

# A Study on Perception on Normalization of Digitally Pirated Content by P.G. Students in Pune

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**Abstract**—This study explores how postgraduate students in Pune, India, view the increasing trend of digital piracy. It aims to understand why downloading and sharing pirated movies, music, and software has become so common, almost like a normal part of life. We want to find out what factors influence this behavior, such as easy access to the internet, high costs of legal content, and the belief that piracy doesn't really harm anyone.

**Index Terms**—Digital piracy, Normalization, Postgraduate students, Peer norms, Self-Justification.

## I. INTRODUCTION:

In today's fast paced digital world, content is everywhere on the internet. From movies and trending TV shows to the latest music albums and new software and tools, we are surrounded by a constant flow of new content and creative work. However, alongside this vast content spread across the internet, a significant challenge has been there since the beginning: Digital Piracy. This is not just downloading illegally from the internet, it's about a widespread shift in how people view and interact with copyrighted material. For many, especially young people, using pirated content has become very common. It seen as a normal thing, everyday activity. People often think, "If everybody is doing it what's wrong with it?" we're calling this "Normalization of Digitally Pirated Content."

## II. OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH:

1. To understand the extent of digital piracy among postgraduate students in Pune.
2. To identify the key factors influencing the normalization of digital piracy among this group.
3. To analyze the perceptions and attitudes of students towards the ethical and legal aspects of piracy.

4. To create solutions for reducing the piracy of digital content among the students.

## III. HYPOTHESIS:

H1 Stronger moral disengagement is positively related to normalization of digital piracy. Students who find ways to excuse or justify using pirated content are more likely to see such behavior as normal and acceptable. As self-justification increases, the acceptance of piracy also tends to rise.

## IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Digital piracy is the act of copying, downloading, or sharing digital content such as movies, music, software, and e-books without the permission of the creator or owner. It is one of the most common forms of copyright violation in the modern world. The rise of the Internet and digital technology has made it very easy for anyone to get such content for free. Although it is illegal, many people, especially students, do not see it as a serious offence. This shows that piracy has slowly become a normal and accepted part of everyday life for many young people.

### 1. Understanding Digital Piracy

Many researchers have defined digital piracy as the unauthorized use or distribution of copyrighted materials. According to Tomczyk (2021), digital piracy among young people has increased because of easy internet access and lack of awareness about copyright laws. Sadiku et al. (2021) also explained that the affordability of digital technology and availability of online content make it easier for users to download or share pirated files without paying for them. These

studies show that convenience, curiosity, and low perceived risk play major roles in encouraging piracy.

## 2. Normalization of Piracy

The idea of normalization means that a behaviour that was once considered wrong slowly becomes accepted by society. When people see others around them engaging in a certain behaviour without facing any punishment, they begin to view it as normal. In the case of digital piracy, normalization happens when students think “everyone does it” or “it’s not a big deal.” Research by Day (2024) on postgraduate students found that many students justify piracy by saying that buying legal copies is too expensive or difficult. This suggests that cost and accessibility are key reasons for the normalization of piracy.

## 3. Economic and Accessibility Factors

Economic conditions also play a significant role in piracy behaviour. Students from lower-income backgrounds often argue that they cannot afford to pay for expensive software, e-books, or journals. When legal resources are unavailable or unaffordable, piracy becomes an alternative source of access. Studies conducted in India have found that limited access to academic resources pushes students toward using pirated content or illegal platforms. Therefore, improving access to affordable legal content could reduce the motivation for piracy.

## 4. Moral Disengagement (Self-Justification)

Another important factor that affects attitudes toward piracy is moral disengagement or self-justification. This happens when individuals find ways to excuse or justify their wrong actions so that they do not feel guilty. For example, students may think, “The companies make too much profit anyway,” or “I am not harming anyone by downloading.” According to Bandura’s theory of moral disengagement, people use such mental justifications to separate their actions from moral responsibility. In the context of digital piracy, stronger self-justification leads to greater acceptance of piracy as a normal behaviour. Research by Day (2024) found that many postgraduate students use these justifications to reduce guilt and view piracy as acceptable.

## V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Title of the Study: A Study on the Perception of Normalization of Digitally Pirated Content by Students.

The purpose of this study is to explore how and why students have come to view digitally pirated content as a normal and acceptable part of everyday life. Digital piracy has become very common among young people, especially students who often face financial limitations and easy access to online content. However, while many students see piracy as harmless or routine, it raises ethical, and legal concerns.

Type of Research:

This study is a descriptive and exploratory research. It aims to describe students’ attitudes and behaviors related to digital piracy and explore the reasons behind the normalization of pirated content among students.

## VI. DATA COLLECTION METHOD:

Primary Data was collected through a structured Google Form questionnaire.

These questions mainly cover students’ usage habits, attitudes, and motivations related to digital piracy. They assess how often students pirate content, what influences their choices (cost, convenience, ethics), and whether access to affordable legal options would change their behavior.

Secondary Data was collected from Indian research papers, educational reports, and government publications.

Sample Design: Population: Postgraduate students studying in Pune City.

Sample Size: A total of 25 students participated in the survey.

Sampling Method: Convenience Sampling was used, as only easily available students were included.

The study did not use any specific division based on gender or age, and all participants were considered as one group.

## VII. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.

Based on the 24-25 responses collected, the following findings are reported.

**Frequency of Consuming Unofficial /Illegal Content.**  
A combined 70.9% of respondents 54.2% "Often" + 16.7% "Always" are frequent consumers of pirated content. Only a quarter of respondents 25% do so "Rarely," and a negligible portion claim to "Never" consume it. This indicates that consuming unofficial content is a common behavior within this group.

**Types of Content Most Frequently Pirated.**  
"Software/Games" are the most commonly pirated items, with 91.7% of students selecting this category. "Movies/TV shows" are also extremely popular, chosen by 75% of respondents. "E-books" are the least pirated content type in this survey, at only 8.3%

## VIII. USE OF PRECAUTIONS

A large majority of respondents (75%) do not take precautions such as using anti-viruses or safe browsing when accessing pirated content. Only a quarter (25%) report using such safety measures, suggesting a high level of risk-taking or a low perception of danger.

### Subscription to Legal Services

The vast majority of respondents (88%) are not subscribed to any legal content services. Only 12% are legal subscribers. This suggests that for this group, piracy is a replacement for, rather than a supplement to, legal services.

### Perception of Piracy as an Ethical Issue

A majority of students a combined 60%, with 56% "Agree" and 4% "Strongly Agree" do recognize piracy as an ethical issue. However, a significant minority of 32% "Disagree," indicating a clear division in perception. 8% remain neutral. That Explains despite knowing it is an Ethical issue Students still consume pirated content.

### Perception of Piracy as a Victimless Crime

A significant majority (60%) "Agree" with the statement that digital piracy is a victimless crime. Only 24% (20% "Disagree" + ~4% "Strongly Disagree") believe it does have victims. This finding helps explain the normalization, as many students may not perceive tangible harm.

### Acceptability of Piracy Due to High Cost

An overwhelming 76% of respondents (48% "Agree" + 28% "Strongly Agree") believe that high cost makes

piracy acceptable. This is a very strong justification shared by the group. 20% remain neutral, while very few disagree.

### Primary Reason for Using Pirated Content

Cost is the dominant reason for piracy, cited by 79.2% of students, the second-biggest factor is "Everyone else does it" at 45.8%, which is a strong indicator of social normalization.

Availability is not a factor at all (0%). Which can be indicated as piracy can be easily done.

### Likelihood to Stop if Content Were Cheaper.

This result strongly reinforces the previous chart's finding. A large majority (79.2%) claim they would be less likely to pirate if legal options were more affordable. This suggests that for most respondents, piracy is a solution to an economic problem rather than a fixed preference.

### Perceived Harm to Content Creators

The responses are heavily centered on "Neutral." A majority (56%) selected the middle option of 3. The remaining respondents were split, with 24% leaning towards disagreement (rating 2) and 20% leaning towards agreement (rating 4). The complete absence of extreme (1 or 5) ratings indicates that students are largely uncertain or ambivalent about the specific harm caused to creators, which aligns with the finding that many consider it a "victimless crime."

## IX. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

An analysis of the survey data, gathered from 24-25 student respondents, reveals several key findings regarding the prevalence, justification, and perception of digital piracy.

### 1. Prevalence and Consumption Habits

The consumption of pirated content is a prevalent and frequent behaviour among the surveyed students.

- A significant majority of respondents (70.9%) reported consuming pirated content either "Often" (54.2%) or "Always" (16.7%).
- The primary types of content acquired through piracy are "Software/Games" (91.7%) and "Movies/TV shows" (75%).

- This behaviour appears to be a substitute for, rather than a supplement to, legal consumption. A substantial 88% of respondents indicated they are not subscribed to any legal content services.

## 2. Ethical Dissonance and Perception of Harm

The findings indicate a significant ethical concern, where students hold contradictory beliefs about the morality and impact of piracy.

- **Ethical Acknowledgment:** A majority (60%) of students "Agree" (56%) or "Strongly Agree" (approx. 4%) that using pirated content is an "ethical issue".
- **Perception of Harm:** Despite this, an identical 60% "Agree" that digital piracy is a "victimless crime". This suggests a disconnect between acknowledging a moral wrong and perceiving any harm.
- **Ambivalence to Creators:** This ambiguity is reinforced by responses regarding harm to creators. When rated on a 1-5 scale, the majority (56%) chose the neutral option "3". No respondents selected the strong agreement (5) or strong disagreement (1) options, indicating widespread uncertainty.

## 3. Primary Justifications and Social Normalization

The data clearly identifies two dominant factors that drive and normalize the behaviour: economic justification and social acceptance.

- **Economic Justification:**

Cost is the principal driver. "High cost of legal content" was cited by 79.2% of respondents as the primary reason for pirating. This is further supported by the 76% (48% "Agree" + 28% "Strongly Agree") who believe it is "acceptable" to pirate if the legal version is too expensive.

- **Social Normalization:**

Piracy is a socially normalized behaviour. The second-most common reason given was "Everyone else does it" (45.8%). This indicates that social proof and peer behaviour are strong contributing factors.

## 4. Risk Perception and Potential for Change

Respondents demonstrate a low perception of personal risk but a high willingness to adopt legal alternatives under different economic conditions.

- **Low Risk Perception:** A large majority (75%) of respondents confirmed they do not use any precautions (e.g., anti-viruses, safe browsing) when accessing pirated content.
- **Propensity for Change:** The behaviour is not fixed. A significant 79.2% of students affirmed they would be "less likely to pirate" if legal content were more affordable. This suggests that high cost, rather than a preference for piracy itself, is the primary barrier to legal consumption.

## X. CONCLUSION:

This study examined students' perceptions and behaviours related to the normalization of digital piracy. The findings indicate that digital piracy is widely practiced and commonly seen as a normal part of modern digital consumption among students. Key factors contributing to this normalization include financial constraints, convenience, peer influence, and the belief that piracy has minimal consequences. Although many students acknowledge that piracy may be ethically questionable and harmful to content creators, this awareness does not always translate into ethical behaviour, suggesting a disconnect between knowledge and practice.

The results highlight the need for stronger awareness initiatives, improved access to affordable legal digital content, and educational efforts that encourage responsible digital citizenship. By understanding the attitudes and motivations behind piracy, institutions and policymakers can better address the issue and promote ethical digital practices. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the social and cultural drivers of digital piracy among students and offers a foundation for future work on promoting ethical content consumption in academic communities.

## XI. SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that educational institutions, policymakers, and digital platforms take proactive steps to address the normalization of digital piracy among students. Increasing awareness about the ethical and legal implications of piracy through workshops, seminars, and digital literacy campaigns can help students better

understand the long-term consequences for creators and industries.

Integrating digital ethics into academic curricula may also foster responsible media consumption habits at an early stage.

In addition, providing students with access to affordable legal alternatives can significantly reduce the motivation to rely on pirated content. Partnerships between universities and digital platforms such as student discounts or institutional subscriptions could make legal content more accessible. Encouraging the use of secure and legitimate resources through campus libraries and official digital repositories can further support ethical behaviour.

Finally, future initiatives should focus not only on punishment or fear-based messages but also on positive reinforcement, highlighting the value of supporting creators and promoting a culture of respect for intellectual property. Continued research in this area is recommended to monitor changing student attitudes and evaluate the effectiveness of educational and policy interventions over time.

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