

U&G of Audio Streaming Platforms:

Understanding the relationship of brand experience, satisfaction and loyalty

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ABSTRACT

As the title suggests, this research aims to understand and explore the relationship of ritualised and instrumental use (U&G) of audio streaming platforms and brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. This study provides academic and social relevance in numerous ways. It extends the existing literature on U&G theory, brand experience, consumer satisfaction and loyalty and applies it to the relatively understudied context of audio streaming platforms. The research also provides a unique perspective on audio streaming platform use by also considering podcasts as part of the audio content distributed by streaming platforms, not just music. The research question is *to what extent does the ritualised and instrumental use of audio streaming platforms affect brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty?* Data was collected quantitatively via an online survey shared on AmazonMechanicalTurk. The concepts operationalised were ritualised and instrumental use (of audio streaming platforms), brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. There was a total of 316 survey participants, who on average expressed favourable perceptions/levels of brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. The analysis also concluded that both ritualised use is greater among music listeners while instrumental use is greater among podcast listeners. In addition, brand experience positively affects consumer satisfaction, and consumer satisfaction positively affects brand loyalty. Moreover, brand experience mediated the relationship between ritualised and instrumental use, and consumer satisfaction mediated the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. The research and results emphasised the importance of brand experience in ensuring satisfaction and building loyalty among audio streaming platform users, which justifies the managerial implications that would elevating brand experience via innovative features for audio streaming platforms. This study concludes with avenues for future research such as a qualitative approach that extends this research and the assessment of parasocial relationships between media consumers and media creators (music artists and podcasters).

KEYWORDS: *audio streaming platforms, brand loyalty, brand experience, consumer satisfaction, ritualised use, instrumental use*

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1. Introduction

Within the last 15 years or so, the manner in which society consumed media would be considered more passive compared to the consumption of media in the present day. A study by Pew Research Center found that subscriptions to cable/satellite television has drastically decreased from 76% to 56% from 2015 to 2021 in the United States (Raine, 2021, para. 3). Moreover, 61% of young adults reported that they do not have a cable/satellite TV subscription while 91% of non-subscribers claimed that they would not bother subscribing to cable/satellite television because they can access desired media content online (Raine, 2021, para. 4). This gradual decline has been a result of the emergence of on-demand streaming which has revolutionized the media consumption landscape. Streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video offer an extensive selection of visual content that can be accessed anytime, eliminating the need for traditional broadcast schedules and allowing for binge-watching sessions (Wescott et al., 2022, para. 17).

The shift in media consumption is evident for other forms of media, such as music. Platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, and Amazon Music have transformed how people access and listen to music, offering vast libraries of audio content that can also be streamed instantly. According to a report by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), streaming accounted for 84% of the music industry's revenue in 2023, highlighting the dominance of this new era of music consumption (RIAA, 2024, p. 1). The traditional ways of consuming music, such as purchasing

physical albums have significantly declined with the rise of digital streaming services. This is evident as digital downloads of music only accounted for 3% of the annual revenue while purchases of physical albums contributed a mere 11% (RIAA, 2024, p. 1).

Podcasts seem to have also experienced a significant increase in popularity. It is said that the percentage of podcast listeners in the United States has gone from just under 30% in 2013 to 57% in 2021 (Richter, 2021, fig. 1). *Serial*, which is a crime investigation podcast series that launched in 2014, is considered as the podcast that put podcasting on the map (Berry, 2016, p. 9; Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2023, p. 685). This 42-episode series was monumental because it was the first podcast to surpass 5 million streams/downloads on iTunes (Dredge, 2014, para. 1). Despite being executively produced by traditional radio company NPR (National Public Radio), the podcast *Serial* illustrated a more flexible and dynamic approach to storytelling, which contrasted the more “structured form of linear radio broadcasting” (Berry, 2016, p. 10).

The flexibility and convenience of streaming services cater to modern lifestyles, where viewers seek immediate access to content, which was unattainable with traditional media forms. The ability to watch content on various devices, from mobile phones to smart TVs, further enhances the appeal of streaming platforms as a whole. According to Pew Research Center, only 35% of people in the United States owned a mobile device back in 2011. Fast forward 12 years to 2023, approximately 90% of Americans have now come to own a mobile device (Pew

Research Center, 2024, fig. 1).

Evidently, technology has played a crucial role in making this on-demand streaming of media content a possibility. This widespread adoption of mobile devices has significantly influenced media consumption habits. The portability and multifunctionality of mobile devices allow users to access a wide range of media content on the go. Streaming platforms have capitalized on this trend by developing mobile-friendly applications that offer seamless viewing experiences across multiple devices. As a result, consumers are no longer tethered to their televisions or desktop computers as they can enjoy their favourite shows, movies, music and podcasts from wherever they are (Lonsdale & North, 2011, p. 109; Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2022, p. 686; Oyedele & Simpson, 2018, p. 298).

Additionally, advancements in mobile internet technology, such as the rollout of 4G and 5G networks, have facilitated faster and more reliable streaming (Hathway, 2023, para. 1). High-speed internet connectivity ensures that users can stream high-definition content without interruptions, further enhancing the streaming experience. These technological developments have altogether democratized access to media, making it more accessible and convenient for a broader audience.

The increased accessibility and convenience of media, especially with streaming platform services, means that consumers are spoiled with a variety of options. As a result, the branding of these platforms and how they present themselves become crucial for an advantage over competing platforms (Hracs & Webster, 2021, p. 251). Branding is defined as “a set of tangible and intangible

aspects designed to create awareness, identity and build the reputation of a product or service” (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015, p. 1). Media creatives (artists, podcasters, etc) create their own brand identity which they communicate to their consumers. This would mean that their content can be classified as a product. In this research, however, the streaming platforms used to deliver modern media content will be assessed as the product/service instead.

Branding in the context of streaming platform services goes beyond traditional brand identity elements like logos and slogans (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015, p. 1). It encompasses the entire experience for users which occurs when users interact and engage with the streaming services. The user experience with streaming platforms is essential for their brand identity due to the intangible nature of media content. This together with the subscription-based business model adopted by streaming platforms contrasts with many other products or services that can only be consumed once or have a finite usage period for every purchase (Picard, 2005, p. 66).

1.1. Relevance of this research

The aim of this study is to investigate and explore the relationship between different types of audio streaming platform use (specifically ritualised and instrumental) and brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. The research question proposed is *to what extent does the ritualised and instrumental use of audio streaming platforms affect brand experience, consumer satisfaction*

and brand loyalty? The understanding of how audio content consumption behaviours influence these brand-related outcomes is relevant for the following reasons.

The research builds on existing theories of media consumption by differentiating between ritualised and instrumental uses. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of the distinctions between ritualised use and instrumental use. Rubin & Purse (1987, p. 60), who first introduced the concepts, discuss the nuances between the two types of media consumption in relation to the viewing of television. Camilleri & Falzon (2021, p. 217) investigate the ritualised and instrumental use of mobile devices following the COVID-19 pandemic. This research extends the mentioned academic literature by 1) understanding the ritualised and instrumental use of audio content that is specifically accessible via streaming platforms, and 2) attempting to link these motivations to brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

In addition to the uses and gratifications of audio streaming platforms, this research investigates how media use patterns shape brand experience, thereby utilising and contributing to the literature on experiential marketing, such as Brakus et al. (2009, p.60) framework on brand experience and how it affects consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Oliver (1999, p. 34) stated that satisfaction results in brand loyalty when the satisfaction is “frequent and cumulative”. This frequent satisfaction can be achieved by creating positive brand experiences for consumers (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 63). By examining the impact of both ritualised and

instrumental media use on these brand-related outcomes, this study provides empirical evidence that enriches the understanding consumers' interactions with brands in a digital environment.

Moreover, this research contributes to academic literature on branding of media products. Media products, as well as services, are inherently different to other products and services in the way they are supplied to the target markets and the demand from consumers (Picard, 2005, p. 65-66). The branding of media products involves innovative strategies that consider the intangible, experiential nature of the content, the digital and immediate supply mechanisms, and the fluctuating consumer demand driven by cultural and technological factors. This research enriches the understanding of these distinctive elements and presents valuable insights for academics and practitioners in the field of media branding and marketing (see section 5.2). The unique nature of media products lies in their duality of aiming to provide engaging content and establishing a medium for (mass) communication, which significantly influences their distribution and consumption patterns (Picard, 2005, p. 65-66).

Understanding the dynamics of media consumption can inform more effective marketing strategies. As mentioned, the use of audio streaming platforms has become a global phenomenon and cemented its role in society (Spotify, 2024; Curry, 2024, RIAA, 2024). While consumers continue to engage with brands through digital media, marketers must adapt their approaches to meet the dynamic behaviours and expectations in the dynamic landscape of media. This research also

provides actionable insights into how audio streaming platform brands can leverage ritualised and instrumental media use to enhance brand experience, boost consumer satisfaction and eventually brand loyalty.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Audio streaming platforms

Streaming platforms is quite a broad term but this research will be looking at music/audio streaming platforms specifically. These digital services allow creators to monetize their intellectual property by giving users access to music, podcasts, and other forms of audio content via mobile devices (Hracs & Webster, 2021, p. 240). The platforms use streaming technology to deliver content in real-time or on-demand, making vast libraries of audio tracks accessible anytime and from anywhere, as long as the user has access to the internet. This exemplifies how the consumption of various forms of media has been drastically revolutionized with the help of technology (Arditi, 2017; Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2023; Camilleri & Falzon; 2021).

Consumers can access primarily audio, and also visual content, via streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal, YouTube Music, and Amazon Music to name a few. These streaming platforms all adopt a similar business model which involves different service packages (Barata & Coelho, 2021, p. 1). Generally, users can have limited access to content free of charge while they experience frequent advertising. Audible ads in-between songs, sponsored playlists and visual ads integrated into the interface are essentially how the streaming platforms generate revenue via a free service package (Bhasin, 2023). Alternatively, users have a premium option where they pay a monthly subscription fee for unlimited access to the content and other benefits such as ad-free and offline

streaming (Thomes, 2013, p. 81; Barata & Coelho, 2021, p. 1).

Spotify is currently the world's leading audio streaming platform with over 600 million users of which 239 million are paying a subscription fee for the premium version (Spotify, 2024, para. 2). YouTube Music and Apple Music follow with approximately 100 million subscribers each as of 2023 (Curry, 2024, fig. 6). These streaming platforms are primarily known for music streaming. However, podcasts have recently become a popular form of media content that can also be accessed via the same audio streaming platforms (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2023, p. 685; Shearer et al., 2023, para. 1). Because users now have more control over the music they listen to as well as the interviews and discourses with public figures, these streaming platforms can be considered as a modernized version of radio (Chan-Olmstead & Wang, 2023, p. 686; Perks et al., 2019, p. 620).

Music and podcasts are traditionally considered as audio content. Artists have been known to create music videos for their songs but the incorporating of visual elements in modern podcasting has only recently begun. Podcasters have been filming their episodes as a way to appeal to audiences more and make their content more engaging (Dixon, 2023, para. 2-3). This is why a significant majority of creators (both music artists and podcasters) also have a YouTube channel for their visual content in addition to the audio content (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2023, p. 685). Moreover, using another streaming platform is a way for creators to expand their revenue streams. Audio streaming platforms like Tidal and YouTube Music have responded to this trend by incorporating visual content as a functional feature

in their user interfaces (Tidal, 2024; YouTube Music; 2024).

2.2. Uses and gratifications

The uses and gratification theory essentially suggests that consumers of media assume an active role in the gratification of their needs via their choice of media or media content (Katz et al., 1973, p. 510). This academic literature by Katz et al. (1973) has been cited in numerous studies surrounding the use of technology and consumption of media (Ferguson et al., 2007; Steiner & Xu, 2020; Camilleri & Falzon, 2021). Katz et al. (1973) research on uses and gratification states that different consumers have different needs when it comes to media consumption, so their needs directly influence their choice of media or media content in order to achieve gratification. Katz et al. (1973, p. 512) proceed to categorize consumer motivations for the uses of media as either educational/informational or for leisure and this is exemplified in Camilleri & Falzon's (2021) research on video streaming platforms as instrumental and ritualised use.

Ritualised use can be defined as a "time-filling activity" that may be habitual and consistent and/or purely for relaxation, according to Rubin & Perse (1987, p. 59). This type of usage in relation to audio streaming platform is less goal-oriented and more about the habitual interaction with the platform. For many users, audio streaming platforms serve as a source of comfort, a means to unwind, or a way to regulate their mood (Hagen, 2016, Experiencing the ubiquitous Internet section, para. 3). The ritualistic use can also be a more passive approach to streaming as

the audio content can be played in the background while users are engaged with other tasks. This need is gratified by streaming platform features like personalised playlist curation and integration with home and vehicle sound systems (Turner & Tollison, 2021, p. 365).

On the other hand, instrumental use is described as more of an “information utility” behaviour, which implies that the consumer is looking to learn something or acquire knowledge (Rubin & Perse, 1987, p. 59). In contrast to ritualised use, instrumental use is often more active as users are more purposive with media (Rubin, 2008, p. 173). Essentially, audio streaming platforms can also serve as a tool that possesses “goal-oriented functionalities” (Hagen, 2016, Music streaming as using tools section, para. 7). This need is gratified by audio streaming platforms via the categorisation of content by genre along with predictive search engines (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 516), which makes the pursuit for information more efficient.

In relation to this this research, music as a form of media would be able to satisfy the need for leisure and entertainment. As mentioned earlier however, audio streaming platforms offer more than just music nowadays. According to Edinson Research (2024, p. 19), there are approximately 192 million podcast listeners in the United States alone as of 2024. Spotify is said to have 6 million podcast titles (Spotify, 2024, para. 2) while Apple Podcasts has 2.5 million (Howarth, 2024, Podcast episode statistics section). Considering that podcasts have gained popularity and are also accessible through the same streaming platforms as music, they have not only gratified the need for entertainment, but also the need to learn

and acquire information (Shearer et al., 2023, para. 12). This is due to the variety of topics that are discussed on podcasts ranging from entrepreneurship, politics, personal relationships, and so on.

2.3. Brand experience

Brand experience is defined by 4 varying dimensions; 1) the sensory, 2) affective, 3) behavioural, and 4) intellectual responses that are evoked by brand-related stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 54). These stimuli could be in the form of the packaging, communications, design, or overall identity of a brand.

Zarantonello & Schmitt (2010, p. 533) state that the sensory aspect relates to the visual, auditory, tactile, gustative, and aromatic stimuli. With regards to audio streaming platforms, the sensory aspect of the platform is primarily experienced by users via the visual interface as well as the audio content. The quality of audio content is initially dictated by the content creators (artists and podcasters) however, audio streaming platforms like Spotify allow users to adjust the audio frequencies with the in-built sound equalizer to optimize the sound quality for their devices. As for the visual interface, the look and feel of the platform can help create a good first impression and encourage user engagement (Lingaard et al., 2006, p. 116). In addition, a brand identity can be established through distinct visual elements of the audio streaming platforms.

The affective aspect refers to the feelings that are evoked in consumers and the emotional connection with the brand (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010, p. 533).

This experience is often provided through the personalization of audio content. Audio streaming platforms make use of algorithms and the user's streaming habits to curate playlists and recommendations that resonate with different moods and activities, which appeals to the user's emotions on a regular basis (Thomson et al., 2005; Hagen, 2016, Music streaming as using tools section, para. 7). Many of the audio streaming platforms have adopted this personalization feature in order to emotionally engage and appeal their users while creating unique experiences (Hracs & Webster, 2021, p. 246). Personalized recommendations can evoke a range of emotions, from nostalgia when rediscovering a favourite song to excitement when discovering new music that perfectly matches the user's taste.

The intellectual aspect relates to the extent to which the brand stimulates curiosity within consumers and encourages critical thinking (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010, p. 533). The intellectual experience is influenced by the genres of content available for users. Having access to a wide range of content covering different real-world topics of discussion can be mentally stimulating and also foster learning and critical thinking, which Perks et al. (2019, p. 629) discovered to be a significant need for podcast listeners. When users think about an audio streaming platform in terms of its intellectual offerings, they may consider how well the platform supports their curiosity and desire for knowledge. A platform that consistently provides intellectually stimulating content can be seen as a valuable tool for personal growth and learning, as it can be a gateway to discovering new ideas and expanding intellectual horizons.

The affective experience with personalized recommendations can help audio streaming platform users discover new and fresh content that could be intellectually engaging for them.

The behavioural aspect highlights the consumers lifestyles and interactions influenced by the brand (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010, p. 533). Audio streaming platforms can also influence the user's behavioural experience. Spotify is known for implementing social features where users can follow their peers, view each other's preferred content, and collaboratively create playlists. Users can also join a jam session together and add their own songs to the queue which is a useful feature when in social settings.

When users think about an audio streaming platform in terms of its behavioural experience, they may consider how the platform fits into their daily routines and social lives. A platform that supports and enhances social interactions can be perceived as integral to the user's lifestyle (Oyedele & Simpson, 2018, p. 299). This integration into daily and social activities can lead to higher levels of engagement, as users come to rely on the platform not just for entertainment or information but also for facilitating meaningful social connections. Moreover, a sense of community is established by popular culture communicated through the audio content (music and podcasts) which encourages social interaction among users via the platforms while shaping their social identities (Turner & Tollison, 2021, p. 363).

2.4. Consumer satisfaction

Consumer satisfaction refers to the subjective evaluation on the extent to which a consumer's prior expectations of the product or service are met (Oliver, 1999, p. 34) This judgment is often made from the consumer's initial perceived value of the product or service in comparison to their experience (Bhartiyadhikara, 2020; Guido, 2015). This phenomenon is often related to the expectancy disconfirmation theory, which is a framework used to understand consumer satisfaction and post-purchase behaviour (Oliver, 1980, p. 460; Elkhani & Bakri, 2012, p. 97).

According to this model, consumer satisfaction is influenced by the difference between their initial expectations and the actual performance of the product or service. The model suggests that consumers go through 4 stages to evaluate their satisfaction, and they are 1) forming expectations, 2) experiencing the product/service, 3) confirmation or disconfirmation and 4) cognitive adjustment (Shukla et al., 2023, p. 3). If the product or service exceeds expectations, it leads to positive disconfirmation and high levels of satisfaction. On the other hand, a product or service falling short of expectations would result in negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction among consumers (Oliver, 1980, p. 460).

Consumer expectations are primarily dictated by the marketing communications of the brand together with their previously similar experiences and recommendations via word-of-mouth promotion (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012, p. 97). In terms of the marketing communications, audio streaming platforms make use of

advertising and promotional activities to highlight the features they offer. These communications act as a benchmark and therefore shape user perceptions and expectations before they even experience using the product or service (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 138). In addition, consumers are likely to trust opinions of their peers (i.e. their friends and family or online reviews) thus, positive word of mouth would positively affect consumer expectations (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012, p. 97).

Once consumers have formed expectations, the next critical stage in the evaluation process is experiencing the product or service. This stage is where the theoretical meets the practical, and consumers can directly interact with or experience what the brand has to offer. In the context of audio streaming platforms, the actual experience can vary greatly depending on several factors, such as the usability of the service, the quality of the content, and the overall user interface. This more specifically involves the ease of navigating the platform and its affordances/features, the relevance and accuracy of personalized recommendations, the audio quality, and the availability of desired content (Oyedele & Simpson, 2018, p. 298; Camilleri & Flazon, 2021, p. 223).

Following the actual experience of the product or service, consumers enter the stage of confirmation or disconfirmation. This stage involves a cognitive comparison between their initial expectations and the actual performance of the product or service. In the realm of audio streaming platforms, confirmation or disconfirmation can manifest in various ways. For instance, if a user expects seamless streaming without interruptions and the platform delivers this experience,

the user experiences positive disconfirmation. This positive outcome reinforces the user's satisfaction and enhances their loyalty to the platform (Oliver, 1980, p. 460). On the other hand, if the user encounters frequent buffering, poor audio quality, or a less-than-accurate recommendation algorithm, negative disconfirmation occurs, which leads to dissatisfaction and may potentially cause the user to consider other alternatives that are competing in the market (Kotler & Keller, 2012, p. 140).

Research by Elkhani & Bakri (2012) supports the significance of this third stage of evaluation by illustrating how consumer satisfaction is heavily influenced by the confirmation or disconfirmation of their initial expectations (p. 98). For marketers and service designers, understanding this process is crucial as it highlights the importance of aligning marketing communications with the actual product or service performance (Fadli et al., 2021, p. 856). Overselling a product or service and subsequently failing to deliver can lead to negative disconfirmation and be harmful to the brand's reputation.

The final stage in the consumer satisfaction evaluation process is cognitive adjustment. This stage involves consumers reconciling their experiences with their expectations, which can lead to an adjustment in future expectations and perceptions of the brand. For audio streaming platforms, cognitive adjustment can influence long-term user behaviour and brand loyalty. If users repeatedly experience positive disconfirmation, they are likely to adjust their expectations upward, leading to a stronger and positive brand association and therefore increased satisfaction. Conversely, consistent negative experiences can lower expectations and damage

the user's perception of the brand (Elkhani & Bakri, 2012, p. 97).

Cognitive adjustment is a continuous learning process where consumers modify their expectations based on their interactions with the product or service (Oliver, 1980, p. 460-461). Cognitive adjustment also highlights the dynamic nature of consumer satisfaction. As consumers' experiences evolve, so do their expectations and standards. This means that brands must continuously innovate and improve their offerings to meet the fluctuating expectations of their users. According to Shukla et al. (2023), ongoing positive experiences and proactive service improvements are essential to maintaining high levels of consumer satisfaction and loyalty (p. 4).

2.5. Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty can be defined by six crucial and “sufficient conditions”, according to Jacoby & Kyner (1973). They state that brand loyalty is the 1) biased, 2) behavioural response, 3) expressed over time, 4) by some decision-making unit, 5) with respect to one or more alternative brands in the same category and, 6) is a function of psychological and evaluative processes (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973, p. 2). Essentially, brand loyalty is the extent to which a consumer will show commitment to a specific brand over other competitors (Bae & Kim, 2023, p. 2415). This is often exemplified by consumer attitudes and behavioural responses such as brand advocacy via word-of-mouth promotion (both electronically and verbally) and if applicable, spending more money via repeat purchases (Zeithaml et al., 1996, p.

34).

Dick and Basu's (1994) conceptual framework on brand loyalty looks at the concept more extensively and illustrates that loyalty can be categorised in 2 dimensions; behavioural and attitudinal. Behavioural loyalty refers to the actions that customers take, particularly their repeat purchasing behaviours. According to Dick and Basu (1994), behavioural loyalty is observed when customers consistently choose the same brand over others in repeated purchase situations (p. 101). This type of loyalty is quantitatively measurable, often seen in metrics such as purchase frequency and customer retention rates. Behavioural loyalty is essential for businesses because it directly correlates with their generated revenue and profits, as well as the overall market share.

One key aspect of behavioural loyalty is habit. When customers develop a routine of purchasing a particular brand, it often becomes a habitual behaviour, driven by convenience and familiarity rather than a deep emotional connection. For example, a consumer might repeatedly buy the same brand of coffee every morning because it is available at a café on their way to work, which seamlessly fits into their daily routine. However, Dick and Basu (1994) point out that behavioural loyalty alone may not always indicate a strong customer-brand relationship (p. 100). Customers might exhibit behavioural loyalty due to situational factors such as lack of alternatives, promotions, or financial circumstances. For instance, a consumer might frequently purchase a product simply because it is the only affordable option available in their local store, not necessarily because they prefer it over other

brands.

Furthermore, while behavioural loyalty can be beneficial in the short term, it might not be sustainable if it is not backed by attitudinal loyalty. Companies risk losing behaviourally loyal customers if a competitor offers a better deal or a more convenient option. Therefore, while behavioural loyalty is a critical component of overall loyalty, it should ideally be supported by strong attitudinal loyalty to ensure long-term customer retention (Dick and Basu, 1994, p. 100).

Attitudinal loyalty, on the other hand, refers to the emotional and psychological commitment a customer has towards a brand. According to Dick and Basu (1994), attitudinal loyalty is characterized by a favourable attitude towards a brand, a strong preference, and a positive emotional connection (p. 101). This type of loyalty goes beyond mere repeated purchase behaviour and encompasses a deeper attachment to the brand, often manifesting in positive word-of-mouth, brand advocacy, and resistance to switching even when alternatives are available.

When customers have positive experiences with a brand that consistently meets or exceeds their expectations, they develop a strong emotional bond. This bond makes them more likely to stay loyal to the brand even in the face of competitive offers. For instance, a customer who feels a strong emotional connection to a brand because it aligns with their personal values and lifestyle choices is less likely to switch to a competitor, even if the competitor offers lower prices. Research by Kotler and Keller (2012, p. 140-141) indicates that the cost of acquiring new customers is significantly higher than retaining existing ones and

attitudinal loyalty plays a more vital role in ensuring customer loyalty than behavioural loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994, p. 100).

Dick and Basu (1994) then continue to convey 4 levels of loyalty that consumers can exhibit based on their behaviours and attitudes. The lowest level is no loyalty and it said that this is a combination of low relative attitude and low repeat patronage (Dick and Basu, 1994, p.101). This occurs when brands have been recently introduced in the market and their distinct advantages are not clear to consumers as competitors are likely to provide similar products or services. As a results, brands must strategically increase their awareness through marketing promotions. A notable example of audio streaming platforms attempting to attract new customers in order to achieve long-term loyalty is with their free trials for premium subscriptions (Spotify, 2024, para. 1; Tidal, 2024, para. 1). New users can have a first-hand experience of the audio platforms and their benefits thus potentially become a long-term customer, which ultimately is the goal for the audio platform brands.

The next level of loyalty is spurious loyalty and it is characterised by a low relative attitude and high repeat patronage (Dick and Basu, 1994, p. 101). This means that users will regularly utilise a product or service, not out of genuine preference, but due to circumstantial factors such as convenience, habit, or lack of better alternatives. In relation to audio streaming platforms, a user, for example, might have an Apple Music subscription because it came free with their new iPhone or Apple device(s) (Apple, 2024, para. 1). The user might therefore be reluctant to

subscribe to another audio streaming platform due to the convenience of Apple Music even though they might not perceive it as superior to other platforms. This type of loyalty is often fragile as it can easily shift if the user comes across a more appealing offer from competing audio streaming platforms.

A high relative attitude with low repeat patronage is referred to as latent loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994, p. 102). In this case, consumers have positive perceptions and attitudes toward a brand but due to situational constraints. In the context of audio streaming platforms, a user may have a personal preference for a platform like Spotify due to its high-quality audio and exclusive content but might not subscribe due to financial limitations, for example. These users are potential high-value consumers because the barriers preventing their repeat usage can be temporary or influenced by the brand itself.

Financial limitations can be removed from the equation through promotional discounts or more flexible subscription plans (Hracs & Webster, 2021, p. 244). Majority of audio streaming platform in the market today like Spotify address these financial limitations with a variety of subscription packages available (Spotify, 2024, para. 4). Users can opt for a free subscription with advertising or even a family subscription package. This package allows multiple users (generally up to 5 or 6) full access to the premium version of the platform, which could encourage users to share a premium subscription with those in their immediate social circles as they would be able to minimise their expenses.

True loyalty is the final and most ideal level of brand loyalty for brands and it

is exemplified through a high relative attitude and high repeat patronage (Dick & Basu, 1994, p. 102). This level of loyalty is ideal of brands because consumers not only use the product or service frequently but also become brand advocates by promoting it through online and real-life word-of-mouth (Zeithaml et al., 1996, p. 33). With regards to audio streaming platforms, users exhibiting this level of loyalty are likely to have been subscribed to an audio platform for a lengthy period of time as a result of their expectations or needs being met or exceeded by the platform, decreasing the likelihood of them switching to another platform.

Looking at the audio streaming market, Spotify has the highest market share and most significant annual growth in users according to Duarte (2024, Music streaming players section, fig. 1), and this suggests a favourable level of consumer satisfaction and loyalty among Spotify users. Spotify are known for their annual Wrapped feature which provides premium users with personalised data and analytics on their streaming habits over the year (Spotify, 2024, para. 1). Seeing as users are always excited for their Wrapped at the end of the year, long term use (high repeat patronage) of the platform is encouraged and high relative attitudes are invoked among users as a result of the social comparison of streaming habits (Purcell, 2023, para. 4-5).

2.6. Hypotheses

2.6.1. Uses and gratifications: ritualised and instrumental use

Music listening often involves a high degree of habitual and emotional

engagement. Music can evoke strong emotions and is frequently used in various daily rituals, such as exercising, relaxing or commuting. This aligns with the concept of ritualised use, where the focus is on habitual and emotional consumption (Hagen, 2016, Music streaming as lifeworld mediation section, para. 1). Research indicates that music has a unique capacity to create emotional connections and is often intertwined with personal and social rituals (Sloboda, O'Neill, & Ivaldi, 2001, p. 11). According to the U&G theory (Katz et al., 1973, p. 511), people use media to satisfy specific needs, and music is particularly effective in fulfilling emotional and psychological needs (Lonsdale & North, 2011, p. 109). The ritualised use of music is supported by its ability to consistently fulfil these needs, leading to repetitive and habitual listening behaviours. As a result, the following hypothesis was deduced:

H1a: Ritualised use will be greater amongst music listeners in comparison to podcast listeners

Podcasts are often consumed for their informational and educational content (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2022, p. 686), aligning with the instrumental use where the focus is on practical and goal-oriented consumption (Rubin & Perse, 1987, p. 59). Listeners turn to podcasts to gain knowledge, stay informed, or learn new skills, which are all instrumental uses. Research shows that podcast listeners often seek out specific content to serve particular purposes, such as staying updated on news, exploring hobbies, or enhancing personal development (Rubin & Perse, 1987; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Whipple et al., 2023). This contrasts with the more

emotional and habitual nature of music listening, reinforcing the idea that podcasts fulfil instrumental needs. Therefore, it is predicted that:

H1b: Instrumental use will be greater among podcast listeners in comparison to music listeners

2.6.2. Brand experience

Ritualised use of audio streaming platforms refers to habitual or routine consumption, often driven by the need for entertainment or to pass the time. The ritualistic use of media is characterized by less cognitive involvement but consistent, repetitive use (Rubin, & Purse, 1987, p. 59). This type of use is critical in shaping brand experience for audio streaming platform.

Ritualised use creates a sense of familiarity and comfort, which enhances user satisfaction. As users repeatedly engage with the audio streaming platforms, they become accustomed to its interface, features, and how the media content is delivered, fostering a positive emotional response. According to Huhmann and Limbu (2020, p. 207), familiarity through habitual use reduces cognitive load, making the interaction seamless and enjoyable, thereby enhancing brand experience. The hypothesis derived from this is as follows:

H2a: Ritualised use positively affects brand experience

Instrumental use of audio streaming platforms would also have a positive effect on brand experience. Instrumental use often involves cognitive engagement

(Camilleri & Falzon, 2021, p. 221), where users actively seek out informational content. This engagement can create a deeper intellectual connection with the platform, contributing to a positive brand experience. For instance, a user who frequently listens to educational podcasts on a particular streaming platform may develop a perception of the brand as a valuable source of knowledge and learning (Shearer et al., 2023, para. 12). This intellectual association would therefore be indicative of a positive brand experience. Consequently, the following hypothesis is formed:

H2b: Instrumental use positively affects brand experience

2.6.3. Consumer satisfaction

A positive brand experience is crucial for enhancing consumer satisfaction on audio streaming platforms. Research indicates that a positive brand experience significantly contributes to consumer satisfaction. According to Iglesias, Singh, and Batista-Foguet (2011, p. 574), brand experience positively influences consumer satisfaction, which is critical for fostering loyalty and repeat usage. The multidimensional nature of brand experience ensures that various audio streaming platforms users' needs are met, from the pleasure of high-quality sound (sensory) to the joy of discovering new music (emotional) and educational/informative content (intellectual) at any given time (behavioural).

In a study by Khan and Fatma (2017, p. 443), it was found that positive brand experiences lead to higher consumer satisfaction, which is crucial for differentiation

in a competitive market for audio streaming platforms. Satisfied consumers are more likely to continue using the platform, subscribe to premium services, and recommend it to others, thereby reinforcing the platform's success. The following hypothesis is formed:

H3: Brand experience positively affects consumer satisfaction

As previously stated, ritualised use of audio streaming platforms enhances brand experience by embedding the platform into consumers' daily lives, creating a sense of familiarity and emotional connection (Schmitt, 1999, p. 12). For instance, a user who listens to their favourite music every morning associates positive emotions with the platform, contributing to a richer brand experience. This emotional and habitual engagement is crucial for enhancing consumer satisfaction as it meets their need for emotional comfort and routine.

Instrumental use enhances brand experience by providing functional and cognitive benefits. For example, a user who relies on a platform for educational podcasts or news updates values the platform's utility and reliability. This instrumental engagement fosters a positive brand experience by fulfilling specific informational needs, which in turn enhances consumer satisfaction (Iglesias et al. (2011, p. 572).

Research also supports the mediating role of brand experience in this relationship (Hracs & Webster, 2021; Moreira et al., 2017). Brakus et al. (2009) found that positive brand experiences significantly enhance consumer satisfaction. Furthermore, Iglesias et al. (2011) research highlights that both emotional and

functional interactions with a brand contribute to satisfaction through enriched brand experiences. The following 2 statements are predicted:

H4a: Ritualised use positively affects consumer satisfaction through the mediation effect of brand experience

H4b: Instrumental use positively affects consumer satisfaction through the mediation effect of brand experience

2.6.4. Brand loyalty

Consumer satisfaction is a critical determinant of brand loyalty. When consumers are satisfied with a brand, their likelihood of remaining loyal to that brand significantly increases. Satisfaction is the extent to which consumers feel that a brand's products or services meet or exceed their expectations (Oliver, 1999). Research consistently shows a strong relationship between consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. For instance, consumer satisfaction is not only indicative of the product or service (in this case audio streaming platforms) meeting consumer expectations but also high levels of brand loyalty among users (He et al., 2012, p. 653). In addition, satisfied consumers are more likely to repurchase and recommend a brand to others. This repeat purchasing behaviour and positive word-of-mouth are key indicators of brand loyalty (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Zeithaml et al., 1996, p. 33; Moreira et al., 2017). Accordingly, it is predicted that:

H5: Consumer satisfaction positively affects brand loyalty

Research demonstrates that a positive brand experience leads to increased

consumer satisfaction and ultimately brand loyalty. Brakus et al. (2009, p. 63) found that enjoyable and memorable brand experiences contribute to higher satisfaction levels. Satisfied consumers are more likely to develop loyalty towards the brand, as their positive experiences create favourable perceptions and emotional bonds. In addition, a study by Nysveen, Pedersen, and Skard (2013, p. 409) highlighted that brands providing consistent and positive experiences enjoy higher consumer satisfaction, which in turn leads to greater brand loyalty. In the context of audio streaming platforms, a positive and engaging brand experience, such as personalized playlists, high-quality audio, and user-friendly interfaces, enhances consumer satisfaction. This satisfaction translates into brand loyalty as consumers continue to use the platform and advocate for it (Khan & Fatma, 2017; Beig & Nika, 2019). To conclude with the hypotheses, the final prediction is:

H6: Brand experience positively affects brand loyalty through the mediation effect of consumer satisfaction

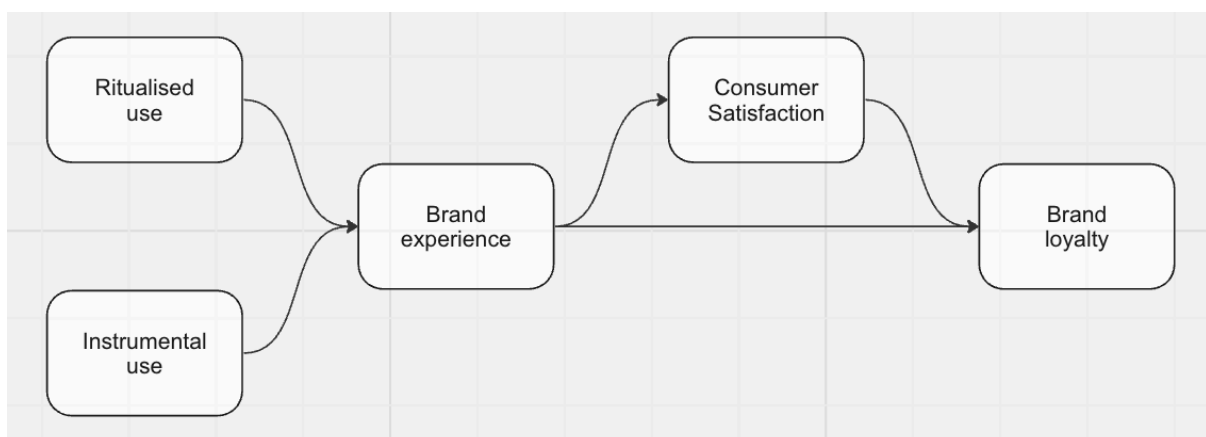


Fig. 1: The conceptual model illustrating the relationship paths

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between the uses and gratifications of audio streaming platforms and brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Considering this as well as the fact that uses and gratifications of the streaming platforms is related to consumer behaviour with media (Venkatesh et al., 2012; Rubin, 2008; Katz et al., 1973), it would be most appropriate to acquire this information quantitatively. An online survey would allow for the collection of a large amount of data as respondents from various geographical locations can respond to a standardised set of questions for further statistical analysis (Creswell, 2003; Muijs, 2011, p. 34). Reaching a diverse demographic would also be representative of the larger and similarly diverse population of audio streaming platform users. Moreover, an online survey can easily ensure anonymity (Nardi, 2018, p.16). Respondents can access the survey online giving them the liberty to complete it in their own time and anonymously, which is said to encourage more genuine and candid responses (Muijs, 2011, p. 45).

The survey was created using Qualtrics. This tool was suitable as it kept track of the total number of respondents and also allowed for the skip logic settings on filter questions, which enhanced the flow of the survey. This was especially useful for the ethical considerations of the research. All respondents were asked for their consent to participate in this study, and it was ensured that they were all at least 18 years of age. Those that denied consent were automatically excluded from

the research by skipping to end the survey. Respondents that approved their consent then proceeded to the next set of filter questions which entailed their use of audio streaming platforms. Considering the focus of this research, respondents had to be audio streaming platform users. It is necessary to reach respondents who meet the study criteria, as it reduces bias and improves the reliability of the results (Hair et al., 2010). The end of the survey displayed a message asking the sample units to share the survey with their peers who also use audio streaming platforms as a form of snowball sampling. This sampling method is known to help find participants that are relevant to specific sample populations (Babbie, 2014, p. 208).

3.2. Sample

The respondents were sourced via Amazon MechanicalTurk and they were financially incentivised to complete the survey. Implementing a financial incentive helped reduce response bias as non-respondents (who fit the study criteria) would have influenced the data and results if they had chosen to participate (Babbie, 2011, p. 289). Additionally, the financial incentive helped increase the survey response and completion rate (Babbie, 2011, p. 289). Once the data collection process was done, there were a total of 343 respondents. However, the data was cleaned using SPSS 29 and 27 invalid responses were removed due survey incompleteness and not meeting research criteria. This left 316 valid responses.

In terms of the general demographic of the research sample, 54.1% ($N=171$) of the total 316 respondents identified as male, 44.9% ($N=142$) identified as female and the remaining 0.9% ($N=3$) identified as non-binary. The respondents'

ages ranged from 19 to 68 years ($M = 33.27$, $SD = 6.26$). The respondents were representative of a total of 29 different nationalities however, majority of respondents were from the United States with 73.4% ($N = 232$), followed by India with 5.4% ($N = 17$) and Armenia with 5.1% ($N = 16$) respectively. The remaining 26 nationalities were represented by no more than 1.3% ($N = 4$) of total respondents. A bachelor's degree was the most frequent level of education attained by the sample with 65.2% ($N = 206$). 25.9% of respondents ($N = 82$) had a master's degree and 6.3% ($N = 20$) had completed college/a vocational education. Less than 1.9% ($N = 6$) of the sample group had obtained a high school or doctorate's degree.

As for the respondents' general streaming behaviour and preferences, 50.9% ($N = 161$) said they use Spotify, 14.2% ($N = 45$) use Apple Music, and 9.5% ($N = 30$) use Tidal. Other audio streaming platforms used by respondents were Amazon Music, Soundcloud and Deezer. 79.4% ($N = 251$) of the 316 respondents said they primarily listen to music while the other 20.6% ($N = 65$) listen to podcasts. The results show that the respondents spend 2 to 9 hours a day using audio streaming platforms ($M = 6.20$, $SD = 1.4$). 53.2% ($N = 168$) have been using audio streaming platforms for at least a year while the remaining 46.8% ($N = 148$) are relatively new audio streaming platforms users, having used them for less than a year.

3.3. Ethical considerations

At the beginning the survey, a brief message was written for participants to introduce the study and its aim. Anonymity and confidentiality of the survey

responses was assured to respondents. Contact details were also provided in case participants had any questions or concerns about the survey. Participants were then asked to approve or deny consent to being a part of the research. All the sample units that were later included in the statistical analysis stated that they consent to participating and that they were at least 18 years of age. Responses from participants who stated that they were under 18 years or age were excluded from analysis, regardless of whether consent was given.

3.4. Operationalization

As illustrated in Fig. 1, the concepts or variables that were operationalized were ritual use, instrumental use, brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Seeing as the aim of this research is to learn more about consumer behaviour specifically with audio streaming platform users, it was appropriate to measure the variables with a 5-point Likert scale with strongly agree and strongly disagree as the 2 polar extremities.

Ritualised and instrumental use was measured using the uses and gratifications scale from a study done by Camilleri & Falzon (2021, p. 224) which investigated consumer uses and gratifications of mobile devices and streaming services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The scale used in this study was developed and adapted and from Katz et al. (1973) research on the general uses and gratifications of media. Both the scale consists of 3 items each. The ritualised use scale includes items that assess the habitual aspects of the audio streaming platform respondents use and the extent to which the audio streaming platforms

serve as a form of entertainment. The instrumental use scale, on the other hand, focuses on the practical and goal-oriented aspects of audio streaming platform use. It includes items that measure the extent to which users utilize their preferred streaming platforms to achieve specific objectives, such as learning new information, staying updated with news, and so on.

Brand experience was measured using the scale from Brakus et al. (2009, p. 60) research. This scale has been incorporated in numerous studies (Frasquet-Deltoro et al., 2021; Pina & Dias, 2021; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010, Sahin et al., 2011). As mentioned in the theoretical framework (section 2.3.), brand experience encompasses 4 dimensions; sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural. Each dimension has 3 corresponding items making it 12 items in total for brand experience. The sensory aspect was used to evaluate the extent to which the users' preferred streaming platform appeals to their senses. The affective aspect measured the extent to which the preferred streaming platform elicited an emotional response among users. The intellectual aspect was used to measure the extent to which cognitive engagement and stimulation is provided by the audio streaming platform. Lastly, the behavioural aspect evaluated the extent to which users' lifestyle and interactions are influenced by the audio streaming platform.

Consumer satisfaction was measured using the scale from Ribbink et al. (2004, p. 451) research on ensuring quality while building trust and loyalty in e-commerce markets. This scale consists of 4 items and is particularly relevant as it focuses on capturing the critical aspects of consumer satisfaction that influence

brand loyalty and trust in digital environments. In addition, it has been cited in various research papers (Amin, 2016; Fang et al., 2014; Taylor & Strutton, 2010). This scale was used to evaluate consumer satisfaction by asking respondents the extent to which their audio streaming platform of choice meets or exceeds their expectations.

Brand loyalty was measured with the scale from Zeithaml et al. (1996, p. 38) research on the behavioural consequences of service quality, which has been cited in plenty of other academic research (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Rita et al., 2019; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Akbar & Parvez, 2009). Zeithaml et al. (1996) developed their scale to capture the multifaceted nature of loyalty. The scale comprised of 4 items and was used to measure repeat purchase behaviour, the extent to which consumers would recommend the audio streaming platforms to others, and the general sense of commitment to the brand such as the likelihood of respondents paying a higher price for a specific streaming platform or even switching to competing platform.

3.5. Validity and reliability

The validity of the items in the scales used for this research was ensured through face and content validity (Babbie, 2011, pp. 160-161). The items for all the scales were rephrased from the original sources in order to ensure that the items were relevant to the context of this research (see Appendix 1 for the full survey questionnaire). This enhanced the face validity of the items (Babbie, 2011, p 160). As for content validity, it was vital to cover all aspects of the concepts being

operationalized (Babbie, 2011, p 161) and this was achieved through the comprehensive literature review in section 2.

As for reliability, a factor analysis was first conducted in SPSS 29 with principal component extraction and varimax rotation for each scale. The uses and gratification scale consisting of ritualised use (3 items) and instrumental use (3 items) had only 1 component with an eigenvalue greater than 1 ($KMO = .73$, $\chi^2 (N= 316, 15) = 337.78$, $p < .001$). The eigenvalue was 2.47 and explained 41.3% of the variance. The brand experience scale comprising of sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual (3 items each) loaded onto 1 component ($KMO = .85$, $\chi^2 (N= 316, 66) = 1560.26$, $p < .001$). The eigenvalue for the component (12 items) was 4.55 and it explained 56.9% of the variance. The consumer satisfaction scale (4 items) also loaded onto 1 component ($KMO = .77$, $\chi^2 (N= 316, 6) = 316.42$, $p < .001$). An eigenvalue of 2.38 was reported and the component explained 59.48% of the variance. The final scale for brand loyalty (4 items) had also only 1 component with an eigenvalue greater than 1 ($KMO = .77$, $\chi^2 (N= 316, 6) = 334.49$, $p < .001$). The eigenvalue was 2.42 and explained 60.42% of the variance.

Following the factor analysis, a reliability test for each scale was also conducted in SPSS. The uses and gratification scale with items measuring instrumental and ritualised use reported a Cronbach's α of .71. Individually, the ritualised use scale had a Cronbach's α of .74 while the instrumental use scale was .7. The brand experience scale reported Cronbach's α of .84. The consumer satisfaction scale had Cronbach's α value of .77 and the brand loyalty scale

reported Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$. Consequently, all scales were deemed acceptable seeing as the Cronbach's α values were at least .7 (Muijs, 2011, p. 73). In addition, there was no need to delete any of the scale items because doing so would not have significantly increased any of the Cronbach's α values.

4. Results

4.1. Music listeners vs podcast listeners

The statistical analysis conducted for the hypothesis H1a which predicted that ritualised use will be greater amongst music listeners in comparison to podcast listeners was an independent sample t-test. The test concluded that ritualised use of audio streaming platforms is indeed greater amongst music listeners ($M = 4.24$, $SD = .62$) than podcast listeners ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .88$), $t(81.39) = 6.82$, $p < .001$. A significant relationship was evident which meant that H1a was accepted.

For H1b, which predicted that Instrumental use will be greater among podcast listeners in comparison to music listeners an independent sample t-test was also conducted. The test revealed that instrumental use of audio streaming platforms is indeed greater amongst podcast listeners ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .49$) than music listeners ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .88$), $t(178.77) = -4.65$, $p < .001$. There was significance between music and podcast listeners which meant that H1b was accepted.

4.2. U&G and brand experience

To test hypothesis H2a (ritualised use positively affects brand experience), a linear regression analysis was conducted where ritualised use was the predictor and brand experience was the outcome. The analysis revealed significance, $F(1, 314) = 44.21$, $p < .001$. Ritualised use of audio streaming platforms had a significantly positive influence on brand experience ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$), with the model explaining 12.3% of the variance, $R^2 = .123$. This meant that H2a was accepted.

H2b (instrumental use positively affects brand experience) was also statistically analysed through a linear regression in SPSS. Instrumental use was the predictor and brand experience was the outcome. The analysis revealed significance, $F(1, 314) = 52.9, p < .001$. Ritualised use of audio streaming platforms had a significantly positive influence on brand experience ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), with the model explaining 14% of the variance, $R^2 = .14$. This meant that H2b was accepted.

4.3. Consumer satisfaction

A linear regression analysis was conducted for H3, which anticipated that brand experience positively affects consumer satisfaction. In the analysis input, brand experience was the predictor and consumer satisfaction was the outcome. The analysis proved the model to be significant, $F(1, 314) = 74.44, p < .001$. Ritualised use of audio streaming platforms had a significantly positive influence on brand experience ($\beta = .44, p < .001$). The model accounted for 19% of the variance, $R^2 = .19$. Consequently, H3 was accepted.

A mediation analysis was conducted to examine H4a which predicted that ritualised use positively affects consumer satisfaction through the mediation effect of brand experience. Ritualised use was set as the independent variable, consumer satisfaction as the dependent variable and brand experience as the mediating variable. The analysis was performed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap samples. The model revealed to be significant $F(1, 314) =$

58.15, $p < .001$, explaining 15% of the variance in consumer satisfaction, $R^2 = .15$.

As shown in Figure 2 below, there was a significant relationship between ritualised use and brand experience ($\beta = .29$, $t = 6.65$, $p < .001$). There was also a significant relationship between brand experience and consumer satisfaction ($\beta = .31$, $t = 6.56$, $p < .001$). The direct relationship between ritualised use and consumer satisfaction was found to be significant ($\beta = .21$, $t = 5.29$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of ritualised use on consumer satisfaction through the mediation of brand experience was reported as ($\beta = .09$, $t = 5.29$). A Bootstrapping analysis of 5,000 samples confirmed that the indirect effect was significant, 95% CI [.0422, .1466]. The results show that the mediation effect is not the only significant relationship in the model. As a result, it was concluded that brand experience partially mediates the relationship between ritualised use of audio streaming platforms and consumer satisfaction. Moreover, H4a was accepted.

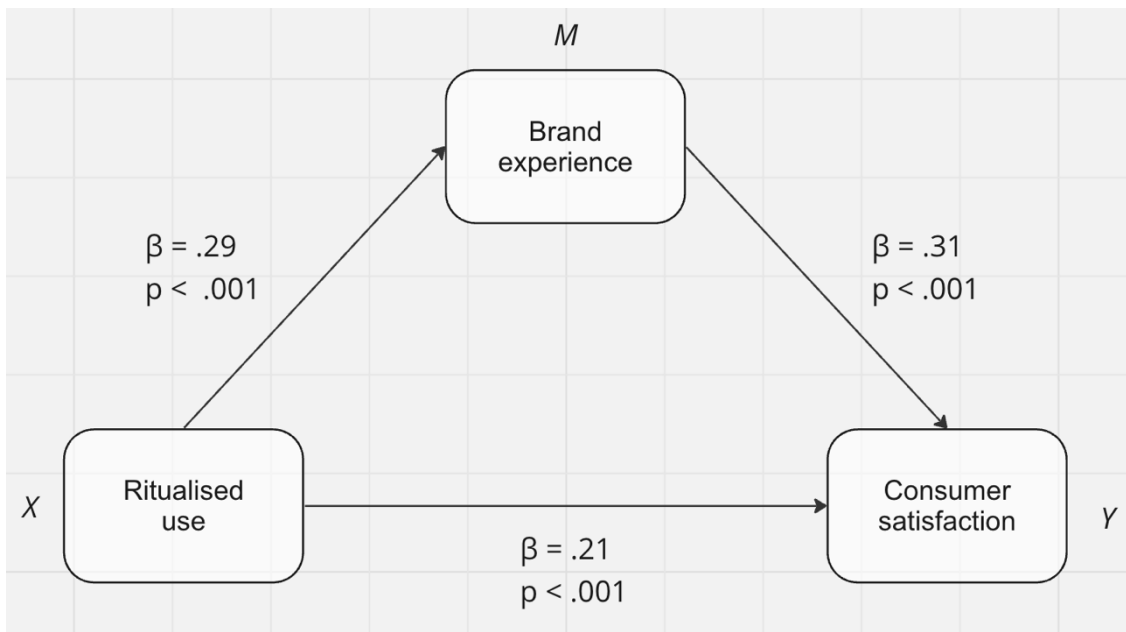


Fig. 2: Brand experience mediating the effect of ritualised use on consumer satisfaction

A mediation analysis was again conducted to examine H4b which stated that instrumental use positively affects consumer satisfaction through the mediation effect of brand experience. Instrumental use of was set as the independent variable, consumer satisfaction as the dependent variable and brand experience as the mediating variable. The model revealed to be significant $F(1, 314) = 25.15, p < .001$, explaining 7.4% of the variance in consumer satisfaction, $R^2 = .074$.

As illustrated below in Figure 3, there was a significant relationship between instrumental use and brand experience ($\beta = .28, t = 7.27, p < .001$). There was also a significant relationship between brand experience and consumer satisfaction ($\beta = .35, t = 7.17, p < .001$). The direct relationship between instrumental use and

consumer satisfaction was found to be significant ($\beta = .085, t = 2.28, p = .023$). The indirect effect of instrumental use on consumer satisfaction through the mediation of brand experience was reported as ($\beta = .1, t = 2.28$). A Bootstrapping analysis of 5,000 samples confirmed that the indirect effect was significant, 95% CI [.0495, .1629]. The results show that the mediation effect is again not the only significant relationship in the model. Consequently, it was concluded that brand experience partially mediates the relationship between instrumental use of audio streaming platforms and consumer satisfaction. H4b was therefore accepted.

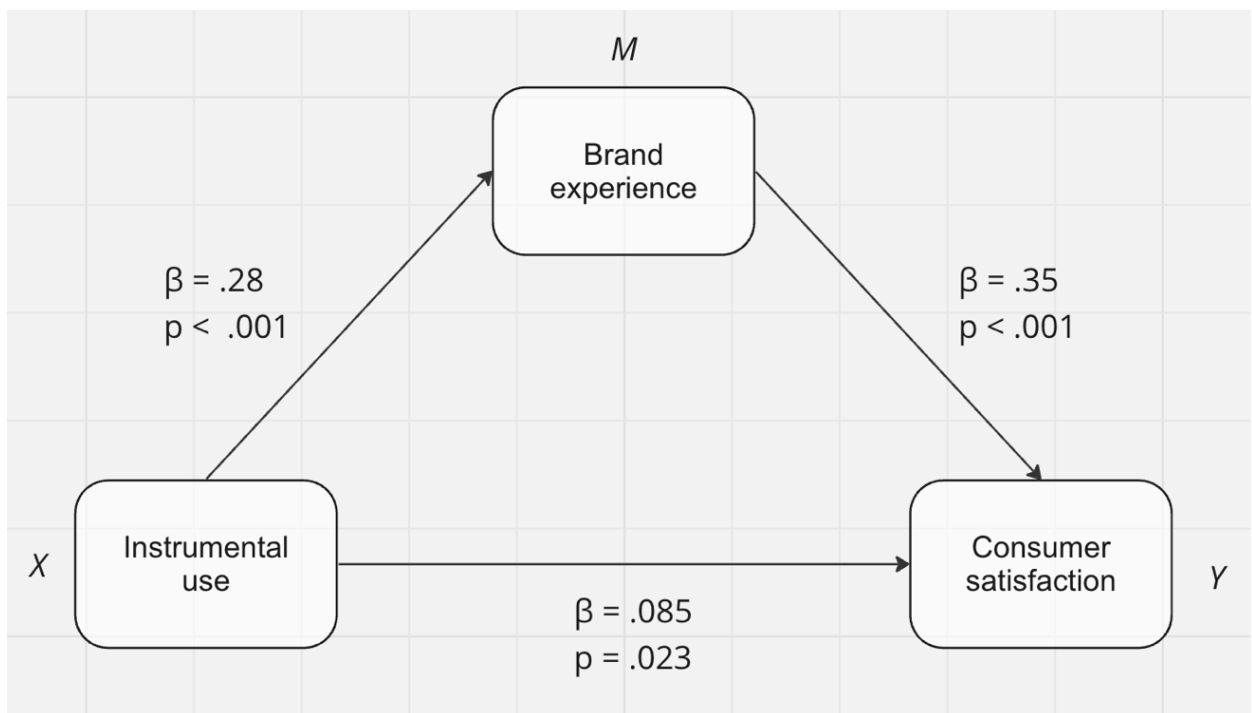


Fig. 3: Brand experience mediating the effect of instrumental use on consumer satisfaction

4.4. Brand loyalty

A linear regression analysis was conducted for H5 (consumer satisfaction positively affects brand loyalty) In the analysis input, consumer satisfaction was the predictor and brand loyalty was the outcome. The analysis proved the model to be significant, $F(1, 314) = 368.06, p < .001$. Ritualised use of audio streaming platforms had a significantly positive influence on brand experience ($\beta = .74, p < .001$). The model accounted for 55% of the variance, $R^2 = .55$. Subsequently, H5 was accepted as consumer satisfaction has a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty.

H6 stated brand experience positively affects brand loyalty through the mediation effect of consumer satisfaction. This was put to the test via a mediation analysis with brand experience as the independent variable, brand loyalty as the dependent variable and consumer satisfaction as the mediating variable. The model revealed to be significant $F(1, 314) = 77.84, p < .001$ and it accounted for 19% of the variance in consumer satisfaction, $R^2 = .19$.

Below, Figure 4 depicts the significant relationship between brand experience and consumer satisfaction ($\beta = .39, t = 8.63, p < .001$). There was also a significant relationship between consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty ($\beta = .74, t = 16.4, p < .001$). The direct relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty was found to be significant ($\beta = .15, t = 8.82, p = .003$). The indirect effect of brand experience on brand loyalty through the mediation of consumer satisfaction was reported as ($\beta = .29, t = 8.82$). A Bootstrapping analysis of 5,000 samples confirmed that the indirect effect was significant, 95% $CI [.1811, .4057]$. The results show that

the mediation effect is also not the only significant relationship in the model.

Therefore, it was evident that consumer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. As a result, H6 was accepted.

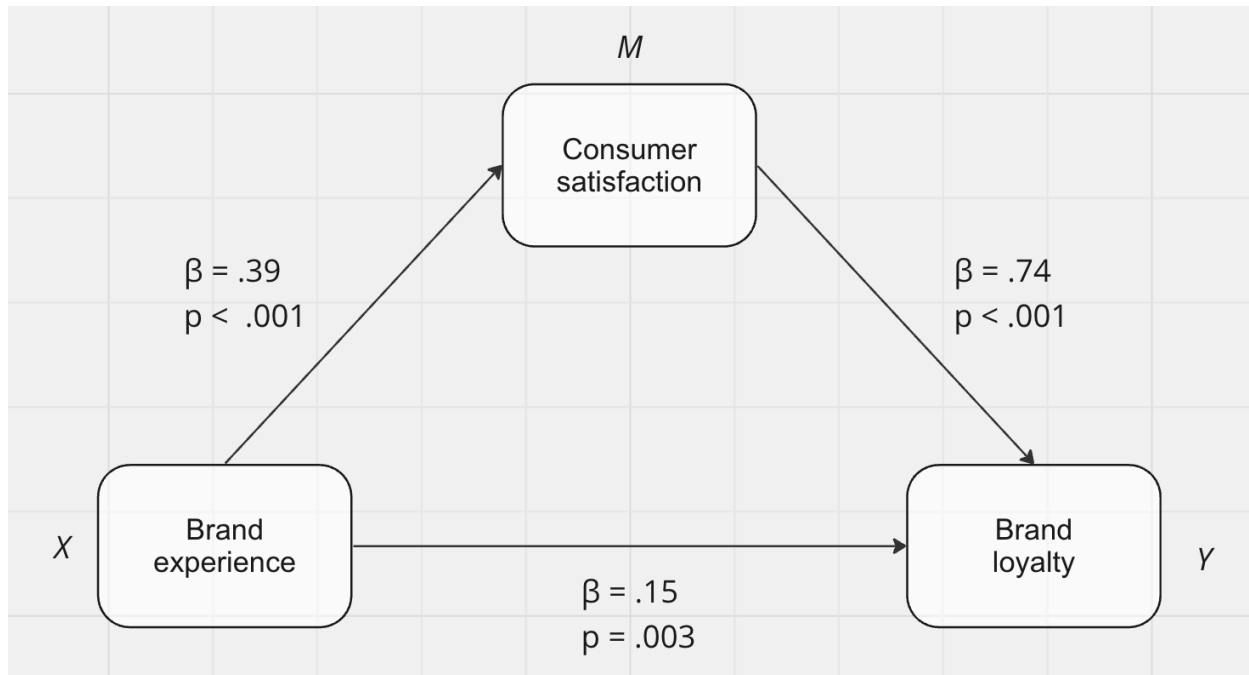


Fig. 4: Consumer satisfaction mediating the effect of brand experience on brand loyalty

Table 4.1

A summary of the formulated hypotheses

Hypothesis	Statement	Conclusion	
H1	a	Ritualised use will be greater amongst music listeners in comparison to podcast listeners	Accepted*
	b	Instrumental use will be greater among podcast listeners in comparison to music listeners	Accepted*
H2	a	Ritualised use positively affects brand experience	Accepted*
	b	Instrumental use positively affects brand experience	Accepted*
H3		Brand experience positively affects consumer satisfaction	Accepted*
H4	a	Ritualised use positively affects consumer satisfaction through the mediation effect of brand experience	Accepted*
	b	Instrumental use positively affects consumer satisfaction through the mediation effect of brand experience	Accepted*
H5		Consumer satisfaction positively affects brand loyalty	Accepted*
H6		Brand experience positively affects brand loyalty through the mediation effect of consumer satisfaction	Accepted*

*p < .05

5. Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate the uses and gratifications of audio streaming platform and the effect it may have on users' brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. The research question was *to what extent does the ritualised and instrumental use of audio streaming platforms affect brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty?* The following deductions can be made based on the tested hypotheses in Table 4.1.

H1a and H1b confirmed that ritualised use of audio streaming platform is greater amongst music listeners while instrumental use of audio streaming platforms is greater amongst podcast listeners. This supports the existing literature that proposes that people listen to music to relax and get their mind off things, when they are pre-occupied and need some background noise or to manage and regulate their emotions (Lonsdale & North, 2011; p. 123). The compatibility of mobile devices with home and vehicle sound systems as well as mood-based playlists also supports this type of engagement as music can therefore be supplementary to daily activities. As for podcasts, it is said that people are likely to listen to them when seeking information (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2022, p. 696). The episodic and thematic categorisation of podcasts further supports this type of engagement, as users can select podcast episodes that match their immediate informational needs.

H2a and H2b corroborated that both ritualised and instrumental use of audio streaming platforms positively affect brand experience. The effect size of ritualised

use ($\beta = .35$) and instrumental use ($\beta = .38$) on brand experience are considered as a medium effect, according to Niemen (2022, p. 436). Brand experience essentially occurs when consumers interact with the product or service (Sahin et al., 2011, p. 1289). In this case, brand experience can occur when audio streaming platform users engage with the platform, regardless of whether the interaction is ritualised or instrumental. A positive brand experience is then established when the users find value in the utility of the audio streaming platform and the extent to which the platforms appeal to the sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural dimensions (Sahin et al., 2011, p. 1290). The results show that on average, the respondents ($N = 316$) expressed a favourable perception of the brand experience ($M = 3.93$).

H3 revealed that brand experience has a positive effect on consumer satisfaction. According to Niemen (2002, p. 436), there effect size of brand experience ($\beta = .44$) on consumer satisfaction would be considered as a medium effect. This supports literature which states that positive interactions with a product or service can positively influence consumer perceptions of the brand (Sahin et al., 2011, p. 1289; Khan & Fatima, 2017, p. 443). In the case of this research, the dimensions of brand experience which are propagated through the affordances of audio streaming platforms successfully appeal to users, resulting in their needs and expectations being fulfilled. The results indicated a positive level of consumer satisfaction ($M = 4.34$) among the respondents.

H4a and H4b confirmed that both ritualised and instrumental use of audio streaming platforms also positively affects consumer satisfaction but with the partial

mediation effect of brand experience. The partial mediation suggests that the direct effect of ritualised use and instrumental use of streaming platforms on consumer satisfaction exists even without brand experience as a mediator. The presence of brand experience, however, amplifies the effect of ritualised and instrumental use on consumer satisfaction, which provide further support on the importance of brand experience on consumer satisfaction (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53).

It was evident from H5 that consumer satisfaction ($\beta = .74$) does indeed have a positive and large effect (Niemen, 2022, p. 436) on brand loyalty. This strong relationship suggests that when consumers are satisfied with their audio streaming platform, they are significantly more likely to remain loyal to the brand. Consumer satisfaction creates a positive emotional connection between the consumer and the brand, leading to behaviours indicative of loyalty, such as continuation of platform use and positive word-of-mouth (Oliver, 1999, p. 43; Ribbink et al., 2004, p. 447).

H6 confirmed that that brand experience also positively affects brand loyalty with the partial mediation effect of consumer satisfaction. Again, the partial mediation suggests that the direct effect of brand experience on brand loyalty exists even without the mediation effect from consumer satisfaction, but the presence of consumer satisfaction enhances the direct effect. Essentially, positive brand experiences with audio streaming platforms would lead users to repeated use, which would also (indirectly) indicate that the platforms are meeting or exceeding consumer expectations. From the results, it is evident that the respondents generally feel a positive sense of brand loyalty ($M = 4.26$) towards their respective

audio streaming platforms.

5.2. Implications of the findings

Given the results discussed and literature presented, it is evident that there is a significant relationship between brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty for both ritualised and instrumental use of audio streaming platforms. Moving forwards, the established as well as the up-and-coming streaming platforms should strive to create positive brand experience for their users, which would help them achieve consumer satisfaction and ultimately brand loyalty.

Apart from the slight nuances here and there, the audio streaming platforms offer generally similar features across the modern market so it is important for them to curate unique brand experience for the desired competitive advantage. Spotify is known for its Wrapped feature which provides users with personalised analytics on their streaming tendencies over the course of the year (Spotify, 2024, para. 1). Some of the analytical data includes the user's most streamed artist or podcast and ranks them in a percentile of total streamers based on total minutes streamed (e.g. You were in the top 0.5% of people that streamed Drake). Alongside these interesting insights, users in the top percentile of streamer should have a chance to be rewarded with collectible items such as merchandise, signed memorabilia or even concert tickets.

This would encourage the overall long-term use of Spotify as the rewards would be a valuable incentive for users. This approach not only increases

satisfaction by providing users with desirable rewards but also strengthens brand loyalty by creating an emotional bond through exclusive, memorable experiences. Research from the Harvard Business Review states that rewarding consumers is an effective method of improving and sustaining brand loyalty (O'Brien & Jones, 1995, para. 2). They also mentioned that a brand's "most loyal customers are also the most profitable" (O'Brien & Jones, 1995, para. 2). Furthermore, these exclusive rewards can foster a sense of community among top users, encouraging them to continue using the platform to maintain or improve their status.

Implementing a reward system for long-term consumers is not a foreign concept in business practices. Notable examples include frequent flyer miles offered by airlines or getting a free coffee for every 10 coffees purchased at a local café. Although audio streaming platforms may offer discounts for subscription fees, they are often short-term promotions intended to attract new customers (Apple Music, 2024). A reward system for long-term users that can be translated to the context of audio streaming platforms is yet to be implemented, making this idea rather innovative for the audio streaming platform market.

Another interesting feature that is yet to be implemented by any streaming platform is remote viewing of live shows. Artists are known to tour different cities and countries when they release new music, however, it may not always be feasible for their fans to be physically present at the shows. The livestreaming of tour concerts would be the next best thing to being present at the venue as it would allow fans to experience the live performance from wherever they are

geographically. The users can gain access to the livestream through a paywall (ideally at a lower price in comparison to the venue tickets), which would act as another revenue stream in addition to paid subscriptions for the streaming platforms. This feature could also be applicable for podcasts as some podcasters have begun to put on live shows where they have the opportunity to interact with their audience. Recently, a popular podcast known as ShxtsNGigs featuring 2 friends from the U.K. hosted a live show at the O2 in London and were even able to sell out the arena (The O2, 2024; ShxtsNGigs Podcast, 2024).

Ultimately, the ideas of a reward system and remote viewing of live shows would not only elevate the brand experience for audio streaming platform users. The brands would also benefit from the perceived value of and association with innovation among new and existing consumers (Boyles, 2022, The importance of innovation section; Beig & Nika, 2019, p. 413). In addition, seeing as these features would be new concept for audio streaming platforms, consumer expectations are likely to be met or even exceeded, encouraging more long-term use of the streaming platform, i.e. brand loyalty.

5.3. Limitations and future research

One of the main limitations of this study that should be considered is the generalizability of the results. Although the survey respondents represented 29 different nationalities, a significantly large majority of them (73.4%, $N = 232$) were from one country (the United States). Majority of the other nationalities were only

represented by no more than 4 respondents. This disproportional representation is most likely a result of the sampling method. The sample group was curated from AmazonMechanicalTurk which was very useful for collecting data in a timely manner. Despite this, it is important to bear in mind that AmazonMechanicalTurk is a subsidiary of Amazon which is based in the United States and therefore would naturally attract the crowdsourced individuals from the market in geographical proximity.

Thus, a more diverse method of sourcing sample units could be implemented for future study. This approach may require more time to achieve but the survey could be shared to sample groups from different geographical locations in order to enhance the generalizability of results (Muijs, 2011, p. 41). To take it a step further, a comparison between the geographical locations could be conducted in order to assess the extent to which audio streaming platform use differs across various cultures. For example, the most popular audio streaming platform may differ geographically.

Additionally, this research could take a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods can complement quantitative findings by providing more context and depth. The narratives and detailed accounts obtained through interviews and focus groups can help explain why certain quantitative patterns exist, offering a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour. Semi-structured interviews or focus groups with audio streaming platform users would provide more in-depth personal insights and opinions about their consumer behaviour and the

streaming services (Babbie, 2011, p. 343). Interviews and focus groups offer more multifaceted responses in comparison to the standardised nature of online surveys (Babbie, 2011, p. 340).

These qualitative methods would allow researchers to delve deeper into the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of users, which respondents may not be able to express in an online survey. In particular, semi-structured interviews can be highly beneficial as they provide the flexibility to explore unexpected themes that emerge during the conversation while still focusing on the research questions. Focus groups, on the other hand, can facilitate discussions that highlight shared experiences and diverse perspectives among participants. This setting allows for interactive discussions where participants can build on each other's responses, often revealing collective behaviours and attitudes that might not surface in one-on-one interviews.

Furthermore, future research can investigate the concepts in this research in relation to other theoretical frameworks. For example, Rubin & Perse (1987, p. 60) mentions that there is a significant relationship between instrumental use and parasocial interaction. They essentially imply that media consumers develop parasocial relationships with media personalities, which may influence their media consumption behaviour. Future research could therefore investigate the extent to which parasocial relationships affect the instrumental consumption of podcasts. The role of parasocial interaction could also be assessed with ritualised use, as this relationship may also be prominent with music artists.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey questionnaire

Dear respondent,

My name is Lenny Musomba and I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The purpose of this survey is to investigate the relationship between uses of audio streaming platforms and brand experience, consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty. The entire survey should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Should you have any inquiries or concerns, feel free to contact me at 529292lm@eur.nl. Before you begin, please indicate whether or not you consent to being a part of this study. Keep in mind that your consent can be withdrawn at any time after you begin by simply leaving the survey incomplete and closing this webpage. If you do so, your responses will not be recorded.

Consent

- I consent to participating in this study
- I do not consent to participating in this study

Preliminary (filter) questions

Do you use any streaming platform (i.e. Spotify, Apple Music, Tidal, etc) on a regular basis?

- Yes
- No

Which streaming platform do you make use of the most? Specify below

- _____

Motivation for ritualised use

I use the streaming platform to break the routine

I use the streaming platform in my free time

Using the streaming platform is form of entertainment

Motivation for instrumental use

I consume to informative podcasts on the streaming platform

I consume entertaining podcasts on the on the streaming platform

I use the streaming platform because they offer advertising options (no advertising, limited advertising or advertising presented with free usage

Brand experience

This streaming platform makes a strong impression on my senses

I find this streaming platform interesting in a sensory way

This brand does appeals to my senses

This streaming platform influences my feelings and sentiments

I do not have strong emotions for this brand

This streaming platform is an emotional platform

I engage in physical actions and behaviours when I use this streaming platform

This streaming platform results in bodily experiences

This streaming platform is action orientated

I engage in a lot of thinking when I use this streaming platform

This streaming platform makes me think

This streaming platform stimulates my curiosity and problem solving

Consumer satisfaction

I am generally pleased with this streaming platform

The streaming platform is enjoyable to use

I am satisfied with the streaming platform's services

I am happy with this streaming platform

Brand loyalty

I say positive things about this streaming platform to others

I would recommend this streaming platform to someone who seeks my advice

I encourage friends and relatives to use this streaming platform

I plan to continue using this streaming platform

Demographic questions

What is your age?

What gender do you identify with most?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other
- Prefer not to say

What is your country of origin?

What is the highest level of education that you are soon to complete or have completed?

- Primary education
- Secondary education/high school
- Vocational training
- College
- Bachelor's degree

- Master's degree
- Doctorate's degree/PhD

How long have you been using your preferred streaming platform?

- < 3 months
- 3 – 6 months
- 6 months – 1 year
- 1 – 2 years
- 2 – 3 years
- 3+ years

What type of content do you consume the most?

- Music
- Podcasts

Roughly how many hours a day do you use your preferred streaming platform?

- _____

You have now completed the survey. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. It would be much appreciated if you could share this survey with anyone you know who also uses audio streaming platforms regularly.