

**Streaming Services Vs. Digital Piracy:  
The Process of Entertainment Media Consumption**

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## ABSTRACT

With the rise of streaming services like Netflix and Disney+, new and convenient ways of consuming entertainment media content have appeared. However, despite these advancements, piracy has not only persisted but has evolved with new methods such as illegal streaming and subscription fraud. This indicates that the current anti-piracy measures in place are not successful, revealing a lack of understanding of consumer needs and expectations. Therefore, the goal of this study is to understand, through the implementation of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the decision-making process individuals go through when they choose to pirate content instead of using streaming platforms. For this, a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews was used to explore four themes: content availability, moral justifications, technical skills, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) or social exclusion. The findings revealed that despite the convenience of streaming services, participants still access content illegally due to fragmented content across platforms, high subscription costs, and minimal moral conflict about piracy. Participants often rationalised their behaviour by highlighting the substantial profits of the movie industry. Additionally, the rise of new technology and user-friendly piracy methods means that technical skills are no longer a significant barrier to engaging in piracy. While FOMO or social exclusion, occasionally influences the decision to pirate, it mainly does so when older, popular content is unavailable on streaming platforms. These findings indicate that technological advancements and changes in the way people consume entertainment media do not necessarily discourage piracy. This highlights the need for policymakers and streaming service providers to develop more effective strategies that meet user needs, such as unifying subscription services and making them more affordable.

## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed the way entertainment media content is consumed. Despite these advancements, digital piracy remains an issue in the movie and television industry (Riekkinen, 2018). As mentioned by Frick et al. (2023), the dynamic of piracy has evolved alongside new technology. Initially, piracy involved the illegal copying of physical media like CDs and DVDs, which then transformed into peer-to-peer sharing. This method allowed users to stay anonymous when downloading and sharing files directly from each other's computers, making it harder for their activities to be tracked. Furthermore, torrenting became another method of piracy, where users could download pieces of files from multiple sources simultaneously (Fisk, 2009; Moore & Dretsch, 2009).

However, the appearance and rising popularity of subscription-based streaming media, defined by Sardanelli et al. (2019) as “an alternative business model in which consumers pay a small fee for the right to temporarily access a set of movies without possessing physical files on their devices” (p. 550), such as Netflix, Prime Video, and Disney+, presented even more challenges. Regardless of the success and convenience of accessing content through streaming platforms, piracy activities for movies and series continued to rise (Riekkinen, 2018; Sardanelli et al., 2019). Over 80% of digital piracy now occurs through streaming, with new methods like illegal streaming and subscription fraud being used to avoid subscription fees (Frick et al., 2023; Baudach Fernández, 2023).

Previous studies have primarily focused on older methods of pirating, such as peer-to-peer sharing and torrenting, highlighting the advantages of these methods for individuals, such as ease of access and anonymity (Arli & Tjiptono, 2016; Cox & Collins, 2014; Riekkinen, 2018). However, given the many changes in recent years with new technologies and the rise of subscription services, there is a limited understanding of the current methods of piracy in

entertainment media content. Consequently, exploring current methods is particularly important, as traditional methods of battling piracy, such as strict copyright enforcement and strong punishments for piracy, have proven to be insufficient. This is because the offered subscription services are not optimally designed to meet customers' needs and preferences (Burmester et al., 2016).

As piracy behaviour has been present for some decades now, a lot of research has been done where various theoretical frameworks have been applied, such as ethics theory (Yoon, 2010) and social learning theory (Hinduja & Ingram, 2009). However, the most popular framework applied is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which allows a deeper understanding of objective measures and motivations behind individuals' piracy behaviours. (Koay et al., 2022). Previous studies have identified key motivations for digital piracy, such as content availability, technical skills, ethical considerations, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and costs (Cox & Collins, 2014; Sardanelli et al., 2019; Malin & Fowers, 2009; Arli & Tjiptono, 2016). For instance, Cox & Collins (2014) found that the decision to engage in piracy is often driven by convenience and accessibility rather than ethical considerations. Similarly, Arli and Tjiptono (2016) observed that many young adults in Indonesia engage in digital piracy due to ease of access and lower costs compared to legal alternatives. While these motivations have been extensively explored in past studies, it is important to re-examine them due to the evolving nature of digital piracy and the rise of subscription services. Furthermore, there is a lack of knowledge about how these motivations influence an individual's decision-making process to engage in piracy behaviour in the context of modern piracy methods.

Hence, this study aims to explore how the motivations identified in previous studies—content availability, technical skills, ethical considerations, and FOMO—influence the decision-making process. This will help explore why piracy persists in the digital age, even with the availability of legal streaming options. Furthermore, to tackle digital piracy, it is important to

understand the current ways individuals pirate. This will create awareness among streaming services on how to better understand the needs and expectations of the audience in the digital age. The main research question of this paper is:

*“What is the process through which an individual decides to engage in media piracy behaviour over legal methods\* of content consumption?”*

This research has four main objectives. The first objective is to explore the current methods of piracy in the context of new technologies and subscription services. The second objective is to understand the process through which an individual decides to engage in media piracy behaviour. Thirdly, the exploration of possible motivations an individual has when engaging in piracy behaviour shows great importance for a deeper understanding of the decision-making process. Lastly, the study intends to create awareness among streaming services on how to better understand the needs and expectations of their audience in the digital age by applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the foundation for the conceptual framework.

Therefore, the paper will begin by examining the main concepts of digital piracy and streaming services. To investigate these aspects, this study applied a qualitative research method, using semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth understanding and insights from participants. Next, the methodology will be presented, continuing with the results and finishing up with a conclusion.

\*By legal methods of content consumption, it is referred to any method that is not seen as pirating behaviours, even though not all piracy behaviours are strictly speaking illegal.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the next section, the main concepts relating to digital piracy and streaming services, such as what digital piracy is, will be presented. Following, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) will be explored as a foundational framework for understanding these behaviours. Finally, the section will examine the four most relevant motivations individuals might have when engaging in such behaviour: the availability of content on streaming services, moral justifications, FOMO, or social exclusion, and technical skills.

### Digital piracy

Digital piracy has been researched for many decades; hence, many definitions of the phenomenon already exist. However, despite the development of media and technologies throughout the years, *piracy* has been used to continuously describe the unauthorized copying and distribution of someone's work. More specifically, *digital piracy* refers to the piracy of digital media content (Fisk, 2009). Cronan & Al-Rafee (2007) defined digital piracy as "illegal copying or downloading of copyrighted software and media files" (p. 528). Additionally, Arli and Tjiptono (2016) consider piracy when we share, buy, use, or upload copyrighted software, audio products, and video. Although when a user watches a movie on Netflix, they are using copyrighted software, audio, and video, which is entirely legal and authorized. Consequently, with the use of the original definition by Arli and Tjiptono (2016), all media consumption, even legal ones, could mistakenly be classified as piracy. Hence, for the purposes of this study, digital piracy is defined as the intentional unauthorized use, sharing, or distribution of copyrighted material without permission or licensing from the copyright holder. This definition helps to separate intentional and unintentional piracy, providing a more accurate framework for analyzing digital piracy in the current age of streaming services.

## Theory of planned behaviour

The Theory of planned behavior (TPB) is used to understand how people make decisions to use a certain technology or not. Building upon the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which emphasizes the role of attitude and subjective norm in acting on a specific behaviour, TPB introduces an additional factor: perceived behavioural control (Koay et al., 2022). Unlike TRA, which assumes an individual has full control over their behaviour, TPB recognizes that individuals may face obstacles beyond their control that influence their ability to enact a behaviour. Therefore, TPB incorporates another factor, considering the consequences of our actions, called perceived behavioural control (Yoon, 2010; Beck & Ajzen, 1991; Liao et al., 2009). Furthermore, TPB posits that behaviour is directly influenced by *intention* and *perceived behavioural control*. Behavioural intention is therefore formed by one's *attitude*, *subjective norm*, and *perceived behavioural control*, which is determined by three types of considerations: behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs (Liao et al., 2009).

When we talk about behaviour beliefs, it is about beliefs regarding the anticipated results of engaging in a particular behaviour and the assessments or judgments made about these potential outcomes. These beliefs typically lead to either a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward a specific behaviour. Normative beliefs, on the other hand, connect with what others expect or consider appropriate in terms of behaviour, as well as an individual's motivation to conform to these expectations. These beliefs contribute to perceived social pressure or subjective norms. Lastly, control beliefs are beliefs concerning the existence of factors that could either aid or hinder the execution of the behaviour, as well as the perceived influence or effectiveness of these factors, which in turn influence perceived behavioural control (Kagee & Freeman, 2008; Liao et al., 2009). As mentioned by Beck & Ajzen (1991), a stronger intention to perform a

behaviour is expected when an individual holds a more favourable attitude and subjective norm toward the behaviour, along with greater perceived behavioural control.

This model has been adopted in many studies, including those related to digital piracy and in other ethically questionable contexts such as music piracy and software piracy (e.g., D'Astous et al., 2005; Liao et al., 2009; Yoon, 2010). For instance, D'Astous et al. (2005) applied TPB to explore the factors influencing music piracy, finding that attitudes influenced by perceived benefits and moral considerations significantly shape piracy intentions. Similarly, Liao et al. (2009) expanded the TPB model by including perceived risk, which showed that it plays an important role in determining individuals' intentions to use pirated software. Furthermore, Yoon (2010) applied TPB to study the behaviours of digital piracy, highlighting that moral judgments influence individuals' piracy intentions.

To conclude, it is clear that TPB is a very flexible model for studying various types of piracy behaviours. Its framework, which includes attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, provides deep insights into why people decide to engage in piracy. Hence, given the focus of this study, applying TPB to modern digital piracy in the context of entertainment media content will provide valuable insights into individuals' intentions to engage in piracy behaviour for entertainment media content.

### **Attitude toward piracy behaviour: Impact of content availability and moral justification**

According to TPB, attitudes towards a behaviour reflect individuals' beliefs about the advantages and disadvantages of engaging in that behaviour. Applying this concept to piracy behaviour reflects the individual's beliefs about the advantages and disadvantages of piracy (Koay et al., 2022). This attitude is influenced by various factors, one of them being the availability of content on streaming services. For example, Frick et al. (2023) suggest that



individuals will not use piracy as their main method of watching entertainment media content. They explain that instead, they subscribe to streaming services, but when specific content is unavailable through their subscription, they will engage in piracy. This idea is also supported by Nhan et al. (2020), who argue that piracy behaviour serves as a supplement when the content is unavailable on legal streaming platforms. They explain that as different services offer different content, users are required to subscribe to several platforms. Consequently, subscribing to multiple platforms can be both costly and inconvenient, therefore young adults often resort to piracy (Baudach Fernández, 2023).

Therefore, an individual's attitude towards piracy behaviour, influenced by their beliefs and perceptions, plays an important role in shaping their decision to resort to piracy, even in the presence of legal streaming service options. According to Koay et al. (2022), if an individual perceives that streaming services offer a variety of content and are easily accessible, they may have a more favourable attitude towards using these services. However, if they perceive that certain streaming services, they subscribe to do not have specific content to their liking, they are more likely to engage in piracy behaviour.

Overall, it is clear that the availability of content on streaming services is an important factor influencing attitudes towards piracy. By understanding the user perceptions in today's digital age, more insight can be gathered into the behavioural patterns that drive digital piracy. Identifying these patterns, streaming service providers can better understand what their users are missing. This will help them tailor their products more effectively, potentially minimizing the need for consumers to pirate content. Hence, to look deeper into this aspect, this leads to the first sub-question:

*SQL: " How does content availability on legal streaming platforms relate to individuals' attitudes towards engagement in piracy behaviour? "*

However, attitudes towards piracy behaviour are not solely shaped by practical factors, like content availability. Internalized moral considerations and moral judgments also play an important role in individuals' decisions about where and in what way they will consume their preferred content (D'Astous et al., 2005; Sardanelli et al., 2019). Consequently, individuals might perceive piracy differently, as these perceptions are often shaped by different factors. For example, Arli and Tjiptono (2016) explained that in many countries, when an individual pirates it is seen as more socially acceptable. For instance, in developing countries like Indonesia, digital piracy is often seen as more acceptable due to the high costs of legal content and lower average incomes. This makes individuals see piracy as legitimate way to access content which is otherwise constricted. Therefore, the legal and moral boundaries of piracy become blurred, meaning that what one person might view as piracy, another might see it as legitimate access to the content (Arli and Tjiptono, 2016; Cox & Collins, 2014).

Similarly, Hinduja and Ingram (2009) found that cultural values significantly impact how individuals perceive and justify piracy. They highlight that social interactions with friends and family help further shape what is considered acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, with individuals rationalizing their actions based on what they learn from their social circles. This was also highlighted by Olivero et al. (2019) explaining how people justify pirating through rationalizations and cognitive mechanisms. These mechanisms include denial of injury, where individuals believe that piracy does not cause real harm, and diffusion of responsibility, where they believe that everyone is engaging in piracy, so it is okay that they are too. This perception leads them to justify their actions and detach themselves from moral judgments when they are involved in piracy behaviour, leading to a reduced feeling of guilt towards pirating content (Olivero et al., 2019; Yoon, 2010). Consequently, when an individual rationalizes piracy in a way it feels less unethical, they develop more favourable attitudes towards pirating, increasing the likelihood of executing piracy behaviour (Olivero et al., 2019).

Therefore, an individual's attitude towards piracy behaviour, influenced by their beliefs and perceptions, plays an important role in shaping their decision to look for illegitimate ways of accessing content, even with legal streaming options available. Understanding these moral considerations adds depth to the decision-making process. It provides a more extensive framework to understand when an individual decides to engage in piracy behaviour and shift from using streaming services for accessing entertainment media content. Therefore, to further understand this dynamic, it leads us to the second sub-question:

*SQ2: “What are the moral justifications individuals make when engaging in media piracy?”*

### **Subjective norm: FOMO or social exclusion**

Furthermore, subjective norms play a crucial role in shaping individuals' behavioural intentions by reflecting their beliefs about the social pressures and expectations surrounding a particular behaviour (Koay et al., 2022). These social pressures are intensified by their need to fit in and be accepted within one's social group (Arli & Tjiptono, 2016; Williams et al., 2010). However, due to the rise of social media and the emergence of real-time content-sharing trends on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, social influence is going beyond friends and family. Real-time content-sharing trends on these platforms have given rise to the phenomenon known as Fear-of-Missing-Out (FOMO), where individuals experience anxiety about potentially missing out on experiences or opportunities shared by others (Conlin et al., 2016).

However, despite the recognized importance of FOMO or social exclusion, there is limited research specifically examining the relationship between these factors and digital piracy. For example, Conlin et al. (2016) explored how FOMO impacts TV consumption and found that individuals with higher FOMO levels are more likely to watch live TV to avoid missing out on trending topics. This aligns with the observations of Twenge et al. (2003) that the fear of being

left out can lead to emotional distress, including anxiety and depression. Furthermore, Baudach Fernández (2023) related the concept of FOMO to digital piracy. They observed that FOMO not only affects legal media consumption but also drives individuals to engage in digital piracy when individuals feel excluded from discussions on social media because the content is unavailable. This means that social norms are an important indicator in predicting individuals' intentions to engage in piracy (Sardanelli et al., 2019). However, further exploration of how these social dynamics relate to pirating in context of entertainment media content, is important for a deeper understanding of the decision-making process individuals go through when they decide to pirate.

Therefore, recognizing the influence of FOMO or social exclusion on media consumption behaviours, this study seeks to gain more insight into this relationship, leading us to the third sub-question:

*SQ3: "How do feelings of social exclusion or FOMO (fear of missing out) regarding trending entertainment media content discussed on social media relate to individuals' engagement in piracy?"*

### **Perceived behavioural control: technical skills**

The last factor introduced in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is perceived behavioural control, which has been defined in the context of digital piracy by Koay et al. (2022) as "an individual's perception that he/she can pirate." (p. 2401) Arli and Tjiptono (2016) further elaborated on this concept, explaining that it includes an individual's perception of their own technical ability to engage in piracy. Previous studies have consistently shown that perceived behavioural control significantly influences the decision to engage in piracy. (e.g., Yoon, 2010; Koay et al., 2022; Arli & Tjiptono, 2016; Liao et al., 2009). For instance, Yoon (2010) and Koay et al. (2022) found that an individual's perception of their ability to perform a behaviour

impacts their decision to engage in that specific behaviour. Meaning, if an individual believes they have the technical skills and understanding how to pirate, they are more likely to engage in piracy. (Yoon, 2010). Moreover, past experience with digital piracy further reinforces individuals believes in their ability to pirate successfully, which will increase the likelihood that they will continue to engage in piracy (Koay et al., 2022). Similarly, Arli and Tjiptono (2016) and Liao et al. (2009) observed that the perceived ease of use and availability of resources further contribute to the likelihood of engaging in piracy, reinforcing the importance of perceived behavioural control. Furthermore, new highly popular methods of piracy, such as the use of illegal streaming sites, make piracy more accessible to everyone, no matter their technical skills. This is due to their accessibility and ease of use. For example, PutLocker, is a platform that offers various entertainment media content for free that features a user-friendly interface similar to Netflix (Nhan et al., 2020).

However, individuals' perception will also be influenced by the risks associated with piracy. Liao et al. (2009) described perceived risk as a feeling individuals experience when they are uncertain if their behaviour will have negative consequences, like malware. They explain that individuals with higher technical skills can better navigate and avoid potential risks, thereby reducing their perceived risk. Consequently, as explained by Yoon (2010) when individuals believe there is a high likelihood of facing legal consequences or other risks, such as malware, they perceive piracy more negatively and are less likely to pirate. Therefore, technical proficiency lowers the perceived risk of engaging in piracy, making it a more attractive option for those with the necessary abilities (Frick et al., 2023).

Overall, the existing literature findings indicate that participants with higher technical skills are more confident in their ability to access pirated content. However, with the evolving landscape of digital piracy, it is important to re-examine to what extent are technical skills still important

to pirate content. Furthermore, as technology advances it is important to understand how technical skills help individuals reduce perceived risks. Understanding perceived behavioural control and its relationship with technical skills is important to understand when and why individuals decide to engage in digital piracy. This could offer valuable insights for creating more effective strategies to minimize piracy. Therefore, the fourth sub-question is:

*SQ4: “How do technical skills impact individuals' engagement in piracy behaviour?”*

## **METHODS**

### **Research design**

Given the nature of the research topic and the main research question, “What is the process through which an individual decides to engage in media piracy behaviour over legal methods of content consumption?” a qualitative approach is well suited for exploring the behaviours and motivations of individuals regarding digital piracy. And as this topic is perceived as sensitive, the chosen method for this research was semi-structured interviews, helping to uncover rich, qualitative data. Furthermore, by choosing interviews instead of anonymized surveys, it was possible to create trust and establish a safe environment between the interviewer and the interviewee, encouraging participants to share more openly and in greater depth. Hence, the possibility to include open questions gave participants the flexibility to provide more detailed responses, capturing the complexity of their experiences and perspectives regarding streaming services and piracy behaviours.

### **Sample**

Based on the research topic mentioned above, a convenience sampling method was used. Participants were recruited by personal invitations, and since the study is focused on subscription-based streaming platforms, the participants had to have some experience with

streaming services. Furthermore, the target group of this study was Generation Z. As Generation Z covers ages between 12 and 27, my focus was between 18 and 27 years old. This age group is considered to be digital natives, meaning they have grown up with digital technology. However, they have less financial stability compared to older age groups, which may provide more incentive to engage in piracy. Furthermore, individuals aged 18 and above are considered to be legal adults, which means that they are more likely to make independent decisions about their content consumption on entertainment platforms and to have their own streaming service subscriptions. Other common demographics, such as gender, were not considered for the sample selection.

Accordingly, this study collected responses from 13 participants, with different nationalities, aged between 21 and 27 years old ( $M = 22.38$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ). The nationalities included Croatia, Germany, Ukraine, Italy, Turkey, Romania, The Netherlands, Slovenia, and Ecuador. Out of thirteen participants, nine identify as female and four as male.

## **Procedure**

To ensure a structure to the interview, predetermined subtopics and corresponding questions were outlined for each main topic discussed in the theoretical section—content availability, FOMO or social exclusion, technical skills, and moral justifications—were created. Before the start of the interview, participants were provided with the consent form, where they were informed about the research's purpose, procedure, and implications. With this, clear and transparent communication was ensured, where any questions or concerns from the participant's side were discussed before the interview started. As the interview started, they were introduced to the topic once again and informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time. And lastly, any sensitive data, such as name, was not collected to maintain confidentiality and anonymity; hence, each participant assigned themselves a pseudonym. By

having participants themselves apply pseudonyms, it not only protected their identity but also allowed participants to speak more freely about potentially sensitive topics.

After the introduction, participants were asked some general questions about their habit of watching entertainment media content and their possible experience with piracy. Then, the formulated topics (content availability, FOMO or social exclusion, technical skills, and moral justifications) and their subtopics (see Table 1) were addressed. However, before going deeper into the specific questions of the formulated topics related to piracy behaviours, participants were asked to explain in their own words what they believe piracy is. Firstly, participants were asked about their strategies for navigating content availability when faced with exclusive offerings on specific streaming services, such as “When you want to watch a movie or a show that's only available on one streaming service, how do you navigate through that?”. These questions aimed to understand participants' views on content availability on legal streaming platforms, their decision-making processes, and the impact exclusive content might have on their piracy behaviour.



**Table 1***Topic list of the interviews*

Topic	Sub-topic	Example questions
Starting questions	Content preference	Do you have some experience with piracy?
	Access to Streaming platforms	
Content availability	Experience with legal streaming services	When you want to watch a movie or a show that's only available on one streaming service, how do you navigate through that?
	Satisfaction with the range of content available	
	Navigating exclusive content	
	Impact of exclusive content on piracy behaviour	
FOMO or social exclusion	Influence of social media platforms on content discovery and consumption	Have you ever felt pressured to watch certain content to stay updated or be part of conversations with friends or online communities?
	Staying informed on content trends (FOMO)	
	Social influence and pressure on content consumption	
	Content sharing among peers	
Technical skills	Familiarity with different methods of accessing pirated content (e.g., torrenting, streaming sites)	How would you describe the level of difficulty when accessing content on streaming platforms compared to other methods?
	Process of accessing content	
	Impact of technological advancement	
	Technical skills for piracy behaviour	
	Ease of accessing content	
Moral justification	Factors influencing content consumption choices	Can you describe a situation where you felt morally conflicted about how you consume content?
	Moral conflicts in content consumption (Comparing attitudes towards piracy with other copyright infringements)	
	Acceptability of piracy behaviour (Perception of the legality and ethics of different piracy methods)	

Furthermore, questions about FOMO, or social exclusion, looked at participants' methods for staying updated on trends, their ways of sharing content with others, and their perceptions of social pressure regarding content consumption. For instance, asking questions such as "Have you ever felt pressured to watch certain content to stay updated or be part of conversations with friends or online communities?". Technical skills were examined through questions about participants' content viewing processes, their perspectives on the difficulty level associated with accessing content online, their perspective on the degree of impact technological advancement has on piracy behaviour, and the needed technical skills to engage in such behaviour: "Can you describe your typical process for accessing and watching movies or series online?" and "How would you describe the level of difficulty when accessing content on streaming platforms compared to other methods?". Finally, moral justification questions explored participants' considerations when choosing between legal and pirated content, aiming to understand the ethical dilemmas involved in their content consumption choices and their level of acceptability of piracy based on their personal values.

Given the nature of semi-structured interviews, participants were guided through the topics based on the outlined questions (see Appendix A). However, they were encouraged to express themselves freely, even if their responses deviated from the main subtopics. At the end, participants were asked if they had any other remarks regarding the study and were thanked for their participation. They were provided with contact information for any remaining questions and a request for a debriefing document of the final findings of the study. This ensured full transparency with participants and that they had a clear understanding of the study's outcome. Overall, the setting of the interview was online, through Microsoft Teams, and all were conducted in English.

## **Data analysis**

The data analysis for this study involved several steps to ensure reliability and validity. The process began with transcribing and anonymizing the audio files from the interviews. This data was only accessible to researchers involved in the study. Next, as a deductive coding approach was used, a set of codes was created prior to the analysis based on the theoretical framework. It was designed to capture the main themes of this study, including content availability, FOMO or social exclusion, technical skills, and moral justifications.

After that, the analysis started via Atlas.ti. As the coding progressed, the initial codes were applied to the interview transcripts (see Table 2). During this process, the method of constant comparison was used, meaning that the data from one interview was compared with another interview. This allowed for new codes to emerge, which were incorporated into the coding scheme.

**Table 2***Initial coding scheme*

Theme	Code	Description
Content availability	Availability impact	The impact of content variety and exclusive content on attitudes towards piracy.
	Multi-Service Content Scattering	The challenge of accessing scattered content across various streaming platforms.
	Value for money	Users' perceptions of the pricing and subscription models of streaming services, including factors such as affordability, and perceived value for money.
	Access method process	The process through which users access digital content.
Moral consideration	Perception of Legitimacy	Individuals view piracy as less unethical or harmful compared to other illegal activities, like shoplifting, which makes them more likely to justify their actions.
	Moral Detachment	When individuals engage in piracy, they convince themselves that their usual moral standards don't apply to this situation, convincing themselves that their actions are acceptable.
	Economic Justification	Individuals justify piracy based on economic factors, such as inability to afford legal content or dissatisfaction with pricing models.
	Ethical Rationalization Risk Perception	Individuals develop justifications for why piracy is ethically acceptable, which makes them feel better about engaging in it.  Users' perceptions of the risks associated with engaging in digital piracy, including legal consequences, security risks and inappropriate pop-up ads.
Social norms	Social exclusion/pressure	The impact of feelings of social exclusion or pressure on individuals' engagement in digital piracy, including the influence of being left out of trending content discussions.
	Peer influence	The role of peer influence and social dynamics in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors towards digital piracy.
Technical skills	FOMO	The anxiety individuals feel about missing out on popular or trending content, which can drive them to engage in digital piracy to stay updated.
	Technical ability	Individuals' proficiency in technical skills, including their ability to navigate online platforms and engage in digital piracy practices.
	Accessibility	The ease and convenience of digital piracy, including software, websites, and platforms, facilitate accessing content on streaming services.
	Learning sources	Sources and methods through which individuals acquire knowledge and skills related to digital piracy, including online tutorials, forums, and social networks.

When the initial coding was completed, a second coder was involved to enhance reliability. They applied the codes from the updated coding scheme to one and a half interviews. Cohen's Kappa, which is used to measure inter-rater reliability, was calculated with a value of 0.63. While this indicated moderate agreement, it also showed that the coding scheme can still improve. Based on the discussion with the second coder, several changes were made to the coding scheme. Firstly, the code for FOMO was seen as unnecessary to be separated from the social exclusion/pressure code, as it presents a very similar concept. Secondly, adjustments were made to the description of accessibility and technical evolution to better reflect the data. Lastly, the codes for ethical rationalisation and perception of legitimacy were combined, as they presented overlapping concepts. Afterwards, the final coding scheme was created (see Appendix B). It ensured that all relevant themes were covered and that the coding process was reliable and consistent across different interviews. When the analysis was finished, any remaining unnecessary data was permanently deleted to ensure the privacy of the participants.

## **RESULTS**

In the following section, the results of this study will be presented. Drawing from participant interviews, the result structure is based on several key thematic areas: content availability, moral justification, technical skills, and fear of missing out (FOMO). Each thematic topic will be first introduced with the underlying problem, and then the results themselves will be explained. However, for a better understanding of the next section, it is important to first look into the detailed process of how people pirate.

Participants in this study described two processes for pirating content. The main methods observed include both streaming from unofficial sources and downloading via torrent websites. However, before they resort to piracy, a common approach involves starting their search on

subscribed platforms. When content is unavailable there, the most often seen in this sample is the approach of trial and error. Participants describe searching for desired movies or series by entering titles into search engines like Google and clicking through links until they find a suitable streaming site. They prefer streaming directly from these sites for convenience, although they explain that full content availability can be inconsistent on these websites. If they still cannot find the content, they most often forget about it or look through YouTube to see if it was uploaded there. Additionally, some participants mentioned that when they exhaust all other options, they resort to asking their friends for login credentials to streaming platforms that have the desired content available. The last resort for this group of participants is to create a free subscription trial to a new platform. The second method observed in this sample is using torrent websites, like Pirate Bay, to download torrent files. They explained their process as very straight-forward after they've set up security measures and logged into the website by going to the website and just downloading the desired content. The only downside they see with their process is that they have to download the content prior to watching, which they sometimes labeled as inconvenient.

### **Multi-service content scattering**

One of the concepts of interest in this study was related to the availability of entertainment media content on streaming platforms and how these relate to individuals' attitudes towards engagement in piracy behaviour. On this topic, all participants expressed that even though they have access to at least one streaming platform, they cannot access desired content due to the scattered nature of content across multiple streaming platforms. As an example, Chloe shared frustration at starting a series on one platform only to find subsequent seasons available on a different platform. Elena shared a similar feeling, saying: *"It's like whenever you want to watch a certain movie, they suddenly don't have it anymore, although they definitely had it before."*

This unpredictable availability becomes a frustration for participants, as they expect consistency from a service they have to pay for.

This dissatisfaction with scattering the content was a common theme among many participants, where many of them highlighted that it makes them look for the content in alternative ways, such as pirating. Maria explained that often their desired content is not on the platform available to them, and they would need to subscribe to yet another streaming service, making them consider accessing the content through pirating behaviour. Participants frequently mentioned that the evolution of digital content consumption has made accessing content on streaming platforms more difficult due to scattered content and higher subscription costs. Consequently, many participants are resorting to the very behaviours these services aim to eliminate. In this context, John Locke stated:

*I think it is a completely silly thing to search where can I watch the movie. [...] I think just the splintering of the streaming service industry has caused me to really dislike streaming services and pick up pirating media again because I can't be bothered to have five different accounts on five different apps across three different platforms that I use for my laptop, computer, and phone.*

However, the issue of scattered content extends beyond individual inconvenience to family dynamics, as Bottle said:

*In a family, it is very hard. For example, I'm into trash TV, my two brothers are into football, my other brother is into law shows because he's a lawyer, and then my mom is into cooking shows. So, everyone has their own interests, and to satisfy that, we would need to subscribe to too many different platforms.*

This portrays the difficulty when multiple household members have diverse viewing preferences. Each member's interests could potentially require a separate subscription, making

the total cost of the services too expensive. For example, Eight stated, *“I don’t want to pay 10 euros for each of the services. That is why I just chose one, and that’s it.”* This becomes particularly challenging now that some streaming platforms are implementing household restrictions, making it even more difficult for families not living under the same roof to share a subscription.

Netflix, in particular, has been battling against password sharing by introducing new policies that restrict the use of an account to a single household. This means that participants who live away from the rest of the family cannot share the same account, even if they are part of the same family. These new restrictions made participants either subscribe to Netflix and pay for the subscription by themselves or not subscribe to Netflix at all and look for alternative ways to access the content. Chloe spoke more of the issue by saying:

*So even if I’m not in the same household, I’m still part of the family, even if I’m on a different wifi [...]. So It’s kind of sad that I can’t use the same Netflix account as my family. But if [I am the only one using the account], I think that’s kind of expensive for one person, to be honest.*

Therefore, the financial burden of subscribing to a platform that cannot be shared with friends or family without living under the same roof is a big concern for many participants. And in combination with high costs and scattered content across diverse streaming platforms, some participants end up watching entertainment media content by engaging in piracy behaviour.

### **Moral Detachment and Moral Rationalization**

The next concept of interest is the moral justification of individuals when engaging in media piracy. Participants' definitions of piracy influence their perceptions of legality and moral justifications. Two different definitions were seen among participants. The majority of participants defined piracy as consuming and distributing illegal content. For example, Elena



explained that both creating and consuming pirated content is piracy, including people who record movies in theatres to upload them to illegal streaming services and those who watch these illegal uploads. However, the second view on piracy noted a more nuanced perspective on its illegality. John Locke emphasised the distinction between media pirates, who create and distribute pirated content, and consumer pirates, who only download and consume it. He explained that consuming pirated content is less morally and legally concerning than creating and distributing it. Similarly, LP03 questioned whether digital goods can truly be owned or stolen, influencing their views on the severity of pirating digital content.

Regardless, most of the participants did not feel morally conflicted about how they consumed their preferred content, either through streaming platforms or through piracy. For example, LP03 expressed a clear lack of guilt, stating, *"Now, especially if it's like a big movie like any Avengers movie or one that made a lot of money, I don't care. They have a lot of money anyway."* Many participants rationalised and justified their pirating behaviour by pointing out the amount of profit movie studios and streaming platforms make. For instance, Elena expressed that they do not feel bad about pirating content that is from a large, financially successful company, as they believe these companies would not be harmed by their actions anyway. However, a few participants distinguish between pirating from a big corporation and a small one. As Elena explained that they do not feel morally conflicted about big companies, they elaborated:

*I feel like if it's from small creators who are dependent on the money that they're making, and the production is not as big [...], I feel like that's more unacceptable to then pirate, because they can't afford to have someone pirate their stuff. [...] But if it's like a really big production, I can't feel bad about it because they're making so much money.*

In addition to moral detachment, the normalisation of piracy in certain cultural contexts played an important role in some participants' moral justifications. In many countries, piracy is not seen as an illegal or immoral act; therefore, some participants do not feel like they are doing anything wrong. As Hannah highlighted, *"In [Ukraine], everyone pirates. It's not seen as a big deal, so I don't really feel bad about it."* However, even though some countries do have legal consequences for pirating content, many participants believe that there is a small risk of them actually getting caught. For instance, LP03 stated, *"Who really gets in trouble for [pirating]? It's not like they're going after everyone who pirates a movie."* Hence, the participant feels like the likelihood of facing any legal consequences is minimal, reducing their hesitation to engage in piracy behaviour. As Emily mentioned, piracy is so common in Germany that most people just download movies and shows without thinking twice.

Therefore, in terms of protecting themselves to avoid any potential consequences, the majority of the participants take no further precaution as they rely on a low perceived risk of getting caught. In this context, Thomas shared, *"I don't really do anything special. I just download what I want and never had any issues. No one I know has ever been caught."* However, a few participants still feel the need to take further steps to protect themselves, as they are now living in a country that has legal consequences. One measure adopted by some participants is the use of a VPN, short for *'virtual private network'*. It is a service that allows participants to hide their IP addresses while navigating through online websites to avoid any potential detection. This anonymity helps participants feel safer when they pirate content. And it does not only feel safer for participants to use a VPN but also brings some sort of security when they use it. For example, when Bottle was explaining the steps they take to protect themselves when pirating, they said they use VPN *just in case*. As for Hannah, they highlighted the need to always remember to have a VPN on to ensure extra safety. Furthermore, John Locke takes additional precautions other than just a VPN:

*I make sure that I'm using the very least VPN [when I torrent]. [...] However, in addition to the VPN, I will make sure that I'm using a browser that is not Google Chrome, for example, where everything is traced, but I would rather use something where most of the information is already anonymous. Just to give myself a few barriers to make it more difficult to trace myself.*

Using incognito modes or specific web browsers that are designed for anonymity and are commonly used with participants who want to minimise their digital footprint while pirating.

To conclude, the combination of moral detachment, cultural normalisation, and the low perceived risk of getting caught contributes significantly to participants' justifications for engaging in piracy behaviour. While some take measures to protect themselves, many do not feel the need due to the minimal perceived consequences.

### **Low technical skills**

Continuing with the next concept of this study, technical skills. Here, the study aims to explore the relationship between technical skills and piracy behaviour. On this note, when we talk about technical skills, many participants believe that the level of skills needed when accessing content through streaming platforms and piracy is not that different. For instance, even though LP03 does think it is sometimes easier to watch content on streaming platforms, they also mentioned that the process of pirating content is straightforward: they look up the movie, click on download, open the torrent, unzip the file, and that's it.

Despite the minimal skills needed to pirate content, participants acquired these skills in various ways. Some participants learned it from friends or family members. For example, Elena learned it from friends, expressing that they would never know where to access the content otherwise. Additionally, others learned how to pirate through trial and error. Chloe explained that they

just google the name of the movie, click through different websites to find full content, and try until they succeed. And lastly, a few participants felt that being a part of Generation Z, who have grown up in the digital age, made these skills almost second nature. Hannah stated:

*I feel that all these technologies and like the ability to use them are kind of natural for me and my siblings. [...] I think it's just natural for our generation to be able to use the technology and all the services without any effort.*

However, even if it is not natural for some and they have little to no knowledge about pirating, John Locke explained:

*Any technical skill is less than an hour of learning away. I think with the amount of YouTube videos, amount of Reddit forums, the amount of you name it. There are so many tutorials, tips, guides, and everything that if you wanted to actually start pirating something [...] it would take no more than an hour to have everything set up free of charge.*

Nonetheless, despite knowing how to pirate, the majority of the participants believe that accessing content through streaming platforms is essentially easier and more time-efficient. For example, despite Hannah stating that it is in their nature to navigate through technology and pirate, they believe that it still takes a lot of time to pirate the content, and at some point, it is much easier to have access to a subscription service and access content quicker. Similarly, for Lilly, it is about the ease of streaming platforms where they can avoid pop-ups and inappropriate advertisements. Therefore, despite knowing how to pirate, the practical difficulties and time consumption make streaming platforms a more appealing option to many participants.

## Social exclusion and pressure

Lastly, the concept of social exclusion was explored. This study's aim is to understand how feelings of social exclusion, or FOMO, on social media relate to engagement in piracy behaviour. On that matter, almost all participants feel the pressure to watch content to not miss out on anything. However, this feeling of pressure is more of an interest in watching certain content that is frequently discussed on social media. For instance, Lilly mentioned that it feels like pressure to watch something when they see a bunch of clips on TikTok and do not want the whole movie spoiled for them. Similarly, others explain it more as an interest in what others are talking about. For example, Thomas explained:

*I guess with some movies that are really hyped, there's like some sort of pressure to watch them. Maybe not like pressure, but if everyone's talking about it, then it would be good to know what they're talking about.*

Additionally, a few participants mentioned that if a movie receives a lot of bad reviews and criticism on social media, they become more interested in watching it to see what the criticism is about. Emily explained:

*I feel like that's how it was for Saltburn. [...] And I was so curious; I wanted to watch it, but just seeing the trailer for the movie would have probably not caught me enough to watch it. But the whole criticism and everyone being like, this is so weird [made me want to watch it].*

Despite the feeling of some sort of pressure to watch the content, either in the context of interest or to not have the content fully spoiled, the source of such pressure varies among the participants. Many participants feel a stronger need to watch content due to social media, and others feel it from their friends and family. However, as Maria mentioned, they first check if

they like the content by watching pilots or trailers, or, as Ann mentioned, they watch five minutes of the content to see how they feel about it.

Furthermore, if participants do not have access to the streaming platform where the content is available, they tend to either forget about it or find something else to watch. As Maria explained, if the movie they want to watch is not available, they would not pirate the content but just ask their friends about log-in information to watch the wanted content or forget about it. Nonetheless, this is less common with new releases since they are usually available on streaming platforms. However, when it comes to older movies, piracy becomes a more viable option. For example, John Locke explained that when an old movie trends again, it is often hard to find it on streaming platforms, so pirating is the way to access such content. Another method mentioned by two participants is to watch the full shows or movies in clips on TikTok.

Overall, this feeling of pressure has decreased over time for many participants. For example, Angelina and Hannah mention that in their teenage years or when they were younger, they felt this pressure much more strongly than they do now. However, for participants who do still feel the pressure to keep up with popular content, it does not always drive them to engage in piracy. Instead, they seek alternative ways to access content legally or lose interest in the content.

## **DISCUSSION**

After conducting an interview analysis and identifying the key findings, the research question stated at the beginning of the paper can be answered. The aim of this research is to answer the main research question, “What is the process through which an individual decides to engage in media piracy behaviour over legal methods of content consumption?” Based on the literature presented at the start of this paper, factors such as content availability, moral justification, technical skills, and FOMO or social exclusion, play an important role in shaping individuals

decisions to engage in piracy behaviour. Therefore, to answer the main question of this study, it is important to first look at the sub-question stated in each theme presented in the theoretical framework.

Firstly, answering the sub-question “How does content availability on legal streaming platforms relate to individuals' attitudes towards engagement in piracy behaviour?”. As mentioned in the results, all participants in this study had some experience with streaming platforms. Therefore, when participants want to watch and access specific content, they first reach out to streaming platforms. However, an aspect that was identified in the theoretical framework is multi-service content scattering, which motivates individuals to engage in piracy behaviour (Nhan et al., 2020). This study confirms that one of the core findings is the frustration participants experience due to the scattered nature of content across multiple streaming platforms. The results indicate that this fragmentation often influences participants to consider piracy as an alternative method to access their desired content. Therefore, when participants have difficulty accessing content through legal streaming platforms, they typically pursue one of two paths: torrenting or using illegal streaming sites. Torrenting is described by participants as a straightforward process of downloading files, while accessing content through illegal streaming sites involves entering search terms into search engines and navigating through links to find the desired content.

Moreover, the financial burden participants feel from trying to maintain multiple streaming subscriptions intensifies this issue. This was also observed by Cox and Collins (2014) and Phau et al. (2016), who highlighted that the high cost of accessing content legally makes individuals look for alternative, illegal ways more often. For instance, as discussed in the results, participants who expressed frustration with the streaming industry often stated they would rather pirate the content. Managing multiple accounts across various platforms is just not feasible. This has become an even bigger problem in recent years, particularly with Netflix

introducing a new policy that restricts account sharing outside of households. The results of the study show that the combination of household restrictions and high subscription costs further influences participants' need to once again resort to pirating content. Therefore, participants see piracy more as a practical solution when streaming services cannot offer what they need.

Secondly, answering the sub-question, "What are the moral justifications individuals make when engaging in media piracy?". The findings show that, generally, participants hold two different definitions of what piracy is. For some participants, the legality and ethicality of piracy differ based on whether one is involved in the act of posting unauthorised content or merely consuming content that has been illegally uploaded by others. Conversely, other participants hold a more negative view of piracy, regardless of whether one distributes or consumes pirated content. Despite these different views of what piracy is, the study reveals that many participants do not feel morally conflicted about piracy. This is in contrast to some theoretical perspectives suggesting that individuals' ethical concerns and sense of right and wrong would typically discourage individuals from pirating content (D'Astous et al., 2005; Sardanelli et al., 2019). Instead, participants rationalised their behaviour in a way that made them feel less guilt. They often rationalised it by highlighting the big profits movie studios and streaming platforms make, and in this way, they minimised their perception of ethicality. This minimization of ethical concerns aligns with the findings by Olivero et al. (2019), which suggest that individuals deny that piracy causes harm, reducing their feeling of guilt and allowing them to continue engaging in piracy without feeling morally conflicted. Therefore, when participants tell themselves they can't feel bad about pirating content from financially successful companies, they reduce their moral conflict and guilt.

Furthermore, based on the observations of Hinduja and Ingram (2009), which highlight that the social environment plays an important role in shaping attitudes towards piracy, this study's findings align with this perspective to some extent. However, unlike the emphasis on social



circles (Hinduja & Ingram, 2009), this research found that certain cultural contexts and perceived low risks of legal consequences play a more important role. Many participants highlighted that in their countries, piracy is widespread and socially accepted, leading them to detach the practical choice to pirate from moral reflection on it. Therefore, these participants do not see pirating as an issue, as other people in their country are also doing it. This is supported by the findings of Arli and Tjiptono (2016), where individuals see piracy more as an opportunity since the act is not considered illegal in many countries. Additionally, participants do not believe to a high degree that any negative consequences could happen to them. Therefore, most participants do not take further precautions to protect themselves from potential viruses or legal consequences. However, the few participants that do mostly mentioned the use of VPN as it gives them security that their pirating behaviour cannot be tracked back to them. This shows the complex interplay between cultural acceptance and perceived risk in shaping moral attitudes towards piracy.

Continuing with the third theme of this study, technical skills, aiming to answer the third sub-question, “How do technical skills impact individuals' engagement in piracy behaviour?”. Although some participants use older methods of piracy, like torrenting, many also use illegal streaming sites. However, no matter the type of method, the results revealed that many participants believe the level of technical skills required to access content through streaming platforms and piracy is similar. This aligns with Nhan et al. (2020), who noted that new piracy methods are especially user-friendly, similar to services like Netflix, making it straightforward for anyone to pirate content. And this was also seen in this study, where participants often found the process of pirating content straightforward, regardless of the method used. Furthermore, in today's digital world, acquiring the basic technical skills needed for piracy can be achieved in an hour, as participants mentioned. The three methods mentioned were: through friends or family, trial-and-error, or online tutorials. Therefore, as some participants mentioned, if an

individual has little knowledge about pirating, it is easy to gather all the necessary information. This shows that the technical skills needed for piracy are easy to pick up, making it less of a barrier to pirate content. Therefore, with newer piracy methods and technology, the level of technical skills does not impact the participant's decision to engage in piracy. This is contrary to previous studies that have shown that technical skills are important to engage in piracy (Yoon, 2010; Koay et al., 2022). However, even though technical skills are no barrier for the majority of the participants, they stated that they would rather access the content through streaming platforms. This is because they believe they are more convenient and time-efficient than accessing the content through pirating.

The last theme of interest was FOMO or social exclusion, aiming to answer the sub-question: “How do feelings of social exclusion or FOMO (fear of missing out) regarding trending entertainment media content discussed on social media relate to individuals’ engagement in piracy?” As discussed in the results, the pressure to watch content has decreased over time for some participants, suggesting that as individuals grow older, they become less influenced by social pressures. However, many participants still feel the pressure to watch content, which is driven more by their interest in the content and the fear of spoilers than a fear of missing out on discussions. This feeling of pressure originates from both social circles and social media. Therefore, this study's results align with the findings of Conlin et al. (2016), who found that real-time content sharing on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat extends social influences beyond immediate social circles.

Consequently, this urgency to watch specific content can drive the decision-making process towards piracy; however, participants still prefer to consume content over streaming platforms. This preference will depend on whether the content is newer or older. If the content is newer, then participants will either forget about watching the content or ask their social circle for login information to the platform that offers the content. However, when it comes to older content, it

is much harder to find on the platforms. Therefore, participants see piracy as the only option to consume such content. This aligns with Baudach Fernández (2023), who noted that FOMO affects both legal and illegal ways of consumption when content is unavailable.

To conclude and answer the main research question, the process through which individuals decide to engage in media piracy over legal methods of content consumption starts with their preference to use streaming platforms, as they are more convenient and easier to access in comparison to piracy. However, the frustration and financial burden caused by unavailable or scattered content across multiple platforms prompt participants to pursue one of two main paths. Many start by Googling the title of the desired content and exploring illegal streaming sites. If they are unsuccessful, they either give up or try YouTube instead. Alternatively, they might ask friends for login information to access the desired content on subscription platforms. The second group prefers downloading content from torrenting websites, although they find this method inconvenient since it requires downloading the content before viewing.

Regardless of the method chosen, participants rationalise their behaviour by minimising ethical concerns in two ways: by justifying piracy because large media corporations are making a big profit and based on cultural acceptance of piracy. When it comes to technical skills, the decision to engage in piracy behaviour is not influenced by the level of technical skills participants hold. Meaning that due to new methods of piracy, they can pirate even with low technical skills. Furthermore, when it comes to social factors like FOMO or social exclusion, participants might feel some pressure to consume the content presented on social media or in their social circle, but it does not often lead them to engage in piracy. Rather, they look for other legal alternatives to consume the content or ask their social circle for the credentials of different platforms. However, when it comes to interest in older movies, the decision-making process is influenced by FOMO, where individuals will pirate the content more often as it is rarely available on streaming platforms. Thus, the decision-making process involves a complex interplay of

accessibility, ethical considerations, technical skills, and social influences. Participants rationalise piracy based on practical and ethical considerations, seeking convenience and immediate access to content while navigating the limitations of legal streaming platforms.

### **Theoretical and Practical implications**

This study applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to investigate digital piracy behaviour among Generation Z. TPB posits that behavioural intention is influenced by attitude, social norms, and perceived behavioural control. Based on the research, it is seen that incorporating contemporary digital habits, such as the use of streaming platforms, social norms, and moral justifications, is essential for understanding digital piracy behavior. However, the decision to engage in piracy is not heavily influenced by technical skills, as modern methods of piracy combined with technological advancements require minimal technical ability. This suggests that perceived behavioural control in the context of technical skills is less relevant when studying digital piracy. Therefore, for future research on digital piracy, integrating considerations such as content availability, moral justifications, and social influences into the TPB framework is important. This approach can help further understand the complex decision-making process of piracy across diverse demographics and evolving technologies.

From a practical standpoint, the findings of this study show some actionable insights for streaming service providers and policymakers. Currently, one of the main frustrations for consumers is the fragmented nature of content across different platforms. Therefore, the study suggests a more unified approach, combining multiple streaming platforms. By combining these platforms into one or by forming partnerships between them, they could create a simpler experience for users. This unified approach could also lead to more flexible pricing options, like bundles or different tiers of service, which could save users money and make entertainment more affordable. Furthermore, having a larger library of content available on a single platform

would fulfil different interests and preferences, making it easier and more enjoyable for people to find what they want to watch. However, achieving this might be challenging in the current economic climate. It would be necessary for streaming services to overcome the competitive barriers and see it more as a potential benefit for all parties involved by expanding their user base and improving overall customer satisfaction. Ultimately, this approach could reduce any temptation to pirate content illegally by offering consumers a legal, convenient, and satisfying alternative.

Furthermore, policymakers should consider the effectiveness of traditional anti-piracy measures and policies that rely on fear and guilt. Given the results of this study, participants felt minimal perceived risk of legal consequences; therefore, policies focusing on improving affordability and accessibility of legal content might be a more effective way of minimising piracy. This will be a more viable strategy than, for instance, integrating persuasive campaigns and reminding people of moral issues with piracy, as it will not effectively change their behaviour when streaming services are not sufficiently satisfying consumer needs. Therefore, companies and policymakers should understand this development and look for new ways to address the real reasons behind piracy.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study provides valuable insights into the decision-making process of individuals engaging in media piracy over legal methods of content consumption. However, several limitations should be acknowledged, and recommendations for future research are provided to address these limitations.

One limitation is related to the target group of this study. This study primarily focused on Generation Z, aged between 21 and 27 years, to explore the specific digital habits and frequent attitudes among this demographic. Understanding how this generation navigates media

consumption in the digital age is important, given their role as early adopters of new technologies. However, while this age group offers rich insights, the findings cannot be generalised to the whole population due to the nature of qualitative research. Therefore, for future research, both quantitative and qualitative approaches could be employed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and increase the generalizability of the results to the whole population. Moreover, as this study found that participants felt less pressure to engage in piracy as they grew older, it would be interesting for future research to explore how the pressure to engage in piracy changes over time, providing more insight into the correlation between age and piracy behaviour. Future research could also look deeper into specific aspects that were not extensively covered in this study. For example, investigating new ways of watching movies on social media, like TikTok, could contribute to understanding how short-form video formats influence viewers' perceptions of movies, their interest in full-length content, and the potential routes they take to access this content legally or illegally. Lastly, the rapid evolution of digital technologies and media consumption habits means that the findings from this study might quickly become outdated. Continuous monitoring and updating of research on digital piracy are necessary to keep up with technological advancements and changes in consumer behavior. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to track changes over time and provide more dynamic insights into digital piracy trends and behaviours.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to understand the decision-making process behind individuals' engagement in media piracy over legal content consumption methods, particularly among Generation Z. The results demonstrate that individual decision-making processes involve several key factors. The first factor relates to content availability, where it was found that the fragmentation of content across multiple platforms and high subscription costs lead individuals

to engage in piracy. Furthermore, the second factor relates to how people justify their piracy behaviour. What was found is that many participants do not feel morally conflicted when they pirate content. Cultural acceptance of piracy and the perceived low risk of legal consequences further reduce any moral conflict. Thirdly, the rise of new technology and user-friendly piracy methods means that technical skills are no longer a significant barrier to engaging in piracy. And lastly, social factors like FOMO or social exclusion do not often lead to engaging in piracy. However, when older content that is popular within social groups or on social media is not available on streaming platforms, pirating content is more likely to be considered as an option. Hence, participants rationalise piracy as seeking convenience and immediate access, especially when faced with the limitations of legal streaming platforms. By understanding this decision-making process, it is seen that reducing piracy is not solely about enforcing legal restrictions but about making legal streaming options so appealing that piracy becomes the less attractive choice. Therefore, policymakers and streaming service providers should reexamine the effectiveness of traditional anti-piracy measures and focus on developing strategies that make legal alternatives more attractive. For example, unifying subscription services could simplify user experiences. Furthermore, introducing flexible pricing and making subscription costs more affordable can better meet the needs and expectations of users, ultimately lowering the amount of pirated content.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview guide**

#### **Introduction:**

*Hello, and firstly, thank you for your participation in the study. My name is Nina Leskovšek, and I am currently working on my bachelor's thesis, which is about streaming platforms and digital piracy behaviour. Therefore, I would like to ask you some questions related to this topic based on your own experiences. As this topic might be sensitive, I would like to reassure you that this is a safe space where you can express yourself freely, as this is only used for research purposes. You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. Also to assure anonymity of this interview, I would like to ask you that you pick any pseudonym yourself (how you would be referred to in my study).*

#### **Starting questions:**

1. Do you often watch movies or series? What type of content do you prefer?
2. Where do you watch this content?
3. Do you have access to any streaming platforms?

#### **Content availability:**

1. Can you describe your experience with using legal streaming services like Netflix, Prime Video, or Disney+?
2. How do you decide which streaming platforms to subscribe to?
3. When you want to watch a movie or a show that's only available on one streaming service, how do you navigate through that?
4. Do you believe that the availability of exclusive content on certain streaming platforms affects your attitudes towards piracy? If so, how?
5. Have you considered multiple subscriptions for broader content access?

6. What could, in your opinion, streaming platforms do in sense of content availability so you would seek content on streaming platforms rather than through piracy behaviour?

**FOMO or social exclusion:**

1. How do you stay updated on the latest developments and trends in online streaming and content consumption?
2. Do you find yourself wanting to watch a movie or series because it's popular or trending on social media, even if it's not available on your preferred streaming platform?
3. Have you ever felt pressured to watch certain content to stay updated or be part of conversations with friends or online communities?

**Technical skills:**

1. Can you describe your typical process for accessing and watching movies or series online?
2. How do you think advancements in technology have influenced the way you access and consume entertainment media content?
3. How often do you find yourself exploring online forums or communities for tips on accessing hard-to-find content?
4. From your perspective, what technical skills or knowledge are required to engage in piracy behavior effectively?
5. How would you describe the level of difficulty when accessing content on streaming platforms compared to other methods?

**Moral justification:**

1. What factors do you consider when choosing between legal streaming services and other methods for accessing content?
2. Can you describe a situation where you felt morally conflicted about how you consume content?
3. Are there times when piracy seems more acceptable to you?

**Piracy:**

1. What does piracy behaviour mean for you?
2. Can you give me any specific examples of piracy behaviour?
3. What content do you prefer to pirate?

**Conclusion:**

To finalize, do you have any other reasons you seek content outside of legal streaming services?

Do you have anything else to add?

*Thank you for your time and participation in the study. If you have any other remarks or questions, or if you would like to receive the final findings and conclusions of the study, please send me a message to my email address: [n.leskovsek@student.utwente.nl](mailto:n.leskovsek@student.utwente.nl).*

## Appendix B

### Final coding scheme

Theme	Code	Description
Content availability	Availability impact	The impact of content variety and exclusive content on attitudes towards piracy.
	Multi-Service Content Scattering	The challenge of accessing scattered content across various streaming platforms.
	Value for money	Users' perceptions of the pricing and subscription models of streaming services, including factors such as affordability, and perceived value for money.
	Access method process	The process through which users access digital content.
	Video quality	The perceived difference in viewing experience between pirated content and legally obtained content.
Moral consideration	Perception of Legitimacy	Individuals view piracy as less unethical or harmful compared to other illegal activities, like shoplifting, which makes them more likely to justify their actions.
	Moral Detachment	When individuals engage in piracy, they convince themselves that their usual moral standards don't apply to this situation, convincing themselves that their actions are acceptable.
	Economic Justification	Individuals justify piracy based on economic factors, such as inability to afford legal content or dissatisfaction with pricing models.
	Ethical Rationalization	Individuals develop justifications for why piracy is ethically acceptable, which makes them feel better about engaging in it.
	Risk Perception	Users' perceptions of the risks associated with engaging in digital piracy, including legal consequences, security risks and inappropriate pop-up ads.
	Cultural norms	Societal and community standards that influence individuals' attitudes and behaviours towards digital content consumption and piracy.
Social norms	Social exclusion/pressure	The impact of feelings of social exclusion or pressure on individuals' engagement in digital piracy, including the influence of being left out of trending content discussions.
	Peer influence	The role of peer influence and social dynamics in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviours towards digital piracy.
	Social influence	influence of social media platforms and the perceived acceptance of piracy within larger social groups.
Technical skills	Technical ability	Individuals' proficiency in technical skills, including their ability to navigate online platforms and engage in digital piracy practices.
	Accessibility	The ease and convenience of digital piracy, including software, websites, and platforms, facilitate accessing content on streaming services.

Learning sources	Sources and methods through which individuals acquire knowledge and skills related to digital piracy, including online tutorials, forums, and social networks.
Technical evolution	The advancement and availability of technology when engaging in entertainment media content
Time efficiency	Users' perceptions of the convenience and speed of accessing digital content through streaming platforms and piracy behaviour

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## Appendix C

### Search log

Date	Source	Search string or search method	Total hits	Remarks
03-03-2024	ScienceDirect	TITLE-ABS-KEY (( "digital piracy" OR "piracy" ) AND ( "streaming platforms" OR "movies" OR "series" OR "Netflix" OR "Disney+" OR "audio-visual" ) )	3,475	To start I identified around 10 sources that could have potential. However, I noticed that my search string is not specific enough as I am getting many missed hits.
03-03-2024	ScienceDirect	TITLE-ABS-KEY (( "digital piracy" OR "media piracy" ) AND ( "streaming platforms" OR "movies" OR "series" OR "Netflix" OR "Disney+") AND ("Decision" OR "Process"))	176	I managed to lower the amount of hits and found 5 relevant articles. More articles were found within these articles.
20-03-2024	Google Scholar	"digital piracy" AND "streaming platforms"	518	I found only two relevant articles, so I decided to specify my searches based on each theme I was interested in.
20-03-2024	Google Scholar	"digital piracy" AND "technical skills"	311	This way I found more relevant articles related to one specific topic. I looked within these articles to find more articles on this topic.
20-03-2024	Google Scholar	"FOMO" AND "digital piracy"	33	
20-03-2024	Google Scholar	"digital piracy" AND "moral justification"	102	

\* During the preparation of this work the author(s) used **Chat GPT** in order to check grammar, coherence of the text and to help with creating concise descriptions of the codes in the coding scheme. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the work.

\* During the preparation of this work the author(s) used **Quillbot** in order to check grammar of the thesis. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the work.