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ENTERTAINMENT LAW DIGEST
Q2 2026

Nigerian House of Representatives launches investigation into alleged copyright royalty diversion

The Nigerian House of Representatives launched an official investigation into allegations of systemic irregularities and royalty diversion within the nation's copyright administration system. Initiated by a motion from lawmaker Hon. Nkemkanma Kama, the legislative probe follows sustained public outcry and protests by the Copyright Society of Nigeria (COSON), alongside various authors, composers, and performers. According to filings, the intervention targets an alleged predatory scheme under the administration of the immediate past Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, which reportedly diverted intellectual property revenues away from rightful creative owners.

This development centers on regulatory enforcement, platform governance, and the oversight of Collective Management Organizations (CMOs). Invoking Section 88 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), the House Committee on Justice has been mandated to interface with the Federal Ministry of Justice, the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC), and industry stakeholders. The inquiry addresses whether administrative decisions breached intellectual property protections and standard licensing accountability, providing a transparent forum for affected parties without determining final civil or criminal liability.

This update carries significant weight for the Nigerian creative economy, particularly the globally influential music sector. For years, disputes surrounding CMO transparency have disrupted the licensing and collection ecosystem. A formalised legislative inquiry into regulatory oversights signals a heightened institutional commitment to safeguarding creators' livelihoods. If structural reforms are recommended, it could fundamentally reshape royalty collection transparency, restore international investor confidence in Nigeria's copyright framework, and establish clearer governance protocols for creative intellectual property nationwide.

IFPI Africa Conference Calls for Copyright Enforcement Reform

The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) hosted its Africa Performance Rights Conference (PRC) in Lagos, Nigeria on 31st March and 1st April 2026. The two-day continental event themed "Addressing Challenges and Leveraging Opportunities to Drive the Sustainable Growth of Recorded Music in Africa" convened regional record label executives, collective management organizations (CMOs), music licensing companies (MLCs), and government officials, including Nigeria's Minister of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy, Hannatu Musa Musawa. Delegates reviewed continental performance rights progress, addressing the widening disparity between the global cultural influence of African music and its actual regional commercial monetisation. The legal focus centered heavily on intellectual property protection, licensing reform, and regulatory framework modernisation. Key discussions addressed the enforcement gap regarding digital piracy and the optimization of statutory public performance rights. Panels emphasised the legal necessity for standardising broadcast licensing agreements and establishing clear contractual parameters for artificial intelligence (AI) developers utilising copyrighted catalogs.

Furthermore, the conference emphasised the statutory duties of CMOs to operate transparently and efficiently under regional copyright laws.

This update marks a critical push toward unifying administrative standards across Africa's fastest-growing music markets. While Sub-Saharan music revenues reportedly grew by over 15% in the preceding cycle, structural inefficiencies continue to leak potential revenue. For the Nigerian music market, formal alignment with the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) backed compliance frameworks could significantly reduce the domestic "value gap." Strengthening cross-border licensing and anti-piracy mechanisms will safeguard creator earnings and improve corporate investment confidence in domestic creative catalogs.

U.S. Musicians' Union Sues Universal Music and Warner Music Over AI Licensing

On 5th June 2026, the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) filed a federal lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York against Universal Music Group (UMG) and Warner Music Group (WMG). The crux of the suit is that the labor union, which represents professional instrumentalists, alleges that the major record labels improperly licensed sound recording catalogs to artificial intelligence music generation platforms Suno and Udio. The complaint follows late-2025 settlement and licensing agreements that concluded prior copyright litigation between the labels and the AI developers.

According to filings, the AFM contends that the record labels secured substantial new revenue streams from these commercial deals while failing to notify or compensate the session musicians who performed on the ingested recordings. The legal dispute focuses heavily on labor law, contracts, and the enforcement of collective bargaining agreements. Specifically, the AFM alleges a material breach of the industry-wide Sound Recording Labor Agreement (SRLA). The union argues that deploying existing sound recordings to train generative AI models constitutes a "new use" under Article 21 of the SRLA, a provision that contractually requires labels to secure union authorisation, provide data transparency, and distribute proportional residual compensation to contributing musicians.

Representatives for UMG and WMG have publicly characterised the dispute as a routine labor friction that should be resolved via standard collective bargaining negotiations rather than federal litigation.

This case sets a critical global precedent for creative compensation frameworks in the generative AI era. It underscores that AI monetisation concerns extend far beyond core copyright ownership, directly impacting secondary performance and session rights. If the court rules in favor of the union, it could establish strict compliance and data-sharing mandates for record labels globally, compelling the African entertainment sector to codify transparent royalty distribution mechanisms for human performers prior to licensing local catalogs for machine learning purposes.

Taylor Swift's Trademark Filings to Protect Her Voice and Image From AI Deepfakes

Popular pop artist Taylor Swift on the 24th day of April 2026, through her company TAS Rights Management, filed three trademark applications with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). The filings comprise two distinct "sound marks" for audio clips of Swift stating, “Hey, it’s Taylor Swift” and “Hey, it’s Taylor,” alongside a specific visual mark depicting an iconic stage photograph of the artist holding a pink guitar from her Eras Tour.

According to filings, the proactive measures follow repeated public incidents involving unauthorised AI-generated deepfakes, ranging from false political endorsements to synthetic commercial advertisements exploiting her identity. While traditional right-of-publicity statutes operate primarily at the state level to bar the unauthorised exploitation of a person’s name or likeness, Swift's team is attempting to establish a federal enforcement layer via trademark protections against "confusingly similar" content. Legal experts indicate that using sound marks to protect a celebrity’s spoken voice is a highly unique and largely untested application of the Lanham Act, particularly since generative AI can mimic a performer’s unique vocal traits without infringing upon a copyrighted sound recording.

Swift's filing reflects an escalating, broader trend of prominent public figures seeking defensive intellectual property portfolios against synthetic media. Following similar voice-trademark strategies utilised by actor Matthew McConaughey, these applications highlight the perceived "protection gap" in existing statutory frameworks. For the global entertainment market, including Nigeria’s fast-evolving entertainment ecosystem, this creates a blueprint for high-profile talent to leverage commercial trademark systems to force major digital platforms into taking down unauthorised AI voice clones and deepfakes. Similarly, creatives can explore the scope of existing legal frameworks by seeking these forms of protection, thereby testing the boundaries and extent of the legal protections available.

Entertainment sues Reliance-Disney joint venture over music copyright

India's Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited has filed a 1,800-page commercial lawsuit against JioStar (the US$8.5 billion media joint venture formed by Reliance Industries and The Walt Disney Company). It was filed at the Delhi High Court on 14th April 2026, the lawsuit alleges that JioStar systematically used Zee's copyrighted sound recordings at least 50 times after multiple music licensing agreements lapsed between 2024 and 2025. Zee, which owns a catalog of over 19,450 songs across 17 languages, claims the unauthorised use occurred across various music and dance shows aired on JioStar's digital streaming platforms and satellite TV channels. Zee is seeking approximately US$3 million (₹28.75 crore) in initial damages, a figure it notes could increase. In preliminary proceedings, the court directed JioStar to ensure that no further infringement of Zee's works occurs on its platforms while the matter is heard. JioStar previously claimed it took extensive steps to remove the content but argued that passive archival hosting does not constitute active infringement.

The dispute centers on copyright infringement and the expiration of intellectual property licensing agreements. The primary issue is whether a media platform's passive archival hosting of legacy programming containing expired music catalogs constitutes unlawful distribution under copyright law. This underscores the escalating friction over content rights and intellectual property valuation within rapidly consolidating international streaming and broadcast markets.

Dua Lipa's Reported Personality-Rights Lawsuit

In May 2026, British pop star Dua Lipa filed a federal lawsuit in a California court against technology giant Samsung Electronics, seeking US$15 million in damages. The dispute centers on a copyrighted photograph taken during her 2024 Austin City Limits Festival Performance which the singer fully owns. The singer stated that she discovered in June 2025 that Samsung had prominently featured this image on the front of its cardboard retail television boxes across the United States. Her legal team asserts that they sent multiple cease-and-desist demands that were repeatedly ignored. In response, Samsung denied any intentional misuse, stating that the image was provided by a third-party content partner for its free streaming service, Samsung TV Plus, with explicit assurances that all retail and packaging permissions had been fully secured.

The complaint lists eight civil offenses, primarily focusing on copyright infringement, trademark violations, false endorsement, and the misappropriation of a celebrity's right of publicity. Lipa's attorneys argue that the unauthorised use of the copyrighted image falsely conveyed a commercial endorsement to the consuming public, directly diluting her premium brand equity. While Samsung contends that it acted in good faith based on contractual indemnity and licensing assurances from its third-party vendor, the case emphasises the stringent liability standard applied to corporations regarding identity rights, regardless of whether the content was generated traditionally or processed through automated partner supply networks.

This litigation underscores the growing commercial friction surrounding identity protections and the critical need for absolute verification in corporate licensing pipelines. As commercial distribution frameworks evolve, the case demonstrates that high-profile talent will aggressively enforce their likeness rights against multi-national corporations to prevent unauthorised commercial association.

U.S. Supreme Court decision in Cox Communications v. Sony Music

The Supreme Court of the United States gave a unanimous judgement in Cox Communications, Inc. v. Sony Music Entertainment, on 25th March 2026 reversing a former decision of the Fourth Circuit. The litigation originated when Sony Music and other major record labels utilised automated software (Mark Monitor) to detect when copyrighted works are illegally uploaded or downloaded and traced the activities to particular IP addresses managed by Cox Communications, a major internet service provider (ISP) with six million subscribers.

During the period it was utilised, the software sent Cox Communications notices identifying IP addresses of subscribers associated with the infringement. The labels filed suit in the Eastern District of Virginia, alleging that Cox willfully facilitated piracy by failing to terminate the accounts of known, chronic repeat infringers despite receiving persistent automated notices. A trial court jury initially held Cox liable for both vicarious and contributory infringement, resulting in a landmark US$1 billion statutory damages award. Although the Fourth Circuit later dismissed the vicarious liability findings and vacated the damages for reassessment, it upheld Cox's contributory liability, prompting an appeal to the nation's highest court.

Writing for the majority, Justice Clarence Thomas clarified that an ISP cannot be held contributorily liable for copyright infringement based solely on a generalised awareness that its subscribers are utilising internet access to trade copyrighted files unlawfully. The Court established that contributory infringement strictly requires the party alleging to show proof of unlawful intent, which can only be proven in two narrow ways: Inducement (Active, affirmative promotion or marketing of the platform to foster infringement) and; Tailoring: (Intentionally designing or selling a service that lacks commercially significant, non-infringing capabilities).

As general-purpose broadband internet access possesses vast, undisputed lawful utility and Cox did not market its service for piracy, the majority determined that the "knowledge plus inaction" standard relied upon by the lower court was legally insufficient. Furthermore, the Supreme Court rejected the music industry's argument that this ruling undercuts the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), clarifying that the DMCA safe harbors exist solely as conditional statutory defenses, rather than an affirmative legal basis for creating liability where common-law secondary infringement elements are not met.

The resolution of Cox v. Sony represents a decisive structural victory for digital infrastructure providers while dealing a severe blow to the entertainment industry's anti-piracy litigation strategy. This means that rights holders cannot leverage the courts to force broadband providers into disconnecting entire households or businesses based purely on automated notice compliance. Instead, copyright owners must present direct evidence of active inducement or design complicity to successfully pursue secondary liability.

European Creator Coalition Demands Reform in Music Streaming and AI Regulation

The European Composer and Songwriter Alliance (ECSA) hosted a half-day international conference titled "Authors' Rights and Music Streaming in the Age of AI" at the MEDAA building in Brussels, Belgium on 2nd June, 2026. The high-level convergence brought together prominent European policymakers including European Commission Executive Vice-President Henna Virkkunen and Member of the European Parliament Axel Voss alongside digital platform representatives, legal scholars, and international creator coalitions led by ECSA President Helienne Lindvall.

The panel discussions during the conference focused directly on the unchecked scale of generative AI content flooding digital streaming services, which has given rise to widespread data manipulation and streaming fraud. Attendees examined how synthetic audio tracks are increasingly gaming platform algorithmic recommendations and exploiting current streaming payout structures. The alliance presented comprehensive studies on how a lack of strict corporate and technical transparency from AI firms leaves independent human music creators in the dark regarding if, and how, their intellectual property is being ingested or monetised.

The legal focus primarily involved the enforcement of existing copyright frameworks, platform governance, and statutory transparency mandates under evolving digital laws. Speakers debated the interpretation of the EU's Digital Single Market Directive, specifically scrutinising the legal boundary of text and data mining exceptions when applied to generative machine learning. Panelists advocated for strict administrative enforcement requiring AI companies to prove clear, upfront human authorship and obtain explicit authorisation prior to distributing content, pushing back against broad corporate licensing buyouts that force creators to sign away their future rights.