



Effect of peer influence on unauthorized music downloading and sharing: The moderating role of self-construal



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ABSTRACT

This research develops an integrative model of music piracy, specifying self-control and differential association as antecedents, peer influence in music downloading/sharing as mediator, and self-construal as moderator. Disentangling peer influence into two forms—informational influence and normative influence—this research examines their differential effects on two aspects of music piracy: unauthorized downloading and unauthorized sharing. The findings suggest that informational influence is the key underlying mechanism through which self-control affects unauthorized downloading, whereas the two forms of peer influence mediate the relationship between differential association and both aspects of music piracy. Furthermore, the relationships among antecedents, mediator, and consequences (i.e., unauthorized downloading and unauthorized sharing) are contingent upon individuals' self-construal. These findings yield important implications and intervention programs (e.g., interpersonal skill training, educational extension programs, and artist-student contact points) that can curb music piracy.

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1. Introduction

Digital music services are rapidly expanding into new markets on a global scale, partially due to newly developed tools such as iTunes, Spotify and Deezer (Shanahan & Hyman, 2010). By now, digital music services are available in 58 countries, compared to only 23 at the beginning of 2011 (IFPI, 2013). Thirty-two percent of the music industry revenues in the world come from digital sources, far surpassing the film, newspaper, and book sectors (IFPI, 2013). Accompanying such an unprecedented global expansion is the prevalence of digital piracy. Because of music piracy, the overall global market declined around 31% from 2004 to 2010 (RIAA, 2014). On average, the music industry loses about \$5 billion every year to piracy worldwide (<http://www.soc.duke.edu/~s142tm01/piracyfaq.html>). Globally, one in four Internet users (28%) regularly accesses unlicensed services (IFPI, 2013). Apart from such financial consequences, music piracy may also have exerted detrimental impact on social, creative, and innovative developments, as well as respect for tradition, norms, and rituals.

As the world's largest music market, the American music industry also suffers a lot from the damage caused by piracy. Since 1999, sales

of recorded music in the U.S. have fallen by an average of 7% every year due to piracy (Connolly & Krueger, 2005), resulting in the loss of \$12.5 billion and dramatic hindrance in job growth (Siwek, 2007). Americans lose 71,060 jobs and \$2.7 billion in earnings every year, including at least \$422 million tax revenues (Siwek, 2007).

Recognizing the severe consequences mentioned above, prior researchers have examined the potential motives for music piracy and tried to find methods to reduce or prevent this behavior. They perceive self-control and differential association as the most impactful factors on music piracy among a variety of potential determinants (Higgins, Fell, & Wilson, 2006; Hinduja, 2006). Self-control refers to the ability to resist temptation to commit criminal or analogous deviant behavior (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Low self-control leads to computer crimes in general (Skinner & Fream, 1997), and MP3 downloading in particular (Higgins et al., 2006; Hinduja, 2006). Differential association reflects the degree to which an individual associates and interacts with those who engage in music piracy or express norms, values, and attitudes supporting pirating behaviors (cf. Akers & Jensen, 2006). It provides a social context where techniques, attitudes, drives, and rationalizations for music piracy are learned and internalized. The more a person is exposed to music piracy behavior and attitudes favorable of such behavior, the greater the probability of that person engaging in music piracy (Wang, Yang, & Bhattacharjee, 2011).

Extending the existing research, this paper develops an integrative model of music piracy (see Fig. 1), specifying self-control and differential association as antecedents, peer influence in music downloading/

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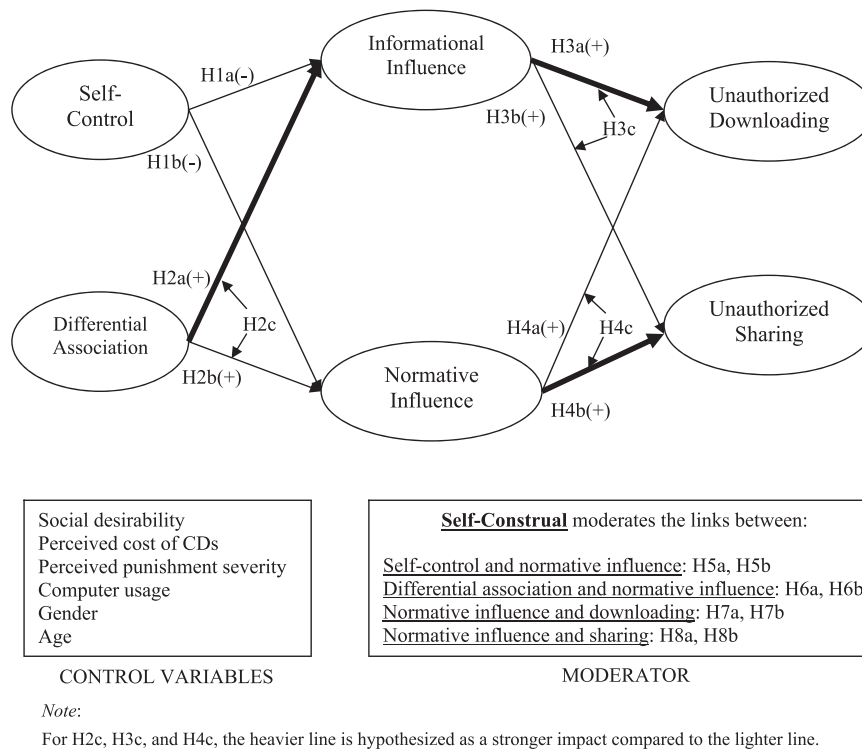


Fig. 1. The music piracy model.

sharing as mediator, and self-construal as moderator. It intends to contribute to the literature in three ways. First, it develops a construct of “peer influence in music downloading/sharing”, drawing upon the relevant literature on interpersonal influence on consumption-related behaviors (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Bristol & Mangleburg, 2005; Mascarenhas & Higby, 1993; Yang, Kim, Laroche, & Lee, 2014; Yang & Laroche, 2011; Yang, Schaninger, & Laroche, 2013). Peer influence in this context refers to the tendency to be influenced by others to engage in music downloading and/or sharing. Note that, by definition, peer influence in music downloading/sharing is not piracy-specific; it also applies to the situation of downloading/sharing authorized music files (e.g., sampling or online purchasing). This research demonstrates that peer influence exerts significant impact on individuals' music piracy even if the construct itself has a neutral stand.

Studying music piracy from the perspective of peer influence is consistent with recent literature showing that word-of-mouth (Condry, 2004; Givon, Mahajan, & Muller, 1995), or making friends with relevant others (Hennig-Thurau, Henning, & Sattler, 2007), is a major motive to engage in piracy. According to Condry (2004), music piracy is essentially a group behavior that involves word-of-mouth discussions, friend-to-friend sharing, and convenience in music access. The culture of music piracy is so strong that lawsuits or technologies alone cannot easily change it (Condry, 2004). As evidence, although the RIAA has filed more than 21,000 illegal downloading/sharing suits since September 2003, the conviction rate is low (Triplett, 2007). Furthermore, there are lawsuits against the recording industry for violating antitrust laws, conspiring to defraud the courts, and making extortionate threats (Fitzgerald, 2007; Triplett, 2007). Such news, combined with conflicting views in the new social media, may create confusion in individuals' minds about whether music piracy is a socially acceptable behavior.

Second, this research simultaneously examines the effect of two types of peer influence (i.e., informational and normative) on two aspects of music piracy, namely unauthorized downloading and unauthorized sharing. *Unauthorized downloading* refers to the extent to which an

individual engages in downloading unauthorized music files from the Internet, while *unauthorized sharing* refers to the degree to which an individual engages in sharing unauthorized music with others (e.g., uploading music files to websites). Unauthorized downloading and sharing differ not only in the direction of piracy (e.g., download from vs. upload to the P2P networks), but also in the motives underlying these behaviors. According to Wang et al. (2011), unauthorized downloading is mainly driven by economic needs (e.g., convenience, money-saving), whereas sharing is largely driven by social needs (e.g., friendship, recognition from friends, reciprocity). The interplay of influence type and piracy dimension likely advances our understanding about differential motives underlying each component of music piracy.

Finally, this research is among the first to examine how self-construal sets a boundary condition for the proposed model of music piracy. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), there are two types of self-construal, independent and interdependent, which correspond to the macrocultural constructs of individualism and collectivism, respectively. An independent self-construal defines oneself as a unique individual and separate from others, whereas an interdependent self-construal defines the self as a member of a group and connected with others (Ma, Yang, & Murali, 2014). Music piracy is a global phenomenon and poses a more alarming threat in collectivism-oriented countries (IFPI, 2009). Comparing music sharers between Japan and the U.S., Condry (2004) finds that the ‘culture’ of file sharing plays a stronger role in affecting music sharing among Japanese consumers. Although these studies provide intriguing findings, they infer rather than measure cultural values. We do not know the extent to which an individual's orientation toward collectivism/individualism affects his/her pattern of being influenced by peers in unauthorized downloading/sharing.

This research uses university students in the U.S. as primary test subjects to study music piracy for several reasons. First, the U.S. is currently leading the trend of the world's music market, and digital channels have overtaken physical formats to become the primary source of revenues for record companies (IFPI, 2013). Thus, studying American youth can

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