An Examination of the Theory of Interpersonal Behavior in the Digital Piracy Context

Mateja Kos Koklič
Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Irena Vida
Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Extended Abstract

Digital piracy or consumer practice of illegally downloading files from the Internet, continues to represent a growing phenomenon and one of particular concern to movie, software and music industries as well as to final consumers (Taylor, Ishida & Wallace, 2009). According to BASCAP (2011), a platform that connects all business sectors worldwide, digitally pirated music, movies and software will account for between $80 billion and $240 billion in 2015. Although a well-researched phenomenon, digital piracy still lacks effective measures to leverage its incidence. Cognizance of underlying motivations to pirate can greatly enhance future public policy and industries’ actions (Cheng et al. 1997).

A vast majority of existing studies applies models of attitude-behavior relations, such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (e.g., Aleassa, Pearson & McClurg, 2011) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (e.g., Cronan & Al-Rafee, 2008). Although prominent theories, they have been subjected to criticism that attitudes alone are often poor predictors of actual behavior (e.g., De Pelsmacker & Janssens 2007). Moreover, a substantial amount of variance in buying behavior remains unexplained by these models, suggesting that other relevant variables should be included when studying various kinds of social behavior (Bamberg & Schmidt, 2003; Shaw et al., 2005). In addition, many piracy studies employ student samples and thus omit other relevant groups. Namely, students are often considered inadequate because of their poor representation of the general population (Yoo & Lee 2012).

In this study, we aim to overcome some of these shortcomings by utilizing a relatively overlooked yet comprehensive model of choice behavior, the Theory of Interpersonal Behavior (TIB) (Triandis 1980), and testing the model on a sample of adult Internet users. TIB is recognized as a complementary, more expansive theory as it expands upon the antecedents of behavior predicted by the two most widely used models of behavior: TRA and TPB. According to TIB, individual’s behavior is a function of intention to engage in this behavior, facilitating conditions, and the strength of habit in performing the behavior. Intention, in turn, depends on perceived consequences of the behavior, affect towards performing behavior and social factors (Pee, Woon & Kankanhalli, 2008).
Following the basic premise of TIB, we suggest an individual’s intention to engage in digital piracy, defined as a conscious plan to carry out this behavior (Eagly & Chaiken 1993), leads to actually engaging in pirating digital content from the Internet (H1). This hypothesis rests on the previously established evidence of significant influence of intention on actual behavior in the digital piracy context (e.g., Taylor, 2012). Together with intentions, facilitating conditions are usually hypothesized as an accurate predictor of actual behavior (Triandis 1980). Facilitating conditions may be considered as factors in individual’s environment that make a behavior easy to perform, having either situational (e.g., access to resources) or internal dimension (e.g., knowledge) (Pee, Woon & Kankanhalli, 2008). In this study, we examine subjective knowledge, a concept rarely considered in the digital piracy research.

One of the few studies that empirically tested the influence of consumer’s perceived knowledge on behavior was conducted by Hennig-Thurau, Henning and Sattler (2007). Hence, we hypothesize an individual’s perceived knowledge of where and how to share files positively influences their digital piracy behavior (H2).

According to Triandis (1980), each act of behavior is perceived as having potentially positive or negative outcome. When pirating digital content is perceived as having positive outcomes (benefits) individuals will be more motivated to engage in digital piracy. In the existing piracy studies, several authors attested to a significant impact of perceived benefits on the intentions to pirate, e.g. Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler (2007) and Lyonski and Durvasula (2008). Thus, it is suggested that perceived positive consequences are positively related to future piracy intent (H3). By contrast, when digital piracy is perceived as having unfavorable outcomes individuals are less likely to form intention to engage in digital piracy. Along these lines, Sinha and Mandel (2008) show that an increased risk of getting caught significantly lowers the tendency to pirate. Somewhat unexpected was their finding that for certain groups of consumers increasing perceived risk led to increase in their likelihood to pirate.

To tackle this controversy, we hypothesize that an individual’s perception of technical risk decreases their intention to pirate (H4).

To better explain intention, Triandis (1980) also included a purely affective measure of attitude toward behavior. Affective aspect has rarely been investigated in the digital piracy context, with the exception of e.g., Al-Rafee and Cronan (2006) who examined the impact of affective beliefs in form of happiness and excitement on attitudes toward pirating digital material. In the context of digital piracy, we expect that positive affect experienced from pirating digital content will be positively related to one’s intent to engage in such behavior in the future (H5). According to TIB, another significant determinant is social factors which involve an individual’s internalization of the reference group’s subjective beliefs with respect to the behavior. In this study social factor is viewed as the extent to which an individual seeks compliance in pirating digital content (as a form of norm susceptibility). It has been suggested that there is a positive relationship between social factors and intention to engage in certain behavior (e.g., Limayem, Khalifa & Chin, 2004). Thus, we posit that social factor positively influences one’s intent to pirate digital content (H6).

Initially, a self-administered paper questionnaire was sent to a nationally representative sample of 10,000 inhabitants of an EU member country. Although a total of 1,523 questionnaires were returned,
910 respondents were included in the present study in order to test the stated hypotheses. A prerequisite for the inclusion in this study was the respondents’ engagement in pirating digital content. Namely, only those respondents who had at least some experience with illegal downloading were included. The final sample consisted of 57.3% females and 42.7% males, while their average age was 43 years (SD 16.7).

All constructs were measured on 7-point Likert scales. We used three items to capture each of the three constructs: perceived benefits (cfr. Hennig-Thurau, Henning & Sattler, 2007), perceived risk (cfr. Hennig-Thurau, Henning & Sattler, 2007), and affect (cfr. Cronan & Al-Rafee, 2008; de Matos, Ituassu & Rossi, 2007). Norm susceptibility was measured with six items (cfr. Bearden, Netemeyer & Teel, 1989), piracy intent with two items (cfr. Taylor & Todd, 1995), and behavior with one item. Based on Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) recommendations, the data analysis consisted of two steps. First, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis with LISREL was used to check the validity and reliability of the measurement items. Then, full-information structural equation modeling was employed to examine the structural relationships in the model. The model fit measures showed the data conform well to the model ($\chi^2 = 931.13$, d.f. = 194, p < 0.00, GFI = 0.915, CFI = 0.941, RMSEA = 0.065, sRMR = 0.045). All the multiple-item constructs display adequate composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). More specifically, CR values ranged between 0.79 and 0.90 and AVE values varied between 0.56 and 0.80, with cut-off values of 0.50 and 0.70, respectively.

As suggested in the first hypothesis, the data confirm that the intention to pirate is positively related to actual digital piracy behavior (std. factor loading = 0.10). We also find support for the hypothesis that knowledge of how and where to share files leads to digital piracy behavior (std. factor loading = 0.56). Similarly, we find significant positive relationship between perceived benefits and future piracy intent (std. factor loading = 0.32). Although we expected a significant negative influence of perceived risk on piracy intention, we could not provide empirical evidence for a statistically significant relationship. It is possible that consumers do not perceive any technical difficulties from pirating digital content, but might experience other types of negative consequences which were not captured in our measure of risk. However, there seems to be a strong positive relationship between affect and piracy intention as suggested in Hypothesis 5 (std. factor loading = 0.54). Contrary to our expectations, we found a negative relationship between norm susceptibility and intention (std. factor loading = -0.13). That is, the more people adhere to norms and beliefs or relevant reference groups, the less likely they are to form piracy intentions. A plausible explanation might be that respondents believe their significant others do not approve of their piracy behavior and thus they suppress their tendency to pirate.

This research offers new insights into the dynamic nature of acquiring illegal digital content. The results show that individual’s piracy intent and their subjective knowledge of downloading significantly impinge on digital piracy behavior, while perceived positive consequences, affective attitude and norm susceptibility significantly shape individual’s piracy intention. Interestingly, it seems that the strongest determinants of intention and behavior are positive affect and subjective knowledge, which are two most promising areas to build upon when creating public policies as well as company strategies.
References


