

# MUSIC PIRACY

*Terry Evashkevich, The University of Lethbridge, 4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, AB, T1K 3M4, 403-317-7787, [terry.evashkevich@uleth.ca](mailto:terry.evashkevich@uleth.ca); Debra Basil, The University of Lethbridge, 4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, AB, T1K 3M4, 403-329-2164, [debra.basil@uleth.ca](mailto:debra.basil@uleth.ca)*

## ABSTRACT

One of the most widely discussed issues in the Canadian music industry is the activity of music/file sharing of copy-written materials. Attempts to decrease music sharing in Canada have resulted in limited success. This research seeks to assess whether increasing the penalty for music sharing and/or increasing the likelihood of being penalized would impact music sharing. These results imply that the threat of high fines and the threat of large numbers of people being sued did not suggest a desire to reduce future music piracy.

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One of the most widely discussed issues in the Canadian music industry is the activity of music/file sharing of copy-written materials. Attempts to decrease music sharing in Canada have resulted in limited success. This research seeks to assess whether increasing the penalty for music sharing and/or increasing the likelihood of being penalized would impact music sharing. Specifically, the following hypotheses were tested: H1: Increasing the amount of the fine will reduce sharing. H2: Increasing the number of lawsuits against sharers will reduce sharing. A 2 x 2 between-subjects laboratory experiment was conducted to test these hypotheses. Eighty undergraduate students from a mid-sized university in Western Canada participated voluntarily. The stimuli presented were four text messages, each of which varied in terms of the content. One of the experimental groups received information indicating both high fines, and a high number of lawsuits; one indicated high fines, with a low number of lawsuits; one indicated low fines, with a high number of lawsuits; and the final groups' information indicated both low fines and number of lawsuits. Following each of the scenarios was a list of 10 questions to determine the affect, if any, the scenario information had on the participants' responses. Upon completion the researcher collected the study materials and each of the participants was given a copy of the experiment feedback sheet in order to debrief them on the experiment and its purpose.

An ANOVA examined the effects of the threat of high fines and the threat of large numbers of people being sued. Results showed a significant main effect for the independent variable "fines" ( $F[1, 90] = 3.7$ ,  $p < .06$ ). This variable was measured on a 7 point Likert-type scale, anchored by "decrease downloading" at 1 and "increase downloading" at 7. Those in the "low fines" condition indicated a greater decrease in downloading than those in the "high fines" condition. Further analysis demonstrated that those in the "high fines" condition indicated no significant change in their projected future downloading ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $t = 1.9$ ,  $p < .1$ ). Those in the "low fines" condition indicated a desire to reduce downloading in the future ( $M = 3.2$ ,  $t = 4.7$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There was no significant effect for the independent variable "lawsuits" ( $p < .8$ ). Manipulating the number of lawsuits brought against people for music downloading did not significantly impact responses ( $M = 3.48$  in both the high and low lawsuits conditions). Age and gender were included as covariates. Older respondents indicated greater likelihood of decreasing music piracy in the future ( $F[1, 90] = 7.8$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Gender did not have a significant effect ( $p < .2$ ). The results do not support our hypotheses.

These results imply that the threat of high fines and the threat of large numbers of people being sued did not suggest a desire to reduce future music piracy. Surprisingly, lower fines led to intentions to reduce downloading, but higher fines led to no reduction in downloading intention. Reactance may explain this counterintuitive result. A majority of music downloaders are young adults, a group which is particularly prone to reactance. As such, efforts to reduce music downloading must be sensitive to the possibility of reactance, and must be positioned in a manner that will minimize this undesirable response.