# AI-generated streams disrupt indie artists’ revenue on major platforms



The music industry is currently embroiled in a fierce battle against the manipulation of streaming services, a conflict that has left numerous innocent indie artists as collateral damage. As fraudsters flood platforms like Spotify and Apple Music with AI-generated tracks designed to siphon off royalty revenues, the landscape for genuine musicians grows increasingly perilous. These fraudulent tracks, produced swiftly and cheaply, have surged significantly; Deezer reported in April that more than 20,000 fully AI-created tracks—18% of new content—are uploaded daily, nearly double the figures from earlier in the year.

Fraudsters employ various tactics to exploit streaming services, from using bots and AI to trigger multiple streams on these faux songs, to hijacking real artists' pages and diverting royalties. While platforms like Spotify claim to dedicate substantial engineering resources to combat this issue, they struggle to keep the problem in check. Apple Music's assertion that less than 1% of streams are manipulated may provide some solace, yet experts suggest this could translate to hundreds of millions of dollars annually lost to fraud in a $20.4 billion global streaming market.

The ease of entry into music streaming for artists has been matched by a parallel increase in opportunities for fraudsters. Darren Owen, chief operating officer of music distribution service Fuga, indicated that the issue has escalated since 2021, now occupying half of his workload. As fraud detection becomes more sophisticated, Fuga utilises AI to analyse listening patterns, assigning a "severity score" to identify non-human activity in streams, particularly in regions like India and eastern Europe, which are hotspots for click-farm operations.

These deceptive practices extend beyond obscure websites; even major entities face allegations. For instance, Universal Music Group has been accused by rapper Drake of conspiring to artificially inflate the play count on Kendrick Lamar's diss track, although UMG denies the allegations. Individual artists have reported their music being taken down following sudden spikes in streams, an automatic process that often lacks transparency. Darren Hemmings, a musician and managing director of music marketing firm Motive Unknown, illustrated the dilemma: his distributor flagged a song as manipulated after a surge in popularity, leaving him powerless to defend his integrity.

The impact on these artists is profound. Bands like Northern Irish rock group Final Thirteen have faced similar issues, where their songs were removed following increased play counts they believe stemmed from legitimate exposure, such as radio plays. Similarly, indie musician Adam J Morgan of Naked & Baked expressed frustration with his distributor's decision to flag his track after a surge attributed potentially to TikTok use. The absence of robust evidence supporting such actions compounds the feeling of helplessness felt by many artists, who are often left navigating an opaque appeals process.

Matthew Whiteside, an artistic director at TNW Music, highlighted a particular difficulty faced by smaller and niche artists, suggesting that the current system inherently disadvantages them. After enduring repeat takedowns of his work, he posited that paying the resubmission fee for each removed album could be untenable for artists operating on tight budgets. Deezer has claimed to lead the fight against streaming manipulation, having implemented dedicated fraud detection systems designed to flag suspicious activity, yet the shortcomings in other systems leave many feeling vulnerable.

The ramifications of this battle extend beyond immediate financial losses; many artists are re-evaluating their presence on major streaming platforms. Darren Owen cautioned that the latest trend involves fraudsters boosting multiple tracks marginally rather than inflating a few significantly, making detection even more challenging. As such, figures in the industry suggest that many independent acts may consider shifting to alternative platforms like Bandcamp to seek fairer revenue models.

While regulators and digital platforms scramble to address these complexities, the situation underscores a deeper crisis affecting the future of music in the digital age. With streaming services operating as a double-edged sword, artists must now contend with the reality that their careers are as much at the mercy of fraud as they are of listeners. In this evolving landscape, the survival of indie artists may hinge on reforms that protect their rights, along with transparency and fairness in a market increasingly dominated by illicit practices.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[2]](https://newsroom-deezer.com/2025/04/deezer-reveals-18-of-all-new-music-uploaded-to-streaming-is-fully-ai-generated/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/0128384e-dabe-4788-89bb-63a33e78c77f), [[4]](https://newsroom-deezer.com/2025/01/deezer-deploys-cutting-edge-ai-detection-tool-for-music-streaming/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://time.com/6273529/drake-the-weeknd-ai-song/), [[7]](https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2024/09/06/aux-etats-unis-un-homme-accuse-d-avoir-detourne-10-millions-de-dollars-de-royalties-grace-a-de-faux-morceaux-sur-les-plates-formes-de-streaming_6305692_4408996.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[6]](https://www.axios.com/2023/04/19/ai-fake-drake-weeknd-song-streaming-services-removed)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[5]](https://time.com/6273529/drake-the-weeknd-ai-song/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[4]](https://newsroom-deezer.com/2025/01/deezer-deploys-cutting-edge-ai-detection-tool-for-music-streaming/), [[6]](https://www.axios.com/2023/04/19/ai-fake-drake-weeknd-song-streaming-services-removed)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/0128384e-dabe-4788-89bb-63a33e78c77f)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery), [[2]](https://newsroom-deezer.com/2025/04/deezer-reveals-18-of-all-new-music-uploaded-to-streaming-is-fully-ai-generated/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/jun/03/ai-bot-farms-and-innocent-indie-victims-how-music-streaming-became-a-hotbed-of-and-fakery> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://newsroom-deezer.com/2025/04/deezer-reveals-18-of-all-new-music-uploaded-to-streaming-is-fully-ai-generated/> - In April 2025, Deezer reported a significant increase in AI-generated music on its platform, with over 20,000 fully AI-created tracks being uploaded daily, accounting for 18% of new content. This surge highlights the growing presence of AI in music production and the challenges it poses to the industry. Deezer has implemented an AI music detection tool to identify and manage this content, aiming to protect artists' rights and maintain transparency for listeners. The company emphasizes the need for responsible AI development to safeguard the interests of creators and fans.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/0128384e-dabe-4788-89bb-63a33e78c77f> - In 2024, French music streaming service Deezer achieved a financial milestone by breaking even for the first time since its inception nearly two decades prior. The company reported a 12% increase in revenue, reaching €542 million, despite an adjusted loss before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization of €4 million. Deezer plans to invest in research and development to foster sustainable growth and profitability, focusing on personalized experiences and enhancing artist revenues through AI-generated music detection.
4. <https://newsroom-deezer.com/2025/01/deezer-deploys-cutting-edge-ai-detection-tool-for-music-streaming/> - In January 2025, Deezer introduced an advanced AI music detection tool capable of identifying fully AI-generated tracks on its platform. The tool was developed over the past year and can detect content from various generative models, including Suno and Udio. Deezer filed two patent applications for this technology in December 2024. The company aims to increase transparency for users and protect the rights of creators by tagging AI-generated content and removing it from algorithmic recommendations.
5. <https://time.com/6273529/drake-the-weeknd-ai-song/> - In 2023, a viral AI-generated song titled 'Heart on My Sleeve,' featuring simulated voices of rappers Drake and The Weeknd, garnered millions of streams across various platforms. Created by TikTok user @ghostwriter977, the track sparked debates about the ethical implications of using AI to mimic artists. Universal Music Group (UMG), representing Drake, worked to prevent unauthorized use of its artists' music by AI platforms, highlighting concerns over copyright infringement and the future impact of AI technology in the music industry.
6. <https://www.axios.com/2023/04/19/ai-fake-drake-weeknd-song-streaming-services-removed> - In 2023, the AI-generated song 'Heart on My Sleeve,' mimicking the voices of Drake and The Weeknd, was removed from multiple streaming platforms following a complaint from Universal Music Group (UMG). The song amassed significant attention online before being pulled. UMG stated that using their artists' music to train generative AI represented a breach of agreements and a copyright violation. This incident underscored the growing conflict between AI advancements and the need to protect intellectual property in the music industry.
7. <https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2024/09/06/aux-etats-unis-un-homme-accuse-d-avoir-detourne-10-millions-de-dollars-de-royalties-grace-a-de-faux-morceaux-sur-les-plates-formes-de-streaming_6305692_4408996.html> - In 2024, Michael Smith was arrested in the United States for diverting $10 million in royalties by publishing fake AI-generated tracks on streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music. He created fake user accounts to listen repeatedly to these tracks, accumulating royalties. Assisted by a music promoter and an AI music company CEO, Smith produced thousands of titles weekly and used software to generate fake track names. He faces up to twenty years in prison for his actions after deceiving music platforms and distributors for years.