

Investigating Factors Influencing Attitudes and Intentions towards Downloading

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ABSTRACT

Digital piracy has been a rampant phenomenon that has attracted attention both from major corporations, policy makers and the media. This study investigates the factors influencing “illegal” downloading of movies and TV series through P2P networks to gain a better understanding of downloaders. Specifically, it examines how social and ethical orientations of university students and their attitudes towards downloading impact on downloading intentions. The data analysis of 284 useable responses produced several significant relationships. Neutralisation theory and the theory of planned behavior are used to explain some of the results. Facilitating conditions and personal moral obligation were found to predict attitudes towards downloading. Personal moral obligation and attitudes towards downloading are also found to influence intentions to download. Findings derived from this study can provide useful managerial implications for marketers and policy makers to have a better understanding of down-loaders and help developed better measures to a problem which is likely to persist.

KEYWORDS

Attitudes towards downloading, downloading intentions, Neutralisation Theory, Theory of Planned Behavior, social and ethical factors in downloading

BACKGROUND

The widespread adoption of the Internet has opened up a whole new avenue for information sharing (Aiken et al., 2003; Altschuller and Benbunan-Fich, 2009; Chalkiti and Sigala, 2008; Parameswaran et al., 2001). At the same time, the fast internet connections, inexpensive and higher media storage capacity, and underground peer to peer networks have also opened the floodgates to illegal downloading and digital piracy (Cronan and Al-Rafee, 2008; Pouwelse et al., 2005; Terrell and Rosen, 2003). The ubiquitous nature of the Internet, making the downloading harder to track further aggravates these illegal activities (Lysonski and Durvasula, 2008). The prevalence of downloading activity is most common through P2P networks or file sharing networks like Kazaa, RapidShare and more popularly today, Bit-Torrent (Lysonski and Durvasula, 2008).

In evaluating the consequences of downloading, it is perceived that little harm is inflicted on individuals or companies when the product (such as movies) is virtual (Picard, 2004).

While downloading movies and TV series online may be impeding on companies' profits, circulating copies of movies through portable physical media and shared among peers is not perceived to be harmful (Byers et al., 2004). One of the greatest concerns of downloading and piracy is the loss of revenue, especially when it robs copyright holders in earning their royalties (Dejean, 2009) and may inhibit innovation (Kwong et al., 2003; Zamoon and Curley, 2008). On a societal level, it is perceived to erode the ethics of consumers (Goles et al., 2008). Although downloading is justified by many as a "victimless" crime, and there is a perception that big organizations are not affected by downloading. It is suggested that such mentality could lead to other more serious practices that would hurt the society in the long run (Goles et al., 2008; Taylor and Shim, 1993). While there is an observed prevalence of studies on movies and TV series being downloaded through P2P networks, the examination of consumers in that context has been limited (Bounie et al., 2006; de Vany and Walls, 2007). As such, the understanding of consumers' attitudes towards the difference between these two bears great importance.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

File sharing and downloading of movies and TV series

The unauthorized downloading and sharing of digital media through P2P networks, also termed as peer to peer piracy (Proserpio et al., 2005) or more broadly termed as "digital piracy" (Cronan and Al-Rafee, 2008) is considered as an illegal copying or downloading of copyrighted software and media files. This practice will bring detrimental effects to the copyright holder, albeit economically or non economically (Cronan and Al-Rafee, 2008). This form of piracy is considered as one of the most critical threats to the entertainment industry. It is found that digital piracy is practised more disproportionately by the young educated male demographics (Teo, 2001), who are suggested to be still "immature" in their ethical development (d'Astous et al.,

2005; Hill, 2007; Hinduja, 2003). It was also found that internet users between the ages of 18 to 29 are more likely to illegally download digital music, whereas there was significantly less in the 30 to 44 age groups. It is found that college students are the most active in digitally pirating music, movies and file sharing on the Internet (Freestone and Mitchell, 2004; LaRose et al., 2006). This could be attributed to the fact that most college students use the Internet to visit or obtain music, movies, fashion, online games and they are more likely to spend time online than any other demographic group (Aiken et al., 2003).

Attitudes towards downloading and Neutralization Theory

Studies have emphasized on the importance and the influence of attitudes on the intention to commit unethical acts, such as to pirate movies (Al-Rafee and Cronan, 2006; Levin et al., 2007; Limayem et al., 1999; Peace et al., 2003). It is suggested that consumers do not perceive the direct harm that digital piracy causes and consider it a “victimless crime”. They are unable to relate and visualize the economic consequences they are impeding on individuals, although they believe it might only affect major corporations slightly (Chellapa and Shivendu, 2003). Furthermore, the “anti-big business” attitude whereby they believe that the price of digital media is inflated and exorbitant, therefore blaming the industry for making their softwares unaffordable to many (Freestone and Mitchell, 2004). It is also thought that these companies will not suffer from downloading as they are perceived to be reaping in profits from other channels. However, little do pirates know that the creative artists working for the companies do suffer due to cuts in royalties.

Existing literature states that many “pirates” or digital piracy offenders do not view piracy as being illegal or unethical (Hinduja, 2007). This can be explained by the neutralization theory which postulates that individuals are able to relieve themselves of the sense of “wrongdoing” by justifying their deviance and actions as “normal” (De Young, 1988). Individuals rationalize the appropriateness of their actions and are also likely to justify their actions under certain situations

by deeming deviance as appropriate depending on the situation and context (Agnew, 1994). It has been found that nine techniques which individuals employ to free themselves from moral, ethical, and legal bindings (Hinduja, 2007). These are denial of responsibility; denial of injury; denial of victim; denial of negative intent; condemnation of the condemners; appeal to higher loyalties; metaphor of the ledger; claim of normalcy; and claim of relative acceptability (Henry, 1990; Hinduja, 2007; Ingham and Hinduja, 2008).

Facilitating conditions

It is suggested that facilitating conditions are factors in an environment that hinders or makes an act (legally or illegally) easier to commit (Triandis, 1980). Because of the accessibility and ease of committing the act, consumers would therefore have standards that could be more easily swayed, therefore forming more positive attitudes (Limayem et al., 1999). Based on the findings of Cronan and Al-Rafee (2008), individuals equipped with the skills and resources to pirate have a higher intention to pirate. In this instance, fast internet connection, lack of copyright measures, easily accessible websites or sources to digital files are some facilitating factors that will assist individuals in downloading movies and TV series (Cheng et al., 1997). Furthermore, the Internet and the P2P applications are widely available, this will further motivate rampant downloading intentions and behaviour. As such, it is postulated that:

H_{1a}: Facilitating conditions will positively influence attitudes towards downloading through P2P networks.

H_{2a}: Facilitating conditions will positively influence intention to download movies and TV series.

Personal Moral Obligation

Moral obligation is defined as the feeling of guilt or the personal obligation under a situation to perform or not perform a behavior. Past researchers have used this as a factor to predict ethical behavior (Chen et al., 2009; Cronan and Al-Rafee, 2008), as such it could well lend insights into downloading consumers' behavior. Furthermore, Ajzen (1991) has also suggested that the

inclusion of moral obligation might be a more predictive measure in the theory of planned behaviour to measure unethical behavior. Individuals who are thinking of committing the act of piracy could feel guilty or a sense of personal obligation to pirate or not pirate the digital material. Increase in media coverage and exposure to negative consequences of piracy could evoke guilt in individuals or a personal sense of moral obligation before or in the act of downloading (Cronan and Al-Rafee, 2008). However, if individuals are less well developed morally, the chances are higher that they will have positive attitudes towards downloading through P2P networks.

H_{1b}: Personal moral obligation will negatively influence attitudes towards downloading through P2P networks.

H_{2b}: Personal moral obligation will negatively influence intention to download movies and TV series.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory proposes that individuals behave and make decisions in a rational and systematic manner by evaluating the consequences of their behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). For a long time, authors have sought to understand and uncover the causes and consumer behavior behind downloading and piracy (Al-Rafee and Cronan, 2006; Ang et al., 2001; Limayem et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2005). It has been postulated that such behavior is attributed to psychological processes and personality traits of the individual (Husted, 2000; Proserpio et al., 2005). Intentions are also suggested to capture the main motivational factors that subsequently lead to behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

Basing on the theory of planned behaviour, attitudes will influence behavioural intention (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977). Other piracy studies have affirmed that positive attitudes towards piracy will lead to intention to download (Ang et al., 2001). Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₃: Attitudes towards downloading through P2P networks will positively influence intention to download movies and TV series.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and survey instrument

Students from two large Western Australian Universities were used as the sample for the study since they represent a large segment of illegal down-loaders (Freestone and Jones, 2008; LaRose et al., 2006; Mitchell, 2004). Trained fieldworkers approached university students at several locations of the campuses over a four week period. The survey took place at various times in the day to achieve a broad cross-section of the population. Over seventy percent of the students approached agreed to complete the survey.

The survey instrument consisted of three sections; Section A measured past downloading behaviour. Section B comprised of four adapted and adopted scales that measured facilitating conditions, personal moral obligation, attitudes towards downloading through P2P networks and intention to download movies and TV series (Goles et al., 2008; Limayem et al., 1999; Lysonski and Durvasula, 2008). All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, 1 represent “Strongly disagree” and 7 represent “Strongly agree”. Section C captured the demographic information of respondents.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Samples

In total, 332 responses were collected, and of these 48 responses were discarded due to incompleteness. The usable responses were then analysed using SPSS 15. Over forty four percent of respondents were males. The percentage of down-loaders (72.7%) was higher than non-down-loaders (27.3%), which showed a high prevalence and acceptance of downloading among university students.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the original 17-items “Attitudes towards downloading through P2P networks” scale. Four factors emerged from Varimax rotation and were named, “social consequences”, “anti-corporate attitude”, “personal risk” and “social acceptance”. In total, the items were reduced to fourteen items with reliabilities above 0.6, which are deemed acceptable for further analysis (Peter, 1978).

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression is conducted between the four antecedents towards “attitudes towards downloading through P2P networks”. It was found that “facilitating conditions” and “personal moral obligation” significantly influence “attitudes towards downloading through P2P network” ($p < .05$, Adjusted $R^2 = .157$). The analysis indicate that “facilitating conditions” has a positive influence on “attitudes towards downloading through P2P networks” ($\beta = 0.190$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.157$, Sig. = 0.001). Thus, H_{1a} is accepted. The regression between “personal moral obligation” and “attitude towards downloading through P2P networks” suggests a positive relationship ($\beta = 0.242$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.157$, Sig. = 0.000). Therefore, H_{1b} has been rejected.

Relationship between the antecedents and the four dimensions of attitude towards downloading through P2P networks

Multiple regression is conducted between “facilitating conditions” and “personal moral obligation” have a positive influence on the “social consequences” dimension ($\beta = 0.201$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.128$, Sig. = 0.001 and $\beta = 0.291$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.128$, Sig. = 0.000).

Multiple regression is conducted between “facilitating conditions”, “personal moral obligation”, and “personal risk”. There is no significant relationship between “facilitating conditions” and “personal risk” ($\beta = 0.037$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.129$, Sig. 0.523 and $\beta = 0.068$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.129$, Sig. 0.272). However, findings indicate that “personal moral obligation” has a significant effect

on “personal risk” ($\beta = 0.144$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.129$, Sig. 0.021 and $\beta = 0.358$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.129$, Sig. 0.000).

Multiple regression is conducted between “facilitating conditions”, “personal moral obligation”, and “anti-corporate attitude”. However, no significant relationship was found.

Multiple regression is conducted between “facilitating conditions”, “personal moral obligation”, and “social acceptance”. It was found that no significant relationship exists between “facilitating conditions” and “social acceptance”. However, significant relationship between “personal moral obligation” and “social acceptance” is reported. However, a negative relationship between “personal moral obligation” and “social acceptance” ($\beta = -0.207$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.432$, Sig. 0.000) is observed.

Table 1 Multiple regression results on factors influencing four dimensions of attitudes towards downloading through P2P network

	B-values	Std. error	β	Adjusted R^2	t-value	Sig.
Social consequences						
Facilitating conditions	0.237	0.069	0.201	0.128	3.438	0.001
Personal moral obligation	0.213	0.044	0.291	0.128	4.801	0.000
Personal risk						
Personal moral obligation	0.348	0.059	0.358	0.129	5.945	0.000
Social acceptance						
Personal moral obligation	-0.141	0.033	-0.207	0.432	-4.244	0.000

Influence of antecedents on intention to download movies and TV series

Multiple regression is conducted between “facilitating conditions”, “personal moral obligation”, and “intention to download movies and TV series”. Findings show no significant relationship between “facilitating conditions” and “intention to download movies and TV series” ($\beta = -0.046$,

adjusted $R^2 = 0.422$, Sig. 0.332), thus H_{2a} is rejected. However, significant relationships are reported between “personal moral obligation”, and “intention to download movies and TV series”. Hence, H_{2b} is accepted.

Relationship between attitudes and intention to download movies and TV series

Multiple regression is conducted between four factors of “attitudes towards downloading through P2P network” and “intention to download movies and TV series”. It was found that “social consequences” has a significant negative relationship with “intention to download movies and TV series” ($\beta = -0.205$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.311$, Sig. 0.000). However, insignificant relationships between “anti-corporate attitude”, “personal risk” and “intention to download movies and TV series” are reported ($\beta = 0.056$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.311$, Sig. =.332 and $\beta = -0.069$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.311$, Sig. = 0.194). “Social acceptance” factor emerged to have a significant positive relationship towards “intention to download movies and TV series”. Thus H_3 is partially supported.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The findings of this study reveal that the antecedents have a positive influence on different dimensions of attitudes towards downloading through P2P network. Firstly, facilitating conditions and personal moral obligation positively influences “social consequences”. It is clear that while down-loaders make full use of some of the facilitating conditions (such as fast internet connection) to help ease the downloading process, they are also conscious of the fact that these activities have negative bearings to society. Managers and social policy makers should design their ad campaigns to build on the concept of moral obligation to send the message across that there is more harm than good in the long term. For instance, the artistic work and intellectual property of each artiste may be dampened and the quality diluted because of lack of funding (through loss of royalties).

Personal moral obligation has a positive influence on “personal risk”. This could mean that the personal moral obligation of a consumer will affect the perception of risk attached to downloading. The risks of being caught, as attached to such behavior should be heightened in awareness campaigns by marketers and policy makers. As such, these two messages will need to be reiterated to consumers on a regular basis, educating them about the risks of being caught, penalized and possibly other risks such as viruses that may inflict on their computers.

Similar to findings in Limayem et al.’s (2004) study, facilitating conditions has a significant influence on intentions. The ease of internet access and the high speed downloads are assisting consumers in downloading movies and TV series easily. University students who may not be able to indulge as much as they wish on movies theatres may turn to the option to download online. Piracy may be very much indoctrinated in consumers’ minds as the copying and burning on CDs and distribution. But downloading is a hazy and grey area whereby it could be legal since there have been little success in prosecution and definition. This is especially when downloaders also download, store and then circulate, share or distribute their wares among their social circles.

As an overview, it is noticed that personal moral obligation plays a huge role in negatively influencing attitudes towards downloading and intentions to download movies and TV series. This could suggest to managers that the use of “guilt” would be an important factor in dissuading downloading. Therefore, a message strategy that communicates the profound impact on an individual, the family and the society as a whole could drive the guilt into downloaders. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize and educate consumers and the public on the general impact of downloading. Demonstrate how lower profits for the industry will result in less time and resources to create quality and innovative productions. Instead, consumers should be provided with other cheaper alternatives and yet not stifling creativity. For instance, following the success of iTunes, it would be a good option to introduce an “iMovies” for the download of

movies through the Internet at a cheaper price. Similar strategies could be explored where consumers can trial the movie, and movies can be transferred to other media devices such as through iPods.

The different dimensions of attitudes towards downloading through P2P network was found to influence intention to download differently. Specifically social acceptance positively influences intention to download while social consequences negatively influence intention to download. This shows that social acceptance among peers, or in this case authority figures could well form intentions and further fuel intentions to download movies and TV series. In this case, universities could also assist by providing less resources and monitoring systems that disallow students from downloading on campus. Providing a quota and monitoring the students who have been downloading could blacklist the students and penalize them through restricted access to the Internet.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

It is found that personal moral obligation plays a huge role in influencing attitudes and intentions towards downloading. A guilt scale could be employed to measure if indeed guilt has an effect of downloading. It could also be cross culturally compared between a developed and developing country as to whether there are varying levels of guilt in terms of piracy/downloading. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to examine consumers from an older segment. Similarly, downloading could be a habitual practice whereby they are so used to it that they do it as part of a compulsive behaviour or addiction rather than a conscious act of malice. Testing the model with habitual behavior as an antecedent in future studies may shed some new light in this issue (Limayem et al., 1999).

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, due to the nature of the study and the sensitivity of the topic, there are possibilities that the respondents are under reporting on their actual

downloading behaviour (Limayem et al., 1999). The scope of the study is limited to a student population examining only university students, who are found to be the most dominant group of down-loaders. However, older individuals who are also technologically savvy and partake in this behaviour are not within the scope of this study thus limiting the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, other cultures or countries could reveal differences. Also, the examination of non-down-loaders and down-loaders could reveal deeper insights into motivations to download movies and TV series.

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