



From Orkut to Facebook: How Brazilian Pirate Audiences Utilize Social Media to Create Sharing Subcultures

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Grounded in case studies in Brazil, this research explores how pirate audiences create an effective parallel system of informal television viewing and distribution. From August 2010 to November 2012, two specific case studies were examined: the informal distribution of U.S. TV shows through downloading websites and Orkut downloading communities, and amateur subtitlers. Informal TV downloading practices are evolving, along with the notions of audiences, television content, television viewing, and piracy. These practices are also incorporated into people's everyday lives. The article establishes a framework around media practices and proposes that many pirates are members of audiences. Thus, the aims of this article are twofold: (1) to document TV sharing infrastructures in Brazil; and (2) to draw attention to contemporary practices of watching television. The findings fill a gap in the Brazilian research literature on television downloading cultures and contribute to current literature on pirate cultures.

Keywords: digital piracy, television audiences, Orkut, cyberlockers, fansubbing

Regardless of their noncommercial orientation, private media sharing practices are considered to be piracy, or types of copyright infringement (APCM, 2012; Mason, 2008; Yar, 2008). For this article, I consider people who download TV shows as *pirate audiences*. I am not the first to introduce the term (Lobato, 2011), or a similar term, "piracy audience" (Cardoso, Espanha, Jacobetty, & Lima, 2010), based on the notion of audiences involved in unauthorized practices of media sharing. I embrace the pirate terminology and aim to enhance the term "audiences" by considering that pirate audiences have more active characteristics that make them distinct from traditional audiences. Pirates are those who create "a new space outside of the traditional, legitimate market" (Mason, 2008, p. 234).

Unauthorized sharing of television content, on a noncommercial basis, can be seen as an alternative way of watching television. I examine how and where these practices happen and consider

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them as practices of new media audiences. Thus, the aims of this article are twofold: (1) to document TV sharing infrastructures in Brazil through social media, and (2) to draw attention to contemporary practices of watching television. The case studies in Brazil illustrate transnational piratical practices with local particularities.

Brazil is an important area for research for a range of reasons. According to a media report (Emarketer, 2012), 74% of Internet users in Brazil utilize social media. Brazil also has high levels of Internet piracy (Mizukami, Castro, Moncau, & Lemos, 2011). Although less than 50% of the total population has access to the Internet—which is still more than 82 million people (Federowski, 2012)—recent research indicates that approximately 41% of this portion downloads media content from unauthorized sources (IPEA, 2012). In other words, more than 20 million people in Brazil are involved in digital piracy. This information can also be confirmed on Internet traffic statistics websites (e.g., Alexa), which verify that Brazilian traffic volumes have in recent years ranked within the top five among all countries' traffic to sites like The Pirate Bay, Megaupload, and Rapidshare. However, there is little research on file sharing of TV shows in Brazil. Existing reports on Internet use in Brazil (IPEA, 2012; NIC, 2011) have tended to mainly consider music, film, and/or software downloading, with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Gomes, 2007; Vandresen, 2012).

Brazil holds an important position in the global economic and political environment, along with Russia, India, China and South Africa. The acronym BRICS (for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) is routinely used to denote a cluster of emergent national economies. Recently, Brazil attracted international attention for a proposed government bill titled *Marco Civil* [Civil Rights Framework for the Internet], which "establishes principles, guarantees, rights and obligations related to the use of the Internet in Brazil" (CGI, 2012, p. 1). The bill has been viewed as a significant development for protecting freedom and civil rights online and has been considered a model for other BRICS countries that, in response to the piracy problem, have alternatively designed heavy restrictions to their Internet laws (Lemos, 2012).

The methods of this study draw on focused examination of the local manifestations of television downloading and distribution practices. I use Couldry's (2011, 2012) work on everyday practices in digital media to analyze research on media file sharing and audiences' digital practices. He suggests that practice-based research approaches are needed in order to understand changing audiences (Couldry, 2011). Therefore, even though the characteristics of content may stimulate new sharing activities, such as informal viewing and distribution of content, the idea of practice is more important to consider than the content itself.

I divided the data collection into three components. Components one and two were mainly conducted to inform the case studies in component three. Component one was the observation and document analysis of informal viewing and distribution (August 2010 to November 2012). This data collection consisted of accessing websites related to file sharing in Brazil and taking field notes. It included nonparticipant observation of Brazilian pirate audiences' practices and their interactions with each other in online communities on Orkut and Facebook related to television show downloading and fansubbing. Component two was an online survey on informal viewing (July and December 2011). The data were

collected through an online survey ($n = 106$) conducted with participants who are regular downloaders of TV shows in Brazil. The survey was designed to provide a general understanding of informal viewing practices in Brazil and to prepare for component three of the data collection, which relates to informal distribution. The respondents were unidentified during the study.

Component three of the research was to create case studies on informal distribution and amateur subtitling (September 2011 to October 2012). I developed two case studies in order to examine the informal, self-organized distribution of content by pirate audiences. Case 1 considered only informal distribution occurring through downloading websites and Orkut communities. At the time I started data collection, Orkut was the most popular social networking website in Brazil (Mizukami et al., 2011). Facebook, however, has become more popular since mid-2011, and by July 2012 was the most accessed social networking website in Brazil (Hitwise, 2012). Case 2 considers the production and distribution of amateur subtitles, which are compiled with the video files offered for downloading. I investigate a group of fansubbers in Brazil known as *Legenders*, who translate TV shows from the United States and the UK into Portuguese. I studied the Facebook groups of teams of Legenders and other websites that are used to distribute subtitles. From December 2011 to November 2012, I interviewed 10 Legenders ranging in age from 18 to 43 to understand how Legenders use social media to distribute and promote their work.

Informal Distribution Practices

Figure 1 enumerates the most popular distribution platforms for TV shows. I used the TV show *Supernatural* (2005–present) as an example, because it was popular with Brazilian pirate communities during my nonparticipant observation and was also commonly mentioned in answers on my online survey.

On Orkut, pirate audiences interact with each other as fans, play games, ask questions such as “which character in the show does the person responding to the thread above you look like?,” and exchange spoilers and news. The popularity these communities is fueled by the provision of links to downloadable episodes by the administrators. Of the communities I investigated,¹ I found that the links for downloading became available within hours of the show being broadcast in the United States.

The administrators of Orkut communities associated with particular shows play a significant role in influencing the downloading activities of people using their website. For example, they often create one specific topic for viewers to discuss about a particular episode. In association with this discussion, they provide a link for viewers to download the episode being discussed. The discussion topics are so popular that within three days after the availability of season 6, episode 3 of *Supernatural*² for downloading, there were almost 900 comments from the *Supernatural/Sobrenatural* community (Mendes Moreira de Sa, 2011).

¹ *Supernatural/Sobrenatural*, *House* Oficial, *Gossip Girl* Oficial, *Smallville* Oficial, *Glee* Brasil, *Dexter* Oficial, and *Modern Family* Oficial.

² Aired in the United States on October 10, 2010.

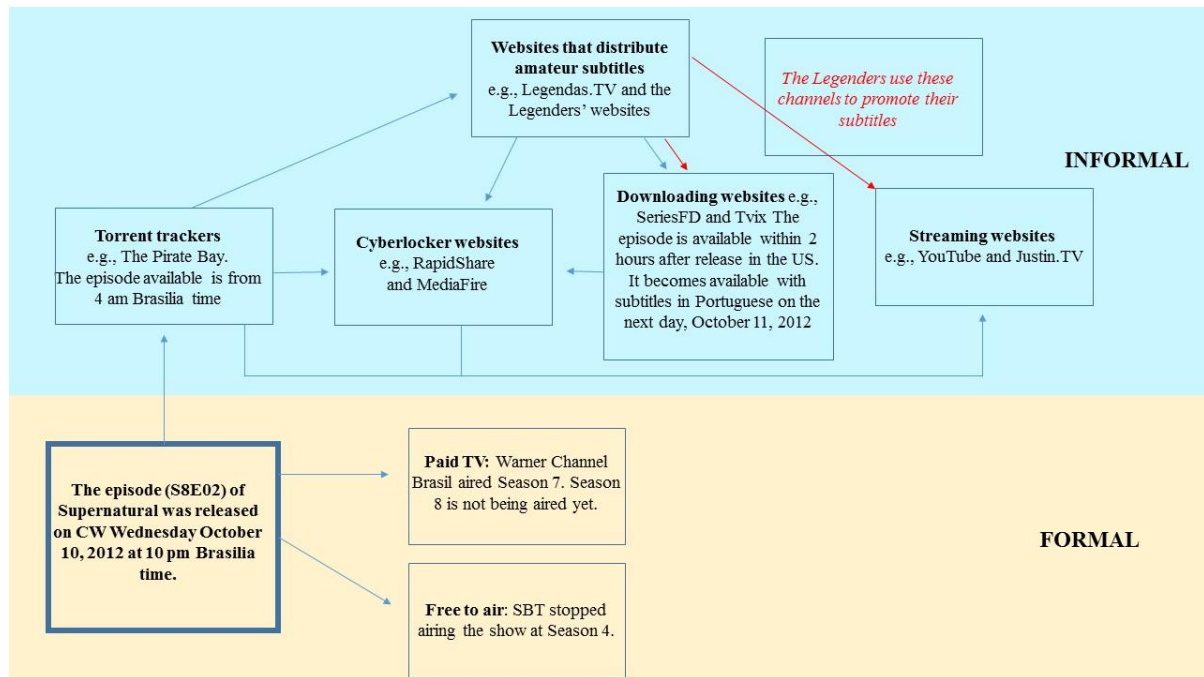


Figure 1. Informal and formal distribution in Brazil of the TV series Supernatural, season 8, episode 2 (S8E02), and its amateur subtitles.

Other websites also contain links for downloading television shows. Like Orkut, they direct pirate audiences to cyberlocker websites. It is difficult to determine how many such websites are available. I focused on 10 popular downloading websites, listed in Table 1. Also, between June 2012 and November 2012, I observed that the administrators of these sites were often engaging with informal viewers on the downloading websites' official Facebook group pages. That is, the groups on Facebook at the time of my research were managed by the downloading websites' administrators, who used Facebook group pages to interact with users and to announce new episodes they had uploaded.

Table 1. Ten Downloading Websites in Brazil for Analysis.

Downloading Website Name	Traffic Rank in Brazil on Alexa.com on August 28, 2012	Domain	Type of Content Available for Downloading
De graça e mais gostoso	288	www.degracaemaisgostoso.org	TV shows, movies, games, and ebooks
Armagedom filmes	364	www.armagedomfilmes.biz/?cat=21	TV shows, movies, and others
Telona	742	www.telona.org	TV shows and movies
Baixar filmes e series	1,046	www.baixarfilmeseries.com	TV shows and movies
Series TVix	1,077	www.seriesvix.net	TV shows
Baixar TV	1,121	www.baixartv.com	TV shows
Series free	1,398	www.seriesfree.biz	TV shows
Series lider	6,594	www.serieslider.com	TV shows
SeriesFD	8,240	www.seriesfd.com	TV shows
Download series	18,275	http://downloadseries.org	TV shows

Note: Websites are organized from the most accessed downloading website, De graça e mais gostoso, to the least, Download series.

In studying these 10 websites, it became clear that social media are commonly used to advertise links for downloading. Besides having official Facebook group pages, many downloading websites also have official Twitter, Orkut, and Google Plus accounts. Once the administrators post messages on Facebook, for example, that they have uploaded an episode onto their website, many followers respond with a "thank you" or by asking when the version with subtitles will become available. Also, many followers may share the post, making their own personal networks aware that the link for downloading that TV show is ready for use. Figure 2 shows the promotion of links on a Facebook page.



Figure 2. Comparison of Facebook promotions.

The screenshots were taken from the Facebook Series TVix group page on October 4, 2012 (left) and the SeriesFD group page on October 11, 2012 (right). In the screenshot on the left, 14 people shared the link with their networks within 34 minutes of the administrators posting it. The text in the screenshot on the right translates to “*Supernatural* 8x02 [season 8 episode 2] already available! If you like it share this post!” The image shows that four people shared it in the first 36 minutes. The first AVI file, with no subtitles, was made available on the SeriesFD group page 2.5 hours after the show was aired in the United States (U.S. Eastern time = 9:00 p.m.). Once pirate audiences access the link available on the social media group page, or just search for the TV show on the downloading website, they are directed to that specific TV show’s section. As with Orkut, the administrators of these downloading websites organize links using the season number. Some downloading websites also provide live streaming of TV shows while they are still being aired in the United States. As these feeds are streamed, downloads of the episodes, including subtitled ones, are not yet available.

Some websites also offer, free of charge, other digital products for downloaders. For example, Figure 3 shows an example of a digital folder created by the administrators of the downloading website SeriesFD for the TV show *Arrow*. The website also offers the possibility of downloading a number of folders for other U.S. TV series. In this way, after downloading a particular episode, pirate audiences may archive the file in a folder customized for that television show.



Figure 3. Arrow archives folder.
Retrieved October 21, 2012 from the SeriesFD Facebook group page.³

The example of this digital product supports De Kosnik's (2012) argument that one of the strongest motivations for file sharing is archiving. De Kosnik (2012) compares "digital-collecting" piracy to earlier offline practices of collecting. She emphasizes that the risks and liabilities are greater with online practices because of the potential to reach a larger number of people as compared to earlier methods of sharing.

In addition to providing promotional services such as advertising, social media announcements, merchandising, and customized folders, download websites also aim to redistribute the release of new episodes as quickly as possible. In fact, this seems to be a priority for many website administrators. For instance, the administrators of the website TVix posted links for downloading TV show episodes until 6:00 a.m., Brazil time, on Monday, October 22, 2012, so that pirate audiences would have access to episodes only a few hours after their release in the United States, thus boosting the popularity of TVix.

³ See

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=369023133182671&set=a.333606450057673.79631.112216395530014>.

The administrators of specialty websites seem to invest more time in the development of digital products, promotions, and distribution services than the Orkut communities' administrators. The features of the downloading websites, therefore, more closely resemble authorized online distribution services.

Case Study 2: Legenders

After downloading a video file, most Brazilian viewers require subtitles in Portuguese. Subtitles are often created by pirate audiences who identify themselves as Legenders, principally to differentiate themselves from fans who translate Asian television shows (Bernardo, 2011; Bold, 2012; Marques de Mendonça, 2012). In Brazil, there are more than 30 teams of Legenders informally working on the Internet, plus an indeterminate number of independent translators (Mizukami et al., 2011). Each team is responsible for creating amateur subtitles for at least one TV show.

In discussion forums on all sites examined here, fans often ask administrators when the "official" subtitles will become available. By "official," they are usually referring to the subtitles published on the Legendas.TV website. The Legendas.TV is a Brazilian fan site that releases subtitles produced by Legenders. Downloaders search for "official" subtitles on the Legendas.TV website specifically, because it is perceived as being reliable, high quality, and popular. The Legenders' work is explored in more detail in Mendes Moreira de Sa (2014). In addition to using Facebook and Twitter to alert fans to new series, Legenders also raise the social awareness of causes beyond television shows. For example, in October 2012, several Legender teams joined the October Pink campaign, which raises money for the prevention and treatment of breast cancer.



Figure 4. Legenders' support for breast cancer awareness month. Translation: With the support of all it is easier to fight breast cancer. October Pink: Other teams of Legenders are increasingly embracing the idea, such as the ManiacSubs, Queens of the Lab, Darkside, L.O.T. Subs, Subtitles in Series, SuBMakers, SNSubs, The Tozz, and About Skins. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=539254526101136&set=a.287734127919845.87961.285934401433151>

As part of the same campaign, Legender teams posted notes on their Facebook group pages on how women can perform breast self-examinations, as well as other general information about breast cancer awareness. All participant teams also changed their trademarks by adding the pink ribbon symbol of the October Pink campaign.

I have argued in a different study (Mendes Moreira de Sa, 2014) that, although amateurs, the approach of Legenders shares similarities with professional work practices in the distribution of work, in advertising, and in public relations, to name a few. In her research, Ito (2010) outlines the division of tasks among fansubbers of anime videos and acknowledges the importance of their work in the

community. She says that in fansub groups "a high degree of specialization and collaboration within each production team as well as in the community overall" (Ito, 2010, para. 32) is maintained.

In summary, the Brazilian pirate audiences facilitating informal distribution of content have a unique way of promoting themselves and interacting with their audiences through pirate networks. The interactions established in communities motivate consumption and distribution through social sharing.

Social Media, Social Sharing, and Social Piracy

The practices of watching television online reflect some of the social aspects of watching television in an analog context. However, television audiences are utilizing the Internet in varied, complex, and networked ways. The pirate audiences examined in this article utilize social networks as a platform to interact with other peers in promoting, discussing, and sharing media, for social purposes and affective reasons. Word of mouth, mainstream media, and social media are the most common ways that pirate audiences learn about television and newly released shows. Social sharing can be related to what Couldry (2012) calls media-related practices of "showing" in social networking sites. Just as searching is an everyday practice, showing and being shown media that are "being put into wider circulation" (ibid., p. 48), and sharing personal preferences about them, have become commonplace. By sharing opinions and links, these pirate audiences fulfill the needs of "sustaining a public presence" and "construct[ing] an objectification of oneself" (ibid., p. 50).

Matos de Morais and Lopes Rocha (2005) argue that by affiliating with social networking websites, Brazilians mirror the social practices of staying connected and socializing with friends and family. They relate this situation to the conventional perception of Brazilians as being friendly and often driven by affect and emotion. In interviews and focus groups with Legenders, respondents reported feeling rewarded by new friendships and interactions with people who share similar passions about their television shows. The respondents also identified "culture exchange" as being a significant motivation for participating in a community of Legenders and file sharers.

Much of contemporary research examines moral disengagement over unauthorized media file sharing (for instance, Bonner & O'Higgins, 2010). Audiences' evaluation of the low financial cost of cultural commodities does not align with the practices of capitalism. This is reflected in a gift exchange, where "information is for sharing not for selling" (Barbrook, 2003, p. 91). In research for this article, I found that many respondents claim that, since they only engage in private file sharing, their practices are not illegal. Interviews with Legenders indicate that they do not consider their work as piracy, but rather, as a hobby, and that television downloading is not piracy, but actually promotion. Many participants argued that, through unauthorized file sharing, otherwise unknown TV shows are promoted among pirate audiences. For some participants, the practice of archiving was considered to be piracy, whereas privately watching a program and deleting it afterwards was not. Archiving is perceived to be an everyday online practice along the lines of those examined by Couldry (2012).

Several respondents thematized the issue of “disrespect for audiences’ demands.” The fact that television networks do not release content sooner and that they make some content inaccessible and generally price content too high (for instance on cable television and on DVDs) are factors motivating people to decline authorized sources without guilt. Absence of guilt has also been found in studies on music piracy (Bonner & O’Higgins, 2010). Pirate audiences in Brazil do not display fears of being caught. As indicated in online survey results, slow downloading and low-quality content are more prominent concerns. In Brazil, intellectual property laws may appear ambiguous and unclear to many audiences (Lemos, as cited in Magalhaes Silva, 2009). According to Lemos, intellectual property law establishes everything that is forbidden but does not clarify what is allowed, opening up a space for confusion and thus interpretation. In addition, the law lags behind changes in communication technologies and the emergence of Internet-based social practices. Therefore, when considering the moral disengagement toward what is defined as an illegal activity, it is important to consider how impractical, inadequate, and unclear the law is (DaMatta, 1986), and also how people disrespect the moral or ethical case that antipiracy organizations themselves try to advance.

As Dent says, “The pirated may be conceived of as perfectly in line with that wonderfully Brazilian way of paying no mind to boundaries” (2012, p. 32). DaMatta (1986) considers how Brazilians constantly find themselves caught between private and public interests and how this can be demonstrated by cultural practices known as *Jeitinho Brasileiro*.⁴ As I have argued elsewhere (Mendes Moreira de Sa, 2011), the informal sharing of television shows online in Brazil is connected to socially acceptable practices of circumventing the system. By not taking such particularities into account and limiting ourselves to seeing media piracy as a “global scourge,” “international plague,” or “nirvana for criminals” (Karaganis, 2011, p. 1), it is even more likely that we will never seriously consider Lessig’s famous question, “What does it mean to a society when a whole generation is raised as criminals?” (Lessig, 2008, p. xvii). Lessig’s interrogative also raises the possibility that many other crimes besides piracy might also seem “natural” to people.

If Brazilian sharing practices—broadly considered harmless, informal, and socially accepted—were to suddenly receive the label of illegality, and if this illegality would be strictly enforced, what might happen then? The parallel systems of informal distribution, which started as an audience-to-audience relationship, could come to be conducted more surreptitiously, and many television audience members would begin to be treated more as criminals by the system. In addition to looking for “fast-changing consumer and cultural practices” (Castells & Cardoso, 2012, p. 828), there is also need to understand pirate practices in their local contexts, to focus on media file sharing as a global phenomenon, and to identify it as partly a result of “high prices for media goods, low incomes, and cheap technologies” (Karaganis, 2011, p. 1).

⁴ *Jeitinho Brasileiro*, a term translated as “a clever dodge” (DaMatta, 1979/1991) defines a famous characteristic of Brazilian culture. It is a way of solving problems or dealing with situations. Brazil’s infamous bureaucracy slows down individuals’ daily activities and business. The *Jeitinho* is a way of overcoming this hindrance (DaMatta, 1986).

Motivations

Comparative and international studies of file sharing (e.g., Beekhuyzen, 2009; Cenite, Wanzheng Wang, Chong, & Shimin Chan, 2009; Rutter & Bryce, 2008; Wang & McClung, 2011) and the present study all strongly suggest that motivations for media file sharing are transnational. Pirate audiences in Brazil download because of high prices and convenience, and as a means to sample content and participate in discussion forums. Delays in the availability of shows on free and cable television in Brazil are a major reason for the informal downloading and distribution of television shows, but the work of sharing is based on affective labor (Terranova, 2004). As with the subjects studied by Ito (2012), Brazilian administrators of downloading communities were seen to be motivated by the positive feedback from satisfied pirate audiences and by the fame that comes from being associated with subtitling a particular television show. Also, the friendships created, the sense of belonging and contributing, and practice in language translation are also motivating factors. The Legenders that I interviewed said one of their primary motivations for creating subtitles was to fill the very obvious gap in the distribution of television shows by the television networks. They felt they contributed valuable access of shows to fans, as well as a sense of belonging, which Vandresen (2012) has also mentioned in her research on Brazilian amateur subtitlers of the TV show *Lost*. This sense of belonging is clearly valuable to a community with shared interests. It is also enriched by new friendships, including friendships with online viewers. A survey respondent said:

What motivated me, before anything else, was participating in something that I believe in. Something that really makes difference in the world. . . . And in the Legenders I saw a true power. It is an honest motivation. It is all evident: we want to subtitle because we want others to enjoy what we also enjoy. There is no practice more beautiful than this one: it is an honest donation, with no hypocrisy. (personal communication, November 23, 2011)

The administrators of Orkut communities and downloading websites and the Legenders are working in precarious conditions (Terranova, 2004). They are willing to work for free so that others can access foreign television content. Their products are freely given, although ironically, their work represents significant investments of time, effort, and Internet connectivity and electricity, among other expenses.

The social status and prestige of being a distributor are linked to theories of a gift economy. According to Hyde (1983) status is related to the act of giving to others. Since online search results can become gifts when content is shared between peers (Barbrook, 2003), the shared links for downloads and subtitles are gifts shared between pirate audiences.

The Practices of Brazilian Pirate Audiences

Informal viewing and distribution practices are presented in Figure 5, which compares informal, amateur practices with formal distribution strategies for U.S. television shows in Brazil.

	TV Networks (e.g., Fox, Warner Channel, and Globo)	Downloading Websites and Orkut	Legenders
Acquiring TV Shows	Broadcasting rights	Search online for the television downloading links made available by seeders	Submit a request for a particular TV show to the Legendas.TV administrators
Translation	Professional companies, such as Gemini	Amateur subtitles are compiled with videos	Organize themselves in their teams to translate
Distribution	TV channel	Downloading websites, which are linked to cyberlockers	Legendas.TV website, the teams' websites, and other websites that distribute amateur subtitles
Advertising/Marketing	Social media, TV networks' websites, television promos, advertising in magazines, on billboard, etc.	Website, social media (e.g., Facebook, Orkut, Twitter, and/or Google plus), and mailing list	Legender's website, Legendas.TV's website, and social media (e.g., Facebook, Orkut, Twitter, YouTube channel, and/or Google plus)
Return on Investment (ROI)	Selling number of viewers to advertisers; for cable subscribers there is also a monthly subscription	To help others, success found in large number of visitors and "thank you" messages. It was not reported but I observed advertising on many of the downloading websites, which could generate revenue to their administrators	"Thank you" messages, perceived fame on the Internet and with offline peers, personal improvements such as better English and/or Portuguese communication skills, friendships, sense of belonging, helping others, and hobby
Loss of ROI Given	Loss of ratings	Decrease in downloads	Decrease in downloads
	FORMAL	INFORMAL	

Figure 5. Formal versus informal (online) distribution of U.S. TV shows in Brazil.
Source: Mendes Moreira de Sa, 2013, p. 251.

A comparison between the informal distribution of television shows among pirate audiences and the formal distribution of TV shows can be made. After reviewing the power of word-of-mouth, social sharing, subtitles that become famous, or the pervasiveness of links for downloads (especially those first links that are posted before others), it is clear that pirate audiences can serve as gatekeepers of content and that they have the capacity to influence the consumption of content significantly. Even though media owners formally control global television distribution, audiences are gaining more control through their interconnections on online networks. Such audiences, therefore, are becoming more resistant to traditional models and are innovatively developing creative ways of consuming and distributing content, as illustrated by the emergence of a subculture of pirate audiences who have found a way to circumvent the system through an online community and the use of social media.

I argue that these audiences resist the standard television broadcasting system in favor of creating their own system of media distribution and consumption by utilizing the Internet. Frequently the interactions between online audiences go beyond simply accessing content and result in forming social communities on the Internet. As a consequence—and mixing work and pleasure—there is a significant social element associated with these informal practices, just as there are social motivations for people watching television content through authorized sources. Such informal practices form part of a broader

movement that aims to promote social change and innovation in the global distribution of television and other cultural products and artifacts.

Pirate audiences are innovative, selective, segmented, collaborative, amateurish, and global. They are driven by affective motivations and influenced by other audiences, while serving as gatekeepers, free culture adapters, fans, and adaptive social networkers. All of these potential features may combine to form an everyday practice, or just a few of them may become part of audiences' viewing habits and combined with more traditional viewing habits, such as sitting on the couch and watching linear television broadcasting.

Overall, it is obvious that the field of piracy is changing, and that further research is needed on the practices of new media audiences, regardless of whether or not they are considered to be "piratical." I conclude that, rather than classifying all forms of television downloading and distribution as piracy, we should focus on understanding the complexity behind informal practices.

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