International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion
https://ijchr.net | eISSN: 3028-1318
Volume 7 Special Issue 1 | doi: https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI1.384

Article

From Vinyl Records to Algorithms: How Streaming and AI are Changing the Music World

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Abstract

In the context of rapid digital technology development and the growing influence of algorithmic consumption systems, music is undergoing profound changes in both distribution and artistic expression. This transformation reflects new models of interaction between listener, work, and digital environment, requiring a rethinking of music as an aesthetic experience. The study aimed to examine the impact of digital platforms on the evolution of musical expression as a cultural form, focusing on musical art as an aesthetic practice in the digital age. The methodological basis combined an interdisciplinary approach with musicological and comparative analysis of 50 popular tracks, as well as content analysis. Findings show that digitalization fosters new forms of expression characterized by fragmentation, hyper-personalization, and algorithmic mediation of listening. Analysis of digital soundscapes revealed two dominant structures in contemporary tracks: fragmentary (e.g., "CHIHIRO" by Billie Eilish) and those with an increasing climax (e.g., "Labour" by Paris Paloma). Special attention was given to generative music involving artificial intelligence. Music created wholly or partly by AI is increasingly integrated into digital soundscapes, offering novel compositional and arrangement possibilities. Such generated music enhances experimentation and variability while sparking debates over authorship and emotional authenticity. The study also noted that AI-generated elements are often seamlessly embedded within tracks, making their origin imperceptible to most listeners. The practical significance lies in developing approaches to analyze music as a media and cultural phenomenon undergoing deep evolution under digital influence, contributing to both academic discourse and practical understanding of contemporary musical creativity.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, generative creativity, musical art, new technologies, popular music*

Suggested citation:

Kmetiuk, T., Demianets, I., Beskorsyi, V., Toloshniak, N., and Husar, D. (2025). From Vinyl Records to Algorithms: How Streaming and AI are Changing the Music World. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion, 7*(SI1), 1187-1204. https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI1.384

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Introduction

In the twenty-first century, music as a form of artistic expression has undergone radical changes under the influence of the digital environment. Streaming services, generative algorithms, digital platforms, and algorithmic coding of the listener's emotional response are gradually transforming the production and consumption of music. They also contribute to changes in musical presentation, ideas about authorship, and the value of musical experience. Against this background, researchers are increasingly studying the digital transformation of music. In particular, the focus is on algorithmic music curation issues.

In their study, Kaswan et al. (2023) systematically reviewed generative artificial intelligence models and their applications. Particular attention was paid to analyzing generative adversarial networks and transformers underlying modern models such as the Generative Pretrained Transformer (GPT). The authors emphasized the flexibility and prospects of generative models, which are already radically transforming approaches to content creation. However, they also emphasized the need for regulatory oversight and the development of ethical standards. Zhang and Kim (2025) covered technological and socio-cultural aspects of integrating AI into creative processes. The study results showed that pop music, as a genre, is conducive to automation due to its repetitive structure, harmonious simplicity, and focus on consumer demand.

Mitra and Zualkernan (2025) presented a systematic review of research in the field of music creation using deep learning and generative artificial intelligence (AI). The authors emphasized that hybrid architecture is the most effective, particularly those that combine recurrent neural networks (RNNs) with transformational models. In turn, Tan and Li (2021) studied approaches to composing based on artificial intelligence, serving as a concise methodological guide for beginners in this field. Alaeddine and Tannoury (2021) studied the main algorithmic strategies for automated music creation. Neural network architectures are considered, including recurrent networks, deep learning, and generative modeling methods.

However, most of the papers tend to be technical analyses. Instead, the transformation of music as a form of cultural and emotional expression remains insufficiently understood. The question of changing the structure of musical expression and the transformation of the artist's role is also important. There is also a lack of a generalized approach to understanding the aesthetics of music in the context of its algorithmizing and dynamic entry into new distribution channels.

In this context, this article aimed to study the evolution of music as a form of expression in the digital age (XXI century), focusing on the changes caused by

streaming services, algorithmic listening mechanisms, and artificial intelligence as a tool for musical creativity.

Literature review

The analysis of the transformations of musical art in the digital era is the focus of interdisciplinary research covering the fields of cultural studies, aesthetics, and musicology. In their study, Bannikova et al. (2023) investigated the complex impact of digital transformations on culture and art of the XXI century. One of the conclusions was that digital technologies significantly expand the possibilities of artistic expression through innovative forms of visualization, interactivity, and multimedia. Similarly, Freeman et al. (2022) studied how users of music streaming services perceive algorithmic content recommendation systems. The researchers noted that a personalized feed becomes a form of self-expression for many listeners.

The latest digital technologies have an impact on the transformation of musical practices. Born and Eisenberg (2025) focused on cases from the 2010s, presenting how digital technologies open new opportunities for musicians from postcolonial regions. In their work, Hayes et al. (2020) investigated the reliability and accuracy of analyses performed using artificial intelligence on the Crimson Hexagon (now Brandwatch) platform. Although artificial intelligence (AI) can process large amounts of data and present consistent performance in routine analysis, its results are not always accurate. Given the rapid development of AI in the music industry, access to such rich data is critical to ensuring transparency, ethical system design, and preserving the diversity of the music experience. The same conclusions were reached by Schedl et al. (2022). The authors presented a new large-scale dataset, LFM-2b, designed for in-depth research of music recommendation systems and issues of fairness in their operation. Schellewald (2022) investigated how public perceptions of algorithms are shaped and reinforced through narratives circulating in the media space. The author concluded that perceptions are not necessarily formed through users' direct experience with algorithms, but rather through narratives about algorithms that can be created by journalists, bloggers, companies, or even ordinary users. Seaver (2022) found that algorithms represent cultural ideas about which musical styles should be highlighted and how best to structure the listener's experience. Logg (2022) examined the psychological aspects of the perception of algorithms. The key conclusion was that in the context of big data, the psychological burden of having to interpret complex systems often presented as unbiased, when they are embedded with cultural or commercial biases, is increasing.

In the digital age, music is less consumed in isolation. Increasingly, it is part of a multimodal experience in which video is becoming a significant factor in music perception. It is important to understand music's transformation as an expression, as audiovisual media now actively shape the listener's perception. In their work, Dasovich-Wilson et al. (2022) investigated how the experience of watching music videos affects the perception of music itself. They argued that visuals can enhance emotional immersion in music and change the interpretation of the content, depending on how closely the image matches or contrasts with the sound material. Hesmondhalgh (2021) reached similar conclusions. The author studied the impact of streaming services on music culture and emphasized that streaming is changing the dynamics of the music industry towards individualized, directed consumption. Váradi (2022) concluded that music education, especially in collective forms (choirs, ensembles, group classes), creates a favorable environment for practicing interpersonal skills, which is necessary in the XXI century.

In his study, Mulla (2022) found that a combination of convenience, content availability, personalization options, and user interaction largely determines the adoption of Over-the-top media services. Shen et al. (2024) examined the ability of AI to create personalized music compositions aimed at improving the emotional state. The main conclusion was that AI-generated music has the potential to be an innovative therapeutic tool that can enhance the effectiveness of traditional treatments, especially for anxiety disorders, depression, and post-traumatic stress. Ardeliya et al. (2024) investigated current machine learning-based technologies, including generative adversarial networks (GANs) and natural language processing algorithms used to create visual, audio, and graphic content. The authors pointed out that AI is no longer just an auxiliary tool but a full-fledged subject of the creative process.

This study aimed to identify the main trends in the transformation of musical expression in the digital age by analyzing the impact of streaming platforms and generative AI technologies on the creation, form, and perception of musical works. To achieve this goal, several analytical and applied tasks were set. One of the key aspects of the study was the analysis of 50 popular tracks by 13 selected artists, which allowed us to trace the peculiarities of the form and principles of musical organization. Particular attention was also paid to studying algorithmic influence, transforming music from an autonomous art form into flexible digital content. This process transforms the ways of musical communication. In addition, it actualizes the need for an interdisciplinary approach to understand the contemporary musical landscape better. The role of artificial intelligence and the peculiarities of generative music, its construction, and changes in the context of listener perception were investigated.

Analyzing these processes allowed us to understand better how music, as a form of cultural and personal expression, evolves in the context of global technological change.

Methodology

The study used an interdisciplinary approach to analyze the transformation of musical expression in the digital age, in the context of streaming platforms and the impact of artificial intelligence on the creation and perception of music. The study was based on selected musical works that represent the musical art of the 21st century. Fifty tracks were selected for analysis, including compositions by such artists as Billie Eilish, Paris Paloma, Taylor Swift, Lana Del Rey, Olivia Rodrigo, Christine and the Queens, Angel, Benjamin Ingrosso, Doja Cat, The Weeknd, Beyoncé, Aurora, and David Kushner. These works were selected based on their popularity, distribution on Spotify, TikTok, and YouTube, as well as signs of the influence of algorithmic mechanisms on the structure and aesthetics of music. This choice made it possible to trace the evolution of music as a form of expression in the context of technological and cultural changes.

A comprehensive methodological approach was applied to combine musicological analysis, comparative research, and content analysis of the digital environment. The musicological analysis included a detailed analysis of the compositional structures, sound characteristics, vocal delivery, and formal features of the works, focusing on elements that can be adapted or caused by the algorithmic influence of streaming platforms and generative artificial intelligence technologies.

The study also included a content analysis of the technological environment surrounding digital music products, including the study of algorithmic recommendation models on streaming platforms, mechanisms of virality in social media, and the role of artificial intelligence in music creation, production, and marketing. This approach allowed us to consider the music product and the conditions of its functioning in the modern cultural ecosystem, where digital technologies play a key role. All research procedures were carried out in the context of classroom and individual listening to the pieces, and in the systematic analysis of available metadata and technical information about digital platforms. Using an interdisciplinary methodology provided a deep and comprehensive understanding of the transformation of musical expression in the streaming and artificial intelligence era.

Results

In the twenty-first century, the art of music has been fundamentally transformed due to the growing influence of digital technologies, particularly

streaming platforms and AI systems. Streaming services have become a factor in changing the very essence of musical expression. Platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube Music are shaping a new paradigm for music, including the transformation of formal, content, audiovisual, and communicative aspects. This paradigm is dominated by algorithmic practices that significantly affect contemporary composition's style, structure, and logic. First, streaming initiates a radical change in the structure of musical work. Contemporary streaming in the twenty-first century tends to be a track culture: single compositions dominate, functioning as separate content units independent of the album as a coherent narrative.

At the same time, platforms like Spotify are actively implementing mood-based and activity-based categorization. The definition means that music is presented not by genre or author, but according to its function - «for studying, » «for sleeping, » «for running, » «for focusing. » This division functionalizes the musical expression, turning it into an instrument of contextual support for a particular state or action. In this format, music loses many of the attributes of art as an autonomous means of expression. It acquires the features of service content, which also stimulates a change in aesthetic guidelines: high complexity or emotional ambiguity is often inappropriate within this context, leading to the standardization of aesthetics.

Another consequence of the streaming culture is a shift in emphasis in music careers: artists no longer focus exclusively on recording albums or live performances, but rather on the constant generation of content that can be included in algorithmic playlists. The regularity of singles, strategic use of collaborations, and focus on viral promotion mechanisms all affect the content of works. The change in the perception of music time deserves special attention. Streaming services are changing the traditional model of listening, which involves the sequential perception of tracks, albums, or concerts. Instead, the culture of fragmented listening dominates short excerpts, switching between tracks after a few seconds of listening. This mode of perception forms a new logic of music editing: works are created to remain expressive at any moment of sound, without preludes or complex exposition. It, in turn, leads to a change in the musical narrative, which becomes less dependent on time and drama, instead tending to immediate communicative action. The functional perception of music is also changing; instead of focused, aesthetically engaged listening, background consumption is emerging, in which music serves as an audio decoration for daily practices. This model affects the type of music material, namely, simple harmonies, transparent textures, and slow development of music material, which are preferred, as this facilitates perception in the context of the listener's parallel employment. Musical expression is becoming less autonomous and more contextual.

The analysis of 50 popular tracks widely distributed on social media and streaming services has identified two dominant approaches to organizing music in the digital age. The first, the fragmentary approach, is to create compositions consisting of separate semantic and musically expressive blocks that function as autonomous units. The second approach, culminating, focuses on the gradual build-up of tension throughout the composition with a distinct dramatic peak that goes viral as the central moment. TikTok, Instagram, and other platforms' algorithms help popularize specific music fragments with a high viral potential. As a result, composers and performers are adapting the musical form to the logic of consuming short content based on instant recognition, emotional intensity, and the ability to be widely shared. One of the key vectors of such adaptation is the tendency to fragmentary composition. Instead of a coherent, unfolding drama, modern tracks increasingly consist of several autonomous sections, each of which has the potential to function separately. For example, in the song «CHIHIRO» by Billie Eilish, there are several distinct motifs, including «Open up the door...», «Did you take...», and «I do not know...», which are actively used in short video formats separately, as independent musical blocks (Figure 1). This separation contributes to the multidimensional recognition of the composition, as the listener often encounters its fragments before thoroughly familiarizing himself with the entire track.

In Figure 1, the parts of the track that can be interpreted as verses are highlighted in gray. The fragment that begins with the words «Open up the door...» is highlighted in green. This fragment can be interpreted as a chorus. «Open up the door...» is going viral on social media. The following fragment, «Did you take...» is highlighted in yellow and popular on various platforms. This fragment contains a hook and numerous melismas on which the fragment is built. Therefore, this fragment has gained popularity through vocal challenges. The fragment «I do not know...» is marked in blue, and the slightly transformed fragment «I do not know...» brought to a climax is marked in a slightly darker blue color. It is the latter that is used in social networks. The hook here is an innovative approach to the ratio of vocal and instrumental parts: the vocals contain phrases that are constantly interrupted and performed with the effect of acoustic distancing, which creates the illusion of spatial depth. The light gray color indicates the playback fragment, which is followed by a postlude consisting of 3 stages. The first stage includes musical material like verses, but a choral sound appears here. After the first passage, the instrumental accompaniment comes to the fore, and fragments of the previous text are heard in the distance. The third time, it is harder to understand the words; only some shouts are heard, and the accompaniment fills the sound (Zarutska et al., 2025).

Billie Eilish's song «CHIHIRO» has a structure that confirms the idea of popularizing fragmentation, which in turn helps algorithms promote music on social media. Despite this phenomenon, all the fragments of the track «CHIHIRO» are connected both at the semantic level and in terms of musical characteristics, namely: a single style, one key, one-plan accompaniment, and a certain cyclicity, due to the presence of a verse comparison.

The second way of working with musical material, which is popular and related to the work of algorithms, is the culmination strategy of form construction. This method is quite natural for musical art, given the experience of the Romantic era, where numerous miniatures were also built on a single musical material that was brought to a climax. Thus, the verse form is used as a gradual emotional build-up leading to a climax located approximately at the «golden section» of the composition. This moment most often becomes a viral fragment on social media. The formal monotony of the previous sections in these compositions prepares the listener for the emotional explosion in the climax. This structure is aimed not so much at developing musical material as at emphasizing the climax as the central artistic unit (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Chart of the track «CHIHIRO» by Billie Eilish

Source: created by the author based on (Billie Eilish – CHIHIRO, 2024)

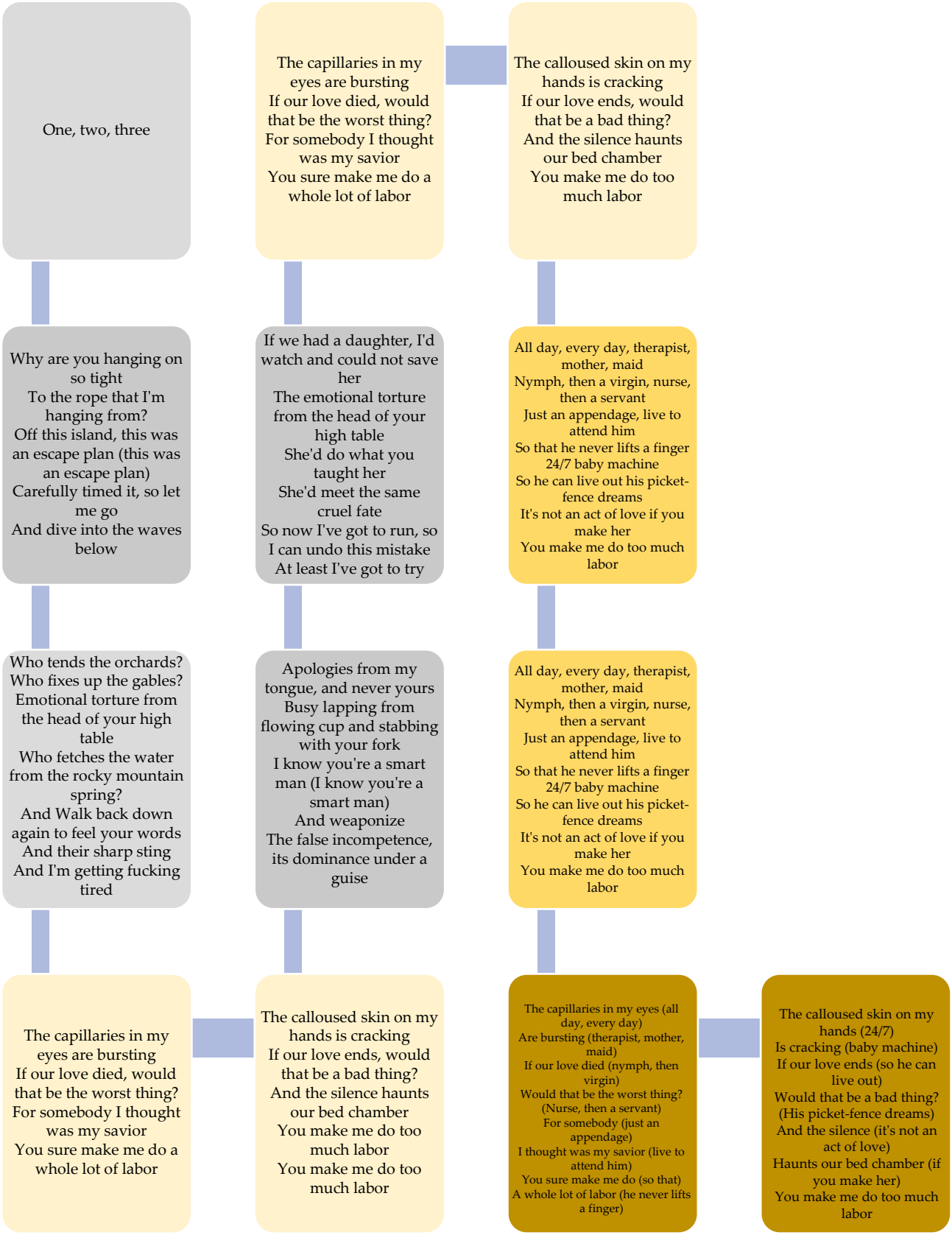

Figure 2. Scheme of the track «labor» by Paris Paloma

Source: developed by the author based on Paris Paloma – labor, 2023

Paris Paloma's track «labor» has a well-defined verse form. The verses are gray; the chorus is yellow. The gradual increase in yellow shows the growth of tension and highlights the fragment «All day, every day, therapist, mother, maid...», which is popular on social media. The hook is realized through intense, dramatic, and rhetorical aggravation, which is amplified by the increase in textual and musical pressure. The last two fragments, highlighted in dark yellow, show the superimposition of the two previous fragments (the most significant emotional load), forming a polyphonic presentation of the musical material. The song's semantic content played a significant role in its popularity. However, the track's structure, which focuses on climaxes, also influenced the promotion of the fragment «All day, every day, therapist, mother, maid...» on social media (Romanenko et al., 2025).

The table below presents a comparative analysis of several tracks from the sample, which allowed us to reflect on their genre, structure, and nature of algorithmic influence.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of tracks from the sample

Track / Artist / Year	Genre	Structure and length	Algorithmic influence	Key observations
«CHIHIRO» by Billie Eilish (2024)	Alt-pop	Fragmentary; 2:34 min	Pros	The composition is adapted to short fragments, keeping attention
«Labor» – Paris Paloma (2023)	Indie pop	Building up to the climax, 3:52 min	Partially	Gradual emotional growth stimulates repeated listening
«Anti-Hero» – Taylor Swift (2022)	Pop.	Build-up to the climax 3:21 min	Partially	A verse form in which the chorus is the main emotional fragment
«Young and Beautiful» – Lana Del Rey (2013)	Baroque pop	Build-up to the climax; 3:57 min	Partially	Imagery and lyric hooks contribute to the spread of both verses and the chorus.
«Driver's License» – Olivia Rodrigo (2021)	Pop ballad	Fragmentary; 4:02 min		Algorithmic adaptation for social media, emphasis on vocals and drama
«Say Yes» – Doja Cat (2019)	Hip-hop/pop	Fragmentary; 3:58 min.	About	Support for TikTok algorithms, focus on rhythmic structure
«Blinding Lights» – The Weeknd (2019)	Pop.	Build-up to the climax; 3:22 min	Partially	Emphasis on the climax, which is the center of the track

Source: developed by the author based on the analysis of the above tracks

The comparative analysis reveals the presence of two dominant structures in contemporary popular music: the fragmentary structure, represented by such tracks as «CHIHIRO» by Billie Eilish and «Driver's License» by Olivia Rodrigo, and the structure with a rising climax, which is characteristic of «Labor» by Paris Paloma and «Young and Beautiful» by Lana Del Rey. The fragmentary structure is adapted to the dynamics of digital attention and is particularly effective for the TikTok platform, where short, bright musical fragments promote virality. The structure with a rising climax supports deeper emotional immersion, stimulating repeated listening on Spotify and YouTube.

In most cases, the algorithmic influence is manifested by adapting the form and arrangement of songs to the specifics of the platforms, optimizing the duration and dynamics to maximize listener engagement. For example, Doja Cat's «Say So» and Billie Eilish's «CHIHIRO» present a thoughtful work with rhythm and texture to keep attention in the streaming environment. These data show that digital technologies and algorithmic mechanisms shape not only the way music is distributed, but also its internal structure and aesthetic content, which is a key aspect of the evolution of contemporary soundscapes.

In the twenty-first century, music is no longer exclusively a human endeavor, and AI is gradually involved in music creation. Artificial intelligence, as an autonomous or auxiliary link in the creative process, constructs new ways of musical expression that change the traditional understanding of composition, performance, and aesthetic perception of a musical work. This transformation process has both a technical and a deep aesthetic dimension, affecting the form and the essence of musical communication. First, AI is radically changing approaches to building a musical language. Algorithms based on deep learning can generate melodies, harmonic structures, rhythmic patterns, and even entire compositions based on large amounts of previous music data. It results in pieces that reproduce the style of a particular composer or genre. However, the success of AI-generated music is determined by cultural and psychological factors of audience perception. There is a particular prejudice against AI-generated music. People evaluate music by matching their cultural expectations, customs, and previous emotional and listening experiences. Music created by AI differs from that created by humans, which is why there is a particular bias. The musical expression generated by AI can either imitate existing patterns or offer new formal and acoustic solutions. However, it is currently

impossible for AI to create something new in the art of music, as it is generated based on millions of examples of music composed by humans. However, if one looks deeper, in the 21st century, it is almost impossible and probably unnecessary for even humans to create something «completely new» in the music industry.

At the same time, the semantics of musical expression are also transforming. Traditionally, music has been seen as a means of conveying emotions, ideas, and narratives that arise in the composer's inner world. In the case of AI, this process loses its direct human intent: a piece of music appears not as an act of international expression, but as the result of computational modeling. In turn, this means that music is becoming less personal and more functional - aimed at meeting the audience's specific aesthetic or emotional needs, which are determined algorithmically based on the analysis of consumer mood or genre preferences. The philosophical paradigm of music is changing, and AI-generated music depends on consumer behavior in the information space or the request. The impact of artificial intelligence on the musical language of vocals should be noted separately. Generative models such as Vocaloid or Synthesizer V make it possible to synthesize the human voice with a high degree of emotional variability, which gives rise to a new form of vocal expression, in which there is no singer in the traditional sense. However, a vocal narrative can convey a specific affective intention. Thus, the voice becomes not an instrument of subjective expression, but a functional module in a large compositional ecosystem.

In addition, AI algorithms are gradually shaping new interaction principles between music and the recipient. Tools such as Mubert or Endel create so-called adaptive music that responds in real time to the listener's state, such as heart rate, emotional state, or physical activity. In this case, music is no longer a fixed object of aesthetic contemplation but turns into a dynamic space of interaction in which the listener becomes a co-author at the same time. There is a shift from consumption to personalized participation, which changes the very concept of musical experience. Equally important is the transformation of the genre structure of music. AI-generated music often does not fit into traditional genre classifications. Its hybridity is becoming the norm, calling into question the feasibility of a rigid genre division. Significant shifts are also taking place in the field of compositional structure. Music created by AI is often devoid of an apparent culmination, traditional drama, or classical forms such as sonata or three-movement forms. Instead, «infinite» compositions can be infinitely extended or varied, depending on the scenario of use. In this context, musical expression loses its teleological orientation and acquires the character of an environment, contextual and open.

Discussions

The study emphasized that musical art in the twenty-first century is actively changing and transforming in relation to technological progress. The same conclusions were reached in Steinbrecher's study (2021). The author noted that popular music remains a dynamic phenomenon that constantly adapts to changes in technology and audience while forming new musical styles and identities. Similarly, in their work, Kahr and Zaddach (2025) emphasized that the music industry of the XXI century is actively changing. In accordance with changes in musical material and music perception, it is necessary to change methodological tools for researching popular music. This study is consistent with the evolution of musical expression in the twenty-first century, as musical art has changed, both in the means of musical expression used and in the creation process.

When analyzing the musical material of the tracks, the emphasis was placed on hooks that can catch the listener. Accordingly, such fragments are actively promoted by the algorithms of various streaming platforms. In their study, Byron and O'Regan (2022) concluded that the study of popular music of the XXI century using methodological approaches used for academic music is irrelevant. The authors proposed to study popular music by analyzing the hooks present in it. In turn, Wu et al. (2024) presented a multimodal music hook dataset designed to promote a deeper understanding and generation of popular music using artificial intelligence. The authors emphasized the structure and features of the collected data, including audio and visual components, allowing for practical analysis of various aspects of hooks. Thus, the study by Zhang and Kim (2025) explains the importance of analyzing hooks in this study, as in popular music, hooks play an important role in determining whether a track will go viral on social media.

The study has shown that AI is actively used in the 21st century and has certain peculiarities of music generation. AI allows personalizing the musical experience of listeners, opening new horizons of musical expression. In turn, Bryan-Kinns et al. (2024) analyzed the technical features of different AI models, their efficiency, and adaptability to music generation in various genres. Dash and Agres (2024) analyzed different approaches to generating musical pieces that can convey and evoke certain feelings in listeners and the challenges associated with the accuracy, adaptability, and personalization of such systems. The authors emphasized that emotional components are a key factor in improving the quality and significance of AI-generated music. In their study, Hong et al. (2020) studied the perception of music created by artificial intelligence through the prism of expectation violation theory. The authors noted that the success of AI music depends on cultural and psychological factors of perception.

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of the study of the evolution of musical expression in the AI era.

Conclusions

The study found that new soundscapes are formed by a change in the formal structure of musical works, the paradigm of musical perception, and communication between the author and the listener. Algorithmic mediation in selecting, distributing, and generating musical content affects music expression's aesthetic guidelines and formats. The results showed that modern digital platforms are changing how music is consumed. In addition, they radically transform their internal organization and aesthetic models. The two dominant structures of modern tracks, fragmentary and climax, reflect the adaptation of musical material to the dynamics of digital attention and algorithmic promotion mechanisms. These models correspond to the logic of perception in the streaming environment. The results confirmed predictions about the impact of digital culture on music, while revealing new patterns in composing and distributing content that have not been studied in detail before.

However, the study had certain limitations due to its focus on popular genres and digital platforms, which may not cover the full diversity of musical practices, including the field of academic music. In addition, the dynamics of algorithms and user behavior are constantly changing, making it difficult to predict trends in the long term. The practical significance of the work lies in the development of tools for analyzing musical structures in the context of the digital economy, which can be helpful for musicians, producers, and marketers. Further research should focus on studying the impact of algorithmic systems on different genre contexts and integrating psychological aspects of music perception in the digital culture. Of particular interest is the study of the personalization of musical experience as a phenomenon that changes traditional notions of audience and creative autonomy.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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