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# OPTIMISM IN MUSIC PIRACY: A PILOT STUDY

*Research-in-Progress*

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## Abstract

*Piracy continues to be a threat to global economy. Previous literature on factors influencing individual's attitude towards piracy indicates that as perceived risk increases, individuals attitude of acceptance of piracy should decrease. In spite of the increased risks, some people pirate, there has been no explanation for this apparent paradox. We try to explain this paradox by using the concept of optimism bias. Results of our study show that individuals having an optimism bias engage in piracy because they consider themselves at low risk than average compared to the group.*

**Keywords:** Music Piracy, Optimism Bias, Perceived Risks, Attitude, Intention

## Introduction

Music industry sales have plummeted by an average of 7% per year which peaked in 1999 (Conolly & Kruger 2005). One of the main reasons cited for the decline in the sales have been music piracy through the extensive use of illegal file sharing sites, such as Grokster, Lime Wire, and Morpheus (Libowitz 2004; Peitz & Waelbroek, 2004). Millions of copyrighted works are available online, and the number is growing, as music downloading became one of the fastest growing activities on the Internet (Graziano and Rainie, 2001).

As a result, numerous attempts have been made to curb piracy. Researchers identified that some of the key factors that promote piracy are affected by economic, technological and ethical considerations. The recording industry attempted to combat the piracy phenomenon using a two-pronged approach. The main emphasis has been to adopt legal measures against online sites that facilitate widespread audio piracy along with working on developing technological solutions. Like many others, Gopal and Sanders (1997) also suggested that deterrent controls help reduce piracy.

Rather, most of the previous studies that focused on identifying the factors leading to piracy suggest that perceived risk is one of the important factors predicting piracy behavior i.e. individuals account for the risk factor before engaging in such illegal activities. This has led to the notion that as the perceived risks increase, individuals restrain themselves from engaging in piracy (Chioug et al, 2005; Limayem et al, 2004). However, the rampant piracy phenomenon persists despite the well-known U.S. Senate Bill 893, which imposes increasing penalties for copyright infringement up to fines of as much as \$250, 000 and jail terms of up to five years (Robinson and Reithel 2004). In spite of these severe legal penalties, many individuals continue to pirate music. Clearly, there is an apparent paradox in that some individuals do pirate in spite of the high risks involved. Moreover, there has been no explanation of this paradox in the piracy literature. We aim to bridge this gap by introducing a new construct of optimism bias in this study to explain the piracy behavior. Optimism bias has been used in psychology literature.

Optimism bias is defined as “a systematic error in perception of an individual’s own standing relative to group averages, in which negative events are seen as less likely to occur to the individual than average compared with the group, and positive events as more likely to occur than average compared with the group” (Weinstein 1980). Thus,

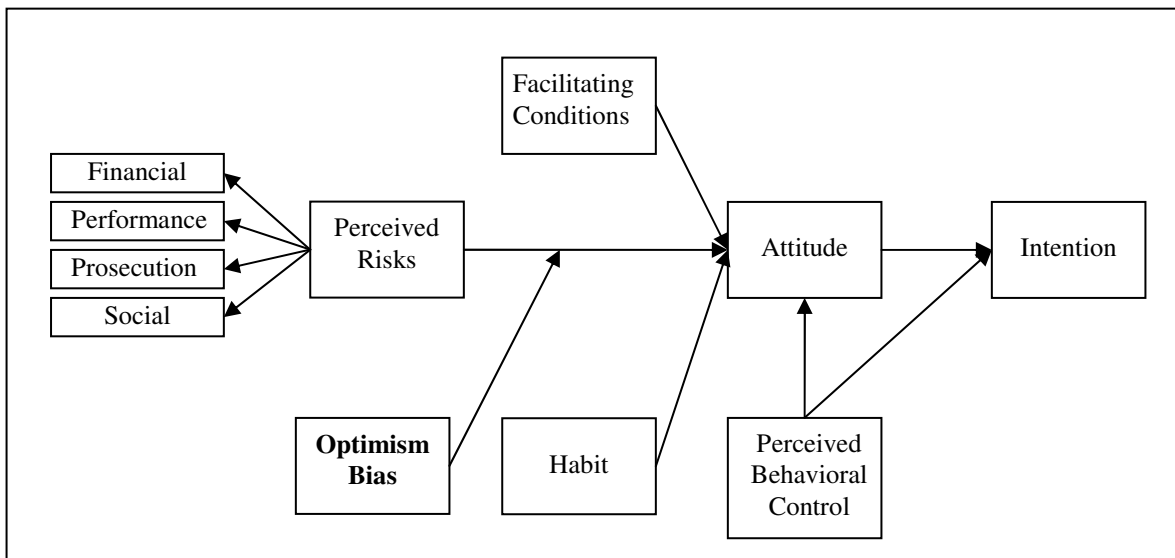
we believe that the individuals pirate music, in spite of associated high risks, because of an optimistic bias that there will not be negative consequences to their actions of piracy. The novelty of this research will provide important practical implications to the music record companies and to some extent the film producers, distributors and software manufacturers.

The remainder of the paper is organized in the order as follows: The first section gives a brief introduction to the topic which is followed by the conceptual framework of research and development of hypotheses section providing a comprehensive theoretical background about the related research done in the area. The third section is the research methodology which contains the description of sample, measures and data analysis. In the fourth section, we present the results of the pilot study and discussion. Finally, we present the conclusion drawn from study and identify the potential scope for the future research.

## **Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

Past research has identified risks as a critical factor influencing an individual's attitude towards piracy. The concept of perceived consumer risk was first introduced by Bauer (1960) when he characterized consumer choice in terms of risk taking or reducing behavior. A study by Fraedrich and Ferrell (1992) also highlighted the impact of perceived risks and moral philosophy on ethical decision making. Eining and Christensen (1991) identified five factors that influenced software piracy behavior: computer attitudes, material consequences, norms, social-legal attitudes, and effective factors. Simpson et al. (1994) suggested that personal and situational factors have an influence on the piracy behavior. Limayem et al. (1999) based their model on Triandis' behavioral model (1980) to explain software piracy. The results of the study indicated that only social factors and perceived consequences had an influence on piracy behavior. Gopal et al (2002) also indicated that perceived legal consequences have a strong impact on an individual's piracy behavior.

All of the previous research on music piracy and ethical decision making indicates that perceived risks will have a negative impact on individual's attitude towards piracy. As a consequence, many attempts like U.S. Senate Bill 893, increased fines, or added imprisonment warnings, etc have been put in place. In spite of all these, piracy did not slow down. We attempt to answer this question of why piracy has not been reduced even after increased perceived risks by borrowing a concept of optimism bias from the field of psychology. The complete conceptual model of all the constructs of interest in this study and their proposed relationships are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**

### ***Attitude and Intention***

Attitude has been long acknowledged as the most important construct in social psychology (Allport, 1935), which is evident from the overwhelming amount of research published in this area (Ajzen, 2001; Olson and Zanna, 1993; Petty et al., 1997). Attitude has also been found to be the most significant factor influencing behavioral intention.

A recent software piracy study (Peace et al., 2003) found that attitude had the strongest effect on intention to pirate software. Moreover, they found that almost one-fourth of the variance in attitude toward software piracy was explained by punishment and software cost. Previous researchers have shown that individuals' attitude towards acceptance of piracy increases with the increase in software prices (Cheng et al, 1997; Gopal & Sanders, 1997). Another factor which affects attitude towards piracy is the celebrity idolization (Dimanche and Samdahl, 1994). Some fans adore celebrities and the pseudo interactions between fans and celebrities provide great meaning to a fan who perceives an imaginary social relationship with celebrities (Alperstein, 1991). Loyal fans stick to the ethics by purchasing copyrighted album and exhibit other behaviors such as collecting artifacts, attending related events, and buying celebrity endorsed products (Raviv et al, 1996). A compelling reason why attitude is so important is the fact that attitude can be changed through persuasion and other means. An abundance of research regarding attitude change and persuasion exists in the psychology literature (Olson and Zanna, 1993). Since attitude is the most significant predictor of intention (Beck and Ajzen, 1991), then behavior could possibly be influenced through attitude change and persuasion.

H1: *Consumer attitude towards music piracy will be positively related to behavioral intention.*

If attitude can be changed, then intention may be influenced (and subsequently behavior may be influenced). A stream of literature regarding attitude change exists, and if applied to digital piracy, will prove to be an excellent choice that can be used to combat and deter digital piracy.

### ***Perceived Risks***

A number of studies have examined how perceived risks affect consumer decision and behavior (Fraedrich and Ferrell, 1992; Jacoby and Kaplan, 1972). Havlena and DeSarbo (1991) explained that perceived risks arise in situations where consumers are uncertain about the outcome of a choice and are concerned about the consequences of a poor or wrong decision. In other words, a rational consumer would rather avoid risk if he is given the option to do so.

Risk perception plays an important role in shaping individual's attitude towards piracy (Fraedrich and Ferrell 1992). Tan (2002) observed four components (financial, social, performance, prosecution) of risk perception in his study. Following Tan (2002), we conceptualize perceived risk as a multi-dimension construct consisting of performance risk, financial risk and social risk and prosecution risk. Performance risk is present when there is no warranty that the pirated music product will function. Pirated products may not function at all, or they may contain viruses intended for malicious activities. Consistent with this reasoning, financial risks reflect the possibility of loss of time and expenses incurred in acquiring the pirated products. Social risks reflect the harm caused to the consumer's social image in his social circle by the use of pirated products (Swinyard et al, 1990; Eining and Christensen, 1991). Prosecution risk is the risk associated with the possible legal actions by the copyrighted owner. Hence, we see that all the risks in one or the other way discourage the consumer for using the pirated products. As a rational consumer tries to avoid risks and pirating music poses the above mentioned risks, we propose that

H2: *Perceived Risk will be negatively related to consumer's attitude towards piracy.*

### ***Optimism Bias***

It is well established notion that people perceive that their risk of experiencing negative events is less than that of an average individual who is similar to them. This belief seems to be correct at individual level but is often not practical at the group level unless the distribution of risk is heavily skewed (Gold, 2008). This belief is known as optimism bias or unrealistic optimism. It has been used in the context of health outcomes, for instance, contracting breast cancer (Absetz et al., 2000), contracting skin cancer (Clarke et al, 1997), becoming addicted to drugs (Cohn et al, 1995) and having a heart attack (Weinstein & Klein, 1995) etc. A possible reason for the existence of optimism bias

is that individuals bias their beliefs because it brings them comfort (Chambers & Windschitl, 2004; Hoorens, 1993a,b; Kirscht et al, 1966; Weinstein, 1980). People are afraid of negative events and their consequences; hence, they intentionally falsify their reasoning to feel that they are at less risk as compared to an average person. If the above reason is correct, one can anticipate that attributes of an event which determines individual's anxiety about that event would have an impact on optimism bias for that event. These attributes can be seriousness of the event's consequences and the probability that those consequences will be experienced. These two attributes can also be jointly referred as event threat (Gold, 2008). One can predict that within certain limits, the greater the event threat, the more likely it would distort an individual's reasoning and higher optimism bias will be the result (Gerrard et al, 1991) Following the arguments, we believe that optimism bias leads individuals to feel that they are at less risk compared to an average person when it comes to experiencing a negative event of being apprehended after pirating music products. This can explain the fact that why some people engage in piracy in spite of high risks associated with it. Hence, we feel that optimism bias will be crucial in determining the relationship between perceived risk and attitude towards piracy. This suggests

H3: *Optimism bias moderates the relationship between risk and the attitude towards music piracy.*

### ***Facilitating conditions***

Facilitating conditions refer to objective factors present in the environment that are instrumental in achieving a certain task (Triandis 1980). In the context of piracy, facilitating conditions can be defined as those factors which facilitate the act of pirating (Limayem et al, 2004). Examples of facilitating conditions for piracy involve absence of penalties, availability of software to pirate, lack of personal ethics, and organizational ethical climate (Pearce & Henry, 1996; Harrington, 1996; Banerjee et al, 1998). A study by Rob & Waldfogel (2006) found that downloading reduced per capita expenditure on hit albums from \$ 126 to \$ 101 but raised per capita consumer's surplus by 70\$. Thus, unauthorized downloading resulted in a per capita decrease of 45\$ in deadweight loss, which was almost double the reduction in industry revenue. Cheng, Sims and Teegen (1997) have suggested that low risk of being apprehended and ease of piracy are also other facilitating factors. Presence of such factors is likely to cause people to think that within their environment, it is easier to pirate and they can be comfortable doing so. Hence, we suggest

H4: *Facilitating conditions is positively related to attitude towards music piracy.*

### ***Habit***

Habit is defined as "behavior that has been routinely performed and is, as a result of repetition, automatically—rather than intentionally—set in motion" (Ouellette & Wood, 2009). This suggests that once behavioral are established and become habitual, intention is less of a predictor of behavior. According to Triandis (1980), habits are behavioral patterns which arise out of situation behavior interaction and which are mostly automatic and occur without self instruction. These have an impact not only on individual's behavior but also attitude. Habits are function of individual's previous experience and the ability to accomplish specific tasks. Hunt and Vitell (1986) argue that personal experience affects ethical behavior. If a person was engaged in piracy frequently in past, then he will have a favorable attitude towards piracy (Ouellette & Wood, 2009). Thus, we expect habit will affect individual's attitude towards music piracy. This leads to

H5: *Habit is positively related to attitude towards music piracy.*

### ***Perceived Behavioral Control***

Roots of the construct of perceived behavioral control lies in the theory of planned behavior (TPB). The theory of planned behavior suggests that in addition to social norms and beliefs, behavior is determined by perceived behavioral control (Ajzen & Fishbien, 1980). This theory was put forward to address the limitations of original theory of reasoned action in dealing with behaviors over which people have incomplete volitional control (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Likelihood of the behavior will be increased, if a person has a strong intention to perform that behavior. However, the behavioral intentional can lead to a behavior only if that behavior is within the person's volitional control. In many circumstances a person's behavior depends on factors which are not motivational in nature such as opportunities and resources for instance, money, time, skill set, cooperation of others etc. Therefore, perceived behavioral control is the extent to which an individual views it easy or difficult to perform a certain behavior (Kang et al,2006).In the context of our study, perceived behavioral control refers to the extent to which an

individual views how easy or difficult it is to engage in piracy. Thus, it can have an impact on both the attitude towards the music piracy as well as behavioral intention. This leads to

H6a: *Perceived behavioral control is positively related to attitude towards music piracy.*

H6b: *Perceived behavioral control is positively related to behavioral intentions towards music piracy.*

## Methodology

### Sample and Procedures

In order to test the data collection instrument, a pilot study was conducted utilizing 118 students at a large university in the Southern United States. The mean age of the students was approximately twenty years, ranging between 18 and 22 years. This sample was chosen because literature has shown that younger people are likely to be involved in the piracy (Bhattacharjee et al, 2003; Rob & Waldfogel, 2006). The survey questionnaire was distributed among the students in a class. Students were asked to fill out the questionnaire and return it back. The participation in the study was voluntary and the students were allowed to withdraw participation at any time during the process of filling out surveys. The surveys were completely anonymous and no question was asked in the survey which could reveal identity out of the participants. 108 of the returned surveys were usable.

### Measures

Most of the constructs used in the study were borrowed from existing scales (Limayem et al 2004; Tan 2002; Peace et al, 2003; Chiou et al 2005; Heine 1993) in the literature. All the items, except for optimism bias and attitude, were measured using 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree ) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Optimism Bias was measured using 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Much below Average) to 5 (Much above Average) in which the respondents were asked to rate the chances of various events happening to them (Heine,1993)

The complete survey instrument is available upon request.

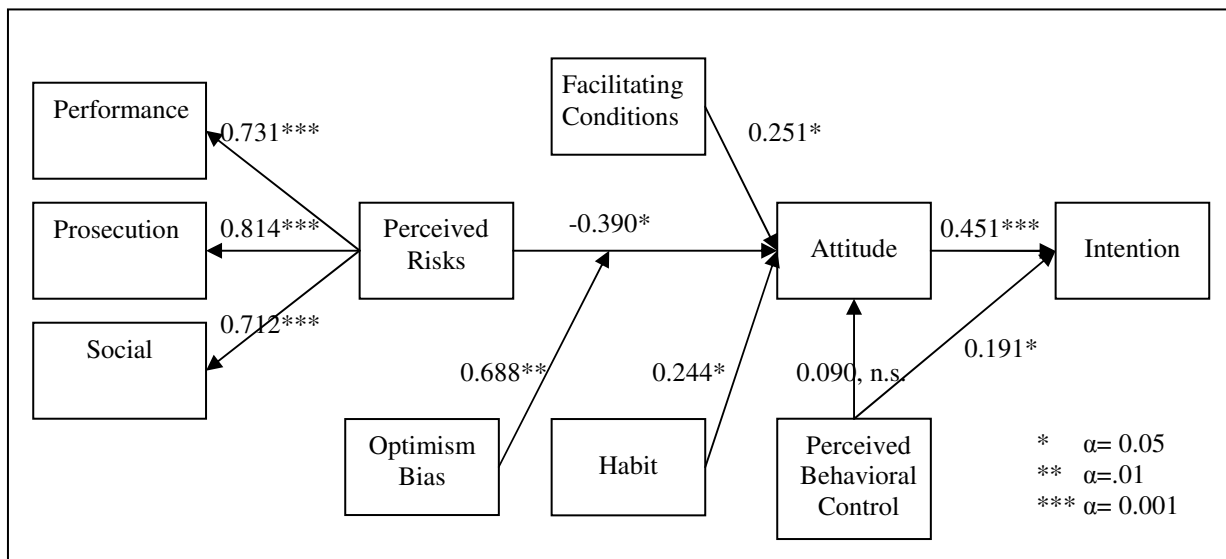


Figure 2: Research Model and Results

### Data Analysis

The main aim of the pilot study was to test the face validity of the instrument. We used PLS software with bootstrapping technique to test the model. The results of the test are shown in Figure 2.

## **Results and Discussion**

Results from the factor analysis showed that items of financial risk did not have significant loadings. Therefore, we decided to drop the financial risk from our analysis (Fig 2). As shown in Figure 2, our study found support for all but one hypothesis. We identified that perceived risk, facilitating conditions and habit play an important role in forming an individual's attitude towards music piracy.

The main contribution of our study lies in the fact that we found optimism bias to be a significant moderator of the relationship between perceived risks and attitude towards music piracy. *Ceteris paribus*, the effect of perceived risks on one's attitude to pirate could be written as

$$\textit{Attitude} = -0.390*\textit{Risks} + 0.688*\textit{Risks}*\textit{OptimismBias}$$

It is obvious from the above equation that when optimism bias is absent, the Attitude decreases by 0.390 units with a unit increase in perceived risks. However, when the optimism bias is present (assuming 1), the attitude increases by 0.298  $(-0.390 + 0.688*1)$  units with a unit increase in perceived risk. This clearly shows that some individuals, in spite of high associated risks with piracy, have a favorable attitude towards it because of optimism bias. Thus, in order to curb piracy we need to influence consumer's optimism bias. This can be done by making people understand the concept of optimism bias with the help of ethical awareness programs incorporated within formal education systems and public campaigns.

Another important finding is that facilitating conditions were found to be significant predictor of individual's attitude towards music piracy. This finding has strong implications. Government should strictly enforce laws to punish people who are involved in piracy. In addition, organizations should build ethical climate projecting piracy as an unacceptable behavior. This would act as a deterrent towards the piracy. Another way to curb piracy is to make music available online at very inexpensive rates. Apple computer started this trend by launching its iTunes music site in 2002. It provides consumers with download option of a song with incredibly low price of approximately \$0.99 (Apple computer 2004). Similarly, an online portal Magnatune has signed certain artists to sell their music online at a subsidized rate with a agreement to share revenues from the sale. It allows consumers to decide how much they want to pay for a record, starting at \$5 (Maney, 2004).

Lastly, habit and perceived behavioral control were also found to be the significant predictors of attitude and intentions towards music piracy respectively. Habits and perceived behavioral control can only be influenced by orientation programs directed to change the thinking and behaviors of individuals. Thus, promoting such kind of programs can be one of the ways to control for piracy.

## **Conclusions and Lessons Learned**

Our paper sheds light on the important factors that have an impact one's attitude towards music piracy. We identified Optimism bias as an important factor in the music piracy behavior which was not shown in previous studies.

The study also had few limitations. One of the limitations of our study is that we could not include the proposed model as our final model because we found that some items did not load on their respective factors. Therefore, we had to drop one sub-construct, financial risks, from the analysis. Thus, the perceived risk in our study does not capture the financial risk component which can be an important type of risk. This indicates that we need to revise our instrument for full study. Secondly, by no means the factors influencing individual's attitude considered in this pilot study can be considered comprehensive. They can vary significantly depending upon the particular individual and the environmental context.

Our study also lays ground work for some of the interesting avenues for future research. First, our study only explored the perceived risks associated with the attitude towards music piracy. In the next phase of this research, we plan to incorporate perceived benefits from piracy in our model. A comparison of perceived risks and benefits is likely to yield some interesting results. Second, due to improper factor loading we had to drop the financial risk component from our study. Therefore, there is a need to refine the construct of financial risk and some work needs to be done in order come up with more accurate items for this construct. Third, previous research has shown that culture plays an important role in consumer behavior research (Husted, 2000; Swinyar et al, 1990; Tavasoli & Han,

2002). Therefore, future study involving a cross cultural comparison of piracy behavior can be conducted. We hope that our piece of work would motivate scholars to carry on interesting research in this domain which will continue to intrinsically add to the body of knowledge in the context of music piracy and related issues.

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