A COMPARATIVE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS ON THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS ONLINE FILE SHARING, CURRENT PRACTICES AND FUTURE PLANS

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The dramatic growth of internet during the last decade has created new challenges with respect to illegal file sharing through P2P network. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) has sued a number of individuals, mostly college students, in 2003 and 2004, for sharing illegal music files online. This study is based on an empirical survey conducted at an American and a Turkish University to obtain student views about their past file sharing practices and future plans. The results indicate that about half of the respondents are not willing to switch to legal for-pay download sites. There were some differences between the American and Turkish students in the way they perceive file sharing, legality, ethics, and the impact on the recording industry.

Introduction

The dramatic growth of Internet usage has changed the lives of millions of people around the globe during the last decade. In addition to electronic commerce, the World Wide Web has been a marvelous tool in facilitating online communications. From the point of view of copyright owners, however, one negative aspect of this new communication medium has been its ability to easily duplicate and widely distribute copyrighted files without authorization. These activities, usually known as file sharing, have become common in exchanging music, video, audio, software, and text files from thousands of potential sources. Among the hardest hit in this process was the music industry.

It should be noted that before the digital age, music piracy was typically characterized by the sale of inferior recordings through flea markets or other unconventional sales outlets. Profits were limited because large sales volume could attract law enforcement attention that resulted in substantial criminal penalties. Today, duplication is perfect. Storage space issues, once a challenge for digital media, have been significantly solved by the development of MP3 compression. Thus, Content digitization, compression technologies and peer-to-peer file sharing (P2P) systems currently presents the music industry with its biggest ever challenge (Altinkemer 2000).

Napster was the most popular site for file sharing during the early years. It was created by a student at Northeastern University so that he could easily swap music files with his friends. The free file sharing software was made available online in August 1999. In December 1999, a federal lawsuit was filed against Napster for copyright infringement. Meanwhile, as Napster's user base increased, more music became available, thus further increasing its popularity. Napster became the ideal place to download music due to the huge selection of songs and it was free. Its user base peaked in early 2001 at about 20 million and it was estimated that about 1.5 million people logged in on any given day and saw 2.7 billion downloads a month (Clothier 2004).

Napster ultimately lost the law suit and closed its doors in July 2001 (Freckman 2001; Zepeda 2002). However, it did not take too long for other P2P networks to take the place of Napster. People could easily switch to other sites such as Kazaa, Morpheus, Grokster, and a few others. Like Napster, these programs use Peer-to-Peer (P2P) technology, which connects users in order for them to share files. These new sites have so far escaped successful lawsuits because their operation uses decentralized servers and does not keep logs of user activity. In April 2003, a federal judge ruled that the Kazaa and Grokster ran legal programs, and that they are not responsible for how the software is used by their members (Duffy 2004).