CONSUMER FIRST

Special Edition: Right to Repair

Reclaiming Ownership in the Digital Economy

WHAT RIGHT TO REPAIR ACTUALLY MEANS?

A Primer

The Right to Repair refers to the consumer's practical ability to diagnose, maintain and repair products they own, either by themselves or through an independent repair provider of their choice. It is not merely the right to open a device. A meaningful Right to Repair framework requires access to repair manuals, diagnostic information, genuine or compatible spare parts, necessary tools, software or firmware support, and fair repair terms.

The issue has become especially important in the case of mobile phones. Smartphones are no longer ordinary consumer electronics. They are essential gateways to communication, banking, digital payments, education, work, government services, emergency access and personal identity. When a phone breaks, the consumer is often left with limited options: pay a high authorized-service cost, wait for manufacturer-controlled repair, use informal repair channels without reliable parts or information, or replace the device entirely. This creates unnecessary financial burden, reduces consumer choice and contributes to premature e-waste.

Quick Pause

We would appreciate it if **you could fill out this survey (Link Here)**, which will help us better understand the repair landscape in India.

If you wish to learn more about **"Right to Repair"** please join us for our upcoming webinar on the same topic.

Registration Link

This isn't just about saving money on a cracked phone screen or a faulty appliance; it's a fundamental battle over resource sustainability and property rights. True ownership means having the autonomy to repair, modify, or pass down our possessions without corporate permission. As global electronics waste climbs to unprecedented levels, demanding open access to spare parts, transparent

repairability scores, and independent servicing isn't just a win for the consumer wallet—it is a mandatory shift for systemic sustainability and digital liberty.

Why Mobile Repair Needs Specific Attention?

Mobile phones present a unique right-to-repair challenge because their repair ecosystem is shaped by both hardware and software controls. A cracked screen, damaged charging port, failing battery, camera issue or motherboard fault may appear to be a simple hardware problem, but repair can be restricted by proprietary tools, unavailable manuals, sealed designs, software calibration systems and parts-pairing practices.

Parts pairing is one of the most significant mobile repair barriers. It refers to the use of software to link a particular component, such as a display, battery, camera or biometric sensor, to a specific device. If a consumer or independent repair shop installs another functional part, the phone may show persistent warnings, reduce functionality, reject the component or require manufacturer-controlled authorization. This can make even legitimate repairs difficult, costly or commercially unviable.

A mobile-focused Right to Repair framework should therefore address the following barriers:

1. Lack of access to repair manuals, schematics and diagnostic information.
2. Limited availability of affordable spare parts.
3. Proprietary tools and software locks that prevent independent repair.
4. Parts pairing that disables or degrades functionality after repair.
5. Warranty terms that discourage consumers from using independent repair services.
6. Lack of transparency on repairability at the point of purchase.
7. Data privacy risks when consumers hand over phones for repair.
8. Poor disposal practices for batteries, screens and other electronic waste.

RTR WATCH: INDIA AND GLOBAL

Where the Policy Conversation Stands

Repair, Reuse, Reclaim: India's Right to Repair Push Moves from Consumer Choice to Policy Design

India's emerging **Right to Repair** movement, which seeks to give consumers greater freedom to repair products they own instead of being forced into expensive manufacturer-controlled repair systems. The movement is especially relevant for electronics, mobile phones, appliances, automobiles, and farming equipment, where access to spare parts, repair manuals, diagnostic tools, and affordable servicing is often limited.

India has taken initial steps through the **Department of Consumer Affairs' Right to**

Repair portal, which provides repair-related information, and through work on a **Repairability Index** that could help consumers compare products based on how easy they are to fix. The debate, however, remains contested. Consumer advocates argue that repair access reduces e-waste, lowers ownership costs, supports independent repair businesses, and strengthens consumer choice. Manufacturers, on the other hand, raise concerns around intellectual property, safety, cybersecurity, and revenue loss.

The key takeaway is that Right to Repair is not just about fixing devices; it is about redefining ownership in a digital economy.

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India's Repairability Index Begins with Phones and Tablets as Consumer Complaints Rise

The government is set to bring **smartphones and tablets** under India's proposed **Repairability Index** first. The index will require manufacturers to self-declare how repairable their products are, based on factors such as ease of disassembly, access to repair information, spare-part availability, software updates, tools, and fasteners.

The move is aimed at helping consumers make informed choices at the point of purchase, including on e-commerce platforms and through QR codes on product packaging. The article notes that complaints related to mobile phones and tablets on the National Consumer Helpline rose from **19,057 in 2022–23** to **22,864 in 2024–25**, showing why repair access has become a growing consumer issue.

A government-appointed committee has submitted its report to the Department of Consumer Affairs, recommending a five-point numeric repairability score.

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The Parts Pairing Problem: Why Repair Rights Need Software Freedom Too

A New York Times investigation highlights how a leading brand's repair ecosystem has become increasingly software-controlled, making it harder for consumers and independent repair shops to replace parts without triggering warnings, malfunctions, or feature limitations. The issue centres on "parts pairing," where phones are coded to recognise original components and may restrict functionality when screens, batteries, cameras, or sensors are replaced outside the brand's authorised network. While the brand argues that these controls protect safety, security, and product quality, repair advocates say they undermine true ownership by forcing consumers back into expensive authorised repair channels. The article frames a central Right to Repair question: once a consumer buys a device, should the manufacturer still control how, where, and by whom it can be repaired?

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Read More on R2R Globally

Replaceable Batteries Return: EU Rules Push Devices Toward Repairability

The EU's new battery rules are reshaping what product repairability means in practice. A "consumer-replaceable battery" is not just a technical feature; it means that users should be able to safely remove and replace a battery using ordinary tools, without relying on specialised equipment or authorised service centres. The move is especially important for phones, tablets, laptops, gaming devices, smart home products, and other battery-powered electronics where battery degradation often forces consumers to replace the entire device. By requiring easier battery access, clearer instructions, and safer replacement procedures, the EU is pushing manufacturers toward longer-lasting products, lower e-waste, and stronger consumer control over repair.

Read More: Link

Right to Repair Around the World – The Repair Association

For readers looking to understand how Right to Repair is evolving globally, The Repair Association's "Right to Repair Around the World" page is a useful resource.

The page is especially useful for comparing India's emerging repair framework with international models, including France's repairability score, the EU's Right to Repair Directive, Australia's vehicle repair information-sharing scheme, Canada's efforts to address software locks that restrict repair, and recent state-level developments in Oregon and Colorado. These newer US laws are especially relevant for mobile repair because they move beyond general access to manuals, tools and spare parts, and directly confront software-driven barriers such as parts pairing, where manufacturers can restrict the functionality of repaired phones or trigger warnings after independent or third-party repairs. The EU's recent repair framework further strengthens this shift by linking repair to consumer protection, spare-parts availability, reasonable repair costs, repair information, and product-specific repairability requirements for devices such as smartphones and tablets. Together, these developments help place India's repairability-index debate within a broader global movement for consumer choice, affordable mobile repair, product longevity, reduced e-waste, and sustainable ownership.

Read More: Link

Kindle's Repair Turn: Amazon May Move Toward Replaceable Batteries in Response to Global Right-to-Repair Rules

Amazon may be preparing a more repair-friendly Kindle, with signs in the **Kindle 5.19.4 firmware update** pointing to possible support for **replaceable batteries, official repair kits, installation guidance, and battery-related warnings**.

If introduced, a replaceable battery could significantly extend the life of Kindle devices, since battery degradation is often the main reason users replace otherwise functional e-readers. This would make the Kindle more aligned with circular economy goals by reducing premature disposal and electronic waste.

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FixFest Signals the Future of Repair: From Local Fixes to a Global Right-to-Repair Movement

FixFest points to a future where repair is not treated as a niche hobby, but as a mainstream pillar of consumer rights, sustainability, and product governance. By bringing together repairers, activists, educators, companies, and policymakers, the gathering shows how the repair movement is evolving from community-led fixing events into a global policy and innovation agenda. Its larger message is clear: the future of ownership will depend not only on what consumers buy, but on whether they are empowered to maintain, repair, and extend the life of the products they already own.

Read More: Link

Why India Must Build a Stronger Right to Repair Ecosystem?

India's Right to Repair movement must be built around how Indians actually use and repair technology. With smartphones now central to work, payments, communication, and access to services, repair is no longer a minor after-sales issue but a core consumer-rights question. India shipped around 151 million smartphones in 2024, making affordable and reliable repair essential for millions of users.

The piece highlights India's strong "repair-first" culture, where consumers often prefer neighbourhood technicians over expensive authorised service centres. However, modern devices are increasingly software-controlled and complex, making unregulated repair riskier in terms of safety, data security, and product longevity. The way forward is not to replace local repair networks, but to upgrade them with genuine spare parts, diagnostic tools, repair documentation, trained technicians, and modular product design. With policy steps like India's Right to Repair portal, work on a Repairability Index, and ERSO indicating momentum, this calls for a full ecosystem approach involving manufacturers, technicians, service platforms, and consumers.

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How Copyright Law Became a Barrier to Repair

The article traces today's Right to Repair battles back to Hollywood's fear of home videotaping in the 1970s and 1980s. When VCRs allowed people to record films and TV shows, studios tried to stop the technology,

but the U.S. Supreme Court's 1984 Sony ruling held that recording TV for personal use could fall under fair use. After losing that fight, the entertainment industry shifted toward technological locks and stronger legal protections.

This history eventually shaped the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998, which made it illegal to bypass digital locks protecting copyrighted software and content. Over time, those protections expanded far beyond movies and music into everyday products with embedded software, including phones, appliances, printers, and tractors. As a result, consumers and independent repairers can be blocked from accessing the software, tools, or diagnostics needed to fix products they technically own.

When repairs become legally risky, technically difficult, or nearly as expensive as buying new, people are pushed toward replacement rather than repair. This increases costs for consumers and adds to electronic waste. The piece ultimately argues that Right to Repair is about restoring control over ownership in a world where copyright, software locks, and manufacturer control have quietly limited what buyers can actually do with their own devices

Read More: Link

Did You Know?

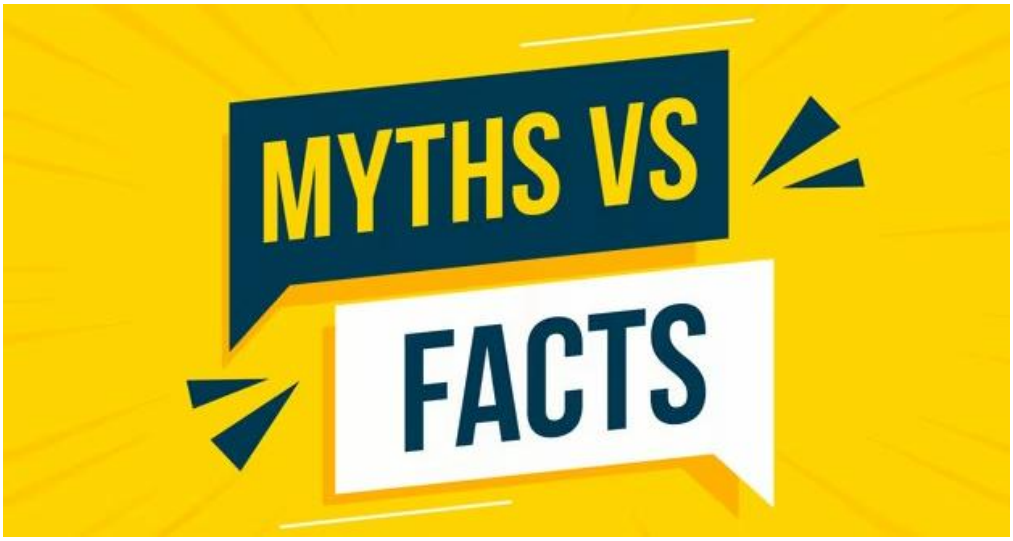
Parts pairing is the practice of linking a device's individual hardware components, such as its battery, screen, camera, or sensors, to the device's software using unique identifiers like serial numbers.

This means that even if a replacement part physically fits and works, the device may still show warning messages, disable certain features, or malfunction if the repair is not recognised by the manufacturer's software system.

In the Right to Repair debate, parts pairing matters because it shifts control away from the consumer and independent repair shops, making repair dependent not only on access to spare parts, but also on software permission from the manufacturer.

This iFixit's article explains how "parts pairing" has become one of the most significant barriers to independent repair. Parts pairing happens when manufacturers digitally link individual components, such as batteries, screens, cameras, or sensors, to a device's software using serial numbers or microcontrollers. As a result, even a genuine replacement part from the same model may trigger warning messages, disable features, or require manufacturer approval to work properly. The article argues that this shifts repair control away from consumers and independent repair shops, forcing many users toward authorised service channels, higher repair costs, or premature device replacement. For the Right to Repair movement, parts pairing shows why access to spare parts alone is not enough; consumers also need access to the software tools needed to complete a repair.

Read More: Link



Right to Repair Edition

Myth 1: “Repair means jugaad.”

Fact: Repair is not a shortcut; it is a skill-based ecosystem. From trained technicians to diagnostic tools and genuine spare parts, a strong repair framework can make fixing products safer, more reliable, and more professional.

Myth 2: “If I repair my device outside the company, my warranty is automatically gone.”

Fact: A warranty should not become a fear tactic. The real question is whether the repair caused the damage, not whether the consumer dared to visit an independent technician.

Myth 3: “Right to Repair is anti-business.”

Fact: Right to Repair is pro-competition and pro-innovation. It doesn't stop companies from offering premium service; it simply prevents them from holding a monopoly on repair. This creates opportunities for thousands of local, independent repair businesses to thrive and encourages manufacturers to compete on product quality and durability, not on locking down their products.

Myth 4: “Repair is only about saving money.”

Fact: Saving money matters, but repair is also about ownership, sustainability, consumer choice, local jobs, and reducing e-waste. It asks a simple question: if you bought it, should you not be able to fix it?

Myth 5: “Modern devices are too complex to be repaired.”

Fact: Complexity is not an excuse for closed ecosystems. With repair manuals, spare parts, software access, and clear information, many products can be repaired safely and responsibly instead of being discarded too early.

Myth 6: "Right to Repair is unsafe and compromises my data privacy."
Fact: A strong Right to Repair framework does not weaken safety or security; it strengthens both. By giving trusted independent technicians access to genuine spare parts, proper tools, and official repair guidelines, it reduces dependence on unsafe components and informal fixes. It also encourages privacy-protective innovations such as Google’s “Repair Mode,” which safeguards personal data while a device is being serviced. This shows that repair can be open, accessible, and secure at the same time.

What You Can Do

Right to Repair is not just a policy debate. It is also a consumer choice. Here are three simple ways to support a repair-friendly culture:

1. Share This Newsletter

Help educate a friend, colleague, or family member about why repair rights matter for consumers, small repair businesses, and the environment.

2. Choose Repair First

The next time a phone, laptop, appliance, or device fails, consider a local repair option before replacing it.

3. Support Pro-Repair Brands

When buying a new product, ask whether spare parts are available, how easy the product is to repair, and whether the brand supports independent repair.