[US] Lawsuit filed by Disney & Universal against Midjourney

IRIS 2025-7:1/9

Justine Radel-Cormann
European Audiovisual Observatory

Disney and Universal filed a lawsuit against Midjourney for direct and secondary copyright infringement before the United States District Court for the Central District of California on 11 June 2025 (under the Copyright Act (17 U.S.C. § 101 et seq.). It is the first case brought by major Hollywood studios against a generative AI company.

In the complaint sent to the Court, the plaintiffs argue that Midjourney directly reproduces, publicly displays, and distributes reproductions and derivative works of Disney and Universal content.

For instance, if a Midjourney user enters the prompt “Chewbacca, screenshot from movie”, it appears that the genAI accesses data about Disney’s copyrighted works stored by the genAI, and then reproduces, displays and makes available for download an image output looking similar to Disney’s Chewbacca.

The complaint lists various examples of prompts whose results display images similar to Disney’s works.

The plaintiffs argue that Midjourney copied their works to train its system without obtaining permission from the plaintiffs. Consequently, the outputs created by Midjourney are copies and derivative works of Disney’s and Universal’s work. According to the complaint, Midjourney’s conduct usurps the Plaintiffs’ control over the exercise of their exclusive rights in their Copyrighted Works, interfering with the Plaintiffs’ exploitation and licensing strategies.

In case Midjourney argues that it is not the direct infringer of Disney’s and Universal’s copyrighted works but its own subscribers, the plaintiffs plead in the alternative that Midjourney is still liable for secondary copyright infringement as Midjourney has the right and ability to exclude copyrighted works from its training data, and has the ability to control its subscribers' prompts.

Disney Enterprises and others v. Midjourney, Case No. 25-5275

https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/disney-ai-lawsuit.pdf

US Copyright Act, Copyright Law of 1976

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/3923

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026