The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) and Its Potential Impact on Indian Copyright Law and the Digital Landscape

Shivansh Nayak, Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies,Indore.

Abstract

The explosive development of digital technologies has drastically remade content creation and dissemination, while equally escalating challenges to the enforcement of traditional copyrights. To address this, the United States passed the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in 1998, creating a seminal model for Internet copyright protection, most notably through its safe harbor provisions for online service providers and anti-circumvention provisions. As India charts its own growing digital economy and works to strengthen its intellectual property regime, the potential ramifications of implementing DMCA-like principles within its particular legal and socio-economic context are worth close analysis.

This paper takes on a far-reaching comparative examination of the DMCA's central principles—namely its intermediary liability bounds (safe harbors) and technological protection measure (TPM) provisions—compared to the current regime of India's Copyright Act, 1957, and Information Technology Act, 2000. It explores the subtleties of "fair use" vis-à-vis India's "fair dealing" doctrine and identifies the inherent differences that would shape any figural transplant of DMCA ideals. The study then imagines the complex effect such an application would have on India's digital landscape, looking at possible advantages such as greater certainty for online businesses and more effective copyright protection, as well as major challenges in the form of chilling effects on free speech, constraints on legitimate uses of digital content, and enforcement realities across the technologically varied infrastructure of India. Finally, the paper makes a case for a well-considered "Made in India" solution to digital copyright, which strongly promotes a balanced approach that selectively borrows suitable elements from global best practices while strongly protecting innovation, freedom of expression, and access to knowledge in alignment with India's own development context.

Introduction

The quickening pace of digital technology change has dramatically restructured the creation and dissemination of content, while at the same time intensifying challenges to conventional copyright protection. The ability to easily replicate, alter, and distribute digital content instantly across frontiers has contributed exponentially to copyright infringement and online piracy, with significant influence on creators and intellectual property-based industries globally.

In response to these burgeoning challenges and the obligations arising from international treaties, the United States enacted the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in 1998. The DMCA sought to strike a crucial balance: safeguarding copyright holders' rights in the digital environment while fostering the continued growth of electronic commerce and technological innovation. Its most important provisions, specifically those capping the liability of online service providers (termed "safe harbors") and restricting the circumvention of TPMs, were a model that would be used in digital copyright protection.

India is poised at the edge of a dramatic digital shift. With a fast-growing digital economy and booming creative industries, India's effective intellectual property protection is critical for long-term economic development and innovation. Whereas India has its own strong legal framework in the Copyright Act, 1957, and the Information Technology Act, 2000, which differ greatly in their provisions on digital

copyright, intermediary liability, and technological measures from the DMCA, enforcement in India's kaleidoscope of digital realities is uniquely challenged by jurisdictional complexity, pervasive unauthorized content, and ongoing challenges of reconciling creator rights with public access and exploding user-generated content.

This research paper is an attempt to critically evaluate the probable implications if the provisions contained in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act were adopted or applied within Indian law. By conducting a detailed comparative analysis of the major provisions of the DMCA with Indian copyright and digital laws currently in place, this work attempts to conceptualize the probable outcomes, both positive and negative. It is going to examine how the DMCA's model of intermediary liability and anti-circumvention requirements may play out within India's specific socio-economic conditions, judicial precedents, and policy needs with regard to fair dealing, innovation, and digital access. Overall, this review aims to further the discussion on fashioning a strong, balanced, and contextually appropriate digital copyright regime in India.

1. The Digital Revolution and the Proliferation of New Challenges for Copyright

The arrival of the internet and digital technologies has profoundly changed content creation, distribution, and consumption, generating unprecedented types and levels of copyright infringement. The pervasive availability of the internet, combined with the spread of high-speed broadband and advanced digital equipment, has democratized content development and sharing to levels hitherto unimagined. With little more than a smartphone, individuals can become prolific content developers, and websites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok make instantaneous international sharing possible. This deep change has not only transformed the conventional roles of creators, distributors, and consumers but has also strengthened a new paradigm where content can be exactly replicated, easily transmitted across national borders, and rapidly altered, planting fertile soil for new ways of infringement. Conventional types of copyright violation, such as the physical bootlegging of CDs or DVDs, have been primarily replaced or complemented by extremely advanced digital bootlegging models. These are not limited to, but encompass as well, the extensive deployment of Peer-to-Peer (P2P) file exchange networks like BitTorrent, which facilitate millions of users to exchange copyrighted content, making the tracking and prosecution of individual infringers a massive logistical and legal endeavor.

In addition, the environment is increasingly controlled by illegal content hosting and streaming services, which run enormous collections of copyrighted TV shows, films, and music with often no valid licensing arrangement. They strategically position themselves in countries where copyright is weakly enforced, making international legal enforcement more difficult. The emergence of cyberlockers and download sites also worsens the situation, enabling users to upload and download copyrighted materials, under layers of anonymity in many cases, effectively hindering identification of the original sources of infringement. In addition to these, the ease of editing and re-uploading materials on social networking sites has led to widespread unauthorized re-uploading and remixing, wherein original works are integrated into new, unauthorized derivatives. The rapidly developing area of generative AI also poses a new threat, as AI trained on copyrighted content can create new works that infringe on pre-existing rights. Lastly, even with emerging progress in Technological Protection Measures (TPMs), including Digital Rights Management (DRM), rightsholders continually look for and develop means to bypass these digital locks, resulting in a never-ending, complicated game of cat and mouse between protection and circumvention. These widespread and changing problems require proactive and adaptive treatment of copyright law, going beyond compliance-focused enforcement to adopt preventative strategies and encourage greater international coordination, acknowledging that national legislation, alone, is usually inadequate to successfully manage this international digital issue.

1.1. The Genesis of the DMCA: Historical Imperatives and Structural Foundations in the United States

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), signed into law in the United States in 1998, is a landmark legislative enactment intended to bring U.S. copyright law into the modern digital era. Its advent was spurred on by a nexus of historical events and an acute need to address the fast-changing intersection of digital technology and intellectual property rights. The 1990s digital tsunami was the main driver of this copyright reform. The mid-to-late 1990s saw an explosive spread of the internet and digital technologies.

This was a period where personal computers became widespread, modems became more accessible, and the World Wide Web grew exponentially. Early internet applications, like AOL and Prodigy, and the growing use of email and early file-sharing technologies (the difficulties created by Napster, even though they arose soon after the DMCA was enacted, lucidly demonstrated the central issue), placed the question of digital copyright infringement squarely at the top of legal and industry agendas, calling for a strong legislative remedy. It was also an era of heavy industry lobbying and the power of international treaty commitments that deeply influenced the DMCA mandate. Established copyright industries, such as music, film, publishing, and software, felt an unprecedented existential threat posed by digital piracy. Having an ease of copying and distributing digital material with complete fidelity, at essentially instant speed, and negligible expense directly threatened their established revenue sources and the very existence of their business models. As a result, these sectors mounted intensive lobbying to secure more robust legal protections. Another key international driving force for the DMCA was the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Copyright Treaty (WCT) and the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty (WPPT), both adopted in 1996. Both treaties were intended to modernize global copyright standards for the digital world, specifically regarding technological protection mechanisms (TPMs) and rights management information (RMI). As a signatory, the U.S. was bound to incorporate these provisions into its national law, setting the stage for important elements of the DMCA. The DMCA thus was built on two pillars: anti-circumvention provisions and online service provider safe harbors. The first pillar, codified in Title I, addressed Anti- Circumvention and Copyright Management Information Protection. This was the central and contentious element of the Act, making it an offense to circumvent technological protection measures (TPMs), commonly called "digital locks" or Digital Rights Management (DRM), that copyright owners use in order to regulate access to or copying of their works. This was in response to the fear that digital material, once decrypted or copied, could be reproduced infinitely and perfectly without permission.

The "notice and takedown" regime, in turn, emerged as a pillar of U.S. online copyright enforcement, which allowed copyright owners to seek the prompt deletion of infringing material without necessarily having to immediately file costly and often lengthy lawsuits against individual users or the websites themselves. In effect, the DMCA was a far-reaching legislative effort to balance the twin imperative of securing creators' rights in an ever-more digital world and, at the same time, promoting the development and creativity of online platforms by offering them a stable and certain legal environment.

1.2. India’s Accelerating Digital Evolution and Imperative for Enhanced Copyright Protection

India is presently witnessing an unprecedented digital shift, with a fast-growing digital economy, a new and highly productive creative and entertainment sector, and a digitally enabled consumer base growing by the day. Such fast-paced and sweeping change renders the creation and strict enforcement of strong copyright protection structures more important and imperative than ever before. India's digital leapfrog, as such, is defined by its widespread internet penetration and resultant economic transformation. The country now has one of the world's biggest pools of internet users, with hundreds of millions of citizens who have been connected via widespread availability of cheap smartphones and increasingly cheaper data plans, especially in historically underserved rural communities. This unprecedented digital uptake has not only led to an online content consumption explosion but also driven the exponential growth of several industries in India's digital economy, such as IT services, e-commerce, fintech, ed-tech, and online media and entertainment. These emerging industries are driving huge domestic and overseas investment, making huge contributions to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Concurrently, India's thriving entertainment and creative sectors have discovered new outlets in the digital era. India's dynamic creative industry includes the world-famous Bollywood and highly differentiated regional cinema industries, a vibrant music industry, a strong literature culture, a fast-growing software industry and game development, and an emerging digital artists' community.

These sectors are not just cultural ambassadors; they are an important economic driver, creating massive employment and playing a substantial role in the national economy and Indian soft power on the international stage. As digital distribution channels have spread around the world, including Over-the-Top (OTT) streaming services and music streaming, the international outreach and impact of Indian content have grown exponentially, so their success and innovation going forward is inextricably tied to robust intellectual property protection. The intersection of these factors highlights a pressing necessity for strong copyright enforcement in India's online environment. Without effective copyright laws and enforcement, creators in the form of artists, musicians, filmmakers, software engineers, or writers do not have the necessary legal framework to effectively monetize their efforts and prevent unauthorized use and widespread piracy. This lack of protection actually disincentivizes investment in creative activities and innovation, since the returns on investment can be significantly drained by unauthorized copying and distribution. In addition, industries that are reliant on copyrights are significant contributors to India's economy through revenues, employment generation, and intellectual property exports. Mass digital piracy directly hits these industries, resulting in significant economic losses, diminished tax revenues, and possible job loss. A weak copyright system can also serve as a powerful disincentive to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in important digital industries, because foreign content creators, technology firms, and investors are understandably more likely to invest in markets where their intellectual property rights are well protected and stringently enforced. In addition, piracy imposes an inherently unjust competitive landscape on legitimate businesses that invest substantially in content licensing, production, and distribution. It permits illegal operators to make money out of copyrighted material without having to pay anything for it, thus distorting the marketplace and prejudicing compliant parties. It is also important to understand that digital piracy is frequently not a random isolated activity but a sophisticated enterprise frequently operated by organized crime groups. Such networks take advantage of loopholes in the law and lax enforcement to dispense enormous quantities of infringing material, causing serious economic threats as well as, in certain instances, a threat to national security.

Last but not least, as a signatory to several global intellectual property agreements such as the TRIPS Agreement and the WIPO treaties, India has international commitments to ensure effective intellectual property protection. While India has a well-developed law of copyright (The Copyright Act, 1957, with major amendments), the special challenges thrown up by the digital environment require ongoing adjustment and hard enforcement. The current legal regime, while revised, might have to borrow lessons and adopt principles from other developed jurisdictions, e.g., in the U.S. DMCA, in order to properly respond to modern challenges such as online intermediaries' liability and the protection of technological measures in the unique Indian context.

2. Understanding the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA)

The US Framework, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), passed in the United States in 1998, is the anchor of U.S. copyright law's transition into the digital era. One of the main goals of the DMCA was to solve the growing issue of internet copyright infringement that came along with the phenomenal spread of the internet. The Act attempted to find a balance the need to defend copyright owners' rights in this new digital landscape with the equally essential necessity to promote technological innovation and development of services on the internet. This balancing act, striving to create certainty for both creators of content and digital intermediaries, characterizes much of the DMCA's design and continuing significance.

2.1. Genesis and Origin of the DMCA

The birth of the DMCA is closely tied to the digital revolution of the 1990s and the global response to the challenges it presented to intellectual property. The explosive growth of the internet and digital technologies made it possible for easy and perfect copying and dissemination of copyrighted materials, and this triggered a real sense of crisis in traditional content industries such as music, film, and software. As a party to international treaties, the United States was bound to harmonize its domestic copyright law with these new international standards. In addition to treaty adherence, another basic goal of the DMCA was to create a robust legal system for combating online

copyright infringement. Before the DMCA, it was unclear what liability online service providers (OSPs) had for infringement on their sites, and this put powerful disincentives on them to provide a platform for user postings or provide interactive services. The Act tried to resolve this by creating a system that both allowed copyright owners to protect their work and granted safe harbors to OSPs. Most importantly, the DMCA sought an advanced balancing between technology innovation and copyright owner rights. It understood that the development of the internet relied upon online services having the ability to function without debilitating liability for their customers' actions, while not destroying the incentive for creators to safeguard investments in digital products. This double goal crafted the distinctive shape of the DMCA, forming both robust anti-circumvention provisions and liability limits for intermediaries.

2.2. Key Provisions of the DMCA

The structure of the DMCA is generally made up of two vital and most contested titles, each discussing different components of digital copyright. Title II: Online Copyright Infringement Liability Limitation Act (OCILLA) - "Safe Harbors" for Online Service Providers (OSPs), enacted mostly in Section 512 of the U.S. Copyright Act, is perhaps the most influential section of the DMCA for the wider digital economy. It grants meaningful legal shields to online service providers, protecting them from financial liability for copyright infringement by their users if they satisfy certain conditions prescribed by statute. These safe harbors apply to four broad categories of OSP activities: transitory digital network communications (Section 512(a)), which is limited to the routing of material without alteration; system caching (Section 512(b)), which includes the temporary storage of material for more efficient network transmission; information residing on systems or networks at the behest of users (Section 512(c)), which is most applicable to sites hosting user-generated content such as YouTube or social networking sites; and information location tools (Section 512(d)), which deals with search engines and other linking services. For OSPs to be eligible to enjoy these safe harbors, they need to comply with certain eligibility conditions. The most important of these is the adoption of a "notice-and-takedown" policy, where OSPs are obligated to quickly take down or disable access to supposedly infringing content upon notification by a proper notice from a copyright owner.

The OSP also needs to have no actual knowledge, to take prompt steps to delete the material. The OSP is also not able to receive a direct financial advantage from the infringing activity and should not be interfering with normal technical measures taken by copyright holders to identify or prevent their works. They must also adopt and reasonably implement a repeat infringer termination policy and provide standard technical measures. This system effectively transfers substantial enforcement authority to copyright holders, enabling prompt removal of infringing material without constant recourse to litigation. In spite of its underlying purpose, criticisms of DMCA Safe Harbors are considerable and ongoing. One of the greatest concerns is the threat posed by false takedown notices, in which legitimate content, including fair use material, is mistakenly or maliciously targeted for censorship or chilling effects on free speech. As more are increasingly depending on automated systems for sending and receiving takedown notices, this problem is exacerbated since such systems do not possess the level of nuanced judgment necessary to differentiate between infringement and legitimate uses. Critics also mention the burden to small creators/platforms, saying that the system disproportionately benefits large copyright holders who can pay for automated enforcement tools, while small creators might have difficulty sending effective notices or fending off bad faith claims. Further, the mere quantity of content and notices can overwhelm even large platforms, creating inefficiency and disagreement on what is "expeditious" removal.

Title I: WIPO Copyright and Performances and Phonograms Treaties Implementation Act of 1998 - Anti-Circumvention Provisions, mostly contained in Section 1201 of the U.S. Copyright Act, expressly addresses the technological side of digital copyright protection. This title criminalizes circumventing technological measures that limit access to or copying of copyrighted works. Specifically, Section 1201(a)(1)(A) prohibits circumventing technological measures controlling access to copyrighted works, preventing unauthorized access to works protected by encryption or other digital locks. In addition, Section 1201(a)(2) and (b)(1) forbids trafficking in circumvention devices, or it is unlawful to produce, import, offer for sale, provide, or otherwise traffic in any technology, product, service, or component that is being primarily designed or

produced to circumvent a technological measure. This encompasses a general ban on preventing the general availability of tools that can facilitate mass infringement. Congress did, however, acknowledge the necessity for exceptions and limitations to anti-circumvention. The DMCA exceptions for lawful purposes such as reverse engineering (for interoperability), encryption research, security testing, and certain activities relating to personal privacy. Most importantly, Section 1201 also provided a rulemaking process every three years by the Librarian of Congress on the recommendation of the Register of Copyrights to create temporary exceptions to the anti-circumvention prohibitions for non-infringing purposes otherwise prejudicially affected. Recent instances of exemptions include right to repair exemptions for electronic devices, so that owners can gain access to diagnostic information or firmware required to repair, and exemptions for purposes of education, film study, and accessibility. Beyond these exemptions, criticism of DMCA Anti-Circumvention provisions is strong and relates to core dimensions of digital rights and innovation. They are opposed to the assertion that the provisions will choke innovation by tying down devices and content, hindering third parties from creating interoperable products or services. There are large concerns regarding their effect on limitations of fair use, since circumventing a TPM even for a non-infringing fair use reason (e.g., taking a clip for purposes of criticism) is prohibited by Section 1201. This essentially creates a "perfect storm" for copyright owners, providing them with technological control which may dominate customary copyright exceptions. Additionally, the anti-circumvention provisions profoundly affect legitimate repair, research, and archiving, as researchers, archivists, and independent repair facilities can be legally excluded from accessing content or devices to which they need access in order to do their work, even if their purpose is non-infringing. This has resulted in existing controversies regarding the balance between copyright protection and public interest in access, innovation, and legitimate use of purchased digital products.

3. Indian Copyright and Digital Law:

The Current Landscape India's copyright legal system, founded in the colonial time period, has seen extensive amendments to meet the challenges and possibilities of the digital era. The current legal landscape is explored here, specifically the Copyright Act, 1957, the Information Technology Act, 2000, and judicial dicta related thereto, as well as its specialized handling of technological protection measures and restrictions on copyright.

3.1. The Copyright Act, 1957

The Copyright Act, 1957 is the main statutory framework for the protection of copyright in India. Since the decades, it has been supplemented numerous times to adjust to technological developments and international treaty requirements, most significantly by way of the Copyright (Amendment) Act, 2012. The fundamental principles of the Act are consistent with global standards, providing authors and creators with sole ownership rights over their original literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works, cinematograph films, and sound recordings. It defines the period of copyright, usually the author's life and sixty years, and details all the rights that have been granted to copyright owners, which range from the right to reproduce the work, issue copies to the public, perform the work publicly, produce cinematograph films or sound recordings of the work, prepare translations or adaptations of the work, and distribute the work to the public. The Act also provides for moral rights like the right of paternity (right to claim authorship) and right of integrity (to avoid distortion or mutilation of work). The organization of the Act is well-rounded, ranging from the formation of the Copyright Office and Copyright Board to the procedure of registration, assignment and licensing of rights, and elaborate provisions on infringement and remedies. The amendments in 2012 brought major changes to enhance creators' rights in the digital space, especially those of authors and composers in the film and music sectors, and also tackle new types of digital piracy.

3.2. Intermediary Liability in India

Intermediary liability in India is essentially regulated by an evolving interplay of the Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act), its follow-up rules, and key judicial interpretations. Section 79 of the IT Act is the most crucial provision, which originally granted a general "safe harbor" to intermediaries and specified that they would not be liable for any third-party information, data, or communication link hosted or made available by them if they are exercising "due diligence" while performing their obligations under the Act and rules. The meaning of "due diligence" and the extent of this safe harbor have been highly controversial and challenged in courts. The regulatory framework was further clarified and revised by the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. These Rules place greater burdens on intermediaries, especially "significant social media intermediaries," with regard to moderation, traceability of messages, and takedown rules. Under copyright law, these regulations require intermediaries to have a sound grievance redressal system in place and to promptly delete or disable access to copyright-infringing content, among others, upon getting actual knowledge or an order from a court. Intermediaries are made responsible for demonstrating "due diligence" by, say, having transparent terms of use, notifying users of illegal content, and acting timely on legitimate grievances. The growth of intermediary liability has been significantly influenced by judicial interpretations within India. A key ruling was that of the Supreme Court in Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015), which declared Section 66A of the IT Act unconstitutional but importantly clarified Section 79. According to the Court, intermediaries would lose the protection of safe harbor only if they did not remove infringing content once they gained actual knowledge of the infringement, usually through a court order or government notice. This judgment placed greater emphasis on a threshold of liability over simple "due diligence." Yet, later judgments, including the Delhi High Court's decision in MySpace Inc. v. Super Cassettes Industries Ltd. (2016), further developed this stance. Although MySpace was held liable for certain infringing content, the court also recognized the difficulties of policing large quantities of user-generated content and inclined towards a "knowledge-

based" model of liability, instead of an obligation to actively monitor. Subsequent judicial rulings still straddle the thin line between the "actual knowledge" rule and the new "due diligence" requirements stipulated under the 2021 Rules, specifically regarding automated filtering tools and the active role to be played by intermediaries in countering copyright violations. These rulings still define the boundaries of online copyright enforcement and the role of platforms within India's digital landscape.

3.3. Technological Protection Measures (TPMs) and Digital Rights Management (DRM) in India

India's Copyright Act, 1957, adequately deals with Technological Protection Measures (TPMs) and Digital Rights Management (DRM) by incorporating amendments in 2012. Sections 65A and 65B were added to address circumvention of TPMs and integrity of Rights Management Information (RMI). Section 65A criminalizes circumventing an effective technological measure taken by copyright owners to restrict their rights with the intent to do so. An "effective technological measure" is a measure that, in the normal course of operation, prevents or restricts access to a copyrighted work. This section seeks to prevent unauthorized bypassing of digital locks. To this end, Section 65B criminalizes intentionally deleting or modifying any electronic rights management information (RMI) without permission. Information that helps identify the work, the author, the owner of copyright, and the conditions of use is considered RMI. This section aims to secure the integrity of metadata that enables management and enforcement of copyright. While such provisions are a major leap towards safeguarding digital content, their scope and limitations compared to DMCA's Title I are significant. India's anti-circumvention provisions are comparatively deemed as less comprehensive and prescriptive compared to the provisions in Section 1201 of the DMCA. For example, the Indian Act targets circumvention itself and RMI tampering, but it lacks the degree of fine-grained exceptions to specific purposes (such as security research or reverse engineering for interoperability) that are explicitly stated in the DMCA. Although the DMCA guarantees a triennial rulemaking procedure to provide exemptions to anti-circumvention, the Indian Act does not contain such a formalized

process for dynamic adjustment. This implies that certain legitimate non-infringing purposes for which circumvention may be required may not be specifically statutorily exempted in India, and therefore could potentially create uncertainty or chilling effects on research or creative endeavors. The enforcement and judicial interpretation of Sections 65A and 65B under Indian law are also ongoing and evolving, especially concerning what an "effective technological measure" is and the standard of proof regarding "knowing" circumvention.

3.4. Limitations and Exceptions: "Fair Dealing" in India

The Indian Copyright Act, 1957, allows for limitations and exceptions to copyright protection mainly through the doctrine of "fair dealing," as enshrined in Section 52 of the Act. In contrast to the more general and open-ended "fair use" doctrine of the U.S., Indian fair dealing is a "closed list" of enumerated clearly allowed uses that do not amount to copyright infringement, as long as they are "fair". Section 52 sets out an exhaustive list of acts that are not infringing, including:

1. Private use, including research: This permits people to make copies for private study or research.

2. Criticism or review: Applying a work for purposes of criticism or review, whether of such work or of any other work.

3. News reporting of current events and current affairs: This covers use in newspapers, magazines, or for cinematographic film or broadcasting.

4. Reproduction or adaptation of a work of literature, drama, music, or art for use in the course of judicial proceedings or for the purpose of reporting a judicial proceeding.

5. Reproduction of a work for educational purposes: This includes many uses in educational institutions, such as teaching, examination, and course packs, under certain conditions.

6. Reproducing for purposes of an archival collection in public libraries or for public use on a non-commercial basis.

7. Performance in the course of activities of a club or society (not for profit).

8. And a number of specific exceptions for disability access, religious ceremonies, and for government purposes.

The determination of what "fairness" is in "fair dealing" usually entails analyzing similar factors to those under U.S. fair use analysis, e.g., the purpose and character of use (e.g., whether such use is commercial or for non-profit educational purposes), the nature of the work being copyrighted, the amount and substantiality of the portion taken in relation to the work as a whole, and the effect of the use on the potential market for or value of the work being copyrighted. But the crucial difference is between India's "closed list" system of "fair dealing" and America's broad "fair use" doctrine. In America, fair use is a defense by affirmative, and it is checked by courts using a four-factor test to see whether a particular use is fair, keeping open the possibility of a more expansive and flexible interpretation to new technologies and uses not specifically foreseen by statute. This flexibility enables development of new legitimate uses. On the contrary, India's fair dealing, being an exhaustive list, dictates that any use not specifically mentioned as an exception, though apparently "fair" in spirit, can be infringement. This can pose difficulties in matching copyright law to quickly changing digital uses and innovative methods that are outside the listed exceptions even though such uses or methods would appear fair in spirit, potentially circumscribing the possibilities for legitimate re-use and transformative works in the digital environment.

4. Comparative Analysis: DMCA Principles vs. Indian Legal Realities

Let us have a comparative in-depth analysis of the principal principles ingrained in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) of the United States vis-à-vis the current legal realities and changing jurisprudence in India. Through the analysis of critical domains like intermediary liability, anti-circumvention provisions, copyright limitations and exceptions, and enforcement provisions, this comparison endeavours to

identify areas of convergence and major divergences, providing insights into the possible effects of introducing DMCA-like principles into the Indian cyber economy.

4.1. Safe Harbors: A Direct Comparison

The idea of safe harbors for internet intermediaries is an important cross-cutting topic of comparison between the DMCA and Indian law, evidencing contrasting strategies for coping with liability online. In America, DMCA Section 512 contains specific "safe harbor" provisions that protect Online Service Providers (OSPs) against monetary liability for copyright infringement by users, as long as they satisfy certain statutory requirements. These conditions are disaggregated, addressing unique activities such as temporary network communications, caching by systems, user-provided content storage, and information location tools. A pillar of the DMCA regime is its formalized "notice and takedown" structure, which commits OSPs to promptly deleting or disabling access to purportedly infringing content upon being provided with proper notice by a copyright holder. The DMCA also requires that a Designated Agent be designated to receive such notices and that a clear communication channel be maintained for rights holders. In contrast, Indian IT Act Section 79 provides a blanket exemption from liability for intermediaries, subject to keeping "due diligence" while performing their responsibilities. Until recent regulations, the definition of "due diligence" had been mostly left to judicial interpretation. One distinguishing factor is the "knowledge" test for intermediary liability in India. The landmark Supreme Court judgment in Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015) set out that intermediaries would lose their safe harbor protection only if they did not take down infringing material after gaining actual knowledge of the infringement, usually through a court order or government notification. This was in contrast to the more formalized system under the DMCA, wherein a proper DMCA notice, even without judicial approval, invokes the takedown requirement and possible loss of safe harbor in the case of inaction. Although the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, have added more explicit "due diligence" obligations and requirements for intermediaries such as the appointment of Grievance Officers (comparable to DMCA's

Designated Agents), the original "actual knowledge" standard established by Shreya Singhal continues to be an important interpretive tool. This divergence means that, in practice, a copyright holder in India may face a higher burden to establish "actual knowledge" on the part of the intermediary compared to the structured DMCA notice system, potentially leading to varied practical implications for content removal and enforcement speed in both jurisdictions.

4.2. Anti-Circumvention Measures: Scope, Effectiveness, and Enforcement

The method of anti-circumvention provisions exposes a critical zone of comparison between Indian copyright law and the DMCA in terms of scope, efficacy, and challenges with respect to enforcement. Title I (Sections 1201 and 1202) of the DMCA extensively forbids circumvention of technological protection measures that limit access to or copying of copyrighted works and also trafficking in circumvention tools. This far-reaching ban seeks to draw a technological fence around online material. A striking aspect of the DMCA is its distinctive triennial rulemaking procedure for exemptions, under which the Librarian of Congress, upon the advice of the Register of Copyrights, may establish temporary exceptions to the anti-circumvention provisions for non-infringing purposes that would otherwise be negatively impacted. This process, though controversial, provides a means for the law to keep pace with new technologies and applications. In India, the Copyright Act, 1957, was amended through Section 65A and Section 65B by the 2012 Amendment, dealing with circumvention of technological measures and rights management information integrity, respectively. Section 65A makes it unlawful to knowingly circumvent an "effective technological measure" meant for the protection of copyright. Though this is consistent with the anti-circumvention purpose of the DMCA, the Indian law is overall more limited in covered technologies and circumvention acts than the DMCA. Perhaps most importantly, India's Act does not have a formalized dynamic process for exemptions similar to the DMCA's triennial rulemaking. This lack indicates that anti-circumvention exceptions are not periodically reviewed and refined to fit new legitimate purposes or to respond to unforeseen effects on fair dealing or innovation, potentially resulting in a more inflexible operation of the law. In addition, enforcement difficulties with anti-circumvention measures are widespread in both countries but can be very acute in India. Prosecution of these cases

tends to demand a high level of technical sophistication in Indian courts to grasp the subtleties of digital technologies, encryption, and evasive measures. The early judicial precedent on these particular sections as opposed to the decades of experience with DMCA cases also poses a challenge, rendering the effective practicality and meaning of Sections 65A and 65B a continually evolving territory.

4.3. Fair Use vs. Fair Dealing: The Basic Divide and its Digital Consequences

The "fair use" doctrine in the U.S. and "fair dealing" doctrine in India constitute a basic philosophical divide in the approach of copyright law in balancing the proprietary rights with the public interest and freedom of users, with far-reaching digital consequences. U.S. fair use (Section 107 of the Copyright Act) is an open-ended, flexible defense against copyright infringement, evaluated using a four-factor test and emphasizing considerations such as "transformative use" – whether the new work provides new expression, meaning, or message to the original. This open-ended system enables courts to respond to unexpected technological advances and emerging creativity, promoting innovation and robust commentary. Indian fair dealing, on the other hand, under Section 52 of the Copyright Act, 1957, is a "closed list" of specifically outlined purposes for which works in copyright may be used without permission, as long as the use is "fair." Some such specific permitted uses are research, private study, criticism, review, and reporting current events, among others. Although the "fairness" within these categories is a qualitative evaluation (akin to the considerations of U.S. fair use), any application not on this precise list, regardless of its transformative or commercial nature, can possibly amount to infringement. This essential distinction is crucial to implications on creativity, innovation, and user rights in the digital environment in both legal frameworks. The broadness of U.S. fair use has enabled the development of remix culture, parody, and user-generated content, enabling a wider variety of transformative works online. In India, the "closed list" method has the potential to strangle digital creativity based on reusing existing content in new manners, if such reuse does not fit squarely within the statutory exceptions. Given how a DMCA-style regime would relate to India's "fair dealing" underscores these tensions further. The anti-circumvention provisions of the DMCA, as noted, can criminalize the circumvention of technological measures even for uses that could otherwise be seen as fair use.

If implemented without proper incorporation, this very robust anti-circumvention approach in India combined with its already restrictive fair dealing doctrine may severely restrict legitimate access to and utilization of digital works for purposes of research, education, or criticism. This might create a digital "lockdown" effect whereby technological protection mechanisms override statutorily conferred user rights potentially to the detriment of educational institutions, researchers, and producers of transformative works in India's growing digital economy.

5. Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations for India's Digital Copyright Future

Framing the future directions of digital copyright in India calls for a forward-looking strategy that overcomes current challenges, seizes arising opportunities, and makes recommendations for a strong and fair future regime. Although international experiences such as the DMCA may provide lessons to be learned, India's own socio-economic, technological, and constitutional scenario mandates an indigenous strategy.

5.1. Shaping Intermediary Liability in India

The present scenario of intermediary liability in India, being influenced by the Information Technology Act, 2000, as well as specifically the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, has both positives and continuing controversies. An assessment of the efficacy of the Rules assumes significance, especially against the backdrop of recent judicial challenges questioning their constitutional legitimacy, ambit, and the operational burden they impose on intermediaries. While the Rules should promote increased due diligence, their implications for freedom of speech as well as operational practicability for platforms are topics of hot debate. Beyond the straightforward "notice and takedown" model is an important opportunity for India. While "notice and takedown" promises velocity, it can also result in over-blocking and abuse. India may consider more subtle and proportional "stay down" requirements, where intermediaries on receipt of a legitimate notice or court order must not only remove infringing material but also take reasonable

steps to block its re-upload. This, however, should be weighed against strong counter-measures against over-blocking and possible censorship. In addition, increasing transparency in takedown notices issued by platforms as well as rights holders may encourage accountability and offer useful data for policy improvement. To decrease the load on courts and enable faster resolution of disputes, encouraging alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms specially designed for copyright grievances in the digital environment, such as mediation or arbitration forums, could be extremely useful. This would provide a more effective and less confrontational avenue for creators and users to settle content-related complaints

5.2. Strengthening Enforcement Mechanisms

Ensuring effective copyright protection needs to be complemented by strong enforcement mechanisms. One of the main challenges in India is the requirement for capacity building for the judiciary and law enforcement personnel in intricate digital copyright and technology issues. This encompasses offering specialized education in digital forensics, online investigation methods, and the nuances of digital evidence. Courts also need increased technical knowledge to decide complicated cases concerning digital platforms, AI-produced content, and advanced infringement tactics. In addition to legal and judicial capability, there should be increased public awareness campaigns on digital copyright. Informing users of the importance of intellectual property, legality of certain online activities, and damage of piracy can promote a culture of respect for creators' rights. Last but not least, promoting international collaboration to deter cross-border online piracy is crucial. With the borderless nature of the internet, national efforts alone are inadequate. Enhancing international collaboration, information exchange, and mutual legal assistance agreements with other countries will be key to success in addressing organized digital piracy networks that span borders.

5.3. Towards an Indigenous "Digital India" Copyright Framework

Finally, the future of India in the digital copyright context is to work on an indigenous "Digital India" copyright framework. This entails meaningfully blending valuable elements of successful overseas examples like the DMCA, such as explicit intermediary safe harbors encouraging innovation, while carefully catering to India's own needs, its constitutional values (such as the Freedom of Speech and Expression right), and its own development objectives. A wholesale, unreflective transfer of a Western model may not be appropriate and may have unintended adverse effects in light of India's heterogeneous society, differences in levels of digital literacy, and sui generis culture. Hence, a focus on multi-stakeholder interaction in policy making is unavoidable. This involves engaging all concerned stakeholders actively: creators (artists, musicians, filmmakers, software programmers), online service providers (platforms, ISPs, app developers), users (consumers, educators, researchers), and government agencies. This way, the resulting framework will be holistic, balanced, feasible, and responsive to India's fast-changing digital environment, exhibiting a genuine commitment to both encouraging creativity and making available broad public access in the digital

Conclusion

Charting a Balanced Path for India's Digital Creative Economy The analysis above has examined in great depth the United States' Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) and the possible ripple effects if its fundamental premises were to be adopted within India's unique copyright and digital legal environment. We have explored the historical imperatives that led to the DMCA's simultaneous emphasis on anti-circumvention and intermediary safe harbors, and analyzed how these provisions have operated and have been criticized in the U.S. Concurrently, we have analyzed India's current copyright scheme, examining the fine print of its Copyright Act, 1957, the developing regime of intermediary liability under the IT Act, and the underlying doctrine of fair dealing. The comparative analysis has identified notable divergences, especially regarding the stringency of anti-circumvention provisions, the "actual knowledge" threshold for intermediary liability, and the differing philosophies of fair use and fair dealing.

This inquiry has confirmed that even as some elements of the DMCA, such as objective safe harbor principles, hold promise

through greater legal certainty for online services and greater protection for rights holders, there is a direct transplantation risk with great substance. The conclusions emphasize the essential importance of an evolved and balanced strategy to India's digital copyright future. An uncritical wholesale imposition of the DMCA, especially its anti-circumvention provisions and without having strong and flexible exceptions, has the potential to unwittingly choke India's growing innovation, induce a chilling effect on user-generated content and free speech, and choke legitimate "fair dealing" activities essential to education, research, and cultural expression. The compliance burden on Indian SMEs and startups, the current technology infrastructure gaps, and possible threats to information access by a large, digitally transforming populace also pose daunting challenges. Additionally, a Western-centric framework needs to be sensitively calibrated to engage in a symbiotic relation with India's diverse cultural heritage and customary knowledge systems, so that digital rights do not inadvertently enclose common cultural resources. Thus, India's path in creating its own digital copyright destiny should eschew imitation of models from abroad. Rather, it offers a chance to develop an indigenous policy that rationally draws on the helpful simplicity and standardization provided by some DMCA concepts, like surefire intermediary safe harbors, yet remain committed to its particular national requirements, constitutional principles such as freedom of expression, and the imperatives of development. This requires an ongoing refinement of intermediary liability norms, a careful reconsideration of anti-circumvention measures to incorporate flexible exceptions, and an anticipatory reconciliation of "fair dealing" with the changing realities of digital production and consumption. Most importantly, the way ahead requires capacity building for the judiciary and law enforcement in advanced digital cases, combined with developing extensive multi-stakeholder collaboration among creators, online service providers, government, and users during the policy-making stage.

Through developing a framework that is both globally consistent where it is helpful and uniquely well adapted to its home environment, India is not only well placed to successfully defend its thriving creative economy but also to exercise a major and unique influence on global digital copyright standards, offering a template that reconciles protection with innovation and access for the digital era.