# A social reboot for illegal downloaders

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Unauthorized downloading of digital goods, including copyright music, videos, computer games, and images has become an increasing problem for content providers and those who hold the copyright on such goods and expect remuneration for distribution. A new research study in the International Journal of Business Environment suggests that content providers must take a pragmatic view based on social consensus to persuade illicit downloaders that their behaviour is economically and ethically unacceptable behaviour among their peer group or other social group to which they belong.

Eva Hofmann of the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, UK and Elfriede Penz of the Institute for International Marketing Management, at Vienna University of Economics and Business, in Austria, explain that unauthorised sharing of digital content, often referred to as "piracy", is well-entrenched in popular culture. However, they have discerned a difference in the way those downloading pirated content and the legal downloaders decide on how to obtain the content they desire from the internet.

Inherent in the problem for copyright holders is that digital [goods](#) can be duplicated endlessly without loss of fidelity, this benefit of the digital realm makes piracy easy but also points to the value of such goods as being less than traditional, physical items in the realm of content, such as CDs and DVDs. This makes the moral decision less onerous for illegal downloaders than were they to steal a CD or DVD from a high street shop. Interestingly, some earlier studies have suggested that [online piracy](#) does not detrimentally affects sales of physical goods and that many so-

called pirates actually spend more on entertainment overall. Nevertheless, the sale of CDs and related goods are in decline and the industry blames piracy largely for declining numbers of units shifted. Conversely, consumers often cite the high price of digital goods as justification for engaging in unauthorised downloading.

"In the era of digitisation, exchanging goods for material and immaterial compensation or for a feeling of sheer altruism remains an important human behaviour," the team says, "But rather than tightening enforcement to protect their assets content providers would benefit more by initiating communication with the illegal downloaders and profiting from global online networking rather than fighting it."