

Press release



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Research on Internet user behavior: Clear rules could prevent copyright infringements

In a recent study on German consumers' use of copyright-protected content on the internet, the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition reveals surprising insights and calls on policy-makers and businesses to act

(Munich, 1 Feb 2018) What amount of music, films, television series and programs is downloaded, streamed or shared by internet users? What proportion of this use refers to paid or free usage types? Do users consider their activities to be legal, and what motives do they have for illegal forms of use? And which factors would prompt users to cease illegal behavior? To answer these and other questions, a representative survey of German consumers has been conducted as part of an interdisciplinary research project that is currently in progress at the Munich Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition.

The four researchers involved in this research project – Dietmar Harhoff, Reto Hilty, Roland Stürz und Alexander Suyer – have now presented a first summary of the main results obtained, which are surprising:

- Consumers with a mix of legal and illegal online consumption behavior have the highest total expenditures, which contradicts the common assumption that illegal use can only be explained by the rationale of reducing costs;
- If legal services were cheaper, easier and more convenient, some users would cease using online content illegally;
- About one-fifth of those surveyed with at least partial illegal use of online content said that they would give up their illegal behavior if they would be more confident to determine what is legal and what is not.

“Copyright law urgently needs to be tailored to the digital age and radically simplified”, says Harhoff, head of the economics department of the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition. And Hilty, co-head of the Institute’s law department, adds: “Many factors indicate that the legislature could prevent a certain amount of copyright infringements by creating unambiguous – and in particular more easily understandable – rules on legal and illegal use of online content and by informing consumers accordingly”.

Stürz and Suyer, both senior research fellows at the Institute, call on the providers of online content to “make content that is already legally available in other countries available in Germany as soon as possible, to take advantage of users’ existing willingness to pay”.

With this study, the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition provides a new statistical basis that has not in this form been available from a neutral institution before. The first summary of main results is available for download at <http://www.ip.mpg.de/en/projects/details/the-use-of-copyright-protected-creative-online-content-by-german-consumers.html>.

As a whole, the survey makes a wide range of additional analyses possible and thus will allow for more profound insights into the online behavior of German consumers. These insights will be made available in a final report with an estimated publication date in the second quarter of 2018.

About the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition

The central focus of research at the Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition is on examining processes of innovation and competition and on developing proposals for designing framework conditions for these processes. The research questions are examined by a law department and an economics department. The Institute was founded in 1966 as the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Patent, Copyright and Competition Law. In 2013, after the establishment of a new economics department, its name was changed to Max Planck Institute for Innovation and Competition. The Institute is one of 84 institutes of the Max Planck Society, one of Germany's leading research organizations. In choosing and executing their research tasks, the Max Planck Institutes are free and independent; thus, each has its own internally administered budget, which can be augmented project-wise by external funding. The research at the Institute must meet the criteria for scientific excellence of the Max Planck Society, which is ensured by regular audits. For further information visit: www.ip.mpg.de/en