https://later.com/blog/how-instagram-algorithm-works/>.

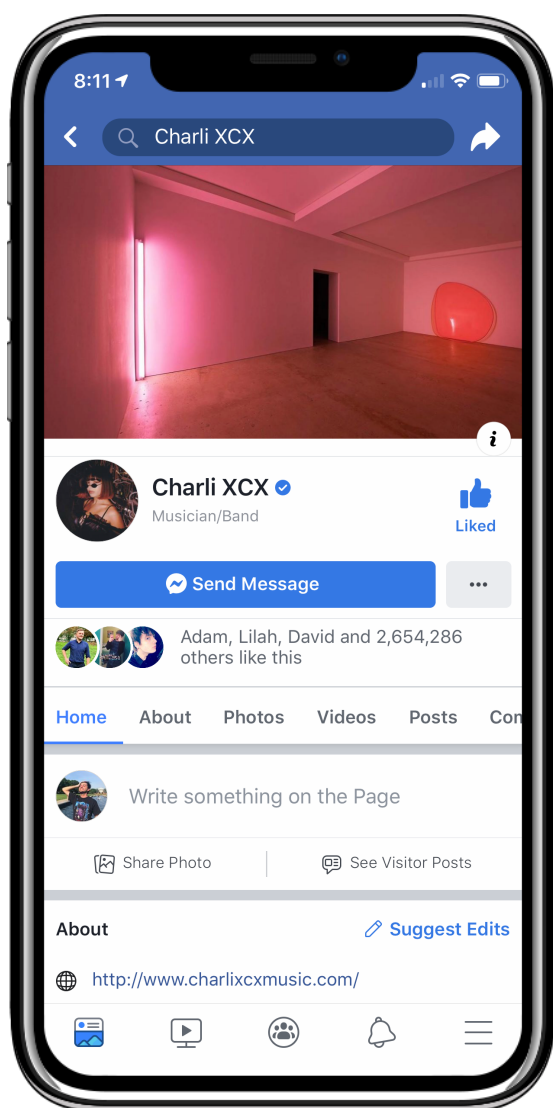
FACEBOOK

With 2.6 million likes, Facebook was the third most used social media platform for Charli XCX, demonstrating a 35% average use. Charli XCX's use of Facebook was notably different than Twitter and Instagram, for the language on there was either textual captions/dialogue relayed from Instagram and Twitter, or formal tones that is specifically tailored to deliver a message and nothing more. The lack of individuality and a platform-focused digital media presence plan is most likely to blame for the low averages for digital user engagement: 2,566 likes per post, 104 shares per post, and 161 comments per post.

Content wise, Facebook posts were made up of pictures of Charli XCX (which connects back to the overall branding and artistry media presence strategy that was seen from other social media channels), album teases, and promotional content.

Promotional content was relayed in a formal tone – formal in comparison to Charli's expressive use of emojis and curse words, where words such as "omg" and "party" were used to potentially attempt to make the formal message more informal and inviting. However, it was promotional posts like that that garnered the least amount of digital interaction. One of two situations could be to blame for the lack of interaction with promotional content – Atlantic Records is pushing Charli XCX to promote radio gigs and other promotional artist-related content in a more formal form, or Charli XCX does not seem interested in promoting record label-related/funded content because it's not as meaningful to her as other content that is more in line with her creative and artistic vision.

Moments where Charli XCX gained the most amount of digital interaction and engagement involved content that reflected her brand and artistry, as well as smaller and more intimate moments that captured her authenticity as a human, such as her advocacy for women's and gay rights.



FINDINGS

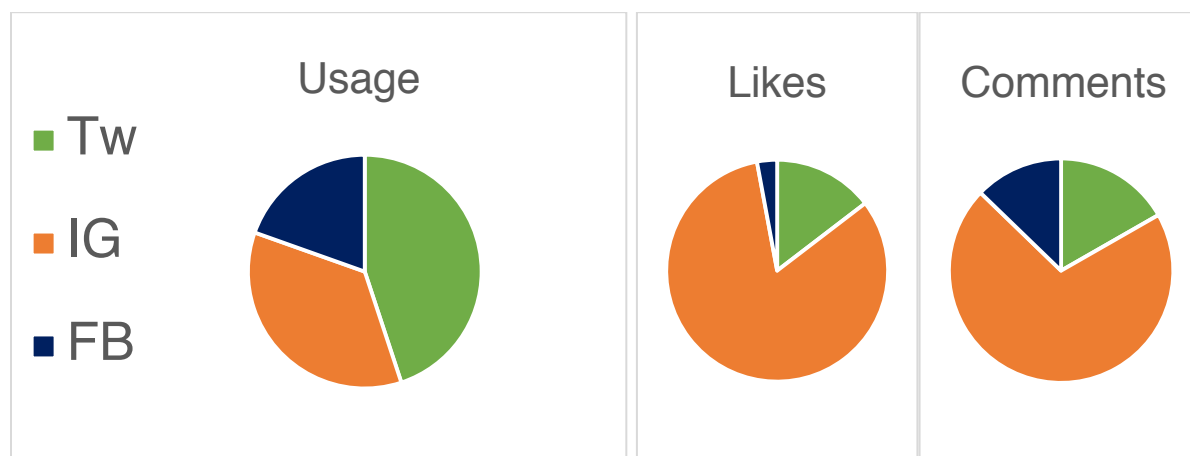
After collecting and coding the data from Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, several things became apparent. Across all platforms, there are several intersectional themes that appear: extensive emoji use to come across as informal communication, posing questions for platform-user interaction, promoting “XCX” (her artistry, her brand, and her upcoming album), and both memes and relatable content is shared to have a less commercial/record label-influenced tone to the overall digital presence of Charli XCX amongst each platform. By analyzing the media that accompanies over 70% of the relayed social media posts across each platform, the Charli XCX brand and artistry feed into one another – the brand represents her colorful merch and fashion-forward sense of style, while the artistry represents game-changing audio and visual concepts. The use of posing questions in captions can be concluded as a strategic way for Charli XCX to not only gather digital engagement from social media platform users, but also use social media algorithms to her advantage by creating more digital outreach of her content. Emojis are also used to create less of a hierarchical divide between her and her followers, which leads to displaying “Charli XCX” as a celebrity/artist that is more similar to those that are not celebrities/artists.

The posts with the least interaction include formal/promotional and non-Charli XCX related content. Within the 78-day data retrieval period, formally worded promotional content, primarily consisting of advertisement sponsorships and radio appearances, got the least amount of engagement from users on each platform. This could be due to the lack of emojis and informal language that was used when the post was made (could be Atlantic Records encouraging a post), or Charli XCX’s lack of interest in the promotional content. In regard to non-Charli XCX related content, the most common one during the data retrieval period was Charli XCX’s aggressive promotion of Nasty Cherry Band – a band consisting of Charli XCX’s friends that signed to her label, Vroom Vroom Records, and that she is the creative manager/director of. She’s used her platform for several months promoting the group for hype and buzz, even though they didn’t release any music until mid-March. There was a significant decrease in user engagement and interaction, measured in likes and comments, when Nasty Cherry Band content was shared. If anything, the promotion of this content sparked outrage amongst a fair number of social media users expressing that they not only don’t want to see Nasty Cherry Band content, but also don’t understand why Charli XCX is promoting their content when she is not directly involved/affiliated with them.

When analyzing every piece of content posted throughout her social media platforms, several words are noted significant and influential target words that play a particular role: “angels,” “party,” “XCX,” “girls,” and “boys.” Angels are the name of her fan base – her prevalent use of verbally calling out her fandom strengthens her brand identity “XCX,” another word that was commonly used. The term “party” is thrown around so often from Charli XCX both inside and outside of her art because her love for partying has translated not only as a front-stage/back-stage phenomenon, but also into a lifestyle that further strengthens her XCX brand. Finally, girls and guys are commonly

said through text on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook because of the XCX brand – a large portion of the XCX brand and lifestyle allures an ideology similar to the 1995 classic *Clueless*, where girls want to have fun, dress to the nines, and chase after boys (aside from other plots and sub-plots to the film demonstrating character development).

Though Twitter was the most dominating social media platform used by Charli XCX, followed by Instagram and then Facebook, Instagram was shown to be the platform with the most user engagement and interaction with platform users: On average, Instagram received 82% of likes and 70% of comments while Twitter received 15% of likes and 17% of comments. The justification for this could be the fact that Instagram has more of a mission statement in terms of how users of the application demonstrate a digital media presence, that of which is visual media only followed by the optional caption, in comparison to Twitter that allows its users to Tweet links, videos, pictures, and text. Additionally, Twitter has a character word limit, which hinders Charli XCX's ability to entirely express her thoughts and feelings on that platform. It is for that reason that Charli XCX demonstrated lengthy narrative captions only on Instagram as a way for her to express her thoughts, demonstrate her feelings, and connect more with her audience. It's important to note that Instagram is also the only platform amongst Twitter and Facebook that allows for users to post stories – Charli took full advantage of this when she posts stories onto her Instagram, inviting viewers to experience her life/world from a back-stage perspective rather than a front-stage perspective.



DIGITAL PRESENCE OF ATLANTIC RECORDS

Since Charli XCX is signed to Atlantic Records, the big question still remains: What is Atlantic Records' digital presence in relation to promoting their own signed artist? When looking back, Atlantic Records posts on their social media platforms (primarily focusing on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) multiple times a day. The content they put out shares the overlaying theme of promoting content that is in regard to the artists they have signed. This content can be promotional content of particular artists they have signed (e.g. press events, a photoshoot), the brand of an artist they have signed (their music, music videos, tour), and content that they repost from artists that they have signed.

What's fascinating when analyzing Atlantic Records' digital media presence is that they have barely promoted Charli XCX as an artist and as a brand on any of their social media platforms. On Instagram and Facebook, Atlantic Records had only once posted about Charli XCX when her photoshoot with Vogue Magazine was released (April 15, 2019). Within the 78-day data-retrieval period, Atlantic Records had only retweeted 4 of her Tweets, one involving the Vogue Magazine photoshoot, two involving relatable content about another signed Atlantic Records artist (Lizzo & Janelle Monet), and one about the anniversary of the *Vroom Vroom* EP.

Granted, in the 78-day window of social media data retrieval, Charli XCX has yet to announce any major music development such as an album name or album artwork, however she has commonly Tweeted (at least twice every two weeks) about the time she spends in the studio and the development of the album. This is similar to the social media presence of other Atlantic Records-signed artists that share similar content, only difference is Atlantic Records evidently shares their content over Charli XCX's. It's ironic how they choose not to share her content regarding an album that's highly anticipated amongst the masses considering that content relating to album tease(s) is one of the largest digitally engaging themes she receives.

THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATION

Whether it is run by Atlantic Records or Charli XCX herself, Charli XCX's strategy of digital media presence is proving to be quite effective. In comparison to other artists who might lack a social media presence, let alone the ability to come across as authentic to a larger audience, Charli XCX is successfully maintaining a social media presence that appeases the people.

Charli XCX demonstrates media affordance as a successful digital media presence strategy. Using social media platform algorithms in her favor, she engages her followers by encouraging them to comment on her posts. Comments range from a general strategy to raise hype for her upcoming music by spamming a post with emojis, to asking her followers and users of the social media platform(s) to suggest songs/artists for her monthly Spotify playlist "the motherf***ing future" – a playlist that showcases the best acts that are sonically ahead of their time. Application/platform user engagement for the playlist in particular is a thematic post for all three social media platforms that commonly encourage a lot of user engagement to her posts, especially considering that she requests recommendations for one month's playlist about 4 times before she releases the playlist to the public.

Media richness is prevalent throughout all of her social media platforms. Her consistent use of selfies, self-portraits, videos, and Instagram stories allow for fans and followers to feel as connected and involved in Charli XCX's life as much as possible. Her occasional Instagram livestreams, YouTube livestreams, and use of the Angel Phone (a cell phone that she annually lets fans call in to chat with her) further strengthen the bond between Charli XCX and her angels. The multi-platform and diverse use of each social media platform connects to McLuhan's medium theory which demonstrates that someone like Charli XCX can display the front stage and back stage of her day-to-day life, from the music creation process in the studio to behind the scenes shot at photoshoots.

When evaluating the data across all the platforms, it's evident that her use of multi-communication to relay one message across each platform is an effective strategy that allows for one message to not only be shared across various mediums (in this case, Twitter to Instagram to Facebook), but also ensures that there will always be content to post.

Reflecting over how she is successful with her digital media presence, one question remains: is this the work of Charli XCX herself, or Atlantic Records? Maybe both? Her consistent use of selfies and emojis relays any message in a very personable and informal way, which can appease the masses. However, this may very well be a branding and marketing strategy implemented by Atlantic Records to strengthen the XCX brand. It could also be a mix of the two, where Charli XCX understands that to become a well-known artist, she must brand herself accordingly and create as much XCX-related content to grow her following.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Charli XCX's current social media practices has proven to be a successful form of maintaining a digital presence that benefits her and her brand. The extensive use of her own photographs along with emojis has made her presence on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook authentic and personable for audiences.

Two suggestions can be made to help improve Charli XCX's social media presence. For starters, over 80% of the content that was posted on one platform was posted on the other two (connecting back to multi-communication theory). Though this is a smart strategy for

having consistent content to post on social media pages, it's important that a particular message being shared on Instagram one day should then be posted on Twitter and Facebook *on the same day*. The collected data demonstrated that Facebook would often fall behind by 1 to 3 days when posting a particular message that was already relayed on Instagram or Facebook. This most likely explains why Facebook was the least used social media platform for Charli XCX along with the least amount of user engagement. To solve this problem, it's important to initiate a digital media use strategy specifically for Facebook – creating content that would be more engaging for Facebook users (in comparison to Twitter and Instagram) would help strengthen Charli XCX's digital media presence on Facebook.

Atlantic Records can make changes to their digital media presence in regard to supporting their signed artist Charli XCX. Ever since the release of *Pop 2*, there has been a common narrative surrounding Charli XCX stating that she is an extremely underrated artist.⁸ As an entity that is meant to help grow and assist artist development, it's vital for Atlantic Records to begin posting more about Charli XCX. Something as small as showcasing her previous work or sharing posts she makes where she teases the upcoming album can go a long way towards not only demonstrating the labels support for their visionary singer and writer, but also creating more hype and buzz about Charli XCX which can then ensure more of a positive, commercial outcome once she releases a body of work.

⁸ Christian Zamora. 2018. "Charli XCX Tweeted That She's Underrated, And She Didn't Lie." BuzzFeed. January 8, 2018. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/christianzamora/charli-xcx-and-the-underrated-tweet>.

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