Spotify

Sheena, Saharnaz, Kasra

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Spotify Background

📌 **Overview:**

- **Founded:**
  Sweden in 2006

- **Users:**
  675M+ (263M Premium) in
  180+ markets

- **Content Library:**
  100M+ songs, 6.5M
  podcasts, 350K audiobooks

- **Student offer:**
  Spotify Premium with Hulu
  (With Ads) for $5.99/month

🚀 **Key functions:**

- **Music & Podcasts**
  (Free & Premium)

- **Audiobooks**
  (Premium Only)

- **Social features:**
  Wrapped, Jam, Blend
  (Free & Premium)

📱 **Listen on:**

- **Devices:**
  Android, iOS, PC, Windows,
  Samsung, LG, Roku

- **Smart Speakers:**
  Sonos, Alexa, Google Nest

- **Gaming Consoles:**
  PlayStation, Xbox

Target Users

Gender Distribution
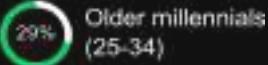
56% Female
44% Male

Source

Age Group

26% Gen Z (18-24)

29% Older millennials (25-34)

16% Gen X (35-44)
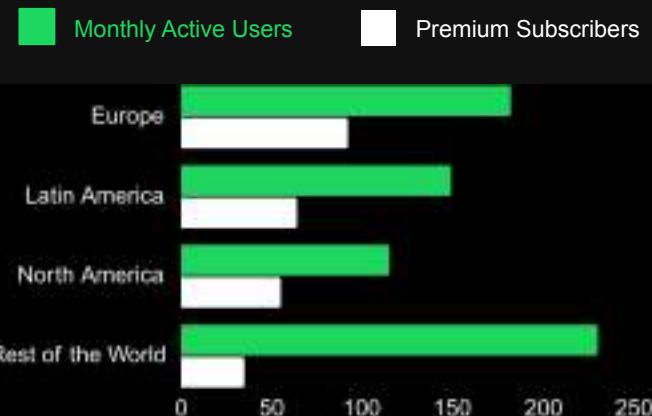
11% Late Gen X (45-54)

19% Boomers+ (55+)

Source

Monthly Active Users & Premium Subscribers by Region

■ Monthly Active Users   □ Premium Subscribers

Source #1 Source #2

Competitors

Apple Music

- **Founded:**
  California in 2015

- **Users:**
  93M in 160+ markets

- **Content Library:**
  100M+ songs, 30K+ playlists, and exclusive shows, concerts, and artist-hosted radio.

- **Student offer:**
  Apple Music and Apple TV+ for $5.99/month

Amazon Music

- **Founded:**
  Washington in 2014

- **Users:**
  80M+ (32M Subscribers) in 50 markets

- **Content Library:**
  100M+ songs, the largest catalog of ad-free top podcasts.

- **Student offer:**
  Amazon Music unlimited for $5.99/month

YouTube Music

- **Founded:**
  California in 2015

- **Users:**
  100M Premium subscribers in 100+ markets

- **Content Library:**
  100M+ songs, many podcasts, live performances, remixes, music videos, and more.

- **Student offer:**
  YouTube and YouTube Music for $7.99/month

Top Challenges

Business Challenges:

- Improve personalization and discovery.

- Keep increasing premium conversion and retain paid users.

- Leverage social features to drive loyalty.
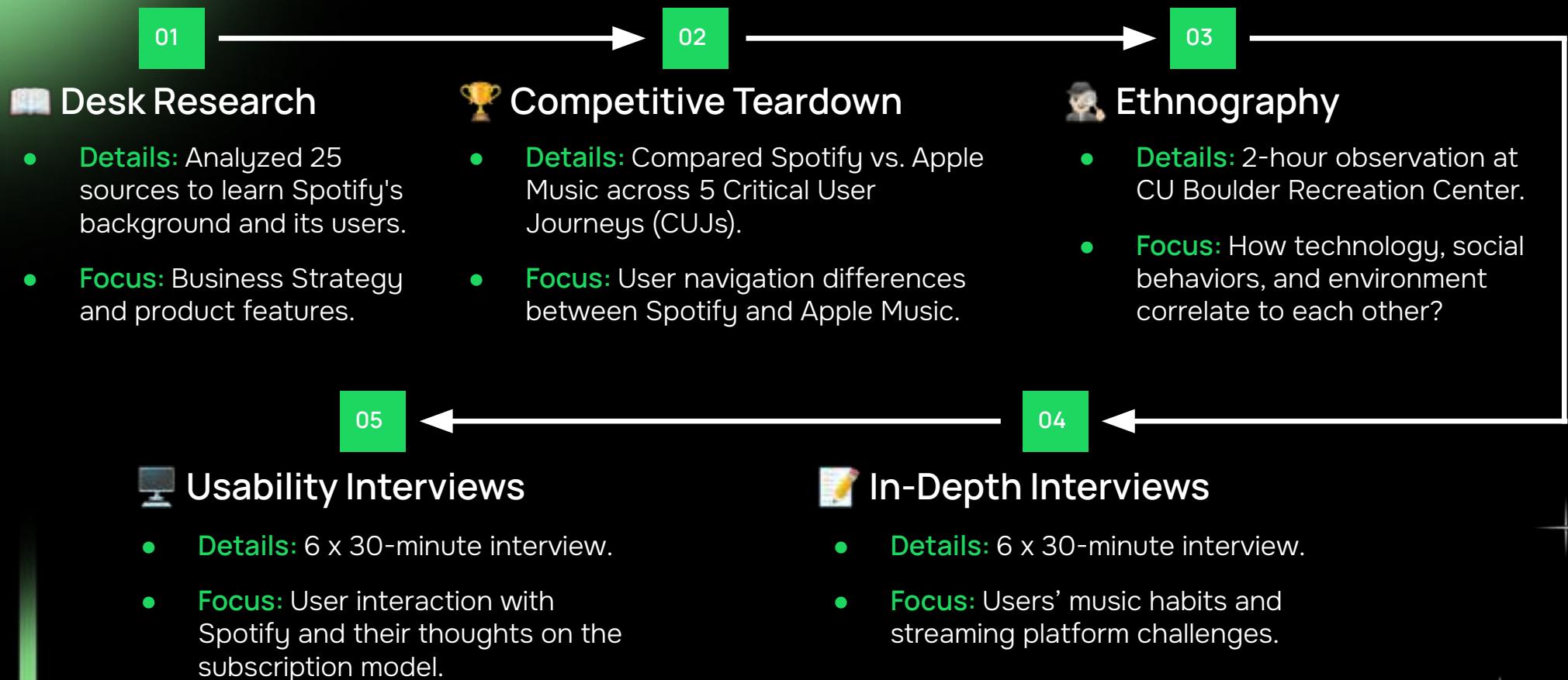
Why It Matters:

- Gen-Z and Millennials anticipate highly personalized experiences.
  (influenced by TikTok & YouTube).

- Free users tolerate ads; premium users often rely on family plans.

- Stronger social features can boost engagement and retention.

Source

UXR Methodology

01 📖 Desk Research

- **Details:** Analyzed 25 sources to learn Spotify's background and its users.
- **Focus:** Business Strategy and product features.

02 🏆 Competitive Teardown

- **Details:** Compared Spotify vs. Apple Music across 5 Critical User Journeys (CUJs).
- **Focus:** User navigation differences between Spotify and Apple Music.

03 🕵️ Ethnography

- **Details:** 2-hour observation at CU Boulder Recreation Center.
- **Focus:** How technology, social behaviors, and environment correlate to each other?

05 🖥️ Usability Interviews

- **Details:** 6 x 30-minute interview.
- **Focus:** User interaction with Spotify and their thoughts on the subscription model.

04 📝 In-Depth Interviews

- **Details:** 6 x 30-minute interview.
- **Focus:** Users' music habits and streaming platform challenges.

Data Collection

01 →

📖 **Desk Research**

02 →

🏆 **Competitive Teardown**

03

🕵️ **Ethnography**

05 ←

🖥️ **Usability Interviews**

04 ←

📝 **In-Depth Interviews**

UXR Limitations

01 → **02** → **03**

📖 **Desk Research**

Some user data and competitor insights were behind paywalls.

🏆 **Competitive Teardown**

We focused on Apple Music but could have analyzed YouTube Music for more insights.

🕵️ **Ethnography**

Observations were limited to one location, which may not reflect all user behaviors.

05 ← **04** ←

🖥️ **Usability Interviews**

Only six participants, which may not fully represent all user experiences.

📝 **In-Depth Interviews**

Each team member interviewed one participant, limiting diversity in responses.

Our team

Sheena

- **UXR Study Background:**
  Company Background, Target Users, Competitors, Challenge, UXR Methodology & data collection

- **Detailed Findings:**
  CUJs, CUJ Ratings, User Pain Points

- **Appendix**

Saharnaz

- **UXR Study Background:**
  UXR Limitation, Editing Slides Fonts and Colors, Collaboration on Key findings, and Recommendations.

- **Appendix**

Kas

- **Executive Summary**

- **Detailed Findings:**
  Users Appreciate, Features Comparison, Spotify Algorithm, Users Interaction, Subscription Conversion, Long Term Users, Improvement

- **Appendix**

Executive Summary - Challenges

Research Question:

- How to improve Spotify's app experience for subscriber retention and acquisition

Market Position:

- Current market leader needing innovation for continued growth

User Expectations:

- Better ad experience

- Enhanced premium incentives

- New personalization features

Competitive Challenge:

- Rivals offering bundled services to increase subscription value

Executive Summary - Key Findings

Ads are disruptive:

- Free users tolerate or avoid them.

Premium pricing feels high:

- Competitors offer attractive bundle deals.

The recommendations are irrelevant:

- Users want more control over personalization.

Users do not want to be judged:

- Social connections can make users feel negative emotions.

Executive Summary- Recommendations

For Free Users

- **Introduce Ad-Skipping Credits:**
  Earn tokens by watching ads, use them to skip future ads or share with friends

  Choose ad categories to make them more relevant.

- **Allow an Algorithm Reset:**
  Users can refresh their recommendations.

For Premium Users

- **Bundle:**
  Partner with premium headphone brands

- **Students:**
  Hulu + 3 monthly audiobooks

- **Podcasts:**
  AI summaries

- **Rewards:**
  Birthday month for free

- **Live:**
  Concert & event integration

Executive Summary - Impact

Short-Term

- Higher engagement and retention as users feel more control over their experience.

- Increased perceived value of Premium with new incentives.

- More ad revenue from Free users through better, less intrusive formats.

Long-Term

- Sustained subscriber growth by making Premium more competitive.

- Stronger brand differentiation as Spotify becomes a platform for both listening and content creation.

- Increased user lifetime value through more integrated experiences.

- A more engaged community that connects both digital and live music experiences.

Detailed Findings - Listening Patterns

🎧 **Key User Patterns:**

- **Primary Use:**
  Commutes, work, workouts, hang out

- **Device:**
  Mobile, laptops, cross-platform

- **Social:**
  Share/ Build playlists together

🎙️ **Listening Behavior:**

- Recreate white noise

- Some free users willing to sit through ads

- Spotify generated playlists/ liked songs

❌ **Pain Points:**

- Repetitive recommendations

- Poor playlist searchability

- Limited collaboration tools

🤑 **Premium Drivers:**

- Ad interruptions

- Offline listening

Detailed Findings - CUJ

5 Critical User Journeys Between Spotify and Apple Music:
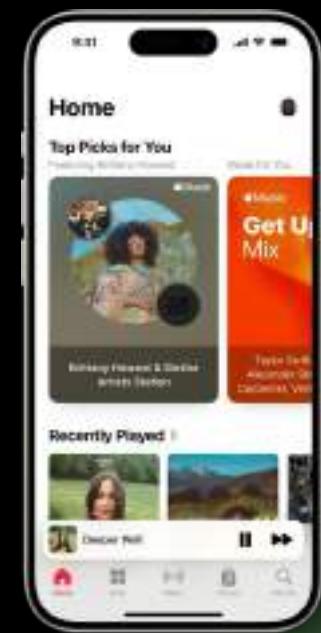
1. Play back and listen to a song

2. Create a playlist and manage it

3. Interact with songs lyrics

4. Share songs/playlists

5. Choose a radio station

Metrics:

- User Satisfaction

- Visual & Information Overload

- Social Connection

- Product Variety

- Overall

Spotify app

Apple Music app

Detailed Findings - CUJ
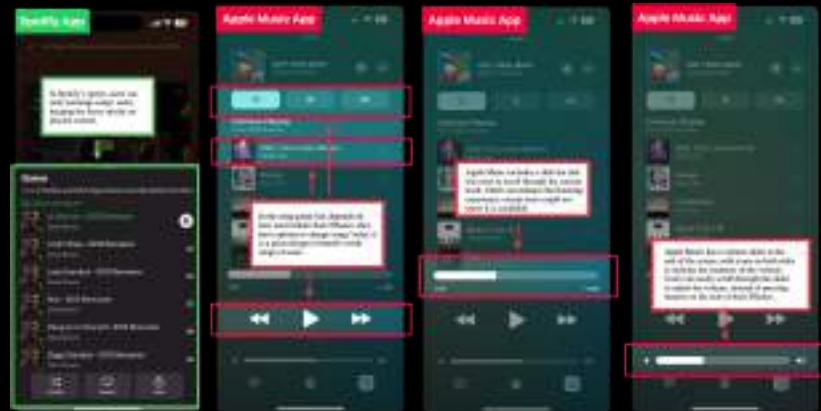
1. Play back and listen to a song

Insight:

- Both platforms share the similar design on the song-listening screens

- Apple Music offers more features on the song queue screen, allowing users to interact in various ways

Recommendation:

- Studies how users hold their smartphones while using Spotify

- Design an interface that is compatible with any kind of smartphone holding

2. Create a playlist and manage it

Insight:

- Spotify has a faster setup to create playlists by default suggesting a name

- Spotify clearly indicates songs added to playlists, while Apple Music simplifies song removal from the playlist

Recommendation:

- Enhance the song removal process by analyzing how Spotify users remove songs to minimize confusion and improve the user experience
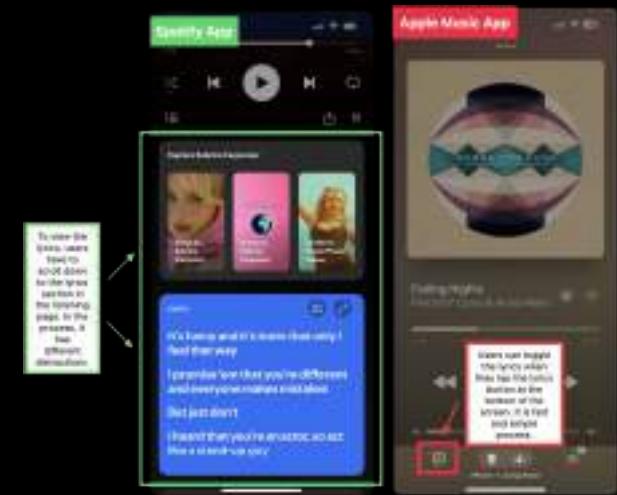
3. Interact with songs lyrics

Insight:

- Apple Music has a lyrics button at the bottom of the screen, making it quick and easy to interact with them

- Apple Music enhances user engagement with immersive lyrics displays and an **option to reduce vocals**, personalizing the sing-along experience

Recommendation:

- Introduce **new features to the lyrics screen** on Spotify, such as a slider on the side to reduce the vocal volume and synchronize the lyrics

4. Share songs/playlists

Insight:

- Both platforms use the same sharing icon, making it easier for users to identify the button

- Spotify is integrated with various social media platforms, showing its inclusivity for all kinds of users

Recommendation:

- Allows Spotify users to quickly share playlists with friends they frequently interact with on the platform

Detailed Findings - CUJ
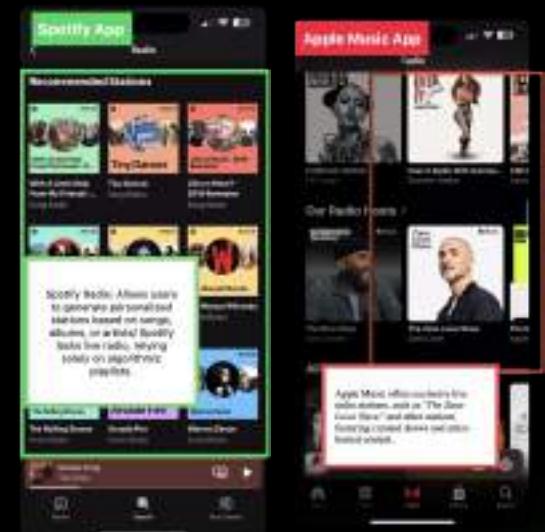
5. Choose a radio station

Insight:

- Both platforms use radio to offer a variety of curated and custom playlist

- Apple Music has a radio icon on the navigation bar at the bottom of the screen

Recommendation:

- **Include Podcast and Audiobook icons** to the navigation bar for easy access, and encourage Spotify users to explore those content

- Categorize the lists so that users can **easily scroll through their options**, and look into the section that they're interested in

Detailed Findings - CUJ Scorecard

	Spotify 🟢		Apple Music 🎵	
🎨 Visual & Interface Customization	**C**	Only available in dark mode	**A**	Option to choose light or dark mode
👭 Social Connection	**A**	Integrated with various social media platforms, welcome for all.	**C**	Only within the apple ecosystem despite a large user base.
🎧 Product Variety	**A**	Offer music, podcasts, and audiobooks	**C**	Music and exclusive live radio stations.
😄 User Satisfaction	**B**	Users might get confused using the app	**A**	User can perform different tasks on the same screen.
🏆 Overall	**A**	Strong social features, diverse content, but weak in the interface.	**B**	High-quality audio, but limited social features. Best for Apple users.

	A	B	C	D	E
Legend	Excellent	Great	Good	Fair	Poor

Detailed Findings - Users Appreciate

🎯 Personalization

- Discover Weekly & Release Radar
- AI-driven recommendations

📱 Cross-Platform

- Works everywhere
- Seamless device switching

💡 User Experience

- Easy playlist management
- Simple navigation

👥 Social Features

- Spotify Wrapped
- Spotify Jam
- Spotify Blend

📚 Content Library

- 100M+ songs

🎛️ Mood & Activity

- Activity-based playlists
- Genre & mood collections

Detailed Findings - Users' Pain Points

Bad Recommendations:

- "I literally never in my life listened to an audiobook on Spotify, so **I'm not sure where it's pulling from** or if it's just pulling from a general like what people listen to."

- "If I add one version of a song, it'll suggest every other version, but I already picked the version I want. **I don't need all 6 versions.**"

- "Oh, that's **not relevant to me** at all. I'm not a big podcast person in general, and I don't like true crime, I'm not religious, so none of these seems very relevant."

Playlist Management:

- "Spotify used to have the "Heart" button in addition to the "Plus" button, but now it has changed to only showing the "Plus" button and it **automatically adds to my favorites**. I have to go to my playlist page to change where to put the song. My "Liked Songs" playlist is for the songs that I really like."

- "I hope that after I **hit the "Do Not Play" once** for the songs I don't like, **Spotify won't play** them in a different playlist."

Detailed Findings - Users' Pain Points

Free Version:

- "The ads are **annoying**."

- "I would **close the app**, reopen it, click another playlist and see if I can get another ad that give 30 mins uninterrupted listening. If it is still not working, I would **go to YouTube** sometimes."

Social Features:

- "I found that there could be a lot of **pressure** if you connect with a lot of people on Spotify."

- "I like Spotify wrapped, but it sometimes feels like Spotify is **judging you**, saying you're in a depression/ breakup phase."

User Interface:

- "I don't like the **podcast screen**. It doesn't like the music screen that gives you a lot of options without you having to **scroll a bunch**."

Detailed Findings - Features Comparison

Features	Free	Premium
Ads-Free Experience	❌	✅
Skipping Tracks	✅ (Limited skips per hour)	✅
Play in any order	✅ Laptop ❌ mobile devices	✅
Sound Quality	up to 160 kbps	up to 320 kbps
Offline Listening	❌	✅
Access to Audiobooks	❌	✅

Source

Detailed Findings - Spotify's Algorithm

Strengths:

- Spotify-generated playlists (Discover Weekly, Daily Mixes)

- Strong song matching & genre grouping

- Real-time recommendation updates

Limitations:

- Repetitive suggestions

- No user control over recommendations

Improvement Needs:

- More varied music discovery

- User-influenced recommendations

- Better discovery-familiarity balance

Detailed Findings - Users Interaction

Category	Key Findings 🔍	User Quotes 💬
Playlists	Many users avoid creating playlists because it requires effort, while some do create playlists.	"I used to create playlist but I don't do it anymore" "I made a folder called 'D&D Character Vibes,' and whenever I open Spotify, I almost immediately go there"
Podcasts & Audiobooks	Podcast and audiobooks are not populars to Gen-Z & Millennials.	"When people talking on a podcast, it's very difficult for me to remember."
Social Features	Spotify wrapped and social features are fun and popular.	"I thinks everybody looks forward to Spotify Wrapped in December." "When we were hanging out decorating cookies, we put on Blend and started building the playlist together."

Detailed Findings - Subscription Conversion

🆓 Ad-Free Experience:

- Users prefer uninterrupted listening.

🛍️ Perks:

- Discounts to get artists merch.

🎧 Offline Listening:

- Essential for commuting, travel, and workouts.

🤝 Bundle deals:

- Partner with other streaming services.

🤑 Family & Student Discounts:

- Lower pricing makes subscription more attractive.

Detailed Findings - Long Term Users

🎧 Personalized Playlists:

- Features like Discover Weekly and Daily Mix keep users engaged.

📱 Seamless Cross-Device Experience:

- Easy transition between phone, desktop, and smart devices.

🤝 Social & Collaborative Features:

- Playlist sharing and friend activity enhance user loyalty.

📚 Diverse Content Library:

- Access to music, podcasts, and audiobooks in one place.

🆕 Consistent Feature Updates:

- New functionalities like AI DJ and real-time lyrics sustain interest.

Detailed Findings - Improvement

⭐ Premium Value:

- Partner with headphone brands

- Student audiobook credits

- AI book summaries

📚 User Content:

- Create & monetize

- Video podcasts

🔀 Discovery:

- Better recommendations

- Playlist tools

👫 Social Enhancement:

- Music matchmaking

- Community building - Virtual trivia to win Spotify credits/ free trial

- Paid users receive a free month on their birthday month

💰 New Revenue:

- Creator tools

Thanks!

Appendix-Desk Research

Key Takeaway:

- Spotify's main rivals—Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube Music, Pandora, Melon, and Deezer—offer distinct advantages. Apple Music integrates well with iOS, YouTube Music excels in video content, and Melon dominates K-pop streaming (Source).

- Holding 63% of platform-wide playlist followers, Spotify remains the leader in curated listening, shaping user habits more than its competitors (Source).

- Playlists account for 30% of total listening time, with another 30% coming from users' saved libraries, often discovered through playlists (Source).

- Users appreciate personalized playlists like *Discover Weekly* but complain about repetitive song suggestions. Playlist placement and user interactions reinforce algorithmic echo chambers (Source).

- Being featured on the Search Page boosts playlist followers by 0.95% daily—twice the effect of adding a major-label superstar track (Source).

Appendix-Desk Research

Key Takeaway:

- Users engage with Spotify during commuting, work, and exercise, favoring curated playlists for moods and activities like Workout, Sleep, and Focus (Source).

- Algorithms using lazy learners and classifiers enhance playlist ranking accuracy and song recommendations (Source).

- Users manage music through Liked Songs and personal playlists, but non-personalized and semi-personalized editorial playlists attract the highest follower counts (Source).

- While major-label artists gain exposure through high-profile playlists, independent musicians face difficulties in gaining visibility within Spotify's playlist pitching system (Source).

- Audio features like danceability, valence, and acousticness affect playlist placement and song performance, while curated playlists raise concerns about bias in music exposure (Source).

Appendix-Ethnography

Top 5 Facts the Team Observed:
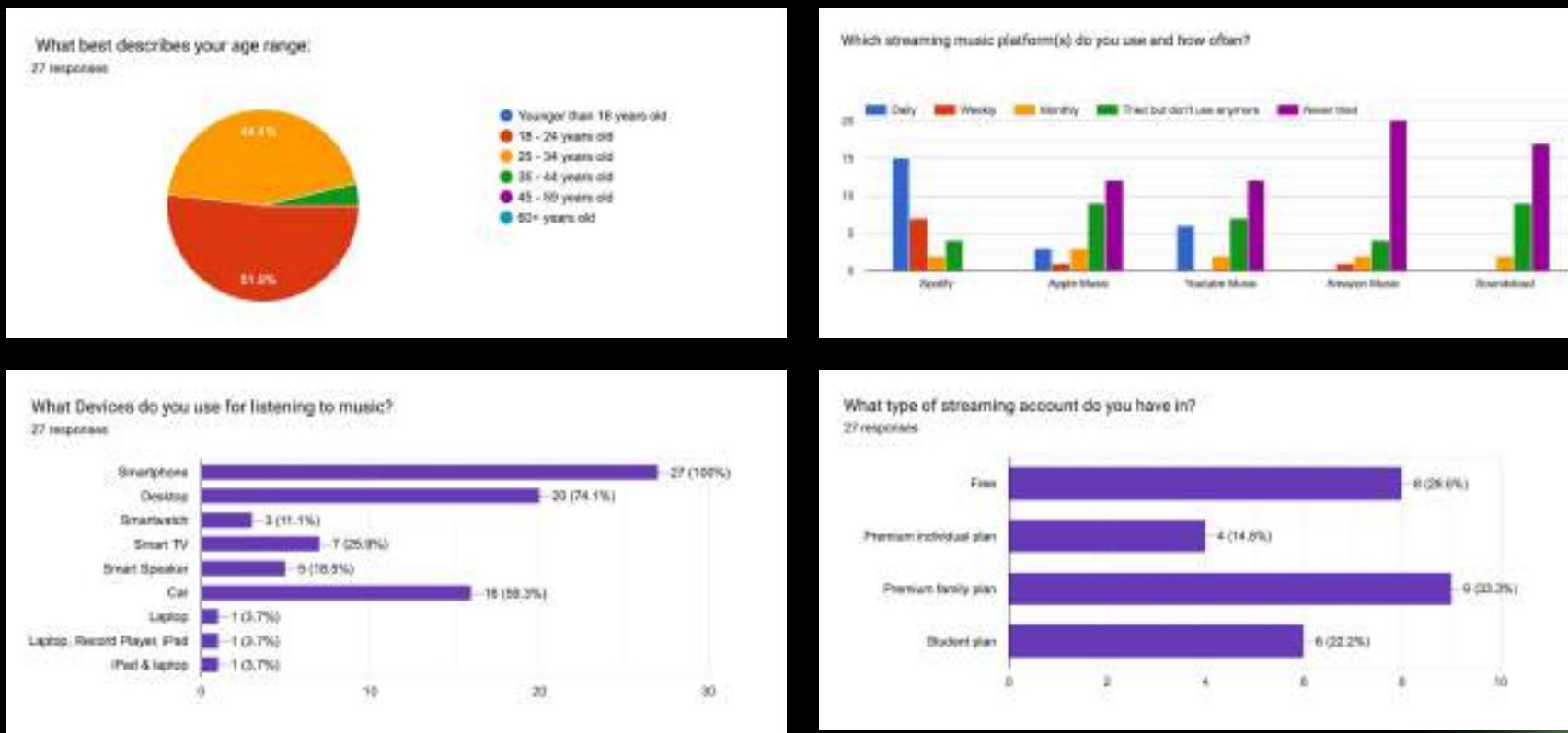
- **Headphone Use is Widespread;** Almost all gym-goers had headphones, whether earbuds or over-ear models, particularly in weightlifting and cardio areas.

- **Minimal Interaction with Phones;** Most people interacted with their phones briefly, mainly for quick song changes or checking notifications, with the exception of cyclists who had an easier time using their devices.

- **Music Presence Varies by Area;** Some sections, like the weight room and cardio areas, had high headphone usage, whereas communal sports areas (basketball, soccer, and swimming pool) had little to no personal music use.

- **Gym Background Music is Often Ignored;** Even when speakers were present in certain areas, gym-goers relied more on their own headphones than the gym's ambient music.

- **Few People Adjust Music During Workouts;** While nearly everyone used headphones, very few actively changed their music mid-session, suggesting they set their playlists beforehand.

Appendix-Ethnography
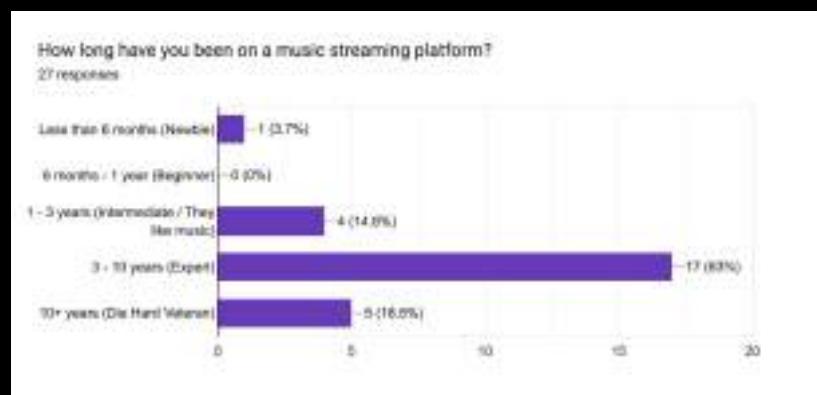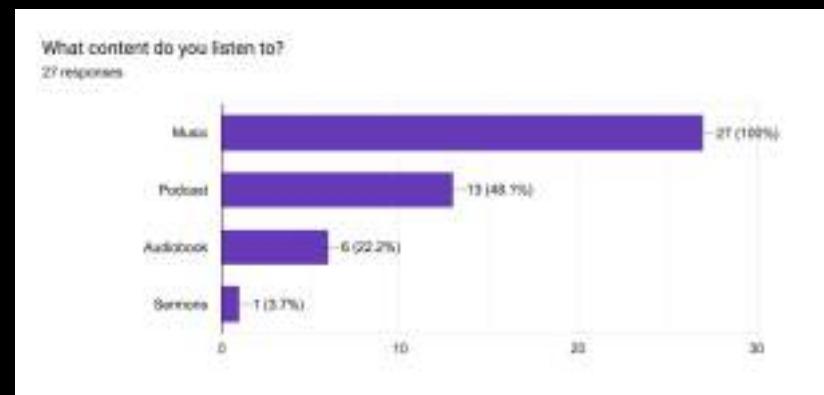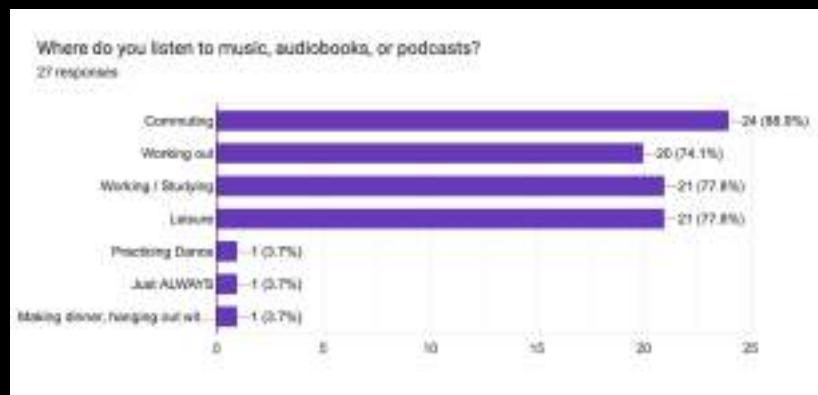
Top 5 Interpretations Based on Observations:

- **Music Serves as a Mental Escape;** Many gym-goers use headphones as a way to zone in on their workout, avoiding social interaction and external distractions.

- **Workout Intensity Influences Music Use;** Cardio sections had the highest concentration of headphone users, possibly because people rely on music for pacing and motivation more in these activities.

- **Headphone Use Reflects Social Preferences;** Those without headphones were more likely to be in pairs or small groups, suggesting that people who listen to music prioritize a more solitary workout experience.

- **People Set Their Audio Preferences Before Working Out;** The lack of frequent song changes implies that gym-goers prepare their playlists beforehand, minimizing distractions during workouts.

- **Environmental Design Encourages Personal Audio;** The Rec Center seems structured for personal listening rather than communal music, as background speakers were rarely used or noticed by gym-goers.

Appendix- Spotify Survey Screener

Appendix- Survey Screener

Appendix-In-Depth Interviews

Name	Age	Gender	User Type	Spotify Familiarity
John	25-31	Male	Apple Music User	Medium
Lauren	25-31	Female	Spotify [Paid] User	High
James	18-24	Male	Spotify [Free] User	Medium

Appendix-In-Depth Interviews

Key Findings - Saharnaz:

- Platform Switching: They have not switched from Spotify for music but use Audible for audiobooks. They find Spotify's audiobook integration confusing.

- AI-Driven Playlists: They believe AI recommendations match their taste but sometimes lean too heavily on specific elements. They wish for more control over recommendations and use AI-driven playlists about once a week.

- Navigation & Home Screen: The participant finds the "Recently Played" and "For You" sections helpful but considers some sections cluttered and confusing. They would appreciate more control over customization and organization.

- Choice Influences: Mood and activity primarily determine their choice of what to listen to.

- Spotify vs. Other Platforms: They stick with Spotify due to familiarity and family membership. They feel "locked in" due to their saved preferences and playlists.

Appendix-In-Depth Interviews

Key Findings - Saharnaz:

- Listening Habits: The participant primarily listens to music on their phone, personal computer, and iPad. They usually decide what to listen to based on their list of liked songs and favorite artists, and they also follow podcasts.

- Playlist Creation & Discovery: The participant rarely creates new playlists due to difficulty maintaining them. Instead, they maintain a long-running playlist of liked songs and sometimes organize them into genre-specific playlists. They occasionally use Spotify's Discover Weekly and Magic Shuffle for new song recommendations.

- Collaboration: They collaborate on playlists with friends, especially for travel. One person creates the playlist and shares the link for others to contribute.

- Spotify Subscription: They use a family premium plan paid by their parent. If not provided, they would still opt for a premium plan, likely a student plan for its discount.

- Content Preferences: Podcasts are the participant's favorite content on Spotify due to early access and minimal ads. They consume news primarily through podcasts rather than reading articles.

Appendix-In-Depth Interviews

Key Findings - Sheena:

- Listening to Spotify is private to my interviewee. He feels uncomfortable playing music around others nor can people tell his taste in music through his playlist. Also, the socializing features are stressing him out and making him feel like a DJ. However, he likes Spotify which allows him to use lyrics to search for songs and tap the plus button to save them to his library for later listening. The plus button is the most used feature.

- He doesn't use Spotify to explore new music, instead, he discovers new songs through his surroundings, such as radio, word of mouth, social media, or movies.

- He doesn't listen to podcasts because he doesn't remember what people say, and he prefers watching people talk in a video instead of listening to a discussion. Therefore, he prefers YouTube over Spotify for this type of content. Especially on YouTube, he has the option to watch the videos or just listen to the conversation if he doesn't want to focus

Appendix-In-Depth Interviews

Key Findings - Sheena:

- He is cautious about spending. Since he can access music elsewhere, he does not see the value in paying for Spotify. The limited skip is fine for him, because he likes the songs in his playlists, so he doesn't skip a lot. If he encounters an ad but has reached a skip limit, he'd close the Spotify app and reopen it to start playing. In addition, it is a low commitment to be a free user.

- He doesn't mind hearing ads during his listening experience, because he is used to hearing ads on the radio. He sometimes doesn't even notice hearing ads on Spotify, because he uses Spotify to recreate white noises. However, when some ads are irrelevant and the voices/sounds in the ads are annoying and unpleasant, he wouldn't like to have a free account.

- To motivate him to become a paid user on Spotify, he wants perks, such as merchandise, cash back, discounts to shop artists' products, or receiving a gift card, rather than just ad-free listening or unlimited skips.

Appendix-In-Depth Interviews

Key Findings - Kars:

- Platform Preferences

  Uses Apple Music due to financial convenience and familiarity.

   Interacts with Spotify only through Music League, an external app for playlist curation.

- Music Discovery

  Prefers human recommendations (friends, searches) over algorithmic suggestions.

  Finds streaming platforms tend to reinforce past listening habits rather than expand them.

- Usability & Features

  Apple Music's classical music app and karaoke feature are major advantages.

  Spotify excels in playlist curation and social engagement but lacks appeal due to its business model.

Appendix-In-Depth Interviews

Key Findings- Kars:

- Ethical & Business Considerations

  Criticizes Spotify's artist compensation model, preferring platforms that offer better payouts to musicians.

- Potential Improvements

  Wishes for streaming services to support DJ mixes, allowing artists to legally monetize remixed

  content.

Appendix- Usability Interviews

Name	Age	Gender	User Type	Spotify Familiarity
Stephanie	25-31	Female	Spotify [Free] User	High
Sanjana	18-24	Female	Spotify [Paid] User	High
Evelyn	18-24	Female	YouTube Music User	High
Pocket	25-31	Male	Spotify [Free] User	High
Lauren	25-31	Female	Spotify [Paid] User	High
Ali	25-31	Male	YouTube [Paid] User	Medium

Appendix- Usability Interviews

	Data trends	UXR findings
1	0 out of 6 participants use the music/podcast filters at the top of the home screen.	All of the users overlooked the music and podcast filters at the top of the screen, as they preferred to find their playlists or podcasts directly on the home screen.
2	2 out of 6 users like that the Spotify home screen/ music screen is broken up into small sections.	A few users liked the layout of the home screen because Spotify clearly labeled each category, but some of the recommendations in Audiobook and Podcasts were not relevant to them.
3	3 out of 4 free users say the Premium plan is too expensive for them.	Many free Spotify users considered the Premium plan expensive, especially since YouTube Premium, which includes YouTube Music, costs only $9 per month.
4	2 out of 4 free users close the Spotify app when they hear an ad while listening to music.	Some Spotify free users chose to close and reopen the app when an ad played, as they wanted to avoid listening to the ad.

Appendix- Usability Interviews

	Data trends	UXR findings
5	4 out 6 users mentioned they want more control over their music choice.	Many users wanted to have control over their music because they couldn't select a song to play, or would receive irrelevant recommendations instead.
6	2 out of 6 users feel that the way of adding songs to their playlist does not meet their preferences.	A few users wanted to streamline the song-adding process, as they found it cumbersome to add songs directly to their desired playlists or had to follow multiple steps to do so.
7	1 users considers the podcast duration when choosing a episode.	One user preferred a shorter episode because she tended to get bored and lose focus in the longer ones.
8	4 out of 6 users mentioned they turned to YouTube over Spotify sometimes.	Many users turned to YouTube because they were tired of the ads in Spotify, wanted to watch music videos, watch a podcast, or explore new music

Appendix- Usability Interviews

	Data trends	UXR findings
9	2 out of 6 users reported their friends introduced them to Spotify.	A few users said they use Spotify because all of their friends were on the platform or their friends wanted to share playlists with them.
10	5 out of 6 participants use Spotify's social features when hanging out with their friends.	Most of the users enjoyed features like Spotify Jam or Blend with friends, because these allowed them to add songs to a shared playlist and listen to the same music in real-time.
11	1 user said Spotify is judging them based on the Spotify Wrap.	One user felt judged by Spotify Wrapped because it reflected her life phase based on the songs she listened to, but it was not accurate.
12	2 out of 6 users are excited to Spotify Wrap in December every year.	A few users were excited about the Spotify Wrap because they could connect with their friend by sharing it on Instagram.

Appendix- Group Photo