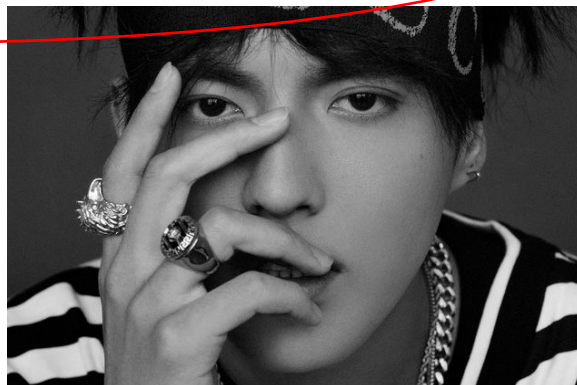


Kris Wu's iTunes-Topping Sales Are Under Review

Was it bots or just impatient Chinese fans that helped him rule the charts?

11/8/2018 by Colin Stutz, Billboard News



Kenneth Cappello (photographer) Kris Wu

Who? 1

When?

When Chinese superstar Kris Wu released his album *Antares* on Friday via Interscope Records it saw quick success on the U.S. iTunes sales chart with tracks soon occupying the top seven song rankings.

What?

Where?

Once Ariana Grande's new single, "thank u, next," dropped on Saturday, Wu was regulated to a still-impressive seven of the top eight spots on the chart, but even then still managed to block Grande from the No. 1 slot.

Why?

1 & 2

(did they need to review his iTunes sales?)

While Wu is a household name in China, he's relatively unknown in America. The former member of boy band EXO who has had acting roles in American and Chinese films made headlines in April when he signed a global deal with Universal Music Group, and his recognition has grown since. But such dominance from a foreign act still raised eyebrows and led to speculation online and in the music industry Wu gamed the system to dominate the iTunes sales chart reported to Nielsen, the data provider for Billboard's charts.

Further adding to the mystery: Wu's streaming figures are relatively low, with just over 1 million monthly listeners reported on Spotify -- which is not available in China -- and his top *Antares* tracks on the platform performing well but not exceptionally so.



Kris Wu Shares 'November Rain' Music Video From Debut Album, 'Antares': Watch

Caption

(His top track "Deserve" featuring Travis Scott dropped nearly a month ago and has almost 24 million streams, while Grande's "thank u, next" already has over 29 million streams on Spotify.)

Who? 2

Grande's manager, Scooter Braun, was among those wondering how Wu managed to drive his sales to such heights. On Sunday, this led him to post in a since-deleted tweet alleging Wu was using bots to drive his sales. On Wednesday (Nov. 7), Braun posted to Instagram that he and Wu had spoken and he wanted to clear up any "rumors" that had come out about them both.

How?
(did they
review his
iTunes sales?)

How 1

How 2

According to Braun's post, it was explained to him and Wu that because Wu's release was held back in China to coincide with his birthday on Tuesday that his fans there "went and got the music any way they could and that was US iTunes."

To do this, Wu's fans in China would need to be technically savvy enough to mask their true IP address with a VPN and gain access to the U.S. iTunes store. Accordingly, assuming this is true, once the album was released in China on Tuesday, Wu's fans no longer needed to hack the U.S. iTunes store, leading Wu's songs to drop from the U.S. iTunes chart.

A rep for Apple could not be reached at time of publishing.

On Wednesday, Universal Music China also issued a statement calling Wu's chart performance with *Antares* "genuine and effective," according to a translation from *Sixth Tone*. It also denied that the album had been taken offline from the iTunes store, as some had believed when the songs' rankings dipped. At time of publishing on Wednesday, *Antares* was available on iTunes and Wu's track "We Alive" was at No. 116 on the iTunes sales chart.

"Billboard and Nielsen Music are working closely to ensure both the accuracy and legitimacy of the sales volumes being reported for Kris Wu this week," said Nielsen in a statement as Billboard's data provider. "We capture data from a number of sources including streaming, radio and retail, allowing us to validate the accuracy of sales and playback information as well as identify anomalies. As we do with all reports when irregularities are noticed during the normal weekly validation process, we work closely with our partners to address the issue, which may result in excluding any irregular or excessive sales patterns, prior to charts being finalized."

Braun continued in his Instagram post, "I have never wished anything bad for Kris nor any other artist and those saying otherwise are wrong. Any fans of anyone I manage who are using this opportunity to spread any sort of division or racism are dead wrong and I won't stand for it. The music community is international and no longer held by borders. Kris happy birthday and you showed yourself to be a global star. Glad we got to connect and speak and keep your head held high. This is just the first of many achievements for you. And for those using my name for false rumors now you know exactly where I stand. Keep it positive."

Additional reporting by Andrew Unterberger.