Charli XCX Takes “Brat” Beyond the Music

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INTRODUCTION

Charli XCX has received a lot of recognition for *Brat*. It became a commercially successful, critically acclaimed album upon release. It also became a cultural phenomenon related to its music, messages, and visual aesthetic. This moment in music and internet culture was dubbed by fans and Charli as “Brat Summer.” The album has remained widely topical following the summer of 2024 and has substantially heightened the career and mainstream status of Charli XCX.

“Brat” Album Cover

BACKGROUND

Coming up in London’s music scene in the early 2010s, Charli has slowly evolved into a mainstream pop star. She first gained international recognition with her song “Boom Clap,” as well as her feature on the Iggy Azalea song “Fancy” (Shiffer, 2025).

For *Brat*, her sixth studio album, Charli deliberately shifted her sound and branding for this project. This allowed her to embrace the revival of 2010s dance and club music, reveal a bold artistic direction, and present her rebellious, chic, and self-assured persona that captured the attention of longtime fans and new listeners.

As a result of strong strategic planning and organic fan engagement, *Brat* was ultimately transformed from an album into a defining chapter of her career and pop culture history.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Charli XCX has a diverse audience and aimed to promote *Brat* to a broad mainstream market. However, specific sectors of fans played a key role in the album's promotion. **These groups were:**

Charli's Existing Fanbase

Charli XCX already had a large following going into the release of *Brat*, though relying solely on her current audience was not enough to ensure mainstream success. Still, her pre-existing, dedicated fanbase contributed to much of the anticipation and excitement generated around the release of *Brat*.

"Brat" Arena Tour Crowd

Gen Z and Millennials

Charli's fans are primarily between the ages of 16–24 (London Post, 2024). This age group is the most important to consider with promotion on TikTok, as the majority of users on the platform are between the ages of 18–24 (Geuens, 2024). She also appeals to a slightly older demographic–especially those who have been following her since the beginning of her career.

Charli Meeting a Fan

LGBTQ+ Community

Prior to *Brat*, Charli was already a vocal ally for the LGBTQ+ community. In addition to frequently acknowledging her queer fanbase, she has collaborated with queer artists like Troye Sivan and Kim Petras (Maskell, 2024).

OBJECTIVES

Like most album release cycles, the overarching goal of this campaign was to promote the new music and its corresponding merchandise and tour. It was also about expanding Charli XCX's status as an artist. While the idea of growing the album into a greater movement wasn't out of the question, much of the album's virality was organic and fueled by fan-generated content and trends that Charli and her team did not develop themselves. While these trends were leveraged and encouraged, many of the tactics and strategies were opportunistic and originally a result of unplanned virality.

Based on the notion that the *Brat* campaign was primarily about promoting the music and launching Charli XCX into the mainstream, hypothetical measurable objectives include:

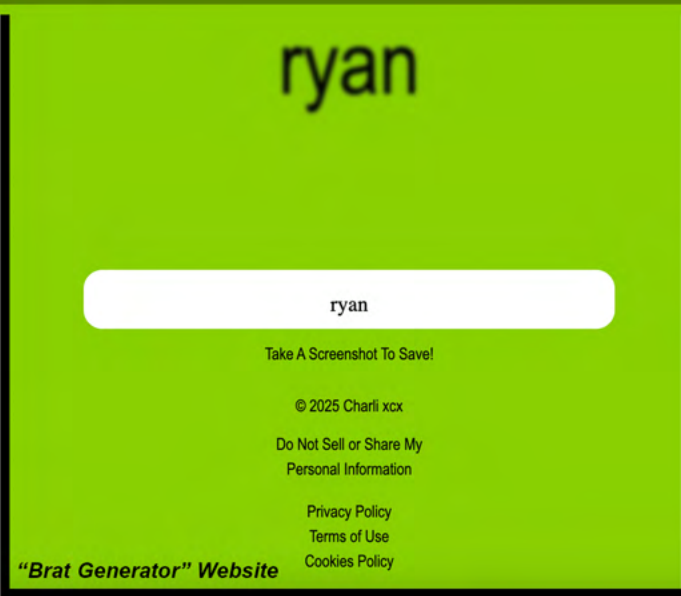
- *Boost Charli XCX's monthly Spotify listeners by 30% within three months of the release of Brat*
- *Sell 20,000 copies of Brat on vinyl within the first week of the album's release*

PLANNING

Tactic 1: Cover Art Generator

The minimalist style of the album cover immediately drew attention to the project. The simple, low quality text over a green background stood out in comparison to Charli's previous albums. In an interview with Vogue, Charli mentioned that she "**wanted to go with an offensive, off-trend shade of green to trigger the idea of something being wrong**" (Ray, 2024). The album cover became a meme, sparking a trend on social media that involved changing a profile picture to match the visual aesthetic of the album cover.

Charli and her team launched the "Brat Generator" to encourage the trend and provide an official way of creating a custom design. After Charli XCX tweeted in support of Kamala Harris, the Harris campaign took part in the meme by changing their banner on X to match the *Brat* visual aesthetic (Martinez, 2024). This drew more attention to *Brat* and the meme behind the album cover.



"Brat Generator" Website

Harris Campaign "X" Page

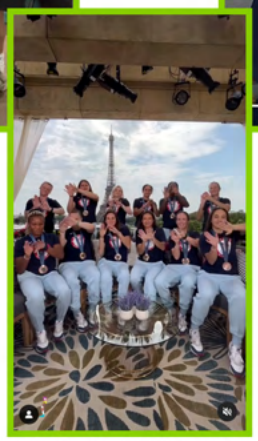
Tactic #2: Embracing the “Apple” TikTok Dance

Throughout the summer of 2024, it was difficult to go on TikTok or Instagram Reels without hearing Charli’s song “Apple” and seeing its corresponding viral dance. Kelley Heyer, a fan of Charli who had a small TikTok following, created the “Apple” dance one week after the album was released.

The dance quickly became a replicable trend. Charli XCX responded by making many videos of herself doing the dance by herself and with her friends and collaborators. Many celebrities took part in this trend as well, such as Stephen Colbert, Brooke Shields, Kerry Washington, and the U.S. Women’s Rugby Team (Schonfeld, 2024).

Charli XCX

Stephen Colbert



U.S. Women’s Rugby Team

Although leveraging this trend was opportunistic, TikTok was always going to be an important factor in promoting *Brat*. In fact, a report from February 2025 reveals that 84% of songs in the Billboard Top 200 in 2024 were originally viral on TikTok (TikTok, 2025).

Tactic #3: Brat Wall

Perhaps the most substantial piece of paid media that was utilized to promote *Brat* was the “Brat Wall” in New York City. A blank green wall mysteriously appeared in early May 2024, immediately causing discussion and rumors among fans. The same day, Charli cryptically tweeted a time and location, matching that of the wall. Hundreds of fans gathered after Charli’s tweet, which resulted in a surprise appearance to debut her song “360.”

Album Promotion

The wall was repainted seven times over two months to promote new singles and the *Brat* remix album. It became a popular spot for photos and acted as a unique way of announcing updates throughout the release cycle. There was also a live stream that showed the process of the wall being repainted with new messages (Danforth, 2024).

Remix Album Promotion

MESSAGES

Article	Message	Intended Target Audience	Effective or Ineffective?
"The Brilliance of Charli XCX's Brat Rollout" (Time, June 21, 2024)	*Brat* by Charli XCX is a critically acclaimed album and has received a lot of attention on social media in particular. By engaging with her audience on a personal level, she was able to build more excitement for the project.	A wide, general audience, millennials, young professionals, older readers who may be unfamiliar with Charli XCX	**Effective** - It displays much of the initial social media virality that has stemmed from *Brat*, and links to many individual posts that could directly receive more traffic from the article.
"If You're Still Wondering What 'Brat' Means, Charli XCX Explained It All During Her 'SNL' Monologue" (Buzzfeed, November 17, 2024)	According to Charli XCX, the lyrics in *Brat* suggest that being "brat" is an attitude that revolves around being carefree yet vulnerable.	Younger, Gen Z, Millennials, readers looking for a brief explanation on the messages behind *Brat*	**Effective** - It provides a simple explanation of the meaning of *Brat* from the perspective of Charli, expanding the reach of the album's messages after the peak of "Brat Summer."
"Charli XCX's Year of the 'Brat'" (The New York Times, December 26, 2024)	*Brat* was a cultural phenomenon in 2024 that swung Charli XCX into mainstream pop and created a long-lasting celebration of its music and themes of youth, being yourself, and embracing imperfections.	Diverse, general audience	**Effective** - In addition to providing a thorough analysis of how *Brat* impacted culture in 2024, it also highlights specific critiques of *Brat* that questioned the trend's longevity, and essentially showcases how Charli XCX proved her critics wrong.

The coverage on *Brat* is focused on explaining the virality of the album, the messages behind it, and the various ways in which it turned into a greater cultural phenomenon. There is a particular focus on explaining what "brat" means as a personality and lifestyle. The commentary remains mostly positive and conveys a wide appreciation for *Brat* in pop culture, and also recognizes Charli XCX's increased position in the public eye.

Media Appearances

Charli was interviewed by Zane Lowe for Apple Music in October 2024. *The Zane Lowe Show* is considered Apple Music's "flagship show" and is known for featuring the biggest stars in music.

Charli made her first appearance on *The Howard Stern Show* in October 2024.

Charli was the host and musical guest on *Saturday Night Live* in November 2024.

Charli was the cover girl for *Vogue Singapore* in April 2024.

She was also the cover girl for *Vogue Australia* in August 2024.

EVALUATION

Measurable Results

- Brat sold **77,000 physical units** within its first week (Frankenberg, 2024)
    - 30,000 were vinyl
- As of February 2025, "Apple" has been used in **1.6 million videos** on TikTok
- As of February 2025, *Brat* has received **1.6 billion streams** on Spotify
- Arena Tour w/ Troye Sivan had an estimated ticket gross of **$23.5 million** (Marshall, 2024)

Final Evaluation

With a general goal of promoting *Brat* as a body of work, Charli and her team achieved a lot of success. The album broke records for Charli, held positions on many music charts, won several Grammys, and ultimately became a highly recognized and well-received project. While Charli and her team succeeded in promoting *Brat* and garnering album streams and purchases, the overarching success story from this project is the organic virality that stemmed from *Brat* and the resulting "Brat Summer."

While luck played a role in the success of the album, as several fan-created trends fueled the album's relevance, Charli seamlessly adopted these trends into her promotional strategy. It was also the deliberate choices to make a unique album cover, apply cryptic promotional techniques, and approach a specific music style that led to the trends and virality associated with *Brat*. Charli knew that many of her choices for this project were bold, and from there let the internet do a lot of work with promoting the album and turning it into a movement with participation from celebrities, politicians, and millions of fans. *Brat* has been immortalized in other ways as well. The Brat Wall is listed on Google Maps as a "cultural landmark," and Collins Dictionary named "brat" word of the year in 2024 (Rackham, 2024).

Artists and communications professionals in the music industry should look at *Brat* when considering how they want to promote a project because this campaign demonstrates how to jumpstart virality with new music and embrace its natural results, all while maintaining positive, widespread exposure.

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