

Research Examines Factors That Influence Intention to Pirate Digital Media; People Do Because They Can

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A study by information systems researchers at the University of Arkansas shows that as many as three out of four college students may be illegally copying and downloading digital material, including copyright-protected music, movies and software.

The finding confirms nationwide data that most students have pirated digital material. However, while the percentage is dramatic, the number of students pirating now is likely decreasing, the researchers said, as entertainment companies and universities implement more advanced and comprehensive prevention technologies.

The researchers found that people pirate digital media because they possess the ability and resources to do so, and because it is easy to copy and download copyrighted music and movies. Furthermore, the study revealed that once an individual participates in piracy, the intention to repeat the illegal behavior increases.

“Past piracy behavior and perceived behavioral control were strong predictors of intent to pirate,” said Paul Cronan, professor of information systems and lead author of “Factors that Influence the Intention to Pirate Software and Media,” which was published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*. “Results from the questionnaires led us to conclude that subjects who had the ability and resources to pirate digital media had a higher intention toward piracy, and that more occurrences

and experiences with piracy tended to increase intentions toward more of the same behavior.”

To better understand why digital piracy occurs and what influences an individual’s intent to illegally copy and download copyrighted material, Cronan and Sulaiman Al-Rafee, assistant professor of information systems at the University of Kuwait, sampled 280 students - 164 male students and 116 female students - from a business college at a university in the Midwest. Through questionnaires, the researchers asked the students to comment on their behavior and beliefs about piracy. The questions were related to various hypotheses about six factors, identified in previous research, that influence the intention to pirate digital material: intention, attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, past piracy behavior and moral obligation.

More than three fourths - 76.5 percent - of the students had pirated material. Almost a third - 30.6 percent - of these students reported participating in a “large amount” of digital piracy, and half of this population said they pirated a “small amount.” There were significant differences between male and female students. Of all students who had pirated, 65.1 percent were men; 34.9 percent were women.

As for factors that influence the decision to illegally copy and download material, the researchers found that past piracy behavior - defined as the frequency of occurrence of digital piracy in the past - had the greatest effect on the intent to pirate. Subjects who had previously pirated had a higher intention to pirate in the future, especially as the frequency of piracy increased.

As Cronan mentioned above, perceived behavioral control - a measure of how easy or difficult it is for a subject to perform the behavior in question - also had a significantly positive effect on intent. More than eight out of 10 subjects - 84.3 percent, specifically - reported that it was

easy or very easy to pirate digital media, and only 0.3 percent found it “hard” or “very hard” to pirate. Perhaps not surprisingly, the results revealed a strong connection between those who had the ability and resources to pirate and the intention to do so.

Forty-four percent of the subjects indicated a favorable attitude toward digital piracy. Less than a fourth - 23.6 percent - had a less favorable attitude, and 32.5 percent were neutral. This means that more than three-fourths of the [students](#) thought illegal copying and downloading of copyrighted material was OK or had no opinion about it. Not surprisingly, the researchers found that those who had a more favorable attitude toward piracy had a higher intention to pirate.

Moral obligation - an individual’s feeling of guilt or personal obligation to perform or not perform a behavior - was also a significant predictor of intention. Subjects who felt more guilt or moral obligation toward digital piracy had a lower intention to pirate. Subjective norms - an individual’s perception of social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior - was not a significant predictor of intent to pirate.

“As expected, there was a positive relationship between subjective norm and intention,” Cronan said. “But it was not significant. We could not conclude that subjects’ intentions regarding digital piracy were positively affected by the approval of others.”

Recording and film companies have reported significant financial loss due to piracy. According to the Recording Industry Association of America, there was a decline of 31 percent in music sales from 1999 to 2002 due to illegal copying and downloading of copyrighted material. The Motion Picture Association of America estimates that the industry worldwide lost about \$18.2 billion in 2005 because of piracy.

Provided by University of Arkansas ([news](#) : [web](#))

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