

Investigation of the Main Factors Influencing Gen Z Users' Willingness to Subscribe/Renew Music Streaming Platforms

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Abstract. The global music industry is increasingly dominated by streaming services, which now account for 84% of recorded music revenue. For Gen Z, music streaming is a primary mode of consumption, making it vital to understand what drives their subscription decisions. This study investigates the primary factors that influence Gen Z users' willingness to subscribe to or renew memberships on music streaming platforms. During the research, this study surveyed a sample of Gen Z users using a Liberty-scale questionnaire measuring these related variables and analyzed the data using Pearson correlation coefficients and multiple regression to test the hypothesized relationships. Results show that perceived ease of use has a strong positive impact on Gen Z users' subscription/renewal intentions, whereas neither perceived usefulness nor reliability exert a significant influence. This finding marks a departure from classic TAM expectations, suggesting that in the hedonic context of music streaming, ease of use outweighs functional utility (usefulness) and perceived reliability in driving usage intentions. Theoretically, the findings revise TAM assumptions for entertainment-oriented technologies. Practically, these insights imply that music streaming platforms targeting Gen Z should prioritize user-friendly designs and smooth usability to encourage subscriptions and loyalty, rather than overemphasizing added functionality or trust-building measures that young users may already take for granted.

Keywords: Gen-Z, music streaming, music consumption, TAM model

1. Introduction

Since the introduction of music streaming platforms, the digital music market has continued to grow at a rapid pace and the streaming subscription model has become a major monetization method. According to statistics, the global music streaming revenue is about \$17.5 billion so far in 2025, accounting for 84% of the global music industry's revenue, and more than 600 million people subscribe to music streaming platforms [1]. This marks a dramatic shift in the industry's business model, which is declining sales of CDs and downloads forced a reinvention toward subscription-based streaming as a primary revenue source [2]. Under this model, platforms offer vast music libraries through either ad-support free access or paid premium subscriptions, ensuring a steady, recurring income stream for providers. This "access-over-ownership" paradigm especially resonates with the newest generation of consumers. Gen Z – typically identified as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s – has grown up immersed in digital technology and now represents a

significant segment of the music streaming audience. Gen Z listeners strongly prefer on-demand streaming media for music consumption, exemplifying the generational trend of valuing instant access to content rather than purchasing songs or albums outright [3].

Taken together with the conditions mentioned above, understanding Gen Z's subscription and renewal intentions on music streaming platforms is both commercially and academically meaningful. From an industry perspective, Gen Z holds immense commercial potential. Because they can represent the majority of the future customer base for streaming services, their willingness to subscribe and remain subscribed directly impacts long-term revenue. Market research indicates that roughly two-thirds of Gen Z users are willing to pay for music streaming services, a remarkably high adoption rate that streaming companies are keen to capture and sustain [4]. By studying what motivates Gen Z's paid subscriptions, platform managers can tailor their marketing strategies and user experience to improve their profitability. Furthermore, from an academic standpoint, this study addresses a relevant gap by focusing on technology adoption behaviors in a Gen Z context. Gen Z's attitudes and expectations may differ from earlier generations, so examining their responses to streaming subscriptions enriches the literature on digital consumer behavior.

This study is grounded in the TAM, a well-established framework for predicting user adoption of new technologies. The theory asserts that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the two main predictors of a user's intention to embrace and engage with a given technology [5]. While TAM traditionally emphasizes usefulness and ease of use, recent scholarship and digital commerce trends highlight trust and reliability as additional crucial factors in technology adoption. Online consumers often hesitate to conduct transactions if they doubt a service's trustworthiness. Therefore, to account for this in the music streaming context, the study extends the TAM framework by introducing perceived reliability as a third key construct. Perceived reliability in this study encompasses the user's confidence that the streaming platform will operate securely and dependably. It captures elements of trust in the service, such as believing that the platform will protect personal data and payment information, stream music without unexpected failures, and generally deliver on its promises consistently.

A quantitative research approach, utilizing survey data, was adopted to explore these relationships. The survey targeted respondents roughly 15 to 30 years old, including both current subscribers and potential users of music streaming platforms. Participants provided responses using a 5-point Likert scale, which measured the extent of their agreement with statements about the platform's usefulness, ease of use, and reliability, as well as their inclination to subscribe or renew. The survey yielded 176 valid responses, providing a substantive sample for analysis. The sample was diverse in gender and age within the Gen Z cohort, but future iterations of this study could improve by including more geographically and culturally varied participants. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported perceptions via Likert-scale items introduces some risk of social desirability bias or response centrality. A mixed-methods approach could complement this quantitative design—for example, pairing survey data with interviews or digital ethnography to explore how users describe ease of use or trust in their own words. This could further enrich our understanding of the emotional and experiential dimensions of digital media adoption, which standard TAM instruments may overlook.

2. Methodology

2.1. Involved variables

The variable design of this study refers to the TAM theory proposed by American scholar Fred Davis in 1986. While, in order to adapt to the research theme of music streaming platform, I added perceived reliability as another critical independent variable to the study according to Flavián's paper in 2006 as well [5]. The dependent variable, on the other hand, is users' subscription/renewal intentions that arise during music streaming usage.

2.2. Theoretical framework and main hypotheses

As mentioned earlier, this research design referenced Fred Davis' TAM theory. The model suggests that users' decisions when interacting with unfamiliar technology are chiefly shaped by two core perceptions: its usefulness and ease of use, as shown in the figure 1. Within this framework, if users perceive a technology as easy to use, they are more inclined to form a positive attitude toward adopting it. In the case of music streaming platforms, this dynamic may lead users to be more willing to subscribe if they believe that the platform can significantly improve their listening experience (e.g., broader music genres, higher sound quality, etc.) and is convenient to use. Additionally, according to Flavián's 2006 study, 49% of consumers are against making purchases on the internet due to a lack of trust [5]. This shows that reliability is another key factor in stimulating spending in the digital market. Thus, to compensate for the limitations of TAM theory in exploring the streaming media platform, this study added perceived reliability as another important independent variable.

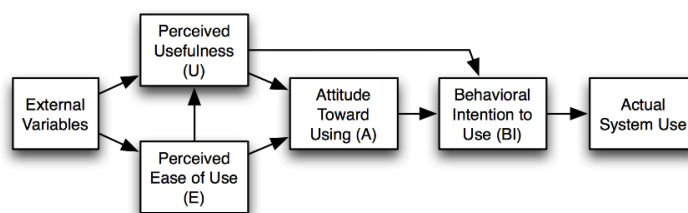


Figure 1. TAM theoretical framework

The theoretical framework above presents the core issue explored in this study (Figure 1), namely, how the three main independent variables influence users' attitudes towards new technologies, and in turn, their usage methods and time spent using them. According to the above theoretical framework, the following three main hypotheses are derived in this paper.

H1: There is a positive correlation between users' perceived usefulness of the platform and their intention to subscribe or renew.

H2: There is a positive correlation between users' perceived ease of use of the platform and their intention to subscribe or renew.

H3: There is a positive correlation between users' perceived reliability of the platform and their intention to subscribe or renew.

By testing these hypotheses, the study aims to identify which factors are most influential for Gen Z and whether adding a reliability construct improves our ability to predict their subscription decisions. The findings will contribute to both theories by evaluating an extended TAM in a new

generational context-and practice, by guiding music streaming services on how to design and position their platforms to attract and retain young subscribers. In addition to the platform design features explored here, it is also important to consider Gen Z's broader media habits. Since streaming platforms are not only music distributors but also gatekeepers that shape the way users discover and consume content. This shift has restructured industry dynamics and user expectations. Unlike older generations, Gen Z expects platforms to offer more than access-they seek personalized, algorithmically curated listening environments that respond in real time to their moods, habits, and identities. These expectations influence not just adoption but retention. Thus, a full understanding of Gen Z's subscription behavior must also engage with how streaming platforms function as hybrid media infrastructures-both technological tools and cultural intermediaries.

2.3. Experiment process

This study obtained data through a questionnaire for Gen Z music streaming users (both subscribed members and potential paying users). The questionnaire covers the question items for each of the above variables and is scored on a 5-point Likert scale. 176 valid questionnaires were collected from the sample, and the respondents were mainly young users aged 15-30 years old. Variables measured the perceived ease of use, usefulness and user's subscription/renewal intention using TAM classic scale items, and perceived reliability refers to the scale for measuring website user trust (which involves entries on data security, service reliability, etc.) [5,6].

2.4. Reliability analysis

After collecting data, the study first adopted the reliability test and based on the test results in the figure below (Table 1), the Cronbach's α of all the involved variables was above 0.7, this suggests that the reliability coefficients of the scale items were high, indicating that the survey data can be regarded as relatively trustworthy.

Table 1. Reliability test

Name of Scales	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Perceived Reliability	4	0.8
Perceived Usefulness	6	0.798
Perceived Ease of Use	6	0.845
Intentions on subscription or renew	2	0.817
Overall	18	0.903

3. Analysis and discussions of findings

3.1. Experiment analysis

With valid reliability, the study examined the relationship between the main variables using Pearson correlation coefficients. The results are shown in the chart below (Table 2). Three basic conclusions can be drawn based on the chart data. First, perceived reliability has the highest correlation with perceived ease of use ($r=0.608$), suggesting that users with a strong sense of trust tend to also believe the platform as more convenient to use. Second, perceived ease of use correlates most strongly with subscription intention ($r=0.784$), suggesting that ease of use is a key factor influencing

users' willingness to pay/renew. Finally, perceived usefulness has a relatively low correlation with subscription intention ($r=0.286$), suggesting that perceived usefulness has a weak direct effect on intention in this sample, and it is possible that this independent variable works more through a mediating factor.

Table 2. Pearson correlation coefficients

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived Reliability	1			
2. Perceived Usefulness	0.41	1		
3. Perceived Ease of Use	0.599**	0.444*	1	
4. Intentions on subscription or renew	0.608**	0.286	0.784**	1

Note: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$ (2-tailed).

To further evaluate the relative impact of each variable on subscription intention, this study employed multiple linear regression analysis; the detailed results are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5. The R-squared value of Model 1 is 0.644, indicating that the two independent variables of perceived ease of use and perceived reliability can explain 64.4% of the variation in subscription renewal intention. Specifically, the regression coefficient for perceived ease of use is 1.067 ($t = 3.935$, $p = 0.001 < 0.01$), indicating a significant positive influence on the intention to renew a subscription; while the regression coefficient value of perceived reliability is 0.278 ($t=1.291$, $p=0.211>0.05$), which suggests that the influence of perceived reliability on subscription renewal intention does not reach a significant level.

Table 3. Model summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard error of the estimate
0.803 ^a	0.644	0.609	0.48908

a: predicted variable: perceived ease of use, perceived reliability

Table 4. ANOVA^a

	SS	df	MS	F	P
Regression	8.673	2	4.336	18.128	0.000 ^b
Residuals	4.784	20	0.239		
Total	13.457	22			

a: dependent variable: users' subscription/renewal intentions.

b: predicted variable: Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Reliability.

Table 5. Coefficients^a

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients					
	B	Beta	Standard error	t	p	Tolerances	VIF
(Constant)	-0.554		0.434	-1.276	0.216		
Perceived Reliability	0.278	0.215	0.215	1.291	0.211	0.641	1.560
Perceived Ease of Use	1.067	0.655	0.271	3.935	0.001	0.641	1.560

a: dependent variable: users' subscription/renewal intentions

Based on the results of the Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analysis above, it can be concluded that the effects of H1 and H3 on users' subscription/renewal intention on music streaming platforms are not significant. Since perceived ease of use consistently shows a significant effect on the dependent variable across both analyses, it can be concluded that only Hypothesis 2 is supported and valid.

3.2. Discussions

These findings suggest that while perceived usefulness and perceived reliability exert limited influence on users' subscription or renewal intentions, perceived ease of use remains a significant predictor in the context of music streaming platforms.

The reasons behind this result are critical. First, perceived usefulness for consumer streaming platforms refers to the utility of the service in satisfying entertainment needs, meaning that users need to see clear benefits before they decide to use a particular streaming platform. In fact, from a study based on UTAUT2, performance expectations were one of the determinants of a user's initial intention to adopt a paid music streaming service [2]. However, perceived usefulness may no longer be an important factor for Gen Z when deciding whether to renew a subscription. One reason for this is that the basic utility of music streaming is largely taken for granted by this demographic. On-demand music is practically a necessity for young digital consumers, and all major platforms offer similar core functionality. In other words, the basic level of utility across competing services is high and relatively uniform, which makes usefulness a relatively undifferentiated factor among platforms [7]. Another reason is that beyond a certain point, adding usefulness might meet the marginal diminishing effect, while ease of use can directly affect the user's daily experience. Previous research on hedonic systems proved this result in some way. It pointed that when the primary motivation is enjoyment, basic tool value (usefulness) may not drive continued use as strongly as the experiential factors [2].

Furthermore, perceived reliability in this context refers to Gen Z's confidence that the music streaming provider will behave honestly and dependably. For example, handling payment information securely or safeguarding personal data. Trust is a well-known factor in online consumer behavior, often crucial for services involving personal data or money. In many studies of digital services (online banking, e-commerce, etc.), trust significantly influences user adoption and loyalty. However, In the realm of music streaming, the role of trust is somewhat different. First, mainstream music platforms are offered by large, reputable tech companies (Like Net Ease and Tencent), which Gen Z tends to trust by default, or at least they do not actively distrust them. Surveys indicate that Gen Z, despite professing concerns about privacy, often behaves as the most risk-tolerant online

group, they frequently click “Accept” on terms and share data for convenience benefits. Over 40% of Gen Z respondents in one study admitted granting apps access to personal info in exchange for perks (e.g. a free trial) [8]. In addition to the streaming industry, this phenomenon also exists in the AI area. According to a study on algorithmic trust, research shows that Gen Z users are quicker to trust AI-powered services than human ones [9]. This willingness to trade data for usage suggests that Gen Z places convenience and access over privacy to a notable extent.

Moreover, Gen Z places a premium on personalization and social integration in digital experiences. Ease of use is not just about a simple interface, but also about the platform easily integrating into their social and creative lives. For instance, Gen Z often curate and share playlists with friends (which our respondents likely do, as many mentioned collaborative playlist features). If a platform makes it easy to create, share, and discover music socially, that boosts its ease-of-use appeal.

Finally, the classic TAM held that perceived usefulness often has the strongest effect on intention in work-related contexts, while ease of use affects intention partly via usefulness. In our Gen Z entertainment context, this hierarchy appears flipped. Ease of use is the most important, since it can make a service easier boost user confidence and reduces effort, thereby encouraging continued use [10]. This suggests that technology acceptance models should be adapted for context (utilitarian vs. hedonic use) and generation. Moreover, Gen Z’s streaming preferences may also be shaped by their media multitasking habits. Research shows that younger users often consume music alongside other forms of content—studying, gaming, or scrolling social media. This suggests that platforms must not only be easy to use, but frictionless in cross-platform behavior. For instance, services that allow seamless transitions between devices or integration with short-form video (like TikTok or Instagram) may enjoy an advantage. These expectations reflect a broader cultural shift toward converged media use, where functionality is judged not in isolation, but in terms of ecosystem compatibility. Streaming services that optimize this convergence may be better positioned to cultivate habitual, loyal subscribers.

4. Conclusion

This research sets out to investigate what drives Generation Z users to subscribe (or continue subscribing) to music streaming services, exploring the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with a trust-related factor (perceived reliability). Based on a survey of 176 Gen Z respondents, the result revealed that, among the variables examined, perceived ease of use is the strongest predictor of subscription intentions within this demographic group. If a music streaming platform is easy to use – intuitive, convenient, and seamlessly integrated into users’ routines – Gen Z listeners are significantly more likely to pay for it. In contrast, perceived usefulness, surprisingly, showed no significant impact on the intention to subscribe when other factors were considered. It appears that while Gen Z does recognize and appreciate the utility of having millions of songs on demand, this is a baseline expectation across platforms and does not on its own sway their decision to pay for a service. Gen Z users generally trust the major music streaming services by default and do not cite trust as a distinguishing reason to subscribe, if the service meets their usability and content needs. Therefore, out of our three proposed hypotheses, only H2 (ease of use) was supported, whereas H1 (usefulness) and H3 (reliability) were not supported in the Gen Z context of music streaming. Considering these findings, future models exploring Gen Z’s media behavior should consider integrating variables such as perceived enjoyment, peer influence, and platform identity. These dimensions are increasingly relevant in hedonic technology environments, where emotional resonance and cultural relevance may outweigh technical utility. Additionally, given the rapid

evolution of algorithmic personalization and AI-enhanced content curation, further research should explore how Gen Z evaluates not just ease of use, but the perceived fairness and transparency of the recommendation systems that shape their listening experiences.

While the paper offers valuable insights, it is important to recognize several limitations. First, the sample size (N=176), while adequate for detecting medium-to-large effects, is relatively modest. A larger sample might be able to provide more stable estimates and allow for subgroup analyses. Second, the sample might not accurately reflect the broader Gen Z demographic of music streaming users. Our recruitment skewed towards college-educated young adults and possibly over-represented certain regions (there was likely a concentration of respondents from China, given the outreach channels and the mention of specific platforms like NetEase/Tencent). Therefore, the findings should be generalized with caution. There might be cultural differences in how Gen Z perceives trust or values ease of use. Third, the study didn't consider other potentially relevant variables. The model focused mainly on TAM constructs and reliability, but the factors like price sensitivity, social influence, habit or perceived enjoyment were not explicitly measured. These could confound or mediate the relationships the study observed. Thus, future research should consider integrating constructions from other models to provide a more comprehensive picture.

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