

The Internet Could Be on the Brink of Destruction!

A Guide to Understanding Online Piracy Acts – SOPA, PIPA & ACTA

"[This is going to be] probably the geekiest, the most rational protest ever." Reddit co-founder Alexis said of SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act) and Protect IP Act (PIPA) oppositions. The popular link-sharing website was the initiator of 18th January's 24-hour Internet blackout. It was joined by other Internet bigwigs such as Mozilla, WordPress, TwitPic and the ICanHasCheezBurger network in the blackout.

Google, although it didn't participate in total blackout, did have a strong message for all its visitors: *Tell Congress: Please don't censor the web*". Some others like Twitter and Facebook showed their opposition in silence. There were physical protests too.

With a strong and unanimous opposition from Internet users – everyday people like you and me – the acts are called off for now.

It's interesting to note that while people from all over supported the opposition of the bills, some like Chris Dodd, Chairman and CEO of Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) called the blackout day a gimmick. Organisations such as MPAA and US Chamber of Commerce are in favour of the acts because they've incurred huge losses from copyrighted content exploitation via overseas websites.

What are SOPA & PIPA?

The two bills aimed to stop foreign websites selling pirated movies, music and other IP. The US government can shut down the websites within their territory but there is no way to stop foreigners to indulge in piracy acts. As per the MPAA (which is the strongest supporter of the bills), a 13% of Americans have watched illegal copies of movies, downloaded illegal music or TV shows online.ⁱ The MPAA maintains it has lost billions due to illegal piracy acts.

The SOPA and PIPA bills would grant the US government a total power to block access to websites overseas even if it just links to copyrighted material.ⁱⁱ

The passing of the bills would allow the Justice Department of US to block access to such websites. If you've seen YouTube's message *"Sorry. This video is not available in your country,"* then you have probably got the first-hand experience of this.

Plus, the bills would also allow publishers, music companies and other creators to take private legal action against the pirate and block payments for advertising on such websites.

The Internet advocates however believe that the real reason behind such bills is the fear of freedom that the Net gives everyday people. They believe such laws will only help the government to gain control over the spread of information, and the information itself.

The Internet has allowed the people to send, receive, share information in an easy and almost zero-cost manner. The sheer power of the Net is therefore challenging to the officials and threatens them in the face of a new power structure.

The opponents believe that the bills are so broad that they might stop the right to free speech on the Internet. This issue is even bigger for website giants such as Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia and Twitter, which depend heavily on uploading and downloading of content every day.

A severe problem with the bills is that they allow the content creators to block payments to innocent websites who unknowingly link to copyrighted material or host pirated content.

The difference between SOPA and PIPA

SOPA is born in the House and PIPA is in the Senate. SOPA also makes it illegal to stream copyrighted content. The opponents called it a “Free Bieber” provision after Justin Bieber, whose music career began after he posted his videos on YouTube performing on other singers’ songs.

What Is ACTA?

Internet advocates are calling ACTA as the super-bad daddy of PIPA and SOPA. Think about the latter two extended to the international level. Although the death of PIPA and SOPA is a relief, ACTA is said to have clauses which are worse.

ACTA stands for Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement. The ACTA does not defines Intellectual Property clearly, so it could be a trademark, or even an idea.ⁱⁱⁱ

A video named “The Truth About ACTA” on YouTube explains the bill in simple terms. Imagine you join cookery class and are taught how to make delicious crispy chicken. You learn the preparation and are ecstatic. You reach home and tell your wife all about it. Soon, you’re sharing the preparation method with her. You can cook together and enjoy a scrumptious meal. In other words, all is merry – until ACTA comes into picture.

Under ACTA, what you just did is illegal. You are committing a crime by sharing copyrighted information. Your access to the cookery course can be blocked, you may be fined, or even sent to jail.

If you thought you can share the crispy chicken recipe in the privacy of your home with no one else to know about your illegal share, you’re right. But once ACTA comes into play, your communication will be closely monitored, even your family’s, just to make sure you’re not indulging in any copyright infringement.

The ACTA will require ISPs (Internet Service Providers) to monitor your communication channel or the inflow and outflow of data packets every time your computer is connected to the Internet. If you send or receive copyrighted information, you will be fined.

It could be as simple as sending a magazine piece link to your friend on email or creating a cool video using someone else’s music.

But Aren't at least the Creatives Winning with ACTA?

Okay. So the whole thing about ACTA is ridiculous for us everyday users. But what about music composers, journalists, movie makers and the like? They will benefit from the act, right?

Truth is, they won't. With bills like ACTA, everyone is bound by strict laws. An already developed idea, for example, cannot be reused to develop further. Creative professionals often build their work from inspiration from others. ACTA will stop them from doing this. Music makers and writers won't be able to share content made by others.

The only bodies to benefit seem to be those like MPAA. The Net works in a totally different way than what ACTA and sister bills are based on. The word is "sharing" which the bill makers don't seem to get.

No one's in support of copyright infringements, but these acts seem to be too broad covering even the innocent Internet users under the umbrella of cyber criminals. The killing of SOPA and PIPA may be just winning the battle, whereas the war with ACTA is in onset.

The ACTA was signed by first group of countries on 1st October 2011 on invitation by Japan. Australia, Canada, Japan, Republic of Korea, Morocco, New Zealand, Singapore and the United States formed this group. But it hasn't been ratified yet.

Choice is yours: Do you support this extreme copyright bill or do you think there's a call for moderation (and giving thoughts to the old business models of non-rights-holders) when it comes to implementing online piracy stoppage?

ⁱ <http://online.wsj.com/article/>

ⁱⁱ <http://tv.globalresearch.ca/2012/01/beyond-sopa-past-present-and-future-internet-censorship>

ⁱⁱⁱ "The Truth about ACTA" <http://www.youtube.com>