

Music Platform Preference: How Does Bandcamp Fit in Amongst the Music Streaming Juggernauts?

Phillip Jankowski



Abstract/Research Goals

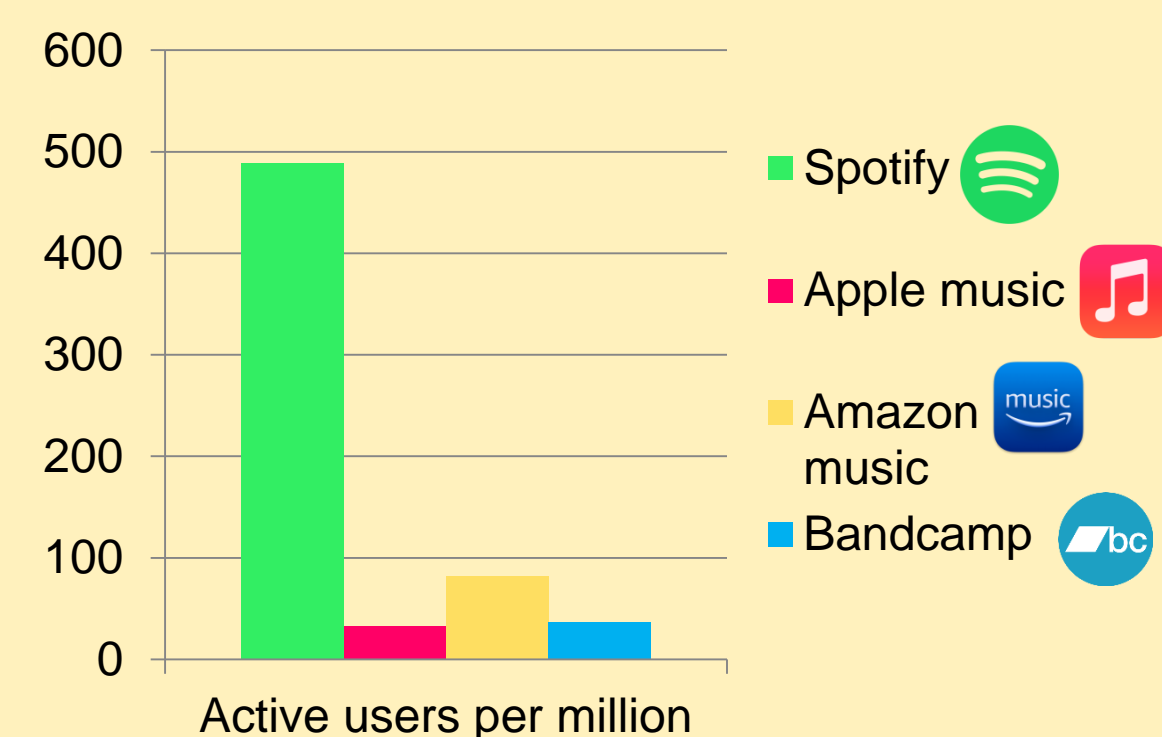
The goal of this study was ultimately to answer two important research questions:

1. What aspects of music platforms make listeners choose one platform over another?
2. What can Bandcamp do to improve its user base by using the data obtained from the conducted survey based on these users' preferences?

Introduction

In today's modern age, the way a person consumes or listens to music has become both simpler and more widely accessible when compared to 15 or 20 years ago. There are apps and platforms that make only a computer or phone the only necessity to be able to access a nearly endless limit of music. However, this freedom has created challenges to not only the industry at large, but to consumers and artists alike. There has been plenty of research done on the music piracy boom of the 2000's and its effect on the industry, as well as how streaming similarly changed the industry, but there is need to figure out where smaller and more niche music platforms, in the case of this research, Bandcamp, fit in amongst the streaming giants (Spotify, Apple Music, etc.) Bandcamp has millions of users, but its numbers are largely dwarfed by Spotify's. Being such a user and artist friendly platform by comparison, it seems like Bandcamp should be much more well-known and popular than it is. The questions that I am asking are:

1. Why or what makes music listeners prefer one music listening platform/service to another, and
2. What can Bandcamp do to improve its user numbers, or is it content with its niche yet loyal user base?



Methodology

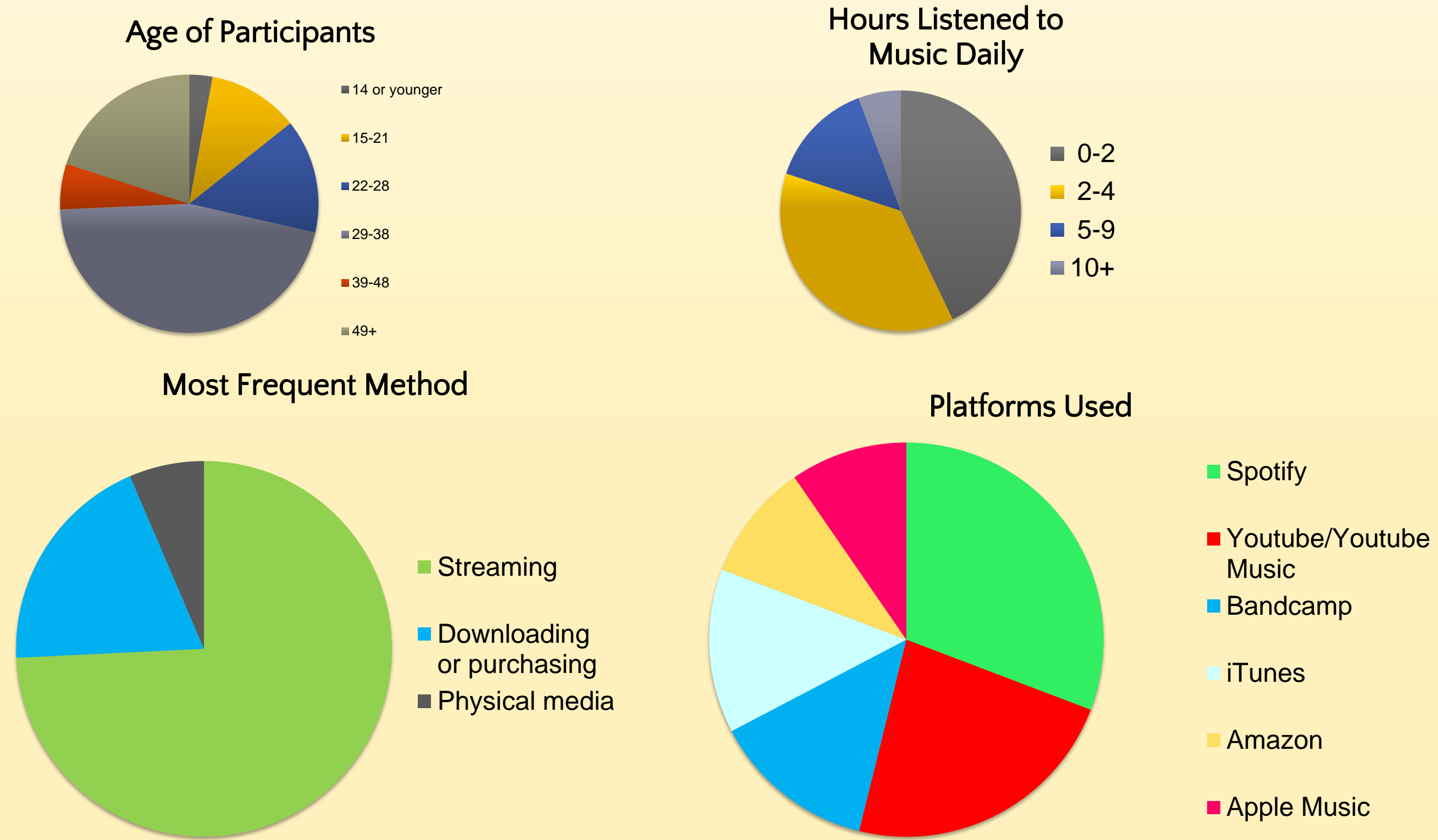
A small scale survey was conducted among Facebook and Reddit communities that asked the following short answer/multiple choice questions:

- Age range
- Amount of daily time spent listening to music
- The preferred method of consuming music
 - Streaming
 - Downloading/purchasing files
 - Physical media
- Which of the following platforms/services they used
 - Amazon
 - Apple Music
 - Bandcamp
 - Deezer
 - iTunes
 - Physical media
 - Spotify
 - Youtube/Youtube Music

And the following long form questions:

- Briefly describe what aspects you like about your main music platform of choice (including physical media if applicable). List specific features (technical or otherwise) if possible
- Are there any negative aspects about your main music platform of choice?
- Briefly describe why you prefer this platform/method versus others listed above. In particular if you prefer streaming over purchasing/downloading (or vice versa) explain why

Results



Main positives of platforms

- Streaming platforms:
- Free
 - Easy music accessibility
 - Sharing of playlists
 - Everything in one space
- Downloading/purchasing platforms:
- Feeling of ownership/permanence
 - No internet connection needed
 - No ads
 - More monetary support for artists

Main negatives of platforms

- Streaming platforms:
- Ads
 - Songs taken off arbitrarily
 - Less monetary support for artists
- Downloading/purchasing platforms:
- Aligning music across various devices/apps
 - Memory/space needed on devices
 - Less convenient than streaming

Analyzation

43% of survey participants claimed they only listened to music less than 2 hours daily. These are the **casual listeners**. Of those, 67% said they only streamed music. Based on their long form answers, they prefer music that is **convenient** and **free**. The **casual listeners** rarely had an answer to the question of why they preferred one platform to another. They picked what was most **convenient**, and normally the most popular platform which is Spotify by far.

While Bandcamp does have streaming capabilities, it does not support the creation of **playlists**, which many participants who used Youtube or Spotify placed under high value. The ability to **share** these playlists under one platform, as well as interact with other users on friend lists, all on the same **singular platform** was also highly valued. Bandcamp's store and old-school format encourages purchasing files and transferring them to different platforms. Therefore, the sense of **community** that is synonymous with the platform actually can be more prevalent on streaming platforms such as Spotify and Youtube. Similarly, those who pay a monthly fee for their streaming service of choice over paying for individual tracks/albums mainly do so because of the **convenience** of having everything in the same place and on the same platform.

Bandcamp and other downloading/purchasing platforms like iTunes offer alternatives to streaming, and there were various reasons as to why those participants chose them over the streaming platforms. One consistent thread was the **control** over how these users could listen to their music. They didn't have to worry about songs disappearing off the platform; eg. the sense of **ownership** and **permanence**. They didn't have to worry about using data or having a Wi-Fi connection to listen to their music. Therefore, these users are willing to sacrifice the sense of **free** music and **convenience** for a sense of **controlling** their music library on their terms.

Takeaways, Hurdles, & Future Studies

There are many factors that determine what music platform a user will prefer, however it does come down to personal decisions, and some factors simply matter more than others depending on the person. Not only will a future study have to sample a larger group of people, but more in depth qualitative interviews should be conducted to determine why certain issues affect some music listeners and don't mean as much to others. While some noticeable trends appeared within the streaming users, it was harder to determine what the main appeals of Bandcamp were. A sample of solely Bandcamp users would help narrow down what Bandcamp's millions of listeners see in the app. As for its future, one could say that the integrating of an in-app playlist feature like Spotify could help it improve its user numbers, the research question of if Bandcamp is content with its niche yet loyal user base still hangs in the air, and in-depth qualitative interviews with some Bandcamp employees would help determine the direction the platform is going in.

