More Than Just Music: Uses and Gratifications of NetEase Cloud Music Among EDM Fans in China

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Abstract Over the past few years, the music industry in China has been witnessing two major shifts: whilst the prevalence of music streaming services are taking music digitalization and mobilization to another level, the rise in popularity of EDM (electronic dance music) is another striking phenomenon. More specifically, the genre not only has been appearing frequently on the domestic music charts, a good number of renowned EDM festivals and artists have also been participating actively in the flourishing EDM event scene across urban China. It is noteworthy here that the online EDM streaming in China is often associated with NetEase Cloud Music (NCM) – a music streaming platform that provides abundant EDM-related services, and NCM is often seen as a hub for EDM lovers and artists to interact. To find out the reasons behind this phenomenon, this thesis explores the uses and gratification of NetEase Cloud Music among EDM lovers in China. Situated at the theoretical intersection of uses and gratifications research, music streaming studies and EDM studies, this research fills the knowledge gap of existing studies by presenting great insights into the uses and gratifications of one of the biggest music streaming services in China and sheds a light on the ever-growing domestic EDM market. By conducting 12 semi-structured interviews with users located in 9 different cities, this qualitative study evaluates the factors including the usage, the motivation of use, the perception of the role NCM plays in the domestic EDM market, etc. Evidence is found in this study that users can derive satisfaction from the convenience utilities, which encompass the user-friendly layout, gigantic music library, multi-functionality and easy music discovery. Besides, the social features of the platform also play crucial roles in terms of user gratification, as they enable users to express their opinions on music by sharing the music to other social media platforms (mostly WeChat), commenting and instant messaging. On top of that, the NCM's annual music report custom-made for its users is highly appreciated by the majority of the respondents, as it is more detailed compared to other music streaming services. Moreover, NCM is also being used as a platform where users can learn more about music genres, the background of music and music production techniques. Another noteworthy outcome is that the actions of downloading music, arranging digital collections and consuming copyrighted music can create and increase the sense of digital music ownership, hence generating greater user satisfaction. NCM is also being used by musicians to publish and promote their own music, while monetary rewards can be acquired from the platform. Furthermore, the platform is being perceived as a trend-setter and a gatekeeper in the domestic EDM market in China, exerting a great impact on the EDM trends. However, some respondents claimed that the influential role of NCM can lead to the formation of an imbalanced market – as it is more likely for NCM to promote renowned musicians or sponsored music, some talented artists that are unknown in China might be neglected. Furthermore, NCM also fosters EDM talent by hosting dance music competitions. Finally, based on the information gathered during the interviews, the EDM label owned by NCM also provides EDM production classes online and offline, which proves that NCM is dedicated to becoming the leading figure in the market.
Key words: Music streaming service, uses and gratification, EDM, Chinese music market, NetEase Cloud Music

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Introduction

Nowadays, the global music industry has been witnessing a profound proliferation of streaming services – the systems of delivery music content on the internet which provide users with unlimited access to music in the "cloud" instead of promoting music ownership (downloading). And this form of digital music service has become heavily associated with platforms such as Spotify (Johansson & Werner, 2017). According to Dörr, Wagner, Benlian and Hess (2013), the MaaS (Music as a Service) is now the most prevalent and the most profitable business model in the industry which refers to the music distribution by streaming services that equipped with recommendation systems. This type of system normally has a free and a premium version that requires a flat rate every month, while the music is not permanently saved on the devices of users. According to IFPI (2019a), on-demand music streaming platforms had attracted around 89% of music consumers globally in 2019.

With the industry structure becoming more standardized, along with the relevant legislation in the cultural industry being constantly perfected, the music market in China is also "undergoing a digital transformation with the constant growth of the number of paid subscribers", as stated by the Managing Director of Sony Music in China, and the market is now the seventh-largest music market in the world (IFPI, 2019b). According to a survey, digital music now dominates the consumption landscape by generating 70% of music record revenues, and 90% of Chinese internet users reported that they use licensed audio-streaming services (Michieletto, 2018). However, compared to the Western music markets, the music streaming industry in China operates in a rather unique way. To begin with, at the time of writing, Spotify has not yet launched its services in the Mainland. There are two most speculated causes for this phenomenon: on the one hand, since the strict online censorship in China aims to eliminate all the "harmful" contents (contents promoting drug-using and sexual depiction, etc.), thus the content of music streaming platforms are hence greatly restricted (Wang, 2016); on the other hand, Spotify is well-aware that this sector is highly competitive in China – It was not until 2015 that Apple music finally entered the market, and it has been the only Western music streaming platform operating actively in China ever since (Beatsreport, 2019). In fact, the music streaming industry in the Mainland is dominated by domestic platforms: in 2018, platforms

operating under Tencent[1] had claimed a lion's share of 69.8% of the total active user penetration, and the number of monthly active users on those platforms had exceeded 740 million (Macquaire Research, 2018).

Apart from that, electronic dance music[2] has witnessed a tremendous growth both artistically and economically during the past few years: the genre itself, the artists, event organizers now have a stronger-than-ever impact on the global music industry (EVAR, 2012). In the late 2010s, an interesting phenomenon had emerged in the Chinese urban landscapes: many world-class EDM artists have started touring in China both at the large-scaled EDM festivals as well in the nightclub events. A number of renowned foreign EDM festival brands are now active in major cities in China, including EDC and Ultra Music Festival.[3] The younger generations are now starting to accept and embrace the genre, which hence enabled a market with great potential to grow. Aside from the vibrant live event scene, the online music platforms have also witnessed EDM's transformation into the terrain of mainstream popularity. According to an EDM market research report published by iiMedia (2018), electronic music had become the 2nd most preferred music genre in China, and the number of online electronic music plays in 2020 is estimated to be more than 360 billion. Considering the fact that this genre with Western roots is being newly popularized in China, unquestionably, this transformation is closely associated with digitalization and mobilization of music. In the age of digitalization and globalization of cultural products, the production, dissemination and consumption of popular music are made easy by the internet and media

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1 Tencent: a leading internet technology company in China, operates the biggest communication platforms in China such as Wechat and QQ. It is also known for gaming development, music streaming, mobile payment, etc. ("Tencent", 2020).

2 The genre encompasses a broad range of music genres including techno, house, trance and dubstep. Also known as "EDM" (Knees, Faraldo, Herrera, Vogl, Böck, Hörschläger & Goff, 2015).

3 EDC: Electric Dance Carnival is a unique multi-day dance music festival that originated in Las Vegas. EDC incorporates carnival themes and attractions to enrich the festival experience. The festival is now active worldwide. ("Electric Daisy Carnival", 2019).

Ultra Music Festival: world-class dance music festival that features the most iconic DJs and one of the pioneers of festival live streaming services. Every March, it holds its flagship event in Miami, and it is now active in 29 countries ("About Ultra", 2020).

platforms, music from all over the world could hence reach their audience in every corner (Baym & Ledbetter, 2009).

Nevertheless, in the case of EDM streaming, the dominance of Tencent is being greatly challenged by one of its rivals – NetEase, a leading internet technology company and gaming developer based in China which dedicates itself to providing "premium online services centred around content, community, communication and commerce" ("About NetEase"). Founded in 2013, its music streaming service NetEase Cloud Music (NCM) had already yielded over 450 million users within 6 years. The platform mainly markets towards younger demographics (15-35-year-old) in tier one and tier two cities in China.[4] An interesting phenomenon on the platform is that 30% of its users listen to international music, besides, the platform also showed great dedication to internationalization by providing services such as lyric translation, attracting more international artists to set up their official accounts and signing international distribution deals with a focus on alternative music scenes (Dredge, 2017; Pastukhov, 2019a; Stassen, 2019). Most importantly, NetEase Cloud Music is an international and local music hub where artists can build an audience and connect directly with their fans, since the platform had successfully incorporated social media functionalities by perfectly combining music listening with blogging, commenting, private messaging, etc., which hence allow users to build online music communities. And yet, none of its Western rivals had any success with it (Pastukhov, 2019a).

One of the inspirations of this study is the assertion of iiMedia (2018) that NetEase Cloud Music is the most popular online streaming platform among EDM fans in China, and it is perceived as the mediator of the high-quality music productions and professional insights of EDM. Moreover, over 50 renowned EDM artists and labels had registered their official accounts on NetEase Cloud Music in the year of 2016, and they had generated over 1 million fan interactions on the platform within that year (Wang, 2017). With a recent investment made by Alibaba, NetEase Cloud Music is believed to have the potential to shift the market (Beatsreport, 2019). Frankly speaking, the digitalization of the music industry has transformed

[4] Tier one and tier two cities are the first two categories of the Chinese city tier system, which refers to the most-developed big cities in China such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou (Hu, 2017).

the genre of EDM from a niche, underground market to the mainstream scene in China, as the music streaming platforms enable music from all over the world to reach a wider audience, and hence facilitating a drastic development in the urban live EDM sector (Beatsreport, 2019). With the consumers' embrace of the genre, China has also become a vast market for offline EDM events in recent years, attracting international music festivals such as Ultra and EDC to host events annually in 1st tier cities. On top of that, the popularity of EDM also manifests in the vibrant nightclub scenes across urban China (Pastukhov, 2019b).

This thesis aims to present insights into one of the biggest and fastest-growing music markets nowadays with a focus on EDM by investigating the users of the most influential EDM streaming platform in China. From the information provided above, it is evident that this platform is unique with various different features, hence, by conducting a uses and gratification research to this app would add great value to the existing research. The main research question of this study is *how can we understand the uses and gratifications of NetEase Cloud Music in the EDM scene of Mainland China?* By focusing on the user experience and the motivation of use, this paper attempts to present information on the online EDM streaming users in China and crystalize the perceived role of NetEase Cloud Music in the domestic EDM market.

This research is of academic relevance, as it contributes insights into the academic field of EDM, music streaming services and uses and gratification studies. Based on the literature review presented below, it seems that the studies on the EDM scenes are rather western-centric with a lack of attention on the fast-growing Mainland market. There are only a few exceptions such as the study on the Shanghai commercial discotheque scene in the 1980s (Farrer, 2000), and some research on the Cantonese EDM scene (Chew, 2011; Lau, 2004). Apart from that, scarcely any research concerning music streaming services in China can be found, as the industry is still adapting to the new form of music consumption. Although the genre was originated in Europe (Collins, Schedel & Wilson, 2013), the assumed "placelessness" of EDM indicates that the genre is not culturally bound (Connell and Gibson, 2006. p.260; Van der Velde and Hitters, 2016). The recent rise in popularity of EDM in China is hence worth looking into. Besides, since the uses and gratification approach is believed to work best in relation to specific types of content where motivation might be present (McQuail, 1983), in this study, the motivation of the use of NetEase concerning online EDM consumption is another research

focus. Thus, it also be interesting for academics who are interested in exploring how people derive gratifications from music streaming apps. Moreover, it might also be useful for those who want to conduct further investigations on Chinese EDM audience and music streaming platforms in China. Besides, this research is also of social relevance. On the one hand, since this research presents interesting facts on EDM lovers in China, the research outcome might be valuable for EDM artists, labels, promoters and festivals aiming for expansion to the Chinese market. On the other hand, as this study presents great insights into user experiences, it might help music streaming platforms for performance assessment and future development.

Literature Review

This thesis conducts an investigation into the biggest and fastest-growing music markets at the moment with a focus on the uses and gratifications of the most influential EDM streaming platforms in China. To better clarify the theoretical framework of this research while highlighting the academic relevance of this study, the literature review section below presents a comprehensive overview of the existing knowledge on uses and gratification of media, the research on music streaming services and EDM studies.

Uses and gratification research

As posited by Jensen and Rosengren (1990), there are several traditions in the research of media audience: whilst a number of early studies tend to focus on the imposed effects of mass-media stimuli on viewers; in the realm of cultural studies, media audience in different cultural and social practices are studied; while reception analysis integrates social-scientific and humanistic perspectives for audience research. The authors also suggested that "a theory of socio-cultural dispositions with individual approach and interact with media content" is one of the crucial components for the research framework of audience research (p.230). Since it is necessary for researchers to pay extra attention to the perspectives of the audience when studying the usage, satisfactions, needs, and motives of media audience (Wang, 2014; Ruggiero, 2000), along with the fact that the main research focus of this thesis is the users of a music streaming service in China, another research school, known as the uses and gratification approach, was set as the major guideline for this research due to its audience-centred nature (Ibid.).

The U&G approach has a long history which attaches great importance to the role of the individual audience in media studies. More specifically, it is a theory of communication for the analyses of media choices and consumption which positions audience members as active (Ruggiero, 2000). The core question of this approach is: "why do people use media, and what do they use them for? (McQuail, 1983, p.424)". Originated in the 1940s, this approach was first used to clarify what gratifications audiences derive from radio and newspaper (Suchman, 1942;

Herzog, 1944; Berelson, 1949). However, Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) argued that the early studies failed to draw a more detailed picture of media gratification, as they tend to emphasis the functions of the media contents while neglecting the interlinks between media functions (different media contents/features) and media gratifications (the needs of users fulfilled by the functions). From the authors' perspective, the audiences are "active", and the patterns of media use are being shaped by the needs of the audience: "people are sufficiently self-aware to be able to report their interests and motives in particular cases" (Ibid., p. 510-511), thus the needs and motives may be generated by social and psychological factors (Ibid.; Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973). Some of the most influential findings in the realm of U&G research on the motives of media satisfaction are presented in sets of categories: Whilst McQuail, Blumer and Brown (1972) proposed a typology of media-person interactions which captures the most important media satisfactions of the individual audience: including escaping from routine, social utility, identity and information seeking, Rubin (1983) developed a set of television viewing motivations including pass time, information, entertainment, companionship and escape. And Denis McQuail (1987) identified several main motives for media consumption, including entertainment (escape from routine, relaxation, fill free time, etc.), social connections, and self-identification as well as perception.

Moreover, as uses and gratifications "has always provided a cutting-edge theoretical approach in the initial stage of each new mass communication medium" (Ruggiero, 2000, p.3), scholars such as Kuehn (1994) have used this approach to investigate the interactive capacity of computer-mediated communication and presented a typology of convenience, diversion, relationship development as well as intellectual appeal. The emergence and development of the internet have also led to investigations on the use of the medium (Larose, Mastro and Eastin, 2001). Among more recent works, one of the most researched topics is the relationship between users and social media. Many in the field looked into the uses and gratification of SNS (social network sites) platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Urista, Dong and Day, 2009; Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2011; Lee and Cho, 2011). In the research of Whiting and Williams (2013), in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the uses and gratifications of social media, and the authors highlighted 7 uses and gratifications for using social media: social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, community utility,

convenience utility and expression. The most useful themes for this research are social interaction, information seeking, convenience utility and expression. In particular, the convenience utility represents the convenience or usefulness of social media to individuals, and expression refers to how users use social media as places where they can express thoughts and opinions (Ibid).

Another interesting study has identified three main dimensions in the uses and gratifications of MySpace and Facebook among university students: information, friendship and connection. More importantly, researchers have also discovered sex differences in the use of social networking sites: while male respondents are more likely to use those sites for dating purposes, female respondents are more likely to use private accounts (Bonds & Raacke, 2010). Nevertheless, it is important to note here that different SNS platforms entail different features, hence generating differences in the uses and gratifications of users (Joinson, 2008; Burke, Kraut and Marlow, 2011). Aside from communication-based platforms, U&G research are also being conducted on the appeal of user-generated media such as YouTube and Wikipedia: Shao's research (2009) argues that users consume the contents for information, entertainment and mood management, and they interact with the content for social connections, while contents productions are for self-expression and self-actualization. By employing focus group interviews and online surveys, Wang (2014) has established a behavior model of YouTube users in Taiwan and confirmed that the level of involvement (including participation activities such as commenting and record sharing) has a positive relation to the gratification users derived from video-sharing sites, since the commenting-related actions require more attention and focus from viewers compared to purely browsing. Besides, regarding the prevalence of video-streaming services nowadays, the U&G approach was also used as a guiding framework to explore the motives behind the binge-watching behaviors on Netflix: the qualitative study of Steiner and Xu (2020) has confirmed that the primary motivations for binge-watching are catching up, relaxation, sense of completion and cultural inclusion. While the sense of completion refers to the satisfaction derived from viewing a show until its conclusion, cultural inclusion, on the other hand, indicates the motivation of participating in a show's cultural community (e.g. online fan community).

On top of that, the use of music was also investigated in the realm of U&G. Previous studies have suggested that some of the main motivations for music listening are: relief tension, pass time, fill silence and mood management (Gantz, Gartenberg, Pearson & Schiller, 1978; Roe, 1985). Taking into account the fact that the early mediums for music consumption constrain people's access to music to a great extent, the motivations observed are hence limited. With the development of technology, the academic field of music listening motivation has also shifted its focuses of investigation. For example, the research of Bull (2005, p.343) has unveiled the mobile-music use of Apple iPod while arguing that "MP3 players give users unprecedented power of control over their experience of time and space" by mood management and space orientations through personalized music. A decade later, Krause, North and Heritage (2014) have conducted a survey-based research regarding the motivation of users using music listening applications on Facebook, and strong similarities were found between the U&G of music applications and SNS platforms. The study underlined three major motivations behind the use of third-party music services on Facebook: communication (communicating, sharing information), entertainment (enjoyment, entertainment, fun) and more importantly, habitual diversion (passing time, out of boredom, habit), which is acknowledged as an important factor that distinguishes the uses and gratification of music applications from other applications.

Nevertheless, it is important to note here that U&G approach has its limitations. First of all, U&G relies heavily on the experiences of the individual, in other words, the findings tend to be highly individualistic and subjective, which makes it difficult to generalize to the population outside the respondents (Elliott, 1974), while some other scholars have criticized that U&G methodologies rely too heavily on the self-reported data rather than actual observations of behaviors (Severin & Tankard, 1997; Rosenstein & Grant, 1997). Ruggiero (2000) has also outlined some flaws of U&G. For instance, he argued that the findings of U&G studies may be "too compartmentalized" (p.12), which makes it more difficult for central concepts to be developed; apart from that, there is a need for clearer classifications among central concepts of U&G, especially among needs, motives, social and psychological factors, etc.; moreover, the approach tends to assume that all media choices are rational, which hence neglects that media choices can also be unselected and habitual. However, due to the audience-oriented nature of U&G, it is still set as the main guideline of this research to investigate the

usage, satisfactions and motives of users. In order to contend with some of its limitations, in this research, the respondents were asked whether they are using NCM is a habit, and "habit" is also selected as one of the main themes of user gratification; besides, the topic list is divided into three main sections to enable the central concepts to be developed in a more structured way.

Digital revolution and online music streaming services

According to Nowak and Whelan (2016), music production has been more or less explicitly influenced by the technology development, since music is a popular cultural form that is "wholly technologically articulated and expressed" in terms of instrumentation, vocal techniques and transmission (p.1). Apart from that, technological development has been constantly reshaping the ways people consume music: the dominant physical music distribution mediums went from analog vinyl records and cassettes to CDs (Toivanen, 2014). Besides, the structure of the music industry is also being heavily influenced by technological developments, which manifests in the shift of the dominant business model in the music sector: By the end of the twentieth century, the music recording industry was dominated by five major labels: Bertelsmann AG, EMI Group, Universal, Sony and Time-Warner (Scott, 2000, p.114). The traditional business model of those majors allows them to have great control of every aspect of the production and distribution process: while the A&R (artists and repertoire) departments are responsible for scouting and casting talents, the studios also possess the most advanced technologies for music production, in combination with sophisticated marketing and distribution networks worldwide. On top of that, the majors also provide legal services, music publishing and management, hence entrepreneurial and managerial skills were not required for musicians (Hracs, 2012). More importantly, due to the lack of resources, musicians were dependent on those majors and they were expected to obey all the requirements from the labels (Ibid.).

This traditional model was being greatly challenged at the end of the twentieth century – The introduction of MP3 format music files and the prevalence of personal computer initiated a digital revolution in the music industry. Since MP3 is a standardized format that requires less

storage space and can be easily downloaded within a short time, it quickly became popular among listeners around the world (Leyshon, 2001). More importantly, the MP3 technology not only gives users great control over and unlimited access to their own digital music collections, the format also gave rise to MP3 playing devices and iPod, which enable users to achieve mobile listening by carrying their own music collections with them (Bull, 2005). This service can be categorized as a "download-to-rent" model as posited by Dörr et al. (2013, p.6), which means that users can download and play the music without limitations during the subscription period. Napster is a case in point here: In the early 2000s, Napster, a peer-to-peer file-sharing system that offered free access to around 2 million copyrighted songs and had 60 million subscribers worldwide, which had redefined how listeners access and interact with music content while raising serious piracy issues which caused the great reduction of revenue of physical recorded music. (Langenderfer and Cook, 2001; Waldfogel, 2011; McCourt and Burkart, 2003; Giesler & Pohlmann, 2003). This has hence facilitated an unprecedented crisis in the music industry: the sales of the music industry had fallen by 9 percent in 2002 globally (Hracs, 2012). The MP3/file-sharing crisis thus signified that here is a need for a distribution channel for legally copyrighted music in high-quality digital formats.

In 2003, Apple reacted to this digital transformation by launching the first legal digital music selling and downloading system – iTunes. By its convenient utilities and the revolutionary idea of 'album unbundling' which allows consumers to purchase individual songs from albums, the platform hence undermined the core of the old music retail model in the recording industry. As suggested by Dörr et al. (2013), this service provided by apple belongs to "download to own" model – users download the songs and pay every time they download (p.6). With this model, Apple had become the leader of the digital music market, and the company had dictated the music price against the wills of the record companies (Kjus, 2016; Mulligan, 2015; Hesmondgalgh & Meier, 2018). Nevertheless, while the music world was still adjusting to the new business model initiated by Apple, in the latter half of the 2000s, "a mature media ecosystem of smartphone platforms and the popularity of Wi-Fi and 3G data services" was gradually being established (Anderson, 2014, p.75). Since 2007, with the introduction and popularity of iPhone and other smartphones, the 3G mobile data networks transformed all kinds of mobile services, and more importantly, from the perspective of the music industry, the

unprecedented combination of hardware and software caters to the exact needs for mobile streaming of music (Ibid).

From vinyl to iTunes, all previous forms of music consumption emphasize the ownership of music without any exceptions. However, the music contemporary industry relies heavily on the MaaS (Music as a Service) model, which also refers to the subscription-based music platforms that streams music files to users' devices with recommendation systems (Dörr et al. 2013). Unlike those previous music distribution mediums, on-demand online music streaming is rather access-based and has redefined the musical experience by liberating listeners from the limited copies to "a world of infinite choice" (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2018; Luck, 2016, p.48). The music streaming platforms function on the legal generation of revenues, from the ownership of music rights to consumer data-collection, advertisement, and subscription, this relatively new form of music consumption is now dominating the music market, making music cheaper and more accessible than ever (Cesareo and Pastore, 2014; Krause et al., 2014; Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2018). In general, the platforms either require a monthly subscription or provide a free ad-supported version (Aly-Tovar, Bacache-Beauvallet, Bourreau & Moreau, 2019; Aguiar, 2017; Wlömert and Papies, 2015). There are two main types of music streaming platforms: interactive and non-interactive. Whilst interactive services allow users to choose the music based on their free-will, non-interactive services like Pandora shuffles the songs for users without letting them choose (Aguiar and Waldfogel, 2017).

On-demand music streaming services attract users with features such as access, collection, podcast, downloading and sharing (Jonathan, Wagner, Hess, & Benlian, 2013; Sinclair and Tinson, 2017). However, to create better user experiences, the overwhelming choices in the repositories of music need to be sorted and presented in the order that caters to individual music tastes. According to media scholar Blakely (2016), it is of crucial importance for media practitioners to employ measurement tools and technologies that provide insights into the preferences of the user, and this can also be applied to the realm of music streaming. As for the music sector nowadays, many music streaming platforms use an algorithm to generate personalized content for the users based on their previous activities to better engage the users and enhance their experiences (Prey, 2018). This hence puts an impact on how music streaming platforms classify the music they have to offer for each user: while the music classifications

made merely based on music genre is considered insufficient, streaming services such as Pandora organizes music by music "genes", which concerns gender of the vocalist, the tempo, lyrics, etc. The algorithm assesses users' music taste based on the feedback given by users (simply by giving a thumbs up for the music they like), this hence allows Pandora to generate more personalized and precise music stations (Ibid., p.1089). Besides, the market dominator Spotify maps out the music database by pitch, tempo, danceability and keywords given by the music creators. By capturing listeners' interaction with music items and behaviors (favorite, ratings, skips and bans), Spotify personalizes the Taste Profile of users. Moreover, Spotify's premier recommendation service Discover Weekly perceives users concerning the listening behaviors of users and the users who have similar tastes (Ibid., p.1090-91). Similar notions can be found in several research on music recommender systems (MRSs): music recommendation is mostly produced by the digital footprints of users on the music service platforms, and most algorithms function based on the "collaborative filtering and content-based model" – while collaborative filtering concerns the music ratings and listening histories, the latter focuses on the user-generated contents to construct recommendation playlists (Chen & Zou, 2019; Cheng, Shen & Hoi, 2016; Knees & Scchedl, 2013; Guo & Liu, 2015). In their very recent research, Chen et al. (2019) explored the social influences for music recommendation, and argued that when users listen to a song influenced by social factors (e.g. recommended by a friend of him/her; or a song in a party, etc.), it may trigger him/her to listen to other songs of that particular artist due to online recommendation from the music streaming service. Werner (2020) has also presented interesting perspectives on the heavy reliance of users on MRSs in an up-to-date study: "algorithm culture reduced decisions on taste to a few factors defining what is good and for whom, constructing social groups and cultural values in the process" (p.81), and the author focused on uncovering how gender is organized by Spotify and how the recommendation algorithm reinforces the already existed gender stereotypes in music.

Apart from the listening-based services, another research focus on music streaming service is inspired by the social features of those platforms. It is important to note that, music is a social activity throughout global history in almost all cultures (Nettl, 1983, 2000), studies have suggested that music has the capacity of creating and strengthen social bonds, and close links between popular music listening and interactions with friends were also observed (Tarr, Launay

and Dunbar, 2014; Marsden and Reed, 1983). Several existing studies have argued that the social aspects of music streaming services provide users with experiences beyond the personal use of music, as music streaming activities nowadays are interconnected with social media use and online music community building (Morris and Powers, 2015; Johansson, 2017; Hagen and Lüders, 2017). To be more specific, music sharing activities allow users to interact with one another both within and outside the streaming services: for instance, Spotify allows users to follow others and share music tracks as well as playlists. In this way, streaming services are experienced as social, and a network for navigating and exploring music is created. Moreover, the use of music streaming services is often associated with the use of social networking sites such as Facebook (Hagen and Lüders, 2017; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). Based on the previous findings, it may be regarded as certain that the social networks people embedded in (both online and offline) enable them to come across different types of music (Frith, 2002). Music streaming services allow users to exchange music and share music online, hence creating and intensifying interpersonal bonds between people who have similar music preferences (Boer, Fischer, Strack, Bond and Lam, 2011; Lonsdale & North, 2009). It is also proved by scholars that music preference to a degree shows the value of its listeners, in other words, it is a form of self-expression. This suggests that personality traits and value orientations can be conveyed by music preference, which hence lead to social attractions (Frith, 1981; Boer et al. 2011). This is also believed to be relevant to the motivation of music sharing: others in the field have found that music listening promotes a sense of musical identity and belonging which situate listeners in contemporary heterogeneous taste cultures (DiMaggio, 1987; Van Dijck, 2007; Hagen & Lüders, 2017). Besides, evidence indicating that self-expression is one of the primary facilitators for music sharing intentions are also found by scholars, as social media nowadays encourage users to construct their social representations (Lee, Park, Kim, Kim & Moon, 2011). And yet, the number of research on social features of music streaming is still scarce.

Moreover, the investigation of Zhou, Xu and Zhao (2018) on the homophily of music listening in online social networks in China has proved that identical music appreciations and patterns of music listening can be found between respondents and their friends linked by the online social network. The researchers highlighted the social features in music streaming

services in China, for example, in NetEase Cloud Music, information about users, their playlists, music comments and listening history are being showed publicly, hence allow NetEase Cloud Music to create a domain-specialized social network in which users can be engaged by following others users of similar tastes as well as following the artists they like. Furthermore, to better facilitate the act of music sharing, Netease Cloud Music also allows users to connect their Weibo (the Chinese version of Twitter, Weibo is the most popular social-networking and micro-blog platform in China) account to the service (to log-in and to share their Weibo account). It is clear that in this case, that social ties are being constantly built both in social networks and music streaming services, influencing their music-oriented activities such as music discovery, communication and tastes (Ibid.).

The existing research on the users of music streaming services belongs to a relatively new academic terrain. This topic often focuses on the user's motivation of use and activities on the cloud/streaming services. For example, in a research concerning the selection, management, access behavior and perceptions of music streaming and cloud services users, the authors looked into the factors motivating users for choosing certain platforms, and how do users interact with their online music collections (Lee, Wishkoski, Aase, Meas and Hubbles, 2016). Through in-depth interviews with cloud and streaming users in the United States, the authors have found that cloud-based services were often used for music collection, while streaming platforms were more likely to be used for music discovery. And in most cases, multiple platforms were relied upon by participants to fulfil their different needs for music experiences. Moreover, in the cloud-based services, sharing activity was considered challenging due to the lack of social features (Lee, et al., 2016; Morris, 2015). One of the pioneer studies is Kaur and Gopinathan's research (2019) on user satisfaction towards music streaming platforms. The authors confirmed that information quality, system quality and trustability have positive impacts on user satisfaction. The effect of trustability is believed to be the most powerful, which concerns factors such as personal information safety, payment security and professional designs. Nevertheless, compared to physical copies, the music services provided by streaming platforms are rather intangible which might influence users' perception of music ownership. In other words, the digitalization and de-materialization of music are believed to be the causes of a loss in the sense of music product ownership (Bull, 2006; Bartmanski & Woodward, 2015).

However, towards this issue, Sinclair and Tinson (2017) took a psychological approach – since participants purchase, organize and establish control over their music collection on those platforms, a sense of loyalty can be developed to a particular application which allows users to experience "feelings of empowerment and social rewards through consumption" (p.2), and a sense of psychological ownership is hence achieved.

Whilst previous studies have proved that music piracy brings negative impact on the sales of physical music and functions as a substitute for paid music (Rob and Waldfogel, 2006; Andersen and Frenz, 2010), the relationship between music streaming service and music piracy is also worth inspecting, as they are expected to be an "economic incentive to reduce the music piracy" (Boeja, Dieringer and Daw, 2015, p.74). However, based on the research of 197 students, the researchers have concluded that frequent music streaming service users are also more likely to download music via illegal practices, and the users' act of pirating is influenced by peer and social pressure, risk-reward and beliefs about the artists' success (Ibid.). Aguiar and Waldfogel (2015) have also confirmed the positive relationship between the number of streaming on Spotify and the number of pirated downloads.

Aside from piracy concerns, another industry insight worth-addressing here is, again, the prominence of music streaming services has changed the structure and business model of the contemporary music industry. Its impact is being viewed positively while raising some concerns: on the one hand, research has shown that the rate of streaming has an impact on the sales of offline music records (Lee, Choi, Cho and Lee, 2016), and streaming services is also exerting positive effects on the revenue of the recorded music industry (Aguiar and Waldfogel, 2018; Wlömert and Papies, 2015). On the other hand, streaming platforms "serve as a substitute rather than a complement for recorded music purchases" (Aguiar and Walfgogel, p.284). From the production side, according to Hracs (2012), the power of major record labels is eroding because technology is democratizing music production and distribution. According to Hesmondhalgh, Jones and Rauh (2019), the phenomenon of cultural democratization in the creative industries has emerged due to the digital revolution. The case in point here is the popularity of "producer-oriented" (p.2) music sharing platforms such as SoundCloud and Bandcamp, which enable free uploading and publishing of music. This development hence set musicians free from the support of major labels, more specifically, it had put a great impact on

the music industry by removing two traditional barriers of cost and skill, since those platforms allow musicians to distribute their own works independently to the globe, which has also created a "new geography of music production" – music producing, marketing and distributing can now be achieved from anywhere (Harcs, 2012, p.456). One of the most prominent examples here is electronic dance music, which will be discussed thoroughly in the following section.

Electronic dance music

EDM is an umbrella term in music that encompasses a range of sub-genres such as techno, trance, house, dubstep, etc., and its production is largely technology-based, as it utilizes electronic instruments such as synthesizer drum machines and samplers (Knees et al., 2015). As the name of the genre suggests, its primary function is for accompanying dance events, hence the length of EDM tracks can be extended greatly (much longer than 3-minute pop music). Apart from that, there are several other distinctive characteristics of EDM: first of all, the beat varies from basic four-four beat to complex patterned ones; the sound materials, on the other hand, consists of synthesized instrumental tracks, raw sample-based materials and vocals (Collins, Schedel & Wilson, 2013). Many in the field explored the production technologies of EDM, since the creation of the genre relies heavily on the use of computers, music software and other related technologies. For instance, Morey and McIntyre's research (2014) assessed the use of contemporary sampling practices such as the acts of listening, selecting and editing. Based on the observation, the author has emphasized that in order to maintain creativity and originality, sampling composers employ different techniques such as traditional sample manipulation, using the sample as an initial building block for a composition (remove the sample afterward) and live performance in the studio. As for the music design, EDM scholars have looked into the beats and rhythms (Butler, 2006), segmentation and timbre similarity (Rocha, Bogaards and Honingh, 2013). The musical structures of EDM are often repetitive, the basic unit is repeated and developed throughout the track, and the musical elements are layered with the grooves expand in textural density (Solberg, 2014). Because music producers often use the techniques of "build-up" and "drop" to create tension and increase the danceability of their music, some content-based research are also conducted on those emotion building sections

which “filled with intensifying features” (Ibid., p.64) and on how “the moment of emotional release” is achieved on the dance floor (Yadati, Larson, Liem and Hanjalic, 2014, p.143). According to Solberg (2014, p.74), the dominant production techniques employed by EDM artists are extensive use of uplifters, the drum roll effect, large frequency changes, the removal and reintroduction of the bass and a contrasting breakdown.

The origin of electronic dance music intertwines with the emergence of discothèque (the dance clubs where disco music is played) because the earliest clubbing dance music manifested in electronic experiments for disco-making (Ibid.). In the 1970s, Giorgio Moroder, the pioneer for popularizing EDM music, changed the trends and the sounds of EDM with his album and introduced “a Munich sound of analog synthesizers in disco” to the world (Ibid., p.104). Moreover, as for the economic part for EDM, Europe had also played a very important role, and later, it became the center of EDM production. The EDM styles developed in Europe (especially in Germany and Italy) influenced producers in the U.K., which later became the biggest exporter for house and techno releases in the U.S., and artists there have developed new styles of dance music. Later on, more different styles have emerged and EDM has made its way to the international mainstream music market. Whilst the genre has been frequently incorporated in the pop chart tracks, EDM nowadays might also be defined as “electronic dance music with pop sensibilities with formulaic grooves and vocals” (Holt, 2016, p.3). Aside from the pop elements being added, the genre has also adapted to the market by “expansive mediation” (p.23) and brand-consumer culture building. By promoting music-related products on different social media channels, the artists are able to reach a wider audience, and festivals are making trailers and after-movies to create more anticipations (Holt, 2016).

Nowadays, EDM clubs and events are booming while super-star DJs are touring the world (Collins, et al. 2013). With the rise in popularity of EDM, apart from its production and history, other aspects of the genre have also been attracting great academic attention in different research fields. For example, an interesting focus of EDM research is the social and cultural impact of the genre within the club and festival scenes. It is believed that electronic dance music cultures are implicated in the culture of festivalization (Bennett, Taylor & Woodward, 2014). EDM scholar St. John (2015) argues that EDM is “the mega-genre birthed by way of the music festival format” (p.4), the formation of event cultures relates closely to the sub-genres of acid

house, rave, techno and psy-trance events. From the underground and local mass raves to world-class commercial dance music events, EDM music festivals have flourished globally over the past twenty-five years, constructing spaces where arts, lifestyles, policies come together. Those mega EDM festivals are able to exert powerful monopolization of music and media, many of them are now responsible for regional tourism development (St. John, 2017). Moreover, some scholars argue that the live EDM events enable the audience to gain collective experience and reach mutual understandings (St. John, 2008; Sommer, 2001-02); while others identified the notion of cosmopolitanism and the global conscious in EDM events (Chalcraft, Delanty and Sassatelli, 2014; Lalioti, 2013; St. John, 2015). Apart from that, St. John (2004) and Soojin Park (2015) analyzed the PLUR (Peace, Love, Unity and Respect) ideology of EDM events and how it has transformed the live EDM events into spaces where equality is highly valued. On top of that, drug use is another topic of interest for scholars while investigating EDM scenes (Colin, 1997; St. John, 2008).

As for the economic aspect in the world of EDM, like many other music genres, capitalist accumulation plays an important role: event promoters produce dance events in the clubs and festivals, producers and DJs generate profit by performing and selling records (Fraser, 2012). With the technological development, the industry has been witnessing a decline of records and CDs sales, while the most important shift in the industry is being led by the paid music downloads as well as the music streaming services, the growth of EDM events globally hence follows (EVAR, 2012). However, EDM business is more than capitalist accumulations. As it is discussed above, the genre has its roots in festivalisation and ideologies of PLUR (peace, love, unity and respect), hence the actors in the industry are dedicated to experience-making and cultural gains for the audience; on the other hand, the geographies of EDM are diverse and complex, certain regions and particular locations are known for its EDM culture (St. John, 2015; Fraser, 2012). As for the structure of the industry, compared to other pop genres that are controlled by the major labels, the most successful part of the EDM industry is mainly in control of grassroots independent labels (Hitters & Van de Kamp, 2010). This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in the EDM industry in the Netherlands. As one of the biggest EDM exporters in the world, Dutch EDM artists enjoy a high reputation globally. Hence, looking into the characteristics of the Dutch EDM industry is believed to be helpful for researchers to gain

greater insights into the worldwide success of this genre (Van der Velden and Hitters, 2016). As it is stated by EVAR (2012), EDM has an economic significance for the Dutch economy not only in terms of entrance tickets for the events, but also in the financial flows involved in merchandising, location rental, security, first-aid services, food services, etc. On the other hand, Dutch EDM has great commercial performances and potential worldwide, in 2011, 53.3 million euros were being associated with Dutch EDM exports (Ibid.). Another demonstration of the success of Dutch superstar DJs/producers' is *DJ Mag's Top 100 DJs* - a UK based magazine dedicated to EDM music and related information that assesses annually the top 100 DJs worldwide through online voting ("About DJ Mag", 2020). For the list of 2020, 6 out of the top 10 DJs/producers are Dutch: Martin Garrix, Armin van Buuren, Don Diablo, Oliver Heldens, Tiësto and Afrojack ("TOP100DJs", 2020), and this phenomenon occurs almost annually in recent years. In this research, their popularity is also evaluated in the growing market of China.

On top of that, the discussion above showed that the existing studies on EDM industries are vastly western-centric, as Europe has been making great contributions to the development of EDM since the 1970s, and the U.S. dance music also plays an important role in the international EDM market. However, although the genre was originated in Europe, the assumed "placelessness" of EDM indicates that the genre is not culturally bound (Connell and Gibson, 2006. p.260; Van der Velden and Hitters, 2016; Collins et al., 2013). This can hence lead to a discussion on globalization in the music industry. According to White (2012), music is not only a manifestation of globalization, the industry is also where globalization is being articulated. As a form of art that is embedded in human culture, engaging people is the nature of music. In the era of cultural glocalization (Robertson, 1995), music from different cultural backgrounds are constantly flowing across geographical boundaries thanks to the development of media (Jenkins, 2006). For the research on music globalization, how the non-Western world views the music from the West is investigated is also being addressed by scholars (Fung & Curtin, 2002; Moskowitz, 2008; Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000).

Ever since the wake of China's globalization, the role of Western popular music in the music market in the Mainland is being studied (Clark 2012; Ho, 2018). "Wham!", a British pop-rock duo, launched a mini-tour in Beijing in 1985 and the event is seen as a "historic moment" which introduced the popular sound of the West to the wide audience in China, hence

the demand for Western popular music "rose exponentially" and "led to the emergence of an underground music market" (Cockrill and Liu, 2013, p. 264). The popularity of dance music in China can be traced back to the 1980s and 1990s, when the "Disco Fever" started to become prevalent in the clubs of urban areas (Farrer, 2000; Chew, 2009). The EDM scene in Hong Kong had also put a great impact on audiences of the Mainland: the genre achieved localization despite its Western-roots, and a number of EDM hits with Cantonese lyrics were created based on the tunes of Western EDM music, and the local clubs started to feature Western DJs. The phenomenon was also spotted in Shenzhen – A city close to Hong Kong at the Pearl River Delta, where CantoEDM (EDM in Cantonese), MandoEDM (EDM in Mandarin) and Western EDM were played in the nightclub scenes (Chew, 2009). However, the Anti-Drug Suppression campaign in 2000 inflicted heavy loss on the urban dance scene in China, many clubs were either shut down or closed temporarily for rectification (Ibid., p.5-8). With technological development and dynamics of cultural globalization, EDM started trending again in Mainland China from the beginning of the 2010s both in terms of online consumption and offline music events, and this phenomenon has not yet been explored by the existing research.

Knowledge gap

Based on the discussions above, the knowledge framework for this study is hence constructed. While U&G is a well-developed approach for media research which evolves with the development of media, the popularity of music streaming service in today's world also puts it in the spotlight of the academic field. On top of that, in the past few years, EDM culture has been wide-spreading on a global scale in terms of digital music sales and events. However, it is evident that there are several knowledge gaps in the existing literature which this study can contribute to: first of all, scarcely any existing studies on music streaming service follow the approach of U&G; secondly, based on the literature overview above, the research on music streaming services is vastly Western-centric – most of them focus on platforms such as Spotify and SoundCloud; other than that, as a music genre that emerged in the West, the research on EDM hence has its main focus on the EDM scenes in the West as well. Taking the music market size in China into consideration, there is a need for a research which provides academic insights

into the music streaming service and the EDM market in China, in other words, a study from the users' and EDM lovers perspectives that shows a glimpse to the music streaming and EDM landscape in China is hence needed.

Methodology

This thesis aims to present qualitative insights into one of the biggest and fastest-growing EDM markets nowadays by investigating the uses and gratifications of the most influential EDM streaming platforms in China – NetEase Cloud Music. Since this explorative research aims to uncover the user activities, user experiences, motivations and appreciation of NCM with a special focus on EDM lovers, closed-ended questions are considered insufficient for this study. It is believed by the scholars that qualitative methodologies are effective for the interpretive media research, as it allows the researcher to investigate the interpersonal insights of mediated communication (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991; Ruggiero, 2000). Hence, the evaluation of the variances should to be conducted with both the environmental and personal factors taken into account (Ochieng, 2009). Unlike quantitative research, this method intends to describe and explain social phenomena in an inductive way. By analysing people's experiences, knowledge, stories, etc., the qualitative research method "seeks to understand how people construct the world around them… and what is happening to them that are meaningful", which hence represents a way of meaning-making (Flick, 2018, p.4).

As for the data collection of this research, a semi-structured interview was chosen for several reasons. As one of the advocators of semi-structured interviews, Hermanowicz (2002) believes that semi-structured interviews "brings arguably closer than many other methods to an intimate understanding of people and their social worlds" (p.480), since the conversation-like nature of this method can help the respondents to relax and hence allows more detailed answers to be generated. Similar arguments on the benefit of using interviews can be found in the research of Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), which argues that qualitative interviews allow participants to have a degree of control over the topics by sharing personal stories, knowledge and provide their own perspectives on certain topics, based on which follow-up questions will be formed by the interviewer to gain deeper insights into the aforementioned issues ; Boeije (2012) has also posited that semi-structured interviews allow both parties to play active roles in shaping the contents of the interview, as the goal of the interview is to "see a slice of the social world from the perspective of the participant" (p.63). Moreover, Pathak and Intratat (2016) have addressed that the flexibility in terms of topics also allows researchers to

investigate more detailed issues emerged during the interview, as it tends to facilitate more useful data to be generated.

Sampling criteria
1. Heavy NCM users (uses multiple NCM multiple times in a day) 2. EDM lover (EDM is one of their favourite music genres) 3. Gender balance: ideally 50% male 50% female respondent 4. Region: respondents are from different cities of China 5. Diversity in occupation: ideally some respondents who has professional music background

Table 1. Sampling Criteria

Rather than investigating phenomena among a wider population, the sampling strategy in qualitative research represents different perspectives and experiences of smaller groups of respondents (Ziebland & McPherson, 2006). For this study, the respondents were selected through purposive sampling, which means that the research population is selected intentionally based on the needs of the study (See Table 1.). To reach the expected number of respondents, snowball sampling technique was employed: based on the acquaintance network of the researcher, a small number of suitable participants were selected, and those "initial informants" nominated other participants they know of who meet the eligibility criteria of this study (Given, 2008, p.815). More specifically, the initial informants assist the researcher to locate other participants who share similar characteristics in terms of music tastes and NCM usage, and other participants helped the researcher to find more suitable participants in their networks. It is important to keep in mind that the snowball sampling technique might pose a risk of a biased sample, as the population outside of the researcher's acquaintance framework is excluded from the study (Given, 2008). The best way to minimize the risk is to "begin with a set of initial informants that are as diverse as possible" (p.816). Thus, the researcher selected 5 initial informants of different occupations from different regions in China. At the phase of snowball sampling, factors such as gender, region and occupation are taken into account.

As for this research, considering that all 12 participants are residents of different cities across China, the interviews are conducted via the most popular social media platform WeChat. The interviews are recorded and the consents for recording are acquired orally at the beginning of every interview. Thus, the interviews can be characterized as mediated interviews. According to Kazmer and Xie (2008), the mediated interviews take place when the interviewer and participants do not share a physical space, and the synchronous interaction interviews (such as phone calls and instant messaging) "require the researcher to remember and accommodate time zone differences at the time of scheduling" (p.262), which is extremely important for this study. Additionally, the interviews based on the use of internet media is considered suitable for internet-based activities such as music streaming (Ibid.).

Respondent No.	Gender	Age	Region	Occupation
1	Female	23	Nantong, Jiangsu	Student
2	Male	23	Jinan, Shandong	Student/music producer
3	Male	22	Guangzhou, Guangdong	Student
4	Male	24	Shenzhen, Guangdong	Student
5	Male	25	Jinan, Shandong	DJ, Club/pub owner
6	Female	25	Changzhou, Jiangsu	Real Estate Planner
7	Male	28	Hohhot, Inner Mongolia	Music Producer/Music Director
8	Male	21	Xi'an, China	Student/amateur music producer
9	Female	22	Shenzhen, Guangdong	Student
10	Female	24	Xianyang, China	Student
11	Female	26	Changsha, Hunan	Local government employee
12	Male	29	Jinan, Shandong	Real estate agent/ music producer

Table 2: Respondent Information

As presented in Table 2, giving consideration to the main market target group of NCM discussed above, the research population of this study is a rather young demographic with the age range of 21-29 years-old. There are 7 male respondents and 5 female respondents, and most of them are inhabitants of 1st and 2nd-tier cities in China (only respondent 7 and 10 are from 3rd-tier cities). Besides, it is important to note here that there is a significant urban-rural gap in China in terms of media ownership and usage (Chan & McNeal, 2006), along with the fact that EDM is a newcomer in the Chinese music market, hence, the sampled population are all from the cities. Other than that, the respondents are all active NCM users who engage

intensely with the platform on a daily basis. Moreover, some of the respondents are professionals in the EDM industry (such as music producers, club owner, music director, etc.) and some are amateur music producers, while other respondents are purely EDM lovers who have less knowledge on the genre. To avoid a biased sample to emerge, the ratio of different types of respondents (occupation, gender, region) is controlled as listed in Table 2. Furthermore, the data was collected during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, due to the physical distance between the researcher and the respondents, the mediated interviews were planned in the initial data collection design. Hence, the pandemic has no significant impact on this research.

Operationalization

The dataset of this research consists of 12 transcripts of the semi-structured interviews with the sample population. To better situate this research in the existing knowledge framework, several sensitizing concepts are selected for the operationalization of this study. According to Bowen (2006) and Charmaz (2003), sensitizing concepts illustrate important characteristics of the subject being studied while providing guidelines for the research of the data. In other words, to explore the answers for the research question in a more structured manner, sensitizing concepts provide starting points for data analysis which helps researchers to categorize data into substantive codes and categories.

Again, since this study aims to crystalize the uses and gratifications of NetEase Cloud Music in the EDM scene of Mainland China, three main factors are measured: *The usage of NCM*, *the motivation of using NCM* and *the perceived role of NCM in the EDM market in China*. The sensitizing concepts are made mainly based on the research question and previous U&G literature focusing on the motivation of the use of media discussed above. And in reference to those notions, the topic list for the interview is hence divided into three main sections. The opening section of the topic list (see in Appendix) consists of some warm-up questions, such as “please describe your favorite music genre” and “how do you usually listen to music?”. To better assess how the respondents use NCM, the primary concern of the first

section is to find out how and why the participant started to use NCM, what activities do they do and what do they think are the best features of NCM. The section also involves topics related to the recommendation algorithm, copyright laws in China, digital music collection and the social aspects of NCM – as the app has different features such as commenting, instant messaging, features for dating purposes, etc. Besides, music sharing activities are also evaluated with a focus on the sharing channels and motivations for sharing.

On the other hand, the EDM section of the topic list facilitates the participant to share their general experience with the newly popularized genre in the Chinese market, via what media channels they interact with EDM-related information, and what role does NCM play in their EDM consumption. The last section mainly concerns the perceived EDM scene on a larger scale, and to what extent NCM has an impact on the domestic EDM scene from the respondents' perspectives. To better measure the variances, questions such as "how do you perceive the development of EDM music in the Chinese market and what role do you think NCM plays in this process?", there are also two rating questions: "on the scale of 1-10, how do you rate the importance of NCM in your overall EDM experiences and consumption? Please elaborate on that" and "on the scale of 1-10, to what extent do you agree with the saying of 'NCM is the most professional EDM streaming platform in China'? Please elaborate". For the full topic list, please see in the Appendix.

Furthermore, in consideration of the fact that the respondents might prefer using their native language during the interview, the interviews are conducted in Mandarin to allow participants to express themselves more precisely. The most interesting highlights of the interviews are summarized and translated into English. The time span of the interviews is between 40 minutes to an hour. The transcripts are made on iflyrec.com and the auto-generated documents are checked carefully by the author. During the data analysis process, the codes, themes and quotes selected are translated into English. For the coding process, another software atlas.ti was employed.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis of this research, the method of thematic analysis is considered most suitable, as this method seeks for descriptive patterns across qualitative data that is useful for "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.79), which hence enables the researcher to explore different dimensions of uses and gratifications of NetEase Cloud Music among EDM fans and to conduct a discussion on the perceived role of the streaming platform in the EDM market in China. Furthermore, the thematic analysis focuses on examining and identifying key patterns of the data which are reported in themes, and according to Braun and Clark (2006), it is vital for researchers to first immerse themselves in the raw data, and after that, the initial categories are generated during the coding process (Boeije, 2012). The coding process of this research is conducted in an inductive manner which begins with open coding – A process of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 2007, p.61)". The second step is axial coding. Based on the segments of the data, this phase determines the dominant codes and less important codes, and cluster codes into main and subcategories based on their connections (Boeije, 2012). The final step is selective coding, which determines the most important codes and select themes with an answer to the research question. The most prominent themes related to uses and gratifications are identified, and to answer the research question in a more structured manner, the main themes are set in reference to several previous findings (Boeije, 2012).

The open coding of this research is achieved by the coding feature of atlas.ti. In this process, around 40 codes were generated for every transcript, all relevant information to the research question is thus highlighted. A number of codes have already stood out by their frequent occurrences: for example, all 12 respondents claimed that they would share music from NCM to WeChat; great changes in copyright regulations in China are perceived by the majority of participants; while most respondents do not think the recommendation algorithm of NCM predicts their taste accurately. The axial coding process of data analysis is enabled by the coding manager and coding network features of atlas.ti, which not only helped the author to visualize the most prominent codes but also allow the connections among codes to

be formed. Initially, 9 code groups were formed in relation to the research question: *The time spent on NCM, the circumstance of use, music listening device, user activities on NCM, the motivation of use, best features perceived* and *NCM's relationship with EDM in China.* Since there are some overlaps between *user activities*, *the circumstances of use* and *music listening device* from the participants' perspectives, the three code groups are combined into a larger group which represents the general uses of NCM. The gratifications, on the other hand, concerns mainly with the codes that belong to *the motivation of use*. The codes of NCM's relationship with EDM in China are used to assess the perceived role of EDM in the market in China.

In the selective coding phase, the main themes are identified in order to answer the research question. The first theme is *the general use of NCM*, the sub-groups are *music listening device* and *the circumstance of use*. Another primary focus of this research is the gratifications of the use of NCM, which is hence identified as the second theme. Due to the abundant information acquired from the interviews, this theme consists of multiple sub-groups that provide answers to the research question: first of all, *best features perceived* is categorized into this theme to better sketch out the user activities while presenting greater insights into this streaming app, its sub-theme encompasses *layout design*, *music library* and the *multi-functionality* of the app. The second theme of the user gratification concerns the social aspects, which encompasses *self-expression*, *information* and *socializing*; while the motivation relates to the *sense of ownership and copyright* is grouped as the second theme; the third sub-theme is *habit* while the last theme covers the gratifications of music professionals.

Another main theme *NCM and EDM in China* is determined by the part of the research question which concerns the perceived role of NCM in the market. This theme sums up how the users appreciate the EDM related services being provided by the platform, which aims to shed a light on whether NCM is perceived as a professional channel for EDM distribution as well as the importance of the platform in the EDM consumption among respondents. The themes discussed above are further elaborated in the result section.

Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are two crucial indicators for research quality, and reliability refers to the consistency of measures used in social research (Boeije, 2010). According to Moisander and Valtonen (2006), there are two ways for qualitative research to reach the desired reliability: high level of research transparency and theoretical transparency, which suggests that the research process should be reported in detail and the interpretations should be presented based on the observation and previous knowledge. In the method section of this thesis, the aforementioned factors are well explained and presented. On top of that, since the data of this study is collected through semi-structured interviews and transcripts, the reliability of the interviews is also of crucial importance. It is necessary for the researcher to make sure that the interview questions are understandable and the "answers can be coded without the possibility of uncertainty" (Silverman, 2015, p.365), as a result, the interviews are conducted in the respondents' native language with straightforward, simple yet precise questions about their music streaming activities, motivations and EDM experiences in general. On top of that, Silverman (2015) has also suggested that the field notes and the preparation of transcripts should be generated using standardized methods (Ibid.). In this research, the field notes were taken down manually during the interview for the formations of probing questions, and the transcripts were generated using a transcribing software. The auto-generated transcripts were verified once again by the author for higher accuracy.

More importantly, the research validity concerns "the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers" (Hammersley, 1990, p.57). To better validate the outcome of this study, there are a few criteria the researcher has followed. First of all, during the online interview, the researcher spoke naturally to help the participants to better adapt to the interview setting to generate more accurate answers. This is achieved through the conversation-like atmosphere created by the researcher. Aside from that, before every interview, the researcher has also made sure that the respondents are well-interested in participating in the research and are enthusiastic enough about music-related conversations; secondly, during the data collection process, the research question and the focuses of the research are kept in mind of the researcher; besides, the researcher has made certain that the

outcomes of the study are completely based on the data collected; finally, the reflection of the research is conducted in an objective manner (Boeije, 2010; Silverman, 2015).

Result

This chapter presents the most remarkable findings of this research on the uses and gratifications of NCM among the selected respondents. The first section introduces the general use of the streaming service, including the devices, circumstances of use. The section follows is the key segment of user gratifications, which concerns the convenience utilities, social aspects, sense of ownership and copyright, habit as well as NCM musician. Finally, the last part summarizes the perceived relationship between NCM and the EDM market in China among the participants.

The General Usage of NCM

When asked about the changes in terms of the device used for music listening before and after the streaming services came into place, similar answers were given by the respondents: in the era of physical music copies, CDs and CD players (including CD players in the car) are the most used appliances for music listening. After the rise of digital music files, MP3 and computer had become more important devices for the respondents. And as it is anticipated, in the era of music streaming, the dominant devices are smartphones, headphones and speakers. Many have claimed that they "cannot live without their headphones", and would feel "naked" when they are outdoor without wearing headphones. To the majority of the respondents, NCM is already well-integrated in their daily routine, not only because music is of great importance for their daily lives, but also because NCM is a brand with a good reputation and brings better user-experiences (which will be elaborated in the later sections).

Based on the information gathered, several prominent circumstances for the uses of NCM are observed. First of all, 6 respondents claimed that they would use NCM while they are on public transportations, walking or simply on their way to something outdoor. Secondly, 3 respondents would use NCM while they are working or studying, for instance, according to respondent 10 (female, 24):

"I would use NCM whenever I need to focus on something, for example, while I am doing my homework or writing something. NCM helps me to isolate myself from the outside world, so I can concentrate better on the important things".

On top of that, other circumstances of use are rather domestic: other respondents reported that they would use the app before sleeping/after waking up, or while they are exercising, showering, cleaning and cooking. As respondent 11 (female, 24) described that sometimes it can be very quiet when she's home alone, hence she opens NCM to cheer up the mood with her favorite music.

The user activities observed are rather diverse. Apart from general music listening practices, the social features of NCM such as commenting, instant messaging, music learning, dating, etc. are also being frequently mentioned during the interviews. Furthermore, the most popular EDM sub-genres among the respondents are future house, dubstep and trance. It occurred that Dutch EDM producers/DJs such as Martin Garrix, Don Diablo, Tiesto and Afrojack are making considerable impacts on the EDM market in China as they were brought up repeatedly by many participants

Gratifications

The user gratifications observed in this study are of great diversity. The most interesting aspects are being grouped and presented in the main themes below. The convenience utilities theme covers the gratifications derived from the user-friendly layout, gigantic music library, multi-functionality and easy music discovery on the platform; the theme of social aspects presents the gratification to self-expression, information and learning as well as socializing; the fulfilled needs of ownership and copyrighted music are presented in the following section, while the last two themes cover the gratifications of habit and the gratifications of music producers to the music publishing and promoting features of NCM.

Convenience utilities

To draw a clearer picture of the app and to provide more pieces of evidence for the findings on user gratifications, some best features of NCM perceived by the respondents need to be highlighted here. The majority of respondents have experiences with other streaming apps such as QQ music, Spotify, etc., however, they finally chose NCM as their main app for music streaming. The most prominent reason here is the great convenience NCM has brought to its users: during the interviews, a significant amount of 8 respondents have mentioned the word "convenience" while describing the reasons why they choose NCM as their main channel for music listening. During the coding process, the most-mentioned aspects in terms of the convenience NCM were sorted into three categories: the layout design of NCM, gigantic and up-to-date music library as well as its multi-functionality.

Layout design

7 out of 12 respondents have stated that the layout of NCM is one of the key elements that leads them to better user experience. The simple yet concise layout of NCM is extremely attractive to many respondents, as several of them claimed that the design of the app is very logical which makes it easy and conformable to use. For example, according to respondent 10 (female, 24):

"(I switched from QQ music to NetEase is because) the layout and interface of NetEase makes it more comfortable for me to use, … the clear and simple layout makes it easy to control. That's why I have become a loyal user of NetEase".

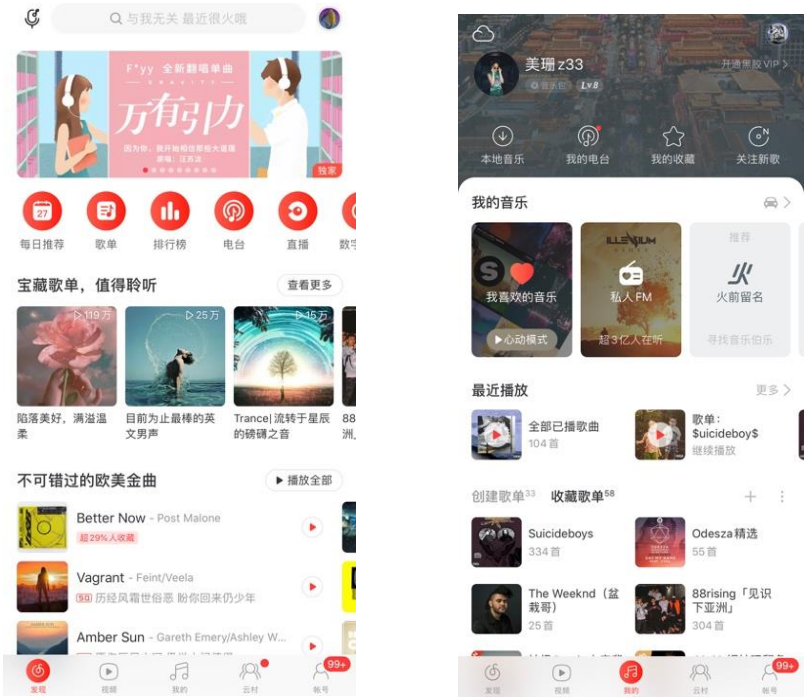

Image 1. Layout of NCM

For this respondent, the interface of NCM gives her a better sense of control compared to QQ music, which hence motivated her to switch the music streaming platform from QQ music to NCM and has stayed as a loyal user of NCM ever since. And similar statements were made by several other interviewees. This phenomenon related to layout design has already been explained by Kaur and Gopinathan (2019) in their investigation into user satisfactions of Malaysian music streamers. The scholars have confirmed that the design quality is one of the factors that influence the trustability of the platforms, which refers to the trust the users have on a brand which makes them more likely to continue using the service. They have concluded that a professionally designed music streaming platform can lead to an increase in their numbers of satisfied users. The observations of this study hence validate this argument.

Music library

Another distinctive reason for users to choose NCM is its gigantic music library. In total, there are 7 respondents asserted that the comprehensiveness of the music library (database) of NCM is one of the motivators for them to use the platform. For instance:

"(NCM) has the ability to acquire the exclusive copyrights for a lot of music, which makes it very easy for me to find the music I like on the platform" (Respondent 9, female, 22)
"There's one thing I really like about NCM is that compared to other platforms, the music library of NCM is basically the most comprehensive compared to other ones in China". (Respondent 12, male, 29).

Respondent 9 emphasized that the exclusive copyright of music, in other words, a good number of songs are being offered only on NCM in China on a legal basis. Whilst respondent 12 showed great appreciation to the gigantic music library. A similar statement is made by several other respondents that the competitiveness of NCM's music library is enabled by its acquisitions of exclusive copyrights on music, and to them, this is an absolute advantage compared to other music streaming services in China. On top of that, 2 respondents said that the fast update of new music is another highlight of NCM, in this way, they can always listen to the new releases in time.

Multi-functionality

For the convenience of NCM, another point being emphasized by the participants is its multi-functionality. In other words, the app offers various different music-related features such as music video sections, song recognition feature, podcasts, etc., hence users do not have to switch apps or download other apps to fulfil their needs for music consumption. While users listen to a song, the music video is just one click away on the screen, while the song recognition feature allows users to find music easily by making a fragment of recording. Moreover, respondent 10 also claimed that the podcast service offered by NCM is the main reason for her to use this platform, since she does not have to open Spotify or YouTube all the time. As it is explained above, Spotify and a number of other Western streaming services have not yet launched their services in China (unless being accessed with VPN), hence NCM makes it much easier for the users to access the podcasts from all over the world.

"Whatever feature Spotify has, NCM has them, and plus NCM has a lot more other useful features" (respondent 4, male, 24)

When asked about "what do you think is the best feature of NCM?", this respondent highlighted the lyrics feature of NCM, which he thinks Spotify is currently lacking. He also claimed that it might be a matter of lyrics copyright for Spotify, suggesting that the existence of the lyrics function on NCM might have something to do with the relatively undeveloped copyright system in China. As a matter of fact, Spotify used to offer lyrics services in the partnership with a lyrics service supplier called Musixmatch. However, the partnership ended in 2016 due to the conflict of interest (Stutz, 2016).

Music Discovery

Based on the collected data, all of the respondents use NCM for music discovery. This observation confirms the findings of Lee, J.H. et al. (2016) that music streaming services are more likely to be used for music discovery. It is safe to say that NCM provides users with a range of possibilities for music discovery, as various methods of finding new music were brought up by the interviewees during the data collection. First and foremost, a large portion of participants use the "daily recommendation playlist" for music discovery on a daily basis, the playlist is made by the algorithm of NCM based on user activities. However, an interesting phenomenon is observed: while only 2 respondents claimed that the recommendation algorithm is "awesome", over half of the respondents asserted that the recommendation algorithm of NCM is "not so impressive", the reason behind this perception is well-explained by respondent 1 (female, 23): "I think the recommendation algorithm is technically accurate", for which she means that the songs in her daily recommendation playlist are relevant to her taste to a good extent, "however, my taste cannot be defined solely by the genre and artists, although they are accurate in terms of genre, most of the time they are not impressive recommendations". To those who have similar thoughts, machines cannot capture accurately what they want to listen to all the time, as there are a number of factors influencing their music tastes and what they want to listen to at a specific time, including their mood and surroundings, etc. In the literature review above, it is introduced that the MRSs (music recommender systems) function based on the digital footprints of users, including listening histories and user-generated contents (Chen, Ying & Zou, 2019; Cheng, Shen &

Hoi, 2016; Knees & Schedl, 2013; Guo & Liu, 2015). This finding hence signifies that more factors should be taken into consideration while designing MRSs to provide users with more accurate recommendations.

Other than that, it occurred that users would also search for new music by browsing the pages of artists that they might like. For example, by clicking on the unfamiliar artists that are featured in the songs of their music collection. Besides, half of the respondents would discover new music via the playlists made by others: "you can just search in playlist section, and put the genre you like in the keywords", respondent 2 (male, 23) described. Other than that, 2 of the participants would find new music through the recommendations in the comment section, as many users would leave the name of their favorite songs in the comment sections. Last but not least, a third of participants would use the song recognition feature of NCM when they hear an unfamiliar song, for example, when they are watching a movie/TV show or even walking on the streets.

Social aspects

It emerged during the data analysis that there are 9 respondents in total reported that they started using NCM due to peer influence from their friends and classmates, which hence signifies that the social aspects in relation to user gratification are worth looking into. The main themes in this section are self-expression, music information and learning as well as socializing. More detailed elaborations on those themes are presented in the sub-sections below.

Self-expression

As discussed in the previous sections, one of the special features of NCM is its comment sections designed for every song and video. There are four active commenters in the sample of this study who believe that the comment sections are great platforms for them to express their feelings towards the music. As said by respondent 6 (female, 25):

"When you comment your thoughts about a song, those who have similar thoughts would like the comment or reply…, for example, when I heard a soundtrack of a TV show I like, I just put some thoughts on the show in the comment, and I have got a lot of likes".

Moreover, this respondent thinks that the users who liked/replied her "have similar values and thoughts", this is relevant to the music bonding model posited by Boer et al. (2011) that shared music preference (taste) can generate social attraction, and this effect is most likely to be induced by the similar value orientations. The authors have also underlined that similarity in music preference for Western music styles (such as EDM) is more significantly associated with value similarity compared to Chinese music styles, this argument can hence be applied to this study.

Aside from the comment section, music sharing is another salient user activity on NCM among all participants. All 12 respondents would share music from NCM via WeChat moments (a section on WeChat where people can post texts, pictures, videos, music, etc.), and a few would share music via instant messages on WeChat or QQ. Moreover, half of the participants mentioned that they would share the custom-made annual music report on NCM based on their tastes and user activities. Five respondents have asserted that the annual report of NCM is better than the ones made by other streaming platforms, since it is more detailed and "knows you better like a friend" (respondent 9). For instance, the yearly report of NCM would record the time when the user stayed up while listening to music (e.g. "you stayed up until 3 am and listened to xxx song"). It has already been proved that the intention of music sharing has a positive relationship with the needs of self-expression, as these activities convey the music taste of the sharer, which is believed to carry certain information on their personality, value, etc. In the meantime, the sharing activities on social media platforms also allow the target demographic to construct their own social representations (Boer et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2011).

Information and Learning

Another dominant theme that emerged in this research is the phenomenon of NCM being used for acquiring music-related information and learning, which is again made possible by

the comment sections. Half of the respondents have mentioned that some top comments (comments that have most likes) have useful insights into the song, the artist(s) as well as the genre, etc., which can be seen as "an encyclopedia of music", and sometimes the information is posted by the music producer him/herself, according to respondent 8 (male, 21). Other than that, as introduced earlier, EDM consists of numerous sub-genres, a number of the respondents would also make use of the information in the comment sections to learn the differences among the sub-genres. Furthermore, for some respondents with professional music-making background, NCM is also a good platform for them to learn others' music production techniques by listening to a large amount of music. "If he/she is also a producer on NCM, it is possible to also communicate with them via instant message on NCM, so it is a way to improve myself", respondent 12 (male, 29) said. In their investigation into the uses and gratifications of social media, Whiting and Williams (2013) presented the theoretical support of the phenomenon of using social media for information seeking and self-education, which also well-explains the observation presented in this theme.

Socializing

With abundant social media features being incorporated in the app, inevitably, a number of respondents use NCM for socializing. Respondent 1 (female, 23) claimed that she has used NCM for dating purposes: "I once wanted to get to know a guy better, so I checked his NCM personal page to get know his music taste, I thought that would be an ice-breaker for our conversation later". Moreover, a not so well-known feature of NCM is the newly-added dating function. According to respondent 2 (male, 23), the dating function matches users with others of similar music tastes, they can swipe left/right to determine whether to start a conversation with the other user. The feature is later introduced to all other respondents and had received a good number of positive reactions, most respondents stated that they would like to start a conversation with people of highly identical music taste to him/her.

Aside from dating purposes, there are 4 respondents who have made friends in real life via NCM, and their scenarios are surprisingly similar. For instance, due to the fact that she's the only one who likes EDM among her friends, respondent 9 (female, 23) has managed to

find people on NCM to go to live events with her and they have eventually become friends in real life:

"There was once when I bought a ticket by myself to an EDM event, and I wanted to 'warm-up' by listening to some artists on the lineup. And in the comment section I saw there were some people asking if anyone else is going to the event, I replied to them and we went there as a group. Now we are all friends".

These phenomena observed are also solid evidence of social aspects of user gratifications on NCM. Hence, by fulfilling users' needs of self-expression, dating and other social interactions, it is clear that NCM is not merely a music streaming service since the platform is also dedicated to facilitate music-related communications and help users to form relationships both online and offline. On the other hand, the information/learning traits observed also proved that NCM offers abundant user-generated content related to music knowledge for users who want to learn more about music.

Sense of Ownership and Copyright

Despite the services provided by NCM are intangible, it seems that the sense of ownership still plays a role in the era of music streaming. 5 out of 12 respondents prefer downloading music to streaming, and the majority of them have asserted multiple times that by downloading music to their devices, they would have a better sense of ownership over the songs. Apart from that, arranging music collection is another activity that intensifies the sense of music ownership – most of the participants reported that they would arrange playlists according to the music genres, while others would arrange them according to artists, mood, occasions, etc. Respondent 8 (male, 21) even claimed that he would never switch to another streaming platform simply because all his collections are on NCM: "I almost have 10,000 songs in my playlists, so as long as NCM does not go bankrupt, I'm not going to switch the platform". This finding appears to support the argument of Sinclair and Tinson (2017): the control over the digital music collection can lead to the growth of user loyalty. In this case, NCM fulfills the users' needs for music collection by providing downloading and playlist

services, in return, the platform also gains more loyalty from the users. While contradicting the argument of digitalization of music is one of the main causes of the loss in the sense of music ownership (Bull, 2006; Bartmanski & Woodward, 2015), this outcome validates the notion of Sinclair and Tinson (2017) that by purchasing, organizing and controlling the music collections, a sense of psychological ownership over music can hence be achieved.

Additionally, a striking number of 11 respondents stated that they have perceived great changes in the domestic copyright system in recent years, it is being indicated frequently that paid music is now being normalized. Regarding this shift in music consumption, 8 interviewees showed positive attitudes. There are 5 respondents reported that the copyrighted music being offered by NCM is another primary motivation for them to use NCM. As asserted by many, NCM not only has exclusive copyrights to a great number of music productions, it also helps the market to be more legitimized by fostering the copyright awareness among users. During the interview, respondent 4 (male, 24) said that paying for the copyrighted music on NCM helps to improve his user experience, since it would not only increase the sense of ownership but also bring the feelings of legitimacy.

While copyrighted music is being valued greatly by the majority of the respondents, there are still a few respondents admitted that they would listen to pirated music every now and then on NCM due to copyright issues. As elaborated by respondent 3 (male, 22), the pirated versions are mainly "mashup" versions of music uploaded by users, "for some songs that NCM does not have the copyright of, I would search for those versions. It's not like I want to listen to the pirated version, if NCM offers it, I would buy it immediately". Most respondents believe that the copyright system in China still needs to be perfected, however, they are positive about its future development since the legislations are becoming stricter than ever.

Habit

To begin with, great brand loyalty is observed among the participants during the interviews - the average number of years spent on NCM reported by respondents is more than 4.6 (excluding respondent 4, 5 and 12 as no specific number of years was provided). Besides, from the data gathered, many of the respondents reported that they use the app multiple times

in a day for at least 2 hours in total. Among others, respondent 7 (male, 28) reported the longest time of use per day: “I listen to music on NCM for at least 6 hours a day”. Having a career in the EDM industry as an artist and music director, this respondent has to constantly interact with the music by listening to a large amount of music on a daily basis, “I usually go on NCM to look for new music and inspirations for my live sets, so it is safe to say that I know a lot of songs thanks to NCM”. It is no surprise that there are 8 respondents who claimed that NCM is already an essential part of their daily routine, “music essential for my life, so NCM is also fundamental”, said respondent 5 (male, 25). Moreover, respondent 6 (female, 25) even claimed that she would feel naked if she is outdoors without her headphones on: “It’s like a habit, I would automatically open NCM. I got so used to it and I might not be comfortable with using other platforms”.

This observation confirms the findings on the motivation behind the use of third-party music services on Facebook by Krause et al. (2014), in which the scholars have underlined habitual diversion as one of the primary motivations of use. Here, the user gratification is hence as a habit or a method to help the users to pass time or escape their real-life problems.

“NCM Musician”

The last theme of user gratification focuses on the perspectives of artist/music producers on NCM. “NCM Musician” is a verified title designed by the platform for users who are also artists/producers, and they would publish their own music on NCM. There are 5 EDM producers who are verified as NCM Musician among the respondents, and great insights into the mechanism of music publishing and promotion on NCM were provided by them. As a sophisticated music producer, respondent 12 (male, 29) elaborated on this aspect:

“I think this platform helps independent musicians in many ways, at least our music is being heard by the users. Also, there would be some extra income from NCM, this is also a form of encouragement for me”.

Apart from highlighting the benefits NCM has brought to him as an independent producer, according to this respondent, the platform still has to make some improvements in

the future since the verification process is not strict enough for music piracy (mostly in terms of remix regulations). At the same time, as reported by respondent 2 (male, 23) and 12 (male, 29), the platform has the role of dictator in terms of copyright – that the musicians themselves are not in control of their own assets. For instance, respondent 2 stated that he does not have the right to take down his own assets on NCM once it is uploaded. Nevertheless, the musicians are satisfied with this service, as it enables them to reach more audience while communicating with other producers. In general, the NCM musicians who participated in this study are positive about the future of this platform for independent music artists in China.

NCM and the EDM market in China

One of the inspirations of this study is the industry insights presented by iiMedia (2018), which states that NCM is being perceived as the most professional EDM streaming platform in China by many users, therefore, this section aims to explain the fundamental causes of this phenomenon. During the interviews, this assertion is formulated into a question to unveil to what extent the respondents agree with this saying and their thoughts on this issue. It turned out that NCM has a great reputation among the respondents in terms of EDM-related services – most respondents clarified that they agree with this saying, in other words, this study also validates the argumentation of NCM as the most professional EDM streaming platform in China posited by iiMedia.

There are 2 respondents agreed with the saying completely since they believe the leading role of NCM in the domestic EDM market is unquestionable. According to respondent 5 (male, 25): “to me, it is because NCM has a tremendous market coverage in China”; while 3 participants agreed with the saying to a great extent mainly because of NCM’s gigantic music library in the EDM section: both respondent 6 and 11 have stated that the music library of NCM provides users with numerous songs made by unknown yet talented musicians, and they could almost find all the EDM songs they want to listen to on the platform – this finding is related to the user gratifications derived music library discussed earlier.

Another highlight of NCM is its EDM podcasts. As emphasized by several respondents, the podcast of NCM is very user-friendly for EDM lovers, as it provides numerous live set

podcasts, podcasts of famous DJs/producers as well as podcasts of different sub-genres. “It feels great that I get to listen to the whole set of my favourite artists, it’s definitely a fuller experience”, says respondent 10 (female, 24).

Other than that, based on the information provided by the participants, NCM has already set up an EDM label in China called “Fever”. Aside from music publishing, artist management and live events services, the label also offers EDM production courses both online and offline (“NetEase Fever”, 2020). As the only person who has participated in the EDM courses provided by Fever, respondent 12 provided great insights into this service: the courses share the resource of a renowned music school in London called “Point Blank Music School”. However, the price of the courses is also quite high. Other than that, 2 respondents (7 and 12) reported that NCM also hosts some EDM music competitions and launches EDM talent fostering projects from time to time. It occurs that extra attention is being paid by NetEase to develop a comprehensive EDM service platform in China.

There are 4 respondents analysed the streaming platform in more a rational manner: despite they are not denying the statement of iiMedia (2011) that NCM is the most professional EDM provider in China, however, they believe this perception is a result of NCM’s brand influence and its monopoly of the EDM copyright in the market. “Almost all EDM lovers I know are on NCM”, says respondent 12, “it basically monopolies the EDM resource in China. It also controls the trends of EDM in the markets, so what happens is, whatever NCM says it’s good music, it would be a big hit”. To those respondents, NCM’s market coverage enables the platform to be a trend-setter as well as a gatekeeper in the Chinese EDM sector. Consequently, the EDM lovers who do not have enough knowledge are more likely to be conformed to the trend created by the platform, which might lead to the formation of an imbalanced market.

To better portray the role of NCM in the domestic market, the interviews also assessed the importance of NCM in the respondents’ daily EDM consumption (on the scale of 1-10). Many have asserted that NCM is of crucial importance, the reasons are similar to the gratifications discussed in the above sections, including convenience, music library, music learning, etc. Respondent 8 (male, 21) gave the highest score of 9, as he thinks other platforms are incomparable to NCM in terms of EDM services. However, several respondents

pointed out some limitations of NCM straightforwardly. As for respondent 2 (male, 23), who claimed that the negative comments on NCM would also put a negative impact on his listening experience. While respondent 9 (female, 22) argued that NCM is too commercialized for people who want a purer EDM experience. Also, to respondent 10 (female, 24), NCM is “not irreplaceable, since there are other choices in the market”. Hence it is evident that although NCM is important for the respondents in terms of EDM consumption, there are spaces for future improvement.

Conclusion and Discussion

Inspired by the recent rise in popularity of EDM in China as well as NCM's dedication on establishing a platform where the best EDM-related services are provided in the country, this thesis presents an investigation on the uses and gratifications of NCM among EDM lovers in China and unveils the perceived role of NCM in the domestic EDM market. Among the heavy users of NCM, 12 EDM lovers located in 9 different cities in China participated in the semi-structured interviews for the data collection. The patterns of the general usage observed is that the respondents mainly use a smartphone in combination with headphone and speakers as the main devices for the use of NCM, and the circumstances of use are mostly outdoor (e.g. when they are on public transportations).

The outcome of the user gratifications is rather diverse, which consists of the appreciations derived from the convenience utilities, social aspects, sense of ownership and copyright, habit as well as NCM musician. The most prominent findings of this research are presented in Table 3.

Prominent user gratifications of NCM	**Convenience utilities** layout design, comprehensive music library, multi-functionality, easy music discovery **Social aspects** self-expression, information and learning, socializing **Sense of ownership and copyright** Digital music ownership, digital music collection, copyrighted music **Habit** NCM as a daily routine **"NCM musician"** NCM as a platform to publish music

Table 3. Prominent user gratifications of NCM

The most prominent findings on the user gratifications of NCM are its convenience enabled by different features, its social aspects, the satisfactions derived from the sense of ownership and copyright, habit as well as the music publishing and promoting features designed for musicians. To begin with, as a digital music streaming app, great user satisfaction with regard to convenience are generated by its clear layout design, gigantic music library, multi-functionality (including music videos, song recognition feature, podcast, lyrics, etc.) and easy music discovery. More importantly, two of the most interesting findings are social aspects and digital music ownership. To elaborate, in the theme of social aspects, the gratification related to self-expression and socializing are highlighted: while NCM's sharing and commenting services are essential for the respondents to express their music taste to others, the platform is also used for dating purposes – evidences are found in this study that users would check others' music taste on their NCM pages to get to know the person of their interest. On top of that, NCM even encourages people to form relationships by designing a dating feature that allows users to swipe users of similar or even identical music tastes. Since the majority of the social activities observed here are enabled by similar music tastes, this can hence be explained by the music bonding model posited by Boer et al. (2011): music preference (taste) indicates people's value orientations, and similar value orientations can lead to social attraction. Another interesting finding of this research is that users do derive a sense of ownership from the intangible music services provided. This is mainly achieved by the activities of music downloading as well as arranging digital music collections. This observation can be perfectly explained by the notion of psychological ownership posited by Sinclair and Tinson (2017). Besides, it is also asserted by the respondents that downloading music, arranging digital music collectio as well as consuming the copyrighted music can lead to a stronger sense of digital music ownership: since the action of downloading can create a sense of ownership, while paying for the copyrighted music can not only increase the sense of ownership but also brings a sense of legitimacy to many respondents. Moreover, while many respondents claimed that NCM is already an essential part of their daily routine, the music producers among the respondents also appreciate NCM for its producer-friendly features which allow them to publish and promote music on the platform.

It is also observed that NCM has a great brand reputation in relation to its EDM services. Being evaluated as extremely user-friendly to EDM lovers in China, NCM not only provides a great range of EDM music and podcasts, it is also dedicated to foster EDM talents in China with its EDM label. It occurred that NCM is of great importance for the EDM consumption among the respondents and is perceived to be capable of exerting a great impact on the trends in the Chinese EDM market. This enables NCM to be a gatekeeper as well as a trend-setter in the mainstream EDM world in China, however, it might also lead to the creation of an imbalanced market.

Reflection and limitation

This research contributes plentiful insights into the existing U&G research, music streaming services research as well as EDM research. While the literature review above signifies that the research on music streaming services in the realm of U&G research is lacking, while great Western-centrism is also observed in those academic fields. With regard to the knowledge gaps, this study conducts an investigation on the users of a music streaming platform in China known as NetEase Cloud Music. This study conducts 12 semi-structured with heavy NCM users from 9 different cities in China. Apart from exploring the uses and gratifications of the particular platform, it also sheds a light on the unexploited Chinese EDM market in the academic world. The most notable findings are the user gratifications derived from the social features as well as the sense of digital ownership created by downloading music, arranging digital music collections and consuming copyrighted music. Besides, NCM is perceived as one of the trend-setters of EDM market in China and functions as a gatekeeper. However, this study has several flaws. First and foremost, since the sample population was selected based on theoretical sampling and snowball sampling, there might be a risk of a biased sample. In other words, the sampling techniques of this study might lead to similar perceptions to the platform as well as music tastes among the respondents. Secondly, as all respondents are loyal users of NCM, their perceptions of NCM might also be biased since they don't have enough knowledge of other music streaming platforms to make comparisons. Thus, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the wider public.

Nevertheless, for the future studies, several interesting findings of this research are worth-looking into: first of all, the social aspects observed in NCM might be useful for scholars who want to conduct research on the relationship between music and how people socialize (e.g. dating, making friends, etc.); secondly, in the era of digitalized music, the importance of looking into the factors influencing the digital music ownership are also good materials for future studies; since the accuracy of recommendation algorithm is controversial in this study, it might also be worth looking into. Furthermore, the findings of this research are also useful for streaming services for future improvement, especially in terms of lyrics feature and the recommendation algorithm.

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Appendix

List of Abbreviations

EDM: Electronic Dance Music
MaaS: Music as a Service
MRSs: Music Recommender Systems (MRSs)
NCM: NetEase Cloud Music

Topic List

Opening questions

- How do you listen to music? How does the medium of your choice change over time?
  - Medium? Platform?
  - Can you tell me something about your music taste? The changes over time?

The usage of NCM and the motivation of use

1. Can you tell me your experience with NCM?
2. How long have you been using NCM?
3. How often do you use NCM in a day?
4. Under what circumstances would you open NCM?
5. How do you perceive the changes NCM had brought to your music consumption experience?
6. Could you describe the ways you discover new music/artists on NCM?
7. What you think of the accuracy of the recommendation algorithm of NCM?
8. What do you usually do on the platform aside of listening to music?
9. Do you download more or stream more? And why?
10. Collection/playlist - How do you organize your music collection?
11. What do you think are the features you enjoy the most on NCM?
12. Can you describe how do you share the music you like?
    - Through what channels?
    - Offline?
13. Do you watch music videos on NCM?
14. What is your experience with the comment sections on NCM?
15. Can you tell me some interesting experience you had with the DMs on NCM?
16. Based on what we have discussed before and your experience, can you tell me what are the main reasons that motivate you to use NCM?
17. How do you perceive the changes of copyright policy in China over time on the platform? - Do you think it is positive or negative?]
    - Do you prefer paying for the copyrighted version compared to pirated version?

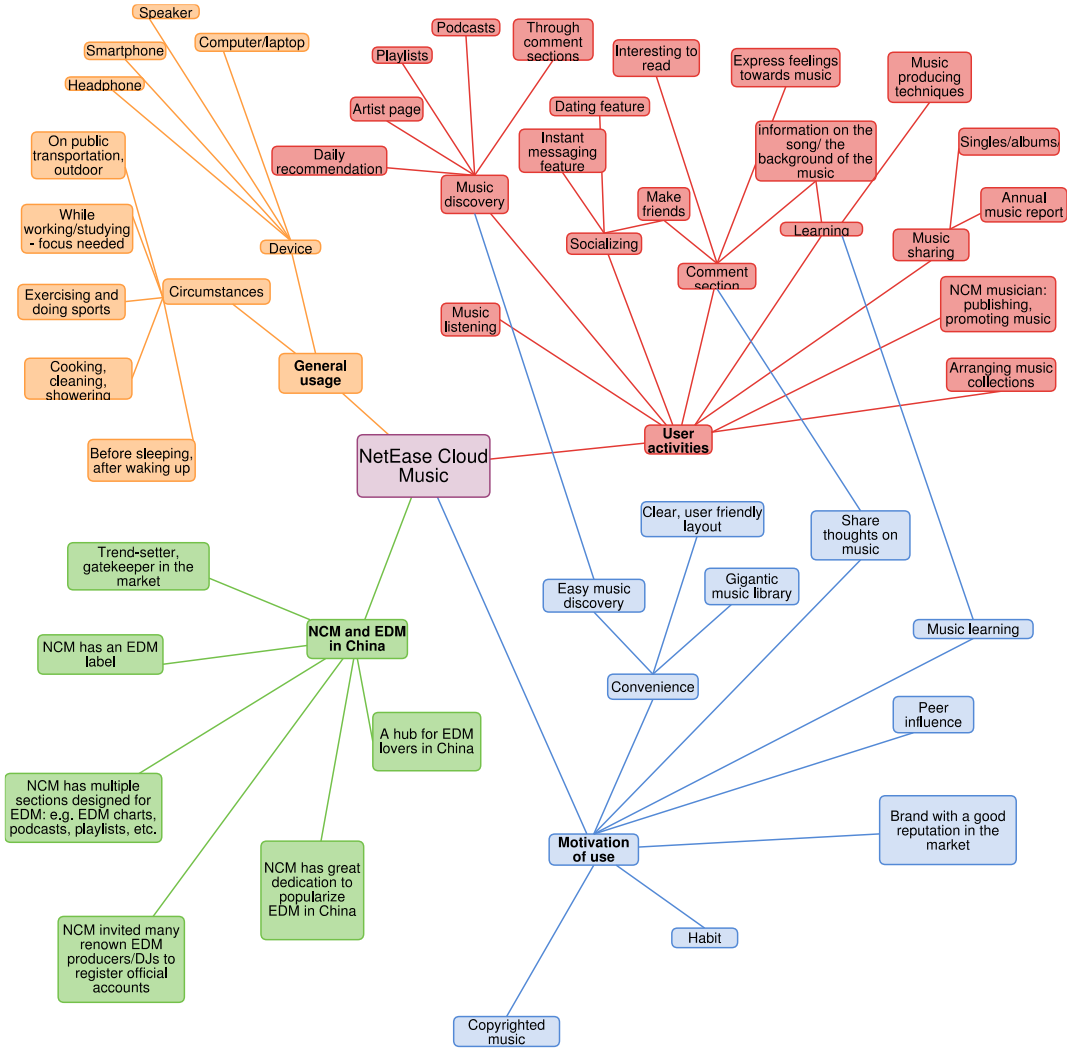
EDM music

1. Can you describe your general experience with EDM?
2. How long have you been an EDM listener?
   - favorite artists, music, sub-genre
3. Do you attend live events?
4. How do you usually acquire information on EDM and related artists/events?
5. Does NCM help you to get to know more EDM fans?
6. On a scale of 1 -10, how do you rate the importance of NetEase Cloud Music in your EDM consumption?

Perceived role of NCM in the EDM market in China

1. As a western cultural product, is there any cultural barriers occurred to you while consuming EDM?
2. Can you give me examples of situations where NCM help you to better understand/connect with the EDM music you are listening to?
3. How do you perceive the popularity of EDM in China?
4. Do you think NCM is doing a good job on mediating EDM to fans in China? Why?
5. To what extent do you agree with the statement that NCM provides the most professional EDM music streaming services in China? And why?
6. Many famous EDM artists have registered official accounts on NCM. What are you experiences with their accounts?
7. Do you think NCM is important in the EDM market in China?
   - In what ways?
8. Does music streaming motivate you to attend live events?

Coding Tree


Speaker
Computer/laptop
Smartphone
Headphone
On public transportation, outdoor
While working/studying - focus needed
Exercising and doing sports
Cooking, cleaning, showering
Before sleeping, after waking up
Circumstances
Device
General usage
Podcasts
Through comment sections
Playlists
Interesting to read
Express feelings towards music
Music producing techniques
Artist page
Dating feature
Daily recommendation
Instant messaging feature
information on the song/ the background of the music
Singles/albums
Music discovery
Make friends
Annual music report
Socializing
Learning
Music sharing
Comment section
Music listening
NCM musician: publishing, promoting music
Arranging music collections
User activities
NetEase Cloud Music
Clear, user friendly layout
Share thoughts on music
Trend-setter, gatekeeper in the market
Easy music discovery
Gigantic music library
Music learning
NCM and EDM in China
NCM has an EDM label
Convenience
Peer influence
A hub for EDM lovers in China
NCM has multiple sections designed for EDM: e.g. EDM charts, podcasts, playlists, etc.
Brand with a good reputation in the market
Motivation of use
NCM has great dedication to popularize EDM in China
NCM invited many renown EDM producers/DJs to register official accounts
Habit
Copyrighted music