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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE WILLINGNESS TO PAY ON TENCENT VIDEO PLATFORM: A STUDY AMONG ONLINE USERS IN CHINA

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Abstract

The scale of the online video platform industry is growing rapidly, and with the increase in the number of such platforms, the competition is becoming more intense. This study examines the factors influencing willingness to pay on the Tencent video platform. Drawing upon the theory of planned behaviour and other relevant concepts (i.e., perceived value, perceived usefulness, perceived playability, perceived quality, and copyright awareness), this study aims to develop a conceptual model to determine the influence of psychological and individual aspects on the willingness to pay among Tencent video users. An online survey was employed to collect data from Tencent video users. The results indicate that the theoretically assumed path relationships were consistent with the actual measured data. There were significant relationships between Tencent video users' attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, perceived usefulness, perceived value, perceived playfulness, perceived quality, copyright awareness and the willingness to pay on Tencent video platform. Our findings supported that users' willingness to pay is mostly influenced by subjective norms. The limitations and recommendations for future research are addressed.

Keywords: *Users' willingness to pay, Tencent video platform, Theory of Planned Behaviour, online users, China*

Introduction

With the advanced development of Internet technology, the number of Internet users has escalated tremendously along with the popular use of mobile terminals. In 2022, China penetrated the Web 3.0 era, and this achievement enhanced the contact behaviour of Internet users towards the mobile media. The 51st Statistical Report on the Development of the Internet in China, as published by the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) in December 2022, recorded a whopping 1.067 million Internet users in China alone with a 75.6% of Internet penetration rate. As of December 2022, it was reported that Internet users spent 26.7 hours online on average each week (CNNIC, 2022).

The vast expansion of Internet users and the popularity of mobile devices have led to the emergence of numerous Internet video platforms that have gradually gained popularity. Internet videos are an integral form of entertainment that is gradually substituting conventional TV using

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computers and mobile devices as terminals (Falkowski-Gilski & Uh., 2020). Tencent video, a popular video streaming platform mostly found across mainland China, has now ranked first in the 2022 with approximately 454 million of active users per month (The Statistics Portal, 2023). They have now launched Tencent Video VIP, as their subscription services, and offers a complete range of video content with the charges of 30 RMB (about 4.4 USD) per month (Tang & Wei, 2023).

Literature Review

Willingness to Pay for Online Platforms in China

Numerous studies in the past, particularly marketing (Wertenbroch & Skiera, 2002; Breidert, Hahsler, & Reutterer, 2006), are concerned much on the willingness to pay approach. It was later expanded to the healthcare (McDougall, Furnback, Wang, & Mahlich, 2019), green energy (Hojnik, Ruzzier, Fabri, & Klopčič, 2021) and others. In short, willingness to pay refers to a tool used by economists, psychologists, and market researchers alike to assess the demand for products and services. However, earlier definition was provided by Cameron and James (1987), who conceptualised willingness to pay as the measure of a user's readiness to spend on a product or service with special attributes. Imminently, it signifies the greatest value that users are prepared to expand for a distinct product or service. Most studies related to users' willingness to pay for online video platforms in China have drawn more distinctive conclusions. For instance, Hu, Zhao, Li and Bairner (2023) claimed that the willingness to pay for the live streaming mainly relies on the influence among peers and personal attributes while another recent study by Xu, Li, Scott, and Wang (2023) revealed that free of commercials, viewing quality and convenience were among the important considerations of the willingness to pay for the over-the-top (OTT) services in China. Hence, it has eventually modified the consumption behaviours among Chinese online users.

Psychological Factors for the Willingness to Pay on Tencent Video Platform

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has been broadly used across diverse research fields, with numerous scholars contributing to the enhancement and refinement of this theory. The TPB has good explanatory and predictive power and is applicable in multiple areas such as shopping (Ha, 2020), travel (Fu, 2021), sports (Ito, 2023) and more. Past studies assessed the willingness to pay by connecting it with the concepts of TPB (i.e., attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control) to determine customers' collaborative consumption behaviour (Ashaduzzaman, Jebarajakirthy, Weaven, Maseeh, Das, & Pentecost., 2022) as well as to investigate the effect of green marketing instruments on tourists' intent to buy green products (Patwary, 2022).

H1 (i): There is a significant relationship between attitude and willingness to pay among Tencent video users.

H1 (ii): There is a significant relationship between subjective norms and willingness to pay among Tencent video users.

H1(iii): There is a significant relationship between perceived behaviour control and willingness to pay among Tencent video users.

Individual Factors for the Willingness to Pay on Tencent Video Platform

Perceived usefulness was first deployed in the field of information technology and was later applied in the field of informatics as one of the factors explaining audience acceptance and adoption of information. Hence, many scholars (Rahmiati, & Yuannita, 2019; Tyrväinen, & Karjaluo, 2022) have since used perceived usefulness as a variable in the study of consumer payment behaviour and it directly impacted the behavioural intentions of consumers. Besides, perceived usefulness showed a significantly positive effect on users' behavioural intentions.

H2(i): There is a significant relationship between perceived usefulness and willingness to pay among Tencent video users.

The notion of perceived value initially gained traction in business studies before it is widely applied across various disciplines. Yang and Xia (2022) categorised perceived value into emotional, economic, social, service, and functional values to assess their impact on the willingness of Chinese customers to pay for using DiDi. They concluded that perceived value had a significant impact on the consumers' willingness to pay. Bushara et al. (2023) highlighted that increased perceived value of customers enhanced their willingness to pay a premium price.

H2(ii): There is a significant relationship between perceived value and willingness to pay among Tencent video users.

Barnett (1990), after compiling prior scholarly research work, found that perceived playfulness is an intrinsic motivation that can increase one's willingness to pay. Kim, Shinaprayoon and Ahn (2022) found that the perceived playfulness of virtual technology tourism promoted greater willingness among people to pay. The later study by Tang et al. (2022) examined the factor of perceived playfulness and identify how it impacts the individuals' willingness to adopt autonomous vehicles (AV).

H2(iii): There is a significant relationship between perceived playfulness and willingness to pay among Tencent video users.

Oliver (1980) depicted that consumers' perceptions of the quality of a product or service may differ from that of the merchant and that consumers have expectations of the product or service

prior to their purchase decision. Quality-conscious shoppers guarantee that the supplier does not give a lower degree of quality than promised for experiential products (Rao & Bergen, 1992). Thus, it denotes how essential perceived product quality is in determining consumers' willingness to pay for a product. Turning to studies that have connected perceived quality and willingness to pay, perceived service quality exerted a significant impact on consumers' willingness to make a purchase via mobile shopping (Zhang, Jun, & Palacios, 2023).

H2(iv): There is a significant relationship between perceived quality and willingness to pay among Tencent video users.

The concept of copyright awareness commonly emerges in studies related to law and journalism, in which the researchers mostly concentrate on an event to critique and reflect on people's copyright awareness. Given the vast number of resources available on the Internet during this digital era, users have access to free online videos through a host of channels. Nonetheless, the increase in awareness about copyright among users can eventually lead more users to pay for video-on-demand (VOD) (Xiang, 2020) among Chinese users.

H2(v): There is a significant relationship between copyright awareness and willingness to pay among Tencent video users.

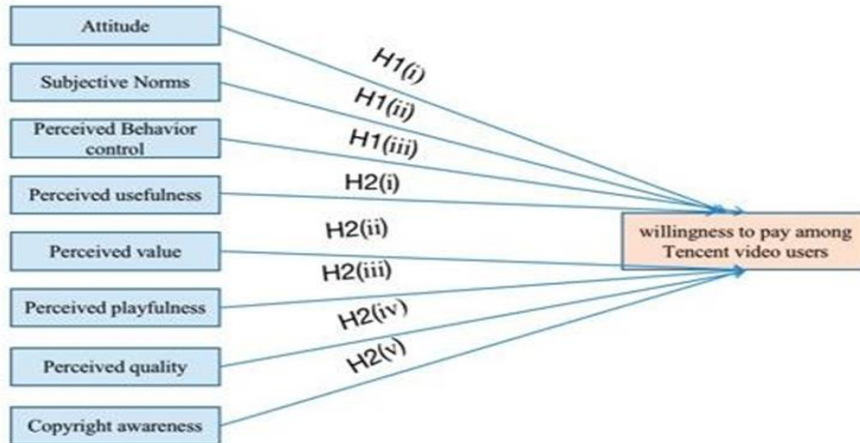


Figure 2.1: The Conceptual Framework of the Study

Methodology

This study quantitatively examined Chinese users' willingness to pay for Tencent video. The researcher distributed the questionnaires online through the China Questionnaire Star platform to collect data. The respondents were Tencent video users aged between 18 and 30 years old. The sample size was determined using G*Power 3.1 software. The study was based on eight

independent variables, and an explanatory rate of 0.10 was considered practically significant. The sample size was calculated to be at least 236 respondents at $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed test) and 0.95 power. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) suggested that a sample of 384 respondents would be required to study a target group of more than one million people. According to the Tencent Revenue Report, Tencent video has a total of 120 million paid members and 432 million active users, which greatly exceeds one million people (Tencent, 2022). Sekaran and Bougie (2016) stated that as sample size > 500 is considered as excessive, hence, the study sample size was therefore > 384 and < 500 . Five hundred questionnaires were distributed for this study, and a total of 484 questionnaires (completion rate 96.8%) were completed.

A snowball sampling technique was then used in all 23 Chinese provinces using filtered questions to ensure the two inclusion criteria were fulfilled: they must be Tencent users and aged between 18 to 30 years old. Snowball sampling, as a type of convenience sample, requires the researcher to make first contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic (Bryman, 2016) and this process continues as the recommended contacts are in turn asked to recommend more potential respondents, which creates a referral chain and expands the potential respondent pool.

Measures

All the data were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data were first pre-tested to eliminate the questionnaire measurement items that affected questionnaire reliability, thereby improving the data collection quality, and ensuring research finding reliability. A total of 50 questionnaires were randomly administered for the pre-test, and the total number of valid samples met the necessary sample size for the analysis. The responses from the pre-testing were considered, with the assistance language experts, the questionnaire was translated from English to Chinese and vice versa.

Results and Discussion

In terms of gender, the number of male respondents (51.7%) exceeded female respondents (48.3%). Out of all the respondents, 51.9% were between 18 and 25 years of age and 48.1% were between 26 and 30 years of age. It was found that 3.9% of the respondents had a high school education or below, 285 (58.9%) were undergraduates, 111 (22.9%) were postgraduates, and 14.3% were doctoral degree holders. As regards the respondents' disposable income, most of them (53.3%) were in the RMB range of 1,000–3,000, followed by 3,000-5,000 (25%), 5,000-10,000 (17.4%) and lastly, below 1,000 (4.3%). As for device usage, 260 respondents (53.7%) reported using mobile phones, 127 (26.2%) reported using computers, 77 (15.9%) reported using tablets, and 20 (4.1%) reported using TVs. The results of the specific samples' characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	250	51.7
	Female	234	48.3
Age	18–25 years old	251	51.9
	26–30 years old	233	48.1
Education level	High school and below	19	3.9
	Undergraduate	285	58.9
	Postgraduate	111	22.9
	Doctorate	69	14.3
Income	Below 1,000 Yuan	21	4.3
	1,000–3,000 Yuan	258	53.3
	3,000–5,000 Yuan	121	25.0
	5,000–10,000 Yuan	84	17.4
Device(s)	Mobile phones	260	53.7
	Tablets	77	15.9
	Computers	127	26.2
	Televisions	20	4.1

(n=484)

In this study, there were two main research hypotheses, one of which focused on the relationships between factors (psychological and individual) and the willingness to pay for Tencent video platforms among online users. The results of the correlation coefficient results for each hypothesis are summarised in Table 2. Among the psychological factors, subjective norms demonstrated a positive and significant relationships ($r= 0.405$, $p=0.000$, $\beta=.423$, $CI=0.340$ to 0.505) toward the willingness to pay for Tencent video platform. Similarly, attitude ($r= 0.397$, $p= 0.000$, $\beta=.421$, $CI=0.337$ to 0.505) and perceived behaviour control ($r= 0.396$, $p=0.000$, $\beta=.408$, $CI=0.325$ to 0.490) all showed positive and significant relationships to predict the willingness to pay for Tencent video platform. Next, perceived value ($r= 0.407$, $p=0.000$, $\beta=.406$, $CI=0.327$ to 0.485) assumed to hold positive yet stronger relationships in comparison with perceived playfulness ($r= 0.398$, $p=0.000$, $\beta=.406$, $CI=0.325$ to 0.488), perceived quality ($r= 0.396$, $p=0.000$,

$\beta=.396$, CI=0.371 to 0.475), perceived usefulness ($r= 0.390$, $p=0.000$, $\beta=.420$, CI=0.337 to 0.502) and copyright awareness ($r= 0.390$, $p=0.000$, $\beta=.405$, CI=0.322 to 0.488) which all of the five hypothesised relationships are classified under individual factors.

Table 2: Correlation between (i) psychological factors, (ii) individual factors and the willingness to pay for Tencent video.

No	Variables	Willingness to Pay			Decision	
		$r(p)$	β	95% CI		
Psychological Factors						
H1(i)	Attitude	.397**(.000)	.421	.337	.505	Accepted
H1(ii)	Subjective norms	.405**(.000)	.423	.340	.505	Accepted
H1(iii)	Perceived behavioural control	.396**(.000)	.408	.325	.490	Accepted
Individual Factors						
H2(i)	Perceived usefulness	.390**(.000)	.420	.337	.502	Accepted
H2(ii)	Perceived value	.407**(.000)	.406	.327	.485	Accepted
H2(iii)	Perceived playfulness	.398**(.000)	.406	.325	.488	Accepted
H2(iv)	Perceived quality	.396**(.000)	.396	.317	.475	Accepted
H2(v)	Copyright awareness	.390**(.000)	.405	.322	.488	Accepted
n = 484, $p^* < .05$, $**p < 0.01$						

Table 3 displays the R square in Model 1 is 0.27 whereby the R square in Model 2 is 0.31. The larger the R square is (close to 1), the better the fitting of the regression equation indicating the weak fitting degree of the regression equation. The contribution of Model 2 (Adjusted R2 = 0.31) was higher than that of Model 1 (Adjusted R2 = 0.27), which suggests that Model 2 helped to explain 31.2% of Tencent video users' willingness to pay, whereas Model 1 helped to explain 27.3% of the willingness to pay Tencent video users.

Table 3: Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis in analysing the factors toward the willingness to pay for Tencent Video Platform

Theoretical Variables	Willingness to Pay for Tencent Video Platform	
	B(<i>p</i>)	B(<i>p</i>)
	Model 1	Model 2
	Psychological Factors	Individual Factors
Attitude	0.22 (.000)	
Subjective norms	0.23 (.000)	
Perceived behavioural control	0.22 (.000)	
Perceived usefulness		0.15 (.001)
Perceived value		0.15 (.001)
Perceived playfulness		0.15 (.001)
Perceived quality		0.14 (.001)
Copyright awareness		0.14 (.002)
R ²	0.27	0.31
Adjusted R ²	0.26	0.30
F	60.12	43.35
Sig.	.000	.000
n= 484, * <i>p</i> < .05, ** <i>p</i> < .01		

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

The Tencent video platform has grown rapidly in the Chinese market. It is now highly ranked among other available major online video streaming platforms in China. Tencent Video also established its market positions through the generous brand benefits and solid user base provided by its parent company. Nonetheless, although Tencent Video is currently the video streaming platform with the largest user base in China, subscriptions have been decreasing. Therefore, based on the understanding of the Tencent Video payment system development process and its current development status, this current study was initiated based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and it has also combined the psychological (attitude, subjective norms, perceived

behavioural control) and individual (perceived value, perceived usefulness, perceived playfulness, perceived quality, and copyright awareness) factors to examine the willingness to pay for Tencent video platform among online users that aged between 18 to 30 years old. The investigation was then conducted by constructing a conceptual model. Several hypotheses were formulated based on the constructed model of the study. Data were collected using online survey and the respondents were recruited via snowball sampling.

The psychological factors (attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) positively and significantly influenced Tencent video users' willingness to pay. Briefly, more positive user psychological factors were accompanied by a stronger willingness to pay. The individual factors (perceived playfulness, perceived value, perceived usefulness, perceived quality, and copyright awareness) also positively and significantly influenced Tencent users' willingness to pay for their platform. Furthermore, the more positive user individual qualities were associated with a greater desire to pay for the Tencent video platform. Subjective norms were the most critical influencing factor among the eight (8) independent variables, which suggested that if more people are present to influence the user's behaviours and if these significant others think that the users should pay for the platform, then the users would have a stronger willingness to pay. Thus, video streaming platforms that intend to continue to develop their payment system must incorporate user experience as the primary principle in their strategy, innovate their profit model, cease reliance on advertising revenue alone to generate profits, focus on content quality and knowledge payment, and create a development system that satisfies more users with more personalised service settings, more diversified and rich content supply, and rationalised pricing principles.

The study also addressed several limitations and thus proposed recommendations for future research. This study has adopted Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to investigate the factors influencing the willingness to pay among Tencent users. Empirical analysis verified that the research model and research hypotheses were valid.

First, this study may not have considered other potential factors that may affect Tencent video users' willingness to pay. In addition to Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), other variables (perceived usefulness, perceived value, perceived fun, perceived quality, and copyright awareness) were also investigated in this study. Future research can refine hypothetical models, while at the same time future researchers can add other relevant concepts (e.g., perceived costs, perceived benefits, social impact) to strengthen the existing conceptual framework of the study.

Second, the questionnaire survey of this study mainly relies on the Internet, but it does not consider the familiarity with the Internet of those who fill out the questionnaire online, so there may be a higher adoption rate of paid services. Future research could consider site stickiness and combine online and offline data collection methods. The sample selection in this study ignores

some factors that may directly affect users' willingness to pay, such as occupation, geographical location, and disparities in experiencing the Tencent video platform. In addition, demographic characteristics of age and average monthly disposable income may be correlated. It's worth noting that many of the respondents were students, which may have skewed the reporting of average monthly disposable income and thus future studies should necessitate stricter controls and filtration.

Third, this study only focused on the willingness to pay of Tencent video users, without further investigation of payment behavior. Future research should also focus on users' payment behaviour and its influencing factors through experiments or cooperation with enterprises. In addition, it is also possible to study how to convert willingness to pay into payment behaviour. Since the membership model and additional paid services of video platforms are still in the development stage, and the membership pricing and benefits of video streaming platforms continue to increase, users' willingness to continue paying is also worrying. Therefore, future research could use panel data to observe whether the purchase behaviour and the willingness to pay of video streaming platform users will change with changes in membership patterns and social environments.

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