

An Analysis on Driving Forces and Impacts of the Commercial Mode of Digital Music—A Comparison Between QQ Music and iTunes

Yang Xinyi

Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, 400031, China

Abstract: *With the progress of science and technology, the Internet gradually permeates all walks of life. The digital commercial mode of music industry has gradually replaced the traditional record mode, which becomes the mainstream operation mode. This paper will focus on the development of digital music commercial mode and the dynamic impact of this topic. In order to further study the commercial mode of the music industry, SCP analysis method will be adopted first to analyze the corporate behavior of the music industry when it is impacted by external shocks through market structure, market conduct and market performance. Through this comparative case study, this paper will illustrate the impact of the digital age on the commercial mode of the music industry. Furthermore, this paper will make a comparative analysis of QQ Music and iTunes to put forward reasonable suggestions for the future development of the music industry.*

Keywords: *digital music industry, commercial mode, QQ Music, iTunes, SCP analysis*

1. Introduction

Digital music industry refers to the combination of music resources and digital technology, the digitalization of traditional music content, and the provision of music products and services through the Internet.[1] No matter how many times it's downloaded, copied, or played, the quality of this commodity doesn't change.

With the advent of digital technology, the way music is consumed has changed. This change in consumption mode amplifies consumer's choice and brings greater profit potential to the music industry.

The competition between modern enterprises is no longer the competition between products, but the commercial mode. The focus of enterprise development is no longer only on the products themselves, but on brand positioning, target market and sales methods. With the popularity of the Internet, digital music market continues to develop. By 2017, the number of digital music users had exceeded 500 million, and the domestic digital music market was booming.[2]

QQ Music is the leader of the streaming music media in China. Since its establishment in 2005, the total number of registered users has reached 800 million.[3] QQ Music has an absolute market leading position with its huge user scale and personalized customized services in the domestic music industry.

In the global digital music industry, the US, Japan and the UK have 39%, 19% and 15% of the market respectively in 2019 according to the Global Music Report 2019.[4] iTunes was once hailed as an industry mover for the digital music era. In 2003, Apple launched the iTunes store, which sold to users 99 cents a song and was tightly integrated with the iPod. According to statistics, the iTunes user spends about \$12 a year on music per person on average.[5] Compared with the streaming media platform like QQ Music, which can be available on any smartphone model, the original intention of Apple's iTunes store is to increase the sales of iPods. iTunes and the iPod push and depend on each other. Back in 2011, 300 million iPods were sold, and the total number of music downloads on iTunes topped 16 billion.[6]

Digital music has developed dramatically in recent years. Because of the wide audience of pop music, the music industry becomes the most promising and profitable part of the digital industry. This paper will firstly compare and analyze the corporate conducts by QQ Music and iTunes respectively through SCP analysis. Besides, through the comparative analysis of the unique commercial modes of QQ Music and iTunes, research on the methods of the enterprises to improve their industrial operation capacity, and so as to make sustainable profits.

2. Music Industry in the Digital Age

With the rapid development of Internet technology, the digital culture industry, which is based on Internet, has a huge potential. In the past, people have the chance to open the door of the new world because of the emergence of the Internet. However, in the future, the economic and social life in the era of big data will shift towards digitalization. The digital music industry which is based on the Internet has a broad development prospect, but how to better reflect the value of the digital music industry, develop the characteristics of the industry, and promote its more diversified development needs a valid and appropriate commercial mode.

2.1 The Development Status of the Digital Music Industry

With the development of digital technology, the carrier form of music has transformed from record to mp3, mobile music to streaming music. Compared with traditional records, digital music is technical, immediate and accurate. According to the Global Music Report 2019, the revenue of the global recorded music totaled \$19.1 billion in 2018, increased by 9.7% from 2017, with digital music revenue rising 21.1% and physical revenue falling 10.1%. [7] These data mean that the traditional music industry is drying out and digital music is entering a golden age.

2.1.1 European and American Markets Lead the World

In terms of the world pattern of the digital music industry, European and American music occupies the mainstream of the market. Economically, the European and American markets have the largest concentration of developed countries. Culturally, the European and American markets have the largest number of artists with worldwide musical influence as well as the top musical production capabilities. [8]

According to the Global Music Report 2019, the US is the most profitable market for the global digital music industry. [9] As the largest music market in the world, the prosperity and development of the music industry in the US is not only related to its own advantages, but also dependent on its external conditions, such as economy, politics, law and culture. Besides, with the emergence of representative music video platforms like iTunes and YouTube, the United States has significant advantages in market operation and industrial chain expansion.

2.1.2 Chinese Industry Remains to be Developed

Compared with the complete law system and business environment formed by the foreign music industry for a long time, the relevant laws and protection system of China's domestic music industry still need to be improved. With this background, consumers have long been in the habit of listening to free music.

With the popularization of the Internet and the improvement of Chinese consumers' cultural and living standards, digital music users are gradually increasing. According to the Global Music Report 2019, after breaking into the top 10 in the global music industry for the first time in 2017, China rose to the seventh place in the global ranking in 2018. [10]

With the emergence of the digital music platforms such as QQ Music, NetEase Cloud Music and KuGou Music, China's digital music industry chain continues to improve. Different positioning and personalized services can help each platform form its own brand advantages. However, due to the lack of correct copyright awareness and high-end talent, the international competitiveness of China's digital music industry is relatively weak. In a word, China's digital music industry remains to be developed.

2.2 Driving Force of Digital Music Industry Development

In recent years, with the help of the Internet, digital music has shown huge development space and promoted a rapid advancement. In a broad sense, from iTunes and Spotify, which have swept over the United States, to QQ Music and NetEase Cloud Music, which have taken up a major share of the domestic music market, these mobile music platforms have not only contributed to users' increasingly mature concept of product payment, but also formed a diversified commercial mode.

2.2.1 The Impact of We-Media

We-Media refers to the way that the general public publish their own life and news through the Internet. [11] It has the characteristics of privatization, popularization and independence. The emergence of We-Media has become a strong support for the rapid development of digital music industry.

In China, the social software such as Weibo and Tik Tok has become a popular We-Media platform. Through the transmission of one-to-one and one-to-many, Weibo has further accelerated the promotion of music works. For instance, in the music transmission of Weibo, music works can be transmitted many times and repeatedly through several information and communication environments that are relatively closed.

2.2.2 The Emergence of Fan Economy

Fan economy refers to the conduct of people with common values or emotional identity to generate commercial revenue around a central figure.[12] The focus of fan economy is to satisfy the emotional value needs of the consumers and realize the transition from spirit to material, thus making profits. After the integration of the music industry and the Internet, the emergence of the fan economy has become the main force in the development of digital music. Global superstar Taylor Swift's new album *Lover* created a new record on the day it was released. In the worldwide scale, it sold more than 2 million copies in the first 24 hours of release, setting a record for weekly sales in the United States in 2019.[13] Behind these impressive statistics, the influence of fan economy cannot be ignored.

On the one hand, the fan economy promotes the development of paid music and accelerates the process of digital music legalization. On the other hand, the crazy purchase behavior under the fan economy also has a certain negative impact on digital music. Such irrational purchase behavior often hinders the sound development of the whole market, leading to the excessive commercialization of music works, the pursuit of profits, and the loss of artistic value.

3. Comparison and Analysis of the Commercial Mode of QQ Music and iTunes based on SCP Analysis

SCP analysis refers to the method of the Structure-Conduct-Performance model to investigate the causes of industry performance, which is based on the model of Cause and Effect.[14] In this case, SCP analysis is used to predict how the digital music industry's profitability will change in response to an external shock. Additionally, this framework provides a complete understanding of current digital music industry structure, conduct and the competitive performance, which can make us compare and analyze the commercial mode of QQ Music and iTunes more specifically.

With the continuous evolution of science and technology, streaming media is no longer limited to providing customers with a single service of listening to music. Personalized commercial mode provides more possibilities for the development of digital music industry. Nowadays, there are some representative digital music media at home and abroad, whose emergence provides more directional enlightenment for the development of digital music industry. For instance, QQ Music is one of the most successful streaming music platforms in China. It has steadily improved its user experience and marketing strategy, which has a considerable market share in China and has become the pioneer of the domestic digital music industry.

3.1 Differences based on Market Structure

From the perspective of the market structure, digital music industry focus on the concentration, product differentiation and barriers to entry and exit to analyze. When one of the factors changes, it will lead to the change of other factors, which then will change the characteristics of the whole market structure so that it affects the conduct and the performance.

3.1.1 Comparison of the Industry Concentration

The industry concentration is the degree to which production in an industry or in the economy as a whole. It is the main factor of the market structure, and the competition in the music market can be analyzed from the market scale of the digital music enterprises.[15] Under the environment of the digital music market, the streaming media are facing more and more competitions. However, QQ Music quickly seize the market because of the massive number of identities of the messenger program Tencent QQ.

Compared with QQ Music, iTunes had nearly 800 million global user accounts until April 2019, which had an increase of 40% from the year before.[16] From the perspective of this impressive data, the user scale and the market share of iTunes definitely far exceeded QQ Music. Nevertheless, iTunes, which revolutionized the whole digital music market, is no longer adapted to the streaming era. Streaming media has gradually replaced downloading paid music, which is regarded as the first choice for the audience. Therefore, Apple announced that it would separate iTunes into three apps in 2015, which includes Apple

Music, Apple Podcasts and Apple TV.[17] Besides, the emergence of Apple Music has brought unimaginable benefits to iTunes to compete in the streaming media. According to the annual report of the Recording Industry Association of America, Apple Music achieved \$6.7 billion in 2019 and had more than 60 million subscribers in June.[18]

In short, although the competition between digital music enterprises is becoming more and more fierce nowadays, iTunes has a higher industry concentration than QQ Music due to its long-term quality assurance and certain regular customer base. Additionally, in the future, streaming media will still be the leading role in the digital music market.

3.1.2 Comparison of the Product Differentiation

Product differentiation is a marketing strategy that strives to distinguish a company's products or services from the competition.[19] As the degree of product differentiation increases, the substitutability of products among different enterprises becomes weaker, and the possibility of enterprises acquiring monopoly status increases.

Besides, product differentiation mainly refers to core product differentiation and brand differentiation. The core product differentiation of QQ Music is reflected in the exclusive copyrights. As a music media with a large number of exclusive copyrights and a strong user base, QQ Music has reached a copyright strategic cooperation with more than 200 record companies at home and abroad, purchased more than 30 exclusive copyrights, and accumulated over 15 million legitimate songs.[20] Therefore, QQ Music has become the domestic online music platform with the most exclusive copyright, which can satisfy the diversified demands of the customers.

By contrast, the core product differentiation of iTunes is mainly embodied in the bundling-sale with iPod. iTunes make customers buy and download music in a very convenient way so that not only did Apple control the entire online music service, but sales of iPods grew dramatically.

Besides, the characteristics of brand differentiation are better reflected in iTunes. Apple's services section includes App Store, Apple Pay and iTunes. Till now, services are Apple's second largest business sector. Experts predict that the revenue for this sector will reach \$100 billion by 2023, which reflects the power of the brand.[21] iTunes has attracted a large number of loyal customers because of Apple's strong brand value.

3.2 Differences based on Market Conduct

Market conduct refers to the pricing and promotion strategies in terms of their objectives and decision-making process.[22] Market conduct is the link between structure and performance. In the digital music industry, price competition and non-price competition are the main means of market conduct.

3.2.1 Comparison of the Price Competition

Competitive pricing is the process of selecting strategic price points to best take advantage of a product or service. Since 2006, QQ Music started a membership service called green diamond, setting a precedent for the domestic digital music commercial mode, which has become one of the main profit models of QQ Music. The green diamond service of QQ Music is different from the ordinary payment model, which is that it provides more additional services, such as lossless music download, no advertising, concert privileges and so on. The target customers of QQ Music are high-end consumers with high demand for music quality. The aim is to build an online music industry that similar to iTunes, and establish the digital music industry channels with Chinese characteristics.

As a distribution platform, iTunes allows customers to browse 20 songs for free, and the music store charges 99 cents a song and \$9.99 a full album.[23] Compared with the monthly price of 15 yuan for QQ Music, buying digital music on iTunes lacks price competitiveness. Although it seems that the price of digital music in iTunes is not advantageous, its effective profit distribution ensures the advantage of music resources. Besides, it costs 99 cents to download a song on iTunes, but \$0.75 of that goes to the record labels, while the remaining \$0.25 is used to cover the technology costs.[24] As a result, the majority of revenue goes to copyright companies and copyrighters.

3.2.2 Comparison of the Non-Price Competition

Non-price competition refers to the way that companies seek to increase sales through methods other than price. Non-price competition usually includes quality of the product, after-sales service and so on.

There is an innovative music social mode of QQ Music. The creative function will rank songs based on how many of your friends have played them recently. This function aims to recommend music based on the songs that friends in the list often listen to, which has certain social attributes, thus greatly attracting customers.

Similar to QQ Music, iTunes also established a list of different music styles, providing convenient browsing for customers. But what makes the iTunes Music Store special is its commercial mode of combining hardware products with network commodity. Except for Apple products, no other music media can play digital music that sold on the iTunes Music Store. This creative bundling has expanded the profitability of iTunes by preventing piracy and ensuring the sustainable development of Apple Music Store.

3.3 Differences based on Market Performance

Market performance is determined by the interaction of market structure and market conduct. It refers to the effectiveness of suppliers in utilizing economic resource to their maximum efficiency and to the ultimate benefit of consumers. Besides, the performance of a company can be measured through sales revenue, market share, customer satisfaction and loyalty.

3.3.1 Comparison of the Market Size

Since QQ Music was founded in 2005, it has grown to 800 million users. While in 2017, Tencent bought the copyright of Universal Music, Sony Music and Warner, which are regarded as the three major record companies in the world. With the cooperation with the foreign record companies, the arrival of copyright legalization makes QQ Music become the pioneer in the domestic digital music industry.

According to statistics, there were 254 million active users of QQ Music in 2018, and each active user spent more than 70 minutes per day on average. Additionally, there was an increase of 83 million over 2017, with a growth rate of 41.5%. [25] From this data, we can see that the market size of QQ Music is expanding year by year. Nevertheless, even though there was an overall upward trend of the digital music sales, the growth rate of premium users was lower than expected.

iTunes, which once dominated the global digital music industry, has a much smaller market size than expected at present. However, behind the impressive data are the challenges of the streaming media. With the advent of the Internet era, paid downloads are no longer the preferred option for people, who believe that too many functions make the operation of iTunes more complicated. In conclusion, the emergence of iTunes is revolutionary for the whole music industry. However, as the years wore on, iTunes is no longer in the era of streaming media.

3.3.2 Comparison of the User Experience Evaluation

With the rapid development of e-commerce today, user experience evaluation has become a very important content of many industries, and its influence sometimes may even exceed the description of the product itself. Firstly, it increases the impact of the product and becomes an invisible advertisement with a high customer satisfaction. Besides, it will win perfect reputation for all industries. With the accumulation of user experience evaluation, it has brought great benefits to the establishment of brand image.

It is worth mentioning that in the customer satisfaction ranking, QQ Music ranks far ahead of other digital music medias with a high score of 8.3, whose total score is 10. Although the user experience is generally high in China, its favorable rate is basically lower than that of NetEase Cloud Music, another popular domestic music media.

Compared with QQ Music, although iTunes was born in the world's largest music market, its loyal customers began to decline in 2013. Its main problem is not just the impact of streaming media, but its own complex application. Young people began to think that 99 cents a song was too rigid, and that paying a certain amount each month to listen to the entire songbook may be more flexible.

4. Comparison and Analysis of the Impact of External Environment on QQ Music and iTunes

An external environment is an unpredictable event and is expected to affect in a significant and visible way, which is composed of the outside factors that affect the operation of the industries. Besides, the companies or industries will produce big mistakes if they choose to ignore the external forces.

4.1 Economy is the Basis for Survival

Economic environment refers to the social and economic conditions that constitute the survival and development of enterprises. Besides, it is also an important factor that affects consumers' purchasing power. It is generally known that the level of economic development will affect people's quality of life. With the rapid development of China's economy, people's material living standards have been greatly improved, which has also stimulated the spiritual consumption, such as that of digital music.

Under the general trend of national consumption upgrading, people pay more attention to experience and the quality of life. From the perspective of the overall domestic consumption, China is in the process of transforming from material consumption to spiritual consumption. Consumers gradually pay more attention to spiritual enjoyment, and cultural consumption accounts for an increasing proportion.

In recent years, the development of China's music industry has been extremely rapid, and our domestic music industry ushered in a round of investment and financing in 2018. On December 12, 2018, Tencent Music Entertainment Group was listed on the New York stock exchange, which is a milestone in the development of investment and financing of China's music industry.

Furthermore, these powerful data reflected the potential energy of the development of our domestic music industry. As the pioneer of China's digital music industry, QQ Music has achieved a greater progress in product innovation and business development with the support of economic foundation.

The rapid development of American music industry cannot be separated from the financial support of its government. For instance, the United States has given huge financial support to the development of the music industry through the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The National Endowment for the Arts is the largest arts aid organization in the United States, most of its financial resources comes from the annual appropriation of congress. The American music industry has grown not only with huge government support, but also with investment from foundations and companies.

4.2 Social Environment's Impact on Consumption Habits

With the improvement of people's living standards in recent years, people are gradually willing to pay more attention to spiritual and cultural life so that the consumption habits are changing. The change of consumer psychology is exactly what drives the development of the digital music industry. Nowadays, mobile music is more suitable for the needs of digital music users. Therefore, mobile phone has become an important terminal device for customers.

However, under the influence of the social environment, copyright consciousness is the important reason for the gap between American and China's digital music industry. In the early years of the digital music development in China, the lack of copyright awareness seriously affected the industry's revenue. In 2015, the government launched one of the toughest measures on digital music distribution against piracy, and introduced a series of policies to protect the legitimate rights of licensed music. In this situation, people's consumption habits have been greatly improved.

Copyright consciousness is the basis for a country to implement a copyright system and promote copyright protection, especially for the digital music industry. There are many reasons for the relatively weak copyright consciousness in China. On the one hand, the Chinese lack the awareness of infringement crimes. On the other hand, the copyright system of our country started late. In conclusion, cultivating copyright consciousness not only can change the consumption habits, but also promote the healthy development of the digital music industry.

5. Suggestions for the Innovation and Development of the Domestic Digital Music Industry

The innovation of the commercial mode not only stabilizes the customer base and improves the industrial competitiveness, but also is the primary driving force for the sustainable development of the industry. Besides, the innovative development of our domestic digital music industry not only depends on the cultivation of talents, but also on the protection of the intellectual property rights.

5.1 Establish the Talent Element Market

The high-quality musical works and songwriters are the core competitiveness of the music industry.

No matter how excellent the commercial mode of the digital music is, it won't last long without satisfying works. Therefore, it is imperative to establish a talent element market that adapts to the development of digital music.

At present, digital music providers should pay more attention to the content of music resources, cooperate with the record companies to help original musicians and provide legitimate music resources. In terms of talent training, China launched a support program for the music talents in 2014, aiming to discover the talents and provide more high-quality music resources for the digital music industry.

Under the background of the development of music industry, the establishment of the talent element market and the effective improvement of the application-oriented talent training are the boosters for the sustainable development of the domestic digital music industry.

5.2 Strengthen Copyright Consciousness by Policies

In the innovation of the commercial mode of our domestic digital music industry, the biggest obstacle is the lack of copyright awareness. At present, the number of music infringement is increasing in China, and the lack of relevant laws has become the difficulty of copyright protection.

Above all, the government should improve the legal system of copyright protection and strengthen the control of piracy. Copyright protection provides an open and fair environment. Under the fierce competition of global digital music market, it can effectively promote the development of the domestic digital music industry.

In conclusion, our government should combine the actual situation of our country, learn from the successful experience of copyright legislation of the United States, improve the laws and regulations of copyright protection, and strengthen the law enforcement against piracy.

6. Conclusion

By researching the digital music industry in China and the United States, this paper concludes that the market construction of the music industry and the impact of the external environment are the main driving forces for its commercial mode innovation.

Through SCP analysis, the commercial mode of QQ Music and iTunes is compared and analyzed, showing the gap and differences between China and the United States in the global digital music market.

Nevertheless, it is found that there are still some serious problems in our domestic digital music industry, such as the lack of high-quality talents and weak copyright awareness. This not only creates new problems in the commercial mode innovation, but also makes it impossible for markets to self-regulate.

In conclusion, with the changing of the commercial mode of digital music, the improvement of copyright system is an inevitable requirement for the sustainable development of the digital music industry. On the basis of respecting the development law of the music market, the digital music industry should use the legal and policy means to effectively explore a reasonable commercial mode.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my special gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Chen, for her warm help and careful guidance. Regardless of the topic or the final draft, Professor Chen has devoted a lot of effort and guided me patiently, providing an important role in the expansion of my theory basis.

Besides, I also owe a special debt of gratitude to all the professors in Foreign Languages Institute, for your selfless dedication and wide knowledge you initiated to us. Your sincere teachings will still benefit me a lot in my future study and work life.

I also feel grateful to all my classmates who have been with me for four years. In the process of writing, I got the share and suggestions from my classmates. In the life of study, I got the concern and help of the classmates, which has benefited me a lot in my college life.

Last but not the least, my gratitude also extends to my family who have been assisting, supporting and caring for me all of my life.

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