



**Web Hackers or Culture Transmitting Agents:  
Internet and Consumption Patterns of Cultural Goods among Algerian Students**

**Leila Hammoud\***

A. Mira University Bejaia, Email : hleila0014@gmail.com

*Received: 29/04/2021*

*Accepted: 08./06/2021*

*Published: 26./8/2021*

*DOI. 10.53284/2120-008-002-010*

***abstract***

*Piracy invests digitized cultural products and allows the entanglement between the piracy of cultural products on Internet and current cultural practices*

*The study aims at interviewing privileged witnesses to the cultural products piracy practice in order to understand their roles as transmitting agents of culture and to grasp the pirate user's own culture and its representations of the practice of piracy of cultural property*

***Key words:*** Cultural Property, cultural practices, piracy, Algeria.

---

<sup>1</sup> \* Corresponding author



## **1. Introduction**

It is widely accepted that the proliferation of ICTs has intensely marked our social life, and that Internet is increasingly becoming a central pivot around which our daily activities are organized and which delineates significantly our positions within contemporary societies. The various uses of Internet give rise to multiple profiles of users, hence, this impressive communicational window open on the world. Among these multiple profiles emerges that of the «pirate» user who because of his/her status and his/her ambivalent practices support the polemics on the social implications of Internet. These controversies are reinforced by an increasingly visible observation at the global level whereby piracy becomes more and more inherent in the appropriation of Internet, especially since this “...piracy of digital goods on a large scale by the general public... [Added to] the one already existing by professionals...” (Dvidovici-Nora, 2005). Piracy affects the whole panoply of digital goods but seems to endow particularly digitized cultural products which spontaneously attract the lust of pirate Internet users. Beyond that, a new reality emerges that is the entanglement between the piracy of cultural products on Internet and the current cultural practices. This reality certifies the relationship between this new medium of digitized cultural products and the social practice of culture, renewed and adapted to the needs of this new context of practices. Thanks to the opportunities that Internet can offer, culture becomes accessible to all and often for free. What makes The Internet “pirate” a new figure among the transmitting agents of culture, acting in a structuration of cultural practice that goes beyond its usual traditional context and enters into a “... new model of culture transmission, in which an out-of-institution actor (the pirate) finds an online audience and adopts a cultural broadcaster posture traditionally restricted to public institutions and the media.” (Tétu, 2012)

## **2. Statement of the Problem:**

The theme of piracy of cultural products raises both the problem of Internet use and that of cultural practices. Culture in the digital age calls for a redefinition of all its paradigms; surpassing institutional frameworks; in other words, it seeks technical support in order to overcome the frameworks of the natural reproduction of social inequalities through the democratization of access to cultural products both in the same society and at the transnational level.. Overriding its meaning “... first thought in anthropological terms, specific to humanity, a definition that characterizes it in reference to a corpus of works valued by a given society is identified.” (Fleury, 2010, p30). These works through which specific “cultural universes” are constructed, relating to social positioning recline with the advent of the digital world to be more open to society as a whole and even to reach the majority of the world’s societies. Hereafter, the piracy of cultural products becomes a privileged means of this sharing of cultural property, which has the power to dissolve all social, cultural, economic, linguistic and political borders. In this new dynamic of the



exchange and flow of cultural goods new questions emerge which are sometimes enthusiastic and favorable to this new trend and sometimes are unqualified and critical, fear of a focalized reproduction of social, cultural and civilisational hierarchies in the field of cultures. Addressing inequalities in use, non-use, digital divide, etc. , emerging issues of the cultural effect of piracy and consumption of fake cultural products which become the new tools of “cultural dependence” (Benchenna,2011) and “bottom-up globalization” (Madiba,2010) because of the pirated and fake content "carrying a substantial trend of homogenization(Madiba,2010) But for some authors, bearers of “cultural virtues” and reserve “the circulation of heritage... and ... cultural diversity” (Tétu, 2012). With these vast debates, raised by the practice of the piracy of cultural products, meaningful questions are being brought up about digital culture, giving rise to a new “spirit of the times” which still eludes scientific investigations and attempts to theorize due to its novelty and complexity. In this respect, we attempt to question privileged witnesses of the practice of piracy of cultural products in order to understand their motives, their positions in the flow of cultural goods and their roles as transmitting agents of culture, their own and that of the “elsewhere” with the aim of seizing the pirate user’s own culture and his/her representations of the practice of piracy of cultural property. Our questions are bound to the approach of appropriation which challenges the contexts of use and the differences of adaptation of users to different situations of practice.

### 3. Methods:

The topic of piracy of cultural products is usually tackled from its economic or legal dimension; however, it is rarely evoked by its cultural effect and even more rarely by the profile of the actors who are the «Pirates» of the web. With this exploratory study on «web hackers», we wish for contributing to the understanding of this phenomenon by addressing the actors of cultural goods piracy. These actors, the «pirates» represent for us “privileged” witnesses. These are people who, by their position, action or responsibility, have a sound knowledge of the problem. These witnesses may belong to the public being investigated or be external nevertheless are of broad interest to the public...” (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1986, p. 63). For the needs of this study, we conducted ten interviews with students from the University of Bejaia, recognized by their peers as “expert pirates” of cultural products. This group of volunteer privileged witnesses was formed by the snowball effect or several interviewees proposed to mobilize one or more people of their surroundings (they talked about networks to signify their networks of real relationships within the university and also their network of virtual relationships, in this case, it was necessary to conduct interviews via Internet) to contribute to the study. Finally, we chose to conduct exploratory face-to-face interviews with students in completion of their studies at our university. The students’ age ranges from 20 to 26 years old, from different majors: medicine, science and technology, sociology and economics. These interviews were utilized as a source of information to report on the properties of piracy of cultural products in the Algerian context.



#### **4.1. Youth Internet in Algeria:**

The use of Internet in Algeria is now being more and more widespread amidst society; the infrastructure has increased in quantity and quality and the network servers have diversified. In the mid-1990s, Internet began to emerge mainly in companies and public institutions, where it was furnished for professional uses. Subsequently, Algerians witnessed the arrival of Internet cafés in the urban milieu; places of Internet connection created by private initiatives as a commercial activity. In addition to being a niche for the creation of new job opportunities, cyberspaces will play an important social role in the generalization of access to Internet, and in the diversification of users; which in the beginning most users were solely males, ended up opening up to girls who populate now the premises of the cyberspaces until late hours of the day, which can constitute a privileged field for observing the socio-cultural changes of the Algerian society concerning the gender division of the public space in particular. These Internet cafés were places of predilection where young users were introduced to the use of Internet, then to acquire know-how, increasingly sophisticated, in the manipulation of the technological tool and the appropriation of Internet and cyberspaces, as a new space for action, exchange and visibility affecting the flow of their daily activities. In this study, all respondents said that they had experienced the Internet for the first time in the neighborhood's Internet cafés. An encounter close to that of a person with whom one begins to become timidly acquainted, and which gradually becomes for us a familiar person, and later an indispensable companion. Meziane a 20-year-old spontaneously states "... it is impossible for me to imagine my life without Internet. It has become a vital need for me". After the Internet cafés stage, comes the time when Internet invaded our homes, by the various devices, aimed at equipping Algerian families with technological equipment and successively the generalization of Internet access: "... Operation OUSRATIC ... focusing on two objectives. The first procedure is to equip families... with a computer... the second is strategic and aims to generalize ICT access and Internet use ..." (Merah, Boudhan, 2012, p 411). This system was followed by others such as the «e-Algeria 2013» plan and the adoption of the 3 G since the end of year 2013. Then the new devices of wireless Internet and the generalization of the latest technical devices (3 G, 4 G) which contribute more and more to its generalization. This process resulted in new forms of sociability that have begun to appear, particularly during this huge gap noticed between generations, in their relationship to technology and their representation of the use and appropriation of ICTs. These generations of young people are born in a very frail socio-political context (the Black Decade) nonetheless at the same time; they socialized very early with ICTs and Internet. They "... have been able to benefit from this new tool both for their social life and for their ... economic engraving..... Thus, in a period that was not very favorable to them, the Net imposed itself on them as an opportunity to act and adapt. They have become pioneers of practices that are becoming more widespread ..." (Dagnaud, 2013,



p. 143).. For these young people who can be described as «Digital natives», Internet is a living environment where they find: friendship, distraction, escape, information and especially where they can build themselves as free actors and masters of their destiny. Twenty-one-year-old Hassan, an economics student, says: I am constantly connected to Internet. This is my world; I find myself inside it and shape a life that suits me ...” A tendency to build a particular type of relationship “... ludicrous and communicative ...” (Dauphin, 2012) to ICT and the Internet. Young people discourses about Internet give an image of a rich El Dorado of its resources open to all. It is enough just to know how to use it to profit from it. Furthermore, “... the Net makes a dream possible: cultural consumption for free. It promotes the ideal of a culture for all and adapted to each, as if immersion in a bath of images and sounds were as necessary to live as the air we breathe... ” (Dagnaud, 2013, p156). This representation of Internet finds its sources in the youth digital culture, which in turn translates the frameworks of sociability and new forms of engraving within society, and which seems to further dissociate from those of the elderly. This juvenile digital culture is “... as a set of immediate values, practices and knowledge, where communication (everywhere and all the time) and new media play a key role in creating and maintaining a form of civic sociability and in allowing identity building ...” (Dagnaud, 2013, p156). This new culture generates a set of specific behaviors and attitudes, which are reflected in “... digital practices of young people [who] are essentially ludicrous: video games, communication, film and music consumption, and pursuits into the emotional and sensational when surfing the internet» (Dagnaud, 2013, p156). In this cultural universe specific to younger generations, the “for free culture” becomes a practice, which despite its ambivalence directs a very large fraction of the forms of appropriation of Internet. Moreover, hacking on the web which in spite of its illegal, immoral and normally prohibited connotation, appears as a culture of the user ignoring these limits that seem from another age, since they confront this «pirate spirit» (Dagnaud, 2013, p156). which indulges in appropriation and sharing to compensate for the rarity of cultural goods and the distinction of the consumption of these goods. The pirate user fleeing any logic other than his/her own in order to take what rightfully belongs to him/her in his/her virtual world open to all possibilities. It is based on a basic and very simple rule: “... free....[for him/her] is a mode of access “normally” expected on the Net in terms of cultural practices, and piracy, a way of consuming that does not ... pose great case of morality... ” (Dagnaud, 2013, p156).

#### **4.2. Cultural practices and Virtual Culture:**

The issue of cultural practices is now addressed from its digital aspect and the predominance of the “screen culture”. Technological developments have always clearly marked the connection to culture, assumed as works of the mind by the evolution of its data carriers as well as its nature and its contents. In the digital age “the conditions for access to



culture have changed greatly under the combined effects of the dematerialization of content, the spread of Internet ... and progress ... in computer equipments, game consoles and smart phones ...” (Donnat, 2009). This finding concluded from the social context of cultural practices in the countries of the North, can also find a similar finding in the countries of the South, in particular with regard to the gradually rapid development of the appropriation of multimedia computer technologies, both in terms of equipment and in terms of use and know-how. A large number of observers agree that ICT users in particular Internet in the countries of the South, follow the global trend of repositioning cultural goods in the field of dematerialization and their consumption through virtual mediation of screens and that: “This evolution has definitively dedicated the screens as a privileged medium for our associations with culture ... With digital technology and the versatility of today’s available terminals, most cultural practices are now converging on screens... everything is now viewable on a screen and accessible via Internet... ” (Donnat, 2009). . This new “screen culture” resonates with the minds of young people who are “... bearers of an ideology of communication and mostly fall under the technophile category” (Daufin, 2012).

The Webdialn@ study in which 18,064 Internet users were surveyed reveals that 90% of Internet users in Algeria their ages range from 15 to 45 years old, which confirms the juvenile nature of Algerian users. More than half of respondents (53.1%) report using Internet for downloading music, software and movies. The field of cultural practices and the flow of cultural products appears as the field that has extraordinarily merged with the virtual space and has taken full advantage of the opportunities that Internet can offer furnishers as well as consumers of these products in terms of availability, ease of use, cost reduction and even consumption in return of nothing.. These days, cultural practices can no longer be comprehended without the digital dimension. Gradually the production, flow and consumption of cultural products has exploited the virtual space and detached itself from the usual physical supports. Internet has now become the favorite space for the life cycle of cultural products and their consumption. The sharing of cultural products has always been inherent in the nature of the productions of the human spirit. They can claim an aesthetic, cultural and economic value only by the judgment of the other in their regard and from which in its turn derives a large part of its credibility from the broadest possible spreading. While acknowledging this need to be publicized, made known and consumed by others, these works of the spirit have always been recognized as a property of the one who produces them; thus the different forms of protection of intellectual rights and copyrights. The adequacy of a recognized ownership of cultural products and their need for broadcast and sharing has been respected, more or less strictly, in the traditional channels of flow and consumption of cultural products. With the advent of the Internet, this balance has been disrupted by the very essence of the network, which is intended as a space open to equity and free access for all and the participation of users in its improvement, hence the emergence of “the culture access for free” which becomes inherent in the representations of





Internet users of cultural products and their flow and sharing through the Internet. The dematerialization of cultural goods has led to a drop in the consumption of physical media of culture (CDs, DVDs, books, etc.) as it has facilitated the exchange of content and reinforced the desire to share, the premises of which have accompanied the birth of Internet motivated by “a culture of access for free that is particularly popular among Internet users nowadays ...” (Proulx, Goldenberg, 2010) and which finds its sources in the spirit of the pioneering founders of Internet who nurtured an egalitarian and democratic ideal allowing free access to the virtues of this new tool of communication. «Castells describes in depth the alchemy that took place between four sub-cultures to lead to the general philosophy of Internet «construction»: that of the technical elite, that of hackers, that carried by the first virtual communities, and finally that of entrepreneurs ...” (Galand, 2013)

#### **4.3. Culture and piracy in Algeria:**

In the collective representation of Algerians, culture accepts two essential meanings; on the one hand, folklore, which includes all the manifestations of traditional life: culinary tradition, clothing and artistic (popular music, ceremonies, etc.) and on the other hand the important musical events organized mainly during the summer and on the occasion of the great national festivals to which are invited the stars of oriental music accompanied by the most popular Algerian singers. This representation of culture is delivered by the national press and is constantly present in the official discourse of culture which place it in a privileged position in the implementation of annual cultural programs, presented as a pseudo-cultural policy but which is in reality a show policy. In this perspective, participation in culture is shaped under the form of a channeling of the collective practice of culture through participation in major shows during which audiences are in a situation of direct consumption of musical products essentially. In addition to these important cultural events, exhibitions and meetings on the promotion of the heritage and products of traditional culture are organized, enveloped in a discourse that aspires to preserve the authenticity and components of the historical identity of the Algerian society. This juxtaposition between the demonstrations of a modern culture oriented towards consumption, leisure and entertainment and a traditional culture oriented towards authenticity, created a situation of confusion and ambiguity emphasized by the lack of a clear cultural policy that generates a situation of cultural vacuum that the younger generations try to fill by turning to foreign products.

#### **4.4. Recreational Piracy:**

It is in these circumstances that young people are turning to increased consumption of counterfeit and pirated products on Internet. They often make of it an activity of distraction; seeking to satisfy their tastes and follow the fashion effect. For our interviewees, the consumption of cultural goods can be summarized in three essential elements: listening to



music, watching films and occasionally reading a book. These goods are accessible on physical media which can be purchased, especially local content but which are consumed in a dematerialized product mode downloaded on Internet. Yacine tells us: “My favorite hobby is music. I am always looking for new things on Internet. Anyway, I only listen to North American music, so I don’t have to go and buy the mediocre CD burners; I find everything on Internet. What matters to me is to satisfy my taste and to enjoy moments of escape”. This practice of searching for cultural objects on Internet reappears in the speeches of these young students as a spontaneous act, of an extraordinary facility that does not relate to an ethical problem. It is a need that must be met. To the question: Has Internet changed the way you consume your favorite cultural products? The answers prove the tendency to adopt screen culture since all the interviewees admitted that they had abandoned the media usually bought or exchanged with friends, to the benefit of the content downloaded on Internet; the offer is more abundant, the quality is better and especially «the pleasure of giving oneself to look for films, videos or music to live moments of very passionate pleasure», bearing in mind that all these moments of pleasure does not cost a single Dinar. Online video games are also involved in the implication that links piracy to leisure and distraction. Ahmed, a medical student, says: I sometimes leave my computer on for days to download a recent video game. After a long day of work, I start playing for days, sometimes forgetting to sleep. It’s my way of escaping and clearing my head.”

#### **4.5. Piracy and sharing:**

Sharing is an essential feature of cultural products. It is also a mode of functioning of the spaces of expressions and navigation on Internet. And that continually nourishes the practice of downloading and hacking. The "pirate" user acts in a relational network and gains its strength from the interactions between the members of the network: exchange of content, CDs, addresses and innovative tracks... . Sharing his/her «loot» is common among web hackers. From the words of our interlocutors, we can draw three paths of exchange of cultural products: sharing with close friends: to share the pleasure of consuming adored products and being sought in the first place. Through this first-degree sharing, we seek the strengthening of our group of belonging with which we share distinctive signs that include artistic tastes and preferences which leads to the strengthening of social ties. Second, there is the exchange between different groups of peers, which, while moving away from the first core emitter of the shared product, will widen the circle of exchange and expand the network of contacts and enrich the panoply of products exchanged. In the third degree comes the large-scale sharing, which only one interviewee has evoked; the exchange in the protocol (peer-to-peer) which for a long time has been very fruitful at the level of the exchanges of pirated products at the international level.





#### 4.6. Piracy and Pirate's Identity:

Internet enables the construction of identity; a representation of self and that of others. Writings on Internet piracy reflect a rather negative image of the "hacker" of the web, since he/she is a person who engages in illegal activities; obstruct the law and the rules of morality. The «pirate» is in some writings «an offender» which by exceeding a certain degree of ability becomes even a criminal. All these elements of the «pirate» identity of the web are built according to the norm of the duty of respect of intellectual and artistic property nevertheless ignore the logic in which this «pirate» acts. On Internet he/she is in his/her territory, he/she makes use of the advantages of free, instantaneous, sharing and exchange. In our interviews we noticed the reluctance to accept the term "pirate"; some show mocking laughter, others prefer silence, while some have clearly rejected the term "pirate"; Ahmed replied: I don't like being called a pirate. I'm just a highly-qualified Internet user compared to others." It is therefore difficult to account for a clear profile of web "hackers". The complexity of the acts and the diversity of the objectives make us face constantly renewed situations and beyond any attempt of categorization.

#### 5. Conclusion:

We have chosen to conclude this reflection with a description of the scene closing the 2014 anti-piracy campaign in Algeria. This description, published in the newspaper "Le Soir d'Algérie" of April 5, 2014, testifies once again to the chronic cultural vacuum in Algeria and the marginality of the cultural policy of the State in relation to the energy furnished by young people to animate a self-produced cultural demonstration. A question arises after reading this description the one to which Nidam Abdi advanced; "Bringing artists and dignitaries together around a massive destruction of pirated media would be the best approach to raise the awareness of Algerians about intellectual property?" (Abdi, 2014). K. B wrote in his article entitled Opération «bulldozer» in the "Palais de la culture": "The engine of the machine, to the assault of the mountain of audiovisual and other media, lying on the ground, roaring. A roar of tracks and the steel colossus is found in the middle of 1.7 million counterfeit audiovisual and multimedia media.... The gigantic arm-wrestling machine ... rises and falls on the plastic pile in a deafening noise... [This] operation took place in the presence of ... the Minister of Culture ... and a large number of artists ..." The symbolism is strong and the demonization of piracy is fully expressed, but the question which rises: is piracy the only one responsible for the derisory situation of culture in Algeria? Is it the cause of the failure of cultural policy? Questions in quest of answers?



## 5. Bibliography List :

- Fleury (Laurent), Sociologie de la culture et des pratiques culturelles, Paris, Armand Colin, 2010.
- Merah (Aissa), Boudhan (Yamine), Représentations sociales et usages de l'Internet. Approche de l'appropriation des innovations, in Usages et pratiques des publics dans les pays du Sud : Des médias classiques aux TIC (Actes du colloque interdisciplinaire d'Agadir (Maroc)), sous la dir. de A. Amsidder, F. Daghami et F. Toumi, Agadir, Volubilis, pp. 409 - 416.
- Quivy (Raymond), Campenhoudt (Luc Van), Manuel de recherche en sciences sociales, Paris, Dunod, 1986.
- Benchenna (Abdelfattah), (2011), Les produits culturels issus de la contrefaçon au Maroc : outils de renforcement de la dépendance culturelle ?, in Mattelart T (dir), Piratage audiovisuels, les voies souterraines de la mondialisation culturelle, Paris, INA- Deboeck, 2011. Version numérique, Consulté en mai 2014.
- Dauphin (Florian), « Culture et pratiques numériques juvéniles : Quels usages pour quelles compétences ? », *Questions Vives* [En ligne], Vol.7 n°17 | 2012, mis en ligne le 15 novembre 2012, consulté le 06 avril 2014. URL : <http://questionsvives.revues.org/988> ; DOI : 10.4000/questions\_vives.988, Consulté en décembre 2014.
- Davidovici-Nora Myriam. Les analyses économiques du piratage des biens numériques. In: Revue française d'économie, Volume 20 N°2, 2005. pp. 107-149. [http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/rfec\\_0769-0479\\_2005\\_num\\_20\\_2\\_1574](http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/rfec_0769-0479_2005_num_20_2_1574). Consulté en mai 2014.
- Dagnaud (Monique), Génération Y. Les jeunes et les réseaux sociaux, de la dérision à la subversion, Paris, les presses Sciences PO, 2013.
- Donnat (Olivier), Les pratiques culturelles des Français à l'ère numérique. Éléments de synthèse 1997-2008, Culture études, Paris, 2009 – 5, <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/deps> . Consulté en mai 2014
- Galand (Jean-Marc), Manuel Castells La galaxie Internet : Synthèse <http://www.outi.be/documents/castells.pdf>
- Madiba (George), La contrefaçon des produits culturels médiatiques ; énonciation d'une mondialisation par le bas, 2010, [periodicals.narr.de/index.php/lendemains/article/viewFile/428/237](http://periodicals.narr.de/index.php/lendemains/article/viewFile/428/237), Consulté en mai 2014.



- Proulx (Serge), Goldenberg (Anne), « Internet et la culture de la gratuité », Revue du MAUSS, 2010/1 n° 35, p. 503-517. DOI : 10.3917/rdm.035.0503, Consulté en septembre 2013.
- Tétu (Martin), « Des vertus culturelles du piratage à l'ère numérique : ou comment le peer-to-peer peut contribuer à la circulation du patrimoine québécois et à la diversité culturelle », Éthique publique [En ligne], vol. 14, n° 2 | 2012, mis en ligne le 28 août 2013, consulté le 30 juin 2014. URL : <http://ethiquepublique.revues.org/1015> ; DOI : 10.4000/ethiquepublique.1015
- WebDialn@™, Etude sur les Usages et Perceptions des Internautes du Web Algérien, Dossier de Presse, Alger, 2008. [www.webdialna.com/pdf/presse.pdf](http://www.webdialna.com/pdf/presse.pdf). Consulté en 2012