

Stream-Ripping and Copyright Infringement in Music: An In-Depth Analysis

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Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) as mentioned by the World Trade Organisation are “the rights given to persons over the creations of their minds. They usually give the creator an exclusive right over the use of his/her creation for a certain period.” In India, the IPR especially that is tied to the Copyright Act, was last amended in 2012 which was done in compliance with the “Internet Treaties”.¹ According to Section 14 of the Copyright Act of 1957, copyright grants the exclusive right to do or authorise the doing of specific acts (as specified in the Act) in respect of a work, which arises automatically on the creator of the work if the work is presented in tangible form. Copyright is awarded to original literary, dramatic, musical, and creative works; sound recordings, and cinematographic films in the form of expression that can be seen, read, or heard, as Copyright cannot protect ideas. A copyright author or owner has the exclusive rights to grant permission and to prohibit others from using their work for any purpose. Everyone is required to obtain permission from the author/owner if they want to exploit their work in any manner. If any individual executes the exclusive rights without a licence granted by the owner of the copyright or in violation of the terms of a licence thus provided by the author/owner of the copyrighted work shall be held liable for infringement² as per the Act.

Keywords: Copyright Act, 1957, Music Work, Online Digital Piracy, Online Streaming

Today, the enforcement of copyright is hampered by rapid technological changes, which can have a beneficial or negative impact on the use of digital media. The negative impact is the enforcement of legal protection against the widespread occurrence of difficult-to-detect copyright infringement. One such technological advancement is stream-ripping which is used in downloading music using unauthorized applications from authorized platforms that do not allow the downloading feature to protect the copyright of the authors. This leads us to first understand the concept of stream-ripping.

What is Stream-Ripping?

Music streaming applications such as Spotify, Gana, Apple Music, and Wink. YouTube Music etc. provides the feature of downloading music but this feature does not allow to download the music to the device. The intention is to let consumers listen to the music even in offline mode. Because the music can't be downloaded to the device, it can't be shared with other devices. This feature is important to protect the rights of the authors whose music is shared on the authorised platform to be listened to by the consumers. The pirates have come up with the hack

for this also. There are numerous websites, if you search on Google which facilitate downloading the music to the device itself. This technology is known as stream-ripping.

The practise of storing data streams to a file is stream ripping also known as stream recording or convertor or de-streaming. Stream ripping is most used to refer to the process of storing audio or video from streaming media websites and services such as YouTube outside of the legally supplied means of offline playback (if any) using unofficial software and tools.³ Stream-ripping, in other terms, is the technique of acquiring a permanent copy of online-streamed content. The technique can be used for both audio and audio-visual data, and an audio-only replica of the song can be made in either case. Once a copy has been created and saved, the user can listen to it offline and share it among their devices.⁴

This is not the first time that piracy has taken place in the field of music. Various ways will simultaneously come up with the changing ways of music delivery to consumers. The compact disc (CD) was the preferred method of listening to music in the 1990s, rapidly followed by commercial bootleggers. Digital files, such as MP3s, began to replace CDs in the late 1990s and early 2000s, providing increased convenience and variety for music consumers

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worldwide. Music pirates, on the other hand, were not far behind, with the appearance of file-sharing sites and other means for propagating illegal versions of music. The digital file is still king today, but music streaming apps like Apple Music, Spotify, and Pandora are the new go-to. However, history is repeating itself as pirates embrace new methods of unauthorized copying, one of which is stream-ripping.⁵

Why do People Prefer Stream-Ripping over Authorised Platforms?

The music on the authorized streaming platforms is available for free to listen to, but if a listener wants to download the music so that it can be listened to offline or if a listener prefers to avoid ads in between then he/she must take the paid subscription for it. This is necessary also, as monetization of streaming is important for making sure that rights owners can get their due compensation or royalty.

Then comes these stream-ripping services that can download music to the device itself and share the music to other devices for free. This means the music can be accessed even if the platform is not installed on the phone and most importantly it can be transferred from one device to another making it convenient for consumers. Therefore, these free versions are incentivizing the users as why would anyone pay to listen if they can now easily stream-rip? The other reason could be the consumer prefers listening to music in offline mode and on the move.

In India, YouTube leads with 82% usage, far ahead of Spotify (48%), Gaana (38%), and JioSaavn (25%), reflecting preferences for video content and regional languages. Spotify holds 26% market share per Redseer, boosted by AI recommendations amid 500M+ listeners averaging 26.7 hours weekly. As a result, it is vital to find effective solutions to the problem of digital piracy and ensure that the recorded music industry's progress is not limited by revenue leaks.⁶

The Effect of Stream-Ripping on the Music Industry

As mentioned above, copyright is an exclusive right of the author/owner, which means no other person can exploit the work in any manner without the permission of the owner. The exclusive right granted by the Act includes, among other things, the right to reproduce the work in any medium; to make copies of the work available to the public; to perform or convey the work in public; to make any other sound recording containing it; and to sell or rent it commercially. Anything done in violation is copyright infringement.

The right to give the music to be played on the streaming applications is the exclusive right of the producer. These music platforms agree with the artists/producers to make the music available on their platforms in return for consideration. They get a royalty for every download of their song. So, in this scenario, where several websites aid the music listeners in downloading the music for free and then sharing the music to other devices is, first, a direct copyright infringement and secondly, it affects the artist from earning royalty that they deserve for their work as they have put labour into it. Therefore, all these stream-ripping sites are violating the economic rights of the creators.

As per the Indian Music Industry Report⁶, with the advent of streaming, the issue of internet piracy has remained a massive, dark cloud over the music industry, costing it billions of dollars in revenues and profits globally. In India, streaming accounts for more than 80% of recorded music earnings. However, as internet and smartphone use increases in the country, so does the problem of digital piracy. Global music piracy dropped 18.6% in 2024 versus 2023, per MUSO's Piracy Trends Report, driven by better legal access; India's overall online piracy traffic hit 8.12% of global totals (2nd after U.S.), but music-specific data isn't segmented. IFPI's 2025 Global Music Report notes streaming's dominance (67% of revenues) curbing piracy, yet stream-ripping persists in India without quantified rates. PwC and EY reports highlight industry losses from piracy at ₹22,400 crore (all entertainment, 2023) and ₹8,000-11,000 crore (OTT, 2025), signaling ongoing issues. The increase reflects the fact that this year, more internet users exploited copyright infringement to listen to or obtain music. As a result, the problem of digital piracy appears to be becoming worse year after year. The most common sort of digital piracy is still stream ripping. Stream-ripping websites were used by 70% of Indian listeners. Lockers and peer-to-peer (P2P) services were also used. Mobile apps were also a problem, with the emphasis on YouTube stream ripping via programmes such as *Vidmate* and *Snaptube*, both of which are freely available for Android phones.

Since stream-ripping offers an alternate means to receive music without commercials, it is the biggest rival of subscription services, and hence possibly one of the biggest losses of potential amount to rights owners and the music industry.⁷

Copyright Act, 1957 – Gaps

India's Copyright Act, 1957 defines infringement comprehensively under Section 51, making it actionable when anyone exercises exclusive rights without permission, directly relevant to music piracy via unauthorized reproduction, distribution, or communication.

Section 51(a) covers primary infringement:

- 51(a)(i): Doing any act exclusive to the owner under Section 14 (e.g., reproducing musical works [S.14(a)(iii)], copying sound recordings [S. 14(e)(i)], communicating music to the public [S. 14(a)(vi)/(e)(iii)] as in stream-ripping or torrent uploads).
- 51(a)(ii): Permitting premises/apparatus for infringement (e.g., hosting pirate sites).
- 51(b): Importing infringing copies for sale/distribution.

Secondary infringement (Sections 51(a)(iii)-(iv), 55) holds enablers liable (e.g., torrent facilitators in *UTV v. 1337X*). No safe harbor for active inducement, per IT Act interplay.

Stream-ripping sites (e.g., Yt1s.com) enable users to convert licensed YouTube streams into permanent MP3 downloads, bypassing temporary buffers intended under streaming licenses, thus creating infringing fixed copies that facilitate further sharing neither excused by Section 52 fair dealing (private use doesn't apply to commercial facilitation) nor protected by IT Act Section 79 safe harbor (active inducement disqualifies intermediary status, per *UTV v 1337X/Sony precedents*). The legal problem lies in enforcement gaps against "hydra-headed" sites (mirrors/redirects), technical circumvention ease, and lack of explicit anti-circumvention provisions like US DMCA Section 1201, though courts bridge this via dynamic injunctions directing ISP/MeitY blocks; this sustains piracy despite streaming growth,

Take of Indian Judiciary on Digital Piracy

According to the International Federation of the Phonographic Business (IFPI), the organization that represents the recorded music business worldwide, and the Indian Music Industry (IMI), representing music labels in India, coordinated on behalf of their member record companies: Sony Music India, Universal Music India, Warner Music India witnessed its first-ever stream-ripping case *Sony Music Entertainment India Pvt Ltd and Ors v Yt1s.Com and Ors*.⁸ Delhi High Court, CS(COMM) 13/2023,

12.01.2023) marks India's first blocking order specifically against stream-ripping sites, highly relevant to music piracy as it compels ISPs to block 18 rogue websites (e.g., yt1s.com with 18-20M monthly visits) that enable unauthorized MP3 downloads from YouTube links, directly undermining streaming platforms' anti-piracy efforts amid India's elevated rates. Building on *UTV v 1337X's rogue website criteria*, the court invoked Section 51(a)(i),(a)(ii),(b) of the Copyright Act for infringing exclusive rights under Section 14 (reproduction, public communication of sound recordings), denying IT Act Section 79 safe harbor due to active facilitation rather than passive hosting, with no fair dealing under Section 52(1)(c). For your copyright research, it advances dynamic enforcement against "stream-ripping" (a persistent music piracy vector post-73% 2022 rates), directing MeitY/DoT to notify blocks and reinforcing judicial tools for hydra-headed sites threatening licensed streaming ecosystems.⁹

Not specific to stream-ripping but there are certain other cases dealing with online piracy. Such as the above-said order was passed in line with another case by the Delhi High Court to tackle online piracy by passing an injunction against cyber-lockers. In the case of *Universal City Studios LLC v Mixdrop. Co*¹⁰ Delhi High Court, CS(COMM) 514/2023, 01.05.2023) decreed a permanent injunction against cyberlocker and referral "rogue websites" disseminating plaintiffs' cinematograph works, relevant to music piracy as these platforms (e.g., Mixdrop.co with referral sites like movies-watch.com.pk) enable unauthorized uploading, hosting, streaming, and downloading of sound recordings alongside films, diverting users from licensed streaming and sustaining high infringement rates. The court held infringement under Section 51(a)(i),(ii),(b) for violating exclusive rights in Section 14(d)(iii) (communication to public, reproduction of cinematograph/sound works), Section 17 (ownership), denying IT Act Section 79 safe harbor for active facilitation, with no Section 52(1)(c) fair dealing, classifying defendants as rogue based on forensic evidence of primary infringing purpose. For your research on digital music piracy, it extends UTV/Sony precedents to cyberlockers' backend storage role in hydra-headed ecosystems, reinforcing blocking remedies and commercial harm findings amid streaming growth.¹¹

The Delhi High Court through its judgement in *UTV Software Communication Ltd. and Ors v 1337X*.

to *And Ors*¹² (Delhi High Court, 2019) granted India's first dynamic injunction against rogue piracy sites, directly relevant to music piracy by enabling proactive blocking of torrent platforms like 1337X.TO that host, stream, download, or hyperlink unauthorized music files (e.g., MP3s/albums), evading takedowns via mirrors while profiting from ads. The court applied Section 51(a)(i) of the Copyright Act for unauthorized public communication, alongside Section 14 (exclusive rights in works including sound recordings via licensing), Section 55 (injunctions/damages), and denied IT Act Section 79 safe harbor as sites actively facilitated infringement rather than acting as passive intermediaries, rejecting fair dealing under Section 52(1)(c). For music piracy research, it establishes a "rogue site" test (primary infringement purpose, masked ownership, anti-block tactics) and extends blocks to hydra-headed mirrors, balancing IP enforcement with free speech proportionality amid India's high piracy rates.¹³

Indian judiciary is coming forward to give decisions on the piracy taking place in the digital era as a mark of achievement and a sign of relief to the music industry and artists. Not only they are making decisions, rather they are also coming up with new solutions such as injuncting all the rogue websites together with the help of "dynamic injunction". As seen above the judiciary has dealt with the cases of piracy through different mediums such as stream-ripping and lockers, acknowledging these kinds of piracy mediums and protecting the rights of the copyright holder is also appreciable.

Scenario in other countries

In the United States, the Copyright Act of 1976 (17 U.S.C.) addresses music infringement primarily through Section 501(a), which defines infringement as violating the copyright owner's exclusive rights under Section 106 specifically for musical works (Section 102(a)(2): reproduction, distribution, public performance via digital audio/radio, derivative works) and sound recordings (Section 102(a)(7), post-1972: reproduction, distribution, rental, digital performance via non-interactive streams). Section 501(a) covers direct acts like unauthorized MP3 downloads/streams; secondary liability applies to contributory/vicarious infringement (e.g., torrent facilitators); the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) sued the website "Youtube-mp3" for copyright infringement based on its stream-ripping services. The lawsuit claims that the site, which is one of the most popular

in the world, profits from copyright infringement and is responsible for upwards of 40% of all unlawful stream ripping of music from YouTube in the world. The RIAA is aiming to have the website shut down permanently, in addition to monetary damages of \$150,000 per violation.¹⁴

This isn't simply a problem in the United States. The British Phonographic Industry, which represents the music industry in the United Kingdom, has also informed YouTube of its intention to sue if the site continues to allow streaming.¹⁴ The High Court of Justice, Business and Property Courts of England and Wales requested internet service providers to ban access to "target (infringing) websites, their domains and subdomains, and any other IP address notified by the plaintiffs" which were involved in the infringement of the copyright of Universal City Studios by the defendants who were operating the UK based website Mixdrop. Co.¹¹ In the United Kingdom, the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (CDPA) governs music infringement through Sections 16-27, where primary infringement occurs by unauthorized performance of restricted acts under Section 16(1), including for musical works (Section 3(1)(a): reproduction, issuance of copies to public, rental/lending, public performance, communication to public, adaptation) and sound recordings (Section 5A: reproduction, distribution, rental, public performance/playback). Secondary infringement under Sections 22-26 targets dealing in infringing copies, providing means for infringement (e.g., torrent/stream-ripping tools), permitting premises/apparatus for infringing acts, directly applicable to music piracy sites as in prior Indian cases like *UTV v 1337X*.

Brazilian law enforcement authorities have executed a substantial number of operations as part of the continuing "Operation 404", a campaign supported by IFPI and Pro-Msica Brasil that addresses copyright and licencing infringement services on the internet. Operation 404 is one of the most comprehensive copyright infringement campaigns of its kind, including a wide range of activities targeting unlicensed music providers. Approximately 1,000 domains have been suspended because of the investigation, 720 infringing music apps have been removed, and 96 search warrants have been delivered. These activities were carried out in coordination with the Brazilian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, local cybercrime police units, and international law enforcement authorities.¹⁵ Brazil's Copyright Law

No. 9.610/1998 (Lei de Direitos Autorais) addresses music infringement via Article 29, which lists exclusive economic rights for musical works (reproduction, distribution, public performance, communication to the public, adaptation) and neighboring rights for phonograms/sound recordings under Articles 93-95(similar rights plus fixation/sale). Article 104 imposes joint liability for commercial dealing in infringing copies (sale, distribution, import), while Article 105 mandates judicial interruption of unauthorized transmissions/communications with fines; criminal penalties under Article 184 of the Penal Code (Decree-Law 2.848/1940) punish willful public dissemination for profit with 2-4 years imprisonment plus fines, extended to digital acts like stream-ripping/torrents.

For the first time since 2019, the Peruvian Copyright Office, INDECOPI, worked with Brazilian authorities to shut down a large online music pirate ring that includes more than 72 domains dedicated to music piracy, including MP3 Download and stream-ripping sites. Meanwhile, Brazilian authorities have ordered the removal of 63 more stream-ripping mobile apps from Brazilian app stores, as well as the filing of legal action against a major group of those involved for pre-release infringements. The City of London Police IP Crime Unit, a strategic partner to Brazilian authorities for Operation 404, has planned more disruptive actions involving multiple infringing sites.¹⁵

Conclusion & Measures to Curb the Piracy

Piracy is very hard to remove from the roots because the technology is so advanced that as soon as one technology is blocked the other one will parallelly emerge. Also, it is quite difficult to identify the level of piracy taking place all over the nation through different mediums. However, pricing or the perception of overpriced music was identified as a cause for stream-ripping. Offering music for free would drastically alter the industry's revenue model. A significant source of revenue is effectively gone, and that money must be made up for in other revenue sources for the sector to remain profitable. However, there could be other measures that can be adhered to reduce piracy at a certain level. The following are mentioned below:

- (i) Explicitly criminalize manufacturing/distributing stream-ripping tools (modeled on US DMCA S. 1201/1204), adding S. 65B: "No person shall circumvent effective TPMs protecting streaming buffers or create/distribute tools primarily designed for such circumvention, punishable under S. 63 with 1-3 years imprisonment." This plugs judicial reliance on "rogue site" blocks (*Sony v YtIs*).
- (ii) Clarify temporary buffers as non-reproducible; make permanent MP3 conversion from licensed streams a distinct infringement under S. 51(a)(i), with presumption of commercial scale for sites >1M visits/month.
- (iii) Expand S. 52(1)(c) exclusions; require ISPs to deploy client-side filters (e.g., Audible Magic) and platforms to watermark streams, with safe harbor tied to compliance reducing hydra-headed evasion.
- (iv) Create fast-track Copyright Review Commission for ripping complaints (90-day resolution), escalating S. 63 fines to ₹10 lakh+ for repeat offenders, mirroring Brazil's Article 105 transmission blocks.
- (v) One of the strongest reasons for choosing pirated sites for downloading music is that authorised streaming platforms are quite over-priced, so if the prices can be made affordable to the consumers, then they might switch to the authorised sites.
- (vi) The music industry should develop certain ways to retain listeners so that they will not be lost to illegal stream-ripping services.
- (vii) The judiciary is already doing a great job of blocking pirated sites and should continue to do so to keep the pirates aware that action can be taken against them anytime and they should prevent indulging themselves in taking recourse of illegal methods.
- (viii) But as we all know the judiciary is already piled up with so many cases, so another measure could be to have the government should implement a strong administrative enforcement framework to target websites and platforms that violate intellectual property rights. This measure is being taken by a few other countries such as Greece, Italy, Lithuania, and Spain.
- (ix) Most people are not even aware that downloading songs from such pirated sites is a criminal offence that can make them held liable for imprisonment and fines, so the government and IMI must take necessary action to aware music listeners aware of the consequences of using such pirated sites.
- (x) Apart from the awareness about consequences, the consumers should also be made aware of the

hard work the artists invest in producing that music and making it available to the public, therefore, as a consumer, we must pay back the artist by using the authorized platforms. By using pirated sites, we are helping the pirates to generate revenue.

- (xi) These rogue websites that grow on unlicensed music use safe harbour provisions under the Information Technology Act as a means of avoiding accountability for infringement of intellectual property. As a result, the intermediary liability framework for websites and platforms must be tightened to guarantee that they do not get away with hosting unauthorised content, which has a detrimental economic impact on the music business.
- (xii) Public-private collaborations, such as Brazil's Operation 404, which provides a coordinated response to copyright infringement and a consolidated response to digital piracy, could be another measure. The Maharashtra Intellectual Property Crime Unit (MIPCU), a public-private partnership associated with the Maharashtra Cyber unit and tasked with combating IP-related crimes such as digital piracy, is a significant example in India. Such projects could begin in other states as well.

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