Consuming digital media: motivational drivers for piracy and legal behavior

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ABSTRACT

Digital piracy is a widely prevalent behavior in most parts of the world. Researchers have examined ways to address this problem from multiple perspectives. However, there is no conclusive approach to mitigate piracy. This research examines motivations of digital pirates and the use of moral distancing and neutralization to justify their actions. A digital nethnographic observation approach coupled with content analysis of conversations within a piracy-oriented subreddit on the Reddit platform was used to gain insights about digital piracy Results indicate that digital pirates are selective in their piracy and consume both legally purchased content as well as pirated content. It is important to understand how pirates perceive the value of digital products. Value of pirated content is not just emanating from saving money. Ownership, convenience, desire of control, and risk reduction are some of the factors that are intertwined in their perception of value. They often use denial of injury to justify their illegal behavior by painting the publisher as a greedy corporate entity. Pirates also do not perceive any meaningful threat from law enforcement. However, they recognize that their behaviors are considered illegal.

Keywords: online piracy, motivation, selective piracy, media, moral disengagement

INTRODUCTION

Digital piracy has evolved over the decades simultaneously with technology and the widespread use of social media. Although it has receded from the media headlines it occupied in the Napster era, still, this continues to be an issue for all stakeholders: content creators, corporations, legislators, and legal entities (Choi and LaPrade 2023; Ismail, Febiyanto, and Moniaga 2023). The statistics on digital piracy are staggering. According to some estimates, digital video piracy is costing the U.S. economy roughly between $30 and $70 billion each year (Spajic 2022). In the movie industry, for example, the total box office revenue is reduced by 11% due to piracy pre-releases appearing before the theatrical release (Lu, Wang, and Bendle 2019).

This research seeks to update understanding and the current state of motivational drivers influencing end-user digital piracy. The literature describes two distinct types of piracy: commercial piracy and end-user piracy (Belleflamme and Peitz 2010). Commercial piracy involves large-scale downloading, reproduction, and sale of digital content at typically reduced rates compared to the original content, such as bazaars in Africa, where consumers can purchase unauthorized movie releases on DVD. The focus of this research is on end-user piracy, which occurs at the individual level when either consumer downloads or shares a link to digital content without paying the applicable fee. End-user piracy is a paradox because people, who are typically law-abiding citizens, knowingly break the law by pirating digital content and then justify their behavior (Bonner and O'Higgins 2010). It is even suggested that "piracy cultures have become part of our everyday life in the network society" (Castells and Cardoso 2012). Throughout this paper, Tomczyk's (2021) definition of digital piracy as "the activity of downloading, making available, and using digital content, including software, without paying the applicable fee (p. 2)"is relied upon. The direct implication of this paper is on legitimate marketing practices to convey value and encourage legal consumption of digital products.

The dominant approach to counter digital piracy has been the legal point of view that paints the pirates as wrongdoers who should face criminal charges. The entertainment industry spends millions of dollars filing lawsuits and advertising campaigns to achieve these ends (Beesetty, Mayabrahmma, and Vineet 2022). However, this approach has not yielded successful results – piracy rates have not gone down. Several studies have shown that pirates have little fear of being prosecuted (Brown 2016; Larsson, Svensson, and Kaminski 2013).

Technology has enabled pirates to keep one step ahead (Marcum, Higgins, Wolfe, and Ricketts 2011). Some have argued that the Internet and related computing technologies have provided the means to pave the path for digital piracy (Goldsmith and Wall 2022). Technology has enabled the reproduction and sharing of original copyrighted works, such as books, music, movies, etc., in high quality and free or very low costs. This is in contrast to the pre-Napster era, where reproduced copies were generally of lower quality and, thus, not attractive to the general population as a substitute for a genuine version. In 2023 it is very easy and cheap (or even free) for consumers to find, acquire, consume, and even share back pirated content nearly or truly identical to the original version. However, the ease of acquisition of nearly free pirated copies of content alone cannot explain prevalence of digital piracy. Findings among the numerous studies are not convergent. Therefore, there is a need to get a better understanding of what motivates people to consume illegally obtained digital media, such as books, music, movies, games etc. This can then be used to address the problem of reducing piracy rates and provide insights on how to convey the value of obtaining these products legally.

Commercial piracy is driven by the desire to generate revenues and is unequivocally criminal in nature. Motivation for *end-user* piracy is more nuanced (Belleflamme and Peitz 2010). While some digital pirates are motivated by economic motives, such as saving money, others may be driven by ego, such as boasting about their collection of digital entertainment. Other reasons for piracy also exist, such as pirating digital content due to lack of content availability or access, the convenience of possessing the content on a locally controlled server, retaining a sense of ownership over digital content that was previously possible with physical media like C.D.s and DVDs (Koklic, Kukar-Kinney, and Vida 2022), or even poor understanding of prevailing laws that delineate piracy from lawful actions (Ismail et al. 2023).

This paper aims to make a contribution to the existing literature through the exploration of motivations of the actual digital pirates by examining their self-expressed views. An analysis of data retrieved from interest-based community on Reddit was used to discover the motivations of modern-day digital pirates. This is in contrast to studies that have used student or general population samples, who may not be actively participating in digital piracy. The paper explores and analyzes the beliefs and views of people discussing issues relating to their acts of piracy, views about piracy, and their justification of piracy.

The objectives of this research are to (i) revisit different motivations which elicit digital piracy occurrences, (ii) explore the circumstances that result in more (or less) digital piracy, and (iii) provide potential strategies that marketers can use reduce digital piracy. This study expands on Brown (2016) ethnographic study of music piracy by looking at all forms of digital end-user piracy and synthesizing findings with research from multiple perspectives.

In the following sections, different research streams on digital piracy that are germane to this study are reviewed. The methodology using "conversations" on Reddit, a social media messaging platform, is then described. This is followed by a qualitative analysis that re-identifies key drivers of digital piracy. The paper concludes with marketing implications to reduce digital piracy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of networks and the Internet on digital piracy came to the forefront with the popularity of software enablers like Napster and Grokster in the early part of the twenty-first century (Bridy 2009). These digital technologies and the growing popularity of the Internet rattled traditional business models in diverse sectors like music, movies, books, software, and games. Academic research in digital piracy has attracted researchers from different disciplines, such as information systems (Barnor, Kolog, Entee, Boateng, Afful-Dadzie, and Patterson 2020), criminology (Goldsmith and Wall 2022), cybersecurity (Bowman, Sharma, and Biros 2022), legal (Bridy 2009), ethical (Simpson, Banerjee, and Simpson 1994), psychology (Herjanto, Bagozzi, and Gaur 2021), sociology (Cooper and Harrison 2001), economics (Belleflamme and Peitz 2010), and consumer behavior (Koklic et al. 2022). Researchers have also studied diminished moral reasoning (Hinduja and Higgins 2011), cross-cultural influences (Udo, Bagchi, and Maity 2016), and poor law enforcement contributing to digital piracy. Marketing literature in this area has examined the piracy sub-culture, the ineffectiveness of anti-piracy messages, and effects of de-ownership on piracy (Koklic et al. 2022).

Much of the initial research during this period examined issues concerning copyright protection and impact of file sharing from legal and economic perspectives. Gasser (2005) looked at the impact of technological advancement on U.S. copyright holders and the laws that

were created to protect them. Laws, such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), criminalized the circumvention of technological controls that prevent access to copyrighted content (Urban and Quilter 2005). Similar legislation, such as Copyright in the Digital Single Market Directive, was passed in Europe as well. However, many consumers considered some types of illegal consumption of content as "fair use." The low rates of enforcement of laws and ease of committing piracy may have also contributed to the confusion of what is legal or illegal digital content. The adverse impact of such laws on stifling creativity was discussed. Legal scholars also needed to balance the opposing interests of the copyright holders and the public's interests. A critique of the restrictive laws was discussed by Boldrin and Levine (2008). The diminishing role of content producers in the distribution process and the disruption of business models relying on physical products was noted by researchers. A related area of focus was the legality of file sharing (Liebowitz 2006) and threats to the enforcement of copyright in the digital world (Green 2002). Interestingly, Ku (2002) argues that digital goods may not qualify for copyright protection because traditional distributors are obsolete since consumers are handling the distribution of content themselves. Breakey (2018) examined the ethics of piracy from various perspectives and emphasized the need to support copyright laws, even for those who believe that big corporations are unfair and exploitative.

Economists were drawn to this area of research to explore the seemingly explicit connection between piracy and reduced revenues for corporations and, in turn, offer strategies to thwart piracy. Many studies have focused on theoretical models that examined profits, pricing, level of technology protection, and consumer welfare under different market conditions (Belleflamme and Peitz 2010; Sundararajan 2004). These scholars identified market conditions under which content producers and marketers could benefit from end-user piracy due to sampling and network effects (Bender and Wang 2009). However, research that has used actual file-sharing data have not found conclusive links between piracy and music sales (Oberholzer-Gee and Strumpf 2010). Chiang and Assane (2009) examined factors that influenced willingness to pay for digital music downloads legally when illegal options were present. They concluded that income and risk perception of getting caught for illegally downloading music was positively related to willingness to pay for legal digital music. Similarly, university students' willingness to pay for legal digital music was influenced by their ethical awareness that piracy was unfair to copyright owners.

Since technology is directly coupled with digital piracy, it is not surprising there is a voluminous body of research from an information systems point of view. Technology-based protection options to thwart piracy have been one area of research (Tang 1998). These technologies, commonly known as digital rights management (DRM) systems, allow digital content owners to manage how their content is consumed and are often designed to stop illegal use. Sinha, Machado, and Sellman (2010) proposed and tested a model where removal of DRM paradoxically increased demand for legitimate music and reduced piracy.

A significant stream of research in information systems and marketing has examined attitudes and intentions towards digital piracy within the framework of established theoretical frameworks such as Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein 1975), Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen 1991), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, and Davis 2003), Deterrence Theory (Higgins, Wilson, and Fell 2005), Neutralization Theory (Sykes and Matza 1957), and Social Cognitive Theory (Lowry, Zhang, and Wu 2017).

Studies show that appeals for ethical behavior are not likely to be effective (Lyoski and Durvasulu 2008). Bonner and O'Higgins (2010) found similar results when examining the digital piracy of music: respondents perceived 'nothing wrong' with the digital piracy. Interestingly, active music fans were more likely than passive fans to indulge in this behavior.

Several studies have examined how digital pirates justify their behavior (Brown 2016; Holt and Copes 2010). These studies draw on the five techniques to neutralize any guilt associated with the illegal activity: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemnation of condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties (Sykes and Matza 1957). It was found that the first three were used more frequently in the music piracy context (Brown 2016). Interestingly, this research points to perceived value of pirated content and not just cost savings as a key explanation for piracy.

Lowry et al. (2017) performed an extensive meta-analysis and identified four key sets of variables that maximized the prediction of digital piracy behavior: outcome expectancies, social learning, self-efficacy and self-regulation, and moral disengagement. Outcome expectancies are perceived extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and punishments from piracy. This is analogous to perceived costs and benefits from digital piracy. The external motivations to commit digital piracy include saving money, expanding digital content collection, and perceived value. The risk of being caught and punished is also a motivator to consume digital content legally (Lysonski and Durvasula 2008). Many studies have focused on external motivations. Linkages between external motivations and digital piracy have been mixed. Internal motivations such as curiosity, fun, thrill, seeking a challenge, enjoyment of digital content, and desire for variety have received less focus. Social learning in the context of digital piracy manifests in the norms that exist among social groups. Self-efficacy with respect to digital piracy is an individual's belief in his or her ability to commit digital piracy. This maps to an individual's confidence and behavioral control (Bandura 1990). Results linking self-efficacy and piracy are mixed. Finally, moral disengagement in the context of digital piracy refers to the idea of justifications individuals make to commit piracy knowingly and not allowing moral perspectives to influence the illegal decision.

Eisend (2019) tested a comprehensive model of antecedents on piracy behavior based on a meta-analysis. Similar to Lowry et al. (2017), included antecedents were: morality, piracy experience, perceived behavioral control, justification, and subjective norms. Furthermore, Eisend (2019) also investigated the effects of culture in the model. He observed significant differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Perceived behavioral controls would likely have a stronger effect in individualistic cultures, while subjective norms would likely play a stronger role in collectivistic cultures.

Simpson et al. (1994) tested a model of ethical decision-making in the context of illegal use of software that included stimuli to act, socio-cultural factors, legal factors, personal factors, and situational factors. Interestingly, (un)ethical perceptions of software piracy did not affect intentions to commit software piracy. Being male had a significant effect on the propensity to pirate software. Other significant factors included personal gain and situational factors. Personal gain refers to intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to commit piracy. These would consist of the challenge of cracking the codes to pirate or simply saving money by not paying for a legal copy of the software. Situational factors, such as inconvenience of acquiring a software through legal channels, was a significant factor in committing software piracy.

Digital piracy has also been examined in the context of e-books and games. Using a field experiment, Kukla-Gryz, Tyrowicz, and Krawczyk (2021) found that the perception of price

unfairness influences the intentions to pirate. Price unfairness provides a moral 'license' to download digital textbook illegally. Holm (2014) evaluated non-legal barriers used by the gaming industry to combat piracy. Such barriers included DRM, cloud-based offerings, ease of accessing legal copies, and community engagement. Koklic et al. (2022) examined the effects of de-ownership on digital piracy. De-ownership is brought about by digitization of content and new business models that rely on subscriptions, temporary access, and renting as opposed to ownership of content. Temporary access to resources is the foundation of sharing economy and it was found that a de-ownership orientation is related to digital piracy through impulsive and compulsive digital acquisition tendencies.

The literature reveals a number of different approaches and theoretical frameworks that have been used to examine digital piracy. Several explanations have been provided for the wide prevalence of this phenomenon. Most studies found rational reasons, especially not having to pay high prices, as a key driver of digital piracy. Studies have also revealed the common neutralization techniques pirates use to justify their illegal activity. There is an abundance of data collected from surveys of college students, yet piracy has no geographic or sociodemographic bounds (Bender and Wang 2009; Blair 2015). Such approaches fail to identify underlying nuances of a dark behavior like digital piracy. Brown's (2016) ethnographic study suggested that digital piracy may be linked to the perceived value of the pirated product. This value may not necessarily be only centered on monetary savings. Such insights are difficult to uncover in survey research. Therefore, more naturalistic observation-based research to study digital piracy is warranted. We want to further understand motivations to commit digital piracy and related techniques of moral distancing and neutralization by examining naturally occurring discussions online about digital piracy.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

This research followed a digital nethnographic observation approach (Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis, and Tacchi 2015) coupled with content analysis (Moisander, Närvänen, and Valtonen 2020; Nascimento, Suarez, and Campos 2022). Bartl, Kannan, and Stockinger (2016) outline the steps we followed when performing a nethnographic study.

Reddit, a social media platform with 53 million users and 1.7 billion global monthly visitors, and 100,000 active communities (Grucela 2023), was chosen as the data source. When people sign up for Reddit platform, they typically select interest-specific sub-reddits where they can participate in public discussion boards. Data from a piracy-oriented subreddit /r/piracy created in 2008 with around 1.1 million participants was used for this study. The community's first rule is "Posts must be related to the discussion of digital piracy."

The data was collected by scraping the specific forum and importing the content into Atlas.ti platform (Hwang 2008) for subsequent analyses. The collected data was public in nature and discussion was intended for public, and not personal, communication.

Data Analysis

A total of 882 comments were analyzed. Anonymity of the users on the platform was maintained and no attempt was made to connect any of identifying information to their actual posts.

For data analysis, conventional steps of qualitative analysis were adopted: data transcription, information coding, and data processing. The authors determined that "template coding", a priori coding system intended to draw out the meaning and framework of communication, was an appropriate approach (Blair 2015).

Coding framework

Following Friese (2019) framework, seven semantic domains were created. The summary description of each domain is presented in Table 1. Five semantic domains (content, economic, extrinsic/intrinsic ego, moral disengagement) were derived from the literature (Condry 2004; Shanahan and Hyman 2010; Simpson et al. 1994; Tam, Feng, and Kwan 2019), while the piracy mode emerged during the coding process. The seventh domain was used for descriptive and classification purposes. Using Atlas.ti's intercoder mode, two independent coders classified all comments into seven domains. Descriptive statistics, such as the occurrence of specific mentions, are shown in Table 2.

RESULTS

The results clustered around seven outlined domains (Table 1). All text presented in italics are original "quotes" from the participants. The individuals making these quotes are not identified. Typically, users on Reddit maintain level of anonymity, since anyone can sign up under any name and email.

Content

Content-related reasons to pirate emerge due to lack of available content, poor quality of the content, or platform-related issues. Users in the discussion board represent a worldwide population that might not have immediate access to content and, thus, resort to piracy:

We don't even have Hulu in Canada so I cannot watch a good portion of what I want to.

Similarly, users in less developed countries, who may be willing to pay, express frustration with the lack of availability:

[even if I wanted to pay] 95% of the shows i watch never reach my country.

Platform-related issues are typically encountered with games. End-user 'problems' encompass few areas, such as game compatibility, licensing issues, or off-line streaming. Users express their frustration and very eloquently justify piracy:

If I buy something, I want to OWN it. Most games these day want to connect to some kind of server or they are unplayable. I dont get that issue with my pirated copy.

Some games you legit cannot buy any more because some kind of license has expired - usually something about the music used in the

> *game. That isn't my fault. I paid for it - I should be able to play it.*
> *Piracy gives me that option.*

User comments also tap the de-ownership issue discussed in Helm, Ligon, Stovall, and Van Riper (2018), where owning digital content (music file) is perceived differently than owning a tangible content (music CD). Yet, the users want to be in control of the content which they believe should be theirs, since they paid for it.

> *Everyone has seen how streaming services will add a show, often*
> *an older show, then after a few months it's gone. I want to watch*
> *what I want, when I want.*
> And,
> *If I buy something, I want to OWN it. Most games these day want*
> *to con…*

Users attribute piracy to the lack of service and service quality

> *[even if I wanted to pay,] 95% of the shows I watch never reach*
> *my country.*
> And,
> *If your service is garbage AND I have to pay for it, fu** you.*

The pirates are even willing to offer solutions to service providers on how to reduce piracy rates:

> *If they [the companies] really want to reduce piracy, then maybe*
> *instead of having a hundred different platforms and services*
> *loaded with commercials and shitty content at highly inflated*
> *prices, they look at some form of consolidation, reduce*
> *commercials and offer at a reasonable price on systems*

This theme manifests frustration with all aspects of digital services: platforms, advertisements, poor-quality content, and pricing.

Economic

Economic reasons contribute to piracy. People pirate digital content because they either can't afford the content or want to save money. There is a disparity between users living in developed nations versus those living in developing nations. Companies, deploying worldwide pricing policies, may encounter a prevalence of piracy of their products. As one user suggests, he can't afford the content at these prices and resorts to piracy:

> *[I] could not afford even 10% of the stuff i watch for free.*

Others are willing to pay for the content, but not at the current prices and diminished services:

> *Dude, if it was legal and affordable, I'd pay. Just like I did with*
> *Netflix before it got gutted.*

Some users offer advice on how they legally pay for a particular service, but only to some extent:

> *For example, if my kid wants to watch rugrats, I'll just pay for*
> *paramount plus for a month. It's not worth finding a way to pirate*
> *it when I can just pay $7 or whatever.*

Piracy can also arise due to changing industry practices, e.g. lack of product trialability, and personal circumstances, e.g. losing income.

> *I pirate games since demos no longer exist and I no longer have*
> *the disposable income I used to.*

Respondents also reflected on their college days when they would pirate all kinds of kind because they could not afford to purchase legally.

Extrinsic Ego

Extrinsic ego included several reasons: willingness to show piracy 'expertise', need for approval by peers/family, convenience seeking, and need to improve/expand collection of pirated content. The piracy sub-reddit provides a wiki[1] for users wanting to engage in piracy behavior. One user openly provides technical examples of how he is sharing piracy knowledge with his friends and family:

> *My friends and family actually ask me for help to set up a seedbox*
> *to work with Plex, or an IPTV provider to watch live sports.*

Yet, others share diametrically opposite reactions:

> *Whenever I tried to include friends and family into it, they become*
> *dismissive and begin ignoring me.*

Convenience-seeking is reflected in more complex behaviors. Users explain the convenience factor stemming from a number of sources. For example, some complain about the sheer number of sources and platforms, from where the content has to be obtained and/or streamed. Having your own streaming server at home makes it easier and more convenient to consume the content.

> *I'm gonna pivot into my own streaming server I think, its getting a*
> *bit ridiculous [by having this many platforms]*

Others point to technical issues, such as the provider's inability to account for outages:

> *For instance, if internet is down or if steam servers go down*
> *(which has happened) I cant play GTA V because I cant connect to*
> *the server. Bullsh** that I dont have to deal with, with my pirated*
> *copy.*

Convenience-seeking appears to be linked with extrinsic need for control concept. Owning and consuming content on their own terms is the ultimate expression of control. The movement from 'ownership' economy to 'access' economy appeared to create dissatisfaction for a significant portion of users who lost access to their favorite content:

> *I honestly would still pay for a lot more shit if it was as you*
> *described it (unlimited access to the thing), but what really fu**s*
> *me off and keeps me from paying is a lack of guaranteed access to*
> *the thing I buy. Like Amazon being able to remove your access to*
> *purchased books etc.*

And:

> *Ill j[u]st pirate now and actually own my stuff. Less of a headache*
> *knowing I own and control my things*

Intrinsic Ego

Intrinsic ego had two components: need to control ownership and variety/novelty/thrill-seeking behavior. Most users think that if they have paid for content, then they should own it.

> *I paid for it - I should be able to play it. Piracy gives me that*
> option.

The act of paying for a tangible DVD and a movie viewing on the big screen may provide similar benefits, but it does not entitle the users to same rights. Paying content distributor, such

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[1] A web-based tool used to work collaboratively to create materials and resources for a specific educational purpose.

as Spotify, does not give the user ownership rights. Some, who are variety seekers, also exhibit hoarding behavior:

> *I'm something of a data hoarder, as I just really want to own the files and have them available anytime with no internet required. Music alone, I have 13,000 lossless albums last I checked. I haven't counted the movies and tv shows.*

Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement has been shown to manifest in piracy context (Brown, 2016; Olivero, Greco, Annoni, Steca, and Lowry 2019). Dehumanization of big businesses by depicting them as greedy and profit seeking 'evil' corporations:

> *[and] publishers are gonna be greedy.*

Users justify piracy as a way to punish corporations. Some users have had enough. They think that piracy is a force used to fight the 'evil corporations':

> *I get fu***d from a million directions by corporate America and I'm supposed to take the high road on the only conceivable freebie in the grand scheme of endless bullsh**? I do my damnedest not to give it any more money if I have a choice.*

Pirates would like to enjoy the same benefits of owning a tangible copy, such as CD, to the benefits of having access to digital libraries:

> *I copied one of my C.D.s and haven't had to buy it ever again. People have paid the music industry billions for music rights they already own.*

Finally, a rhetorical sarcasm to justify piracy:

> *You're constantly getting fu**ed by the 1% and you're worried about Netflix not getting my money?*

Piracy mode

We distinguish between two modes of piracy. Users engage in complete piracy when they purposefully pirate all content regardless of user's ethical considerations (Tam et al. 2019). Selective end-user piracy occurs either as parallel or longitudinal piracy. Selective parallel piracy can be defined as normalizing behavior when users concurrently pirate some content and legally purchase another or even the same content. Selective longitudinal piracy is when users pirate some content, and then, for whatever reason, decide to purchase it legally and continue using it. A pirate illustrates selective parallel piracy using streaming video services:

> *[I] have just one or two of my favorite services and pirate everything else. Some paid services outside of HBO Max, Netflix, Prime, and Disney plus are a joke anyways.*

Another individual is engaging in selective longitudinal piracy by pirating the content illegally even though he is paying for the very streaming video service:

> *I pirate plenty of stuff, [e]specially because i refuse to pay for awful streaming services (i even pirate amazon shows despite having amazon prime).*

Selective parallel and longitudinal piracy can co-occur:
> *I do both still, pirate some stuff and pay for others e.g most of the*
> *games I play I've bought tho I still test them out first.*

And one user provides very vague heuristic to the process:
> *I pirate some things and buy some things*

Yet, some pirates engaged in selective parallel piracy have a moral compass by making a distinction between individual content creators and "capitalistic" corporations. It appears that the user wants to support independent artists:
> *I buy from creators and pirate from corporations.*

And:
> *I will usually buy what I Pirate - especially if it's Indie.*

Finally, a user sets his own idiosyncratic rules for which content he will pirate and under what price point:
> *I've always felt that if it's easily obtainable for a fair price, I will*
> *pay for it. If the sh** is geo locked (NFL games for me) or overly*
> *priced, I'm going straight to the piracy community.*

A word cloud of responses in shown in Figure 1.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of our research provide an interesting and very intimate view of how pirating consumers think, feel, and behave. Collectively, the findings paint a complex picture, where pirates express a myriad of opinions, suggestions, anecdotes, and advice to like-minded community. This is how piracy operates in *real world*, with *real people*, hiding behind truly anonymous reddit (Brodkin 2023). Represented convenience sample reflects the point of view of your 'typical' pirate. The findings cluster around six interlinked and overlapping domains. The most revealing, interesting, and illustrative results and observations will be discussed.

First, the thoughts expressed by pirating users indicate that the pirates and the companies do not share the same view and interpretation of convenience and control. The users see the concepts in broad terms: convenience should be absolute and control should be unlimited. The pirates impose their terms on using, storing, sharing the content – when they want, where they want, how they want, etc. For the companies, convenience and control may be relative and much more restrictive and utilitarian. Limiting access, e.g. throttling, can provide greater quality to a greater number of users. Consistent with the findings of Brown (2016), respondents in this study stressed that legally available options were simply not convenient and often were inferior to pirated content.

From an economic agent's point of view, act of piracy can be explained by cost-benefit analysis. Watson, Zizzo, and Fleming (2015) list studies that suggest price to be an indicator of likelihood of paying vs. pirating music. Yet, users talk more about wanting simple and easy access, ability to control downloaded content, and simply desiring more freedom in their consumption choices. All that can be achieved only with the pirated content. Pirates don't see value only in monetary terms.

Second, piracy is justified as means to sample the content. If one pirates the game, plays it, likes it, and then obtains it by paying full price – what harm was done to the company? From a financial point of view there was no harm done, yet a copyright infringement has occurred. A pirate's view may be that if the content creator, especially an independent one, received

compensation, then there is no foul. Economists have demonstrated positive effects of sampling to the firm and the consumers. Sampling provides informational value and reduces uncertainty.

Third, selective piracy is not a new phenomenon and has been discussed elsewhere (Smallridge and Roberts 2013), but it needs more attention and better understanding. A principle of dual morality, when ethical behavior is context-dependent, is applied by pirates. Interestingly, some engage in pirating and paying for the same content, treating pirated content as insurance (should it disappear from a legal source).

Economic literature shows that there may be benefits to piracy. Gu and Mahajan (2004) postulate that, under certain conditions, piracy can decrease competition and increase company's profits. Similarly, it can enhance the network effect for companies striving to increase the adoption and propagation of their digital products. If, as in the case of selective piracy, pirates can become paying customers, then maybe piracy should be ignored if not encouraged (Belleflamme and Peitz 2010).

Fourth, similar to Brown (2016), this study finds that the users further rationalize their piracy behavior by showing moral disengagement. In pirate's defense, and as Sykes and Matza (1957) point out, under certain circumstances, the injury is not the injury to the corporations. They make a clear distinction between a 'faceless corporation' and an actual independent developer, where one does not feel the pain while the other has to feed his family.

Finally, this study found no mention of self-admitted law enforcement issues or legal repercussions faced by pirates. Over the years, the pirates-consumers have gotten accustomed to virtually non-existent enforcement of copyright infringement law. Single-case user-level copyright infringement or piracy is a relatively low priority for law enforcement (Quintais and Poort 2018), because policing and coercion are not the most effective ways to combat piracy (Sinclair and Green 2016). Induced shame can affect behavior, such as discontinuation of digital piracy (Herjanto et al. 2021). Balestrino (2008) argues that digital piracy is socially acceptable due to low perceived social cost and therefore, there is no reason to condemn it. The conversations examined in this research indicate some degree of need for acceptance. However, motivations of desire for control and convenience appear to outweigh moral considerations.

CONCLUSIONS

Digital piracy is a complex problem. This qualitative study provides an intimate look at motivations expressed by users in a piracy-oriented forum. The perception shared by the pirates is that companies provide sub-par service, restrict content consumption, experience, and choices, overprice their content. It is imperative for digital product creators to understand what drives value for digital pirates and design effective and optimal marketing mix for their products. Value to pirates is more than just saving money. Freemiums appear to be a viable way to encourage consumers to try new digital content and convert them to legal users. Digital publishers should explore DRM options that grant consumers greater control and a sense of ownership. Innovative business models that dispel perceptions of lack of control for consumers over content are needed to discourage piracy. Digital publishers can also counter pirates' use of denial of injury to content creators as a rationale for pirating content through creative approaches. Recent research with online branding communities suggest potential ways to denormalize digital piracy and promote legal consumption (Scarboto et al. 2020).

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Descriptions of semantic domains

Semantic Domain	Description	Framework
Content	A motivation to pirate steming from a lack of content availability, quality, of accessibility issues.	Simpson et al. (1994)
Economic	A motivation to pirate due to economic factors, either cost savings or inability to purchase.	Simpson et al. (1994) Shanahan and Hyman (2010) Condry (2004)
Extrinsic ego	Egoistic motivations based on the desire for approval/acknowledgment of peers, showcasing expertise, convenience, and collection hoarding.	Simpson et al. (1994) Shanahan and Hyman (2010)
Intrinsic ego	Egoistic motivations based on the desire for challenge, thrill, control, fun, and variety seeking.	Simpson et al. (1994) Shanahan and Hyman (2010)
Moral disengagement	The moral justification of piracy actions by the pirates.	Shanahan and Hyman (2010) Setiawan and Tjiptono (2013) Tam et al. (2019) Condry (2004)
Piracy content	The types of piracy content, such as movies, music, books, software, and video games.	
Piracy mode	The piracy mode, such as full or selective piracy.	

Table 2: Statistical information on semantic domains (counts)

Semantic domain	Category and frequency	
Content	Availability	14
	Platform	13
	Quality	9
Economic	High cost	22
	Cost savings	9
Extrinsic ego	Convenience	12
	Demonstration of expertise	7
	Hoarding	7
	Approval	5
Intrinsic ego	Control	9
	Variety	3
Moral disengagement	Big corporations	23
	Not harming	13
	Acceptable here	10
	Everyone does it	9
	Not stealing	8
	Insignificant	4
Piracy content	Video games	13
	T.V.	12
	Movies	9
	Music	6
	Books	3
	Software	3
Piracy mode	Selective piracy	47
	Full piracy	5

Figure 1: Word cloud of responses