Access to knowledge

Rationale

CI [1]'s work on Access to Knowledge (A2K [2]) is predicated upon the fact that intellectual property rights (IPRs) are a consumer issue, not just an issue for business. For example, the expansion of the scope and enforcement of intellectual property rights at the behest of rights holders impacts on consumers by inhibiting the sharing and development of culture, by denying consumers the freedom to use goods in the way they reasonably expect to be able to (for example due to Digital Rights Management (DRM [3]) technology), and by making learning materials unaffordable or simply unavailable to consumers in developing countries.

Read more...A knowledge society can be developed only when there is access to information on all fronts. Such a society is sustainable when access to knowledge is unhampered and inclusive, promoting co-operative forms of knowledge production as the basis for innovation and creativity. The new paradigm considering knowledge as a public common is a new chance to extend collective intelligence to deepen and enlarge cultures in their diversity. The role of consumer organisations in making this possible is vital.

CI's 2013-2015 work programme on A2K confronts governments and corporations who abuse the rights of consumers in the digital age through unfair restrictions on access to knowledge. Through the interventions outlined here, our ultimate aim is to empower the digital consumer to more fully enjoy the rights of freedom of expression, participation in the cultural life of the community, education, and privacy that are guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Current activities

Flexible user rights

From 2013-2015, we are partnering with American University College of Law, Washington DC on an IDRC-funded project Exploring the Value of Openness in the Digital Economy [4], involving surveys of consumers and producers about the value of flexible user rights in copyright [5].

IP abuse

From 2013-2015, we will be resourcing our members to apply pressure through national consumer laws, policies and media against tech companies that abuse consumer rights [6], supported by OSF. Our official global launch event for this programme will be Consumers in the Digital Age 2014 [7].

Previous activities

Flexible user rights

- With support from OSI [8], CI sought to engage with copyright collecting societies to agree on expanding fair use [9] of copyright materials by consumers. In this way, we can legalise existing consumer uses of such materials, where law reform to formalise the legality of those uses is not a likely short term prospect. This led into a 2012 code on the quotation [10] right under copyright.
From 2009 to 2012, funded by OSI, Consumers International published the Consumers International IP Watchlist [11], which identifies countries whose IP policies and practices are harmful to consumers, to counterbalance the USTR's Special 301 Report of countries that are considered by the United States government to offer inadequate IPR protection. The IP Watchlist is used as a tool for campaigning and advocacy at national and international level.

**IP abuse**

- In 2011-2012 CI assisted members at a national level to oppose a variety of public policies that impede Access to Knowledge [12], such as the imposition of taxes, customs duties, and other imposts on information resources.
- In 2012, CI published research addressing the problem of abuse of intellectual property rights [13]. Our research mapped out strategies for combatting such abuse through the use of the laws under the TRIPS [14] Agreement, and through the use of consumer protection law.
- CI has also supported national activities [15] of its members during 2010, including national-level case study research as well as advocacy and campaigning initiatives.

**Other research and publications**

- In 2010 with the support of OSI, Consumers International produced a Consumer Survey [16], which was used to gather evidence of consumers’ actual experience in trying to access and use materials in three areas covered by copyright: educational materials, software [17], films and music. Rather than focusing exclusively on legal barriers to the access and use of these materials, the survey uncovered evidence of other access barriers faced by consumers.
- In 2010 CI released a short educational film on A2K, titled When Copyright Goes Bad [18].
- Access to Knowledge - Copyright as a Barrier to Accessing Books, Journals and Teaching Material [19] was a two-year project (October 2004 to September 2006) implemented by Consumers International Kuala Lumpur Office with the support of the Open Society Institute Development Foundation (US) and the International Development Research Centre (Canada).

Source URL: http://a2knetwork.org/a2k

Links:
[12] http://a2knetwork.org/a2k-policies