

# A Study on the Influencing Factors of User Discontinuance Behavior on NetEase Cloud Music in the Digital Era

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**How to cite this paper:** Tang, B. E. (2026). A study on the influencing factors of user discontinuance behavior on NetEase Cloud Music in the digital era. *Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4(1), 148–159. ISSN Print: 3104-4328, ISSN Online: 3104-4336. <https://doi.org/10.63313/SSH.9097>  
**Published: 2026-05-28**

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## Abstract

In the context of the booming digital music industry, user discontinuance behavior on NetEase Cloud Music has attracted considerable attention. This study delves into the influencing factors of such behavior from the perspectives of user experience, content resources, and social interaction. Through in-depth interviews and participatory observation, the study finds that factors such as unfriendly interface design, lack of copyright in the music library, inaccurate algorithmic recommendations, and poor community atmosphere may contribute to user discontinuance. The findings help optimize platform functionality and improve user retention for NetEase Cloud Music, while providing theoretical support and practical guidance for the sustainable development of digital music platforms.

## Keywords

Digital Discontinuance; Netease Cloud Music; Influencing Factors

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## 1. Introduction

The digital era has reshaped music consumption, with digital music becoming a dominant mode of access through Internet and mobile devices. NetEase Cloud Music, a representative platform, attracts users via personalized recommendations and social interactions. However, intense competition and a dynamic digital environment have led to increasingly complex and diverse user behaviors, prominently user churn. Users may discontinue platform use due to factors such as content, service quality, or user experience. Such discontinuance behavior significantly affects platform development and operations, calling for an in-depth analysis of its causes and mechanisms. Meanwhile, the vast user data accumulated by music platforms enables data-driven investigations into behavioral patterns and preferences. Studying discontinuance behavior among NetEase Cloud Music users

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through data analytics can support targeted improvement strategies and enhance user satisfaction and loyalty.

Against this backdrop, this study has three objectives. First, it aims to identify the factors influencing discontinuance behavior—platform-related, individual, and environmental—to comprehensively understand the determinants of continued use. Second, based on these factors, it will propose specific optimization recommendations to improve service quality and user experience, thereby reducing discontinuance and strengthening platform competitiveness. Third, it seeks to enrich user behavior theory by empirically examining the characteristics and patterns of discontinuance behavior on digital music platforms, thus advancing theoretical development and providing a reference for future research.

## **2. Research Methods**

This study adopts a qualitative approach. Participatory observation and in-depth interviews are employed as primary methods, with three-level coding used for data analysis.

### **2.1. Participatory Observation**

Participatory observation is a direct, naturalistic method, typically unstructured. It requires the researcher to conduct interactions without preconceptions, aiming for a holistic and deep understanding of a specific cultural phenomenon to identify core characteristics. Depending on whether the researcher's identity is disclosed, it can be classified as overt or covert participatory observation.

### **2.2. In-depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews facilitate direct or indirect contact between the researcher and participants, helping to uncover the motivations and meanings behind behaviors. Through such interviews, participants are guided to reflect on their personal experiences and identify factors leading to discontinuance behavior—including platform-related, individual, and environmental factors—thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the key determinants of continued platform use.

## **3. Literature Review**

### **3.1. Research on the NetEase Cloud Music Platform**

A search on CNKI using "NetEase Cloud Music" as the keyword yielded 854 relevant documents, of which 232 fall within the field of journalism and communication, with the highest number published in 2018. Organizing and categorizing the literature reveals that research on NetEase Cloud Music covers a broad range of topics, focusing primarily on its current development status, user interaction, and future development directions.

### 3.1.1. Research on the Current Status of NetEase Cloud Music

Studies on the current status of NetEase Cloud Music mainly analyze its music ecosystem and marketing strategies. For instance, Wang Lu (2017) pointed out that starting from the advanced concept of "music socialization," NetEase Cloud Music has built a unique music community by creating group strata, emotional windows, and personal social capital, presenting a distinctive social ecosystem [1]. Tang Xiaoli (2017) examined NetEase Cloud Music as a typical music self-media platform, and by analyzing its development logic and philosophy, argued that its popularity among users is attributable to its advanced platform-based thinking and user-centered industrial operations. In addition, many scholars have studied the marketing strategies of NetEase Cloud Music, exploring why this music product has repeatedly gone viral through high-quality marketing cases [2]. Hou Lulu (2020) investigated the platform's development strategies in the music market, summarizing them into online and offline marketing based on the characteristics of the NetEase Cloud Music app [3]. Li Luyi (2019) explained emotional marketing from four perspectives—music functions, social functions, emotionally oriented advertisements, and emotional services—pointing out that this is the biggest difference between NetEase Cloud Music and other music platforms [4]. Ding Taiyan (2019) elucidated the characteristics of NetEase Cloud Music's content marketing under social creativity, including socialization, authenticity, and personalization [5].

### 3.1.2. Research on User Interaction on NetEase Cloud Music

Most existing studies adopt theoretical approaches, using interdisciplinary thinking and methods to explore user interaction behaviors and their effects on NetEase Cloud Music. For example, Li Dandan (2016) conducted a micro-level analysis of music socialization on NetEase Cloud Music using the theory of interaction ritual chains, arguing that the emotions evoked by music blur the boundary between front-stage and back-stage behaviors, thereby creating strong emotional entrainment [6]. Jiang Wenwen (2024) conducted an in-depth study of users' online interaction behaviors using participatory culture theory, further elaborating the mechanism of music-based social communication [7]. In terms of practical approaches, Tian Ye (2017) argued that every success of NetEase Cloud Music is inseparable from user support. It is precisely because the platform adhered to a user-centered principle throughout product design and development, deeply understanding user needs, that NetEase Cloud Music was able to establish a good reputation and successfully drive traffic, ultimately achieving a virtuous cycle of the entire business ecosystem [8]. Zhang Yuanyuan (2018) pointed out that the platform's own positioning enables it not only to play and publish songs but also to possess the potential to evoke emotional resonance with the music [9].

### 3.1.3. Research on Development Strategies of NetEase Cloud Music

Regarding the future direction of NetEase Cloud Music, different scholars have adopted different perspectives, which can be broadly summarized as platform-centered and user-centered viewpoints. Huang Jingru (2016) discussed and explored the development prospects of NetEase Cloud Music from the perspectives of the product itself and the market environment, offering suggestions on how the platform can achieve breakthrough and innovation under new industry developments [10]. Zhang Xiao and Yuan Wei (2017) approached from the perspective of audience psychology, recommending that NetEase Cloud Music leverage group psychology to enhance its music socialization functions, for example, by increasing the logicity of user comments to raise the visibility of high-quality comments, thereby increasing users' willingness to interact. Some scholars have also made suggestions for the future development of NetEase Cloud Music and the online music industry from a copyright perspective [11]. Wang Jia (2019) argued that although the development of Internet technology has shifted the music industry from traditional publishing to new media publishing, copyright issues remain central to the development of digital music platforms [12]. Wang Wenna (2024) conducted an online questionnaire survey on NetEase Cloud Music from four aspects—product layout, comment function, social function, and emotional experience—and proposed development strategies and recommendations based on the survey results [13].

### **3.2. Research on Intermittent Discontinuance**

The concept of discontinuance was first proposed by Everett Rogers in his diffusion of innovations theory. According to Rogers (1958), a user's decision to adopt or reject an innovation does not mark the end of the innovation adoption process. During the confirmation stage, users may accept an innovation but may also reject it—this is termed "discontinuance" in the innovation adoption process [14]. Rogers noted two main types of discontinuance: replacement discontinuance and disenchantment discontinuance. Replacement discontinuance occurs when users abandon an existing innovation because a more suitable alternative becomes available; disenchantment discontinuance refers to users ceasing use due to dissatisfaction with the innovation.

Based on the degree of discontinuance, user behavior can be classified into permanent discontinuance (also known as sustained discontinuance) and intermittent discontinuance. The former refers to users permanently or long-term withdrawing from a platform or uninstalling a digital product or online service. Research on intermittent discontinuance is a key focus within digital discontinuance studies. A search of CNKI, Web of Science, and other databases reveals three main strands of research.

#### **3.2.1. Research on Influencing Factors of Intermittent Discontinuance**

Overall, existing research identifies factors influencing intermittent discontinuance on social media as including enablers, inhibitors, and individual factors.

Enablers are factors that prompt users to choose discontinuance, such as negative emotions, stress, and burnout. For example, Du Shiyao (2021) found that perceived intrusion, perceived overload, cost perception, privacy concerns, and upward social comparison lead to discontinuance behavior, while alternatives as external factors also exert a certain influence [15]. Meanwhile, Gan Chunmei (2017) found that "stimulus factors (e.g., upward social comparison and conflict)" affect "organism factors (e.g., negative emotional experiences)," and their interaction influences the intermittent discontinuance behavior of WeChat users [16]. Fu et al. (2020) found through empirical research that factors such as perceived technology overload, information overload, social overload, dissatisfaction, and social media fatigue significantly affect users' discontinuance behavior [17]. Xie et al. (2020) conducted an in-depth analysis of Weibo users' behavioral patterns and found that factors such as negative information-related events, social media fatigue, and perceived information overload influence users' discontinuance intentions [18].

Inhibitors are factors that suppress intermittent discontinuance behavior among social media users. The existing literature primarily addresses two aspects: social cognition and environmental influences. For example, Turel (2015) verified that user satisfaction, through the formation of usage habits, directly or indirectly inhibits users' intermittent discontinuance behavior [19]. Li Shanshan (2021) introduced the communication theory of the "I and Me" into the study of social media user behavior, finding that "I factors" and "Me factors" are the main causes of discontinuance behavior, while "environmental factors" serve as an important medium through which I factors and Me factors influence, overlap, or reverse each other [20].

In addition, some scholars have focused on individual factors. For instance, York (2015) found that differences in users' socioeconomic status and geographic location lead to different patterns of temporary discontinuance from Facebook, and the burden of personal time, cognitive, and social resources is the primary reason most Facebook users choose to temporarily leave [21]. Zhang Min et al. (2019) found that individual factors, including demographics, personality traits, usage characteristics, and relationship characteristics, have a moderating effect on intermittent discontinuance behavior among social media users [22]. Gan Chunmei et al. (2024) found through empirical research that three configurations—envy-dominant, burnout-dominant, and co-existing envy and burnout—all lead to intermittent discontinuance behavior among social network users, exerting varying degrees of combined effects [23]. In another study, she found that neuroticism significantly positively affects fatigue among Weibo users, and the stronger the perceived fatigue, the more likely users are to engage in intermittent discontinuance [24].

### 3.2.2. Research on the Consequences of Intermittent Discontinuance

First, regarding negative effects, existing research suggests that users' intermittent discontinuance behavior can have adverse effects on their self-management and personal growth in daily life, as well as on their willingness to adopt technology. For example, Hanley (2019) examined the relationship between SNS holidays and users' subjective well-being and found that SNS holidays not only fail to reduce negative affect or improve life satisfaction but also negatively affect users' active usage behavior [25]. Gan Chunmei (2017) similarly found that although intermittent discontinuance of WeChat can to some extent help users focus their attention and save time and energy, it can also lead to negative effects such as social dysfunction, self-isolation, and fear of missing out [26]. Chen Mengru (2024) found through empirical research that intermittent discontinuance reduces individuals' enthusiasm for online public participation, thereby affecting the entire society's political actions [27].

In contrast, some scholars view intermittent discontinuance more positively. For example, Cho (2015) found that discontinuance itself is not a negative experience but has more positive meanings [28]. Domestic scholar Tang Sijie et al. (2024) used experience sampling methods to study users with short-video discontinuance behavior, finding that users with no sustained usage intention (suspension discontinuance) had significantly higher awareness of the harms of falling into information cocoons than users with sustained usage intention (controlled discontinuance and intermittent discontinuance) [29].

### 3.2.3. Research on the Reversal of Intermittent Discontinuance Behavior

Intermittent discontinuance behavior on social media is not merely passive usage behavior, nor is discontinuance irreversible. Existing research has begun to focus on the process from leaving to returning to social media, exploring the possibility of users reversing discontinuance and re-engaging with the medium.

For example, in foreign research on Facebook discontinuance, Baumer et al. (2015) focused on users' return behavior, examining the influence of four factors—perceived addiction (withdrawal, compulsive urges), boundary negotiation (surveillance, impression management), emotions, and use of other social media—on Facebook return behavior. They found that subjective experiences consistent with perceived addiction, negative emotions, surveillance-based boundary negotiation, and use of other social media reduce the likelihood of discontinuance reversal, while opposite conditions promote reversal [30].

Meanwhile, as the framework of domestication theory has entered research on human-technology interaction, studies of intermittent discontinuance have begun to adopt a dynamic perspective. For example, Yan Qing (2022) found that short-video users with intermittent discontinuance exhibit a clear "self-technology relationship perception process": based on media response assessment and self-immersion

assessment, they enter a conflict-processing stage of self-alertness, leading to a form of intermittent self-controlled discontinuance, where such self-control technology helps users return after a discontinuance pause [31].

In addition, domestic scholar Jiang Xiaoli (2022) found that in the intermittent discontinuance of Douyin, because the initial domestication process did not achieve expected perfection, users who reversed discontinuance and returned would reflect on and even change their initial usage patterns before re-engaging with the medium. Users' reversal and return to the platform constitutes a process of re-domestication [32]. Tang Tingting (2024) found through research that active returners reflect on their initial usage patterns and excessive immersion, and take a series of measures to reintegrate the medium into their daily life practices. The adjustment of usage patterns after return reflects a renegotiation between users, the platform, and media technology, carrying the significance of re-domestication [33]. Li Yifan (2024) found that game players' intermittent discontinuance behavior is a dynamic cyclical process, occurring under the alternating effects of usage fatigue and switching fatigue [34].

## **4. Theoretical Foundations**

### **4.1. Expectation-Confirmation Theory**

Oliver (1980) posits that users compare pre-use expectations with actual experience. Positive confirmation yields satisfaction and continuance intention, while negative disconfirmation causes dissatisfaction and potential discontinuance. For NetEase Cloud Music, unmet expectations in music library coverage or algorithmic recommendation precision are key drivers of user churn.

### **4.2. Cognitive Emotion Theory**

This theory holds that cognitive appraisal shapes emotional responses, which in turn guide behavioral decisions. On NetEase Cloud Music, positive perceptions (e.g., intuitive interface, seamless playback) enhance user engagement, whereas negative experiences (e.g., intrusive ads, repetitive content) trigger dissatisfaction and abandonment.

### **4.3. Social Comparison Theory**

Individuals evaluate their abilities and behaviors through social comparison and adjust actions accordingly. On the platform, negative comparisons (e.g., perceived inferiority in music exploration, unrecognized shared content) may reduce usage frequency or lead to complete discontinuance.

## **5. A Qualitative Investigation into the Factors Influencing User Discontinuance Behavior**

### **5.1. Interview Design and Implementation**

This study adopted in-depth interviews to conduct one-on-one exchanges with users. The interview guide focused on two aspects: (1) reasons for discontinuance, including content quality, functional experience, social interaction, and payment models; and (2) users' expectations and suggestions for platform improvement, such as copyright, recommendation algorithms, and interface design.

Regarding participant selection, factors such as age (18–35 years), gender, occupation, and usage frequency were considered. A total of 12 users were interviewed, including 5 males and 7 females; among them, 5 were students and 7 were office workers.

The interviews were semi-structured, using open-ended questions to encourage free expression, with flexible follow-up questions based on participants' responses. The interviews were conducted primarily via online video calls, each lasting 30–60 minutes. Prior to each interview, the purpose, procedure, and confidentiality principles were explained to the participants. After the interviews, the records were promptly organized and analyzed, laying the foundation for subsequent thematic analysis.

## 5.2. Thematic Analysis of Interview Results

Through analyzing the interview data, five key themes influencing user discontinuance behavior were identified.

**1. Poor Platform Functionality** – Issues such as playback lag and app crashes disrupt listening fluency and reduce willingness to use.

GYQ: I have high demands for smooth playback; lag ruins the experience. If basic needs aren't met, I would consider reducing usage.

ZYC: QQ Music has richer playlists and a simpler interface, not as flashy as NetEase Cloud Music.

MGK: Slow loading, lag, and poor sound quality affect my mood, but if it's a network issue, I wouldn't reduce usage.

**2. Content Homogenization** – Music types, recommendations, and playlists lack uniqueness, failing to meet users' demands for personalized and niche music.

GYQ: Some copyrights are exclusive to other platforms. During that period, I had to abandon NetEase Cloud Music and go elsewhere.

CMD: The recommendation algorithm has become increasingly "traffic-driven." The homepage is full of popular hits, and niche discoveries have dwindled. The shrinking music library makes it hard to stay.

JHX: The removal of SM copyrights disillusioned me. Copyright instability drove me to switch platforms.

**3. Unreasonable Payment Model** – High membership fees, inflexible payment options, and cumbersome processes discourage users from paying and may lead to discontinuance.

GYQ: If only one or two songs require payment on NetEase Cloud Music, I wouldn't

buy a membership just for that.

MGK: Copyright loss was the trigger, but what bothers me more is the shrinking membership benefits—even classic old songs now require separate payment. Competitors offer better value.

TRH: The recurring monthly fee is too high. Without a membership, I cannot listen to the songs I want, so I stopped using it.

**4. Poor Social Interaction and Community Atmosphere** – Comments sections are flooded with ads, spam, and negative content; user interaction is low, making it hard to foster a sense of belonging.

GYQ: In the beginning it was fun to interact, but later the community became “depressive cloud.” Too much negativity, so I lost interest.

TRH: The community vibe has changed. Comments are full of pointless memes, and fewer people actually discuss music.

HNB: The atmosphere is too pessimistic. All comment sections are full of melancholy, and I don’t want that to affect my mood.

**5. Inaccurate Algorithmic Recommendations** – Collaborative filtering and deep learning algorithms have limitations; they struggle to adapt to dynamic changes in user preferences and can sometimes be overly narrow.

ZYC: People’s tastes change. If the algorithm keeps recommending sad songs, it will continue doing so.

HNB: The daily recommendation is average—sometimes too narrow. But the private radar and recommended playlists are decent.

## 6. Conclusion

In the highly competitive digital music streaming market, addressing user discontinuance behavior is critical for NetEase Cloud Music to enhance user retention and sustain its competitive edge. This qualitative study identifies five key factors influencing discontinuance: poor platform functionality, content homogenization, inaccurate recommendation algorithms, unsatisfactory social interaction and community atmosphere, and the lack of effective user feedback mechanisms.

Based on these findings, several strategies are proposed. First, to optimize user experience, the platform should simplify operation processes, provide personalized interface options, and improve server stability to reduce lags and crashes. Second, regarding content resources, it is essential to expand copyright acquisition, enrich the music library, establish a copyright early-warning system, and introduce diversified content such as music documentaries and instructional videos. Third, recommendation algorithms should be refined by incorporating multi-source data (e.g., location, time, device) and building real-time feedback systems to adapt to users’ dynamically changing preferences. Fourth, social interaction can be enhanced by improving community governance, organizing interactive activities, and

recommending like-minded music friends to foster a sense of belonging. By implementing these measures, NetEase Cloud Music can better meet user needs, reduce discontinuance, and achieve sustainable development. As technology evolves and user demands become increasingly diverse, further research on user behavior on music platforms remains both necessary and promising.

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