



Technological Development and Consumer (Dis)involvement in the SoundCloud Service

O Desenvolvimento Tecnológico e o (Des)envolvimento do Consumidor no Serviço SoundCloud

El Desarrollo Tecnológico y el (Des)envolvimiento del Consumidor en el Servicio SoundCloud

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Abstract

Drawing on the consumer culture theory (CCT) approach, this study sought to understand how consumers reveal their involvement with the SoundCloud platform through their use of the service. Despite the growth of the Brazilian streaming market, the platform has faced difficulties monetizing its range of offerings, a situation that has benefited its consumers. Given that the platform emphasizes direct interaction among users and between users and creators, and that involvement is shaped by cultural contexts and fostered by marketplace cultures, we propose linking involvement to the user experience, as materialized in the meanings attributed to everyday consumption. We conducted a qualitative, interpretive study involving 17 interviews with users and applied functional discourse analysis. The findings revealed three strands of meaning: limited interest in the service's offerings; a nostalgic attachment connecting users to the service; and an appreciation of involvement with the user community. The value attributed to interactions among users contributed to a deeper understanding of the other two strands of meaning because consumption, as an inherently complex, cultural, and collective activity or phenomenon, enables participants to construct their sense of self within the social spaces they inhabit. Finally, we demonstrate how sociocultural, symbolic, and experiential aspects are essential to consumer relationships and, consequently, to the establishment of an emotional relationship with the brand.

Keywords: consumer involvement, SoundCloud, Consumer Culture Theory.

Resumo

Este estudo se apoiou na abordagem da Consumer Culture Theory e propôs compreender como o consumidor revela seu envolvimento com a plataforma SoundCloud no uso do serviço. Apesar do crescimento do mercado brasileiro de streaming, a plataforma apresentou dificuldades em monetizar seu conjunto de ofertas, condição atraente para seus consumidores. Considerando que a plataforma enfatiza a interação direta entre usuários e criadores e que o envolvimento é moldado por contextos culturais e nutrido por culturas de mercado, propomos vinculá-lo à experiência de uso, materializada nos sentidos atribuídos ao consumo

cotidiano. A partir de um estudo qualitativo e interpretativista, procedemos a 17 entrevistas com usuários, com base em uma análise de discurso funcional. Os resultados apontaram para três linhas de significados: um baixo interesse pelas ofertas do serviço; um apego saudosista, ligando os usuários ao serviço, e uma valorização do envolvimento com o grupo dos usuários. O valor dado à interação entre usuários auxiliou a aprofundar o entendimento das outras duas linhas de sentido, pois, sendo o consumo uma atividade ou um fenômeno essencialmente complexo, cultural e coletivo, ele serve aos participantes como meio de construção de si perante os espaços sociais que frequentam. Demonstramos, ao final, como os aspectos socioculturais, simbólicos e experienciais são essenciais para as relações de consumo e, conseqüentemente, para o estabelecimento de uma relação afetiva com a marca.

Palavras-chave: envolvimento do consumidor, SoundCloud, Consumer Culture Theory.

Resumen

Este estudio se apoyó en el enfoque de la Consumer Culture Theory y se propuso comprender cómo el consumidor revela su involucramiento con la plataforma SoundCloud durante el uso del servicio. A pesar del crecimiento del mercado brasileño de streaming, la plataforma presentó dificultades para monetizar su conjunto de ofertas, una condición atractiva para sus consumidores. Considerando que la plataforma enfatiza la interacción directa entre usuarios y creadores y que el involucramiento está moldeado por contextos culturales y nutrido por culturas de mercado, proponemos vincularlo con la experiencia de uso, materializada en los sentidos atribuidos al consumo cotidiano. A partir de un estudio cualitativo e interpretativista, realizamos 17 entrevistas con usuarios, basándonos en un análisis funcional del discurso. Los resultados señalaron tres líneas de significado: un bajo interés por las ofertas del servicio; un apego nostálgico que vincula a los usuarios con el servicio; y una valoración del involucramiento con el grupo de usuarios. El valor concedido a la interacción entre usuarios ayudó a profundizar la comprensión de las otras dos líneas de sentido, pues, dado que el consumo es una actividad o un fenómeno esencialmente complejo, cultural y colectivo, sirve a los participantes como medio para construirse a sí mismos ante los espacios sociales que frecuentan. Finalmente, demostramos cómo los aspectos socioculturales, simbólicos y experienciales son esenciales para las relaciones de consumo y, en consecuencia, para el establecimiento de una relación afectiva con la marca.

Palabras clave: involucramiento del consumidor, SoundCloud, Consumer Culture Theory.

Introduction

Music streaming platforms illustrate the profound transformations that consumption has undergone. As potentially attractive alternatives to traditional audio distribution services, they have played a decisive role in reorganizing the music economy. By accounting for 67% of the global recorded music industry, streaming services have restored the industry's profitability (Marchi & Figueiredo, 2024). Platforms centered on collaborative consumption practices, rather than consumer-oriented models, are on the rise, primarily because they foster independent and collaborative audio production and offer free or low-cost playback (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019; Kossmann et al., 2023).

Kossmann et al. (2023) report considerable growth in the Latin American streaming market. In Brazil, consumption increased by 37.1% in 2020 alone. In 2023, the country ranked ninth among the world's ten largest recorded music markets for the seventh time, outpacing global market growth (Agência Brasil, 2024). In 2024, Brazil accounted for 2.8% of the global market. Although no official SoundCloud-specific data are available for consumption in the country, such consumption is expected to continue growing through 2030 (Grand View Horizon, 2025).

According to Scatamburlo and Campos (2020), Brazil has approximately 30.8 million audio users, who consume an average of 12.9 billion minutes per month, equivalent to approximately 7 hours per person. SoundCloud accounted for 19.2% of this domestic market in 2025 (Wmtips, 2025). The platform is considered particularly relevant to the electronic music market (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019). Alberte (2024) found that 93.9% of the users and professionals interviewed in Brazil had used the platform. It is used predominantly by young men between 25 and 35 years of age who have higher education degrees and live in the country's Southeast region. SoundCloud stands apart from its competitors by enabling interactions among users and between users and creators. In addition to audio playback, the platform hosts remixes, backing tracks, podcasts, compilations, independent productions, and experimental content (Kossmann et al., 2023; Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019).

Although the platform distinguishes itself through the distribution of alternative music and offers a robust set of features valued by social media users (including reposting, liking, sharing, and commenting [Free Your Music, 2025]) this audience has increasingly abandoned the platform (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019). According to the authors, its business model relies on users' unpaid labor. Since adopting stricter copyright policies in 2017, the platform has sustained substantial losses, placed user accounts at risk of deletion, and laid off employees. Nevertheless, consumers appear to return to the platform, even as their interest remains divided among competing services.

These developments demonstrate that digital media provide opportunities to reflect on the relational changes brought about by new types of offerings. At the same time, they raise questions about consumer involvement, an important concept in the field of marketing (Menezes et al., 2021).

Within consumer culture theory (CCT), involvement is examined beyond the individual level and is understood as an element shaped by cultural contexts. CCT addresses consumer engagement, involvement, and experience (Hollebeek & Belk, 2021), investigating how consumers attribute meaning to products and use them to support their identity projects and lifestyles (Coelho & Tanan, 2022). Involvement is therefore understood as a dynamic, multidimensional phenomenon encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral subprocesses that remain underexplored and are connected to symbolic values (Menezes et al., 2021). More specifically, the strand of this approach that seeks to understand how consumers interpret, and sometimes subvert/internalize, messages originating from marketing may provide important insights into their attitudes and product use (Arnold et al., 2023).

This study therefore seeks to understand the involvement process by examining how users reveal it through their practices – i.e., how consumers evoke unexpected meanings and functional benefits. Involvement is commonly analyzed across different market segments. Menezes et al. (2021) suggest that observing the practices of a particular consumer culture can generate valuable insights and enrich the literature. Because consumer practices operate within regimes of value (Rohde & Lindberg, 2025), research highlights the creativity involved in sharing meanings associated with offerings, demonstrating how these experiences shape consumer interest and engagement while strengthening relationships among those involved (Kossmann et al., 2023).

Accordingly, recognizing that materiality and individuals are connected through functions and symbolic meanings enriches our understanding of consumption phenomena (Batinga, 2021; Senka & Vieira, 2023). Because engagement is a cultural, practical, symbolic phenomenon, studies of streaming platforms grounded in cultural and interpretive perspectives underscore its importance. Involvement is embedded in practices, narratives, and social contexts, emerging as consumption becomes intertwined with values, emotions, and personal projects. Therefore, when attention is directed toward the forms of investment users make in these services, involvement can be examined in terms of symbolic consumption (Whitehouse, 2023), identity (Oquifena et al., 2025), performance (Xia & Lin, 2025), relationships (Jacob, 2025), political and ideological dimensions (Jarrett, 2021), and market dynamics (Hracs & Janson, 2017). More specifically, Hollebeek and Belk (2021) demonstrate how technological platforms that facilitate interaction foster consumer involvement with brands. Chimenti et al. (2025) further emphasize that platforms are key drivers of the sharing economy.

Because SoundCloud provides an environment conducive to interaction and its users' involvement is distinctive (ephemeral and shared with competing platforms) it represents a particularly relevant case for analyzing consumer involvement based on what consumption practices reveal about this process.

Theoretical framework

Streaming platforms and SoundCloud

Technology has significantly affected the contemporary world. Within a capitalist model centered on the economic exploitation of data (Chimenti et al., 2025), the connected world has transformed labor relations, social practices, and democratic relations (Dijck et al., 2018). Digital technology has enabled new ways of producing, distributing, and sharing content while encouraging social interactions and community organization. From this perspective, these transformations have affected both management strategies and consumer behavior, creating challenges that require companies to adapt continuously, including overcoming barriers to consumer engagement (Sagar, 2024).

Moreover, recent years have transformed how music is marketed and consumed (Verboord, 2021). The recorded music industry's business model has invested in a "new music economy," in which the priority has shifted away from selling the object itself and toward the capacity of resources to create connections and valuable social contributions, with the aim of providing integrated music experiences with instant, cross-platform access (Morris & Powers, 2015, p. 4). Despite the importance of these transformations, the operating dynamics of alternative music markets remain underexplored. Streaming platforms form part of this network, providing a foundation for the organization of the independent music market (Collet & Remy, 2022).

However, some studies suggest that platforms have become infrastructures that both underpin and "control" market practices and that their usefulness depends on their interactive capabilities (Chimenti et al., 2025). The sharing economy (Kviat, 2021), the growing need for visibility and recognition (Campanella, 2023), and the possibilities afforded by connectivity (Verboord, 2021; Kozinets & Jenkins, 2021) have produced new forms of consumer involvement (Planells, 2015), which depend on prevailing regimes of value and the alignment of meanings associated with what is offered (Rohde & Lindeberg, 2025).

SoundCloud has grown in popularity since its launch in 2008, distinguishing itself by allowing users to publish content and act as independent creators and beneficiaries of the value produced (Kossmann et al., 2023). Music uploads on the platform are integrated with robust social media sharing tools (Free Your Music, 2025). Considered

one of the most important repositories supporting the cultural industry economy, the platform has become crucial to alternative creation (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019).

Unlike conventional streaming services, SoundCloud therefore fosters a strong sense of community, allowing emerging artists to share their work with potential consumers worldwide (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019). The platform hosts more than 320 million uncurated tracks, encompassing both professional and popular material, and is a leading platform for underground culture. It also provides access to exclusive tracks and a publishing channel for creators. However, increasingly stringent copyright restrictions have threatened its business model (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019). Under new management, the platform secured additional investment, but its future remained uncertain.

CCT and consumer involvement

The CCT approach offers an alternative means of understanding consumption phenomena from an interpretivist perspective, encompassing their “experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects” (Sampaio & Souza-Leão, 2025, p. 333).¹ According to the authors, CCT responds to the growing scholarly interest in contextual and critical aspects of marketing. The approach also addresses the dynamic nature of consumption relationships and the continually changing meanings involved in these relationships, some of which are produced through the use of products and services (Oliveira & Pinto, 2023).

In summary, CCT seeks to understand the sociocultural aspects of consumption (Farias et al., 2021). It also encompasses and legitimizes discussions of how materiality and individuals are connected through functions and symbolic meanings, thereby enriching the understanding of consumption phenomena (Coelho & Tanan, 2022; Hollebeek & Belk, 2021; Senka & Vieira, 2023). For example, CCT examines how goods shape identity construction and lifestyles and how they also possess agency within relational networks (Batinga, 2021). It further addresses how memories shape consumption rituals (Whitehouse, 2023) and how involvement is constructed (Hollebeek & Belk, 2021). As previously discussed, involvement can be dynamic, multidimensional, and shaped by cultural contexts (Menezes et al., 2021). Because involvement is produced through practices, the focus shifts from how much something matters to consumers to why and how it matters.

Research has provided holistic insights into involvement by linking it to consumer experiences (Thomas et al., 2025), perspectives, and priorities (Carlini, 2025), while identifying barriers such as distrust, powerlessness, and feelings of exclusion. The concept encompasses underexplored subprocesses and includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, in addition to being connected to symbolic values (Menezes et al., 2021). Involvement may also be collective. In relationships with streaming platforms, it can be observed through the investments consumers make and is strengthened when associated with identity-related, performative, relational, ideological, or market dimensions.

In this context, the digital environment has enabled new forms of involvement (Planells, 2015), although some studies have identified gaps in the frameworks underpinning the concept (Carlini, 2025). Recognizing involvement as a dynamic, culturally embedded phenomenon connected to identity construction, consumer experiences, and symbolic meanings prevents it from being reduced to the purchasing process. More specifically, the marketplace cultures stream within CCT may provide valuable insights into consumer attitudes (Arnould et al., 2023).

Methodological procedures

This qualitative study is grounded in interpretivism. Accordingly, we used two commonly applied data collection techniques: observation and interviews (Creswell, 2014).

The corpus comprised 17 open-ended interviews conducted through Google Meet, each lasting approximately 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded for subsequent transcription and to allow the research team to revisit observational features, such as participants' nonverbal behavior during the interactions, which constitutes an important component of communicative competence. Observations were documented in field notes. Data saturation served as the criterion for ending data collection and was reached when additional interviews and observations yielded thematic redundancy, with no meaningful new analytical categories relevant to the study objective. Representativeness in qualitative research, which focuses on the diversity and depth of experiences, was addressed through participant selection, with particular attention to participant diversity and the richness of the information obtained (Creswell, 2014).

For the interviews, we developed a planned topic guide structured around three central themes (Creswell, 2014): a) product, which explored how participants learned about the service, which features they used, and how they used them; b) consumer, which explored the importance participants attributed to the service and their motivations for using it; and c) culture, which examined how online consumption occurred, including relational aspects, behavioral norms, habits, and beliefs. The adoption of these themes was justified by the objective of understanding involvement in relational terms, as a meaningful and culturally situated practice (Arnould et al., 2023).

Participants were randomly selected from among individuals who self-identified and/or were identified as regular users of the platform. We initially invited several participants located through their public SoundCloud profiles and

¹ For the purposes of this article, all direct quotations from the original sources have been translated into English.

subsequently used snowball sampling to recruit the remaining participants (Godoi & Mattos, 2006). All participants received information about the study and provided written authorization for the use and dissemination of their data. The group was diverse and included both professional and recreational user profiles.

We conducted functional discourse analysis (Gill, 2002), a tradition influenced by speech act theory. This theory holds that language does not merely describe the world; it also enables people to perform actions through words. If speaking is a form of action, it is also a political act. Functional discourse analysis therefore seeks to uncover the purposes and intentions that narratives fulfill within their discursive contexts, as it views language as constitutive of social reality.

The analysis followed the three basic stages of a qualitative research strategy: a) data preparation and organization; b) thematic data reduction through the creation and condensation of codes; and c) data representation in the discussion (Creswell, 2014). In the first stage, we constructed and organized the corpus through the systematic selection of participants. As participants were selected, we assessed their diversity and expanded the corpus accordingly (Creswell, 2014). In the second stage, we categorized data, analyzed the excerpts according to their discursive functions, and interpreted the strands of meaning that addressed our research question by examining the relationships between categories and functions. Because the 11 categories emerged from data, they are presented in the following section.

Results and Discussion

After coding the data, we found that the 11 categories could be organized according to the three macrofactors that affect consumer involvement: situational, physical, and personal (Fonseca & Rossi, 1998). The personal factor concerns motivation arising from interests, values, or needs; the physical factor concerns characteristics of the object that may increase consumer interest; and the situational factor represents the temporary nature of this increased interest.

The categories encompassed the following factors: i) situational: innovation, publicity, and free access; ii) personal: entertainment, socialization, and professional feedback; and iii) physical: versatility, personalization, functionality, smart technology, storage, and distribution. These categories were interrelated within the discursive field, affecting and reinforcing one another and emerging as either causes or consequences of one another (Chart 1).

Chart 1:

Analytical categories: grouping of the units of meaning identified in the corpus

	Category	Description
Situational factor or temporary nature of interest	Innovation	Concerns users' ongoing desire to try new offerings and adopt the consumption behavior of their group.
	Publicity	Refers to users' desire for greater promotion of the platform so that their participation would also receive greater visibility.
	Free access	Concerns the free and unlimited availability of some of the platform's features.
Personal factor or motivation	Socialization	Encompasses the importance attributed to interaction, including exchanging information, recommending playlists, and sharing content.
	Professional feedback	Concerns users' feedback and opinions regarding artists' musical productions. It refers both to the professional reassurance obtained by having a production evaluated by a group before its release and to the artist's own promotion, both of which are facilitated by the platform.
	Entertainment	Concerns listening to music as the primary purpose for using the platform.
Physical factor or object characteristic	Versatility	Concerns the value attributed to the application's ability to perform different functions, including downloading content for offline use, mixing content, sharing, following others, and interacting with them.
	Personalization	Concerns the options for customizing profiles on the platform.
	Functionality	Encompasses easy access to relevant content and the intuitive use of most features, partly because of the platform's layout.
	Smart technology	Refers to the platform's ability to intelligently process data generated by users' actions and use this information to recommend similar or potentially relevant content.
	Storage and distribution	Concerns the democratic means of storing and distributing content provided by the platform, as well as the security of this storage, which helps preserve a collection of rare material.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Because speaking is a form of social action and is therefore guided by situated purposes (Gill, 2002), the statements were analyzed within their discursive contexts based on the following analytical question: What action

does the participant perform by saying this, in this context and in this manner? This question allowed us to identify the discursive function of each statement (Chart 2).

Chart 2:

Discursive functions: actions situated within speech contexts

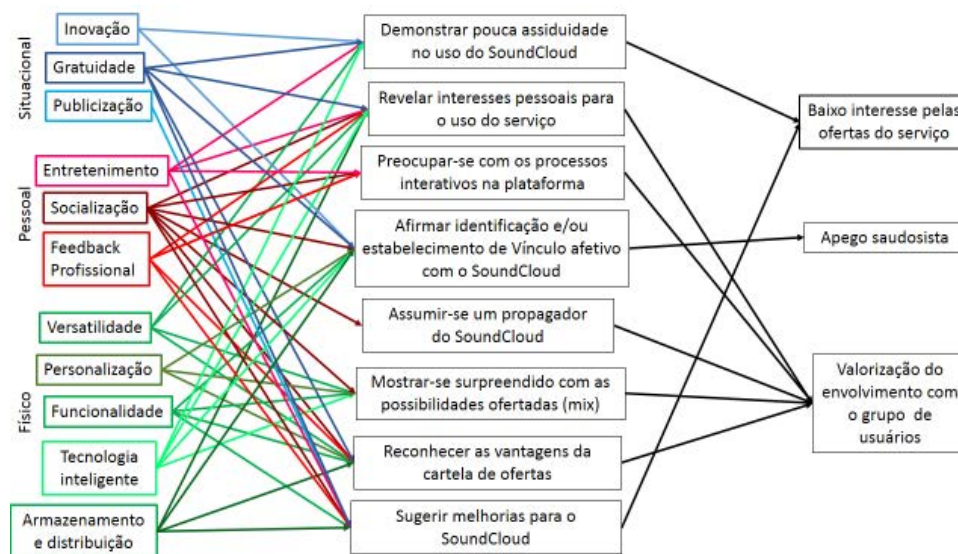
Functions	Description
Revealing personal interests in using the service	Seeks to explain how the service accommodates the participant's preferences and needs, including content production, musical tastes, a network of friends who use the platform, free access, and the storage of old, emotionally significant, and/or rare material.
Expressing surprise at the range of options offered (mix)	Seeks to convey a sense of delight with the service's features, including automatic playback and content recommendations based on the user's profile.
Expressing identification with and/or an emotional bond with SoundCloud	Seeks to demonstrate identification, trust, and a certain degree of attachment to the service, whether because it provided the participant's first digital experience, continues to store their work, or offers a layout and functionality they appreciate.
Assuming the role of a SoundCloud promoter	Seeks to repeatedly promote the benefits of using SoundCloud because the platform enables users to share their tastes, preferences, and interests with their peers.
Demonstrating infrequent SoundCloud use	Seeks to demonstrate a weak relationship with the service, either because the participant enjoys trying new offerings and is interested in new alternatives or because they were disappointed with the platform's range of offerings.
Recognizing the advantages of the range of offerings	Seeks to reiterate the benefits of the available features, including opportunities for interaction and connection among users, automatic playback functionality, an ad-free experience, ease of use, and options for sharing and remixing content.
Suggesting improvements to SoundCloud	Expresses a degree of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the platform, such as the belief that its layout should be updated, file formats should be standardized, and the brand should invest more in advertising because attracting additional users would benefit everyone.
Expressing concern about interactive processes on the platform	Seeks to demonstrate that interaction among users is relevant to everyone, although the desire to express opinions about others' work is accompanied by a fear of criticism. Sociality is simultaneously facilitated and threatened, and cyberbullying is also present.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The next stage sought to establish relationships between the categories and functions to produce interpretive meanings (Figure 1). Our analysis of these relationships revealed three strands of meaning that reflect consumer involvement with the SoundCloud platform through use of the service (Chart 3).

Figure 1:

Relationship between categories and functions



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Chart 3:*Strands of meaning*

Strand of meaning	Description
Limited interest in the service's offerings	We observed limited consumer interest in the service despite participants' recognition of its benefits. Part of this lack of interest was associated with a latent desire to try new market offerings, following the behavior of most users.
Nostalgic attachment	We observed the importance of goods in constructing social spaces, particularly attachment to objects and the relationship between memory and the service.
Involvement among users	The experience occurs "with" and "within" the collective. This strand reveals the relational culture of virtual networks: the desire to see and be seen, exchange experiences, and maintain real-time contact.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The relationships are presented below according to their functions, with illustrative examples.

Demonstrating infrequent use of SoundCloud

This function was associated with the strand of meaning concerning limited interest in the service's offerings. It was most clearly reflected in the personal factor (i.e., entertainment) and, to a lesser extent, in physical factors such as versatility and smart technology. The platform's versatility was mentioned as a feature participants remembered using, while entertainment was associated with an appreciation of smart technology because this feature allows music to continue playing while users perform everyday tasks.

This function emerged primarily from the innovation category and was associated with the function of expressing surprise at the range of options offered. This idea encompassed an interest in trying new offerings, described as "jumping on the latest trend," which led participants to experiment with and adopt competing platforms. Participants demonstrated limited knowledge of the service's offerings and/or reported using it only occasionally.

The following excerpt is associated with temporary involvement because the consumer's intention is aligned with the meanings inherent in novelty and innovation. This form of innovation is characterized by the rapid technological changes typical of contemporary society, which shorten the lifespan of objects and cause them to become rapidly outdated and replaced. This process characterizes the function of demonstrating infrequent SoundCloud use.

R1.1 – Actually, I don't think it's that great. While I do find it interesting, when Spotify, Deezer, and other services emerged, I no longer felt inclined to go back there.

Before making this statement, the participant explained that they had initially used the platform more frequently as a means of promoting their work. However, "when Spotify, Deezer, and other services emerged, I no longer felt inclined to go back there." The participant added that they found the platform merely interesting, indicating limited involvement. This lack of interest was not attributed to any failure in service delivery but was associated with a shifting and ephemeral pattern of consumption in which consumers follow other users and continually seek novelty.

Because involvement can be temporary and collective (Hollebeek & Belk, 2021), the search for novelty can be understood through the operating logic of platforms themselves: ideas and trends spread rapidly, demonstrating how technologies have become embedded in consumption practices (Verboord, 2021).

Revealing personal interests in using the service

This function appeared most frequently in the discursive field and was only weakly associated with the situational factor. Free access appealed to several users: for professional users, it enabled broader promotion of their work, while for other users, it represented an important incentive to adopt the service. This function appeared across all dimensions of the personal factor and in three dimensions of the physical factor: storage and distribution, versatility, and smart technology.

When associated with socialization, this function concerned sharing albums or music selections, making friends, and learning about culture. Participants stated that they shared music to delight and connect with others, demonstrating how goods are fundamental to human socialization (Batinga, 2021) and can support identity projects and lifestyles. Individuals thus connect through functions and symbolic meanings (Senka & Vieira, 2023), while connectivity becomes more important than previous markers of distinction (Verboord, 2021).

In relation to both socialization and professional feedback, sharing was understood as an opportunity to promote creative work, mutually reinforcing the importance of free access as a facilitating factor. In professional use, storage and distribution highlighted the platform's importance for research, including searching for artists and discovering new

sounds or “treasures” unavailable through other media. SoundCloud therefore helps sustain underground culture by democratizing the ecosystem and providing space for experimentation (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019).

The service’s versatility, which allows users to save music and listen to it anywhere and at any time, and its smart technology features were both described as relevant. These aspects affect professional feedback and entertainment by improving quality and convenience. Because this function was most frequently associated with personal factors, particularly socialization, we understood these relationships as reflecting appreciation of involvement with the user community.

The following excerpt illustrates the free access category and the function of revealing personal interests in using the service, associated with appreciation of involvement with the user community:

R4.2c – So, from the perspective of convenience and not having to pay, I went there and saw it as a way to keep my work in the cloud and share it more easily on social media.

Physical and situational factors were identified as facilitating sharing, demonstrating the priority attributed to creating connections and contributions among group members as both creators and beneficiaries of the value produced. Within this context, seeing, being seen, and receiving recognition are prioritized (Verboord, 2021; Kossmann et al., 2023; Kozinets & Jenkins, 2021; Kviat, 2021).

Expressing concern about interactive processes on the platform

This function revealed a latent desire to interact, sometimes accompanied by a fear of exposure to hurtful comments. It was associated with three personal factors: a) professional feedback, which involved concern about visibility (Campanella, 2023; Verboord, 2021; Kviat, 2021), because the platform provides a means of presenting creative work to a smaller audience, receiving feedback, and subsequently releasing it to the broader public. Creators expect the platform to serve as the initial channel for promoting their work, generating engagement and sharing; b) socialization, because users enjoy collaborating and hope to contribute to the process, follow others, gain followers, and form friendships based on shared tastes; and c) entertainment, because users have fun on the platform, and this experience is crucial to involvement (Carlini et al., 2025; Thomas et al., 2025).

Importantly, the digital environment exposes users to hurtful comments, directly affecting the socialization and professional feedback categories. Because expressing concern about interactive processes on the platform places value on interaction and is associated with personal-factor categories, this function also refers to the strand of meaning concerning appreciation of involvement with the user community.

The following excerpt illustrates the professional feedback category, associated with the function of expressing concern about interactive processes on the platform and the meaning of appreciation of involvement with the user community. This relationship reflects creators’ desire to develop interactions with their peers while gaining visibility for themselves and their work:

R7.19 – I’d like people to give their opinions when I share something of mine – about the sound, like, “Oh, you need to improve the sound,” and also about the quality of what I posted there, you know? If someone could offer constructive criticism, like, “Look, you can improve this [...]” – that would be perfect for me.

The excerpt demonstrates the importance attributed to interactive exchanges, which form part of a cultural phenomenon that naturally involves the socialization of experiences (Batinga, 2021; Menezes et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2025). In this case, this socialization is manifested as a desire for professional success. Because consumer culture is constituted through the production of a dynamic system of meanings (Senka & Vieira, 2023) and operates according to regimes of value (Rohde & Lindberg, 2025), it affects involvement.

Expressing identification with and/or an emotional bond with SoundCloud

This function was associated with two situational categories (free access and innovation) the personal category of socialization, and the physical categories of storage and distribution, personalization, smart technology, and functionality. Free access was relevant to users’ identification with the service but did not appear sufficient to establish a broader process of involvement.

Innovation, in turn, emerged as a feeling of nostalgic attachment to the service. This attachment may have developed because SoundCloud was the first such service participants encountered, through which they acquired expertise in navigating the digital environment, or because it was the first platform on which they publicly shared their creative work, which they enjoyed revisiting and preserving. During observation, we noted how much participants enjoyed recounting these early experiences. Regarding socialization, creators viewed SoundCloud as the first channel that enabled them to socialize their creative processes and establish their professional careers. Other users, in turn, felt welcomed by the community and enjoyed interacting with it.

Among the categories comprising the physical factor, storage and distribution concerned the sense of security users associated with storing and preserving personal files on the platform. Functionality concerned the platform’s

colors and visual arrangement, which users considered attractive, particularly because albums could be personalized with cover images that they valued and associated with positive memories. Finally, smart technology also supported identification and generated a feeling of attachment, both through the convenience of playlist recommendations and by eliminating the need to change tracks manually during use. These connections refer to an appreciation of the service's pioneering nature, which we termed nostalgic attachment.

The following excerpt illustrates the free access category and serves the function of expressing identification with and/or an emotional bond with SoundCloud. It therefore leads to the meaning of nostalgic attachment. Involvement encompasses attachment, an emotional bond constructed with the service:

R8.16 At first, when I started using it, it really was because there weren't any other streaming services that offered everything SoundCloud did, you know? Access to free music.

The participant stated that they used the service while exercising, studying, and meditating. When describing the experience, they explained that it provided a feeling "[...] of traveling because I leave wherever I am. If I'm meditating at home, I leave my home and feel as though I'm sometimes in a field surrounded by flowers. It's surreal!" The relationship with the service therefore evokes positive memories. In the accelerated digital era, Whitehouse (2023) examines how nostalgic memories shape consumers' relationships with materiality and their consumption practices and rituals. Nostalgia may draw on shared understandings and memories, personal recollections, and sociocultural practices, while also providing a foundation for life narratives.

Assuming the role of a SoundCloud promoter

This function appeared least frequently in the discursive relationships and was associated with the socialization category. Participants promoted the platform's benefits to encourage more people to adopt the service. From this perspective, we identified the prosumer work described by Kviat (2021), which involves sharing the application, explaining how to download and use it, and promoting its advantages. This strand of meaning consequently highlights the importance of involvement with the user community.

The following excerpt illustrates the socialization category, whose function is assuming the role of a SoundCloud promoter. Immersed in a participatory culture, consumers are encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions to become visible and integrated into the network:

R2.19 I listen to the music and share it with other people through WhatsApp, that's all. Someone says they liked it, asks for the name, and asks, "Oh, how do I download this app?" Then I explain everything. Afterward, people always tell me, "Oh, I liked it! I'm really enjoying it. This app is great!"

By stating that they "listen to the music and share it with other people through WhatsApp," the participant assumed the role of a SoundCloud promoter. We documented the participant's enthusiasm for promoting the platform in our field notes. The level of interest appeared to correspond to the degree of identification and attachment. Consumers therefore appear more involved when they actively participate, produce and/or discover content, and share it. Such involvement is a crucial component of digital connectivity and a means of discovering and producing culture (Verboord, 2021). However, the platform's promotion of sociability is not neutral because it influences the behavior of those involved and collects and analyzes their behavioral traces (Chimenti et al., 2025).

Displaying surprise at the possibilities offered

This function was mostly assigned to categories linked to the physical factor: smart technology, functionality, versatility, and personalization. It also emerged in connection with the socialization category, indicating how the user values, seeks out, and is surprised by the interactive possibilities offered, such as: ease of use (functionality); not needing internet access to reach their preferences (versatility); personalization of their profiles and albums, as well as the smart technology applied to music selection and the use of the mobile device for other purposes while simultaneously using the service.

Despite being surprised by the range of offerings, participants showed a fickle pattern of adherence to the novelties of competing services. In addition, they reported valuing participation in the community, which points to the valorization of engagement with the user group.

The following excerpt illustrates how the smart technology category was linked to the function of displaying surprise at the possibilities offered, leading to the valorization of engagement with the user group. The producer states:

E14.17 I started listening to a lot more artists I didn't know, partly because of the way SoundCloud delivers, you know?

He attributes meaning to the service as "an easy way to reach the listener, whereas other streaming platforms sometimes, due to copyright issues, cut a portion of a song, thereby preventing the user/producer from reaching their listener." According to him, SoundCloud is freer. In our observation, we noted that the interviewee paused reflectively and subsequently showed conviction in his answer.

In summary, we can see that engagement rooted in a taste for novelty led the respondent to display surprise at the possibilities offered “because of the way it delivers,” increasing the dissemination of his productions, which points to the line of meaning: valorization of engagement with the user group. On social media, consumers commonly position themselves by sharing their habits and lifestyles (Collet & Remy, 2022), as well as their productions, which must pass through the scrutiny of others (Campanella, 2023). Moreover, they produce popular culture (Kozinets & Jenkins, 2021), in an environment conducive to experimentation (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019). Therefore, sharing shapes engagement (Kossmann et al., 2023).

Recognizing the advantages of the range of offerings

In addition to being linked to a situational category – namely, free access – this function was linked to two personal categories, socialization and professional feedback, and to four physical categories: versatility, personalization, functionality, and storage and distribution.

Free access was of limited significance, praised as a distinguishing feature of the platform and tied to the physical aspect of the offering – versatility – for not displaying advertisements. Personalization and storage and distribution, in turn, were of limited representativeness. Furthermore, the most widely recognized physical factors were versatility and functionality: the former for favoring musical mixing by another producer, tracking access (visibility), enabling interaction (sociability), and allowing the listening of exclusive musical styles; the latter for addressing the recognized advantage of the user-friendly interface and ease of handling, factors that promote engagement (Carlini, 2025; Planells, 2015; Thomas et al., 2025).

With the same intensity of value as versatility and functionality, categories related to personal aspects emerged: professional feedback and socialization. Users recognize as advantages: the feedback received by those producing content (professional feedback), the possibility of commenting on these productions, as well as the relationship with producers and other users (socialization), which even results in friendships and comparisons with social networks. Since the importance of giving one's opinion appears to be as relevant as receiving feedback, and that the advantages of the physical aspect are consistent with improved conditions for personal categories to occur, this line of meaning led us to the valorization of engagement with the user group. This corroborates the platform's distinguishing features, as indicated by Hesmondhalgh et al. (2019), demonstrating the benefits of the values produced there (Kossmann et al., 2023; Verboord, 2021).

The following excerpt illustrates the relationship between the free-access category, the function of recognizing the advantages of the range of services, and the meaning of valorization of engagement with the user group.

R5.10 Because back then it didn't exist, right? Neither Deezer nor Spotify, and, nowadays, if you look at SoundCloud, it's an easier tool than Spotify and Deezer themselves, because it's completely free, right? You can put your songs there and promote them. With Spotify, there's a certain bureaucracy and you have to have a financial relationship with these platforms; with SoundCloud, as far as I know, there isn't that, let's say, that financial commitment for you to be associated with the platform.

Suggesting improvements for SoundCloud

This function was linked to categories related to physical aspects, but it also reflected conditions relating to personal and situational factors. Regarding functionality and free access, more frequent updates and a wider range of musical offerings in the free mode appear to be directly tied to both the quality of entertainment and innovation.

Regarding storage and distribution, it is suggested that the service standardize the format of posted productions – i.e., maintain a standard for sound level – which is directly linked to a personal factor, comfort of use: entertainment. However, this function was also linked to the issue of publicization, a situational factor, in which greater promotion of the platform is suggested, and, consequently, the attraction of a larger number of users. This issue is tied to the personal interest in socialization and professional feedback, since greater interaction on the platform reflects the culture of the virtual social space itself: an existence dependent on visibility (Campanella, 2023).

The following excerpt demonstrates how the functionality category was linked to the function of suggesting improvements for SoundCloud. This reveals a low level of interest in the service's offerings, given the belief that the service lacks quality standards to certify the innovative properties of the material available there:

R3.7a I believe that, today, it could improve the layout further. I said before that the layout in 2010, 2011 was nice, but, in my view, it hasn't evolved much and hasn't kept up with the changes other media have been making, such as Instagram and YouTube, which release major updates every 6 months. I think it stopped – the layout froze in time.

Despite the platform's usefulness in terms of offering diversified catalogs and interactive, shareable features (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019), drivers of the sharing economy (Chimenti et al., 2025), the consumer wishes it would stay aesthetically updated (layout), keeping pace with social media trends. This condition points to the issue of recognition, which depends on simultaneous visibility on social media (Campanella, 2023). After all, updating in line with other networks fosters interest and ensures greater connectivity.

Conclusions

The digital environment has shaped modes of consumption and engagement. Thus, the aim was to understand how consumers reveal their consumption practices on the SoundCloud platform. Recognizing the advantages of the range of offerings and revealing personal interests for using the service were the functions that maintained the largest number of relationships within the discursive field, linking to several categories and associating with issues of socialization and professional feedback. It is concluded that users engage with the service to the extent that it meets their personal interests; they work for the platform, but they demand improvements.

Consumers' greatest interest appeared to be connectivity, in which the possibility of participating generated engagement. Although this is the greatest advantage of this service offering, with intensifying competition and, certainly, with the limitations generated by copyright policies, the platform has become, for many, an alternative use – whether to retrieve some material or to search for rare material not available through other means. Others demonstrated nostalgic attachment or worked to promote the service. We found that the platform's usefulness extends to all aspects that challenge its capacity to provide interaction among the network's actors. In this context, consumers demanded updates to the service.

As we anticipated, the responsibility for visibility belongs to all members of the network; it is part of contemporary subjectivities. Likewise, engaging and promoting values – actions associated with self-representation and sociability – is everyone's duty. As networked, connected life seems to be a condition with no turning back, and platforms manage regimes of visibility and are, moreover, easily adaptable to change, since their assets are code, we corroborate the view that social relations, impregnated by neoliberal logic, can lead to the "emptying out of the social."

Our research contributes to the advancement of knowledge on engagement, insofar as it reaffirms that engagement does not depend on purchase motivation but rather primarily involves consumer interests, such as connectivity and visibility. By identifying these dimensions as central to engagement with the streaming service, we contribute to CCT, shifting its understanding toward a relational and sociotechnical approach.

The value of streaming seems to go beyond the consumption of content itself, taking shape as a cultural practice that mediates social bonds and symbolic belonging. From a managerial standpoint, the findings suggest that competitive strategies for the sector should prioritize features that intensify connectivity among agents. Shared experiences tend to strengthen engagement and increase consumer audience retention. In this sense, engaged consumers produce positive impacts for themselves, for the group, and for the market.

The limitations of this research lie both in its focus on a single streaming platform and in the location of the interviewees. Future studies could draw on focus-group-type research, bringing new understandings and exchanges of experience. Finally, we envision that conducting netnographic research can help in understanding the dynamics of the practices of subjects who share in cyberculture.

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