

PIRACY IN THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME PHENOMENON

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Анотація

У статті розглядається феномен цифрового піратства в ігровій індустрії, його історичний розвиток та вплив на сучасний ринок відеоігор. Аналізуються позитивні та негативні аспекти цього явища, наголошуючи на його ролі у популяризації ігор, збереженні культурної спадщини та забезпеченні доступності контенту для соціально незахищених верств населення. Окрема увага приділяється боротьбі з піратством через створення комфортних цифрових сервісів, таких як Steam, та впливу економічних і соціальних факторів на масштаби піратства. Наголошується на суперечливості піратства як явища, що водночас завдає шкоди розробникам і сприяє збереженню ігрової спадщини.

Ключові слова: Цифрове піратство, відеоігри, Steam, цифрове піратство, авторське право, відеоігри та економіка, культурна спадщина, позитивні та негативні наслідки піратства, технічні недоліки в іграх, DRM та захист від піратства, роль піратства у популяризації ігор, стратегії боротьби з піратством.

Abstract

The article examines the phenomenon of digital piracy in the gaming industry, its historical development and impact on the modern video game market. The author analyzes the positive and negative aspects of this phenomenon, emphasizing its role in popularizing games, preserving cultural heritage and ensuring access to content for socially vulnerable groups of the population. Particular attention is paid to the fight against piracy through the creation of comfortable digital services, such as Steam, and the impact of economic and social factors on the scale of piracy. The author emphasizes the contradictory nature of piracy as a phenomenon that both harms developers and contributes to the preservation of gaming heritage.

Keywords: Digital piracy, video games, Steam, digital piracy, copyright, video games and the economy, cultural heritage, positive and negative effects of piracy, technical flaws in games, DRM and protection against piracy, the role of piracy in the popularization of games, anti-piracy strategies.

Introduction

The history of computer Internet piracy dates back to the emergence of the ability to share files between users. Already in the 70s and 80s, piracy became widespread through the Bulletin Board System (BBS), where software, including games, was illegally distributed. It is difficult to identify the first case of spiraling content, as this phenomenon developed gradually and in different forms.

In 1980, the U.S. Congress recognized computer programs as intellectual property, which became the starting point for computer piracy. From that moment on, unauthorized copying and distribution of programs became a copyright infringement. In the late 90s, with the development of the Internet and the emergence of platforms such as Napster, piracy became a massive and widely discussed phenomenon, gaining even greater prominence with the emergence of the first pirate groups, which are still known to many today.

Noble pirates are a myth, or at least they were until now. The modern interpretation of this concept is a bit broader, and therefore more interesting. Today's pirates are not always looking for freebies; sometimes they are real heroes who preserve forgotten cultural heritage.

Modern piracy covers various aspects and industries, including the impact on the gaming industry. In the past, it played an important role in introducing many players to video games, and nowadays digital distribution and regional prices have made legal purchases more affordable.

Of course, there are still people who don't understand why they should buy games when they can download them for free. But there are still debates about this.

Research results

From a legal point of view, everything is clear: if you want to get a product, you need to pay for it, and video games are no exception. But who are the people who engage in digital piracy? Different categories of people are involved in this trade, each for their own reasons.

The first group is those who do not have enough financial resources or are not ready to spend a significant amount of money at once. Most often, these are schoolchildren and students.

The second category is users who are not sure that the game will run on their computer at all. They download a pirated version to test the performance before purchasing. This problem is partially solved by Steam's refund policy, where you can get a refund if you spend less than two hours in the game. However, there are some nuances here: some developers make the first hours of the game as polished as possible, while the quality can drop sharply after that. For example, Mafia III or the unoptimized The Last of Us Part I for PC, where the process of compiling shaders on some systems took more than two hours, which made it virtually impossible to return the game before even starting to play it.

The third group is those who pirate simply because they can. They have the money to buy a game, but deliberately choose to bypass the system, taking advantage of any opportunity to get it for free. [1]

This can have negative consequences:

If the game is not bought but downloaded from pirated sites, the development company does not receive any money. This can lead to the closure of the studio and the lack of sequels. Sometimes pirated copies contain viruses. For example, the pirated version of Watch Dogs for PC had malicious code embedded in it - it happened at the release in May 2014, but the unpleasant aftertaste remained.

Another issue is copyright infringement. For example, selling Dendy (Famicom) clones without Nintendo's consent is piracy. But, as practice shows, sometimes it is necessary. Due to the same copyright, publishers themselves remove games from sale. This was the case with the original Mafia: it was first removed from GOG, and then returned, but in a stripped-down form. Recently, Dark and Darker was shut down under false accusations of infringement, although the game was warmly received by players.

Many studios suffer serious financial losses due to piracy, which can lead to staff reductions or even company closures. This is especially true for indie developers, for whom every copy sold is of great importance.

However, there are certain positive aspects that cannot be ignored:

Another aspect is the disconnection of multiplayer games. When Xbox Live cut off support, LA 2 fans kept their consoles running for years to keep access to the online world. And Blizzard ignored fans of the classic World of Warcraft for a long time, closing fan servers. It was only in 2019 that they released WoW Classic, but it took time to realize its necessity.

Another problem is optimization. For example, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II came out crude, but fans fixed bugs, returned cut content, and improved performance. There are similar examples now. Developers sometimes abandon games after release, and only pirates keep them for history. For example, the horror game Devotion was withdrawn from sale because of an Easter egg with Winnie the Pooh associated with the leader of China. But pirates have preserved this example of Chinese game development.

Pirates also help to preserve games that are officially impossible to buy. The Video Game History Foundation has found that 87% of titles released before 2010 cannot be legally obtained anywhere else. A game could be lost forever if it weren't for pirated archives. [2]

Another aspect is Denuvo's protection. It loads the processor, reduces FPS, and increases loading time. Tests have shown that without it, Ghostwire: Tokyo launches in 54 seconds instead of 200. Games run better without anti-piracy protection, but publishers continue to use it. [3]

Some developers believe that pirates even help popularize their games. For example, The Witcher series of games by CD Projekt RED has gained immense popularity, partly due to the fact that the first parts of the game were widely distributed illegally. This allowed to attract more players to the franchise, and with the release of the third part, a large part of the audience willingly purchased the game officially.

Steam as a response to piracy: Gabe Newell's innovative approach

When the words "game" and "service" are mentioned, most people immediately think of Steam. Back in 2011, Gabe Newell realized that fighting piracy through bans, blocking, or various DRMs was futile. Every defense can be broken sooner or later. So he decided to offer players something that

would exceed the benefits of free downloading games from torrents. And he did: a high level of service, a convenient ecosystem, and a new culture of content consumption.

Steam allows you to easily transfer your game library, read reviews from other players, curators' opinions, find partners for multiplayer games, and discuss technical issues. Moreover, the platform allows returning games within two hours if you do not like them. Steam also has a support service and other features that make using the ecosystem convenient. [1]

Conclusion

Digital piracy in the gaming industry is a multifaceted

phenomenon that has both negative and positive consequences for the video game market. On the one hand, it causes significant financial losses to developers, especially indie studios, which can lead to the closure of companies and the cessation of new games. Copyright infringement, the presence of viruses in pirated versions, and the low quality of illegal copies all have a negative impact on the player experience and the industry as a whole.

On the other hand, piracy can have a positive effect, particularly in preserving cultural heritage. In some cases, when games are no longer available for purchase or are removed due to legal issues, pirates preserve these games, providing access to them for future generations of players. In addition, sometimes pirated versions of games help to identify technical flaws and fix them, which can improve the overall product.

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