

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND THE FUTURE OF NIGERIAN GOSPEL MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

The growing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into music and worship contexts presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in Nigeria, where gospel music serves a dual role as both a liturgical practice and a cultural expression. A pressing concern emerges regarding how AI technologies may affect the spiritual, theological, and cultural authenticity of gospel music, especially as some churches remain sceptical of non-human agents in sacred spaces. This study aims to investigate the impact of AI on Nigerian gospel music, focusing on its influence on composition, performance, and worship practices. Utilising a qualitative, multi-dimensional methodology grounded in convergent theory, the research engages interviews with clergy, musicians, and focus groups in Jos, Nigeria. The study examines the use of AI tools such as Amper, AIVA, LANDR, and Boomy, which enable real-time performance support, multilingual worship delivery, and accessible music production platforms. These innovations reveal AI's potential to democratise gospel music creation and dissemination. Findings indicate that while AI offers enhanced technical precision, genre innovation, and wider audience engagement, concerns persist over the 'soullessness' of AI, financial limitations, and fears of redundancy among music professionals. Spiritual leaders question AI's capacity to convey theological depth and emotional resonance in worship. The study recommends a hybrid model where AI enhances but does not replace human-led worship and artistic expression. By maintaining theological and spiritual grounding, Nigerian gospel musicians and church leaders can leverage AI to amplify gospel messages while preserving the sacred essence of Christian music.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence (AI), church, Christian music, gospel music, hymns, and algorithm.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) in religious and musical spaces has introduced a paradigm shift in how worship songs are composed and delivered. A landmark event occurred in Germany at St. Paul's Protestant Church, where a full worship service was conducted entirely by AI, a world first that saw computer-generated avatars lead over 300 congregants through liturgical components such as intercessory prayers, psalm readings, the confession of faith, a sermon, and the final benediction. Even the interlude music between these activities was AI-composed (Evangelical Focus, 2023). This unprecedented event signals a growing intersection between technology and spiritual practice.

Globally, AI is transforming the music industry by reshaping traditional models of composition, production, and distribution. Nigerian gospel music, a vibrant expression of faith and culture, is not insulated from these changes. AI technologies offer gospel musicians, worship leaders, and music producers innovative tools for enhancing musical creativity, improving production quality, and broadening audience engagement. These advancements, while promising, raise deep theological, cultural, and ethical questions within the Nigerian Christian community.

As the influence of AI deepens, a critical inquiry emerges: Could AI compromise the spiritual authenticity of gospel music, or might it enhance its creative and evangelistic potential? Are Nigerian churches and congregants ready to embrace AI-integrated worship experiences? The integration of AI into gospel music holds both transformative promise and potential peril. This paper explores the implications of AI for Nigerian gospel music and examines its possible benefits, challenges, and the readiness of the church to adapt to these technological innovations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory used in this research is the convergent approach. The convergent approach is recognised as a vital theoretical and practical framework for advancing music creation and education in the digital age. This approach promotes the integration of multiple disciplines, tools, and perspectives, encouraging musicians, educators, and researchers to work collaboratively. At its core, convergence highlights the need for interactive and participatory composition processes that reflect the shifting dynamics of music in a technology-driven environment (Keller et al, 2011).

In this evolving context, the convergence model proves especially valuable. It supports the blending of human creativity with computational intelligence, aiming to produce music that is not only technically sophisticated but also emotionally engaging and culturally meaningful. Researchers like Kayak et al (2020) argue that combining the intuitive, emotional, and cultural knowledge of human composers with the speed,

accuracy, and pattern recognition capabilities of AI can open new frontiers in music composition and pedagogy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative exploratory approach to explore the complex relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) and Nigerian gospel music. It seeks to understand human perceptions, cultural meanings, and theological implications, rather than numerical or statistical data, which is characteristic of qualitative research. It is also a poly-methodical/Multidimensional Approach, meaning it draws from multiple qualitative methods to ensure a broader understanding of the subject. This aligns with Danfulani's (1999) notion that requires a phenomenon to be studied from more than one angle; this justifies the use of diverse perspectives and techniques.

The research setting is Bassa and Jos North Local Government Areas of Plateau State. Data was collected from Focus group discussions (FGDs), men, women, and youths through Semi-structured interviews with musicians and clergy. These interviews gathered first-hand experiential knowledge and beliefs about the integration of AI into gospel music. Sampling was purposive and non-random, selecting participants based on their involvement in gospel music and church leadership.

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into music creation and performance is gaining ground across global music scenes, and Nigerian gospel music is no exception. Scholars and industry experts have begun to explore how AI can enhance music production, composition, and distribution, while also raising important ethical and cultural concerns.

Several scholars argue that AI offers promising tools for music creation. According to Agwan et al. (2023), technologies like Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) are now being used to compose original melodies that blend traditional gospel styles with new musical innovations. This means AI does not just replicate music but can produce fresh compositions that sound familiar yet unique. Platforms like Amper and LANDR are highlighted by Bonini and Magaudda (2023) for making high-quality production accessible to musicians who may not have formal training. These platforms allow artists to produce, master, and fine-tune their music digitally, thus lowering the barrier to entry for new gospel musicians. Casini and Roccetti (2018) also affirm that AI can reduce production costs and democratize access to music-making tools. An important angle of interest lies in the fact that AI could level the playing field in music creation, especially for gospel musicians in Nigeria who may lack access to expensive studio equipment. However, a question worth pondering on is whether over-reliance on such tools might stifle the raw, spiritual creativity often associated with gospel music.

Beyond composition, AI is also influencing live performance. Odu et al. (2023) note that AI can enable real-time improvisation, allowing musicians to adapt their

performance based on audience reactions. This could enhance worship experiences, making them more engaging and responsive. A very glaring point here is the idea of AI acting almost like a bandmate, adjusting to the energy in the room. While this seems helpful, it raises the question: can a machine truly understand a spiritual atmosphere, or does it only react to data?

AI is also changing the way music is distributed and consumed. Mokoena and Obagbuwa (2025) explain that AI algorithms used on streaming platforms help match gospel music to individual user preferences, potentially expanding the reach of Nigerian gospel artists. This personalization could increase visibility and impact for gospel musicians, especially in a country as diverse as Nigeria. Moreover, AI can help optimize pricing and promotion strategies, making gospel music more accessible to a wider audience. This seems like a great way for upcoming gospel artists to gain exposure. However, it is important to ensure that the message of the gospel does not get diluted in the race for more clicks and streams.

Despite the benefits, there are strong warnings about the ethical and cultural consequences of using AI in sacred music. The authors of "Artificial Intelligence and Musicking" (2024) and "Exploring Artificial Intelligence-Powered Spirituality for Moral Rejuvenation in Nigeria" (2024) raise concerns about authorship, cultural authenticity, and spiritual integrity. They argue that AI-generated content may conflict with traditional views of creativity as a divine gift. If AI begins to replace human input entirely, the unique emotional and spiritual qualities that define gospel music could be lost. These concerns are echoed by Bonini and Magaudda (2023), who point out that AI might turn music into a profit-driven venture, minimizing the personal testimony and sacred experience usually embedded in gospel compositions. These concerns are valid. Gospel music is more than just sound; it is ministry. So, while AI can support technical quality, it should not replace the human heart behind the worship.

The literature reviewed agrees that a balanced, hybrid approach may be the most responsible way forward. As suggested by Odu et al (2023), AI can act as a collaborator rather than a replacement. In this model, human musicians provide the spiritual and emotional foundation, while AI handles technical tasks like mastering, sound mixing, and even lyric subtitling. This interactive partnership would allow Nigerian gospel music to evolve with technology without losing its theological and cultural essence.

UNDERSTANDING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: AN OVERVIEW

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a multifaceted and rapidly evolving discipline situated at the intersection of computer science, cognitive psychology, linguistics, philosophy, and engineering. Fundamentally, AI is concerned with the creation of systems and machines capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks include learning, logical reasoning, problem-solving,

perception, language understanding, pattern recognition, and decision-making (Karmakar et al., 2024).

AI encompasses a wide range of cognitive functionalities that allow systems to process information and adapt to new inputs. These capabilities are realised through varying levels of sophistication, ranging from basic reactive systems to highly autonomous agents that exhibit advanced reasoning and decision-making capacities (Morandín-Ahuerma, 2022). In its essence, AI seeks to replicate, simulate, or augment human-like intelligence using computational models and algorithms.

Multidisciplinary Nature of AI

The development of AI is inherently interdisciplinary. It synthesises knowledge from psychology to model cognitive processes; from linguistics to process and generate human language; from philosophy to address ethical concerns and the nature of intelligence; and from engineering to design and implement intelligent systems. This convergence enables AI to not only execute tasks but also to learn from interactions, adapt to varying contexts, and improve over time (Triantafyllou, 2024). One striking application of this integrative approach is the AI-driven analysis of user behaviour on social media platforms. Here, AI systems interpret large volumes of unstructured data, recognise emotional cues, and generate responses that align with human expectations and interactions. This showcases AI's potential to simulate empathy, anticipation, and engagement.

Types and Levels of AI

AI is generally categorised into three levels based on its capability (Huang, 2024):

1. **Narrow AI (Weak AI):** This form of AI is designed to perform a specific task. Examples include virtual assistants like Siri or Alexa, and recommendation systems on platforms such as Netflix and Amazon.
2. **General AI (Strong AI):** This type is theoretical at present and refers to systems with generalised human cognitive abilities. A General AI system would be capable of performing any intellectual task that a human can do.
3. **Superintelligent AI:** A futuristic concept, superintelligent AI would surpass human intelligence across all domains of interest, including creativity, social intelligence, and problem-solving.

AI in Decision-Making and Personalisation

A major strength of AI lies in its ability to enhance decision-making processes. AI algorithms can process vast datasets, extract meaningful insights, and make predictive analyses that inform strategic decisions. In healthcare, for example, AI supports diagnostics by analysing medical images or patient data to identify patterns indicative of

diseases such as cancer or neurological disorders (Mahato, 2022). AI also plays a pivotal role in personalisation. Through continuous learning, AI systems refine user profiles and deliver tailored experiences. This is prominently observed in e-commerce, where AI-driven recommendation engines suggest products based on previous searches, purchases, and preferences.

Learning and Adaptation in AI Systems

A distinctive feature of AI is its capacity for continuous learning. Systems are designed to improve performance based on feedback and historical data. This learning mechanism allows AI to adapt its behaviour in real-time, becoming more accurate and efficient in task execution. Such adaptive learning is particularly useful in dynamic environments such as financial markets, where predictive models must be updated constantly to remain relevant (Karmakar et al., 2024).

Task Automation and Operational Efficiency

One of the most significant impacts of AI is in task automation. AI systems can perform routine and repetitive tasks with speed and precision, freeing up human resources for more strategic and creative activities. Examples of such tasks include: email and calendar management, data entry and processing, customer service interactions via chatbots, and predictive analytics for business insights. These capabilities streamline operations and enhance productivity across various sectors, including manufacturing, education, logistics, and healthcare (Oyasor, 2024). Moreover, the incorporation of AI in administrative functions transforms traditional workflows. Tasks such as document verification, transcription, and scheduling are now efficiently handled by intelligent software, reducing human error and accelerating turnaround times.

AI in Start-Ups and Innovation

Start-ups across the globe are harnessing AI to drive innovation, particularly in analytics, logistics, and statistical forecasting. AI's ability to process complex datasets at scale and in real-time empowers businesses to make informed decisions and identify market opportunities. Start-ups leveraging AI often outpace competitors in agility and innovation, offering novel solutions such as AI-driven health diagnostics, smart agriculture, and autonomous delivery systems (Boute & Udenio, 2021).

BACKGROUND TO GOSPEL MUSIC

Christian Music

The earliest biblical account of music and musicianship is attributed to Jubal, identified as the forefather of all who play the harp and flute, as recorded in the Old Testament. The scriptures underscore the centrality of music in Jewish life, reaching its pinnacle in the Book of Psalms (Onwochei, 2007). In early Christianity, music was

primarily vocal in nature and used as a vehicle for scriptural transmission. Hymns served as theological instruments, crafted to communicate the truths of the Christian faith effectively (Wagner, 2017). The Christian doctrine affirms that humanity is fundamentally created to worship God, and music thus serves as a divinely ordained medium to glorify God with passion and sincerity.

Music in the Christian context articulates the essence of the gospel in musical form, elevating the soul and deepening spiritual intimacy (Jacob, 2014). Worship is regarded as the ultimate vocation of the redeemed, involving the complete offering of oneself to God through praise (Adeleke, 2014). Damian (2022) adds that music enables believers to transcend human limitations and engage the divine presence in worship.

The term "hymn," derived from the Greek word meaning "song," encompasses both sung and recited expressions of praise. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, is credited with introducing antiphonal singing into congregational worship, laying the foundation for structured hymnody. Adeleke (2014) traces the historical evolution of Christian music to Jewish psalmody, asserting that early church music maintained a high regard for spiritual purity by excluding instrumental music and dance due to their perceived association with immorality.

Liturgical traditions, particularly in the Catholic Church, emphasise the sanctity of worship music. For instance, only organs and sacred lyrics are permitted during Mass to ensure clarity and divine focus. While Anglicans are noted for their extensive hymnological tradition, Methodists are credited with preserving the highest number of hymns still in use today (Adeleke, 2014).

Hymns are universally integral to Christian worship, especially within Western-based denominations such as Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, and Methodist churches. While some congregations adhere strictly to traditional modes of rendition, others have adopted contextual approaches incorporating indigenous instruments or singing a cappella. Hymns fulfil various liturgical roles, including adoration, instruction, and communal affirmation. As Adey (n.d.) observes, hymns have evolved to reflect theological developments and cultural shifts, often transmitted orally across generations.

Christian music is uniquely characterised by its lyrical content rather than its musical style (Livengood, 2004). It is defined as music composed, performed, and rendered by Christians for the edification of the Church. While "church music" pertains specifically to liturgical contexts, "gospel music" is generally oriented toward evangelism and spiritual outreach (Adedeji, 2007).

Distinguishing Christian music by its style alone is insufficient, as musical genres can vary widely while still maintaining a biblically grounded message. The acceptability of musical styles in worship is influenced by numerous factors, including cultural context, the ethnic composition of congregants, the musical preferences of church leaders, and the theological vision of church founders (Onwochei, 2007).

Historically, Christian attitudes toward gospel music have been marked by conservatism and spiritual rigour. As Endong (2016) argues, secular influences have gradually infiltrated the genre, eroding its original sanctity. The diminished spiritual impact of some contemporary Christian music underscores the need for artists, or "ministers," to remain spiritually aligned with their divine calling. Onwochei (2006) identifies the music minister as a vessel of prophetic, didactic, and priestly functions within the worship context.

Characteristics of Christian Music

Onwochei (2006) posits that spiritual rebirth is the foundational qualification for any music minister, asserting that music becomes mere entertainment when it diverges from divine intent. He defines entertainment-focused music as that which prioritises pleasure, self-glorification, or profit over spiritual edification. Janvier (1995) echoes this sentiment, noting that secular themes such as romance or wealth often detract from the sacred purpose of church music. Ibude (2018) also highlights the moral and spiritual inconsistencies of performers whose lifestyles contradict their messages.

Adedעי (2007) outlines several critical components of authentic Christian music. Firstly, the lyrics must be theologically sound, rooted in scripture. Secondly, the music must serve its biblical purpose: to evangelise, glorify God, and offer comfort and exhortation. Thirdly, form and style, whether hymns, gospel songs, or indigenous airs, must embody spiritual depth. Additionally, the musical structure should exhibit artistic quality, and the final presentation must maintain a high standard of performance ethics. Finally, artists are expected to embody their message in personal conduct, safeguarding the anointing and testimony attached to their ministry.

The Nigerian Gospel Music

The development of indigenous Nigerian church music was a response to the need for contextual relevance in worship. This movement sought to preserve and reflect African cultural values within Christian liturgy. Euba (2012) asserts that church music provided the foundation upon which Nigeria's broader popular music industry was built. Mission schools and churches, particularly the Anglican denomination, served as incubators for musical talent, producing early pioneers such as Ekundayo Phillips, Rev. Canon J.J. Kuti, Rev. T.A. Olude, Akin George, Emmanuel Sowande, Nelson Okoli, and Ikoli Harcourt-Whyte (Bode & Sowande, 1998).

Nigerian gospel music gained traction in the 1970s as choral groups expanded their performances beyond church walls into the public sphere (Effiong, 2022). The genre encompasses a wide spectrum of artists, from those who have gospel roots to those with hybrid musical backgrounds. While some musicians transition to secular music for financial reasons or broader appeal, others retain their gospel orientation.

Nobelie (2024) observes that many secular artists in Nigeria began their musical journeys in church choirs.

There is a notable pattern of artists shifting between gospel and secular genres. Jeremiah Gyang is a case in point, prompting questions about his musical allegiance (Nightingale, 2013). Notably, artists such as Chidinma Ekile and Nathaniel Bassey began in gospel music, ventured into secular or mixed performances, and later reaffirmed their gospel identities. Mercy Chinwo's transition from Nigerian Idols to gospel music illustrates this phenomenon as well. Other figures in this category include T.Y. Bello, Ebenezer Obey, Sonny Okosun, and Kcee.

In the North-Central region, several artists have left a lasting imprint on the gospel music scene. Panam Percy Paul, known for his Jos-based music school, stands out, along with Lani Stephens, Jerry Jinang, Bulus Datiri, Earnest Dades, Ezra Jinang, Dorcas Bentu, Pam Monday, Kefas Diyals, Rahila Sarauniya, Solomon Damulak, Daps, Pic Charles Onwochei, Amik Adam, Emma James, and Joseph Michael (Adedeji & Loko, 2019; Effiong, 2022).

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF GOSPEL MUSIC PRODUCTION

Technological advancements have consistently influenced how music is composed, produced, and consumed, and recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI) have introduced profound shifts across these domains. Earlier innovations, such as Fruity Loops, Sonar, Cool Edit, and Hypersonic, transformed traditional music production by streamlining composition and editing processes. However, the integration of AI marks a significant leap forward, enabling more sophisticated music generation and mastering through neural networks and deep learning systems (Agwan et al, 2023).

AI's role in music creation is evident throughout the production pipeline, from composition to mastering. AI-assisted mastering platforms now offer outputs that rival those of human audio engineers, helping to automate time-consuming processes and provide consistency in quality (Aker, 2024). This shift has helped redefine the music business, introducing efficiencies, novel sounds, and cross-cultural collaborations. Tools like Amper and LANDR illustrate how AI can automate both composition and distribution, fostering a more streamlined and accessible music production ecosystem (Bonini & Magaudda, 2023).

When contextualised within the domain of gospel music, especially in Nigeria, AI's influence becomes even more intriguing. Gospel music, deeply embedded in spiritual, cultural, and community contexts, presents both opportunities and challenges for AI adoption. Scholars and practitioners suggest that AI can enhance creativity in gospel music by enabling new forms of collaboration between artists and algorithms.

AI-powered tools can analyse large datasets to generate melodies, harmonies, and lyrics that align with emotional themes, thus assisting even those without formal musical training (Mane, 2023; Tan & Li, 2021).

Beyond composition, AI's democratising potential in gospel music is evident in platforms such as Google's Magenta Studio, which allows artists with limited resources to produce music. The inclusion of AI in gospel music is also opening doors for immersive multimedia experiences by integrating virtual and augmented reality, enhancing both personal and communal worship practices (Abraham, 2022; Yuldashev, 2024). These technological advances signal a broader reach and inclusivity within the gospel music space.

AI also plays a critical role in preserving and promoting the cultural relevance of gospel music. By analysing archival data and traditional musical forms, AI can assist in documenting and replicating historical styles, thereby helping new artists connect with their heritage. This function is especially relevant in culturally rich and diverse musical traditions like Nigerian gospel, where maintaining spiritual authenticity is paramount (Ba'ai & Aris, 2024). Nevertheless, some critics caution against the risk of algorithm-driven homogenisation that could dilute the unique spiritual and cultural essence of gospel music (Sadovenko, 2024).

While AI introduces efficiency and accessibility, there is concern about its capacity to capture the emotive depth and theological significance of gospel music. Critics argue that gospel music, unlike many secular forms, relies heavily on spiritual inspiration, personal testimony, and emotional engagement. Machines, lacking consciousness and spiritual depth, may fail to evoke the same connection that human-composed gospel music does (Novelli & Proksch, 2022; Yang, 2024). Despite AI's capability to mimic stylistic elements, it cannot replicate the lived spiritual experiences that give gospel music its power and authenticity.

Ethical considerations further complicate the integration of AI into gospel music. The commercialisation of AI-generated worship music has raised alarms over the potential commodification of spirituality. AI may facilitate the creation of music tailored to market trends rather than spiritual edification, undermining the gospel's core purpose (Oyasor, 2024). Moreover, the question of copyright and authorship in AI-generated music remains unresolved. Current legal frameworks struggle to define whether the rights belong to the algorithm's creators, users, or if such works should enter the public domain (Corbelli, 2024; Yang & Zhang, 2024).

Despite these challenges, AI can be leveraged constructively to complement rather than replace human creativity. Many scholars advocate for a hybrid model where AI assists in repetitive or technical tasks, allowing artists to focus on spiritual and emotional expression (Sadovenko, 2024). In this model, AI serves as a tool for enhancing, not diluting, gospel music's theological integrity and cultural identity.

In conclusion, AI's role in gospel music production is multifaceted. While it offers remarkable benefits in terms of creativity, accessibility, collaboration, and global reach, it also poses risks to authenticity, spiritual integrity, and cultural specificity. The future of AI in gospel music will depend largely on the choices of artists, producers, and worship leaders to harness these tools thoughtfully, ensuring that the core mission of gospel music, to uplift, inspire, and connect people to God, remains intact.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Future of Gospel Music in the Face of Artificial Intelligence

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into gospel music within the Nigerian context heralds a significant shift in both the creative process and the spiritual engagement of music. As AI continues to reshape industries across the globe, its application in music production represents a transformative innovation with far-reaching implications. AI-powered platforms and tools offer immense potential to enhance creativity, streamline production processes, and foster deeper connections between gospel artists and their audiences. Despite these prospects, the adoption of AI in Nigerian gospel music remains complex and nuanced, revealing both enthusiasm and scepticism among stakeholders.

Some Contemporary Gospel Music Icons

Insights from focus group discussions illuminate listener preferences. Music producers and consumers hold biases towards the familiarity of content. Women expressed a strong affinity for traditional gospel artists such as Pam Monday, Bazata, Nazari, Mallam Jauro, and Friday Jibo. They appreciated the spiritual and moral alignment of these songs, which serve not only in worship but also in social contexts like naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals (Women Focus Group Discussion, 11 August 2024).

Similarly, youth respondents identified Panam Percy Paul, Job Manja, Jerry Jinang, Ezra Jinang, Solomon Damulak, Earnest Dades, Mathias Dades, Silas Nyako, Sinach, Frank Edwards, Monday Dilas, Joseph Michael, John Mishi, Solomon Damulak, Nathaniel Bassey, Mercy Chinwo, Mallam Razphil, Ziggy Zikman, Pam Monday, Ben Douglas, and Markus Isa Tallum, founder of the *Sabon Rai* genre of music genre among many others; citing their reasons for their choice as inspirational lyrics, engaging rhythms, and spiritual resonance. They emphasised the role of these songs in fostering a deeper connection with God and enhancing worship experiences (Youth Focus Group Discussion, 11 August 2025).

The Church's Readiness and Acceptance of AI in Worship

One of the foremost concerns is the level of readiness among churches to adopt AI in their worship practices. In Nigeria, many churches remain deeply rooted in traditional worship formats. These congregations are often conservative and may resist innovations perceived as undermining spiritual authenticity. The replacement of human-led worship with AI avatars or digital music production may be interpreted as an intrusion of secular technology into sacred spaces. According to personal communications with focus groups, many churchgoers expressed discomfort with non-human entities leading worship, fearing this might be akin to introducing elements contrary to Christian doctrine (Men & Women Focus Group Discussion, May 18, 2025).

Moreover, theological questions arise concerning the appropriateness of using AI in spiritual rituals. Worship in Christianity is deeply relational, centred on human interaction with the divine. Congregants may experience dissonance when an artificial system, lacking a soul or spiritual consciousness, assumes a central role in worship. In interviews, some church leaders suggested that any deviation from human-led services might face significant resistance, particularly if AI-generated music fails to evoke the spiritual resonance expected in a worship setting (Adegoke, personal interview, May 12, 2025).

Financial Limitations and Infrastructure Challenges

Another significant barrier to AI adoption in gospel music is the financial capacity of churches to acquire and maintain the necessary technology. AI implementation requires sophisticated equipment, trained personnel, and a stable power supply, all of which pose serious challenges in many parts of Nigeria. Church budgets often prioritise essential services over technological innovations, and where AI tools are procured, ongoing maintenance costs and software upgrades present further hurdles (Basila, personal interview, May 12, 2025).

For smaller congregations and rural churches, the digital divide widens the gap in access to AI-enhanced worship. While urban churches may experiment with AI-generated musical accompaniments or digital soundscapes, rural counterparts may struggle with basic audio systems. This disparity could create an uneven landscape in gospel music innovation, further marginalising churches already lacking in resources.

Spiritual Concerns: The 'Soullessness' of Artificial Intelligence

Clergy members have raised concerns about the 'soullessness' of AI. Gospel music is not merely an artistic endeavour but a medium of spiritual expression, deeply rooted in human experience and divine inspiration. Worship is expected to be rendered "in spirit and truth," as emphasised in Christian teachings. Critics argue that AI, by its very

nature, cannot possess the spiritual essence required to lead worship (Pogwan, Baidi & Maidawa, personal interview, May 12, 2025).

AI systems operate on algorithms and data. They lack emotions such as empathy, love, and joy, and cannot possess moral reasoning or ethical judgment. While they can be trained to recognise emotional cues, they cannot genuinely experience or understand the spiritual dimensions of human existence. For many believers, the notion of being led in worship by a machine challenges core theological principles, making acceptance difficult.

Improving Quality and Musical Precision

Despite the spiritual concerns, AI offers potential benefits in enhancing the quality of gospel music. Among urban congregations already influenced by digitisation, AI-generated music could improve sound clarity, eliminate performance errors, and allow for greater musical innovation. According to interviews, respondents acknowledged that AI algorithms could deliver balanced sound levels, consistent vocal harmonies, and technically refined productions (Bulus, Dabels, Agile & Exodus, personal interview, May 12, 2025).

Furthermore, AI can be programmed to work across diverse musical styles, fostering genre versatility and enabling artists to experiment with new sounds. AI-assisted composition tools allow for quicker production cycles, reducing the time and cost involved in music creation. In this regard, AI serves as an efficient assistant, offering tools that can complement human creativity rather than replace it.

Fears of Redundancy and Economic Displacement

With the automation of music production comes the fear of redundancy among human artists and producers. The Nigerian gospel music industry sustains many livelihoods, from studio technicians and sound engineers to equipment vendors and distribution agents. Full automation risks displacing these stakeholders, raising ethical concerns about technological unemployment (William & James, personal interview, May 11, 2025).

Youths who often hone their musical skills through active church participation may lose these learning opportunities if AI systems dominate worship settings. Moreover, the influx of AI-generated content could saturate the market, making it harder for individual artists to distinguish themselves. This could lead to widespread disillusionment, anxiety, and even abandonment of the craft among emerging talents.

Toward a Balanced Use of AI in Gospel Music

A nuanced perspective emerging from interviews suggests that AI need not be an antagonist to gospel music but rather a co-creator. Respondents advocated for a hybrid

model where AI is used to assist rather than dominate the music creation process. For example, AI could be employed to generate background instrumentals, improve production quality, or manage live sound adjustments, while human musicians and worship leaders retain the central role in spiritual engagement (Aligaitah, personal interview, May 11, 2025).

This collaborative model encourages a balance between technological efficiency and spiritual authenticity. By leveraging AI for technical enhancements, artists can focus on embedding personal testimony, theological depth, and emotional sincerity into their music. This model ensures that the essence of gospel music is preserved while embracing innovation.

Prospects of AI-Driven Genre Fusion and Innovation

AI's capability to analyse complex musical data presents opportunities for genre innovation. Nigerian gospel music, which traditionally draws from highlife, reggae, makossa, soukous, and Sabon Rai, could evolve through AI-generated fusion tracks that combine multiple cultural influences. AI-assisted cross-genre experiments may lead to fresh musical expressions that retain spiritual potency while appealing to broader audiences (Odu et al, 2023). Such innovations could also help Nigerian gospel music gain a stronger foothold in international music scenes. Through AI, artists can easily translate lyrics, subtitle content, and distribute music globally, thus breaking linguistic and geographical barriers.

CONCLUSION

The intersection of artificial intelligence and Nigerian gospel music represents both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, AI offers transformative tools that can elevate music quality, improve accessibility, and expand creative boundaries. On the other hand, it raises critical concerns regarding spiritual authenticity, cultural identity, ethical responsibility, and economic sustainability.

The future of gospel music in Nigeria lies in striking a delicate balance: embracing the benefits of AI without compromising the genre's spiritual core. Gospel musicians must remain anchored in theological principles and spiritual purpose while using AI to support, not supplant, their ministry. In doing so, they will ensure that gospel music continues to inspire, edify, and elevate both present and future generations.

The following are therefore recommended:

1. AI should be embraced as a tool to amplify the message and reach of gospel music, especially given its potential to democratize access and enhance production quality.

2. A hybrid model that preserves the human element of emotional depth, spiritual insight, and doctrinal integrity should be adopted. This model combines the strengths of human inspiration with AI's technical efficiency.
3. Gospel artists and church leaders must prioritise spiritual grounding and theological soundness to maintain the sanctity and authenticity of gospel music, ensuring it continues to serve as a conduit for divine truth and worship.

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NAMES AND PARTICULARS OF INTERVIEWEES

S/N	NAME	DATE	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	POSITION	CHURCH AFFILIATION
1	Michael Ulakili	11/2/25	Bassa	Musician	Evangelical
2	Women Focus Group Discussion	11/8/24	Bassa	Women Fellowship Musicians	Evangelical
3	Youth Focus Group Discussion	11/8/24	Bassa	Mixture of Musicians and Non-Musicians	Evangelical
4	Men Focus Group Discussion	11/8/24	Bassa	Mixture of Musicians and Non-Musicians	Evangelical
5	Benjamin Adegoke	12/5/25	Jos	Non-Musician	Evangelical
6	Abalis Basila	12/5/25	Jos	Non-Musician	Evangelical
7	Lydia Pogwan	8/5/25	Jos	Clergy	Evangelical
8	Nuhu Baidi	8/5/25	Jos	Clergy	Pentecostal
9	Gaius Maidawa	8/5/25	Jos	Clergy	Evangelical
10	Mildred Bulus	12/5/25	Jos	Musician	Evangelical
11	Fwanshak Dabels	12/5/25	Jos	Musician	Evangelical
12	Thomas Agile	12/5/25	Jos	Clergy/Musician	Pentecostal
13	Sam Exodus	12/5/25	Jos	Musician	Evangelical
14	Lami Williams	11/5/25	Jos	Non-Musician	Pentecostal
15	Laraba James	11/5/25	Jos	Non-Musician	Pentecostal
16	Richard Aligaitah	11/5/25	Jos	Non-Musician	Sabbath