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Global Illegal Distribution Stifling K-Content Growth to be Eradicated by Mobilizing International, Interagency, and Private Sectors

- Speed up blocking of illegal sites such as “noonoo TV Season 2” by mobilizing all ministries’ capabilities
- Strengthen civil and criminal measures against copyright infringement by expanding international investigation cooperation with the DHS and the INTERPOL
- Contribute to achieving USD 25 billion in content exports in 2027 by preventing leakage revenue from illegal distribution

On August 1 (Tue), the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (Minister PARK Bo Gyoon, MCST), together with the Ministry of Science and ICT, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Korea Communications Commission, and the Korean National Police Agency, announced measures to combat illegal K-content distribution, which is stifling K-content growth. The actions are a follow-up to President YOON Suk Yeol’s directive to prepare intergovernmental support measures to eradicate the illegal distribution of K-content and were prepared after a private-government-ruling party consultation on July 31 (Mon), based on discussions at a meeting related to illegal K-content distribution between government, ruling party and public and opinions from the content industry.

“Thief watching” is increasing through illegal sites that are internationalizing and getting smarter

The K-content industry has become a lifesaver for the Korean economy, gaining global popularity in various fields such as K-dramas, K-pop, and K-webtoons. The value of content exports in 2021 was USD 12.45 billion, surpassing home appliances, secondary batteries, and display panels, and Korea’s

cultural influence ranked 7th out of 85 countries in 2022. The appeal of K-content is driving the growth of K-services and manufacturing industries and exports.

However, behind the global popularity of K-content, the shadow of increasing illegal distribution of K-content at home and abroad has threatened the growth of the industry. In particular, the emergence of illicit large-scale content distribution sites with servers overseas, such as “noonoo TV,” which was shut down in April, has disrupted the growth ecosystem of the content industry. After the shutdown of “noonoo TV,” which caused an estimated KRW 5 trillion in damage to the industry, the number of domestic over-the-top (OTT) media service users increased by one million, demonstrating the impact of illegal content distribution on the industry. Advanced digital technologies have made it difficult to track and block these sites while also contributing to the rise of “thief watching,” where anyone can access content without paying for it.

In response, the government has developed a four-tiered SCSC strategy—Speed and Strict, Cooperation, Science, and Change—to combat the illegal distribution of K-content by mobilizing international channels, ministries, and private sector capabilities.

Speed and Strict: Mobilize all ministries’ capabilities to respond quickly, from detecting illegal sites to reviewing and blocking them

The first strategy is “Speed and Strict” to respond quickly and strictly to illegal content distribution. The government will speed up the monitoring, reviewing, and blocking of illegal sites such as “noonoo TV” to prevent the illegal distribution of content. The Ministry of Science and ICT and the Korea Communications Standards Commission (KCSC) shortened the review and blocking cycle to shut down the largest illegal streaming site, “noonoo TV,” pressuring to stop it 27 times in 4 months. Such swift and strict intergovernmental measures curb the scope for unlawful income through copyright-infringing sites.

They have developed an analysis system that can automatically detect illegal sites through keywords such as search terms and expanded the number of platforms monitored to quickly detect illegal distribution sites with low connectivity. The KCSC’s deliberations on blocking access to copyright-infringing sites will also be changed from twice a week to full-time discussions to speed up blocking access to sites. To this end, all lawmakers and government officials attending the meeting agreed that

the pending amendment to the Act on the Establishment and Operation of the Korea Communications Commission needs to be passed by the National Assembly as soon as possible.

The MCST, the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Prosecutors' Office, and the Korean National Police Agency will work together to intensively investigate "priority management sites" with significant social problems and operate "intensive crackdown periods" when mass piracy occurs in certain genres or media.

In addition, in order to strengthen civil and criminal punishment for copyright infringement, the sentencing standards for copyright infringement and prosecution case handling standards are promoted, and a punitive meaning is added to civil damages so that an amount larger than the actual amount of damages can be judged as damages. The government will also promote the public interest reporting system and its rewards to encourage insider reporting against illegal site operators.

Cooperation: Expand cooperation with INTERPOL by designating a "K-Content Infringement Investigation Cooperation Officer"

Science: Reorganize the MCST investigation team into the "Copyright Crime Scientific Investigation Team"

The second strategy is "Cooperation," which strengthens international cooperation to combat illegal content distribution. Operators of illegal sites will be thoroughly investigated and arrested through domestic and international cooperation. In particular, the government will strengthen public-private cooperation with the United States, a major victim of illegal content distribution. The MCST has signed a business agreement with the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to form a joint investigation team. In addition, the Motion Picture Association (MPA), comprising six member companies, including the Korea Copyright Protection Agency and Netflix, will also share copyright infringement information and promote joint responses.

Cooperation with international law enforcement agencies, including International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), will also be strengthened. The MCST is reinforcing its collaboration with INTERPOL in investigating copyright infringement. In March 2022, the MCST, the KNPA, INTERPOL, and the General Directorate for National Security of the Kingdom of Morocco worked together to shut down "SkyManga," a site that illegally distributed Korean webtoons overseas. In the

future, the Ministry will further expand joint investigations with INTERPOL, designating a “K-content infringement investigation officer” within INTERPOL and providing cooperative support to investigate illegal sites based overseas. The Ministry of Justice plans to expedite joining the Budapest Convention, which establishes a system for rapid criminal justice cooperation in cybercrime among countries that have signed the convention. By doing so, it aims to lay the foundation for quickly obtaining investigative data and information from countries that have signed the convention.

The third strategy is “Science,” which will strengthen international cooperation to combat illegal content distribution. The MCST’s Special Judicial Police, which specializes in investigating copyright infringement, will be reorganized into the “Copyright Crime Scientific Investigation Team,” and a crime analysis room will be established to analyze digital evidence and develop investigative strategies to strengthen the scientific investigation capabilities of the team.

“Copyright, Right Now,” An Awareness Project for Respecting Copyright

The fourth strategy is “Change,” which aims to change society’s perception of copyright. Above all, to eradicate illegal content distribution, it is necessary to support the social awareness of “K-Content, My Own Money,” wherein people should pay a fair price when using content. To this end, the MCST is conducting a project to change the perception of copyright protection called “Copyright, Right Now.” It supports the younger generation, who are at the center of content creation and consumption, in spreading copyright protection messages through various means in their own spaces, such as second-hand stores and university student communities.

In addition, the MCST will develop an authorized textbook on copyright and create educational copyright protection guidelines to ensure fair copyright awareness among young people, future generations, and primary content consumers. We will also expand the “Visiting Education with Creators” program for young people and build a copyright experience museum in Jinju, Gyeongnam.

Establishing national values of industry growth, job creation, fairness, and common sense through content copyright protection

By announcing this comprehensive plan, the content industry is expected to recover the revenue lost

by illegal distribution. This will contribute significantly to achieve the targets of the “K-Content Export Strategy” announced at the “Fourth Export Strategy Meeting” announced by President YOON Suk Yeol on February 23, which is to achieve USD 25 billion in content industry exports and KRW 200 trillion in content industry sales by the year 2027. If content industry sales increase by KRW 63 trillion, from KRW 137 trillion in 2021 to KRW 200 trillion in 2027, about 580,000 jobs are expected to be created. This is significant in terms of expanding future jobs in the content sector, which is popular among the younger generation.

A government official said, “This comprehensive plan will serve as an important opportunity to eradicate crimes that steal content containing the passion and dedication of creators and take unfair profits. It will also help deepen the national values of fairness and common sense in our society. We will take intense measures at the intergovernmental level and show the government’s strict and unwavering will to eradicate the illegal distribution of K-content.”

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