Kinephanos
Revue d'études des médias et de culture populaire
Journal of media studies and popular culture

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Volume 10, Number 1, January 2024

Au-delà de Netflix : penser la diversité des pratiques et plateformes de télévision en ligne

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1113454ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1113454ar

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Publisher(s)

Université de Montréal Département d'histoire de l'art et d'études cinématographiques

ISSN

1916-985X (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Arouh, M. & Miliopoulou, G.-Z. (2024). Digital Piracy as a Socio-Cultural Practice: A study of the Greek Market. *Kinephanos*, *10*(1), 175–199. https://doi.org/10.7202/1113454ar

Article abstract

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KINEPHANOS
Revue d'études des médias et de culture populaire /
Journal of media studies and popular culture
Volume 10, no. 1
Au-delà de Netflix / Beyond Netflix
Janvier 2024 175-199

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Abstract

The illegal file sharing of digital content is a widespread activity with far-reaching ramifications. In Greece, studies indicate that "digital piracy" has become an accepted form of criminal practice, disrupting relevant market developments. To explore this, we conducted an online questionnaire that documented practices of Greek audiences, regarding the piracy of movies and television series. This paper goes beyond the labelling of the practice to an analysis of its socio-cultural character. We argue that these findings point to a changing market, and the disruption piracy causes is explained as an effort by consumers to participate in a global culture that transcends national borders.

Keywords: Digital piracy; Greek Market; Consumption practices; Global culture; Movies and television series.

Introduction

Digital technology has revolutionised the communication and entertainment industries by allowing users around the world to consume and share content in new and easy ways. These technological possibilities have paved the way, however, for the emergence of digital piracy, that is, the unauthorised copying, sharing or distribution of "digital-based intellectual property" (Lalović, Reardon, Vida & Reardon, 2012, p. 59). This pirated content may vary from movies, music, and television programs, to software, books, comics, and other commodities. Research

on digital piracy focuses on a variety of issues such as the financial impact on the relevant industries, the moral character of this criminal activity, or the policies that governments around the world struggle to implement. As Ivana Katsarova explains, "the rapid development of broadband technologies enlarged both the potential supply of pirated materials and the audience for illegal copies" (2014, p. 6); and this disruption, as Laikwan Pang also argues, deserves study and explication (2004).

Our research focuses on Greece, a small market where digital piracy, especially of movies and television series, has become a widespread activity averaging an estimated 1.23 billion illegal viewings per year (NA, 2015). In a sense, digital piracy has become an accepted form of criminal practice across the social spectrum, especially affecting the creative industries. Additionally, the pervasive financial crisis of the last decade has intensified illegal practices leading to the ineffective development of Video on Demand in Greece, the DVD market collapsing up to 90 per cent by 2014, and assumed lost revenue for cinemas climbing up to €30 million (NA, 2015; Papadimitriou, 2018). The first years of the economic crisis especially led to an abrupt decrease in disposable income and consequently spending on cinema viewership. As Lydia Papadimitriou notes, this trend was partially countered in 2014-2015 with a ticket price reduction as well as other attempts to draw the audience back to movie theatres (2018). By then, however, piracy had become the most dominant form of informal distribution. Such access, we argue in this paper, drastically changed the relevant viewing habits, rituals and practices of the Greek audience.

The privately-run Greek Institute for the Protection of Audiovisual Work (EPOE) reports that in 2009 Greece ranked third globally despite limited access to broadband technology (Koutsogiannopoulos, 2014). At the time, the most popular Greek illegal downloading site for movies and television series had 850,000 members, that is, half of Greeks with broadband at the time (Koutsogiannopoulos, 2014). In 2014, Greece ranked eighth in the world, based on the total number of illegal downloads and the number of users with broadband access (Koutsogiannopoulos, 2014). The situation remains dire as in a 2017 study published by torrentfreak.com, Greece ranked sixth in the world based on average number of visits per user (Papazoglou, 2018). This is despite frequent action taken by the Greek government. Among

the reasons stated for the proliferation of this activity are the inefficient legal framework, lack of political motivation, and lack of a thorough understanding by key agents of both the magnitude of the problem and the social and economic consequences (NA, 2015). In November 2018, Greek Internet service providers were court-ordered to block the access to more than 40 pirating sites, although quickly many of these sites relocated to different IP addresses not covered by the court's order (Papazoglou, 2018). As Papadimitriou rightly observes, it is hard to quantify with any accuracy whether actions taken have indeed assisted in reducing illegal practices in Greece (2018).

Although the damage inflicted on the Greek industry and the action taken to prevent it are certainly topics worth considering, this paper focuses on consumers who, through their actions, are deemed responsible for this disruption. Our research aims to study the tendency of Greek users to download movies and television series specifically, and explain the motivation behind the disruption. In this research, movies and television series are defined as cultural goods, that is, products of the creative industries with certain distinct characteristics such as copyright (Unesco, 2004; 2009) that contribute to the construction of social meaning (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). As such, we aim to explore how habits and practices develop beyond the sphere of economic transaction and constitute an important form of social participation; a growing ritual that includes search of information in a social context prior to viewing, the act of viewing per se, and the ritual of sharing observations and information after viewing. First, we review literature relevant to the study of digital piracy, especially in relation to sharing practices as these have developed recently. Specifically, we discuss piracy as a mode of online participation that grants users access to desired content. Second, we outline the methodological framework of our study, and present a summary of results. These results are discussed and interpreted following theoretical concepts that assist in explaining the cultural character of this transaction, and the social value that is discerned underneath. Understanding the user's point of view is central to this enquiry and our research findings aim to contribute in two distinct ways: first, by showing how a small market might turn to deviant behaviour to counter lack of distribution; and second, by showing how cultural content constitutes an integral part of social interactions and everyday consumption rituals which connect an individual to their peers.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Digital Piracy

Framed as an illegal activity of the audience, piracy is one of the most challenging and escalating problems especially for the creative industries (Tan, 2002; Levin, Dato-On & Manolis, 2007; Cammaerts, Mansell & Meng, 2013; Hill, 2018). Arli, Tjiptono and Porto note that, "57 per cent of computer users admit to commit software piracy resulting in US$64.4 billion of lost revenue", while the "sales of pirated music CDs outnumbered original CDs in 2004" (2015, p. 349). Lalović *et alii* argue that "[t]he prevalence of internet piracy is central to question the survival of the music industry itself, which is faced with income stagnation" (2012, p. 59). The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) claims, "that online piracy is devastating the movie industry", citing major losses due to piracy (Cammaerts *et alii*, 2013, p. 8). It is estimated that "400,000 to 600,000 copies of films are traded on a daily basis and that the sharing, downloading, and piracy of films have cost the industry over $18.2 billion worldwide" (Phau, Teah & Lwin, 2013, p. 313). However, claims about the effects on the creative industries are often contested, as it seems that the correlation between piracy and loss of profit has not been well established (see for example, Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz & Feldhaus, 2007; Cammaerts *et alii*, 2013; Ionescu 2012; McKenzie & Walls 2016, Waldfogel, 2017).

Despite such contentions, the European Union has been increasingly concerned with the matter. In a 2014 briefing on Europe's film industry, it is stated that "piracy poses a double challenge, both in terms of direct economic loss as well as in a more intangible way, since it threatens the very premise of copyright, with an increasing number of consumers expecting to find content free in a 'sharing economy'" (Katsarova 2014, p. 7). It seems that "the convenience and anonymity of file sharing have turned it into a 'guilt-free' escapade, making it hard for law enforcers to detect"; a phenomenon prevalent around the world (Phau *et alii*, 2013, p. 314). As Michael Strangelove argues, "[n]othing epitomises the Internet consumer's ambivalent relationship to the law more than digital piracy" (2005, p. 56). For some researchers the situation has been aggravated by the efforts of policy and lawmakers to abolish this activity, through fining, suspension of operations, and aggressive labelling (Garcia-Bardidia, Nau &

Rémy, 2011). As Ramon Lobato suggests, piracy in such a context "is imagined as a parasitic act of social and economic deviance" (2008, p. 20).

1.2 Sharing Practices

In several ways illegal sharing of cultural and entertainment goods belongs to the broader context of a contemporary sharing economy, as this has been facilitated by technological innovation. This alternative mode of consumer action is aided by platforms that transcend borders, and allow for alternative ways of sharing. When it comes to digital piracy, peer-to-peer (P2P) technology for over a decade has been established as the easiest and most popular means of sharing pirated content (McKenzie & Walls, 2016; Ulsperger, Hodges & Paul, 2010). Although pirating methods vary, P2P, especially torrent technology, has dominated (Poort, Leenheer, van der Ham & Dumitru, 2014). This ground-breaking technology has challenged preconceived notions of content distribution, and has irrevocably altered the consumption and sharing of such goods towards a new type of economy (McKenzie & Walls, 2016). For Lobato it can even be read as a mode of free enterprise that without the hindrance of restrictive legislation becomes a "commercial activity catering directly to market needs" (2008, p. 22). As he insists, "piracy is a *distributive technology*—it enables ideas, knowledge, and cultural production to circulate in and through society—and should be recognized as such" (2008, p. 31).

When it comes to such sharing innovations, researchers note their ambivalent nature, as these are first met with enthusiasm by the general public (Botsman & Rogers, 2010) but are then frequently criticised as they disrupt social institutions and specific industries. The actual or potential disruptive effect of such efforts is gradually documented in the reactions of both the state and the relevant industries, with several industries claiming loss of profit (Zervas, Prosserpio & Byers, 2017). For example, French, German and Israeli governments now claim taxes from the use of Airbnb after initial hesitation (Boffey, 2017; Rosenthal, 2017); whereas the Greek state aims at strictly regulating such enterprises, as for example Beat, the taxi hailing online platform, on the grounds that the app limits the revenue of traditional taxi operations

(Koutantou, 2017). Digital piracy, with its disruptive character and alleged financial impact, certainly seems to fit in this discourse.

It should be noted, however, that most research on the sharing economy does not include a discussion on digital piracy, as this seems to fall outside the scope of legitimate enterprising. For Russell Belk, however, illegal downloading is indeed part of such collaborative consumption practices (2014). Although he acknowledges the financial factors at play, he focuses on the gratification users find in sharing. Those who download movies and series know that they do not contribute to the sustainability of the industry and that they pursue an illegal practice. Users download and share content, knowing it is illegal, not only to enjoy a cultural artefact but also to acquire a social token. Since for Belk you are what you can access, users aim for content that will benefit and inform their online and offline interactions. This is an observation that is further verified in our research, and seems to address at least partially the nature of digital piracy. As such, the sharing character of this activity needs to be considered and determined.

1.3 Piracy, Access, and Participation

It is our understanding that users who illegally access such cultural goods partly wish to access global communities on equal grounds with other users, as they go through considerable efforts in order to discover and acquire information from peers, and subsequently download the material. In other words, their incentive is social as much as it is financial. In Sweden, for example, after laws limited illegal downloading and streaming, and after services like Netflix became available, a decrease in illegal downloading was observed. As Daniel Westman states:

> People are willing to pay if they can get what they want when they want it… But we need to have both the carrot and the stick. The content needs to be available, easy to access, fast, and reasonably priced. But there will also always be people willing to break the law, no matter how the problem is attacked (quoted in Gee, 2013).

A point further reinforced by Joel Waldfogel's observation that "consumers are generally less enthusiastic about older products than new ones-a phenomenon akin to depreciation" (2017, p. 205).

This line of thinking is also evident in recent research which shows that digital piracy has again increased after years of steady decline because it is becoming significantly expensive for the consumer to subscribe to all streaming platforms (Netflix, HBO, Hulu, Amazon Prime) that deliver "must-see" content (Bode, 2018). As it is estimated that by 2022 most, if not all, major broadcasters will each have their own streaming services, the cost of subscription alone will push consumers back to pirating methods (Bode, 2018). Specifically, it is argued, as providers are increasingly interested in exclusive content that is not available to competing platforms users will be faced with the choice of either increasing their budget spending on platform subscription, or pirate the content they desire (Bode, 2018).

Following this, perhaps the best way to conceptualise digital piracy of movies and television series is as a form of participatory action. As the identity of a cultural fan, in the broadest of senses, becomes mainstream and fandom practices common, many users seek to connect with viewers from around the world. Heavily relying on open social platforms of a participatory nature, like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit or Tumblr, they seek ways of interrelating and furthering their consumption (Hennig-Thurau, Wiertz & Feldhaus, 2015; Groene & Hettinger, 2016; Chadborn, Edwards & Reysen, 2016). As Henry Jenkins notes: "[f]or the fan, watching the series is the beginning, not the end, of the process of media consumption" (1992, p. 284). However, Elana Shefrin has observed that, "participatory fandom is the enemy of media companies. The battle-lines are drawn over the issues of copyright and intellectual property law" (2004, p. 273). Furthermore, she suggests that within the context of online practices,

> corporate products are easily treated as abstract digital bits of information, or more concretely, as raw material for fans' creative re-interpretation…At certain times, the media producers will court online fans as consumer affiliates; at other times, they will attack them as illegal pirates (2004, p. 274).

Nevertheless, for users to participate within this global consumption and appreciation of these goods, there needs to be a standard of distribution that will allow entry to those seeking it. For Annette Hill as well, piracy and fan participation should be discussed in terms of access and "the underlying power dynamics within popular culture" that are often a result of geography and distribution (2018, p. 100).

The above seems to suggest that the main cause for this market disruption is one of access and ineffective modes of distribution. Traditionally Hollywood studios distributed much of their content through platforming, where the film opens in a few big cities and gradually opens wider—for example the film *Selma* premiered in 2015 in January in the USA, February in Greece, March in Denmark, and June in Japan (Selma Release Info). In television, the show might first open in the US and then gradually and much later on, or even never, in other countries. By the time the commodity becomes available there will most certainly be a pirated copy in circulation (Bordwell, Thomson & Smith, 2016). Especially if the film has garnered attention or critical acclaim, the audience will be certainly tempted to pirate a copy. For example, after receiving an Emmy award, the show *Breaking Bad* "went from being the sixth most pirated show, to the second most-pirated show overnight" (Pomerantz, 2014). Similarly, the television series *Game of Thrones* is often cited as the most pirated show in the world (Lotz, 2017). Amanda Lotz suggests that the suspenseful storytelling of the show "inspired instant dissection and analysis on social media feeds" (2017). This encouraged fans in TV markets outside of the U.S. to seek out unauthorised video sources: "[i]t was the only way they could avoid spoilers" (2017). This led HBO to announce an unprecedented 94-country simulcast in order to bypass traditional delays and limit piracy. However, their efforts were not successful as the premiere of their eighth and final season was pirated 54 million times in the first twenty-four hours after its initial release (Clark, 2019). Apart from this being a missed commercial opportunity it is becoming increasingly clear that for users without access, piracy remains the preferred action. For instance, in China, that had the second biggest piracy numbers of the episode after India, the episode was not aired in full, as censors removed approximately six minutes (Clark, 2019).

The second reason has to do with online distribution. In the last decade, subscription-based platforms have been distributing content globally through streaming, with a positive effect in reducing piracy (Nicholas, 2015). However, either some platforms are not available in Greece at the time of writing (such as Hulu, Disney +, and The Criterion Channel), or they were made available very recently—iTunes Movies became available in 2011, Netflix in 2016 and Amazon Prime Video in 2017. Still, their content is not fully available to Greek users, because of the different licensing deals. Many recent titles, both films and television shows, are excluded from Greek streaming. For instance, at the time of writing this paper the popular CW title *Arrow* had broadcast its seventh season in 2018-19 in the US, whereas both Netflix and Amazon Prime in Greece only had up to season five. Even Netflix original content, such as *Orange is the New Black*, is not fully made available: in summer 2019 Netflix was allowing Greek users to stream up to season five while their seventh season was available in the US. These delays result in cross-border viewing, an illegal form of streaming where users through VPN technology alter their IP addresses to watch otherwise unavailable content (Roberts, 2015). As Papadimitriou argues, "despite a number of measures taken in specific territories to restrict and persecute unregulated streaming or downloading, national or state boundaries are permeable" (2018, p. 489). A situation aligned to what Taryn Hamilton also observes, namely that "research confirms something many internet pundits have long instinctively believed to be true: piracy isn't driven by law-breakers, it's driven by people who can't easily or affordably get the content they want" (quoted in Bode, 2019).

2. Method

To further explore the underlying causes, as well as consumption patterns, we designed, using the paid version of surveymonkey.com, a questionnaire which was distributed between October-December 2016 via emails and posts on Facebook and Twitter. It included 29 questions in the Greek language. All questions were multiple-choice and in some, more than one answer was allowed, while in others there was an 'other, please specify' open text area. Words like 'piracy' or 'illegal' were deliberately avoided and used only in specific questions toward the end, to test awareness. Thus, the authors maintained a neutral approach regarding

ethical and legal matters, avoiding any indication that user habits were characterized in a positive or negative manner.

Since the approach was exploratory, respondents were asked to describe and discuss their habits and practices. The questionnaire started with a filter question to solicit answers only by those who watch movies and series online. Then, it proceeded by exploring their everyday habits: whether they stream or download, and which platforms they use; how they choose what to watch; if they have different viewing habits when choosing movies and when choosing series, thus shaping their preferences; which information media they rely on to stay up to date; whether their choices are affected by genre, as well as availability, trailers and peer networks; and whether watching per se is a solitary or social activity. Especially for series, questions around binge watching aimed to examine viewing habits and immersion. Delays in national broadcasting were also addressed as factors relevant to downloading and streaming. Toward the end, users were given a list of platforms, to tick which among these were not legal. Five demographic questions were included at the end of the questionnaire. We followed the TSE framework (Moy & Murphy, 2016) to avoid structural gaps, and we collected pilot responses to test for accuracy, comprehensiveness, and cohesion before distributing.

After the filter question, 362 respondents completed the questionnaire. Results were analysed using spreadsheet software and were cross-referenced to check for patterns between clusters of users. Our sample is random, neither weighed nor representative, but still limited enough to allow for broad generalization. It comprises 41.22% men and 58.78% women who are overrepresented in comparison to the general population (50.780% in 2017, NA 2018). Age wise, 33.45% of the respondents belonged to the 25-34 segment; 25.34% to the 35-44 segment; 24.32% to the 18-24 segment. The rest of respondents were above 45 years of age. The age span probably is an indicator of the number of people who are more active when it comes to downloading and streaming movies and series. Among the respondents, 52.36% are College graduates and another 27.36% have a post-graduate degree. All have completed secondary education. Slightly over 40% of the respondents work as employees, 21.96% work freelance and over 24% are College students. Over 50% of the sample have an annual income of less than €10,000 a year.

In reviewing the results and noting patterns of answers, we endeavour to offer an interpretation that utilizes social and cultural literature to explain consumer habits. We cannot determine, however, whether the respondents might have been affected by the research context. Although the focus is not on the legal status of such activities, it is possible that the sample may have answered questions in a self-conscious, or even inhibited, manner. Piracy, due to its illegal character, is a difficult topic for research and documentation (Peitz & Waldfogel, 2012). Since in public discourse it is largely framed as a parasitic activity and often equated with theft, it is possible that all surveys of this kind will be colored by a framing that links their actions to deviance. Despite this limitation, however, such study needs to be pursued. As Hill explains, "the absence of audience research on illegal viewing, listening and reading points to a significant lack of understanding of what people actually do beyond the point of illegal access… The person behind the piracy label is an absent presence" (2018, p. 94).

3. Findings

3.1 General observations

An impressive 83.45 per cent of the respondents download or stream interchangeably. They constitute the sample upon which we draw percentages and compare data. Among these users, 91.06 per cent do not pay to download; 72.79 per cent have no subscription to a legal platform; 91.42 per cent visit sites where they can watch movies and series without any further obligations; however, 27.22 per cent of these users also have a subscription to a legal platform. This is an important implication, as it highlights the desire to access pirated products, even if there is willingness to pay for relevant services, as seen in previous research (Hill, 2018, p. 96, citing Mann 2016). Thus, access to pirated content becomes a ubiquitous, unquestioned part of daily life (Hill, 2018).

Among the respondents, 27.30 per cent watch movies on a daily basis and 44.51 per cent once a week or every two weeks, and 66.97 per cent also watch series on a daily, weekly or bi-monthly basis. Users choose based on genre (82.95 per cent) combined with less influential factors such as the cast (36.72 per cent) and/or the director / showrunner (24.92 per cent). It

appears that once somebody engages in watching online, the habit takes hold quickly and finds its place in everyday routines and rituals, as it is assumed to be easier and more effortless compared, for example, to going to the movie theatre or to a DVD store.

When asked about DVD rentals, users (69.76 per cent) state that they prefer watching the content online both because they can do it anytime and easily, and because they generally prefer online environments. Only 4.49 per cent clearly prefer DVDs while 4.70 per cent complain it takes too long for the DVD copies to become available. These seem to confirm that DVDs have lost the place they once held in the market (Papadimitriou, 2018). However, only 3.80 per cent rejects DVDs because they cost too much.

Only 16.07 percent of the respondents need Greek subtitles, while 29.84 per cent are comfortable with English ones or without any subtitles at all, provided they speak the language of the movie (19.67 per cent). Furthermore, 24.59 per cent download subtitles only if they do not speak the language. These percentages do not reflect the entire Greek population but do indicate that the majority of viewers who speak English no longer find subtitles necessary. The observations noted here seem to contradict claims made by EPOE that illegal sites that are based in Greece and offer Greek subtitles are more attractive to a Greek audience (Papadimitriou, 2018).

There appears to be no correlation between income and illegal viewing, a finding consistent with the literature review that suggests this is not a necessity but a choice of preference and convenience. Age is not a determining factor either, although this is somewhat contra to Papadimitriou's speculation that younger demographics are more prone to illegal downloading (2018, p. 499).

Last but not least, not one of the 341 respondents agreed with the proposition: 'I am not sure whether I do something illegal'. As it is addressed below, this is a significant finding indicating that legal restrictions do not deter the social need for inclusion. Being 'part of the conversation' becomes a significant insight explaining why users take risks in order to enjoy a very significant benefit: the benefit of belonging. This is why research findings in other countries show that

those who watch movies and series illegally do not actually feel as if they are doing something wrong or that this is delinquent behaviour. On the contrary, they feel that such restrictions are immoral and that they should be granted access to cultural content (Roudaut, 2014). This finding also suggests that awareness campaigns no longer have a preventive outcome.

3.2 At home or at the movies?

More than 50 per cent of the viewers watch movies at home. The idea of 'going to the movies' loses ground not just because of the financial crisis but also because instant gratification at home replaces the desire to spend a night out. It seems that if these users could not download, they would simply spend their time differently. Watching movies online indeed does not appear to substitute a visit to the movie theatre; it simply constitutes a leisure activity that users perceive of, or even desire, as free. Besides, 31.13 per cent declare that they do go out and pay to watch a movie when they believe 'it is worth' it (although what this 'worth' exactly is still needs to be determined). Among respondents, only 1.31 per cent usually watches with friends; they mostly watch alone (29.84 per cent) or with their companion (37.05 per cent). This becomes a solitary activity, or post-work escapism, just as broadcast television used to be in the past.

3.3 Seeking information

Respondents seek information using a number of sources: friends and word of mouth (81.31 per cent), trailers and online ads (54.10 per cent), websites and blogs (40.98 per cent), as well as social media (54.71 per cent). Users mainly rely on word of mouth but also double-check, consulting, for example, a social media page or user-generated reviews, before making their final choice. Importantly, they do so quite frequently: 30.82 per cent on a daily basis, 31.80 per cent on a weekly basis, 12.13 per cent on a monthly basis, and slightly over 25 per cent every three months or even less frequently. Therefore, more than 60 per cent of the respondents invest time and effort on a weekly basis to keep up.

An overwhelming 72.46 per cent visits *IMDB*, the online database with user-generated rankings, while only 27.21 per cent visit the *Athinorama* website, arguably the leader in

presenting and reviewing movies in the Greek market. The role of the expert is clearly undermined in favour of peer commentary and rankings.

3.4 Consumption rituals

These research results indicate two different consumption rituals: one reserved for movies and one for series. Even the same person will appear to behave differently when it comes to choosing and watching movies versus series. In particular, when it comes to movies, users first decide they want to watch a movie and then go online to choose which one (66.18 per cent). This means that their decision is based on a general rather than a specific desire for a particular release. Only 5 per cent of the respondents systematically seek movies immediately after their release, and 26.47 per cent immediately after they hear a good copy is available. Users decide which movie to watch by visiting online sources, then watch the trailer (69.1 per cent), and finally seek a copy. Three characteristics become evident in movie watching: first, 74.10 per cent claim they will illegally watch a movie online if they perceive a considerable delay of its release in Greece. Second, those seeking a movie to watch primarily rely on word of mouth. Third, 69.52 per cent of the more frequent movie watchers are also more frequently informed on the topic.

When it comes to series, respondents are first informed either by somebody they know (63.39 per cent) or because they actively follow online sources (58.04 per cent) with 74.40 per cent seeking information from *IMDB*. The more frequent series watchers are also more frequently informed: 65.30 per cent of those who watch series, more frequently than once every two months, claim that they look for relevant sources of information on a daily or weekly basis. If they decide to watch the series, 31.55 per cent of them download all available seasons and episodes. Only 16.07 per cent seek series after having watched an episode on TV. This finding points to the difference in the ritual as well as to the decline of traditional television viewing (De Kosnik, 2013).

Findings indicate that although movie watching follows a random pattern based on mood and availability, series watching requires commitment: a more focused search; relying on

information by trusted peers; and consumption of all the episodes before sharing an opinion. The investment in time and effort seems more systematic as the watching of series does not begin with an impulse, like in the case of movies. Still, these two rituals co-exist. It is not that the sample is divided between series and movie watchers. Actually 68.00 per cent of the more frequent movie watchers are also frequent series watchers. It is not the person that changes; it is the consumption ritual that differs.

4. Discussion

Inclusion in a global and local group of peers is an important factor shaping consumption. Even if such consumption takes place indoors, it is not a solitary activity. On the contrary, movies and series come to define the social and cultural context of everyday conversations. Reviews, catchphrases, popular characters, and plot-twists are discussed on a daily basis. As respondents in this research clearly indicate, talking about movies and series and visiting user-generated content constitutes part of their consumption experience. Sharing views and information as cultural tokens shapes their ritual before and after viewing the content. This ritual fosters a sense of perceived belonging in peer groups with shared interests, hence a sense of social inclusion. They are even likely to watch something which is not to their taste, only to be able to shape and share an opinion; for such content they are even less likely to pay.

Previous research in Greece demonstrates the same underlying motives: although users tend to acknowledge the financial impact their actions have on the industry overall, they believe that this activity is socially beneficial and serves the common good (Mylonas, 2012). To explain this somewhat paradoxical contention, consumer needs and expectations should be placed within a broader social and cultural context, and the social utility of goods must be highlighted. For instance, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood describe consumption as a set of rituals that fulfil social rather than individual needs (1996). Going beyond the idea that owning goods is a materialistic or even psychological need it is argued that consumer choices occur in a social context where goods are not understood only as belongings but rather as signifiers of belonging to a group of peers. In this sense, goods constitute building blocks in the formation of social identity and their value manifests in different forms of social sharing. As the authors suggest,

goods become a system that signals information (1996); information that remains open to change and interpretation since cultural meaning is constantly re-negotiated within different contexts (see also Dunn, 2008).

Additionally, such actions can be interpreted through Jean Baudrillard's work where consumption is explained as a series of social practices that define the individual and shape social identities (1968; 1970; 1972). Consumption here is understood as an active way of building relations; a systematic activity on which our culture is founded, as a dialogue rather than an isolated individualistic practice (1968). It is exactly this notion that seems to illuminate our research findings: movies and series constitute cultural tokens to be exchanged in a social context. Information and discourse about these tokens are available online for free, thus increasing the desire for access to the artefact and enabling the individual to join-in the dialogue. For Douglas and Isherwood, the price for those who cannot afford to participate in such rituals would eventually be social exclusion—and this seems to make sense of users seeking content that is not otherwise available to them.

Even when an economic transaction does not occur, the social ritual is still there; and in a sharing economy the token is not money but time and access to sources of information, hubs or online communities of interest; as well as the gratification derived from sharing *per se* (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkonen, 2016). The respondents in this research clearly indicate that "talking" about movies and series and visiting user-generated content on popular websites constitutes part of their consumption experience. Sharing views and information as cultural tokens shapes their ritual before and after viewing the content. As Lehdonvirta also argues, these consumption practices act as symbolic identifiers often re-negotiated as digital technologies spread, turning from luxuries to necessities (2012).

Even in studies conducted by social anthropologists it is observed that ritualistic consumption enhances the consumer experience (Vohs, Wang, Gino & Norton, 2013; Otnes & Rowley, 2004; Rook, 1985) and strengthens social connectedness (McKechnie & Tynan 2006; Rook, 1984). Findings indicate that rituals are developed not only during the moment of consumption but also in the pre- and post-consumption stage, usually in the form of conversations (Brown

& Laurier, 2014). As noted earlier, our findings reveal both dimensions and show the persistently reiterating processes and practices in the consumption of pirated products.

Pirated products are experiential products—defined as those products, which consumers choose, buy, and use solely to experience and enjoy—and require expenditure of time rather than money (Cooper-Martin, 1991). This appears to apply to the respondents in our research: they invest time to access pirated products that they perceive as worthy and are possibly not available to them otherwise. Or, products that they perceive as less worthy to pay for, but still create word-of-mouth and are worth of their time to become knowledgeable. This notion supports findings that demonstrate that one-for-one sales displacement from illegal downloads is not necessarily an accurate measurement for lost revenues in the industry (McKenzie & Walls, 2016). In fact, in a study of Netflix's promotional strategies, Chuck Tryon explains that: 'the company reinforces what Pierre Bourdieu has called the discourses of distinction. In particular, the streaming service highlights… the promises of plenitude, participation, prestige, and personalization' (2015). Our findings also support the idea that penalizing pirated access by solely framing the individual, is a myopic approach that ignores the broader socio-cultural motivators behind such actions, therefore making it impossible to provide legal, viable alternatives for both users and distributors.

Conclusion

By exploring user perspective, rituals, habits and aspirations, this study approached consumption of pirated movies and series as a socio-cultural need rather than a delinquent practice. We aimed to show that as inhabitants of both a small country and a global village, Greek viewers desire to be included in the discussion of premium and popular content which may not be available to them either due to limitations relating to market distribution or to budget constraints. This desire prevails and surpasses any concerns of disobedience. Future research on the subject could combine similar patterns observed in different markets, especially of comparable sizes, and determine the differences in consumption rituals regarding movies and series, as well as the social shift in private viewing and public (online) discussions.

It is certainly worth considering that within this current digital landscape, users are asked to share: their news, photos, knowledge, memories, art, information, and posts they agree or disagree with. Most digital platforms today acknowledge and facilitate sharing practices with easy, intuitive applications that frequently defy traditionally conceived regions and borders. It is unsurprising, then, that users find it counter-intuitive not to share entertainment content that dominates much of the leisure time today in the western world. Additionally, piracy sites come with their own in-built, and frequently much easier to use, services for sharing (De Kosnik, 2013). These are services that are fast and thorough, competing, albeit unevenly, with their legal, region-based counterparts. Although this kind of thinking does not legitimise the violation of copyright laws, it certainly explains aspects of this complex social and cultural phenomenon. For Greek users, it seems, access to such content is seen as an entitlement that grants them access to a global stratum of information and cultural participation. In a recent interview, the legendary filmmaker Werner Herzog discussed piracy by reference to access. In discussing what users can do when they do not have legal access to his work he admitted that, "piracy has been the most successful form of distribution worldwide…If you don't get [films] through Netflix or state-sponsored television in your country, then you go and access it as a pirate… I don't like it because I would like to earn some money with my films. But if someone like you steals my films through the internet or whatever, fine, you have my blessing" (quoted in Blaney, 2019). In accepting that, at least in part, piracy is the desire to access content, how consumption and ritual operate become central points of analysis. Even though the Greek market is small in size, it can be seen as representative of consumer desire to participate in a global cultural market.

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Résumé : Le partage illégal de fichiers sur Internet est une activité largement répandue aux ramifications profondes. En Grèce, des études indiquent que le « piratage en ligne » est devenu une forme acceptée de pratique criminelle, perturbant les développements pertinents du marché. Pour explorer cela, nous avons mené un questionnaire en ligne qui a documenté les pratiques du public grec concernant le piratage de films et de séries télévisées. Cet article va au-delà de l'étiquetage de la pratique afin de prioriser une analyse de son caractère socioculturel. Nous soutenons que ces résultats indiquent un marché en mutation et que les perturbations provoquées par le piratage sont expliquées comme relevant d'un effort des consommateurs pour participer à une culture globale qui transcende les frontières nationales.

Keywords: Piratage en ligne; Marché grec; Pratiques de consommation; Culture globale; Films et séries télévisées.