

# Effects of Enduring Involvement on Intention toward Digital Piracy: The Case of Japanese Anime

Kazuya Haraguchi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doshisha University

## ABSTRACT

Recently, digital piracy has been a major problem in the content industry, and a massive amount of anime has been illegally uploaded to the Internet in Japan. Previous studies have drawn on social psychology theories to explore the motivation to pirate entertainment media. This research, however, attempts to apply the concept of consumer involvement to find possible factors affecting intention toward piracy. The author focuses on enduring involvement and its facets in the context of leisure activities. Data were primarily obtained from Japanese undergraduate/graduate students through an online survey, and a partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to test the model developed. As a result, the following two effects on intention were confirmed with statistical significance: risk consequence of buying legal products/services (positive and moderate) and moral obligation (negative and strong). From these findings, the author recommends that stakeholders commit to enlightening anime viewers about the importance of stopping digital piracy and encouraging them to be more proactive in using free, official services to mitigate the risk for anime consumers.

## Introduction

Digital piracy, or “the consumption of illegal copies of digital services” (Taylor, Ishida, and Wallace 2009, 246), is widely recognized as unethical behavior that inflicts financial damage on copyright holders. The huge market size of the Japanese content industry, amounting to 12.8 trillion yen in 2019 (METI 2020), is accompanied by a massive amount of entertainment content that has been illegally uploaded to the Internet. In April 2018, the Japanese government requested internet service providers to block access to three piracy websites in an “emergency measure”: Mangamura, Anitube, and Miomio (See Table 1). Indeed, three NTT group companies complied with the request and cut off user access to the websites. However, the total number of web sessions has gradually increased even after the measure, with the majority of traffic coming from Japan (Goto 2019). CODA (2020) estimates the total damage caused by digital piracy of Japanese entertainment content to be up to 430,030 million yen. Hence, it can be considered that understanding the reasons why individuals commit piracy is an urgent task for creators and businesses in the industry.

**Table 1.** Three piracy websites blocked by internet service providers

Website	Pirated content	Number of monthly users <sup>1</sup>	Percentage of access from Japan <sup>1</sup>	The estimated amount of damage
Mangamura	manga	160 million	96%	300 billion yen
Anitube	anime	46 million	99%	88 billion yen
Miomio	TV shows	12 million	80%	25 billion yen

<sup>1</sup> Data as of February, 2018

Source: The Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters 2018

Several researchers have drawn on social psychology theories to explore the motivation for young adults to pirate entertainment media (e.g., music). However, little research has been done on relations between consumer involvement and intention toward digital piracy behaviors.

In consumer research, the term *involvement* has been used to describe a consumer's degree of attachment to a product or product class. Highly involved consumers of cameras, for example, tend to put significant amounts of time into gathering information about cameras. In addition, highly involved enthusiastic fans of pop idols splurge on buying their CDs and merchandise. Involvement is such a determinant to drive consumer behaviors.

Some researchers have tried to investigate the influence of consumer involvement on piracy behavior; however, few researchers have considered media consumption as entertainment, depicting it as neither hobby nor leisure activity. The objective of this study is to explore the relation between enduring involvement, which is a type of involvement often used in the leisure context, and intention toward digital piracy behavior. To achieve this goal, the author examines the relevance of college students' enduring involvement with anime to their intention to use anime-pirated websites<sup>1</sup>.

## Literature Review

### Enduring Involvement and Leisure Activities

Consumer involvement has been a major concept in explaining consumer behavior. While the meaning and usage differ by researcher, in general, it represents a psychological state of motivation or arousal that affects consumer's purchase decision processes. As mentioned earlier, involvement describes a consumer's degree of feeling or commitment attached to an entire product category. The general consensus is that "high involvement means (approximately) personal relevance or importance" (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984, 583). Houston and Rothschild (1978) proposed three types of involvement: situational involvement, enduring involvement, and response involvement. Enduring involvement is "an individual difference variable representing an arousal potential of a product or activity that causes personal relevance" (Higie and Feick 1989, Conceptualizing Enduring Involvement section, para. 2). Consumers with enduring involvement with some subject or object (e.g., a celebrity, a sport, or a TV show) intently focus their time, energy, and resources on it (Thorne and Bruner 2006).

In leisure research, Havitz and Dimanche (1997, 184) defined involvement in line with Rothschild (1984) as follows:

[A]n unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product. It is evoked by a particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties. In other words, leisure involvement refers to how we think about our leisure and recreation, and it affects our behavior as well.

Enduring involvement, rather than situational involvement, has been the major focus of leisure and recreational activities (e.g., sports, hobbies) in discussing these activities' relationships to ego or self (Havitz and Dimanche 1997) because they are considered to be long lasting, and are given importance based on an individual's personal values, which are less affected by situational stimuli (Kyle and Chick 2004).

To measure enduring involvement, several scales were developed based on Laurent and Kapferer's Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP) (1985) consisting of five facets: importance, pleasure, risk importance, risk probability, and sign. Risk consequence was used synonymously for risk importance in subsequent studies. CIP and its extensions are often employed in leisure research to measure enduring involvement (Nishimura 2009). Many researchers use the term "attraction" to refer to the combination of importance and pleasure items (Havitz and Dimanche 1997), a facet that is peculiar to leisure studies. In addition to the above, "centrality to lifestyle" is also a

<sup>1</sup> Watching anime can be considered a leisure activity as Havitz and Mannell (2005) classified "watching television" and "watching a movie" as leisure activities.

relevant component of enduring involvement (McIntyre 1989). Table 2 lists the facets of enduring involvement that have been studied in the context of leisure activities.

**Table 2.** Major components of enduring involvement in leisure research

Facet	Explanation
Attraction (cf. Dimanche et al. 1991)	The combination of importance and pleasure.
Importance (cf. Laurent and Kapferer 1985)	The perceived importance of an activity.
Pleasure (cf. Laurent and Kapferer 1985)	The hedonic and emotional value that gives pleasure.
Sign (cf. Laurent and Kapferer 1985)	The symbolic value associated with an activity; the unspoken statements that participation in an activity conveys about the person (Kyle and Chick, 2002).
Risk probability (cf. Laurent and Kapferer 1985)	The perceived probability of making a mistake because of poor choices.
Risk consequence (cf. Laurent and Kapferer 1985)	The perceived importance of negative consequences resulting from poor choices.
Centrality (to lifestyle) (cf. Wellman et al. 1982)	The social connections centered around an activity and the centrality of its role to an individual's life (Kyle and Chick, 2002).

## Digital Piracy Behavior

In social psychology, several theories have been used to analyze consumer piracy behavior. While the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and its extended studies (e.g., Theory of Planned Behavior: TPB) are commonly applied to explain unethical behavior (Chang 1998; Cronan and Al-Rafee 2007; d'Astous, Colbert, and Montpetit 2005; Yoon 2010), as Riekkinen (2018, 3558) point out, "TRA and TPB neglect the normative and moral aspects in their basic form". In this context, neutralization theory (Hinduja 2007; Morris and Higgins 2009), which was originally proposed by Sykes and Matza (1957), has found that the techniques of neutralization can be applied in justifying digital piracy (Yu 2012).

## Involvement and Piracy Behavior

Outside the field of social psychology, few studies have focused on consumer involvement and its relation to intention toward piracy behavior. While some researchers incorporated the concept of involvement into their research models to investigate variables that may affect intention (Cesareo and Pastore 2014; Culiberg et al. 2016; Kos Koklic et al. 2013), they did not consider various aspects that involvement contains (e.g., risk probability). For instance, Kos Koklic et al. (2013) investigated the influence of involvement on the relation between attitude and intention toward digital piracy; however, they used Zaichkowsky's Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) (1994) to quantify the respondents' involvement easily. No one has applied the enduring involvement concept to leisure contexts. That is the author's motivation to examine relations between enduring involvement and intention toward digital piracy behavior.

## Hypothesis and Conceptual Model

It is challenging to prove a possible relation between the components of enduring involvement and intention toward digital piracy because such a connection has never been studied before. The author developed the following hypotheses based on logic and prior research:

### *Attraction*

Consumers purchase and consume goods and services based on their hedonic and utilitarian values. Hedonic value is defined as “an overall assessment of experiential benefits and sacrifices, such as entertainment and escapism” (Overby and Lee 2006, 1161). Anime is a type of entertainment and is assumed to have high hedonic value. Also, hedonic value highly correlates with pleasure and emotional arousal (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994), both components of attraction. People who have a higher degree of attraction will have higher expectations of deriving emotional benefits from the consumption of a given form of entertainment; hence, they will not place as much emphasis on the legitimacy of their means of access to the entertainment media.

H1: Attraction to anime positively affects an individual’s intention toward using anime piracy websites.

### *Sign*

Sign, which is also called “self-image” (Havitz and Dimanche 1997), represents the symbolic value of objects for an individual. No individual who has a high degree of “sign” would want to accept a symbol that is afforded by illegal measures.

H2: Sign for anime negatively affects an individual’s intention toward using anime piracy websites.

### *Risk probability*

Anime usually costs a certain amount of money to watch. People who have higher risk probability are more afraid of making wrong choices and spending money on anime that may offend their feelings. Hence, individuals with higher risk probability will be more likely to use free pirated content.

H3: Risk probability for anime positively affects an individual’s intention toward using anime piracy websites.

### *Risk consequence*

There are many kinds of anime, and each of them has a different, unique flavor and appeal. Anime viewers feel different after watching different episodes. No one knows how they will feel about an anime until they have finished watching it. Therefore, the more regret individuals feel after watching an unsatisfactory anime, the more intention they will have to buy illegal products to avoid financial and time-loss risk.

H4: Risk consequence for anime positively affects an individual’s intention toward using anime piracy websites.

### *Centrality*

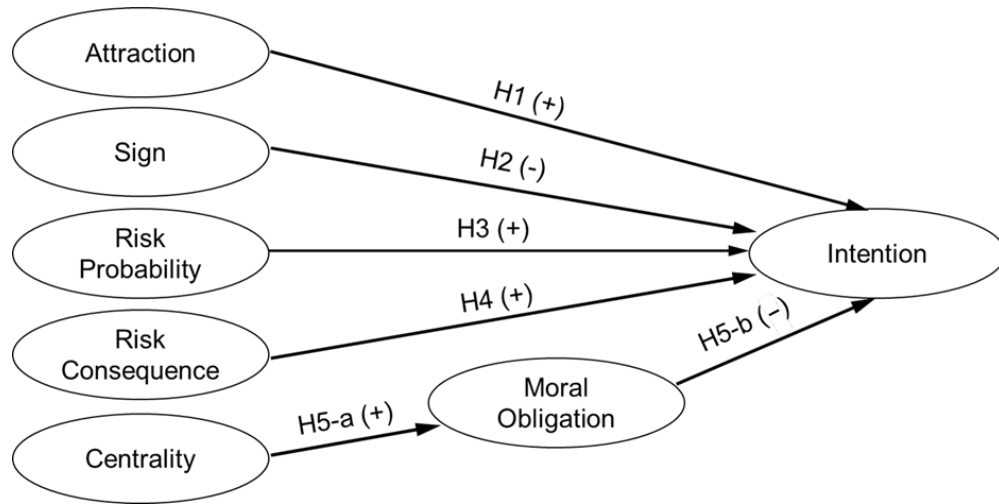
According to Kyle and Chick (2002), centrality represents the social connections and the central role of an activity in an individual’s life. As the use of social networking services became popular among youths and young adults, large numbers of anime fandom sites have been formed in virtual space. People in such communities have an unspoken common perception that piracy behavior is a wrong activity that damages anime-related stakeholders. Also, in anime shops (e.g., animate) where anime otaku often go, many posters can be seen urging visitors to refrain from digital piracy. Hence, people with higher centrality should have a higher level of moral awareness, and they will feel a higher moral obligation. Moreover, as Yoon (2010) showed, moral obligation will negatively affect intention to commit digital piracy.

H5-a: Centrality positively affects moral obligation.

H5-b: Moral obligation negatively affects intention toward using anime piracy websites.

Based on the above hypotheses, the following research model was established, shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Research Model



## Methods

### Data Collection

As digital piracy is recognized as a behavior committed mainly by young adults, the sample was primarily chosen from Japanese undergraduate/graduate students (Table 3). Volunteers were asked to fill out an online, self-administered questionnaire with the understanding that their responses would be kept confidential, and only aggregated results would be reported. Respondents were given the opportunity to enter a raffle to win a 500-yen Amazon Gift Card if they desired. Overall, a total of 50 surveys were distributed, with 43 completed questionnaires received from December 4th through 9th, 2020. Accordingly, 43 questionnaires were used for further analysis.

**Table 3.** Characteristics of the valid sample (% of respondents, *n* = 43)

Gender	Male	72.1
	Female	27.9
Education	Undergraduate/Graduate students	95.3
	Working adults	4.7

### Measure Development

The measurement scale used in this study was created using 31 items. First, the author changed the wording of the questions to fit the context of watching anime and then conducted a pretest to assess the understandability of the questionnaire items. Survey questions were translated into Japanese beforehand. All items were measured on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” From these 31 questions, 11 items with outer loadings under 0.7 were eliminated (Hulland 1999). Selected items for the analysis are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Finally selected items in the study

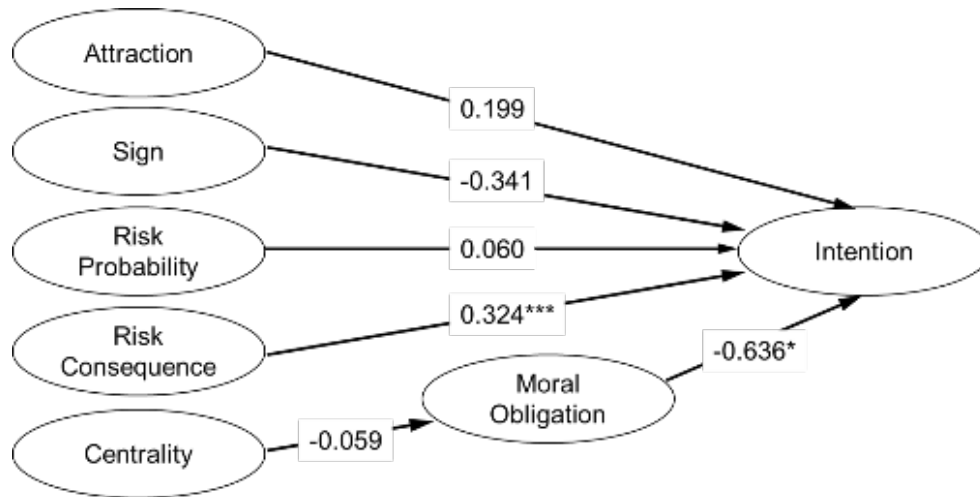
Facet	Item	Revised from
Attraction	A1: I attach great importance to anime. A3: I really enjoy watching anime. A4: Anime never leaves me indifferent. A6: Anime is a pleasure for me.	Havitz and Mannell 2005
Sign	S2: I want others to think of me as an anime maniac. S3: I can tell a lot about a person when I see him /her watching anime. S4: Anime helps me maintain the type of life I strive for.	Jang et al. 2000
Risk probability	RP2: Watching anime is always the right choice. * RP3: When choosing watching anime from among other activities I always feel confident that I will make the right choice. *	Havitz and Mannell 2005
Risk Consequence	RC1: I get annoyed if I watched anime and it proves to be the wrong activity choice. RC2: If, after I have watched anime, my choice proves to be poor, I am upset. RC3: When I make a mistake in choosing anime, it really matters to me.	Havitz and Mannell 2005
Centrality	C1: I find that much of my life is organized around anime. C3: When I am with friends, we often talk about anime.	Jang et al. 2000
Moral Obligation	M1: I would feel guilty if I used anime piracy websites. M2: To use anime piracy websites goes against my principles. M3: It would be morally wrong for me to use anime piracy websites.	Yoon 2011
Intention	I1: I intend to use anime piracy websites in the near future. I2: If I have a chance, I will use anime piracy websites. I3: I never use anime piracy websites. *	Yoon 2011

\* Reversely scaled item

## Analysis and Findings

The partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM) approach was employed to validate the research model. PLS-SEM is more suitable compared to the covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) when the sample size is small (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2011; Hair et al. 2016; Wong 2013). The author used SmartPLS 3, and Figure 2 shows the results of the analysis. According to Hair et al. (2016), the data analysis process embraces two stages: (1) evaluation of the measurement model and (2) evaluation of the structural model. In the first stage, four indicators were examined: indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Table 5). All indicator reliability values are over 0.4, confirming indicator reliability. The preferred value is 0.7 or higher; however, 0.4 or higher is acceptable (Wong 2013). All composite reliability values are between 0.7 and 0.95, which confirms internal consistency reliability (Hair et al. 2019). All AVE reliability values are over 0.5, confirming convergent validity (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). To verify discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria was used (Table 6). The attraction-sign construct (0.850) is larger than sign-sign construct (0.836). However, the difference (0.014) is too small; thus, it can be ignored (Ab Hamid, Sami, and Sidek 2017). After all, discriminant validity was established.

Figure 2. Structural model results



Note: \* p<.001, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.05 (two-tailed)  
 R<sup>2</sup> for Intention: 0.560  
 R<sup>2</sup> for Moral Obligation: 0.004  
 Adj. R<sup>2</sup> for Intention: 0.501  
 Adj. R<sup>2</sup> for Moral Obligation: -0.021

Table 5. Results summary for the evaluation of the measurement model (and VIF)

Latent Variables	Indicators	Loadings	Indicator Reliability (i.e., loadings <sup>2</sup> )	VIF	Composite Reliability	AVE
Attraction	A1	0.881	0.776	3.961	0.923	0.751
	A3	0.931	0.867	3.253		
	A4	0.885	0.783	2.462		
	A6	0.762	0.581	2.851		
Sign	S2	0.807	0.651	1.784	0.874	0.699
	S3	0.748	0.560	1.518		
	S4	0.941	0.885	2.202		
Risk Probability	RP2	0.952	0.906	2.374	0.936	0.879
	RP3	0.923	0.852	2.374		
Risk Consequence	RC1	0.738	0.545	1.548	0.852	0.658
	RC2	0.861	0.741	2.040		
	RC3	0.830	0.689	1.469		
Centrality	C1	0.824	0.679	1.405	0.865	0.763
	C3	0.920	0.846	1.405		
Moral Obligation	M1	0.913	0.834	2.687	0.899	0.750
	M2	0.902	0.814	2.028		
	M3	0.775	0.601	1.832		
Intention	I1	0.854	0.729	2.177	0.926	0.806
	I2	0.922	0.850	2.848		
	I3	0.915	0.837	2.569		

Table 6. Fornell-Larcker criterion analysis for checking discriminant validity

	Attraction	Sign	Risk Probability	Risk Consequence	Centrality	Moral Obligation	Intention
Attraction	0.867						
Sign	0.850	0.836					
Risk Probability	-0.771	-0.799	0.938				
Risk Consequence	0.297	0.385	-0.230	0.811			
Centrality	0.695	0.752	-0.615	0.475	0.874		
Moral Obligation	0.035	0.103	-0.111	-0.009	-0.059	0.866	
Intention	-0.062	-0.160	0.174	0.244	-0.028	-0.674	0.898

Next, in the second stage, the structural model is evaluated. All VIF values in Table 5 are under 5.0, confirming an absence of multicollinearity (Wong 2013). Then, the  $R^2$  values of the endogenous constructs were examined. To assess structural path significance, the bootstrapping procedure was used, and 5,000 sub-samples were taken from the original sample (Wong 2013). The result of the significance test is shown in Table 7.  $R^2$  values of 0.75, 0.50, or 0.25 for endogenous latent variables can be described as substantial, moderate, or weak, respectively (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2011). Only 0.4% (0.004) of the variance of moral obligation is explained by contrarily, which can be deemed as “no correlation.” Meanwhile, 56% (0.560) of the variance of intention is explained by attraction, sign, risk probability, risk consequence, and moral obligation, which is considered a moderate correlation. Also, the effect size ( $f^2$ ) for each path is tabulated in Table 7, and the value 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Cohen 1988). The  $Q^2$  effect size (cross-validated redundancy) assesses the inner model's predictive relevance.  $Q^2$  values for intention and moral obligation are 0.398 and -0.025, respectively.  $Q^2$  values higher than 0, 0.25, and 0.50 report small, medium, and large predictive relevance of the path model (Hair et al. 2019). Similarly,  $q^2$  effect values were computed to describe the relative impact of predictive relevance. The  $q^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, respectively, indicate that an exogenous construct has a small, medium, or large predictive relevance for an endogenous construct (Hair et al. 2016).

Table 7: Results summary for the evaluation of the structural model

Path	Path coefficient	t-value	$f^2$	$Q^2$	$q^2$
Attraction → Intention	0.199	0.628	0.023	0.398	0.013
Sign → Intention	-0.341	1.138	0.054		0.025
Risk Probability → Intention	0.060	0.282	0.003		0.027
Risk Consequence → Intention	0.324	1.981***	0.199		0.120
Moral Obligation → Intention	-0.636	5.626*	0.893		0.537
Centrality → Moral Obligation	-0.059	0.292	0.004	-0.025	N/A

Note: \*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed)



## Discussion

In this article, the author offered a possible relation between enduring involvement and intention toward piracy behavior. A research model was proposed that assumes relations among involvement indicators, and a set of hypotheses was established to test the research model empirically. After running a series of analyses, it was found that intention is well explained by four indicators. The coefficient of attraction path is 0.199, suggesting attraction has somewhat positive effects on intention. Outside the study of piracy, in their study of attitudes toward buying fashion counterfeits, Yoo and Lee (2009) showed that hedonic benefits positively affect consumer intention to purchase counterfeits. Similar to this research, individuals who valued hedonic benefits were found to have higher intention toward consuming pirated products in terms of the use of rights-infringed goods/services. Sign has a -0.341 path coefficient value, which means that higher sign moderately leads to less intention. Again, Yoo and Lee (2009) found that self-image positively affects purchase intention of originals in fashion counterfeit research, which does not contradict with the results of our study. As well as attraction, this characteristic may be applicable for counterfeit research other than digital piracy or fashion study. Risk probability, however, had no effect observed on intention as the coefficient is 0.060, which suggests that even if consumers have higher risk probability, it does not directly affect intention. Paths H1, H2, and H3 are not significant, probably because not enough samples were collected, and thus, these hypotheses cannot necessarily be supported. However, there are considerable significant relations in the paths H4 and H5-b, supporting these two hypotheses. Risk consequence has moderate positive effects on intention with a coefficient of 0.324. Previously, perceived risk (e.g., criminal risk, performance risk, social risks) of buying counterfeits has been a main objective in piracy research. This study, however, focused on the risk involved in buying genuine products. It turns out that the higher perceived importance of adverse consequences causes a higher intention toward using illegal goods. Moral obligation has a coefficient of -0.636, suggesting strong negative effects toward intention, following Yoon's work (2010). It means that the higher sense of moral obligation an individual has, the less intention to use pirated services. For the moral obligation variable, no substantial correlation was observed between centrality and moral obligation, rejecting H5-a with a coefficient of -0.059. After all, the R<sup>2</sup> for intention is 0.560, meaning intention is moderately explained by the indicators attraction, sign, risk consequence, and moral obligation.

In prior piracy research, involvement was measured by very simple scales. However, the current research considered several aspects of enduring involvement that have never been studied before. It was found that attraction and risk consequence have positive effects, while sign and moral obligation have negative effects on the intention toward digital piracy. Even though only a part of the research model was confirmed, the study makes an important contribution to explaining piracy behavior as the model gives a new, more nuanced perspective on digital piracy research.

## Implications and Limitations

Besides the above theoretical considerations, this study also has practical implications. First, it confirmed that risk consequence has positive effects on intention. To mitigate the financial risk for consumers, some episodes of anime should officially be made available for free online. Some companies have already made such attempts; however, it cannot be denied that these actions are not widely known to the public<sup>2</sup>. Also, as moral obligation negatively affects intention, users should be notified of the harmfulness and illegality of downloading pirated anime at the same time as they are notified of the presence of free anime officially uploaded on the Internet. For instance, as young people often

<sup>2</sup> There are some official websites (e.g., Tver) to watch TV shows for free online. Indeed, television stations promote these services to viewers in the last few minutes of dramas on TV; however, they are not advertised in mid-night anime shows.

use Social Networking Services (SNS), the official accounts of IP stakeholders<sup>3</sup> should make more efforts to educate followers about the importance of stopping digital piracy, indicating the extent of the damage caused by such behavior, and encourage them to be more proactive in using free, official services. For instance, each member of an anime's production committee, including the video maker who leads production and promotion (e.g., Aniplex), the publisher of the novel or manga (e.g., Shueisha), the advertising agency (e.g., dentsu), and the anime production studio (e.g., ufotable) has a SNS account to publicize the anime and its merchandise. It is possible to enlighten anime viewers and promote legal services using these social media accounts.

While the findings provide meaningful implications for researchers and practitioners, this study has some limitations. First, the sample size is small; thus, the result cannot be overgeneralized. Non-significant paths in the study may turn out to be statistically meaningful if a larger sample is obtained. Besides, in this study, most samples were collected from undergraduate/graduate students. High school and junior high school students also commit digital piracy; hence the research does not reflect the actual situation among young users. Second, there may be possible relations between variables in addition to the tested paths. It cannot be denied that the author was not able to consider all possible paths thoughtfully. Therefore, in future research, the model should be tested with a larger sample size from a wider range of populations, and with all potential relations between variables taken under consideration. In sum, this study contributes to the growing body of literature detailing factors affecting intention toward digital piracy by introducing several facets of enduring involvement. The author hopes that more piracy research emphasizing consumer involvement will be conducted in terms of leisure and hobby studies, which has little been studied up to this point.

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, IP (Intellectual Property) indicates original entertainment works such as novels, story and characters.

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