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ILLEGAL CONTENT CONSUMPTION SURVEY AND COPYRIGHT AWARENESS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

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ABSTRACT

This contribution presents the findings of an annual survey in the Republic of Korea on illegal content usage and copyright awareness, conducted by the Korea Copyright Protection Agency (KCPA). Some 24,000 individuals aged 13 to 69 were surveyed with regard to six content categories. The study indicated that overall illegal content usage had declined slightly to 19.1 per cent in 2024, with films and games showing the highest infringement rates. It highlights evolving piracy methods, including increased use of streaming and clone-posting sites and a decline in traditional P2P/torrent usage. The multifaceted response by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism includes AI-based detection, inclusive monitoring teams, international cooperation (such as with INTERPOL on Project I-SOP) and public awareness-raising campaigns like “Copyright Protection, Right Now”. Those efforts have boosted public copyright awareness and thus reinforced the country’s commitment to strengthening copyright enforcement. The contribution also highlights amendments to the Copyright Act, designed to make enforcement more robust. They include emergency measures to block access and provision for quintuple damages in cases of intentional infringement.

* The views expressed in this document are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Secretariat or of the Member States of WIPO.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Each year, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) of the Republic of Korea surveys the consumption of illegal content by Koreans and public awareness of copyright protection. The Korea Copyright Protection Agency (KCOPA) conducts the surveys, which provide key statistical data for developing national copyright protection policies. The results are published in the Annual Report on Copyright Protection. The latest edition of the report contains findings released in 2025 and examines key enforcement activities carried out by the Ministry. It also outlines the latest amendments to the country's Copyright Act, which are designed to make copyright enforcement more robust. They include the adoption of emergency access blocking measures, more punitive damages and tougher criminal penalties.

II. ILLEGAL COPY CONSUMPTION IN 2024

2. KCOPA surveyed 24,000 individuals aged 13 to 69 across the Republic of Korea with regard to six content categories: music, film, broadcasting, publishing, games and webtoons. The survey has been carried out annually since 2009, with several methodological improvements over the years. The current methodology, which has been in place since 2019, uses survey data to measure total content consumption (legal and illegal) in order to calculate and analyze the volume and rate of illegal consumption (i.e., illegal consumption as a proportion of total consumption).

3. In 2024, the overall rate of illegal content consumption was 19.1 per cent, a slight drop from 19.5 per cent in 2022 and 19.2 per cent in 2023, and continuing the downward trend from 22 per cent in 2019. The most frequently cited reason for illegal consumption was "because it is free or very cheap" (29.1 per cent of respondents).

4. By content category, films had the highest rate of illegal consumption (22.6 per cent), followed by games (22.5 per cent), broadcasting (21.1 per cent), webtoons (20 per cent), music (18.7 per cent) and publishing (14.1 per cent).

5. Notably, 56.3 per cent of respondents who had previously accessed illegal content reported either that they had stopped using free sites or that they had switched to legal (licensed) content platforms after the implementation of measures such as the blocking of access to illegal websites.

6. In the music sector, the illegal consumption rate has increased since 2021 (17.3 per cent) to 18.7 per cent. However, the percentage of individuals with past experience of illegal music consumption has dropped significantly, from 39 per cent in 2020 to 21.5 per cent in 2024, indicating that only a small number of users are responsible for repeated infringements. The use of non-affiliated cyberlocker/peer-to-peer (P2P) and torrent platforms has declined steadily (cyberlocker/P2P: from 17 per cent in 2020 to 5 per cent in 2024; torrent: from 8 per cent to 2.7 per cent in the same period), reflecting a shift from downloading to streaming services.

7. In the film sector, consumption of both legal and illegal content has declined steadily, which suggests an overall downturn in the film industry. Illegal streaming link sites (21.7 per cent) and video platforms (28.6 per cent) account for 49.3 per cent of illegal film consumption, indicating a change in how users consume video content. Moreover, traditional methods of piracy such as non-affiliated cyberlocker/P2P (8.5 per cent) and torrent (13.1 per cent) still account for 21.6 per cent, highlighting the need for continued vigilance.

8. In terms of broadcasting, consumption of legal and illegal content has been decreasing since 2021. Consumption of Illegal broadcast content was mainly through bulletin boards (online platform where users can create, share and exchange content or information), at 26.5 per cent, illegal streaming sites (20.3 per cent) and unlicensed social networking service (SNS) platforms (19.6 per cent). Interestingly, illegal consumption via cyberlocker/P2P and torrents increased from 2020 to 2024 (cyberlocker/P2P: from 14.8 per cent to 17.4 per cent; torrent: from 11.3 per cent to 14.1 per cent), indicating that many illegal distribution channels still operate. Nevertheless, the overall consumption rate of online illegal broadcasting has dropped sharply since 2022, possibly due to the rise of full-episode binge-watching formats that are not included in the current tracking methods.

9. In publishing, consumption of illegal content online has risen since 2022, while offline consumption has dropped. The share of illegal publishing through clone-posting sites² increased significantly from 16.8 per cent to 21.5 per cent year-over-year. However, that trend may be interpreted as evidence that the publishing sector is steadily transitioning to digital formats, which represents a positive and necessary evolution for expanding access, fostering innovation and ensuring the sector's long-term growth. Nonetheless, offline illegal consumption (copying, printing and binding services) still accounts for 24.3 per cent, indicating the need for tailored copyright protection strategies for this sector.

10. In gaming, the illegal consumption rate declined steadily from 26.2 per cent in 2022 to 22.5 per cent in 2024. A unique characteristic of the sector is the use of unauthorized private servers, which have consistently accounted for over 10 per cent of illegal consumption since 2020. In 2024, 37.5 per cent of illegal gaming content consumption came from non-affiliated cyberlocker/P2P (23 per cent) and torrents (14.5 per cent). That indicates the need for ongoing enforcement against private servers, cyberlocker/P2P and torrent-based distribution.

11. Webtoons were included in the survey from 2022. Legal consumption has consistently increased and illegal consumption has declined modestly. Clone-posting sites remain the most common channel for illegal distribution, accounting for 43.7 per cent in 2024, a dramatic increase from 20.2 per cent in 2022. Video platforms ranked second (25.2 per cent), possibly influenced by the growing popularity of short-form video formats. The Government continues to carry out enforcement through administrative and judicial actions, such as site-blocking, in collaboration with the webtoon industry.

12. MCST and KCOPA are upgrading their Comprehensive Infringement Response System, using artificial intelligence (AI) technology for the automatic and systematic detection of illegal content flows to facilitate responses to the creation and distribution of illegal copies online. To supplement that automated system and identify cases where AI cannot detect illegal copies, MCST and KCOPA run the Online Copyright Infringement Home Monitoring Team. Team members come from marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, women returning to the workforce after a career break and people at lower income levels. The team complements the automated system and allows its members to earn an income, thereby promoting inclusivity as it leads the way to stronger copyright protection.

13. To boost international cooperation on copyright protection, MCST has started the second phase of Project I-SOP, a collaborative project between the Korean National Police Agency and INTERPOL, and signed memorandums of understanding with neighboring countries, including Vietnam. MCST has expanded support for the Customized Overseas Copyright Voucher program, which provides vouchers to domestic content companies and individuals entering overseas markets to cover the costs involved in preventing copyright infringement abroad and

² Clone-posting sites are illicit websites that provide services in Korean from servers overseas.

resolving related disputes. The aim of the project is to lighten the financial burden of copyright litigation, which in the long run helps to strengthen self-redress mechanisms.

III. COPYRIGHT AWARENESS

14. In 2024, the average public awareness score³ regarding copyright protection was 3.24 out of 4, a slight increase from 3.18 in 2022 and 3.20 in 2023. The positive trend is being driven by the high level of awareness among young people, especially adolescents and people in their twenties, which is attributable to public campaigns like Copyright Protection, Right Now.

15. The aim of that campaign is to raise awareness of copyright in the general public. Campaign activities include the production of promotional videos, short-form content and short articles, promotion on online platforms (such as YouTube and Instagram), advertisements on public transportation, and on-site campaigns at large gatherings and events. The campaign involves more than 50 acclaimed promotional ambassadors, 50 university students and 36 content and media enterprises. The more than 220 projects implemented under the campaign have created greater public awareness and opportunities and space for dynamic public discussion on copyright protection.

IV. AMENDMENTS TO THE COPYRIGHT ACT

16. Passed by the National Assembly on January 29, 2026, the latest amendments to the Copyright Act of Korea reflect the Government's efforts to strengthen copyright enforcement. Highlights include emergency measures to block access to sites, provision for granting quintuple damages for intentional copyright infringement, and tougher criminal penalties. The emergency measures to block access are due to enter into force on May 11, 2026. That is expected to result in a drop of 80 per cent in losses arising from delays in blocking access.

V. CONCLUSION

17. The rate of illegal content consumption in Korea continues to decline, a success attributable directly to campaigns and initiatives focused on public awareness of copyright protection. This positive trend is the result of consistent cooperation between the Government and industry, encompassing institutional improvements, tougher enforcement against illegal websites, copyright-awareness campaigns for the general public and amendments to the Copyright Act. The Government sees the content industry as a key engine of national growth and will continue to strengthen copyright enforcement, backed by effective legislation.

[End of contribution]

³ The public awareness score is a measure of overall awareness of copyright protection, which is measured using four indicators: the importance of copyright protection, attitudes to illegal copying, the perceived impact of piracy, and acceptance of responsibility for piracy. Each indicator is assessed with three questions, for a total of 12 questions, using a 4-point scale.