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INFO 608

User Research Report 2

## Tidal User Research Report: Observational Method

### I.      Introduction

Last week, I conducted semi-structured interviews of music listeners that fit the demographic identified in the competitive analysis of Tidal Music. One of the findings concluded that the needs of music listeners were often met by their current service. Thus, they did not feel a strong desire to change their behaviors or the system(s) they use. I offered a few suggestions to Tidal Music such as application customization, personalization of spending power, and task-driven playlist features. However, one thing that was missing from this initial research was the viewpoint of current Tidal Music listeners. This week we were provided the option to use the survey or observational method of research. I chose the observational method, though I do not know any users personally. Rather than observing users directly using the system, I observed the subreddit, r/Tidal, to understand users needs and thoughts regarding the service.

### II.     Methodology

According to Reddit Inc's homepage, it is "home to thousands of communities, endless conversation, and authentic human connection" ("Homepage/About," n.d.).  It offers a platform for people to connect and discuss any topic in what it refers to as a community. The subreddit community r/Tidal, is a Reddit community where people interested in Tidal and/or users of Tidal discuss the music platform. The community currently has 31,400 members ("R/Tidal," 2011). The reason I decided to observe the discussions on the subreddit for my analysis is because it catches a large number of people, globally, interested in or users of Tidal Music. While it does captivate many participants, the downside is that I do not know each individual and what their demographics are, such as age/gender.

The approach that I took was to scroll through the feed and identify the common discussion themes. Then I opened and read through the discussion posts related to the common themes

found and posts that discussed topics like, features or usability. As I read through the discussions, I noted down what I thought was relevant to this study.

The thing that surprised me about this study, was that I still learned about people's behaviors in the posts. While this method of observation does not show me the end to end interaction process with the system, it does allow me to see into the pieces that matter and are important to the users. I learned that this approach is valuable in research, especially when there is a short time frame in which to observe. I do, however, agree that other research approaches should be used in conjunction with this approach. This is because you need to understand the user demographics in order to draw conclusions in this limited environment. The competitive analysis and semi-structured interviews helped me develop a strong base for this observation. So, while observing, I made the following assumptions:

1. People posting in the chats are likely users of the service or interested in the platform.
2. Given the limitations of the internet on control of information, common themes and elements are points of focus rather than one individual's opinions.

### III.    Findings and Analysis

Observing the subreddit r/Tidal has offered many findings. I will discuss the themes of the posts on the community, then dive into some of the discussions within them, and finally will review the results. The common themes amongst the posts include user recommendations and requests for improvements in the app, the pros of Tidal compared to other services, Qobuz, a French streaming service commonly discussed on this community, and how to obtain a cheaper subscription ("R/Tidal," 2011). These themes relate to the goals and needs of the users. To summarize, the high-level goal of users that are discussing Tidal Music is to listen to affordable high-quality, lossless, music. To better understand their needs, we will review the themes in more depth. First, we will discuss the pros of Tidal music.

Based on the discussion in "Thinking of Making to Switch to Tidal" which was posted on February 5, 2023, many users like Tidal's selection of jazz music, the sound quality, and the user interface (u/SteveGriff1983). In another post, users discuss how Tidal pays more to the music artists on their platform; though some debate if this is really true or if it has that much of an impact on the earnings (u/lolboxes, 2022). They also like the artist credits and editorial content, which can appeal to users who do not identify as audiophiles (u/CoolBen07, 2022). Many people

inquire about making the switch to Tidal in the subreddit, however, the responses are mixed in whether the switch is worth it. One hesitation about switching to a new music service is with transferring of music from one platform to another. Users on r/Tidal suggest using Tune My Music to transfer up to 500 songs for free from one service to another (u/GiddyGoatGaming, 2022). I decided to try this out as I have an extensive Spotify library that has been built up over many years. In the Appendix, I have provided screenshots as I walk through the steps. Overall, it was easy to complete and only 3 songs, of the 297, that I selected to move did not transfer. One limitation of the service was that the free version only allowed 500 songs to be transferred. Therefore, I selected only the most relevant playlists to my current listening preferences. Ultimately, this feature is a positive, although it is a third party service and can be used to transfer music to other services as well. Thus, it is not unique to Tidal. In general, the pros discussed in these posts were similar to those discussed in our team's previous research analysis. The only new discovery was that of Tidal's wide selection of Jazz music, which could mean that Tidal appeals to Jazz listeners as well as audiophiles and music artists (u/SteveGriff1983, 2023).

Next, we will discuss the recommendations and requests for improvements of the application by users. The requests for improvements in the discussion are representative of the user needs and provide some insights. Fortunately, there is a lengthy thread on the subreddit titled "Stuff Tidal NEEDS." This discussion began seven months ago and has 294 comments (u/KonradSpooky, 2022). In order to focus on the relevant information, I focused on comments posted in the two months. The findings are as follows:

1. Users would like smart device integration, so it is easier to play music on devices, like Google Home or Amazon Alexa.
2. The application's search, sorting, and shuffling features are buggy.
3. Tidal Music lacks social integration features that other services, like Spotify, do well.
4. Tidal Music seems to have an issue recognizing different artists with the same names.

(u/KonradSpooky, 2022)

Additionally, people also made some requests for Tidal Music to add some nice-to-have features. These included a BPM (beats per minute) count and application customization (u/KonradSpooky, 2022). Besides the customization, many of the observations were new discoveries compared to our previous analysis. This is likely because the previous survey

participants were users of other services. Furthermore, the problems faced by those posting on these discussions were not ones mentioned by users of other applications, such as Spotify or Pandora. While a user of Spotify, in my interview study, mentioned having trouble easily switching between profiles on the smart home device, they did not have to open the app on their phone to cast the music to the device to listen, like Tidal users. These problems lead me to wonder if that is why many are discussing Qobuz in the subreddit.

Qobuz, another music streaming service, also offers high-resolution sound quality. The key differences are in the format and pricing offered to users. Qobuz offers streaming in FLAC and Tidal in FLAC (for Hi-fi) and MQA (for Hi-fi Plus) (Johnson, 2022). Tidal offers a wider range of pricing options and discounts for military and students, which has been noted as a positive for Tidal, and Qobuz offers cheaper plans overall (Johnson, 2022, Qobuz, n.d.). In the subreddit post "I love hi-rez music, should I continue to pay for qobuz, or give MQA a chance?", people were mixed on their feelings on whether or not Qobuz was the better alternative (u/ogerloaf, 2022). Many admitted that Tidal's MQA sound quality, in the Hi-fi plus subscription, wasn't as good as Qobuz's FLAC, however Tidal seemed to win over people in their UI, music selection, and artist payouts (u/ogerloaf, 2022). This could mean trouble for Tidal as their demographic includes audiophiles and those that prioritize sound quality. Especially if another large competitor, like Spotify, begins to offer Hi-fi subscriptions.

Currently, I feel that Qobuz is a topic of discussion in this community because it offers high-quality sound for a competitive price. Which brings me to my last observation during this study. While users of Tidal seem to highlight the benefit of higher artist payouts, there are also many discussing how to obtain a cheaper subscription. Many users are discussing how they use a VPN to get a cheaper subscription in another country. However Tidal seems to have caught onto this and has implemented measures, such as using the credit card country to validate user location, to avoid this from occurring (u/SteveGriff1983, 2023). According to Cybernews.com, Spotify plans are also cheaper in other countries (Hiley, 2023). Though, when I searched for "vpn" on the subreddit r/Spotify, I did not come across many threads discussing pricing for VPN. Despite this, I am sure that many streaming platforms experience this as a problem. In my previous research report, I noted that younger users are more likely to face economic restrictions and that platforms could consider ways to make the services more accessible to users without sacrificing a profit.

**IV.** **Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

In conclusion of the final user research for this study, this report provides an examination of reddit users' discussions on the subreddit r/Tidal. I learned that many of the people discussing Tidal Music on Reddit, were those that were interested in high-quality music listening formats, enjoyed Jazz music, interested in affordable music streaming, and supported Tidal's higher artist payouts and artist credits. While this observation had limitations, such as limited user specifics and demographic information, it provided some promising insights as to the goals and needs of the users of Tidal Music.

Based on the information gathered in this report, as well as the previous reports, I make the following recommendations to Tidal Music (note: some recommendations are the same in the previous report but also addressed a need or a problem expressed in this observation):

1. Application customization. Allow users to switch between light theme and dark them and to select which features they want to appear in their user interface. Customization is important here as music is a personalized experience.

2. Provide users with the proper hardware devices to listen to the MQA format, for an additional subscription price. Similar to how internet service providers provide modem/routers to their customers who may not have purchased their own.

3. Consider offering FLAC as a listening option for the Hi-fi Plus users as well. Some audiophiles feel that MQA is not lossless, and that FLAC is better (u/KonradSpooky, 2022).

4. Enhance the sorting, searching, and shuffling features in the application.

5. Partner with a smart-home device company to enable integration with their devices. In addition to the integration, they could work with the companies of the devices to offer an easy way for users to get information on their listening statistics and know how much artists earned by their listening.

6. While Tidal does offer up to 10% direct artist payouts to a user's most streamed artists, this is only available on the HiFi Plus plan ("Tidal Pricing | Tidal," n.d.). I suggest that Tidal can further enable the users to personalize their spending power and be connected to the music artists they listen to and offer additional payouts at lower-tiered subscriptions. Additionally, they could allow users to select where they

want their extra payout to go to rather than it being based on number of streams. This may provide support to smaller artists. Or if they have the free version, they could select the type of advertisements they would like to see and from which artists.

7. Tidal users expressed an interest in a social component to the application. Tidal could enable users to be able to connect to users of other platforms and collaborate on playlists together. While this may seem counterintuitive because it wouldn't require users to move to Tidal, services like Spotify have a hold on users in this regard and some may not want to switch to a different platform because they would no longer be able to collaborate with their friends.

8. Another social feature that Tidal could offer is exclusive jam sessions. This could be a new release from users' favorite artists or even live sessions from those artists. They could have a chat session for users to connect and discuss the music.

While Tidal Music was one of the first to offer high-resolution music to its listeners, many competitors are starting to offer similar quality. Given some of the issues faced by its users, as observed in the subreddit, they may be likely to turn to a competitor as they begin to roll-out Hi-fi plans. In this study, I identified some key needs and recommendations to Tidal Music. I believe that these considerations could help Tidal Music as they are considering future enhancements to the system.

## V.    References

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## VI.    Appendix

### a.   Moving music to Tidal from Spotify using Tune My Music

  i.   [https://tidal.com/transfer-music](https://tidal.com/transfer-music)

Tune*my*.Music

Help

## Select playlists to move

**Load from your Spotify account**

Or

Copy Spotifys playlist URL and paste here:

Paste Spotifys playlist URL here

Load playlist

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Tune*my*.Music

Help    Plans

## Select playlists to move

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☑ 🟢 My Spotify Music Library | | Megan Cunningham |
| ☑ 🎵 Favorite Songs (21/21) selected | | Show list > |
| ☑ 🧑 Favorite Artists (21/21) selected | | Show list > |
| **Playlists (57)** | | |
| ☑ Drive 2023 (40/40) selected | | Show list > |
| ☑ Drive 22 (45/45) selected | | Show list > |
| ☑ Chair yoga (4/4) selected | | Show list > |

**Transfer To TIDAL**

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Tune*my*.Music

Help    Plans

## SUMMARY

| Moving: 59 playlists (2110 tracks) | 🟢 Spotify » ◆◆◆ TIDAL | |
|---|---|---|
| 🎵 Favorite Songs (21 tracks) | | Show list > |
| 🧑 Favorite Artists (21 artists) | | Show list > |
| **Playlists (57)** | | |
| Drive 2023 (40 tracks) | | Show list > |
| Drive 22 (45 tracks) | | Show list > |
| Chair yoga (4 tracks) | | Show list > |

Want to transfer more than 500 items at a time? Go Premium

**Start Moving My Music »**

Tune**my**.Music

Transferring more than 500 tracks?

**BECOME PREMIUM**
and transfer as many tracks as you want

**Transfer all**    **Transfer first 500 tracks**

See premium plan details

Already have an account? Sign in

Moving: **59 playlists** (2110 tracks)

♪ Favorite Songs    Show list

Favorite Artists    Show list

Playlists (57)

Drive 2023 (40 tracks)    Show list

Drive 22 (33 tracks)    Show list

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Tune**my**.Music                Help    Plans

**Transferring your music**
Lay back while we transfer your music

Processed: 53 out of 294 tracks                Spotify ≫ ❖❖❖ TIDAL

**18%**

♪≡ Playlists (13)

✓  Drive 2023  40 moved    Show list ›    Open  Sync  ⇱

↻  Drive 22  13 moved    Show list ›

  Chair yoga    Show list ›

  Run2    Show list ›

  punk workout    Show list ›

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**Finished Transferring. Now Create a Daily Sync!**    ✕

Show list ›    Open    Sync    ⇱

**Keep both playlists Synced**

When you make changes & updates to the original playlist

The same changes will also be applied on the transfered playlist

Q: How often the sync is performed?
A: You can choose between daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Q: Where I choose my Sync setting and preferences?
A: Once you click the Sync button a settings popup will open.

Learn More    **Cool! Got it**