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A Study on the Psychological Motivations and Marketing Strategies Behind Paid Consumption on Digital Music Platforms

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Abstract. With the development of digital technology, digital music platforms have gradually become an important channel for people to access music content, and the membership payment model has also become an important way for platforms to commercialize. Users' payment behavior is influenced not only by their demand for music content, but also by psychological factors such as emotional needs, social identity, and usage habits. This paper takes the user payment behavior of digital music platforms as the research object, combines relevant theories of consumer psychology to analyze the psychological motivations of paid consumption, and uses NetEase Cloud Music as an example to explore the platform's marketing strategies to promote user payments. This article analyzes the reasons why users pay for memberships from three aspects: emotional needs, social needs, and usage habits. It also examines NetEase Cloud Music's marketing strategies from three perspectives: membership benefit design, fan economy operation, and long-term membership management. The research finds that users purchase memberships not only for a better music experience but also to satisfy their needs for emotional value and identity.

Keywords: Digital music platform, payment behavior, marketing psychology, marketing strategy

1. Introduction

In recent years, advances in Internet technology have digital music integrated into people's daily lives, and digital music platforms have emerged as an important channel for people to access music content [1]. The subscription-based membership model has also become an important means for platforms to generate revenue. Digital music platforms such as NetEase Cloud Music and QQ Music are constantly improving user value through membership services and digital content consumption.

Users subscribe to digital music memberships not simply for functional benefits, but also to pursue higher-quality music experiences, emotional fulfillment, and a sense of identity through the act of paying. For example, membership benefits can provide better music services, and digital content consumption can reflect users' support for musical works and musicians. Furthermore, usage habits formed over time also influence users' continued willingness to pay.

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Therefore, this paper analyzes the psychological motivations of users' paid consumption from three aspects: emotional needs, social needs, and usage habits, and takes NetEase Cloud Music as an example to explore the platform's marketing strategies to promote user payment.

2. Psychological motivations for paid music consumption

As the digital music market continues to evolve, membership purchases on digital music platforms have become increasingly prevalent, and user payment behavior is influenced by a variety of psychological factors. From the perspective of marketing psychology, consumers purchase membership services not only to obtain music content, but also due to the combined effects of emotional needs, social needs, and usage habits. Therefore, this paper analyzes the psychological motivations behind digital music platform users' paid consumption across these three dimensions.

2.1. Emotional needs: musical companionship and emotional value

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory suggests that once people's basic living needs are met, they will pay more attention to psychological needs such as emotions and a sense of belonging [2]. Nowadays, as material living standards continue to improve and most basic survival needs are met, emotional needs have become increasingly salient. Music can help people express their emotions and relieve stress. Therefore, many users regard listening to music as a way of spiritual companionship in their daily lives. Whether studying, working, or resting, people tend to select different types of songs according to their mood, using music to regulate their mood and achieve relaxation and comfort. Therefore, music has gradually become an indispensable part of people's lives.

Digital music platforms have grasped this emotional need. In addition to increasing the emotional connection between music and users through features such as comment sections, playlist sharing, and daily personalized recommendations, these platforms have introduced paid benefits such as high-quality audio, ad-free playback, digital albums, and member-exclusive music libraries to provide users with a better music experience. When a platform can meet the emotional needs of users, users' recognition and favorability of the platform will continue to increase, as does their willingness to pay. Compared with free services, paid members can enjoy a wider music library, higher sound quality, ad-free playback, and other exclusive benefits. Consequently, many users are willing to pay for this more comfortable and stable experience. From the perspective of marketing psychology, users pay not only for music, but also for the emotional value derived from long-term musical companionship [3].

2.2. Social needs: musical taste and social circle identification

Nowadays, listening to music is no longer just a personal pastime, but has acquired a certain social attribute. Music brings together people with similar musical preferences, forming various interest groups.

According to Social Identity Theory [4], individuals can gain a sense of belonging by joining a group, and the characteristics of the group will deepen their awareness of their own identity. On digital music platforms, users with different musical tastes congregate in circles with common interests, such as fan groups centered around specific artists or genres. Some users buy memberships not only to use more functions, but also to make their membership a mark that distinguishes them from ordinary users. When membership badges, exclusive benefits and platform activities become

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part of their identity, membership can help them show their interests and consumption options in the music circle, thereby gaining a certain sense of identity.

Beyond these features, platforms offer premium benefits that further strengthen users' ties to specific music communities. For example, memberships include the ability to purchase digital albums, opportunities to participate in exclusive music events, and access to content only available to members. These benefits not only enhance the user experience but also deepen users' engagement with the music communities they value. For someone who likes a particular singer or genre, a membership not only means convenient access to services but also represents their support and participation in the related music culture, thus strengthening their sense of belonging within their interest group.

From this perspective, social needs constitute a crucial psychological driver of users' willingness to pay for digital music services. Users buy memberships not just for functional needs, but primarily to strengthen their sense of identity and participation in their community. When platforms design membership benefits that reflect identity and social value, users experience psychological satisfaction during the consumption process, making them more willing to pay and continue using the platform for a longer period.

2.3. Habit formation: behavioral transformation from free to paid services

In addition to emotional and social needs, long-term usage habits are also an important factor affecting consumption. Habit Formation Theory [5] suggests that when a person repeatedly engages in a behavior over an extended period and has positive experiences, this behavior becomes habitual, and subsequent decisions will subconsciously rely on the habit rather than making new choices.

Many users initially perceive digital music platforms simply as free software for listening to music. As they use them more, they accumulate a large collection of tracks, building their own personalized playlists. Over time, once users develop stable usage habits, switching platforms requires adapting to new operating methods. Given the high switching costs, users are generally reluctant to switch platforms easily, which makes them more likely to subscribe to paid services on their existing platforms.

Meanwhile, digital music platforms typically reduce the psychological pressure on users to make their first payment by offering free trials, limited-time discounts, and student memberships. Once users experience the membership service and find that ad-free playback, higher sound quality, more music resources, and a more convenient user experience meet their needs, their perception of the membership's value increases, increasing the likelihood that they will maintain their subscriptions.

Therefore, the payment behavior of digital music platform users is not a one-time consumption decision, but rather a habit formed through prolonged use. By optimizing the membership experience, lowering the threshold for first-time purchases and enhancing users' perception of the value of services [6], the platform can promote the transformation of users from free users to long-term paying users.

3. Analysis of netease cloud music's membership marketing strategy based on user psychology

The preceding analysis explored the psychological motivations behind paid consumption by users of digital music platforms. Users purchase memberships not only to meet basic music listening needs but also to obtain higher-quality music experiences, emotional value, and a sense of identity. Therefore, platforms need to enhance users' perception of membership value through differentiated paid services. Taking NetEase Cloud Music as an example, its membership marketing strategy

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mainly focuses on three aspects: membership benefit design, fan-economy operations, and long-term membership retention.

3.1. Membership benefit design: enhancing perceived value through functional differentiation

Users' willingness to pay for digital music platforms largely depends on the membership services and whether they can provide exclusive value not offered by free services. If the user experience of free and paid services is not significantly different, users will not be inclined to pay. Thus, platforms rely on high-quality membership benefits to enhance users' perception of the value of paid services.

NetEase Cloud Music effectively enhances the value of its memberships by offering high-definition audio quality, lossless audio sources, download privileges, and exclusive member content. While regular users can only meet basic listening needs, members enjoy a more complete and high-quality music experience. High-definition audio caters to users' desire for musical detail, and offline download capabilities ensure uninterrupted listening without an internet connection. These benefits genuinely optimize the user experience.

Furthermore, digital albums and exclusive music content effectively drive user spending. Users pay not only to access music resources but also to support their favorite works and artists. Industry data indicate that membership subscriptions and digital album purchases have become mainstream revenue models, and users' demand for music quality and personalized experiences continues to grow.Therefore, the key to membership operations lies in differentiating the value between free and paid tiers, so that users can clearly see that paying will bring a better music experience.

3.2. Fan economy strategy: strengthening community identity through emotional support

The consumption of digital music is not just about simple functional consumption; it also includes a significant amount of emotional consumption. Many users subscribe not merely for additional platform features, but primarily to support their favorite artists and musical works through payments, and to earn recognition from their fan communities.

NetEase Cloud Music leverages digital albums, member-exclusive content, and various music events to strengthen the emotional connection between users and music content. When users purchase digital albums of their favorite singers, they can not only satisfy their need to listen to music but also express their support for music. Within fan communities, such paid behavior also reflects personal interests and preferences, thereby helping users earn recognition from the group [7].

The platform's membership system will further strengthen users' sense of community. Members can demonstrate a higher level of engagement with music and differentiate themselves from ordinary users. This exclusive status can effectively deepen users' recognition of membership services.

Therefore, the fan-economy model serves not merely to drive consumption, but to leverage emotional connections and community recognition to foster users' willingness to pay.

3.3. Long-term membership retention: cultivating sustainable consumption habits

A user's first membership purchase does not necessarily indicate stable consumption; the platform still needs continuous operation to increase users' willingness to renew. From the perspective of habit formation, when a person uses a service over an extended period and derives consistent value, their consumption behavior will gradually become a habit.

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NetEase Cloud Music launched continuous monthly subscriptions, quarterly memberships, and annual memberships, thereby reducing the long-term cost of using the service. Users can also choose different payment durations according to their needs. At the same time, the platform will use membership discounts and new user discounts to lower the threshold for first-time purchases, making it easier for users to experience membership services [8].

As users use the membership features for a longer period, their initial payment behavior gradually transforms into a stable habit. Once users become accustomed to ad-free playback, higher-quality audio, and offline download capabilities, they become less likely to cancel their subscriptions. This sustained usage enhances users' perception of the membership's value, thus encouraging long-term payments.

Therefore, the focus of membership operations is not to attract users to make purchases in the short term, but to continuously provide value and cultivate stable consumption habits among users, thereby enhancing user retention.

4. Conclusion

This paper examines paid consumption behavior among users of digital music platforms, analyzing the psychological motivations underlying such behavior and the marketing strategies NetEase Cloud Music employs to drive user payments.

Users' purchase of digital music memberships is not solely influenced by functional needs, but rather by a combination of factors including emotional needs, social recognition, and usage habits. Membership benefits enhance users' music experiences, digital content consumption satisfies users' needs for emotional support and community recognition, and long-term usage habits encourage continued payments.

Taking NetEase Cloud Music as an example, the platform enhances users' perceived value of paid services through membership benefit design, fan-economy operations, and long-term membership retention strategies. Nevertheless, this study relies primarily on theoretical analysis and the case study method, and does not incorporate user surveys or empirical data. Future research could incorporate more platform case studies to further investigate digital music payment behavior.

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