

Investigation of Music Platform's Features and Pricing That are Appealing to Teenagers

Xintao Yao

*Keystone Academy, Beijing, China
xintao.yao@outlook.com*

Abstract. This research investigates the features and pricing strategies of music platforms that are most appealing to teenagers aged 14–18. Focusing on popular platforms such as QQ Music, NetEase Music, and Spotify, the research investigates key features and pricing plans that are most attractive toward teenage users. A survey with 50 responses from teenagers on this topic shows features like ad-free listening, offline access, exclusive content, large music libraries, and high-quality audio are key factors that teenage users are willing to pay for. In terms of pricing, teenagers prefer shorter free trial periods combined with moderate subscription fees, while longer free trials are attractive only if the increase in monthly cost remains reasonable. These findings provide insights for music streaming platforms to optimize their features and pricings to enhance user experience and increase the number of teenage users.

Keywords: Music streaming, teenage users, platform features, subscription pricing, user preferences

1. Introduction

Music is a popular way of entertainment and relax. It includes a wide range of genre and music from different language and producers across the globe. To access music audio online, a variety of music platforms were created as a source of entertainment for users across all age groups to use with cost. The huge number of different music platforms increased the competitiveness within the market. All platforms create a revenue through charging a subscription fee to give access of music and access to some feature of their platform to their users. Some features include access to download of music, sound effects, user custom, visual effects, etc [1]. This is a common feature for all music platforms such as QQ music, NetEase Music, and Spotify music [2]. More specifically, Spotify includes personalized playlists and algorithm-driven recommendations that efficiently attract users from different age groups [3]. Within the different music platforms, they all have their own unique method and functions to attract users from different age, aiming at different groups [4]. These brand also has created user loyalty and with special features to maintain its users and prevent its users from using an alternative platform [5]. A big part of music platform's customers are teenage customers, as teenagers are more frequent online. Focusing on the teenage user, it is valuable to investigate: What pricing and musical features are most attractive towards user within a 14-18 age group? What are the

differences between music platforms in China and a platform that is considered to be more international?

2. Value of the research

This research investigates which pricing structures and platform features of music streaming services are most appealing to teenager aged 14–18. The value of this study lies in its potential to improve user experience on music platforms. By identifying and understanding the features that teenagers find most attractive, music platforms can adjust or expand their existing functions to better serve this audience. For example, platforms may focus on improving compatibility across devices or providing higher audio quality to better meet teenagers' preferences. Therefore, examining both the features of music platforms and their pricing strategies for teenage users represents an important contribution of this research.

Teenagers are among the consumer groups that rely most heavily on technology for entertainment and relaxation. Music streaming services play a significant role in this usage. Increasing the number of teenage users could therefore generate substantial profits for music platforms. Consequently, this research may also help platforms develop strategies to attract more teenage users and improve their financial performance. Rather than studying the entire population of consumers, this research specifically focuses on the preferences of teenage audiences. This targeted approach allows the study to provide more precise insights into the behavior and needs of this group.

Pricing decisions can be particularly challenging for music platforms when designing subscription plans. Many platforms offer an initial free trial period before charging a subscription fee. For example, Spotify offers students the first month of its service free of charge. However, it remains unclear whether this pricing structure is the most effective way to attract new subscribers. This study seeks to examine that question. Specifically, it investigates whether it is more effective to extend the free trial period while charging a higher monthly fee afterward, or to shorten the free period while maintaining a lower monthly subscription cost. Understanding the pricing trade-offs that are most attractive to teenage consumers is important because pricing strategies are directly linked to the profitability of music platforms.

3. Method of research

Some background information about the apps especially QQ music and Spotify is essential to analyze the pricing and features of the apps. QQ music and Spotify music was chosen because QQ music is a music platform commonly used in China and Spotify is commonly used outside of China [6]. It is also supportive for us when analyzing the music apps from multiple perspective by comparing the two platforms and analyze what difference there are between China's platform and an international platform. The information about cost and privileges after unlocking premium was found directly from downloading the apps and looking at different plans and costs in the user interface. For other data such as user data, monthly active users, market share, revenue, and competitors, this information was found from secondary sources online. After gathering the basic information about music apps, a survey was created, asking specifically teenage boys and girls (between 14-18) to respond to the survey. The survey collected their preference of some features of the music apps, their commonly used app, and their preference upon the trade-off in pricing of the apps mentioned in the previous section. The link of this survey is: <https://forms.office.com/r/Q8Wj6S8iaU>. The preference of features and pricing for teenagers will be

analyzed based on the results of the survey, as the questions are designed for a clear analysis of the results.

4. Result analysis

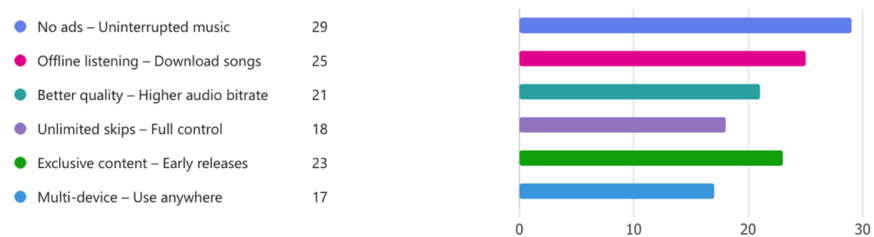
50 responses were collected for the survey, all of which came from Chinese teenagers aged 14–18.

First, the two music applications most used among Chinese teenage users was identified, where the two music streaming platforms are QQ Music and NetEase Music. According to the survey results, 38% of respondents use QQ Music, while 33% use NetEase Music. Given their popularity among teenagers, it is valuable to examine the characteristics that these platforms share which make them attractive to teenage users. These common characteristics may include similar pricing structures, subscription privileges, or platform features.

For example, QQ Music offers several subscription tiers. Its basic VIP plan costs 20 RMB per month, with a promotional price of 15 RMB for the first month. This plan includes privileges such as high-quality audio, the ability to download music, ad-free listening, access to exclusive songs, and limited theme customization. The SVIP plan costs 30 RMB per month, also with a promotional price of 15 RMB for the first month and provides additional benefits such as higher-quality audio formats like FLAC (a lossless audio compression format that preserves original sound quality without data loss) and Hi-Res tracks, increased download limits, access to more exclusive songs, and additional theme customization options.

QQ Music currently has approximately 1.337 billion monthly active users (MAU), which refers to the number of unique users who engage with a platform within a 30-day period. Among these users, about 121 million are paying subscribers, including 111 million basic VIP subscribers and 10 million SVIP subscribers. Given the platform's large user base, its pricing structure may serve as a useful benchmark for other music applications operating in the Chinese market.

3. What would be your main reason for paying for a premium subscription?



5. What are some features of music platforms that will attract you as an user?

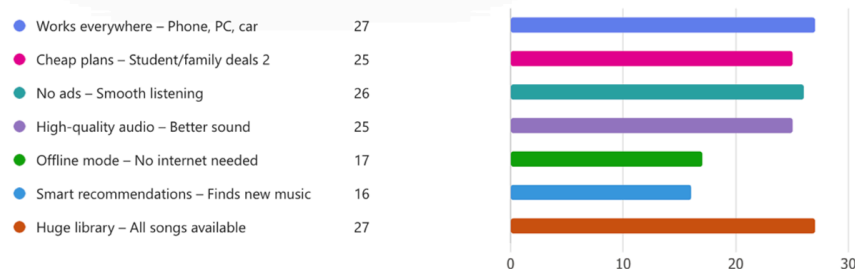


Figure 1. Survey result for question 3 and question 5

Next, respondents were asked the question: "What would be your main reason for paying for a premium subscription?" Several options were provided. According to the results, the top features that teenage users are willing to pay for include ad-free listening, the ability to listen offline, and access to exclusive content. Other features such as a large music library, high-quality audio, and affordable subscription plans were also considered attractive. These findings suggest that music platforms seeking to attract teenage users should prioritize these features when designing their subscription services.

On the next section of the survey, which is one of the most crucial parts of the investigation, responses were collected to investigate the best pricing plans for music apps to attract teenage users. Usually, subscriptions for music apps includes a free period, where users get to try out the subscription privileges for free with commitment of automatic payment after the free period. respondents were offered with two new pricing plans with an existing pricing plan from one of the existing music apps. One of the two hypothesized pricing has a longer free period but a higher cost per month, the other There are 3 questions asked in this style:

For Question 7, respondents were asked to compare three subscription plans with different combinations of free trial periods and monthly prices. App 1 offers the longest free trial period of three months but has the highest monthly price of 25 RMB compared with App 2 and QQ Music's VIP subscription. App 2 provides the lowest monthly price of 18 RMB but does not include any free trial period. In contrast, QQ Music's existing VIP plan offers a one-month free trial and a moderate monthly price relative to the other two plans.

The results show that 46% of respondents selected the QQ Music VIP pricing plan, indicating that its current pricing structure is effective in attracting teenage subscribers. The findings suggest that teenage users prefer having a short free trial period while maintaining a relatively low monthly subscription cost. In other words, users appear willing to accept a shorter free trial if it results in a lower ongoing monthly price. Consistent with this interpretation, App 1—despite offering the longest free trial—was the least preferred option in this question. One possible explanation is that its monthly price is significantly higher than the alternatives: approximately 39% more expensive than App 2 and 25% more expensive than the QQ Music VIP plan. This relatively high monthly fee may discourage teenage users from choosing the plan despite the longer free period.

7. If there are two new music apps that has similar VIP features:
APP 1 cost **25 RMB per month** but **free for the first 3 months**,
APP 2 cost **18 RMB per month with no no free period**
and QQ Music VIP (普通VIP)-**20 RMB monthly, with a cost of 15 RMB for the first month**
Which one will you subscribe?

[More details](#)

● APP 1	2
● APP 2	5
● QQ music VIP	6

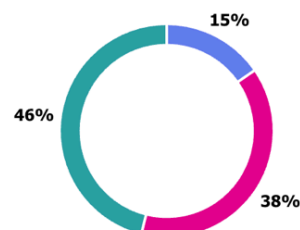


Figure 2. Survey result for question 7

For Question 8, a similar comparison was presented using higher-priced subscription tiers. App 1 again offered the longest free trial period of three months but had the highest monthly cost of 33 RMB. App 2 had the lowest monthly cost at 27 RMB but did not include a free trial. QQ Music's existing SVIP plan includes a one-month promotional trial price of 15 RMB, followed by a monthly price of 30 RMB.

The results show that QQ Music's SVIP plan remained the most preferred option among respondents, which helps explain the platform's success in attracting teenage users. However, in this scenario App 1 was significantly more preferred than App 2. Although App 1 is approximately 22% more expensive than App 2, it includes a three-month free trial period. This finding suggests that a longer free trial combined with a moderately higher monthly price can be an effective strategy for attracting teenage users. Over time, such a pricing strategy may also generate higher long-term profits for music platforms.

8. If there are two new music apps that has similar VIP features:

APP 1 cost **33 RMB per month** but **free for the first 3 months**,

APP 2 cost **27 RMB per month with no no free period**

and QQ Music SVIP (豪华VIP / Super VIP) cost **30 RMB monthly, with a cost of 15 RMB for the first month**

Which one will you subscribe?



Figure 3. Survey result for question 8

Finally, the last question in the survey followed a similar format but compared hypothetical plans with Spotify's student premium plan. In this case, App 1 was preferred by more respondents than the existing Spotify pricing plan. App 1 again offered a three-month free trial but charged the highest monthly price of 45 RMB. App 2 had the lowest price at 40 RMB but did not provide a free trial. Spotify's student premium plan included one free month followed by a monthly fee of 43 RMB.

The results further support the idea that offering a longer free trial period can help attract teenage users. App 1's success may also be explained by the relatively small difference in monthly price compared with the alternatives. Its monthly fee is only about 12.5% higher than App 2 and approximately 4.6% higher than Spotify's student plan. This suggests that while free trial periods are important in attracting teenage users, keeping the monthly subscription price within a reasonable range is equally important. Music platforms therefore need to balance trial length and monthly pricing when designing subscription strategies aimed at teenage consumers.

9. If there are two new music apps that has similar VIP features:
APP 1 cost **45 RMB per month** but **free for the first 3 months**,
APP 2 cost **40 RMB per month with no free period**
and Spotify student Premium that cost **43 RMB monthly, free for the first month**
Which one will you subscribe?



Figure 4. Survey result for question 9

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the result from the survey indicates several music platform features and music pricing decisions that may best attract teenage users. Features including ads free, offline listening, exclusive contents, huge music library, high-quality audio, and cheap plans are considered as effective to attract teenage users based on the 50 responses collected using a survey.

Next, the trade-off between longer free period but higher pricing or shorter free period but higher pricing that best attracts teenage users is established. Results shows that teenage users have a preference towards a longer free period or tryout period while bearing a high cost. However, when the increase in monthly cost is more than around 25% of an existing cost, most teenage users will not be attracted by the 3 months of free tryout period as they might consider the monthly fee after the free period to be too expensive. When the increase in cost is relatively at a smaller proportion, the free period seems more attractive towards teenage users and can create more long-term profits for a music platform.

The findings from this survey are only at a surface level, where the precise preferred tradeoff between higher cost and longer free period remains uncertain. It is also valuable to investigate whether users in other age group shares the same preference and trend upon the tradeoff of music platforms or behave differently.

References

- [1] Hesmondhalgh, David, et al. "Critically analyzing platform interfaces: how music-streaming platforms frame musical experience." *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 18, no. 0, 2024, p. 22, ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/21989.
- [2] QQ Music. "QQ Music – A high-quality music platform with tens of millions of licensed songs, a massive lossless music library, and daily access to new and trending songs for unlimited listening!" Qq.com, 2019, y.qq.com/.
- [3] Stanisljevic, D. "The impact of spotify features on music discovery in the streaming platform age." Master's Thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2020.
- [4] Barata, Mariana Lopes, and Pedro Simões Coelho. "Music streaming services: understanding the drivers of customer purchase and intention to recommend." *Heliyon*, vol. 7, no. 8, Aug. 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07783>.

- [5] Jones, Nell. User loyalty and willingness to pay for a music streaming subscription identifying asset specificity in the case of streaming platforms. 2020, sites.duke.edu/djepapers/files/2020/08/nelljones-dje.pdf.
- [6] Spotify. "Spotify." Spotify, open.spotify.com/.