



Synamedia

Understanding sports fans and what drives their behaviors

Charting global sports piracy



AMPERE
ANALYSIS

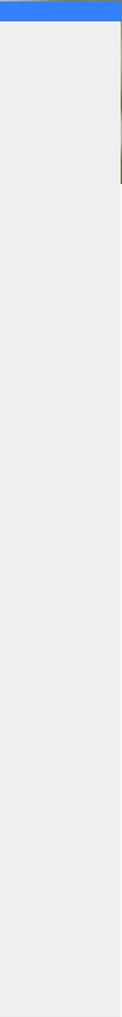




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1.0 Summary

This report is the first in a new series of sports-focused studies from Synamedia.

Based on groundbreaking research conducted by media analyst firm *Ampere Analysis*, this white paper covers more than 6,000 TV-viewing sports fans in ten countries (see full details in the [Methodology](#) chapter) and reveals differences in the ways they consume illegal sports content, and the attitudes and behaviors that underpin consumers' use of pirate content providers.

Understanding the traits of each type of sports fan and the behavioral groups within them offers a clear route to reducing demand for illegal content, encouraging uptake of legitimate services, and managing the impact on the industry. Other aspects of viewers' behavior—such as the way different groups discover and access content from pirates and the types of sports that lead them on the path to illegal consumption—point to simple, effective, ways that piracy could be reduced.





“This problem is constantly evolving. Rights owners need to keep in mind that there's no one single best practice that they can implement to tackle this problem, and it has to be a multi-faceted approach.”

—Sports league rights holder—



Most fans consume some form of illegal sports content

Summary: the headline figures

Distinct clusters of behavior highlight the triggers for illegal viewing

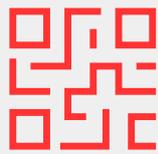
This report provides the industry with a detailed understanding of the different **attitudes, motivations and behaviors of sports fans** accessing illegal content across the **five distinct consumer clusters** we have identified. This detail points to the solutions needed to tackle and reduce such behavior, reduce the demand for pirated content across the industry, and convert losses from piracy into incremental revenue opportunities. A detailed assessment of specific solutions will be provided in subsequent reports in this series.



16%

Just 16% of online sports fans say they *never* watch via illegal sources of sport content

Nearly a third of those who watch illegal content regularly claim they do so because the event they watch isn't shown locally



31%

29%



Over a quarter of those using illegal sites and services have paid these services for access



51%

Over half of sports fans consume sports content from pirate services at least once a month

44%



But 44% of sports fans are already watching sports content via legal OTT video services every week

89%



Most sports fans are willing to pay for their favorite events. 89% of sports fans have a pay TV or subscription OTT service in the home



42%

The biggest viewers of illegal sports streams are also among some of the most engaged fans. 42% of those regularly watching illegal content services watch sports fixtures daily. This figure is over 60% higher than the average sports fan, meaning approaches to piracy must be considered and well-targeted

Fans are defined by their attitudes to sport and illegal content

Summary: the segments



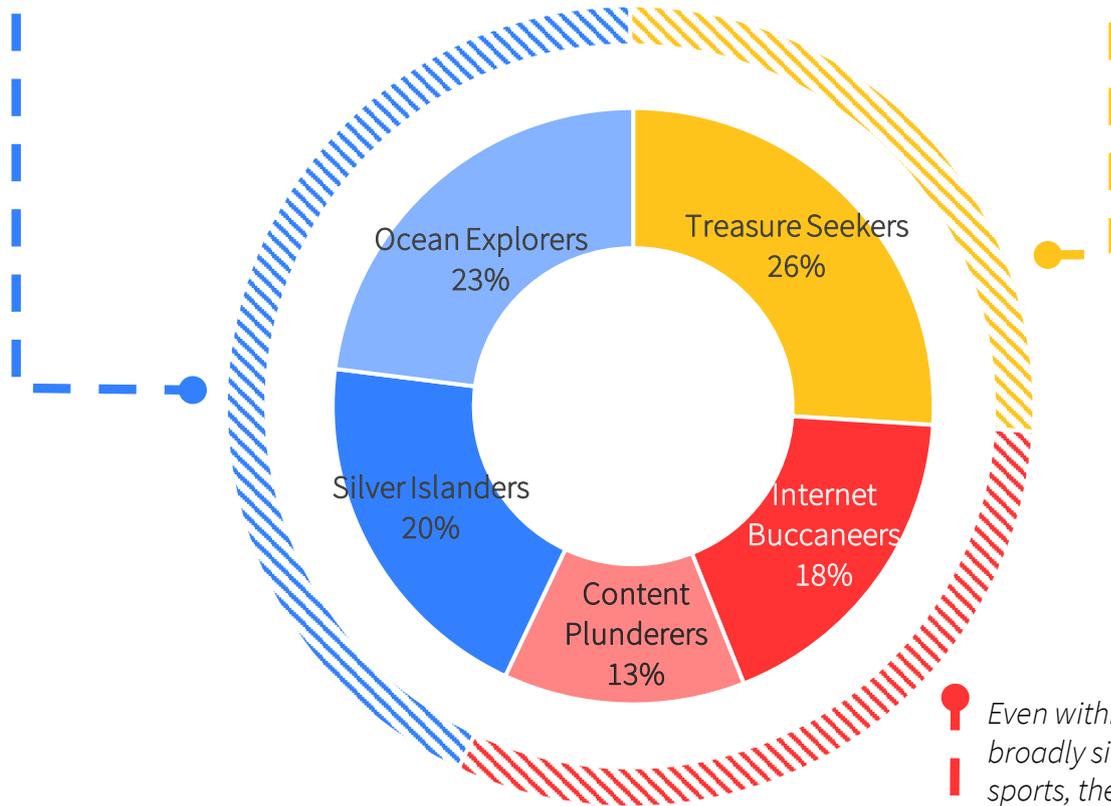
Casual Spectators —43%

Two sub-segments: *Silver Islanders* & *Ocean Explorers*. Occasional sports fans, enjoy events and tournaments over leagues. Much more likely to have basic or free TV. Older, most over 55.



Loyal Stalwarts —26%

Traditional viewing habits: pay TV sports channels on the main TV screen at home. Older middle-age, male-skew. In households with older children. In full- or part-time employment.




Fickle Superfans —31%

Two sub-segments: *Internet Buccaneers* & *Content Plunderers*. Enjoy the most diverse range of global and national sports. Multiscreen viewing: on every device and screen, at home and outside, alone or with friends. Younger – in their 20s and early 30s.

Even within groups with broadly similar interests in sports, there are important sub-categories of ethical views and behaviors that will allow specific targeting to combat illegal content consumption.





2.0 Attitudes to sport and illegal content

Global spend on TV sports rights is set to total nearly \$50bn* in 2020. Protecting that value is the key to maintaining access to a wide range of sports and events on television.

Analysis of the attitudes and behavior of viewers within each group reveals who watches content from pirates, why they do it—and, crucially, what might compel them to stop.

TV-watching sports fans fall into three groups: *Loyal Stalwarts* who love traditional pay TV; *Fickle Superfans* who are sports mad; and *Casual Spectators*, more interested in the occasional sporting event.

For operators and rights holders, the key is to understand the different behaviors and use the opportunity to turn illegal behavior into legal sports viewing—and revenues.



*source: Ampere Analysis Content Markets





“We assume 30% of consumers would pay the subscription if they understood [what they're doing is wrong] and could be converted.”

—Sports OTT platform—



Loyal Stalwart fans are least likely to stray—but many still do

The three types of sport fan



The **first group** of fans are **Loyal Stalwarts** and found disproportionately in soccer-mad nations like Brazil, Italy and the UK. These traditional fans take pay TV and enjoy major sports, leagues and competitions.

Often older middle-aged men watching at home, we've termed these fans **Treasure Seekers** because they use illegal content services when they can't find every game they want on their main TV service.



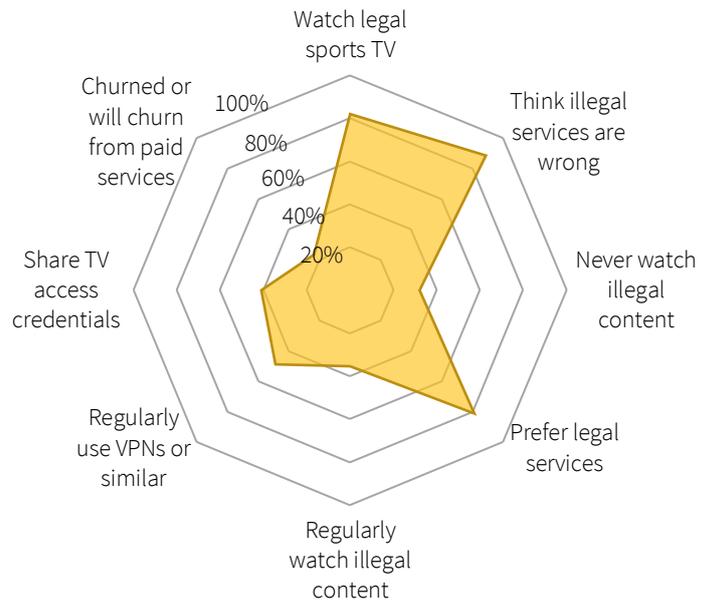
The **second group**, comprising some of the biggest sports fans, is marked out by a single common characteristic: they all consume pirate content, and most of them do it frequently.

These **Fickle Superfans** enjoy not only the big international sports like soccer, but also a wide and varied selection of local and niche games. Typically younger and often living in developing markets, fickle superfans fall into two clusters with very different moral attitudes.

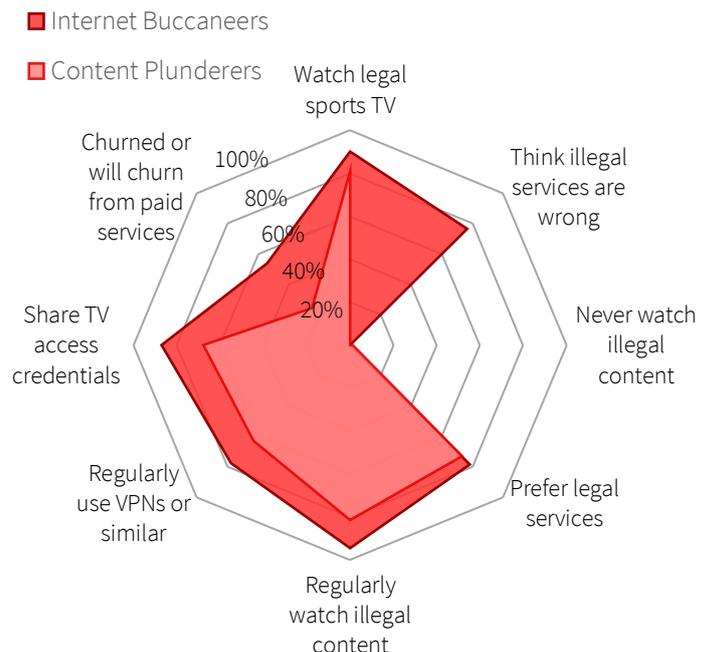
Internet Buccaneers are motivated financially and turn to pirate providers to get cheaper access to a full range of sport when this would otherwise mean taking subscriptions from several providers. Their moral stance singles them out: despite their buccaneering approach, this group claims not to agree with piracy, especially when the pirates are making money.

By contrast, **Content Plunderers** are driven to consume pirate sports by the lure of immediate, ready access to a wide range of sports to supplement their paid-for package. This group contrasts with the Internet Buccaneers in that they see nothing wrong with piracy.

Loyal Stalwarts: key characteristics



Fickle Superfans: key characteristics



Different motivations divide Casual Spectators into two sub-groups

The three types of sport fan



The third and biggest group of sports fans are far less faithful to legitimate TV providers. These **Casual Spectators**

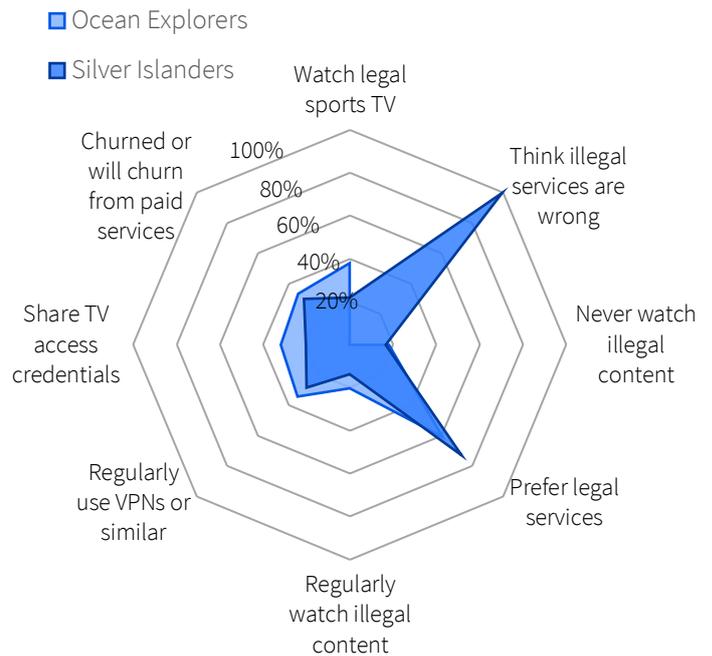
watch TV sports less frequently—but a significant proportion of them also consume illegal sports content from time to time.

Less likely to be hooked on regular league sports, these consumers are often drawn to big event-based sports—whether it’s the Olympic Games, Wimbledon Tennis, the Tour de France or Rugby World Cup final. They are surprisingly active viewers of illicit sports content, and also fall into two clusters:

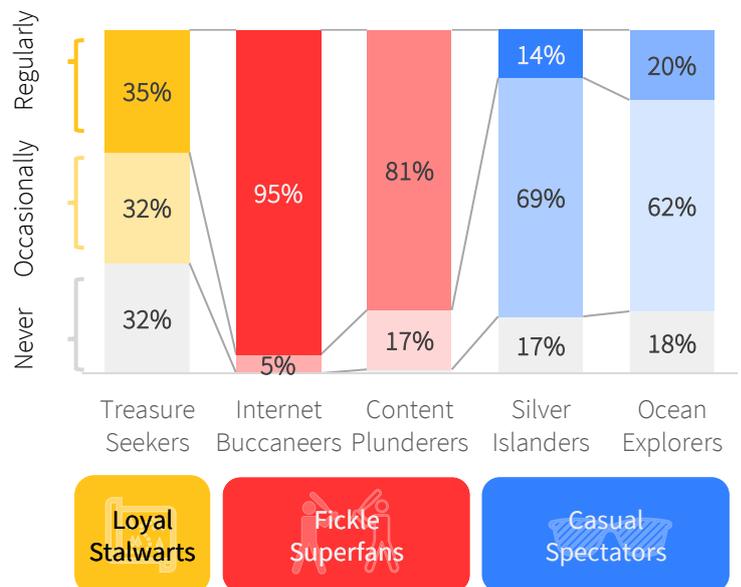
Silver Islanders are likely to be silver haired, retired, or unemployed, and in a household with no children pestering for access to sports. They are the least likely of any group to pay for legitimate sports services. They say they respect intellectual property, universally believing piracy is morally wrong: many of them say they would rather not watch at all than go to pirate sources. This does not appear to stop them though, with more than 80% consuming pirate sports content at least occasionally.

Ocean Explorers are very similar in most respects except one: they have a polar-opposite attitude to other people’s intellectual property and see nothing wrong with roaming the sea of pirate content to see what’s out there. They all believe piracy is acceptable, especially if the pirate provider isn’t making money. Ocean Explorers feel they don’t watch enough to justify a proper subscription.

Casual Spectators: key characteristics



Consumer segments: frequency of accessing illegal sport content (%)





Routes to access

There are many ways for consumers to access content from pirates.

Some are simple, such as searching out illegal feeds of live sports broadcast on mainstream social media sites like Facebook Live, Twitch and YouTube, often streamed by individual pirates.

Many consumers also report using dedicated pirate

streaming aggregator sites to find live sports events, either free-to-view or paid.

More determined consumers use illicit IPTV software services or IPTV apps on an adapted streaming device to view on their main TV. This requires a greater degree of technical skill and effort and is more likely to involve the consumer paying to access the content from pirates.





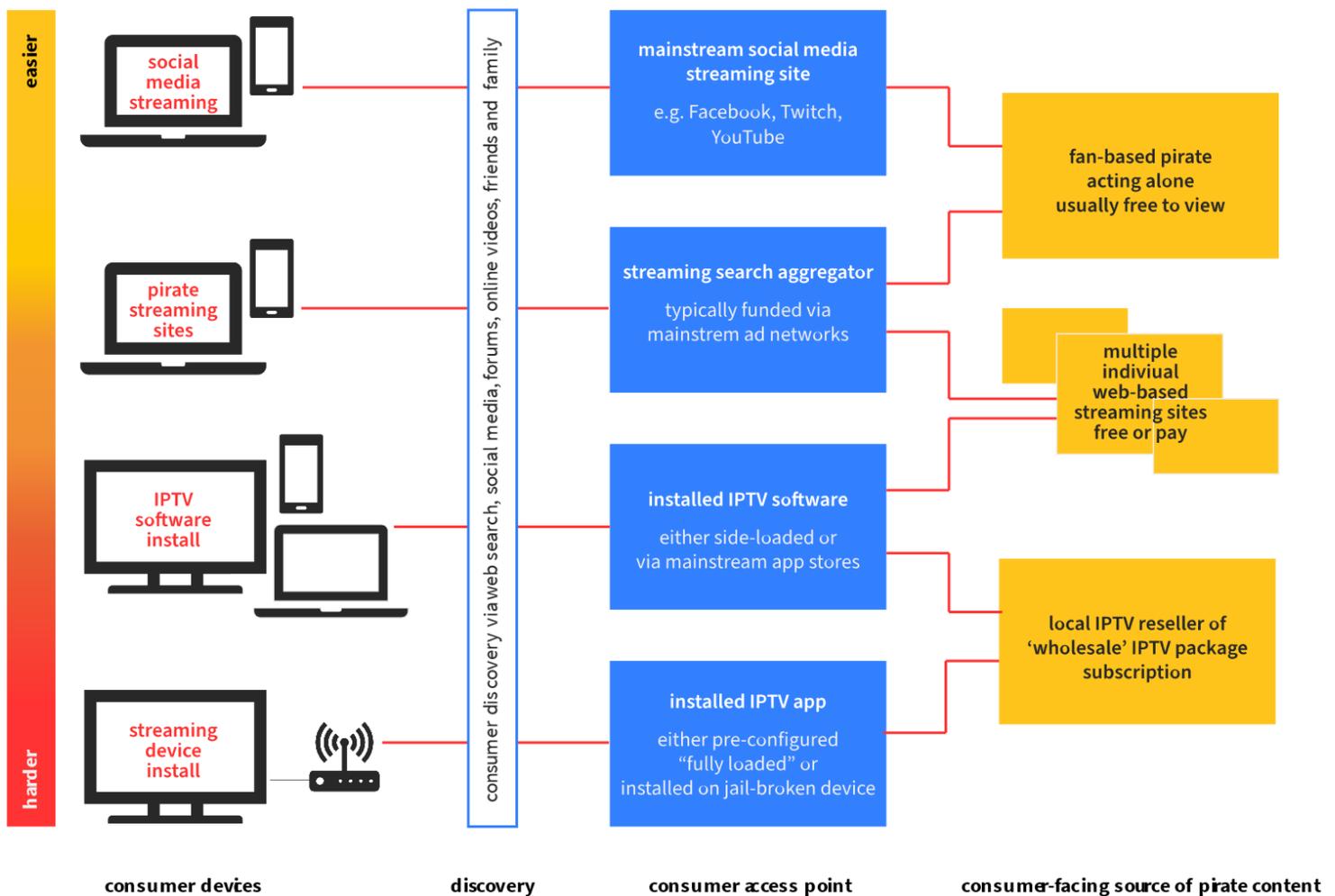
“Sometimes people use an illegal stream just because they can't access the content easily or it's too expensive for them. We made the content accessible with high quality delivery, and that seems to be working.”

—Sports rights distributor—

Mechanisms and devices used to find and access content

Consumers' routes to piracy

How do fans gain access to pirated material?



Understanding the triggers of piracy is key

Drivers for piracy

- **Sports fan engagement**—the biggest sports fans are consistently more likely to view illegal content, mostly to access games not included in their main TV package.
- **Access in territory**—when no legitimate providers in a country have rights for an event, consumers feel they have no legal viewing option.
- **Access on devices**—consumers who want to watch on second screens and mobile devices rather than on a main TV connected to a cable or satellite box seek out alternatives if their main provider doesn't offer OTT options.
- **Access easily**—consumers who value a simple user experience or want to sidestep contracts or installation avoid traditional pay TV services.
- **Economic value**—when lighter consumers don't value a particular sport or event enough to commit to a legal subscription.
- **Economic cost**—consumers who are less well-off may seek cheaper alternatives, particularly for a secondary service for sports or matches not covered by their main TV package.
- **Economic resentment**—a small number of consumers begrudge paying at all for sports, believing the clubs and leagues are already wealthy enough.
- **Top-up sports**—dedicated fans are more likely to use illegal services to access occasional sporting events like world cups, or to see all the games in a league when rights are split among multiple TV providers.

Consumer segments: moral attitudes & use of illegal content





3.0 Charting illegal content consumption

An effective strategy to address sports content piracy will combine legal and technical action against the distributors of illegal streams with measures to reduce the demand for illegal content from consumers.

Consumer attitudes to piracy and their consumption behavior is far more nuanced than previously understood. For the first time, we can see inside the minds of consumers choosing to access illegal streams.

Even within groups with broadly similar interest in sports, there are important sub-categories of behavior that will allow specific targeting to more effectively combat illegal content consumption.

A granular understanding of sports fans' attitudes and behavior enables broadcasters and platform owners to identify opportunities to convert illegal watching into incremental revenues.





“Sports rights are way too complicated for the average consumer to figure out which match is on which platform. Most people will pay if it's available to them.”

—International sports broadcaster—

Loyal stalwarts behave like Treasure Seekers to ‘top-up’ their sports

Loyal Stalwarts



The **Loyal Stalwart** fans behave like **Treasure Seekers** when they engage with illegal content. They use illegal sports content as a top-up to their legitimate services. They are the keenest armchair fans of all, watching a wide variety of global sports from the comfort of home.

Most of all, they appreciate big-ticket league sports. Soccer is the **Treasure Seekers**' biggest love: top-flight leagues like the English Premier League, La Liga or Serie A, tournaments like UEFA Champions League, and most of all the FIFA Football World Cup. In countries where soccer is less popular it is events like Twenty20 cricket and NBA basketball that capture these fans' attention. Their appetite for watching extends beyond the big leagues and they also enjoy sports as diverse as athletics, motor racing, tennis, UFC martial arts and Olympic Games.

More likely than most to be watching on their main TV screen rather than other devices, nearly all have a pay TV service (cable, satellite, IPTV). Most subscribe to premium sports channels, and a third of them to a sports OTT streaming platform.

With all this legitimate content to hand, **Treasure Seekers** are the most likely of any sports consumers never to indulge in illegal viewing. But more than a third of them still do it regularly (weekly or more) and a further third access illicit content at least occasionally. Illegal streams on social media are their preferred source, and generally only if they're free.

Soccer mad, these fans get frustrated when rights are split between pay TV providers or when other restrictions stop them getting access to all the games they want. Wanting to watch their favorite teams on a mobile device while traveling or at work is another factor leading **Treasure Seekers** to use illegal content if their main provider does not offer a TV Everywhere-type solution for off-TV set viewing.



Loyal Stalwarts

Profile: **Treasure Seekers**

- Enjoy soccer and a wide range of other sports
- Traditional viewing habits: pay TV on the main TV screen at home
- Older middle-aged men
- In household with older children
- In full- or part-time employment
- Living particularly in Italy, UK and Brazil

But **Treasure Seekers** don't regard this illicit content as a full alternative to their paid-for TV packages; they are the least likely sports fans to cancel a legitimate subscription as a result of watching illegal services.

And **Treasure Seekers** are more concerned than any other group about the downsides of that illegal viewing. They fear everything from the risk of legal action, to the potential for malware on their devices, to the financial impact on their favorite team. Most of all they worry about poor technical quality of the illegal sources they view and the risk of streams stopping altogether mid-game.

Young fans watching lots of sports on lots of screens, by any means

Fickle Superfans



The **Fickle Superfans** fall into two clusters: *Internet Buccaneers* and *Content Plunderers*. They are younger than the **Treasure Seekers** and more ‘next generation’ in their viewing habits. They go beyond the popular international games like soccer to watch the most varied and diverse selection of sports—from IPL cricket and women’s soccer to Formula E, volleyball and badminton. These fans are also more likely to be watching national-interest niche sports, such as camel racing in the MENA region, kabaddi in India and sepak takraw in southeast Asia.

More than 90% of them subscribe to mainstream pay TV services, with most having premium sports channels in their package. They’re also far more likely to subscribe to a sports-focused OTT service. These consumers are also the most regular viewers of paid-for premium sports channels and sports SVoD services.

Their viewing habits reflect their younger demographic: these fans are significantly more likely to watch sports on a wide range of devices other than the main TV.

Living particularly in developing markets, they’re more likely to watch sports away from home—in bars, while traveling and with friends. They are also significantly more likely to engage with their favorite teams and athletes directly through social media.

These superfans are near-ubiquitous consumers of illegal content. Barely a single person in this group doesn’t access illicit sports streams, and nearly all of them do it at least weekly.

Although the *Internet Buccaneers* sub-group are the biggest and most frequent consumers of illegal sports content, none of them believes what they are doing is acceptable. They all feel it’s either wrong altogether, or at least wrong when the pirate providers are making money from their activities.



Fickle Superfans

Profile: *Internet Buccaneers & Content Plunderers*

- Enjoy the most diverse range of global and national sports
- Multiscreen viewing: on every device and screen, at home and outside, alone or with friends
- Younger—in their 20s and early 30s
- Live with young children; Content Plunderers often living with parents or friends
- Many are students or employed full time
- Disproportionately found in developing markets: India, Malaysia, and MENA

This contrasts with the *Content Plunderers*, who think there’s little wrong with piracy: more than 70% see no issue at all, and the remainder think it’s only a problem when pirate providers are profiting. And they’re less concerned by the potential risks of using illegal content than most other viewers.

Ubiquitous consumption of illegal content when it suits them

Fickle Superfans

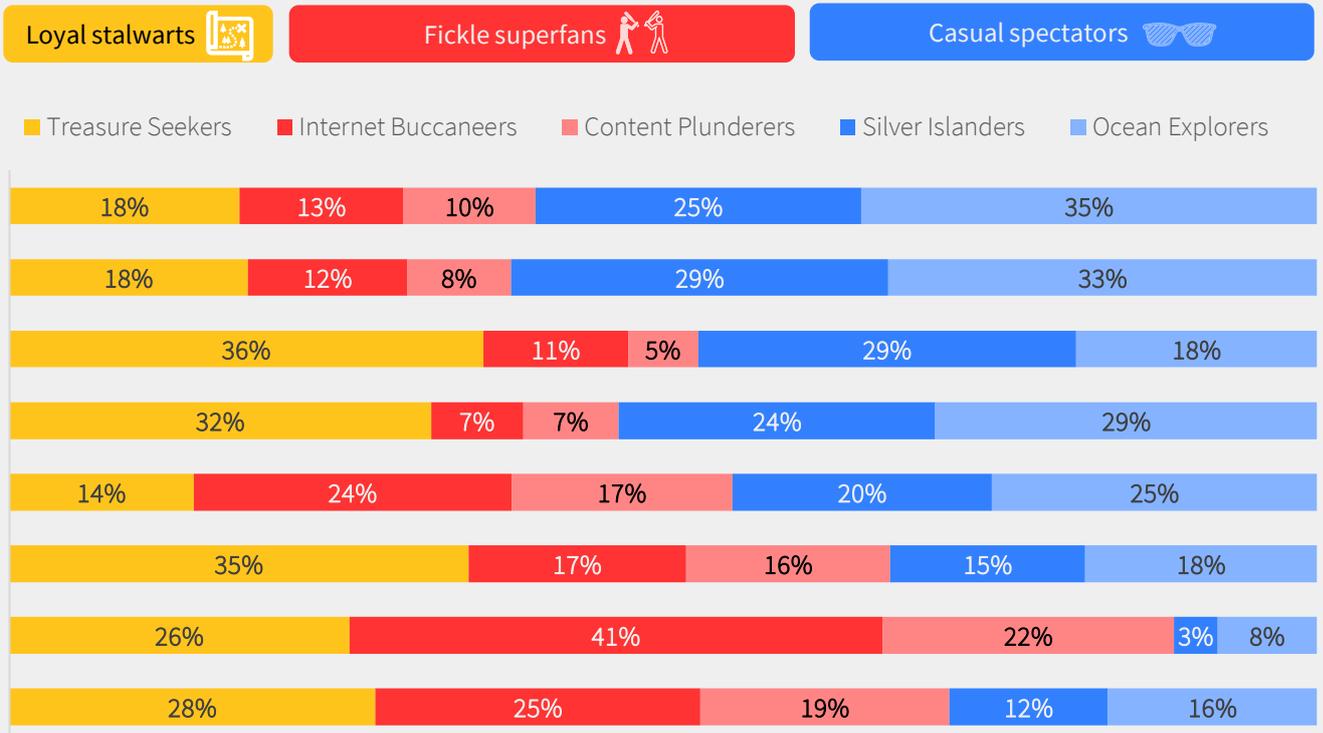
The motivations of the two sub-groups of **Fickle Superfans** for illegal viewing also contrast sharply. **InternetBuccaneers** have a wide range of excuses ranging from the high cost of a legitimate subscription to a perception that sports leagues are rich enough without their additional support.

Wanting to view leagues and competitions that they think aren't legitimately available in their market is another driver. And a significant minority of **InternetBuccaneers** do not have ready access to a main TV set and want to access sport on a mobile device. In markets where platform operators are yet to roll out a multiscreen offer, cord cutters are more incentivized to find alternative options.

ContentPlunderers have similar explanations for their behavior, but in addition this group thinks services run by pirates are easier to use. With many of them living in shared households, traditional pay TV platforms that require long-term contracts and physical installation may be less attractive to this group of sports fans.

Despite their prolific and universal use of illegal sports streaming services, the **InternetBuccaneers** and **ContentPlunderers** are more likely than anyone else to combine legal pay TV and OTT with illegal providers. But **InternetBuccaneers** are also more likely than any other group to have cancelled, or plan to cancel, at least one of their legitimate subscriptions as a result of consuming illicit content.

Geographic split of consumer segments



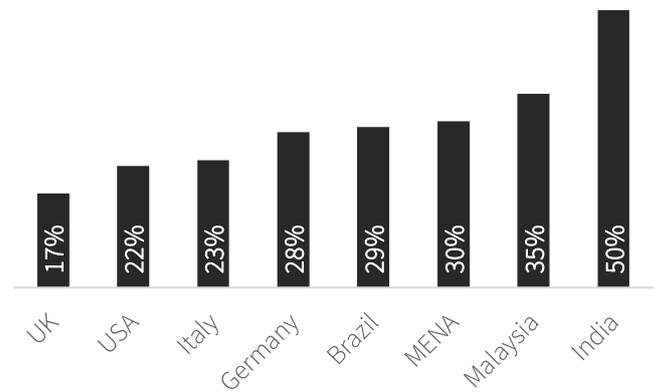
Configuring illegal streaming devices and paying for illicit services

Fickle Superfans

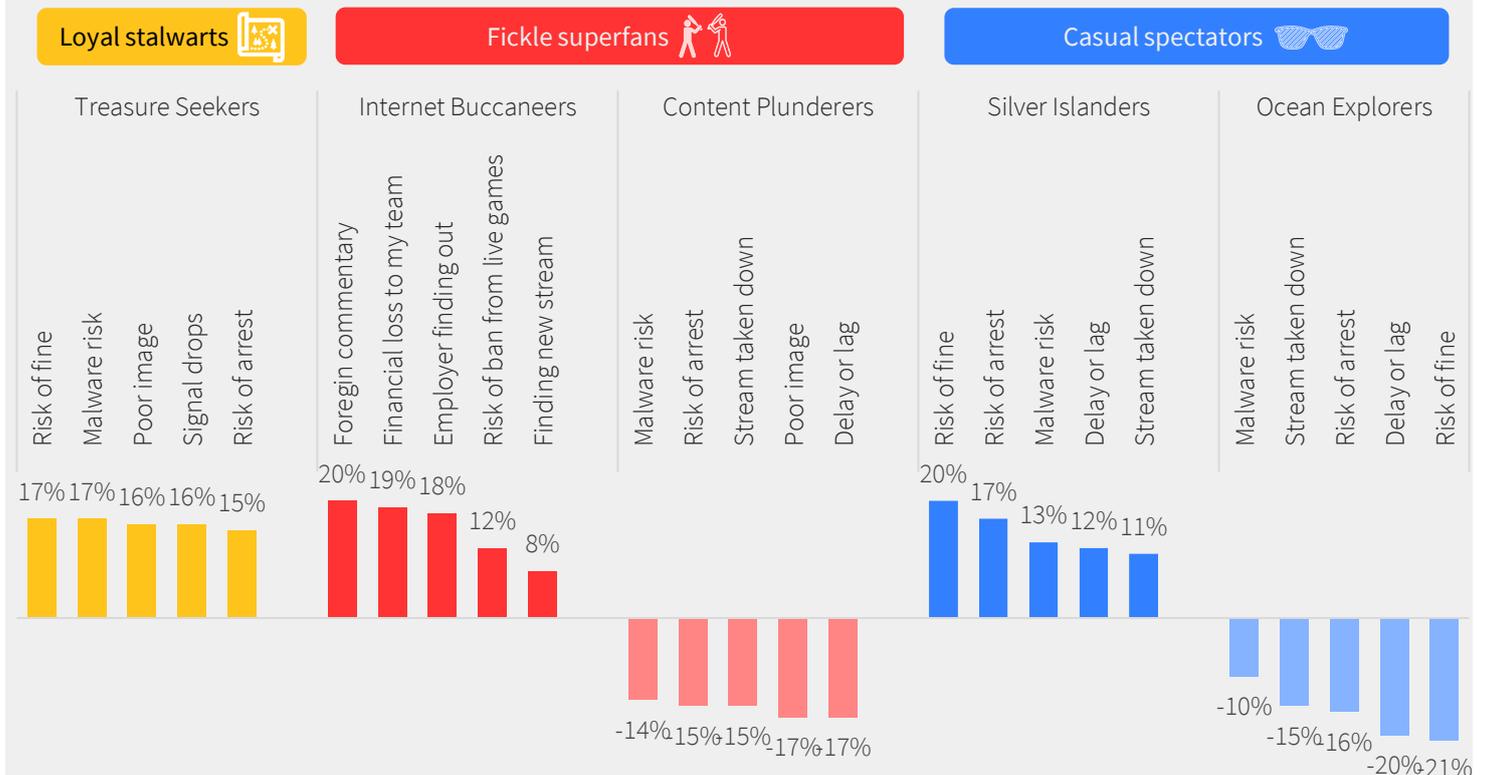
While many consumers are willing to view illegally via social media and streaming sites, far fewer go to the trouble of installing, configuring and using IPTV apps and streaming hardware devices.

Those who do are mostly found among these **Fickle Superfans**, as are the viewers who are willing to transact with pirate providers and pay for illegal content. More than 70% of **Internet Buccaneers** and half of **Content Plunderers** are paying for streaming sites, IPTV apps and modified streaming devices. The prevalence of these segments in countries such as India, Malaysia—and in MENA markets—is reflected in the proportion of sports fans in these territories willing to pay for access to illegal content.

Proportion of illegal content consumers willing to pay for illegal content access



Top five concerns about illegal content consumption (% under/over sample average)



Occasional viewing of the big sporting events

Casual Spectators



The third major group of TV sports fans are far less committed and watch much less often than everyone else. When they are viewing, these **Casual Spectators** are more likely to be interested in big one-off sporting events than keeping up with a league—except in the US where they also follow baseball and American football.

These consumers switch on to watch events like the Olympic Games, Ashes cricket, Tour de France cycling, Formula 1 and Rugby World Cup.

These **Casual Spectators** derive less value from a subscription to a regular premium sports package and are much less likely to pay for one. Less than half of this group subscribe to pay TV, and they are disproportionately more likely to use a basic free TV platform as their main TV service at home.

Older, often retired, and living alone or as empty nesters, these occasional fans are to be found in mature markets like the US, Germany, Italy and the UK. They fall into two clusters—**Silver Islanders** and **Ocean Explorers**—separated primarily by distinct moral attitudes to the consumption of illegal content.

These fans' casual interest in sports translates to a widespread but occasional use of pirate sports content, but when it comes to the ethics of illegal content, they differ significantly.

Although 100% of **Silver Islanders** feel using pirate services is wrong in any circumstances this does not appear to stop them. Only 17% of this group say they “never” pirate. Wanting to watch a sporting event that they couldn't otherwise access by legal means is their main trigger to first use an illegal service. They often excuse their continued use of illegitimate viewing on the basis that they don't watch enough sports to justify a full subscription.



Casual Spectators

Profile: *Silver Islanders & Ocean Explorers*

- Occasional sports fans, enjoy events and tournaments over leagues
- Much more likely to have basic or free TV package
- Older, most above 55
- Live alone or as a couple without children at home
- Retired or unemployed
- Most likely to live in mature markets: North America and Western Europe

A significant minority actually prefer illegal content sources

Casual Spectators

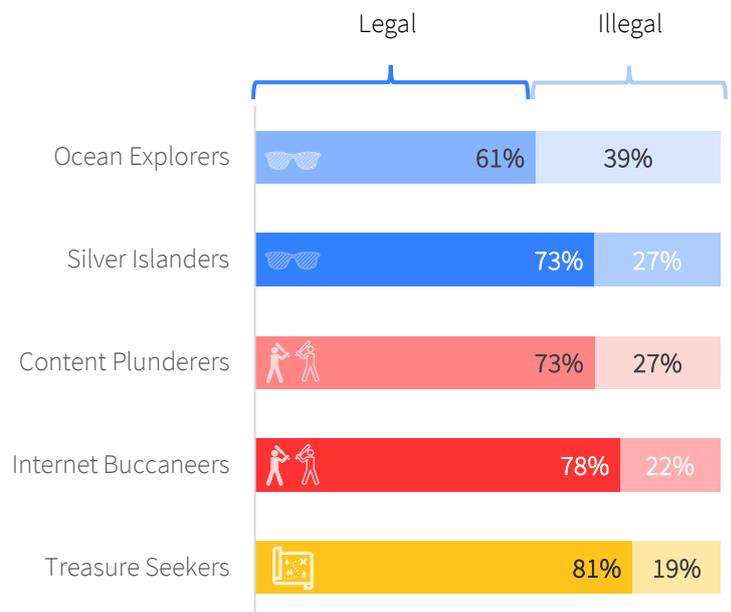
Ocean Explorers on the other hand think there's nothing wrong with piracy, and they stand out as the group of sports fans with the highest preference for using pirate providers even if the price for access was the same as via legitimate services.

Slightly more engaged with legal sports than *Silver Islanders*, a third of *Ocean Explorers* do subscribe to legitimate premium sports channels. However, they still believe these are too expensive and many choose illegal consumption, as they feel they don't watch enough sports to justify paying, and because they find pirate services easier to use.

Reflecting their overall attitudes towards pirate content, *Silver Islanders* are fearful of both the legal and technical repercussions of using illegal services, while *Ocean Explorers* are relatively unconcerned about any potential negative aspects.

When viewing illegally, all of the *Casual Spectators* are most likely to access the more readily-available pirate content found on mainstream social media and streaming sites, and are rarely pay for it.

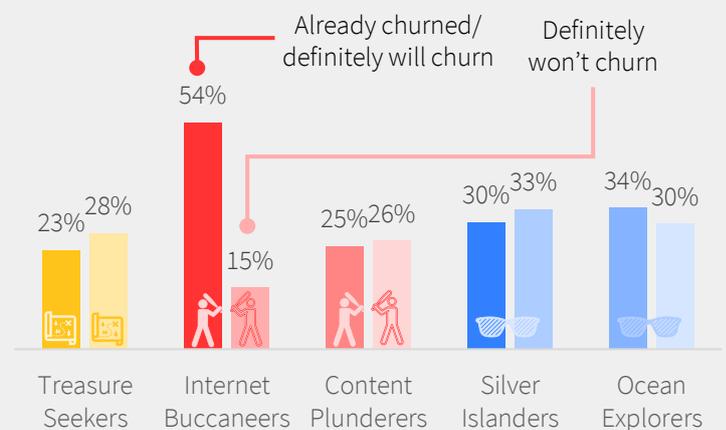
Consumer segments: choice of content source if service price the same



Segment attitudes reflected in pay TV churn behaviors

- The wider economic impact of sports piracy is a topic which will be covered in more detail in future reports in this series, but behaviors and attitudes of the segments can be seen reflected in their pay TV churn behaviors
- Over half of consumers in the *Internet Buccaneers* segment—a group of consumers which engage regularly in accessing illegal content—have already churned from their pay TV service, or definitely plan to churn in the future

Illegal consumption impact on pay TV subscriptions (%)





4.0 Solutions and industry implications

With the benefit of a detailed understanding of the fears, motivations and behavior of each cluster of consumers, it becomes clear that there is no “one size fits all” approach to deterring the consumption of illegal sports content.

Consumers who most indulge in illicit viewing are also the most engaged sports fans and

potentially most willing to pay for legitimate content. The challenge for rights holders and platform operators is to combine enforcement activity to frustrate illegal viewing with products that address the underlying triggers for consumers to stray.

Done right there is potential to generate incremental revenue.





"The sports industry should work more together. Working alone you can do so much, but not have a very global impact."

—Pay TV operator—



A targeted response addresses each cluster of consumers

Solutions and industry implications

This report identifies and describes the different segments and profiles their attitudes, behaviors and sentiments towards accessing legal and illegal sports content.

Rights holders, rights buyers and distributors can work with industry technology providers like Synamedia to fine-tune their response, reacting to the needs of each group of consumers individually—creating focused product offers and ensuring content is fully protected as it is delivered across every platform, network and device.

This means focusing on security solutions which create flexible access and payment models, protect and facilitate multiscreen access, and help to combat the full range of illegal access technologies. Delivering this without increasing complexity of access or frustrating paying sports fans is the key to maximizing disruption of the pirate ecosystem.



Loyal Stalwart fans want access to every game their favorite teams play. These **Treasure Seekers** are willing to pay, if they're provided with legitimate access to all the games in one place and viewable on all their devices, at home and when they're mobile.



Fickle Superfans also demand multiscreen access, and often don't want, or feel they can't afford, a traditional pay TV installation.

Among these fans, **Internet Buccaneers** may be prolific pirates but don't approve of what they're doing. Providing legitimate access to a wide range of sports, including niche events, with flexible business models is key for this sub-group.

Content Plunderers are harder to tackle because they see little wrong with what they're doing. Making access to official services simpler across all devices and screens, not just a set-top box, with easy onboarding and flexible terms will help.



Of the **Casual Spectators**, **Silver Islanders** require little incentive to consume legitimate content—and ensuring flexible access to occasional big events is essential. As with other segments, cracking down on free-to-view streaming and social media content will quickly frustrate them.

Many **Ocean Explorers** actively prefer pirate services for their infrequent viewing. Providing "light" access to events with flexible payment models, or content via lower-priced OTT or social media platforms will help win them round.

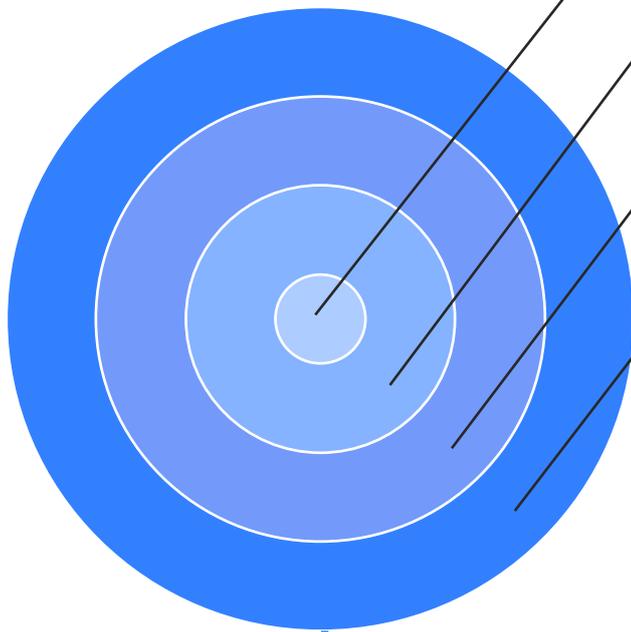
Further reports in this series will provide a deeper dive into the specific solutions and measures (such as education, service disruption, adjustments to business models, and other factors) which can be targeted at individual segments and sub-segments, as well as how this might vary for different sports and geographic regions around the world.

Effective strategies for discouraging piracy and the economic impact of doing so, along with analysis of the most pirated sports and events will be assessed in further detail in subsequent reports.

Online quantitative study of more than 6,000 sports fans aged 18-64

5.0 Notes on methodology

Study Background



Ampere Analysis ran an online quantitative study of over **6,000 sports fans** aged 18-64 in March 2020, before the coronavirus-related lockdown and event suspension.

The study was run in **ten markets**: Brazil, Egypt, Germany, India, Italy, Jordan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, UK and USA.

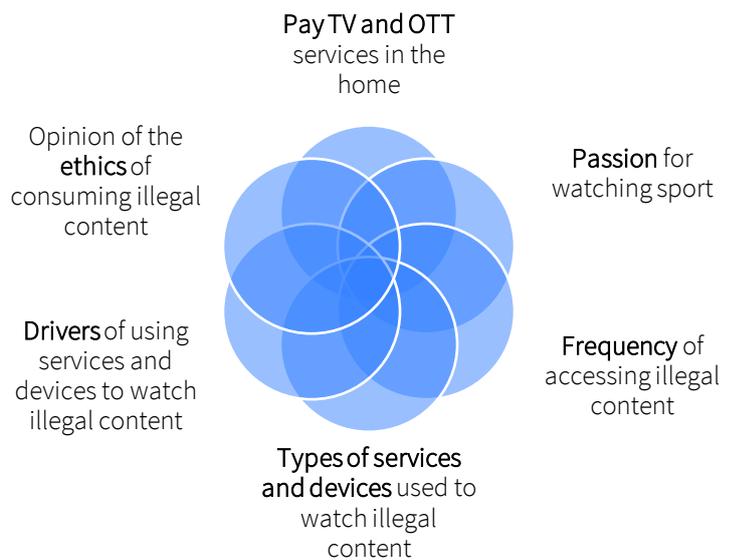
Respondents were chosen based on their experience of **watching sport** on TV.

Segments were created using a **k-means cluster analysis** which groups similar consumers into distinct groups.

Industry interviews were conducted throughout the process to aid in survey design and report formulation, and to ensure stakeholder concerns were adequately reflected.

The analysis resulted in five distinct groups of consumers, each with varied attitudes and behaviors around accessing illegal sports content streams.

Clustering criteria





Synamedia

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For more information about this report, or about Synamedia's services and solutions, please contact:

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