

Social Networking through Music: A Study of Netease Cloud Music Users' Media Practices

Huiwen Zheng (Corresponding author)

Dept. of College of Publish, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology

516 JunGong Road, Yangpu District, Shanghai, China

Tel: +86 133 2782 6753 E-mail: 924059481@qq.com

Received: October 18, 2024 Accepted: November 23, 2024 Published: December 19, 2024

doi: 10.5296/jsss.v11i2.22330

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/jsss.v11i2.22330>

Abstract

Social networking through music has developed into a mediated practical activity for individuals in a variety of contexts, including going out, playing games, sports, and working. This is due to the mobile mediatization of daily life. A social ecosystem centered around music has developed as a result of mobile music applications, such as NetEase Cloud Music, which have progressively exposed the social aspects of music. From the standpoint of media practices, this study investigates the relationship between people's social practices and music as a medium, highlighting the social role and relevance of music as well as the various ways in which users use it for social interactions. Users employ music as a medium to engage in social interactions, establishing meaningful connections. Social networking through music socialization is generated in personal sharing and multidimensional interaction. The NetEase Cloud Music platform recognizes the importance of music as a social communication tool, creating a novel kind of social music engagement and fully valuing music. A thorough examination of music socialization in the context of media practice is important because it gives us a practical perspective on how music, media, and society interact in day-to-day living.

Keywords: social networking through music, media practice, NetEase cloud Music

1. Introduction

In recent years, the trend of 'social networking through music' has gradually blown into the Chinese music market. As the Internet and information technology continue to advance at a rapid pace, music-oriented social media platforms are becoming more and more popular. Online socializing in the fast-paced Internet era is often accompanied by a sense of loneliness

and emptiness, in contrast to the intuitive emotional experience of traditional face-to-face interactions. Individuals seek emotional solace, self-identity, and opportunities to share emotions during interpersonal interactions. Emotional expression and conveyance are greatly aided by music. On mobile music platforms, listeners not only enjoy music but also use it as a medium to vent emotions, comment, forward songs, and share feelings to seek recognition and emotional comfort. This also shows that the mobile music platform is not only a place for users to enjoy music, but also provides social functions, creating a new social place for individual interaction.

Currently, China's mobile music platforms mainly include NetEase Cloud Music, QQ Music, KuGou Music. Among these mobile music platforms, NetEase Cloud Music is the first music platform in China to integrate 'music' and 'social activities' together. NetEase cloud music has a Characteristic playlist and accurate delivery functions to adapt to the need of people (Meng, 2019). On the NetEase Cloud Music platform, users base on their own interest and emotional judgement, and socialize online through expressions, sharing and other behaviors in the virtual community. The interactive behaviors between users form a continuous chain of interactive rituals between individuals and individuals, and between individuals and groups within the platform.

In recent years, social networking through music has gradually attracted scholars' attention. However, most existing studies are relatively one-sided, mostly focusing on the marketing strategy of music socialization, music copyright, music creation, etc., and scholars' horizons are too limited and normalized. In this paper, we study the social role of music as a medium and people's music social behavior, so as to find out the meaning behind 'music socialization' in the virtual network.

2. Theoretical Basis and Related Research

2.1 Media Theory

The concept of media theory was introduced in the 1980s by Merowitz (1994), who advocates looking at the characteristics of a particular medium and emphasis its impact on individuals and society. Unlike the use of media as a tool for human beings, the media practice of media theory advocates an examination of the impact of media on human existence and social change from the perspective of the media.

In contemporary society, the act of using NetEase to socialize is a mediated practice. Examining the music socialization practices of NetEase Cloud Music users is conducive to enriching the theoretical perspectives of media practices.

2.2 NetEase Music Research

At present, most of the domestic research on NetEase Cloud Music focuses on business strategies and copyright issues related to the development status and prospects, and there is relatively little research on music socialization.

A number of researchers have focused on technological aspects of practical significance in an attempt to push the music community forward. PD. Adamczy(2004) attempts to provide more

suggestions for upgrading the user's music retrieval and recommendation system in the direction of expanding information visualization. Peng et al.(2015) suggests the importance of the emotional factor in the communication of music, suggesting the provision of a good social network and experience for music.

In terms of music commentary (Wang, 2017), Meng (2015) and Fang, Lu, & Zhu (2017) revealed the development trend of social behavior in music applications and the information dissemination law of digital music through the analysis of the review data of Netease Cloud Music. Some scholars also believe that users are emotionally invested in music social networking, and therefore tend to explore how NetEase Cloud music social networking is formed from the emotional aspect of users. Liu & Ouyang (2019) compared and analyzed the social functions of NetEase Cloud Music and QQ Music, which are significantly different in social development and social mode.

2.3 Music Socialization

The term “music socialization” appeared late in China, and the concept was introduced from abroad. In September 2003, MySpace was born, which is the second largest social networking platform in the world. As the world's second largest social networking platform, it integrates online dating, information sharing, real-time communication, etc. In 2009, MySpace first showed the concept of “music socialization” to the public, aiming at finding common music friends. Young people use the platform to make friends online, and the music-themed social network has gradually developed through the process of user sharing and interaction.

Using “music socialization” as the keyword to collect literature data found that foreign researchers pay more attention to the practical significance of music, highlight the practical function of music, and try to promote the development of music socialization. Pasi Saari & Tuomas Eerola (2013) investigated whether mood scales such as arousal and tension in music social media are conducive to automatic music mood annotation as a way of revealing the relationship between music and mood-related social labeling. JuanMorera Borja et al. (2022) argues that the development of inclusive music practices music practices from the end of the 20th century has promoted equality and social justice.

Domestic research on music socialization started relatively late, mostly focusing on music business research. According to Sun (2020), the concept of music socialization takes the platform as the initiating point, and connects each participant through the value users, thus creating a situation in which multiple parties can benefit together. Jiang (2024) starts from the media practice of music software, combines with the theory of participatory culture, and elaborates the social communication mechanism based on music.

In summary, scholars have paid attention to the field of “music social networking” and conducted research on the theory and practice of “music social networking”, but they have not elaborated on music social networking at the specific practical level, so they are unable to conduct in-depth research on the functional significance of music social networking for users.

Starting from the media practice of music socialization platforms, this study conducts

in-depth research on the music socialization behaviors of users of the NetEase Cloud Music platform, which can help enrich the research on music socialization and media practice in the professional field of journalism and communication.

3. Method

In this paper, 8 NetEase Cloud Music users are selected to conduct interviews on the topic of social experience on the NetEase Cloud Music platform. To ensure the diversity and representativeness of the interviewees, participants were selected based on their distinct social identities and lifestyles, encompassing university students, office workers, and self-employed individuals. Selection criteria included demographic diversity (age, gender, education level) and varying levels of engagement with the NetEase Cloud Music platform. Active users—those frequently engaging in comments, private messaging, or playlist sharing—and less active users were included for comparative analysis. All interviewees had at least one year of experience using the platform to guarantee their familiarity with its social features.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a predefined guideline. Questions explored the forms and frequency of interaction (“How often do you engage with others on the platform?”), social purposes and experiences (“Why do you interact with others, and how does it influence your music experience?”), and potential improvements (“What new features would you suggest to enhance the social experience?”). This approach allowed for both consistency in data collection and flexibility to capture unique perspectives.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy and facilitate subsequent qualitative analysis. In-depth online and offline interviews were conducted for them, through which rich and vivid qualitative data were obtained, so as to understand their group portraits and different experiences of socializing with NetEase Cloud music. And through the analysis, induction and summary of the conclusion of the article.

Table 1. Basic Information of Interviewees

Code	Gender	Age	Occupation	Time of use
M-01	Male	25	Civil servant	3 years
M-02	Male	19	Bachelor	1 years
M-03	Male	30	Company employee	4 years
F-04	Female	24	Civil servant	4 years
M-05	Male	22	Bachelor	2 years
M-06	Male	20	polytechnic	3 years
F-07	Female	21	Company employee	1 years
M-08	Male	23	Company employee	5 years

4. Analysis and Discussion

The arrival of the mobile social era has given rise to a number of social platforms, changing the way music is disseminated, expanding the space for users to share music, and personal listening behavior is received by the outside world with active sharing. In the context of

music social, the user's personal sharing behavior is the user's re-expression in the new social scene, and the user's self-expression of music, thoughts, emotions, and social aspects on the NetEase Cloud Music platform.

4.1 Self-expression and Presentation

Music can arouse the corresponding emotions and emotions in the heart of the audience, and these emotions and emotions need a user to express and present the export, NetEase Cloud Music provides such a platform, so that users can enjoy the music to express and present themselves.

Since its inception, NetEase Cloud Music has created the concept of "listening to music while commenting", and the Square Music Review has become the most iconic section of NetEase Cloud Music. Most comments are moving personal stories and sentences that lead to people's imagination (Zihan Y, 2022). Rich comment area connects the platform with music fans and builds a harmonious online music community. Through interviews, we found that most users continue to pay attention to and use music reviews of NetEase Cloud Music.

F-07 said, "I like to read hot reviews on NetEase Cloud Music. I can feel the emotions and stories of others. Since a hot review must have a reason for its popularity, I often listen to the whole song because of a hot review to understand the story behind it."

Every piece of music criticism in the song comment section is a story. Even if you have never met the same song, you can always enter the story through the sensibility and temperature between the lines on the screen, no matter whether you review or write your own comments, so as to generate emotional resonance. At the same time, the "anonymous" state in virtual space gives users a certain degree of security, so that they can speak freely and express themselves as they please, and the operations such as "like" and "reply" under the comment mechanism also meet the needs of users for self-expression and presentation.

4.2 Multi-platform Social Interaction

For the new era of social media, making friends through sharing is about building larger, more connected networks to boost your popularity. NetEase Cloud Music users mainly share in two forms: the first is sharing within the platform. Users can publish cloud music dynamics and share them in the cloud village community to develop their own music practice; The second type is cross-platform sharing, where music information is shared on WeChat, Weibo, QQ and other social platforms for multi-platform interactive communication

Through the interactive sharing of internal and external platforms, it increases the way for users to have dialogues and the space for music socialization. The interview results show that most users tend to share music on social platforms such as WeChat and Weibo, linking music to other platforms in the form of links: the content they share is not limited to the music itself, and a large number of users will share lyrics, mood, evaluation and sentiment and other emerging forms of social interaction to achieve diversified interaction with friends.

M-01 said: "My relatives and friends also like the songs I share in moments. Occasionally they give me a thumbs-up and make interactive comments with me. I think it is quite

interesting.”

F-04 said: “In peacetime, I can get closer to my friends by sharing my favorite music. In the evening, when I hear some touching songs, I will post some words on social platforms such as moments or Weibo.”

M-05 said, “I have the habit of sharing songs to my good friends, my family members and my family's WeChat group. I forward the songs to the moments of friends, which can not only express my opinions and feelings about the song, but also communicate with my friends. It's good.”

The social features of NetEase Cloud Music facilitate the extension of online interactions into offline relationships, extends from the virtual network to the real world, breaks through the boundaries of time and space, establishes a more diversified emotional experience in the online world, and enhances users' social relationships.

4.3 Making Friends for Pleasure

The purpose of socializing is to obtain information and resources, self-expression and presentation, and seek belonging and identity. The social attribute of NetEase Cloud Music considers the socializing of acquaintances and strangers. In acquaintance socializing, sharing music on social platforms is a kind of self-expression, which can reflect one's aesthetic taste, personality, mood and even recent life status, and is the shaping of one's social image. In stranger social interaction, just like other interest communities, communication can be generated based on the common preference for a certain music type, a certain singer or composer, and a certain style of works.

NetEase Cloud music platform's music socialization products and gameplay are also constantly innovating, developing and upgrading. In June 2019, a small program called “Music make Friends”, a chatting tool for strangers to socialize, was officially launched on NetEase Cloud. Each user can improve their personal information. In addition, each user can also provide information related to music hobbies and tastes, based on which, the two users can chat online and share music. This is also the feature of music social networking of this small program. NetEase Cloud music will automatically recommend users' song lists based on the songs they listened to before and users can find a group of people who have the same music taste as themselves and form a communication spontaneously. By analyzing users' music database, strangers with more matching personalities are selected according to users' music preferences, to avoid awkward social networking and make social networking of music platform touchable.

M-02 said, “I like to make friends, both in real life and online. ‘Music make Friends’ allows us to make friends with a wider range of people than in real life and makes it easier to make friends with similar interests. My classmates and I are all looking for musical confidants here to get to know each other and follow each other.”

M-03 said, “I like to make friends, and occasionally I escape from real social relationships and go into the virtual world of Music make Friends to chat with strangers.”

Through the analysis of users' music database, Music Friends selects strangers with better personalities according to users' music preferences and uses the music information attributes of users on the platform to create a relatively safe environment for making friends. Therefore, this function is favored by users and gradually popularized, which is also the difference between “Music Friend” and other similar software.

4.4 The Practice of “Cloud Village”

The NetEase Cloud “cloud village” community was officially launched in August 2019, further upgrading the music socialization function of its products. The decentralization of the “Cloud Village” community allows everyone to express themselves through music and sharing words and pictures on their own. Decentralized users can form a specific collective public circle with the aid of network relationships and interactive platforms. In this circle, users share and communicate with each other and with the platform, building a network structure with a strong sense of group belonging.

User-created song lists are also a way of forming social chains. Users listen to songs, create song lists, quality song lists are recommended, and other users play, comment, favourite, and share them, forming interactions within and outside the community. During the interviews, most of the interviewees expressed their own opinions about the activities related to “Cloud Village” and the use of self-created song lists.

M-06 said, “Sometimes people in the group often ask if there are any friends who like folk music, at this time I will come out to chat with them and share their favorite song lists!”

M-08 said, “I love this sharing feature of NetEase Cloud music, music or song lists shared to friends often find friends who like the same song commenting below.”

With Cloud Village, an open and anonymous mobile music platform, individual emotional interactions in music socialization are more easily integrated into the collective of the group, resulting in group excitement and a sense of belonging.

5. Conclusion

Based on the perspective of media practice, the development of music socialization reflects the more frequent and effective connection between people, people and technology, users and platforms, and thus builds a social ecosystem. Through the warm emotional connection of music, users realize the construction from weak connection to strong connection, from music exchange to new relationship, and build a common circle of users' interests, thus shaping the spiritual community of platform users and realizing a wider range of social connection.

Users become subjects in the communication process of music as a medium, and interact, share and connect through music to achieve social communication among subjects. At the same time, music social interaction should be generated in personal sharing, multi-dimensional interaction and deep connection. In order to pursue high-quality music sharing, seek emotional identification and meet social expectations, individual users should conduct personal sharing activities and multi-dimensional interaction in platforms and communities through technology, based on music and interests

This study, through an analysis of user social behaviors on NetEase Cloud Music, reveals the formation of a unique social ecosystem built upon deep connections among users. These findings underscore the universal potential of music as a medium for social connection, providing actionable insights for the enhancement of social functionalities on music platforms globally. For instance, platforms such as Spotify and QQ Music could leverage similar social functionalities to enhance user experience. However, user behaviors may be influenced by varying technological frameworks and cultural contexts across platforms, highlighting the need for further exploration in future research.

6. Limitations

Due to the influence of various factors, the study of this paper also has deficiencies and defects. First, the analysis of this paper is based on periodical papers, industry reports, network data and other secondary data and user interviews, which lack in-depth interviews with industry insiders and professionals, and empirical data is not comprehensive enough. Secondly, because users have different degrees of social interaction on NetEase Cloud music platform, the social function and significance of music is subjective. A thousand people have a thousand different perceptions and opinions, so the sample obtained is not fully representative.

The theoretical analysis of the social function and significance of music as a medium in this paper is not thorough and in-depth. Based on further understanding of the theoretical context and essence, there is still a large room for efforts. The author will do more thinking in the future, hoping to obtain more harvest in related topics.

Acknowledgement

I appreciate the guidance and encouragement of my mentor Mengyu Luo. I am grateful to the interviewees for sharing their views and insights with me.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out solely by Huiwen Zheng. The author was responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis and interpretation, manuscript drafting, and final approval of the version to be published.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Macrothink Institute.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

Adamczyk, P. D. (2004). Seeing sounds: Exploring musical social networks. In *Proceedings of the ACM Multimedia 2004* (pp. 751–754). Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1027527.1027651>

Fang, A., Lu, H., & Zhu, J. (2017). Analysis of the distribution law of digital music information under the user review field of view: Take NetEase Cloud Music Hot Song List as an example. *Wide Angle*, 3.

Jiang, W. W. (2024). Music socialization: The communication mechanism of NetEase Cloud Music from the perspective of participatory culture theory. *Sound and Screen World*, 12, 94-96.

JuanMorera Borja, NadalGarcía Icár & LópezCasanova Belén.(2022).Systematic Review of Inclusive Musical Practices in Non-Formal Educational Contexts.*Education Sciences*, 1, 5-5. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13010005>

Liu, T., & Ouyang, Z. (2019). Research on the ‘music social’ mode of mobile music platforms: Taking NetEase Cloud Music and QQ Music as an example. *Today's Media*, 27(4), 58–61.

Meng, S. M. (2019). Research on emotional marketing strategy of NetEase Cloud Music. *Rural Economy and Science and Technology*, 30(22), 125-126.

Meng, W. (2015). Content analysis based on user reviews in the social features of music apps. *Anhui Literature* (Second Half Moon), 64–65.

Meyrowitz, J. (1994). Medium theory. In D. Crowley & D. Mitchell (Eds.), *Communication theory today* (pp. 119–135). Polity Press.

Pasi, S., & Tuomas, E. (2013). Semantic Computing of Moods Based on Tags in Social

Media of Music. *CoRR*.

Peng, J. W., Sun, S. W., Cheng, W. H., et al. (2015). eMusic: Mobile media pushing through social emotion sensing. In *Proceedings of the ACM* (pp. 1–5). ACM.

Sun, W. B. (2020). Revisiting the ‘music socialization’ concept of online music platforms: From the perspective of ‘structural hole’ theory. *Art Communication Studies*, 2, 111-117.

Wang, L. (2017). The construction of the ‘music social’ ecology from NetEase Cloud Music. *Unpublished manuscript*, 70-72.

Zihan, Y. (2022). A report on NetEase Cloud Music business. *Tourism Management and Technology Economy*, 5(1), 33-36.