China moves to control online music industry

September 10 2009, by Marianne Barriaux

Customers use their laptop computers at a wireless cafe in Beijing. China has announced that all songs posted on music websites must receive prior approval and foreign lyrics must be translated into Chinese, in a new push to control online content.

China has announced that all songs posted on music websites must receive prior approval and foreign lyrics must be translated into Chinese, in a new push to control online content.

The culture ministry says the rules are designed to step up regulation of the Internet, curb rampant piracy and protect intellectual property rights, but experts say they will be difficult to implement.

"If there are thousands of websites that provide content, how can a single government check all of the content in just a few months?" said Liu Ning, an analyst with Beijing-based high-tech consultancy BDA.

The official Global Times said Thursday that music providers would have to submit songs for approval by December 31, at which date the new rules go into effect.

They would also have to translate the lyrics of foreign songs into Chinese, the report said.

In a statement sent to AFP, the ministry said the rules were necessary "to regulate the transmission of cultural information, guarantee the safety of the nation's culture, and regulate public ethics."

It said information that violated public morality or spread pornography and violence "continuously appeared" online, "seriously damaging the healthy development of China's online cultural market."

China has at least 338 million Internet users, more than any other country in the world.

The government regularly blocks online content it deems unhealthy, which includes pornography and violence, but also information critical of the government, a censorship system dubbed the "Great Firewall of China."

Liu said the rules were an extension of requirements already in place for the offline music industry, which has to submit foreign albums to the government for prior approval. The same regulations apply for foreign films.

"In recent years, the Chinese government has put more effort into online content censorship as some emerging applications like video sharing are getting more and more popular with Internet users," he said.

According to the ministry's guidelines, the rules also aim to "strengthen

the protection of intellectual property rights, and to increase the market share of legal businesses and legal music products."

Online music providers will be required to get a special licence from the culture ministry.

The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry says up to 99 percent of all music downloads in China are illegal, costing record companies billions of dollars in lost revenue annually.

But it was unclear how effectively the ministry would be able to fight piracy with the new rules.

"A lot of illegal content providers or websites may not follow the notice and continue their illegal services," Liu said, pointing out the new rules would create a lot of additional work for music providers.

A culture ministry spokesman told the Global Times that there would be a three-day "fast-track" system to gain permission to upload songs to the websites.

He also said content generated by Internet users -- including songs composed, recorded or uploaded by individuals -- would not have to go through the censorship process, according to the report.

Baidu, the search engine that has long been criticised for posting links to websites offering pirated music, welcomed the new rules.

"We believe that a more standardised environment for digital music will benefit music content providers, Internet users and Internet companies alike," it said in a statement emailed to AFP.

Mathew Daniel, vice president of Beijing-based online music distributor

R2G, was also upbeat about the new requirements.

"If it levels the playing field in some way, then it's worth doing," he told AFP.

(c) 2009 AFP

Citation: China moves to control online music industry (2009, September 10) retrieved 19 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2009-09-china-online-music-industry.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.