

FROM STREAMING TO STEALING: A COPYRIGHT ANALYSIS OF STREAM RIPPING

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Introduction

Streaming has become one of the most common forms of entertainment today. Earlier, television and radio were the primary sources for watching shows and listening to music, where viewers had to wait for their favourite programme to be telecast or for a particular song to be played on the radio. However, the shift to a digital ecosystem has completely changed how content is consumed. Today, users can watch or listen to content anytime and anywhere, directly from their devices through various streaming platforms like YouTube, Netflix, Spotify etc.

Streaming refers to the continuous delivery of audio, video, or other media over the internet in real time, enabling users to consume content without downloading it permanently.¹ The scale of the streaming industry reflects its growing dominance. The global video streaming market was valued at USD 811.37 billion in 2025 and is expected to grow from USD 969.56 billion in 2026 to USD 3,394.56 billion by 2034.² A significant portion of the revenue generated by streaming platforms comes from user subscriptions and advertisements. When a user streams content on these platforms, these platforms earn revenue through ads or subscription fees, a share of which is paid to the owners of the copyrighted works being streamed. However, this revenue-sharing model is disrupted when users download or extract streamed content using third-party websites or software. This practice is commonly known as stream ripping.

What is Stream-ripping?

Stream ripping is the unauthorised process of converting and downloading audio or video from streaming platforms (like YouTube, Spotify) into permanent, offline files, bypassing official means, and is a major form of online piracy, often violating copyright laws and platform terms of service.³ Using various apps, websites, or browser extensions, users extract content to keep it permanently, circumventing Digital Rights Management (DRM). This practice has surged in popularity,

¹ *Streaming*, BRITANNICA (Jan 14, 2026), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/streaming-data-transmission>.

² *Video Streaming Market Size, Share & Industry Analysis, By Component (Software and Content Delivery Services), By Channel (Satellite TV, Cable TV, Internet Protocol Television (IPTV), and OTT Streaming), By Revenue Model (Subscription-based, Transactional-based, and Advertising-based), By Vertical (Education/E-learning, Healthcare, Government, Sports/eSports, Gaming, Enterprise and Corporate, Auction and Bidding, Fitness & Lifestyle, Music & Entertainment, and Others), and Regional Forecast, 2026-2034*, FORTUNE BUSINESS INSIGHTS (Jan 14, 2026), <https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/video-streaming-market-103057>.

³ Hugh McIntyre, *What Exactly Is Stream-Ripping, The New Way People Are Stealing Music*, FORBES (Jan 14, 2026), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hughmcintyre/2017/08/11/what-exactly-is-stream-ripping-the-new-way-people-are-stealing-music/>.

becoming a leading method for illegal music acquisition, leading to legal action against major ripping sites.

Copyright Rights Involved

When streamed content is converted into downloadable files through stream-ripping tools, multiple exclusive rights of the copyright owner under the Copyright Act, 1957⁴ (hereinafter referred to as ‘**the Act**’) are infringed.

1. **Right of reproduction** - Such conversion directly violates the right of reproduction under Section 14 of the Act⁵, as stream ripping results in the creation of a permanent and unauthorised copy of the copyrighted work, which goes beyond the limited right of access granted through streaming.
2. **Right of communication to the public** - Stream ripping interferes with the right of communication to the public, particularly where the ripped content is further shared or made available to others, thereby extending infringement beyond private copying. Further, streaming platforms are licensed to communicate works to users under specific technological and contractual conditions that are circumvented when content is ripped and stored offline.
3. **Economic and distribution rights**- Stream ripping adversely affects the economic and distribution rights of copyright owners by enabling repeated access, sharing, and dissemination of content without lawful remuneration. In many instances, the process also involves the circumvention of technological protection measures, which is expressly prohibited under Section 65A of the Act⁶.

Accordingly, stream ripping impacts not just one but several core copyright rights, making it a clear case of infringement under Indian copyright law.

The Saregama Case

The *Saregama India Limited v. En.ssyoutube & Ors.*⁷ case is one of the latest examples of stream-ripping in India. The plaintiff, Saregama India Limited, one of the largest music labels in the country, initiated proceedings against multiple websites whose primary and deliberate purpose was to facilitate copyright infringement, including infringement of the plaintiff’s copyrighted works by means of stream-ripping. The defendants also included domain name registrars through which these websites were registered and operated, as well as internet service providers, the Department of Telecommunications, and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, in order to effectively enforce the reliefs sought.

The stream-ripping websites were found to be engaged in large-scale and deliberate copyright infringement by providing

⁴ The Copyright Act, 1957, No. 14, Acts of Parliament, 1957 (India).

⁵ The Copyright Act, 1957, § 14, No. 14, Acts of Parliament, 1957 (India).

⁶ The Copyright Act, 1957, § 65A, No. 14, Acts of Parliament, 1957 (India).

⁷ *Saregama India Limited v. En.ssyoutube & Ors.*, CS(COMM) 1191/2025.

tools that enabled users to download copyrighted content, including Saregama's works, from licensed streaming platforms such as YouTube, without authorisation. By converting streamed content into downloadable files, these platforms undermined the conditional and time-bound access granted by copyright holders and licensed streaming services, while enabling offline access and further distribution of protected works.

Court's reasoning

In this decision, the Hon'ble Delhi High Court clearly distinguished between licensed streaming and downloading through stream-ripping. The Court observed that streaming involves the real-time transmission of content over the internet for immediate consumption, without the creation of a permanent copy on the user's device. In the absence of an authorised download option, a user is required to stream the content afresh each time they wish to access it. However, downloading via stream ripping results in the creation of a permanent digital copy that can be accessed repeatedly and may be transferred, shared, or disseminated indefinitely, without the consent or authorisation of either the copyright holder or the streaming platform.

The Court noted that this distinction is central to the business models of licensed streaming platforms. Authorised download options given by the streaming platforms typically involve a one-time transaction under a separate pricing structure, with revenues appropriately shared with rights holders and stream ripping disrupts these legitimate models by enabling the unauthorised conversion of streamed content into downloadable files, thereby depriving rights holders of lawful remuneration and eroding the value of licensed content.

The Court further held that such services cause substantial economic harm as they reduce traffic to licensed streaming platforms, reduce sales of premium subscription streaming services and divert sales of permanent downloads. In addition to statutory copyright infringement, the Court recognised that the use of stream-ripping services also results in violations of the terms of service of streaming platforms.

Recognising the serious economic impact of such activities, the Court granted a dynamic injunction, observing that stream-ripping services cause irreparable harm by extracting copyrighted content from licensed ecosystems where artists and rights holders are entitled to fair compensation.

Analysis

At the heart of the stream-ripping issue lies a fundamental principle of copyright law, which is that access to content does not translate into ownership of the content. The Streaming platforms grant users only a limited and conditional licence to access copyrighted works in real time. This licence is narrowly tailored to permit consumption within the technological

and contractual framework of the platform and does not extend to the creation, retention, or circulation of permanent copies by the users accessing that content.

This distinction between access and ownership gets collapsed when someone, instead of accessing the content through legal measures such as streaming, downloads the content with the help of stream ripping or other ways of piracy. By converting a stream into a downloadable file, the user moves from passive consumption to active copying. Under copyright law, this act of downloading the file permanently is legally significant, as it triggers the exclusive right of reproduction. The fact that the content was freely accessible for streaming does not dilute the copyright owner's control over copying, storage, or subsequent use. Free access, therefore, cannot be equated with permission to reproduce.

From an economic perspective, stream ripping directly undermines the licensed business models on which streaming platforms are built. These platforms function on carefully calibrated revenue structures based on subscriptions, advertising impressions, and authorised downloads, all of which ensure that rights holders are remunerated. Stream ripping bypasses these mechanisms entirely, allowing users to obtain permanent access without contributing to the revenue pool. Consider a situation where a person listens to a particular song on a daily basis. If the song is accessed each time through a licensed streaming platform, the copyright owner earns revenue on every listen, whether through advertisements or subscription fees. However, if the same person instead downloads the song through a third-party stream-ripping service, the owner earns nothing after the initial act of illegal downloading. What was earlier a recurring source of lawful revenue is now completely eliminated and when this practice is replicated by large numbers of users across multiple works, the cumulative impact is significant. Over time, such diversion erodes traffic to licensed platforms, reduces subscription uptake, and diminishes the overall value of licensed content, thereby destabilising the economic foundation of the streaming ecosystem.

The judgment also has wider implications for digital piracy enforcement in India. By recognising stream ripping as a clear case of infringement rather than a technological loophole, the courts have strengthened the legal framework against emerging forms of online piracy. The willingness to grant dynamic injunctions and address circumvention of technological protection measures signals a shift towards more proactive and adaptive enforcement. This approach equips rights holders with stronger remedies against piracy models that evolve alongside digital consumption, reinforcing the principle that technological convenience cannot override statutory copyright protections.

Conclusion

The act of downloading copyrighted content by stream ripping cannot be justified because the content is freely available for streaming. Indian copyright law clearly distinguishes between temporary access to content through licensed streaming platforms and the creation of permanent copies through unauthorised means. By converting streamed content into

downloadable files, stream ripping infringes fundamental copyright rights and undermines legitimate business models, causing substantial financial losses to rights holders and licensed platforms.

Judicial recognition of such cases, particularly in the *Saregama* case, reflects a growing awareness of the need to protect digital content ecosystems. As streaming continues to dominate content consumption, strict enforcement against stream-ripping practices is essential to safeguard the interests of creators, rights holders, and licensed platforms, while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the creative industry.

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