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Where do beliefs about Music Piracy come from and how are they shared? An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract

Research suggests that those individuals engaging in music piracy have little concern for the potentially negative consequences of engaging in this illegal activity. This study aims to build on previous research which finds that sub-cultural piracy knowledge is effectively transmitted online. Explicitly, this study aims to observe the various justifications people forward to rationalise engagement in music piracy, in accordance with Sykes and Matza's (1957) widely researched neutralization theory, and if techniques used to rationalize behaviours are shared amongst those individuals found to be discussing and engaging in music piracy online. The research examines naturally occurring discourse across three online settings, finding a widespread perception that there is 'no harm done' and that tips to work around web-blocking are exchanged online, including in public spaces such as Twitter. However, differences were found in the beliefs and attitudes of the sample. The study raises key conceptual issues about the theory used.

Keywords: Digital Piracy, Social Media, Morality, Ethnography, Discourse, Qualitative.

Introduction

Though music piracy has existed for decades, the digital revolution inspired widespread copyright infringement of protected works on a vast scale. Scharf (2013) defines a *holy trinity* (internet, mp3, and peer to peer technologies) in facilitating digital piracy. This convergence of technologies now means that people can listen to their own music in virtually every context possible (MacDonald et al., 2012). Moreover, they can do so for *free*. The result is that legions of otherwise law-abiding citizens are also 'pirates', though how these same people would categorise themselves remains contentious. Certainly, as Gray (2012) notes, pirates have been depicted as deviants and that studies have focused on building psychological, demographic and moral profiles of those engaged in piracy. This study principally considers the latter, and through use of data collected on microblogging service Twitter, explores beliefs and attitudes towards music piracy to learn more about this sample of interest.

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Review of Literature

de Kaminski et al. (2013) found that the legality of content found online was not of importance to participants in their focus group study and indeed one need not look further than public forums such as Twitter to emphasise this, with users regularly posting links to pirated content with little concern over being caught in the process. This is likely due to the fact that the certainty of punishment, the most important deterrent factor with crime (Brown et al., 2007; Li & Nergardze, 2009), is not upheld – piracy is widespread, and the mass majority of people engaging in music piracy will face no negative consequences. Brown and Marsden (2013) explain that more litigation leads to more encryption, citing the prosecution of popular cyberlocker *Megaupload* as leading to more advanced cyberlockers. Put simply, when access to one source of pirated music is removed, others quickly emerge in its place. In the words of Higgins and Marcum (2011): ‘There are always savvy Internet users that seem to outsmart technology faster than it can be produced’ (p. 78).

Importantly, Kay (2012) reveals that many Internet users are unclear over which content is legal and which is not. Hunt et al. (2009) explaining that as the scale of piracy expands, confusion over legality will also expand, lending to the volume of ways in which media can be accessed. Access to content which is in breach of copyright is constantly evolving, and confusingly so. Some 49% of videos removed from YouTube breach copyright (Liikanen & Salovaara, 2015) and as Trainer (2015) notes there is no way to stop uploading content breaching copyright. YouTube is a legitimate digital platform, but the content hosted on it is not necessarily legal. Conversely, use of P2P, torrents, and cyberlockers is not illegal – it depends on which digital files are accessed. The perception that torrents are principally used for engaging in digital piracy is however supported by research, with Price (2013) finding that of the 12,500 most popular torrents, only two were distributed legally. It is noteworthy also that Bit-Torrent services profit from advertising, and often adverts are for reputable brands.

It could be said then, that the public are receiving mixed signals about digital piracy. Certainly, with policing of copyright infringement clearly not a priority for governments worldwide, and with more music being released than ever before, including music being given away for free by established artists, the notion that music piracy negatively impacts on the industry is difficult to take seriously. This is made all the more so when considering research into the economics of music piracy.

Several studies have demonstrated that P2P usage reduces the likelihood of buying music (such as Montoro-Pons & Cuadrado, 2008; Rochelandent & Le Guel, 2005); with Zentner (2006) showing this can be by as much as 30%. Elsewhere, a more neutral effect was found by Oberholzer-Gee and Strumpf (2007) who showed that downloads have an effect on sales statistically indistinguishable from zero; the research has been widely criticised on methodological grounds, particularly by Liebowitz (2007; 2010). Controversially, Andersen and Frenz (2007) concluded that P2P file-sharing tends to *increase* rather than *decrease* music purchasing. Barker (2012) however, reached the opposite conclusion when conducting analysis on the same dataset, observing that a 10% increase in P2P downloads reduces legitimate demand by 0.4%. Aside from Hammond’s (2012) observations that new releases marginally benefit from file-sharing, empirical credibility to support the notion that piracy increases legal sales of recorded music is scarce.

Oberholzer-Gee and Strumpf (2010) perhaps best summarise research into this contentious area of digital piracy, explaining that: ‘Some studies find evidence of a substitution effect, other findings, in particular the papers using actual file-sharing data, suggest that piracy and music sales are largely unrelated’ (p.49). They also remark that concert sales have increased more than music sales have fallen, suggesting the need to take into account live music when evaluating the impact of music piracy on the industry.

To this end, Connolly and Krueger (2005) note that the main source of income for artists is generally from live music – not recorded music. As Wikström (2011) notes artists receive approximately 85% of the profits as compared to around 10% for recorded music. Though the figure is likely to be far less for most musicians, the sum far surpasses revenues culled from recorded music. Accordingly, individuals engaging in music piracy may feel that they are ‘doing the right thing’ to better support their favourite artists by substituting recorded music purchases with concert tickets; such was the conclusion from Brown and Knox’s (2016a) recent research into the drivers behind live concert attendance. Furthermore, Gayer and Shy (2006) argue that demand for live performances is reduced when piracy is prevented. Given also that ticket prices have increased beyond the rate of inflation (Brennan & Webster, 2010; Holt, 2010), it is feasible that individuals engaging in music piracy feel that they should not be criminalised, given they are already being penalised in the form of increasingly lofty ticket prices.

This is complicated further by a substantial volume of research which demonstrates that those who download music illegally also spend more money on music legally (Huygen et al., 2009; Karaganis, 2011; Thun, 2009; Watson et al. 2015; and Zentner, 2006). A trend which has been found across different cultures, Karaganis and Renkema (2013) most recently observed this amongst both US and German samples, stating that in absolute spending terms, P2P-users value music *more* than those who do not engage in file-sharing at all. Schwarz (2014) acknowledges that it is now uncontroversial that pirates (or ‘file sharers’, in his terms) are greater consumers of culture overall.

Irrespective of the claims made above, much research has explored the moral reasoning of music pirates, working to the assumption that engaging in music piracy is unethical. This, despite the fact that moral arguments can be put forward to defend wholly opposite positions (Brown, 2010, p. 10). Comparison across studies is also difficult due to the wide-ranging methodologies used, often with no use of theory, a reliance on single-item measures of ‘morality’, or as with much research, self-reported piracy engagement.

While some studies have found no link between moral reasoning and piracy (see Jacobs et al., 2012, for example), the majority of empirical works have (see Al-Rafee & Dashti, 2012; Gupta et al., 2004; Hinduja & Higgins, 2011; Wang & McClung, 2012), with findings suggesting that pirates do in fact demonstrate lower moral reasoning. No research to date has depicted pirates as morally *superior*. Higgins (2011) specifically finds that shame is negatively correlated with digital piracy engagement, and Wang and McClung (2012) observed that anticipated guilt had a strong negative relationship with intentions to pirate amongst samples who downloaded media illegally in the past six months. These more specific aspects of morality are revealing, and suggest that people understand that digital piracy is in some way *wrong*.

However, as Altschuller and Benbunan-Fich (2009) show with use of a moral dilemma task, inconsistencies exist between what they believed the subject of a task should do, and their own opinions and attitudes on the matter when specifically exploring music piracy. In other words, the relationship between piracy and morality is less than straightforward.

Individuals engage in music piracy despite believing it to be immoral (Bonner & O'Higgins, 2010; Flores & James, 2012). Though, as Yu's (2012) mixed-methods research highlights, pirates are not morally inferior *overall*, when considering other crimes. That is to say, individuals engaging in piracy are not otherwise immoral, engaging in a variety of other crimes.

Classic research into morality by eminent psychologist Albert Bandura suggests that it doesn't matter if piracy is in fact immoral, at least in terms of informing anti-piracy strategies centred on morality. To clarify, Bandura's (1991) research reports mechanisms of 'moral disengagement' to allow oneself to appear moral, yet maintain self-interest. In the context of music piracy, individuals actively neutralising their immoral behaviour implies they are aware that the act is itself immoral. While this may appear as an important weapon in the arsenal of policymakers aiming to amend piracy behaviours, Batson et al. (2002) conclude from their experimental research that: 'What may look like motivation to be appear moral (moral integrity) often is not. It is instead motivation to appear moral yet, if possible, avoid the cost of actually being moral' (p. 339).

Pirates may not respond to morality-based deterrent measures as they are able to repress the undesirable effects of behaving in an immoral way. Piracy of copyrighted media, including music, is inherently unfair act and as such, it is intuitive that otherwise law-abiding citizens may rationalize their illegal downloading behaviours to maintain their status as moral citizens. Sykes and Matza (1957) explain how, in their theory which explains how criminal behaviour can be justified prior to the behaviour itself. Use of particular techniques allows criminals to convince themselves that their behaviour is acceptable, regardless of laws or norms which conflict with such behaviours. Whilst their theory was initially limited to juvenile offending, the theory has since been explored successfully amongst other populations, including pirates.

Sykes and Matza (1957) put forward five techniques which were associated with neutralizing the guilt related to deviant behaviour. The first is 'denial of responsibility', that individuals refused to accept responsibility for their actions. The second is 'denial of injury', that there is no harm caused to the person who was affected by the deviant behaviour. The third and related technique is 'denial of victim', whereby the victim was deemed deserving of punishment. The fourth is 'condemnation of condemners', with the individual claiming that the victims were not real victims, were hypocrites, or would have engaged in the same act if given the opportunity. The final technique is 'appeal to higher loyalties' where an act was considered inappropriate but justified on the basis that immediate social groups needed this behaviour to occur.

The techniques listed are sufficiently applicable to piracy behaviours, with a growing area of research has contributed greatly towards our understanding of why conventional deterrents and certainly those based on morality do not appear to amend piracy behaviours. Piracy-specific neutralizations might include that music is easy to access freely (denial of responsibility), that piracy doesn't harm musicians (denial of injury), record companies pay poor royalties to artists or that artists are rich (denial of victim), that music is overpriced (condemnation of condemners) and that burning a CD compilation for a party is important (appeal to higher loyalties). Smallridge and Roberts (2013) note the inclusion of additional neutralization techniques over time to add to the theory including the *claim of normalcy* (everyone else is doing it). This neutralization was found to be the

most important for both music and movie piracy and other studies such as Bouhnik and Dshen (2013) find that piracy is encouraged by the fact that so many people engage in it.

Ingram and Hinduja (2008) observed from a student sample that greater acceptance of denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim and appeal to higher loyalties significantly predicted moderate levels of piracy behaviours. The first three of these denial techniques were also noted in Yu's (2012) mixed-methods study. Yu also found that techniques of neutralization accounted for almost 75% of the variation on viewing piracy as justifiable. Drawing both from interviews and ethnographic observation of forum data, Holt and Copes (2010) find that the most common neutralization technique was denial of injury; this particular technique was also found to be the most common in Moore and McMullan's (2009) research. Elsewhere, Levin et al. (2007) discovered no significant result when testing attribution of harm on both musicians and industry. In other words, there appears to be a perception that piracy does not harm the music industry.

Holt and Copes (2010) showed how pirates appeased their behaviours by illustrating the little harm their piracy behaviours cause, remarking on how it in fact *helps* artists; this was also noted in Moore and McMullan's (2009) qualitative research, where all of the 44 participants interviewed indicated support for at least one of six neutralization techniques considered. Thorley (2011) finds that even students hoping to work in the music industry similarly forward neutralizations. One participant in Moore and McMullan's study explains: 'I read somewhere that musicians make their money off concerts, so I think file sharing is actually helping the artists' (p. 446). Where the 'somewhere' remains elusive, but certainly this belief was echoed in Hinduja's (2012) qualitative research. Moore and McMullan's study also revealed that as participants believed that as all of their friends were also downloading media illegally, that it was more acceptable.

Current Study

This study aims to build on the findings of Holt and Copes (2010) who observed that sub-cultural piracy knowledge is effectively transmitted using online interaction. The research is informed by the social theory of differential association (see Sutherland & Cressey, 1974) which asserts that criminal behaviour is learned, and specifically learned by interacting with others. Lending to the observations that the public are given mixed signals about music piracy, the research aims to generally explore beliefs and attitudes about music piracy. It does so by principally observing the various justifications people put forward to rationalize music piracy engagement, in accordance with Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization, given prior qualitative research utilising the theory has exposed compelling motives to engage in music piracy. The research aims to further understanding into techniques of neutralization by examining naturally occurring discourse online to see how people make sense of engagement in piracy.

Methodology

The research employed online ethnographic observation and content analysis. Ethnographic observations online, principally collected from the microblogging service Twitter, were explored by reviewing posts using the following *hashtags*: #piracy, #torrent, and #piratebay, every day for a 90-day period. Whilst messages or 'tweets' sent are visible to anyone on Twitter, hashtags offer users what Doughty et al. (2014) explain as: 'Enormous power' (p. 55), ensuring a large volume of Twitter users read them; the hashtags used in the study were chosen on the basis of being popular. The use of Twitter

as a research tool has become increasingly more popular in recent years to explore a range of topics relating to discourse, including digital piracy (Lindgren, 2010).

YouTube comments on the documentary film “TBP: AFK” (Persson & Klose, 2013) were also considered, noting that a rich discussion on the events depicted in the film (the lives of the three founding members of The Pirate Bay, including their legal battles) unfolded in the days after its release. YouTube is also becoming more widely used as a research tool (see Thelwall et al., 2012). Additionally, data was collected from public forums (unspecified in the interests of anonymity), found after a series of Google searches using similar search terms as those used on Twitter. These three domains (Twitter, YouTube, and forums) represent three different online contexts where piracy discussions were taking place allowing a more detailed insight into the various sub-cultures of digital piracy online.

The data gained from these sources were collected through passive observation in the form of content analysis. The richness of data collected online has been persuasively demonstrated elsewhere, including Bennett’s (2012) use of Twitter data to explore changing notions of ‘liveness’ with live music. Holt and Copes (2010) and Holt et al. (2012) convincingly demonstrated the suitability of the approach specific to digital piracy in the criminological field. Whilst all data exist in the public domain, usernames and other identifying information are not included in the interests of maintaining anonymity. In the interests of consistency, users from all three platforms whose data was used for analysis will be referred to as ‘participants’.

The analytical strategy employed a directed approach (see Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), given a coding scheme already existed in the form of Sykes and Matza’s (1957) techniques of neutralization. This made the initial coding strategy more structured than with traditional content analysis (Hickey & Kipping, 1996). Codes were initially generated on a summative basis in the form of word frequency, given the vast amount of data available, and critically, observations extended beyond music piracy to incorporate digital piracy more broadly. At least three of Creswell’s (2007) eight validation strategies were employed, exceeding the recommended minimum of two.

Results

Data from all three online platforms are firstly considered collectively, with emphasis on data supportive of Sykes and Matza’s (1957) techniques of neutralization. Data clustered under four additional themes is then summarised. These four themes are: *acknowledgment of cultural and commercial realities*; *a willingness to disclose illegal behaviours online*; *links to pirated content and news items*; and *the transmission of tips*. Secondly, and following on from Lindgren’s (2010) findings that discourse on piracy varies markedly across different online communication platforms, similarities and differences observed across the three online platforms are considered. All text presented in italics are subtle variations of the original ‘quotes’ from participants – they were changed in the interests of maintaining anonymity. Despite all data collected existing in the public domain, original ‘tweets’, for example, can be quickly linked to individuals and this was considered unethical. The thrust of each excerpt remains unchanged.

1. Justifying Digital Piracy: Use of Techniques of Neutralization

Evidence of all of the neutralization techniques in Sykes and Matza's (1957) theory was found, with the majority being those relating to 'denial'. The specifics concerning denial of responsibility centred on accusations that the piracy equivalents to legal resources were *superior* and that the creative industries therefore encouraging sourcing content illegally.

Jesus. You try your hardest to watch films legally and it still is not possible.
#PirateBay anyone?

If there was a legal alternative to the Pirate Bay I would use it. There isn't, so I don't.

Given the multitude of legal alternatives to digital piracy, such comments appear very much as justifications or excuses, rather than actual reasons. Techniques relating to denial of injury, on the other hand, were rooted in fact.

I was under the impression that musicians made most of their earnings via concerts, not from record sales.

Objectively speaking, this is true. However, this is not to say that it is a viable reason to deny rights holders' revenues they are legally and morally entitled to. A recurring sentiment was that musicians (and those in the creative industries more generally) were wealthy and that this made it acceptable to avoid paying for their music. This, uniquely, appears to be an example of both a denial of injury and denial of victim in as much as the perceived material wealth of rappers, for example, suggest not only that they are not being denied financial reward for their works (and that therefore piracy does not harm them), but that their rich lifestyles invite piracy of their works as they are not deserving of more money.

Same way I don't buy hip-hop albums to listen to a guy tell me how many cars he has and how he is throwing bills at strippers.

OMG what a super serious issue. Rich people are losing cash, someone throw them some floaties so they don't drown in their sea of tears!

funny how movie companys always bitch and complain to tpb but u never see a homeless person in the movie business.

Moore and McMullan (2011), who find denial of injury to be the most common technique from interviews with University students, explain how anti-piracy strategies which focus on making people feel guilty will fail as guilt is neutralized both before and after engaging in digital piracy. The very specific example from the present study offers a window into how this is possible. The fact that some wildly successful musicians earn large sums from their tours such as those with '360' deals like Madonna (see Marshall, 2013) may in fact encourage music piracy, or encourages a *laissez-faire* attitude. As one participant in Yu's (2012) qualitative study explains: 'I don't think music piracy is a crime. I don't think they (the singers) need two Ferraris' (p. 368). Yu explains that the perception that digital media is too costly is encouraged by the depiction of wealthy alleged victims;

this is likely a direct contributor to why the denial of injury or denial of victim is so prevalent, and certainly data in the present study clusters on wealthy stakeholders in the creative industries who of course are not representative of the huge workforce across multiple industries. There was some evidence that people were aware of this, with one participant (on YouTube) explaining:

There are a lot of middle men you aren't thinking about. I think you just want to justify getting stuff instantly, rather than waiting.

Smallridge and Roberts (2013) note the inclusion of additional neutralization techniques over time to add to the theory, and the data collected in the present study highlight the potential to add another. Perhaps specific to art (in this instance music), this technique is tentatively labelled 'denial of motives', and it is closely related (but considered distinct from) the denial of injury. Put simply, participants routinely forwarded idealised notions that the commercial reality of music was secondary to the music itself.

I would be proud to see my album on #tpb You can pay to be on i-tunes, but you're only on pirate bay if people want your music.

Thoughts on music piracy: If you are a true artist you care more about your music being heard than how many copies you shift.

Effectively, this 'technique' trivialises the criminal nature of an act (in this instance digital piracy) by re-shifting the focus on a more positive aspect of it. (the 'true' motives behind being a musician.) As a result, participants romanticise musicians' drive as being a labour of love. Though this may very well be the case for many musicians, emphasising this (and especially in the absence of evidence that this is in fact the case) is a cruel strategy which aims to inflict guilt on the victim – it borders on the manipulative. Just because musicians enjoy making music does not mean that they should not be paid for making musical recordings which cost money to produce.

2. Acknowledgement of Cultural and Commercial Realities

As well as observing widespread disapproval of piracy from individuals commenting on Twitter and YouTube, not all participants forwarded skewed notions of the perceived reality of the creative industries, and not all participants rationalized their behaviours. In fact, a substantial volume of the activity on YouTube concerned self-confessed pirates exposing the rationalisation techniques of fellow pirates.

Again, as someone who does pirate, NO, it's not sharing, it's fucking stealing. Don't pretend it's not. It's just stealing from wealthy people.

Look, guys. I personally don't have too much of a problem with it... Saying that though, at least admit you are just getting free shit because you can... Nuff' said 'I'm not against the pirate bay or piracy, hell I used pirate bay today, but I see that many of you have gone as far as to try and justify the piracy by declaring there is nothing wrong with it. You people need to be honest and acknowledge that you're stealing, You may take a file for free because it's convenient and free, as we all do. But don't try and pretend it's not stealing'.

One participant, in a lengthy analogy which acknowledged that pirates are able to afford expensive hardware and internet connections etc., explains:

It's like saying, you have to get your gasoline for free, 'cause you wanna drive around in your Ferrari. I kinda feel that, if you can afford a "Ferrari", you'd be able pay for your "gasoline" as well.

Back-and-forth debate concerning piracy not being theft (where technically it isn't, but is nonetheless illegal), and that it ought not to be illegal, was marked by comments that appear intended to be taken seriously.

File Sharing shouldn't be illegal, and by simple logic it can't be. If no original files are missing then nothing is stolen, and therefore cannot be considered illegal... Sharing is not illegal, but arresting people for doing it is illegal.

Don't you realize that torrenting is just the sharing of 1s and 0s? How can you steal numbers?

Of course, these arguments are not coherent. Crucially, participants clearly recognised this and challenged them. One participant on YouTube concisely explains:

Pirating is stealing. No matter what you say, the law already says so.

3. Willingness to Disclose Illegal Behaviours Online

One of the most striking (and unforeseen) observations during this study was that users of all three online platforms discussed piracy behaviours so openly. Crucially, given many of the exchanges related to the protection of identities online, it cannot be inferred that participants were oblivious to their presence online as anonymous. Rather, it appears that the perception of being caught is so low that they simply did not worry about any negative consequences – one participant on YouTube reasoned that the chances of being caught are lower than that of being struck by lightning. The frankness evident from the sample is illustrated with the comments such as:

I love award season, there's so many good dvd screeners going about on pirate bay.

Not everyone was so laidback, however. One participant on Twitter reasons that:

People are so #Dumb - if you use #TPB don't go bragging bout it and posting links. you keep quiet about it. you don't boast bout it.

Related research from Thompson et al. (2015) find that people are also willing to engage in discussion of drug use online, a crime which is similar to piracy and that it is also widespread and normalised, with a low likelihood of being caught or punished.

4. Links to Pirated Content and News Items

Twitter was found to be commonly used to link participants to illegal copies of copyrighted content – this was unexpected. Twitter is a widely used and highly visible

service and in recent years people have even went to prison for libellous claims and cyber-bullying. Remarkably, unofficial lists of the ‘top ten’ most pirated movies each week or month are widely circulated and shared in much the same way as official box-office rankings are. Lindgren and Lundström (2011), in their analysis of Twitter activity specific to the hashtag #WikiLeaks found that a high volume of tweets were links to news items – this was also found in the present study. Reference to news sources on real life events had a tendency to focus on pirates as *victims*, as with a trending news item concerning a 9 year old Finnish girl who had her ‘Winnie the Pooh’ laptop confiscated by the police; most links encompassed a legal or technical component which often challenged digital piracy practices.

How about that? Researchers find that Megaupload shutdown hurt box office revenues [link].

Pirate Bay Censorship Backfires with New Proxies Blooming [link].

IP Address Snapshots Not Sufficient Evidence For Infringement Suit [link].

UK ISP’s ordered to block more piracy websites [link].

Twitter users are limited to a modest 140 characters when tweeting, which often leads to links being shortened; this frees up users to add their own brief commentary on the news depicted. Yet, the majority of tweets containing links were passively written, as with the excerpts above. Given the websites participants tended to link to (such as popular pro-piracy news resource ‘Torrent Freak’) appear to reflect their views, perhaps they do not feel the need to elaborate to reaffirm their point of view on particular news items, letting the title of particular links do that for them.

The links shared typically adopted a pro-piracy stance, and recent research by Chen et al (2015) highlights why such links are likely to be shared on social media – users enjoy sharing information which they find fun and interesting. This is why an anecdote about a Winnie the Pooh laptop being confiscated by police is more likely to be shared than a link outlining rigorous research into digital piracy. Crucially, to briefly consider misinformation more broadly, inaccurate messages regularly go ‘viral’ even after being debunked, whilst accurate information receives far less attention (Oyeyemi et al., 2014). It has been argued that it is *catchiness* which drives both information and misinformation, not truthfulness on social media (Ratkiewicz et al., 2010).

5. Transmission of Tips

Related to the exchange of links to websites concerning legal and technical aspects of digital piracy is the solicitation of assistance to bypass web-blocking and other technical inconveniences. This was, intuitively, marked in forums; it was also common on Twitter.

Hi, can anyone provide a list of mirrors that will help overcome the recently announced Pirate Bay block in the UK?

What's the best Apple Mac Torrent downloader?

by the way, the most secure place to download virus-free stuff is the pirate bay. A hardly secure way is following links to ads on google or MSN.

The findings support Holt and Copes' (2010) observation that sub-cultural piracy knowledge is efficiently exchanged online – this is of course predictable, given that digital pirates have long congregated in online communities. What is most striking in the present findings though, is that this knowledge was exchanged in such public spaces.

6. Similarities and Differences across Online Platforms

Support for Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization was found from Twitter, YouTube, and forum data. Additionally, a willingness to discuss digital piracy behaviours openly on all public forums was found. Doughty et al. (2014), in their analysis of Twitter commentary on reality TV shows (which invite tweeting by encouraging suggested hashtags) explain that: 'Despite the obvious public nature of the Twitter timeline, and the clear possibility that the owner of any Twitter account can be identified and, potentially, prosecuted, the online abuse of individuals and groups/communities remains an everyday occurrence' (p. 56). The present research highlights that this is also the case with digital piracy across all three platforms, where on forums some participants included profile pictures with location information and even their internet service provider.

In addition to similarities between Twitter, YouTube, and forum discourses, some differences were clear. The most striking observation was the generally more vulgar and vindictive commentary on YouTube, as compared to the other platforms of communication. Examples of denial of injury in relation to the movie industry included:

Fuck Jew run Hollywood. They produce 2 or 3 movies a year worth pirating.

The great thing about these greedy old bastards is that they will be dead someday soon.

Comments also targeted other stakeholders negatively, suggestive of a morally inferior mindset. These included:

So #HMV are going bust... Couldn't give a shit, that's what-#Torrent is for lol.

Reckon rappers these days make gay songs for chicks because they know they are thick and will actually buy there album ? #Torrent.

Suggestions for why such nastiness is so well represented on YouTube can be found in McCosker's (2014) exploration of 'trolling', where he explains that the relative lack of constraints placed on posting videos of comments are likely to encourage this. Twitter is also unregulated, but explanations for why YouTube comments are so different can be inferred from the implied makeup of the different users of these services. Anecdotally, Twitter can be best thought of as most widely used by more professional users with commercial aims (such as journalists, academics and politicians), whereas YouTube reflects a mass and therefore eclectic audience who may not share the same ideals. Observing widely different levels of discussion on different categories of videos, Thelwall et al. (2012) propose that different audiences use YouTube for different reasons, from passive

consumption to active participation. Certainly, the results from the present study suggest that YouTube users are not one uniform group of digital consumers, with debate on the video focusing on the conflicting views of copyright of different individuals; the video is political in nature, where Thelwall et al (2012) found that videos depicting ‘provocative’ content such as politics and religion encouraged the biggest trigger of sustained discussion on YouTube which is marked by the presence of negative comments. Arguably then, given discussion of digital piracy fundamentally incorporates political and moral (or indeed religious) beliefs which challenge ideas of individual rights and democratic rights, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that some individuals were particularly nasty.

Probing the malicious nature of YouTube comments further, Thelwall et al. (2012) found that the typical YouTube comment was posted by a 29 year old male. This is unsurprising, given males’ increased propensity for ‘face-saving’, and, as Doughty et al. (2014) explain, that the disinhibition effect (as motivated by the relative anonymity afforded) of online communications can encourage less socially-constraining discussion. Crucially, Doughty et al. find that both positive and negative disinhibition can be found on Twitter, where observations in the present study highlight more intellectually informed opinion and debate on Twitter when compared to YouTube; this is further suggestive of different people using these different online platforms. Thelwall et al.’s demographic makeup of YouTube users reflects the profile of a music pirate, and that of the YouTube users under observation in the present research. The underlying drive behind both trends is likely due to the interest and relative expertise in technology amongst young males who are early adopters of technology.

Another notable difference across the three platforms is that anti-piracy sentiments were not present in the forums considered: though rare, they were present on Twitter and YouTube. This is instinctive, where, as mentioned, mass audiences converge on YouTube and Twitter and for wholly different reasons. Forum participation naturally encourages likeminded individuals to come together and discuss topics of mutual interest.

Discussion

Stephen Witt argues: ‘If something was available for free, and could be freely and infinitely reproduced for free, with no degradation in quality, why would anyone pay to own it for a second time, when they already had it, for free?’ (p. 125). This is a logical question, and certainly one that many ordinary citizens will ask. But absent is a consideration of the impact that music piracy has on others. This study highlights that discussion of music piracy online does not ignore the impact on others, but rather takes it into consideration, then rejects it. The findings support Sykes and Matza’s (1957) theory of neutralizations, with denial of responsibility, denial of injury, and denial of victim found to be the most commonplace, synchronising with related research on the topic. A new technique was tentatively added: the denial of motives. Future quantitative work is necessary in order to validate this new technique across broader contexts.

Whereas common sense logic about music piracy might be thought to centre on money, and indeed much research has revealed that price is a core factor in choosing whether or not to pay for music (see Watson, et al., 2015, for a review), the findings of the present study suggest that it may be more about *value* – this is not the same. There was concern over where money goes when paying for music, with a widespread belief that musicians (and others in the creative industries) are wealthy and undeserving of being

financially rewarded for their efforts. Other research corroborates this finding (Ang et al., 2001; Brown & Knox, 2016b; Green et al., 2015).

Collectively, the techniques discussed in the present study show how pirates are able to rationalize their behaviours and continue to engage in digital piracy. And, as Ariely (2012) notes, rationalisation is a key component in increasing dishonesty. Most importantly in the present study is that pirates were not found to be one uniform group of freeloaders but that personal politics and circumstances encouraged conflicting beliefs on the same activity which otherwise unites them. As Shermer (2011) explains: ‘We form our beliefs for a variety of subjective, personal, and psychological reasons in the context of environments created by family friends, colleagues, culture, and society at large... Beliefs come first, explanations for beliefs follow’ (p. 5). In this study, it has been shown that a variety of beliefs are prevalent amongst the sample explored and that these are often contradictory. Beyond uncovering novel (if thin) data, this highlights the need for researchers to cease considering ‘pirates’ as one unified group: this important conclusion acts as a gentle reminder of how piracy operates in the *real world*.

To this end, Sinclair and Green’s (2016) recent research, drawing from interview data, finds significant overlap in how people access music. Defining a typology of four different consumer groups, Sinclair and Green categorise the sample into: Steadfast Pirates; Ex-Downloaders; Mixed Tapes; and the Old Schoolers, based on a continuum of preference for piracy. At either extreme are those principally engaged in illegal and legal music consumption, but those defined as Mixed-tapes, for instance, occasionally pirate from mainstream artists, express guilt about piracy, and feel good about buying music legally. These individuals demonstrated a complicated set of rationalisations, and believed that attending concerts counterbalanced engagement in music piracy.

From a policy point of view, by using online communication mediums to swap tips and link likeminded others to news items, pirates are able to effectively bypass any technical barriers to illegal downloading. Thus, support for Sutherland and Cressey’s (1974) theory of differential association is also found in the present study, with the theory proposing that individuals learn the techniques and motives behind crimes through interaction with others. With much piracy thought to occur online, then it stands to reason that individuals engaging in piracy will encounter likeminded others in the process, whether directly or indirectly. Clearly, the data from the current study shows how people publicly solicit suggestions on how best to source copyrighted media illegally. Though ongoing web-blocking efforts may minimise piracy for a great many people, there will of course exist others who are willing and able to find ways to work around such inconveniences.

The methodological approach should be considered a rich one which deserves to be considered in future research, particularly given pirates’ willingness to discuss their behaviours openly. Lindgren and Lundström (2011), through their exploration of online discourse on #WikiLeaks, find that even though Twitter is loosely-knit, the interactions are organised and meaning is produced. The findings from the present study support this claim.

Conclusion

Cho et al.’s (2015) research shows how increased exposure to different information on digital piracy reduced participants’ egocentric thought processes, with the study finding that participants made estimations about others’ attitudes towards piracy and behaviours

based on their own. The implications are that increased sources of information on digital piracy, from trusted sources, may alter beliefs and perceptions about piracy. Presently, the internet is awash with disinformation and misinformation, with individuals engaging in piracy readily able to source information in support of their beliefs, including on Twitter, YouTube, and forums. Given that for every piece of knowledge found on the internet there is another which is contradiction (Kelly, 2011), the public must know which sources to trust. Levitin (2014) highlights a key concern here in that search results online are becoming increasingly more personalised. In effect, people are: 'More likely to be given results that support your world view and less likely to encounter results that challenge your view' (p. 365).

The rejection that music piracy causes any harm on the music industry is pervasive. However, given that research into the economics of digital piracy is inconclusive, it is possible that participants' 'denial' of responsibility, injury, or victim are not techniques at all but rather rational assumptions. Put simply, without concrete evidence to confirm that music piracy has a negative economic impact on the music industry it is not possible to make the claim that individuals demonstrating techniques of neutralization are in fact doing so.

Limitations

The data analysed is not representative of the overwhelming volume of content online concerning piracy, with Twitter only reviewed for a 12-week period. Furthermore, it only reflects those individuals who use Twitter – no participant identification information is available. Lending to the emerging interest in, so-called *netnography* (Kozinets, 2009), and in Twitter as a research tool, new software exists which monitors hashtags, and this would have allowed for a more comprehensive data collection method. The scope for researcher bias during the coding process is also unavoidable when using the direct approach, given that researchers are more likely to find evidence which is supportive rather than non-supportive of a theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). However, the findings are in support of other research to date, and so can be feasibly considered representative. A greater limitation is that the findings are principally descriptive – the results do not shed light on where beliefs and attitudes about digital piracy come from. Furthermore, it is unclear if participants believe what they were saying to be true. Notably, Cox and Collins (2014) find that there is a stronger link between piracy and the belief that it harms the movie industry than is the case with music. Given that box office revenues for films are readily listed on Wikipedia entries, for instance, it could be said that the music industry's comparatively low level of transparency naturally leaves people with necessary gaps to fill to make sense of music piracy.

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