Consumer analysis of WeChat Reading and NetEase Snail Reading

Name: GuoQian
Student ID:1155097109

Introduction

With the development of digital technology, reading gradually shifted from paper books to digital reading and from publications to mobile terminals. In April 2017, China Digital Reading Conference was hold in Hangzhou. During the conference, amazing data showed that in 2016, China's digital reading users exceeded 300 million, and China's digital reading market has reached 12 billion RMB. Young people becoming the main body of digital reading.

In this growing prosperous market, we can find hundreds of APPs or products that provide digital reading sources to users. For example, iReader, Kindle, eBook reader, and so on. However, WeChat Reading and NetEase Snail Reading is different from others. They are digital reading products of a new generation because they offer different user experience, which makes up their main feature in this market.

WeChat Reading is a digital reading product developed by Tencent. The slogan of this product is *Make reading no longer lonely.* As a reading application, its biggest feature is the integration of social relationships and reading. It provides well-designed reading experience, and users can find high-quality books and exchange reading feelings with their friend, in addition to that, users can complete with their friends on the time they spend on readings.

NetEase Snail Reading is developed by NetEase, whose slogan is *Free reading for an hour everyday.* It encourages users to use limited time and harvest unlimited value. Reading leader is a unique mechanism for this product, they will lead the users to read and recommend high-quality books for users.

The purpose of comparing this two product is to discover whether the innovative products among similar products can meet needs and fulfill the expectation of user.

MAAM analysis for both products

Define the evaluation criteria

An online group was established in order to find the evaluation criteria. The group was consisting of five users who have digital reading experience and often reading on mobile terminal on relatively frequent frequency. They discussed for about 15 minutes in a WeChat group about what kind of attributes they will take into consideration when they chose a reading product.

The result of discussion has been recorded. After summarizing and classifying, 11 criteria were defined:

- Category of books
- Quality of books
- Price of books
- Reading experience
- Interaction with friends
- Operation experience
- Incentive mechanism
- Sharing mechanism
- Update speed
- UGC quality
- Book recommendation mechanism

These eleven attributes cover the following aspects:

1. Category of books: Does the product provide variable books?

2. Quality of books: Does the product provide high-quality books?

3. Price of books: Whether the price of books in the product is reasonable?

4. Reading experience: Does the product provide a good reading experience? For example,

comfortable interface.

5. Interaction with friends: Does the product provide a platform for users to interact with friends? for example, leaving comments or sending books as presents to each other.

6. Operation experience: Does the operation on the application smooth and simple?

7. Incentive mechanism: Does the product provide a good incentive mechanism? For example, reward free reading hours, rank the time of reading.

8. Sharing mechanism: Does the product provide a good sharing mechanism for users to share their questions and comments?

9. Update speed: Does the product update new books in time?

10. UGC quality: Does the product has high-quality content of other users' comments or book reviews?

11. Book recommendation mechanism: Does the product provide a good book recommendation mechanism that you can always meet books you like?

Data collection

In order to accomplish the research, the survey approach was adopted. Online questionnaire was made on the online survey site (https://www.wjx.cn). The questionnaire was first pretested of five users and made some modifications according to their feedback. The final version of questionnaire covers the following areas:

1. What kind of digital reading product or applications they have ever used?

2. How important is those eleven attributes to the users when they choose a digital reading product?

3. The frequency of their usage;

4. Their attitude toward WeChat Reading and NetEase Snail Reading;

There are 85 digital reading users were investigated. The profile in terms of gender, age and education is depicted in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of questioned users

Demographic variable	
1. Gender(%)	
a. Male	39.29%
b. Female	61.71%
2. Age(%)	
a. 0-18	3.57%
b. 19-24	84.52%
c. 25-30	11.90%
d. 30-36	0.00%
e. 37 and above	0.00%
3. Education(%)	
a. High school and below	3.57%
b. College	9.52%
c. Undergraduate	51.19%
d. Master and above	35.71%

As it is shown in the Table 1, female is about 22% more than male, and the majority of them were in the 19-24 age group. Over 86% of subjects were well-educated users who have got bachelor degree or above.

Table 2 The frequency of consumers' use of digital reading products

Frequency	Number of people	Percentage
Almost use every day	12	14.63%
4 or 5 times a week	14	17.07%
2 or 3 times a week	25	30.49%
Once a week	9	10.98%
2 or 3 times a month	5	6.1%
Once a month	6	7.32%
Less than once a month	11	13.41%

And in the Table 2, it can be seen that the using frequency of digital reading applications is quite different, over 30% users use 2 or 3 times a week, only 14.63% of users use every day and there are 13.41% of users use less than once a month.

MAAM analysis

Users being investigated gave their opinions on how important each attribute is to themselves when they choose a digital reading products. The survey is done by five point likert scale, "1" for very unimportant and "5" for very important. The outcome is in Table 3.

Table 3　How important each attribute is to the individual

Attributes	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Category of books	4.76%	0%	14.29%	27.38%	53.57%	4.25
Quality of books	2.38%	2.38%	19.05%	19.05%	57.14%	4.26
Price of books	1.19%	4.76%	32.14%	27.38%	34.52%	3.89
Reading experience	0%	0%	16.67%	22.62%	60.71%	4.44
Interaction with friends	17.86%	21.43%	29.76%	20.24%	10.71%	2.85
Operation experience	0%	3.57%	15.48%	35.71%	45.24%	4.23
Incentive mechanism	5.95%	15.48%	22.62%	27.38%	28.57%	3.57
Sharing mechanism	9.52%	14.29%	30.95%	29.76%	15.48%	3.27
Update speed	3.57%	2.38%	21.43%	32.14%	40.48%	4.04
UGC quality	3.57%	7.14%	27.38%	38.10%	23.81%	3.71
Book recommendation mechanism	5.95%	9.52%	17.86%	38.10%	28.57%	3.74

According to the result, it can be seen that the top 6 attributes that users value is "Reading experience" (4.44/5), "Quality of books" (4.26/5), "Category of books" (4.25/5), "Operation experience" (4.23/5), "Update speed" (4.04/5) and "Price of books" (3.87/5). However, the top 5 attributes that users think it is not important is "Interaction with friends" (2.85/5), "Sharing mechanism" (3.27/5), "Incentive mechanism" (3.57/5), "UGC quality" (3.71/5) and "Book recommendation mechanism" (3.74/5).

Then, the questionnaire collected the attitude that users hold toward WeChat Reading and NetEase Snail Reading on those eleven attributes respectively. The result is showed in Table 4.

Table 4 Overall brand attitude toward two products

Attributes	Importance	WeChat Reading score	NetEase Snail Reading score	WeChat Reading attribute score	NetEase Snail Reading attribute score
Category of books	4.25	3.97	3.77	16.87	16.02
Quality of books	4.26	3.79	3.55	16.15	15.12
Price of books	3.89	3.71	3.77	14.43	14.67
Reading experience	4.44	4.16	3.91	18.47	17.36
Interaction with friends	2.85	3.95	3.73	11.26	10.63
Operation experience	4.23	4.11	3.91	17.39	16.54
Incentive mechanism	3.57	3.92	3.91	13.99	13.96
Sharing mechanism	3.27	3.97	3.68	12.98	12.03
Update speed	4.04	3.58	3.73	14.46	15.07
UGC quality	3.71	3.47	3.77	12.87	13.99
Book recommendation mechanism	3.74	3.61	3.68	13.50	13.76
Average	**3.84**	**3.84**	**3.76**	**162.38**	**159.15**

Conclusion and discussion

As it can be seen in the Table 4, both applications fail to fulfill the consumer attitudes on important attributes like "Reading experience", "Quality of books", "Category of books", "Operation experience", "Update speed" and "Price of books".

However, for the top 4 important attributes, WeChat Reading behaves better than NetEase Snail Reading: 0.25 point higher on "Reading experience", 0.22 point higher on "Quality of

books", 0.2 point higher on "Operation experience" and 0.2 point higher on "Category of books". For the other two important criteria, NetEase Snail Reading shows a better performance than WeChat Reading: 0.15 point higher on "Update speed" and 0.06 point higher on "Price of books".

The unexpected result is both two applications exceed users' attitude on the top 3 unimportant attributes. WeChat Reading and NetEase Snail Reading get 1.1 and 0.88 point higher on "Interaction with friends" than user attitude respectively. On "Sharing mechanism", WeChat Reading is 0.7 point higher than user attitude when NetEase Snail Reading is 0.41 point higher. And for "Incentive mechanism", they get 0.35 and 0.34 point higher respectively.

As for the unimportant attributes "Book recommendation mechanism", both two applications have a little bit distance with the users' expectations. However, about the "UGC quality", NetEase Snail Reading defeats WeChat Reading and even 0.06 point higher than user attitude when its' competitor get 0.3 point lower than it.

Overall, WeChat Reading gets an attribute score of 162.38 and NetEase Snail Reading gets 159.15. The difference between the two products in the overall performance is not too big but they have subtle and interesting differences on each attributes. As a social-type reading products, WeChat Reading gets high score on "Interaction with friends" and "Sharing mechanism" and the "reading leader" of NetEase Snail Reading helps it get a relatively higher score on the "UGC quality".

Recommendation

Based on the MAAM analysis, unfortunately, both two applications got a regrettable evaluation on all the important attributes, which means that they ignore the users' most essential needs when they try hard to build their own product characteristics. It is undeniable that products need to be differentiated in a Red Sea market, but attend to trifles and neglect the essentials will lead the product to a wrong path. The most important thing for these two products is to make every effort to improve the variety and quality of book resources, and enhance users' reading experience in order to fulfill users' expectation of a good digital reading product.

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