



# The intention to download music files in a P2P environment: Consumption value, fashion, and ethical decision perspectives<sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

Downloading unauthorized music file, being framed as a problem of crime, is deemed unethical, but the peer-to-peer systems have boosted its popularity and have become the killer application for the music industry. Two factors, cost savings from CD purchase and the low moral reasoning ability of Internet users, have been frequently attributed as rationales for this behavior. Music download, however, can also be interpreted as a value maximizing behavior that chooses between the values from consuming illicit and legitimate music, wherein the consumption value is partly dependent on one's degree of fashion involvement since music is fashionable. This paper presents a conceptual model of music download by looking at and integrating these seldom noticed perspectives with traditional explanations. An analysis of 834 samples drew from a survey of P2P users in Taiwan reveals that: people are maximizing value while downloading music; and that fashion involvement influences the perception of consumption value from music download. This study also found that moral reasoning moderate the relationships among fashion involvement, consumption value, and behavioral intention to download music.

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**Keywords:** Peer-to-peer; Music download; Behavioral intention; Fashion; Moral reasoning; Consumption value

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## 1. Introduction

Digitalized music files, retaining almost the same quality as the original, can be reproduced, stored, and transferred at almost zero-cost. The technology of peer-to-peer (P2P) architecture has brought great convenience to and fostered the popularity of illegal downloading of “free” music. P2P architecture provides a platform for people to share resources with others. Many individuals, enabled by this technology, would rather download music from unknown members of P2P platform, than buying CD or music files from legitimate sellers. This is quite detrimental to the music industry [29]. Understanding why or how an inten-

tion to download develops becomes one of the critical issues for music companies. More empirical studies, therefore, are needed to investigate the antecedents of users' behavioral intention to download music files in the P2P environment [1,13,19].

User's unauthorized downloading of music files is an invasion of intellectual property. Traditionally, consumers' economic savings and moral judgment are two explanations, among others, for downloading illegal music files. Monetary or economic gains such as cost saving, low price, or low income of customers was frequently suggested as one possible antecedents of this illegal behavior [13,26,44]. The proposition of saving money on music purchasing, however, is found not a primary antecedent of downloading free, so-called pirate music [32], and may be present only for “unknown” new songs wherein individuals with low income sample new music [2].

Some researchers assumed that music download is not only illegal, but also immoral. A decision to act, hence,

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partly depends on an individual's ethical framework to judge the degree of morally rightness of this behavior [34,31,13]. Kohlberg's Model of Cognitive Moral Development (CMD) describes one's developmental status in a continuum of moral reasoning ability to judge morally right or wrong regarding an act in a situation of moral conflict. Previous studies have consistently found a direct relationship between higher level of moral judgment and ethical behavior [43,55,23,12,35,39]. One possible explanation of the popularity of music download, hence, is the low level of moral development of Internet users [34]. But conflict results have also been found [23]; music download even may not be perceived as an unethical behavior at all [46].

Downloading of music files can be viewed as a kind of music consumption [19]. One of the primary purposes for music download is to enjoy the "free" pirate music. P2P in such context is an alternative channel for having music. Downloaders can be viewed as consumers of music who are maximizing value from the trade-offs between illegal and legal channels. Consumers are always rational to some certain extent when choosing among alternative channels. Though higher CD price would increase the pay-off from music piracy, hence encourage music download [13], consumption value is a multi-dimensional concept including but not limited to economic gains [62,47,50].

Music is fashionable and always conveys features of social utility that satisfy interpersonal needs. The popularization of music presents a typical phenomenon of fashion [42,51]. Fashion is the process of adopting symbols primarily to provide the individual an identity relative to others [42]. People highly involved with fashion may perceive music with higher value from its social utility. The need of pursuing fashion may affect personal behavior greatly. People, especially the young generation in poor financial status, may thus be inclined to download music.

Despite an extensive amount of research examining the influences of economic gains and cognitive moral development, researchers have not fully explored this issue in the context of music consumption. This paper fills in the gap by proposing an integrative model for interrelating various theories that views music download as an ethical issue, a mean to music consumption, and music is fashionable. Standing on the above assumptions, the objective of this study is to provide insight into the decision process of music downloaders by integrating traditional approaches with the new perspectives. More specifically, the objectives of this study are to compare the effects of consumption value, moral reasoning, and fashion involvement, and to explore their relationships.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Music downloading and moral concepts

Since music files is somewhat similar with software in its nature [2,13], previous ethical models regarding softlifting can be extended and refined to enhance our understanding

of the contributing factors of music files downloading. Previous studies about softlifting found that legal factors were not the determining variables for softlifting [40,9,48]. But since music download is illegal, a decision to act invokes in an individual's ethical dilemmas. An ethical dilemma occurs when there is a moral conflict, creating a situation where right or wrong is hard to evaluate and decide.

Kohlberg's theory of cognitive moral development, emanating from field of cognitive development, explains the processes individuals go through to arrive at decision prior to moral behavior [30]. Kohlberg [28] argued that, during the process of moral judgment, three levels of moral reasoning, with two stages within each level, would be applied. He believes that an individual, while growing up, will sequentially and unidirectionally proceed through three levels of moral reasoning.

The focus of level one, "pre-conventional level," is on the self. Moral reasoning on this level is predominantly based on maximization of personal gains and minimization of personal loss. Younger children obey rules to avoid punishments or obtain rewards. At stage 1, a person do what was told; then, at stage 2, people begin to learn that "doing good" is doing what is good for me, rather than doing what others demand. One may make a bargain with others for cooperation [30,39].

The focus of level two is on the relationships with other groups. Children and teenagers in conventional level conform themselves to rules to avoid disapproval or dislike from others, or censure by legitimate authorities and resultant guilt. They become eager for the recognition from peers and hence produce a sense of conformity, strictly adhere to law imposed externally. Reasoning at stage 3 involves the making and sustaining relationships with friends and loved ones, and produces a sense of mutual caring; and reasoning at stage 4 provides guidelines for cooperating with remote others, such as strangers, competitors, and enemies [30].

Stage 5 and 6 comprised the third level of moral development. The focus of this level is on personally held principles [30]. The third level signifies a more principled reasoning reflecting a growing autonomy based on self chosen principles [39]. Adults in post-conventional level conform themselves to rules to avoid self-condemnation, and maintain the respect of impartial spectator judging in terms of community welfare. Prior to social attachment, an individual at stage 5 will be aware of universal values and rights that anyone could choose to build a moral world [39]. Individual reasoning at stage 6 makes a choice to do what is right if it is consistent with self chosen principles [30].

An individual's cognitive moral ability increases as cognitive moral structure of greater sophistication is added [11]. The higher the moral reasoning ability is, the more likely it is that a person will consider alternatives that are least detrimental to others that are affected [59]. As one advance along the ethical development continuum, this person will be less influenced by dysfunctional events in

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