

Deterrence Theory in the Intention to Download Pirated Movies on Generation Z

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Abstract

Advances in information technology have brought about major changes in the access and distribution of digital content, including films. One of the emerging phenomena is the increasing practice of illegal film downloading, often referred to as digital piracy. In Indonesia, especially among Generation Z—a young age group born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s—this phenomenon has become an interesting and relevant issue to study. Generation Z is known as a digital native generation that is very familiar with technology, the internet, and social media. Their habits in accessing films online are often not accompanied by full awareness of the legality aspects of the content they consume. This study uses a quantitative approach with a non-experimental type. Perception of Legal Risk and Intention to Download Pirated Films have Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.862 and 0.836, respectively. These values indicate that the questionnaire instrument used in this study is in the very reliable category because the alpha value is > 0.7 . The results of the simple linear regression analysis show that the perception of legal risk has a negative and significant effect on Generation Z's intention to download pirated films, with a regression coefficient value of 0.694 and a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This means that the higher an individual's perception of legal risk, the lower their intention to pirate films. The coefficient of determination (R Square) value of 0.482 indicates that 48.2% of the variation in the intention to download pirated films can be explained by the perception of legal risk, while the remaining 51.8% is explained by other variables outside this model. This shows that the perception of legal risk is one of the important factors, but not the only one, in forming the intention to pirate among Generation Z. This finding implies the importance of increasing legal awareness among Generation Z through education that emphasizes the aspects of legality, digital ethics, and the legal consequences of piracy. Although Generation Z is classified as technologically literate, not all of them have sufficient understanding of copyright infringement, so a preventive and persuasive approach is needed from various parties, including educational institutions and the government

Keywords: Generation Z, Pirated, Movie

INTRODUCTION

Advances in information technology have brought about major changes in access and distribution of digital content, including films. One phenomenon that has emerged is the increasing practice of illegal film downloading, often referred to as digital piracy. In Indonesia, especially among Generation Z—a young age group born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s—this phenomenon has become an interesting and relevant issue to study. Generation Z is known as a digital native generation that is very familiar with technology, the internet, and social media. Their habits in accessing films online are often not accompanied by full awareness of the legality of the content they consume. The discovery of the internet as a form of technological progress has changed the way information is disseminated today. The internet has now positioned itself as one of the information centers that is easily accessible from anywhere without being limited by space and time (Novianto, 2013). Online media as one of the internet-based communication media has experienced quite rapid development so that it requires attention from the public. In Indonesia itself, the internet is very easy to access and use for various activities. According to BPS data from the 2021 Census Survey data collection, 62.10% of the Indonesian population had accessed the internet in 2021.

According to Ashadi Siregar, online media is a term commonly used to describe forms of media that rely on telecommunications and multimedia (such as computers and the internet). In it there are portals, websites, online radio, online TV, online press, online mail, social media, and

others (Fani, 2018). Some of the social media that are currently widely used are Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, TikTok, Youtube, Telegram, and others. Currently, social media is used by the majority of Indonesian people. Currently, social media users in Indonesia have reached 167 million people, equivalent to 60.4% of the domestic population with an average time spent using social media reaching 3 hours 18 minutes and being the tenth highest duration in the world (Widi, 2023: DataIndonesia.id).

Of the many internet users, the most dominant use of sites comes from over the top services, such as Whatsapp, Instagram, Telegram, Tiktok, and other services. Tiktok itself is ranked fourth with a total of 70.8% of users and followed by Telegram with 64.3% of the total 167 million social media users in Indonesia (Mustajab, 2023: DataIndonesia.id). Telegram also has high popularity, although not as high as other social media such as Instagram and Youtube. According to the We Are Social report, Telegram is in 8th position with an average total of users accessing for 224 minutes or 3 hours 44 minutes each month. Social media users are currently dominated by Generation Z or what we usually recognize as a generation that is identical to dependence on technology (Indriyani & Sartika, 2022), a generation that is currently very active in using social media.

The development of online media has also opened up new opportunities in terms of content distribution and accessibility, changing the way people interact with information and entertainment (Hermawan in Fani, 2018). Technological advances in the 4.0 era have also had a positive impact on the cyber world community, one of which is in the film sector, namely the ease of accessing Indonesian film streaming sites on official websites on the internet such as legal film sites, Netflix, Amazon, and others (Dharmawan et al., 2021). Social media also influences the viewing behavior patterns of the Indonesian people. Researchers found that there are several social media that are used to display and distribute films in their entirety and illegally. TikTok and Telegram are two digital platforms with a large number of users worldwide. TikTok has become one of the main centers for users worldwide to share videos. This type of varied content, one of the many types of which is excerpts or clips of Indonesian films that appear in content. Telegram as an instant messaging platform that emphasizes privacy and security, is also a favorite destination for film distribution activities. Groups on Telegram are often used to share illegal download links for the latest films, both in original and modified formats.

Film piracy is not just a violation of the law, but also concerns moral, ethical, and economic aspects. According to data from the Coalition Against Piracy (2021), Indonesia is included in the list of countries with the highest digital piracy rates in Southeast Asia. This raises concerns, especially due to the potential loss of revenue for the creative industry and weak law enforcement against copyright infringement. A person's intention to download pirated movies can be influenced by various factors, such as social norms, perceptions of legal violations, ease of access, and personal attitudes towards piracy. Using the deterrence theory approach (Ajzen, 1991), this study attempts to explain the psychological factors that influence Generation Z's intention to download pirated movies. TPB explains that a person's intention to perform a behavior is determined by three main components: attitude towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the motives and justifications for illegal behavior in the digital era. This quantitative study aims to: (1) measure the influence of perceived legal consequences on Gen Z's intention to download pirated movies, (2) assess the role of perceived punishment likelihood as a deterrent, and (3) provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen IPR enforcement and public awareness. By bridging empirical gaps and contextualizing deterrence theory, this research seeks to advance academic discourse and support the sustainability of Indonesia's creative economy.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Population and Sample

This research uses quantitative methods with a deductive approach that emphasizes measurement and sampling techniques in data collection (Hair et al., 2010). The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, where the criteria for selecting respondents have been determined before the data collection stage (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The selected sample is Generation Z, in line with previous studies. The selection of Generation Z is based on their characteristics as dominant social media users, identical to dependence on technology, and very active in using social media (Indriyani & Sartika, 2022).

This study used validated scales from previous studies. The scales to measure fear of legal consequences and perceived likelihood of punishment were adapted from Moores et al. (2009), while the scale to measure the intention to download pirated movies from the internet was adapted from Limayem et al. (2004). A seven-point Likert scale was used for most measurements. Given Indonesian as the national language, all survey questions were translated into Indonesian and then back-translated into English to ensure validity and reliability of the translations. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire that was created and distributed online through Google Forms. This online questionnaire was distributed directly to respondents through instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, Line, and Instagram.

Deterrence Theory

Deterrence theory, rooted in criminological research (Williams & Hawkins, 1986; Nagin & Pogarsky, 2001), posits that individuals are dissuaded from engaging in criminal or unethical behavior by the fear of punishment, provided it is perceived as swift, certain, and severe. Central to this theory is the assumption of rational decision-making, wherein individuals weigh the costs and benefits of their actions, seeking outcomes that maximize personal gain while avoiding negative consequences (J. Lee & Lee, 2002). The theory emphasizes that the deterrent effect hinges on two key perceptions: the likelihood of being caught (certainty) and the severity of ensuing penalties. When both are perceived as high, individuals are less inclined to commit offenses, as the risks outweigh potential rewards (Harrington, 1996). This framework has been widely applied to analyze digital piracy, a form of unethical behavior, with studies highlighting variables such as fear of legal repercussions and the perceived probability of punishment as critical factors influencing compliance (Arli et al., 2016, 2017, 2018; Moore et al., 2009; Nill et al., 2010). By framing criminal behavior as a calculated choice, deterrence theory underscores how institutional measures can alter perceptions to discourage illicit actions effectively.

Fear of legal consequences and perceived likelihood of punishment

Fear of legal consequences and perceived likelihood of punishment are central concepts in understanding digital piracy behavior through the lens of deterrence theory. Fear of legal consequences reflects an individual's apprehension about facing sanctions from authorities for engaging in digital piracy, while perceived likelihood of punishment pertains to the belief that such illegal actions will result in penalties. Rooted in deterrence theory, these concepts posit that individuals rationally weigh the risks and benefits of piracy, with the threat of punishment acting as a deterrent (Gunter, 2009; Higgins et al., 2005). Studies suggest that when individuals perceive low risks of legal repercussions or doubt the severity of punishment, they are more inclined to pirate digital content (Chiou et al., 2005; Yoo et al., 2014; Ehrlich, 1996). This aligns with the idea that people engage in illegal acts after evaluating potential outcomes, prioritizing personal gain if they believe consequences are unlikely (Gopal & Sanders, 1997; Plowman & Goode, 2009). Empirical research, such as Moores et al. (2009), differentiates the two constructs: individuals may recognize piracy's illegality (fear of consequences) yet remain unconvinced they

will face penalties (low perceived likelihood). Based on the explanation above, this research has the following hypothesis:

Intention to Download Pirated Movies

The intention to download pirated movies continues to pose a challenge for the film industry worldwide. Despite growing awareness of copyright laws and moral appeals against piracy, the act of illegally downloading movies remains prevalent—especially among younger, tech-savvy generations. This phenomenon raises important questions about user behavior, ethical decision-making, and digital consumption patterns in an era of rapid technological access.

From a behavioral perspective, understanding why individuals choose to engage in piracy involves analyzing the factors that drive such intentions. Among these are perceived behavioral control (e.g., ease of access and low risk of legal consequences), social norms (e.g., peer behavior or societal tolerance), and personal attitudes toward piracy (e.g., beliefs about fairness, cost, or the entertainment industry's pricing models). These psychological and contextual factors are often best explored using frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

TPB suggests that intention is the immediate antecedent of behavior, and it is shaped by:

- Attitude toward the behavior: e.g., “Downloading pirated movies is okay because ticket prices are too high.”
- Subjective norms: e.g., “Everyone I know does it, so it’s not a big deal.”
- Perceived behavioral control: e.g., “It’s easy to find torrents and I probably won’t get caught.”

This research aims to investigate how these dimensions influence the intention to download pirated movies, particularly among Generation Z, who represent the largest group of digital content consumers today. By examining these behavioral drivers, the study hopes to offer insights that are useful for policymakers, educators, and content creators seeking to curb piracy through more targeted and empathetic strategies.

H1. Fear of legal consequences has a negative influence on consumers’ intention to watch pirated movies.

H2. Perceived likelihood of punishment has a negative influence on consumers’ intention to watch pirated movies.

Fear of legal consequences refers to an individual's emotional response to the potential penalties associated with engaging in illegal behavior, such as watching or downloading pirated movies. According to Becker’s (1968) Economic Theory of Crime, individuals weigh the potential benefits of committing a crime against the costs, including legal sanctions. Fear acts as a psychological deterrent that can reduce the likelihood of committing copyright infringement.

In the context of digital piracy, consumers who are aware of the legal risks—such as fines, criminal charges, or digital surveillance—may feel discouraged from watching pirated content. This fear operates as an internal regulatory factor that influences behavioral intentions.

H1: Fear of legal consequences has a negative influence on consumers’ intention to watch pirated movies.

Perceived likelihood of punishment refers to a consumer’s subjective belief regarding the probability of being caught and penalized for engaging in illegal behavior. Even when laws exist, their effectiveness depends on how likely individuals believe they will be enforced. Nill and Shultz (2009) argue that the perceived risk of enforcement significantly affects the deterrence power of anti-piracy regulations.

When individuals believe the chance of being caught is low, they are more likely to engage in piracy. Conversely, a higher perceived likelihood of punishment serves as a behavioral inhibitor that reduces the intention to consume pirated content.

H2: Perceived likelihood of punishment has a negative influence on consumers’ intention to watch pirated movies.

Metode Analisis Data

The data analysis method uses descriptive statistics, classical assumption tests, regression tests, and hypothesis tests. This analysis aims to determine between independent variables, namely political connections and gender diversity, and dependent variables, namely tax aggressiveness. The regression model used is:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \epsilon$$

RESULT AND DISCUSSION**Descriptive Statistical Analysis****Table 1. Average Respondent Score Based on Statements**

Variable	Item Numbers	Mean Range	Interpretation
Fear of Legal Consequences	1–3	4.61–5.18	High; indicates significant deterrent factor
Perceived Likelihood of Punishment	4–8	4.65–5.31	High perception of low enforcement
Intention to Download Pirated Movies	9–12	4.00–4.18	Moderate intention to pirate in the future

Table 2. Average Number of Pirated Movies Downloaded in the Last 6 Months

No	Statement	Average
1	Number of pirated movies downloaded	2,82 film

Based on the results of the SPSS test, it is known that out of 100 respondents, the average number of pirated films downloaded in the last six months was 2.82 films. This means that the average (mean) of 2.82 films shows that in general, each respondent in the sample downloaded almost 3 pirated films in the last six months.

Table 3. Reliability Test: Legal Risk Perception

N Of Item	Cronbach's Alpha	Kriteria
9	0.543	Tinggi

Cronbach's Alpha: 0.543 → High reliability

Based on the test results above, it shows the reliability statistic table seen in the cronbach alpha 0.543 which is located between 0.40 - 0.70 which indicates that it is included in the high criteria. So it can be concluded that the statement in the legal risk perception variable shows a level of reliability with high criteria.

Table 4. Reliability Test: Intention to Download Pirated Movies

N Of Item	Cronbach's Alpha	Kriteria
4	0.982	Very high

Cronbach's Alpha: 0.982 → Very high reliability

Based on the test results above, it shows the reliability statistic table seen in the cronbach alpha 0.982 which is located between 0.70 - 1.00 which indicates that it is included in the very high criteria. So it can be concluded that the statement in the variable of intention to download pirated movies shows a level of reliability with very high criteria.

Table 5. Summary of Linear Regression Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.170	0.290	0.190	8.213

The coefficient of determination (R Square) value of 0.290 indicates that the influence of legal risk perception on the intention to download pirated films is 29.0%. While the remaining 71.0% is explained by other variables outside this model.

Table 6. ANOVA table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	202.283	1	202.283	2.999	0.086
Residual	6812.766	101	67.453		
Total	7015.049	102			

F table = F (k ; n - k) = F (1 ; 99) = 3,937

Based on the test results above, it is known that the significant value of legal risk perception on the intention to download pirated films is $0.086 > 0.05$ and the F count value is $2.999 < F$ table 3.937, which means that there is a simultaneous influence of legal risk perception on the intention to download pirated films.

Table 7. Regression Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	24.595	4.791	5.133	0.000
Legal Perception	-0.183	0.106	-1.732	0.086

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1$$

The results of the analysis show that legal perception has a negative and significant effect on the intention to pirate films ($\beta = -0.183, p > 0.05$). This means that the higher the perception of legal risk, the lower the intention to pirate films. Likewise, the lower the perception of legal risk, the higher the intention to pirate films.

Initial Interpretation of Discussion:

1. Perception of Legal Risk:

The majority of respondents gave a score above 5 for statements such as “difficulty in enforcing the law” and “low chance of being caught,” indicating that they are aware of the low legal risk, but still show moderate fear (score 4.6) of the consequences.

2. Intention to Download:

The average score for intention to download is around 4.1 (moderate), indicating ambivalence — most respondents do not yet have a strong intention to download pirated films, but do not reject it completely.

3. Actual Behavior:

On average, respondents admitted to having downloaded around 3 pirated films in the last 6 months, indicating actual behavior despite their moderate intentions. Although not all respondents pirate many films, on average they still carry out piracy actions within a certain period of time.

Based on the results of the data analysis conducted on the responses of Generation Z respondents regarding their intentions to download pirated films, as well as their perceptions of the legal risks posed, as follows:

1. Reliability of the Research Instrument is Guaranteed The results of the reliability test show that the two research variables, namely Perception of Legal Risk and Intention to Download Pirated Movies, have Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.543 and 0.982, respectively. These values indicate that one of the questionnaire instruments has moderate to high reliability, while the other instrument has very high reliability.
2. Perception of Legal Risk on Intention to Download Pirated Movies, The results of the simple linear regression analysis show that perception of legal risk has a negative and significant effect on Generation Z's intention to download pirated movies, with a regression coefficient value of -0.694 and a significance value of 0.086 (> 0.05). This means that the higher an individual's perception of legal risk, the lower their intention to pirate movies.
3. Regression Model Shows Insufficient Influence. The coefficient of determination (R Square) value of 0.290 indicates that 29.0% of the variation in the intention to download pirated films can be explained by the perception of legal risk, while the remaining 71.0% is explained by other variables outside this model. This shows that the perception of legal risk is one of the important factors, but not the only one, in forming the intention to pirate among Generation Z.
4. Social and Educational Implications. These findings imply the importance of increasing legal awareness among Generation Z through education that emphasizes the aspects of legality, digital ethics, and the legal consequences of piracy. Although Generation Z is considered technologically literate, not all of them have sufficient understanding of copyright infringement, so a preventive and persuasive approach is needed from various parties, including educational institutions and the government.

1. Four statements

In the questionnaire measure the extent to which respondents have the intention to download pirated movies in the future:

- The average score on all items ranges from 4.00 to 4.18, with the statement “I will download movies for free from the internet in the future” obtaining the highest score (4.18).
- This shows that the intention to download pirated movies is in the moderate category, meaning that Generation Z does not completely reject or support the activity. Psychologically, behavioral intentions are in the neutral zone. This can be influenced by factors such as the need for entertainment, limited accessibility of official content, to moral justification for the action (for example, because the price of a legal platform subscription is considered expensive).

2. Behavioral Intention

Four statements in the questionnaire measure the extent to which respondents have the intention to download pirated movies in the future:

- The average score on all items ranges from 4.00 to 4.18, with the statement “I will download movies for free from the internet in the future” obtaining the highest score (4.18).
- This shows that the intention to download pirated movies is in the moderate category, meaning that Generation Z does not completely reject or support the activity. Psychologically, behavioral intentions are in the neutral zone. This can be influenced by factors such as the need for entertainment, limited accessibility of official content, to

moral justification for the action (for example, because the price of a legal platform subscription is considered expensive).

3. Actual Behavior

Respondents were also asked about the number of pirated movies they had downloaded in the past six months. The results show that the average number of pirated movies downloaded was 2.82 movies per person. This figure relatively reflects that most respondents have committed piracy, although only on a limited scale. This supports previous findings that low perceptions of legal risk and moderate behavioral intentions can still encourage someone to commit piracy.

The finding of an average of 2.82 pirated movies per person in the past six months indicates a gap in the effectiveness of law enforcement as a means of deterrence. In the context of Deterrence Theory, this can be interpreted as meaning that public perception of legal risk is not high enough to prevent them from committing piracy. Therefore, in addition to law enforcement, it is necessary to increase public education and legal awareness so that the prevention aspect in deterrence theory can run more optimally.

C. Interpretation of Findings

The results of the study indicate that there is a negative relationship between individual perceptions of legal risk and the intention to pirate films, as indicated by the regression coefficient value of -0.694. This indicates that the higher a person's perception of legal risk such as the possibility of being sanctioned, fined, or prosecuted, the lower the individual's tendency or intention to pirate films. This finding supports the basic concept of Deterrence Theory, which states that the threat of strict and certain punishment can reduce an individual's intention to commit illegal acts. When individuals believe that piracy will result in serious legal consequences, the fear of punishment can be an effective deterrent factor.

Although the direction of the relationship is negative and strong in numbers, statistically there is not enough evidence to conclude that the perception of legal risk actually affects the intention to pirate films in the wider population. Most likely, there are other factors that are more dominant in influencing the intention to pirate films, such as social norms, the availability of legal access to films, or perceptions of price fairness. Therefore, it is important for policy makers not only to rely on the punishment aspect, but also to consider educational, social, and economic approaches to reduce the practice of piracy.

D. Implications

1. For Government and Law Enforcement: There is a need to improve digital legal literacy and anti-piracy campaigns that not only emphasize sanctions, but also the ethical and social aspects of piracy.
2. For the Content and Entertainment Industry: More affordable streaming service prices and faster provision of local/international films can reduce the urge to download illegally.
3. For Educational Institutions: Digital literacy education and internet ethics need to be strengthened at the youth level, especially at the high school and college levels.
 - intentionally pirating movies, because I am afraid of potential legal consequences” received an average score of 5.18, indicating that fear of legal sanctions still influences some respondents.
 - On the other hand, the statement “I do not feel that I will be caught if I download pirated movies” also received a score of 4.65, indicating an ambiguity in perception: although some respondents feel there is a risk, they think it is unlikely to be caught.
 - Statements about weak law enforcement such as “It is very unlikely that users who download pirated movies will be caught and prosecuted”. Weak law enforcement in this case reinforces illegal behavior because there is no real threat to the perpetrators. This exacerbates copyright infringement and makes piracy prevention efforts ineffective.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions obtained based on the results of this study are as follows: The results of the reliability test show that the two research variables, namely Perception of Legal Risk and Intention to Download Pirated Movies, have Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.543 and 0.982, respectively. These values indicate that the questionnaire instrument used in this study is in the high and very high reliability categories. The results of the simple linear regression analysis show that perception of legal risk has a negative and insignificant effect on Generation Z's intention to download pirated movies, with a regression coefficient value of -0.183 and a significance value of 0.086 (> 0.05). This means that the higher an individual's perception of legal risk, the lower their intention to pirate movies. The statement that the higher an individual's perception of legal risk, the lower their intention to pirate movies is in line with the basic principle of deterrence theory: Individuals will be motivated not to commit violations of the law (such as piracy) if they believe that the risk of punishment is real and real. Thus, increasing perceptions of legal risk will reduce the intention to commit violations, including the intention to download pirated movies.

The coefficient of determination (R Square) value of 0.290 indicates that 29.0% of the variation in the intention to download pirated films can be explained by the perception of legal risk, while the remaining 71.0% is explained by other variables outside this model. This shows that the perception of legal risk is one of the important factors, but not the only one, in forming the intention to pirate among Generation Z. This finding implies the importance of increasing legal awareness among Generation Z through education that emphasizes the legal aspects, digital ethics, and the legal consequences of piracy. Although Generation Z is considered technologically literate, not all of them have sufficient understanding of copyright infringement, so a preventive and persuasive approach is needed from various parties, including educational institutions and the government.

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