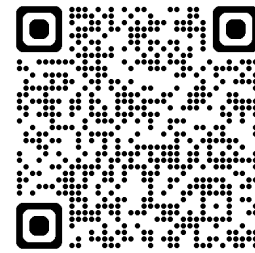


Anti-piracy hackers set sail to save Japan's manga



<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20260119153657004/>

Late last year a survey found that pirate websites carrying Japanese publications, mainly manga comics, now drive losses of about 55 billion dollars a year. Researchers at anti-piracy organization, Authorized Books of Japan or ABJ, estimated that readers got through a pirated manga that would cost over \$3 in just 30 minutes. Manga are sold directly to fans in both print and digital editions, but the people behind pirate sites can give the content away for free and still make advertising money while the authors and publishers see none of the profit. Last November a major US tech firm that provided data services to pirate sites was ordered by a Japanese court to pay compensation. A verdict that is currently under appeal. With piracy posing a serious threat to Japan's manga culture, we look at how publishers are fighting back.

A survey of ABJ of over more than 900 pirate sites discovered that they get an average of 2.85 billion hits a month from around the world.

Recent pirate sites are designed to be read on smartphones, so they feature vertical scrolling like this.

This site runs the range from famous works published 30 years ago to the latest chapters of today's biggest manga. It's all just a click away. The damage is now spreading on social media where people stitch whole series together and post them as videos.

It's about 9 hours long so you could probably read the equivalent of 47 volumes of a comic.

And it's not just the Japanese versions.

The operators of pirate sites translate them into English and release them with that in place of the Japanese text.

Pirate sites operate in at least 12 languages including English, Indonesian, and Chinese. Foreign language sites make up 84% of the total. Most are run from overseas bases which makes it difficult to take action.

I think this is evidence that Japanese manga are so popular that they are finding a global audience, but I have mixed feelings about the fact that people can read pirate copies.

Manga artist Satonaka Machiko is president of the Japan Cartoonist Association. She has spent more than 60 years working as a manga artist on popular titles. As an author, she is deeply unhappy about the spread of piracy.

I believe that a piece of work is an extension of yourself. Not just for me, but for other artists as well, stolen work is a form of theft if someone profits from it.

Another fear is what this does to young manga artists. If publishers' income drops and they don't have the funds to invest, they may lose the chance to discover new talent.

If we lose this creative space, we'll only produce things that are sure to sell, and we won't be able to take risks. I'm scared there will be fewer chances for young people to get involved. I feel the foundation on which manga has been built has a spirit of challenge, of trying new things even if you don't know how they'll turn out.

This organization receives support from the government and works to crack down on pirates overseas. Four years ago, it successfully shut down a major site based in China. It formed a joint research team with a company specializing in internet security and law. The first step in detective work is to look for information about the operator of a pirate site. They hunt for any breadcrumbs that could lead to a breakthrough. If they find an email address, they can track down other websites where someone has used that same address. In this case, the technique linked the apparent operator's email to several other services. Even so, it is not easy to find a full name or address.

It's only possible if we can find something like a site that wasn't run anonymously in the past.

Using the information they obtain, the group makes an information disclosure request and ultimately seeks to have local investigative authorities shut the site down. Even though overseas authorities don't always cooperate, the researchers believe it's essential to persevere in the hope of raising awareness.

We need international cooperation at all costs. It's important to create a movement and remind other countries that it is bad to make and use pirate websites that infringe copyright.

Beyond the obvious damage to authors and publishers, manga fans need to be aware that the act of reading pirated copies could prove fatal to the very comic book culture they enjoy. As globalization and AI pose new challenges to protecting intellectual property, piracy feels increasingly like a crime against both the works involved and creativity itself.

Now discuss the questions with a partner.

1. Can you think of any other ways to improve this situation?
2. Can you imagine any situation where it would be OK to upload manga to the internet?
3. Do you agree that piracy threatens manga culture itself? Why or why not?
4. Who is more responsible for piracy: the people who upload manga or the people who read it? Who should be punished and what should the punishment be?
5. Do you read manga or books online? Why or why not?