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Platformed Invisibility: Algorithmic Discrimination and the Sustainability of African Music - A Scoping Review

Platformed Invisibility: Algorithmic Discrimination and the Sustainability of African Music - A Scoping Review

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Abstract
Music streaming platforms and short video services have become dominant intermediaries in the global circulation of African music, yet mounting evidence suggests they simultaneously reproduce structural disadvantages for African artists, genres, and audiences. This scoping review synthesises the interdisciplinary literature on how algorithmic systems, revenue models, and data governance regimes produce what we conceptualise as *platformed invisibility*: the systematic, opaque, and technologically mediated marginalisation of non-Western cultural expression on ostensibly universal digital infrastructures. Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) and Joanna Briggs Institute methodology, we searched seven bibliographic databases, targeted grey literature, and hand searched six leading journals for records published between January 2015 and June 2026. A total of 1,033 records were screened; 41 met inclusion criteria and were charted using an a priori extraction form. Narrative synthesis identifies four interlocking mechanisms, namely construct, method and item bias, algorithmic opacity, popularity feedback loops, and demographic and geographic skew, that operate within a political economy of data extractivism and infrastructural dependency. Countervailing interventions cluster around trustworthy artificial intelligence, data sovereignty, intellectual property reform, culturally grounded datasets, decolonial pedagogy, and Afrofuturist design imaginaries. The review advances three contributions: a conceptual definition of platformed invisibility that distinguishes it from adjacent constructs; a mapping of the mechanisms to interventions terrain; and a research agenda for empirical audits of African music on major streaming platforms. Findings underscore that algorithmic fairness for African music cannot be achieved through platform tweaks alone but requires structural decolonisation of technology, economy, and epistemology.

Introduction
The global music industry has been reorganised, in less than two decades, around a handful of streaming intermediaries. Amazon Music, Apple Music, Spotify, TikTok, YouTube Music, and in African markets Audiomack, Boomplay, and Mdundo now mediate discovery, distribution, and



remuneration for the vast majority of recorded music consumption (IFPI, 2025). For African music, this transition has been double edged. On the one hand, genres such as Afrobeats, Amapiano, Bongo Flava, and Gqom have achieved unprecedented global reach; Nigerian artist royalties from a single major platform reportedly exceeded US$38 million in 2024, and continental streaming revenues are forecast to cross US$500 million (Adedeji & Röschenthaler, 2024; Ahmed, 2025). On the other hand, this visible success masks a deeper structural problem: the very platforms that appear to democratise access are governed by algorithmic and economic architectures that systematically disadvantage most African music most of the time.

We term the above said condition platformed invisibility: the algorithmically produced, infrastructurally embedded, and economically consequential marginalisation of cultural expression that does not conform to the metrics, categories, and consumption patterns encoded into globally dominant digital platforms. Platformed invisibility is not the absence of African music from platform catalogues, since catalogues are large and growing, but the systematic underweighting of that music in the recommendation, curation, monetisation, and moderation pipelines that determine what listeners actually encounter and what artists actually earn. It is invisibility through presence rather than invisibility as absence.

The problem has been touched on by several distinct literatures, including critical algorithm studies (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2018; Seaver, 2022), music information retrieval fairness research (Yesiler et al., 2022; Ferraro et al., 2021), platform political economy (Srnicek, 2017; Nieborg & Poell, 2018), critical data studies and data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Kwet, 2019; Birhane, 2023; Ricaurte, 2019), decolonial African musicology (Agawu, 1995, 2003, 2016; Mapaya, 2016, 2024; Akuno, 2020), and Afrofuturist media theory (Dery, 1994; Nelson, 2002; Steingo, 2015). Each captures a facet of the phenomenon, and closely adjacent analyses of algorithmic visibility and African content are now emerging; none, however, offers a protocol driven synthesis that maps documented mechanisms to candidate interventions across this multidisciplinary field. Existing systematic and scoping reviews of algorithmic recommendation in music (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023) treat African music at most tangentially; recent surveys of algorithmic bias (Wang et al., 2024; Mokoena & Obagbuwa, 2025) rarely engage decolonial theory; and the small but growing decolonial computing literature (Birhane, 2023; Pasipamire & Muroyiwa, 2024) has yet to be brought into sustained conversation with music specific evidence, though first steps exist (Kirui, Wanyama, & Mapaya, 2025; Ngatiah & Kirui, 2025).

This paper addresses that gap. We ask:

a) *Research question 1.* Through what mechanisms do algorithmic systems on music streaming and short video platforms produce platformed invisibility for African music?

b) *Research question 2.* How do the political and economic architectures of these platforms, that is, revenue models, data governance, and infrastructural ownership, shape the sustainability of African music ecosystems?

c) *Research question 3.* What decolonial, policy, technical, and design interventions have been proposed to counter algorithmic discrimination and support African musical sustainability, and what is the current evidence on their efficacy?

The paper makes three contributions: a conceptual definition of platformed invisibility differentiated from algorithmic gatekeeping (Bucher, 2018), symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978; Coche & Lynn, 2020), discoverability (Morris, 2020), and cultural erasure (Fraser, 1990); the first PRISMA-ScR compliant map of a fragmented evidence base spanning media studies, ethnomusicology, computer science, law, and African cultural studies; and a mechanisms to interventions matrix that researchers,

regulators, platform designers, and cultural organisations can use to target reforms. It is written by African music scholars from an explicit decolonial positionality (see Positionality below).

Conceptual Framework

Platform Capitalism and the Political Economy of Streaming

Following Srnicek (2017) and Nieborg and Poell (2018), we treat music streaming platforms as *platform capitalist* enterprises whose value proposition rests on the intermediation and datafication of cultural exchange. Platforms accumulate value not primarily by producing music but by capturing rents on the encounter between listeners and rights holders, extracting behavioural surplus from every interaction, and monetising both attention, through subscriptions and advertising, and prediction, through targeted recommendation and licensing analytics (Zuboff, 2019). The pro rata royalty model, in which the total pool of subscription and advertising revenue in a market is divided across all streams in that market, structurally advantages high volume, low cost content and disadvantages niche, culturally specific, or geographically dispersed listenerships (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2021; Marshall, 2015). For African artists whose audiences are concentrated in markets with lower average revenue per user and higher ad supported tier penetration, the same stream is worth substantially less than a stream from a subscriber in a high average revenue market (Ahmed, 2025; InterSpace Daily, 2025).

Data Colonialism and Infrastructural Asymmetry

The infrastructural conditions under which African music circulates are shaped by profound geographic asymmetry. Africa hosts approximately 18 per cent of the world's population but less than 1 per cent of global data centre capacity (World Economic Forum, 2025). The dominant music streaming platforms and social platforms are headquartered in, and answerable to regulators in, jurisdictions of the Global North. Following Couldry and Mejias (2019), we understand this configuration as *data colonialism*: an emerging order in which human life, including cultural expression, is appropriated as raw material for datafication and value extraction, echoing but not identical to historical colonialism. Kwet (2019), Coleman (2019), Birhane (2023), Oyedemi (2021), Salami (2024), and Mattelart (2025) have extended the frame to African contexts, showing how free connectivity initiatives, algorithmic governance, and platform terms of service function as instruments of contemporary extractive relationships. Data colonialism is not a metaphor for algorithmic bias but its structural precondition. Bias in recommender systems is not accidental; it is the downstream effect of who owns the infrastructure, whose data trains the models, whose taste is treated as default, and whose cultural expression is legible to the categories the platform uses to sort the world (Birhane, 2023; Ricaurte, 2019; Mohamed, Png, & Isaac, 2020).

Decolonial African Musicology

A parallel intellectual movement in African musicology has, since at least the mid 1990s, contested the epistemic framing of African music in Western scholarship. Agawu (1995, 2003) has argued that the concept of African rhythm as uniquely complex, quintessentially communal, and functionally embedded is an invention that reflects Western scholarly desire for difference more than African musical practice; he calls for analyses that begin from a presumption of *notional sameness*, subjecting African musics to the same rigour as any other tradition without exoticisation. Mapaya (2016, 2024) has developed the concept of *aura oral* pedagogy, that is, immersive, communal, oral and aural transmission of *mmino wa setšo*, indigenous music, as a substantive alternative to notation centric, individualist university curricula. Akuno (2020) argues that music education in Africa must be community defined to preserve cultural relevance. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) call to decolonise the mind through indigenous language expression provides a wider frame within which the algorithmic marginalisation of non English lyrics can be read.

These arguments matter for platform studies because they name the epistemological substrate on which algorithmic categories are built. When a music streaming platform genre taxonomy has one label for Afrobeats and another for World Music but no analytic room for the distinctions between Benga, Bongo Flava, Chimurenga, Genge, Gqom, Highlife, and Kwaito, the taxonomy is not just imprecise; it is epistemically colonial (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023; Hall, 2024).

Afrofuturist Imaginaries

A fourth strand supplies the imaginative register. Afrofuturism, named by Dery (1994) and theorised as a tradition of future texts by Nelson (2002), asks why imagined technological futures so rarely centre African protagonists and what changes when they do; Steingo (2015) complicates the frame from the continent, cautioning against reading African speculation as a simple extension of African American experience. For this review, Afrofuturism matters twice over. Analytically, it names the horizon against which platformed invisibility becomes visible: marginalisation can only be diagnosed where alternative futures are thinkable. Practically, it anchors the design end of the interventions continuum mapped under Research Question 3, where African led music technologies and speculative archives are less policy instruments than exercises in future making. Treating Afrofuturism as theory rather than ornament connects the review's structural critique to its constructive agenda.

Defining Platformed Invisibility

Bringing these strands together, we define *platformed invisibility* as the condition in which cultural expression is present in a platform catalogue but systematically underweighted in the algorithmic, curatorial, monetary, and moderation processes that determine encounter and remuneration, such that its cultural, economic, and epistemic value is depressed relative to expression aligned with the platform's default assumptions about genre, language, taste, and market.

This definition distinguishes platformed invisibility from four adjacent concepts. It differs from *algorithmic gatekeeping* (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2018) by emphasising the multi modal, and not solely recommender driven, character of exclusion and its coupling to political economy. It differs from *symbolic annihilation* (Tuchman, 1978; Coche & Lynn, 2020) in that the object is not absent from representation but present yet suppressed. It differs from *discoverability* (Morris, 2020) by treating the problem as structural rather than as a challenge for individual artists to navigate. And it differs from *cultural erasure* (Fraser, 1990) by locating the mechanism in technical and economic infrastructure rather than in explicit symbolic denial. Platformed invisibility is thus a condition rather than a single mechanism, with interacting algorithmic, economic, infrastructural, and epistemological drivers that demand responses at multiple levels.

Methods

This scoping review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018) and Joanna Briggs Institute methodology (Peters et al., 2020, 2022), operationalised via Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five stage framework as refined by Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010). A scoping review was selected because the research questions are exploratory, span multiple disciplines, and aim to map rather than statistically synthesise a fragmented evidence base (Munn et al., 2018). The review protocol was developed following the Joanna Briggs Institute template and registered with the Open Science Framework prior to formal screening. No amendments were made after registration.

Eligibility Criteria

The Population, Concept, and Context framework is summarised in Table 1. In line with the source type criteria, a small number of press and practitioner items cited in this review (Antal, 2020; Aroni, 2025; BBC, 2024; InterSpace Daily, 2025; Kitili & Koros, 2025) are used strictly as illustrative primary data rather than as scholarly evidence, and are flagged as such in the charting records.

Table 1: Population, Concept, and Context eligibility framework.

Element	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	African music artists, genres, listeners, streaming or short video platforms operating in Africa, and African music streaming datasets.	Non-African music unless used as comparator; general AI ethics literature without cultural or musical connection.
Concept	Algorithmic bias and discrimination, recommender systems, platform governance, data colonialism, cultural sustainability, decolonial musicology, Afrofuturism, and streaming political economy.	Purely technical music information retrieval papers with no discussion of bias, fairness, culture, or equity.
Context	Music streaming and social platforms including Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, TikTok, Boomplay, Mdundo, Audiomack, SoundCloud, and equivalents; global digital cultural industries.	Radio, television, or print era distribution unless used as historical background.
Time frame	1 January 2015 to 30 June 2026, since streaming became the dominant global revenue source in 2015.	Pre 2015 sources except seminal works such as Agawu (1995, 2003), Ngũgĩ (1986), Dery (1994), and Tuchman (1978).
Language	English, French, Portuguese, and Kiswahili.	Other languages.
Source types	Peer reviewed articles, peer reviewed conference proceedings, academic monographs and edited volumes, and targeted grey literature from UNESCO, WIPO, IFPI, AU, ARIPO, and UNCTAD.	Op eds, blog posts, and press articles, except as illustrative primary data with the label clearly flagged.
Study types	Empirical, conceptual, theoretical, review, and policy analyses.	Editorials without a scholarly argument.

Information Sources

Seven bibliographic databases were searched: Web of Science Core Collection (SSCI, AHCI, ESCI), Scopus, ACM Digital Library, IEEE Xplore, Communication and Mass Media Complete (EBSCOhost), JSTOR, and African Journals Online. Communication and Mass Media Complete could not be accessed at the date of the search; its coverage was secured through direct publisher platform searches of SAGE Journals and Taylor and Francis Online, which host the core communication and media studies journals indexed by that database, together with the Web of Science Core Collection overlap and the hand search protocol described below. Scopus institutional entitlement was similarly unavailable at the search date; OpenAlex, an open bibliographic index whose coverage substantially subsumes Scopus indexed journals, was searched in its place using the same Boolean string, and a native Scopus search will be added should access be restored before submission. Two supplementary sources were used to capture literature not consistently indexed in the main databases. These were Google Scholar (first 200 relevance ranked results, per Haddaway et al., 2015) and hand searches of the tables of contents of *New Media and Society*, *Information, Communication and Society*, *Big Data and Society*, *Popular Music*, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, and *Ethnomusicology*. Grey literature was searched via OpenGrey, the UNESCO Digital Library, the WIPO IP Portal, the IFPI Global Music Report archives, and the African Union Commission publications portal. Reference lists of included studies were hand searched for backward citation tracking, and Google Scholar's cited by function was used for forward citation tracking on the ten most cited included studies.

Search Strategy

The search string was developed with a subject librarian and pilot tested in Scopus before syntactic adaptation to each database. It combines four concept blocks with Boolean operators.

a) *Block 1 (music and platform).* "music streaming" OR "streaming platform*" OR Spotify OR "Apple Music" OR YouTube OR TikTok OR Boomplay OR Mdundo OR Audiomack OR "recommender system*" OR "music recommendation".

b) *Block 2 (bias and discrimination).* "algorithmic bias" OR "algorithmic discrimination" OR "algorithmic fairness" OR "algorithmic gatekeeping" OR "algorithmic curation" OR "recommendation bias" OR "popularity bias" OR "platform* invisibility" OR "content moderation" OR "algorithmic opacity".

c) *Block 3 (Africa and Global South).* Africa* OR "Sub-Saharan" OR Nigerian OR Kenyan OR "South Africa*" OR Ghanaian OR Tanzanian OR "Global South" OR decoloni* OR "digital colonial*" OR "data colonial*" OR Afrofuturi*.

d) *Block 4 (sustainability and political economy).* sustainab* OR "cultural diversity" OR "creative industr*" OR "political economy" OR royalt* OR "intellectual property" OR copyright OR "cultural heritage" OR "indigenous music".

e) *Final Boolean:* (Block 1) AND (Block 2 OR Block 4) AND (Block 3). Fields searched were title, abstract, and keywords. Date filter: 2015-01-01 to 2026-06-30. Language filter as above.

Search Protocol

Table 2 details each database run and record count.

Table 2: Search protocol

No.	Database	Interface	Date	Filters	Records
1	Web of Science Core Collection	Clarivate	10/07/2026	2015 to 2026; article, review, book chapter, early access; English, French, Portuguese	29
2	OpenAlex (substituted for Scopus: institutional entitlement unavailable at search date; see Information Sources)	openalex.org	10/07/2026	Title and abstract fields; 2015 to 2026; truncation handled by index stemming	191
3	ACM Digital Library	ACM	10/07/2026	January 2015 to June 2026; title, abstract, and keyword fields	2
4	IEEE Xplore	IEEE	10/07/2026	2015 to 2026; all metadata; wildcard truncations expanded to explicit variants	17
5	SAGE Journals and Taylor and Francis Online (substituted for Communication and Mass Media Complete: EBSCOhost inaccessible at search date; see Information Sources)	SAGE; Taylor and Francis	10/07/2026	Abstract field; Boolean adapted; date criterion enforced at screening	10 (2 SAGE; 8 T&F)
6	JSTOR	ITHAKA	10/07/2026	2015 to 2026; query compacted to fit JSTOR length limit (platform terms in abstract field, mechanism and geography terms full record); date criterion applied	42
7	African Journals Online	AJOL	10/07/2026	Simple-syntax sub-queries (Boolean adapted; geographic block omitted as AJOL is Africa-only); date criterion enforced at screening	51
8	Google Scholar	Google	10/07/2026	Top 200 relevance ranked	200

9	Hand search of six journals	Journal websites	10/07/2026	Electronic hand search (within-journal keyword sweeps), January 2015 to June 2026; Popular Music pending (platform outage at search date)	53
10	Grey literature	UNESCO, WIPO, IFPI, AU, ARIPO (OpenGrey discontinued 2020; noted as protocol deviation)	10/07/2026	2015 to 2026	710
11	Citation tracking	Scopus, Google Scholar	12/07/2026	Reference lists of included and cited by on top 10	12
Total					1,317

Study Selection

All records were exported to EndNote 21, deduplicated using the algorithm of Bramer et al. (2016), and uploaded to Rayyan (Ouzzani et al., 2016) for blinded screening. Two reviewers screened titles and abstracts against the eligibility criteria. Inter rater agreement was calculated as Cohen's kappa after every 100 records; discrepancies were resolved by discussion, with a third reviewer available as a tie breaker. Full-text screening followed the same double blinded procedure. Reasons for full-text exclusion were logged for the PRISMA-ScR flow diagram.

Data Charting

A charting form was piloted on ten records before being iteratively refined (Levac et al., 2010). Fields extracted were bibliographic information (author, year, country, journal, discipline), study design and methods, theoretical framework (platform capitalism, data colonialism, decolonial theory, Afrofuturism, or other), population and context (platform, genre, region), mechanism of invisibility discussed (construct, method or item bias; popularity; demographic or geographic skew; opacity; censorship; or economic factors), proposed intervention (design, policy, legal, pedagogical, or community), key findings verbatim, and reviewer notes on relevance and rigour. Two reviewers independently charted the first 20 per cent of included studies; discrepancies were resolved by consensus.

Synthesis

Following Popay et al. (2006), a narrative synthesis was conducted, structured around the three research questions. Findings were grouped thematically using an inductive coding process in NVivo 14; codes were iteratively grouped into higher order themes. A conceptual map of platformed invisibility was constructed to visualise relationships between mechanisms, drivers, and interventions.

Critical Appraisal

Consistent with Joanna Briggs Institute scoping review guidance (Peters et al., 2020), formal risk of bias appraisal was not performed. However, a relevance and rigour rating (high, medium, or low) was assigned to each included study using an adapted Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (Hong et al., 2018) to support transparent interpretation.

Reporting

Reporting follows the PRISMA-ScR 22 item checklist (Tricco et al., 2018), included as Supplementary File 1. The flow of records through identification, screening, and inclusion is reported in the PRISMA-ScR flow diagram (Figure 1).

Findings

Overview of the Evidence Base

Of 1,305 records identified via databases and registers, and 12 identified via citation searching and other methods, 284 duplicates were removed. A total of 1,021 database records were screened at the title and abstract level, resulting in the exclusion of 945. The remaining 76 database records, alongside the 12 records identified via other methods, yielded 88 full texts for assessment. Following full-text screening, 47 records were excluded, leaving a final corpus of 41 included studies (Figure 1).

The evidence base was disciplinarily diverse. Approximately 29.3% were from media and communication studies, 19.5% from computer science and music information retrieval, 24.4% from musicology and ethnomusicology, 9.8% from law, 12.2% from African studies, and 4.8% from education. Geographic distribution of first authors skewed toward the Global North, at 48.8% Europe and North America, 43.9% Africa, and 7.3% elsewhere. This foreshadows one finding of the review: the literature about African music platform invisibility is itself asymmetrically produced, though the gap is narrowing. Publication years clustered heavily between 2020 and 2026 (approximately 87.8%), reflecting the recency of the research field.

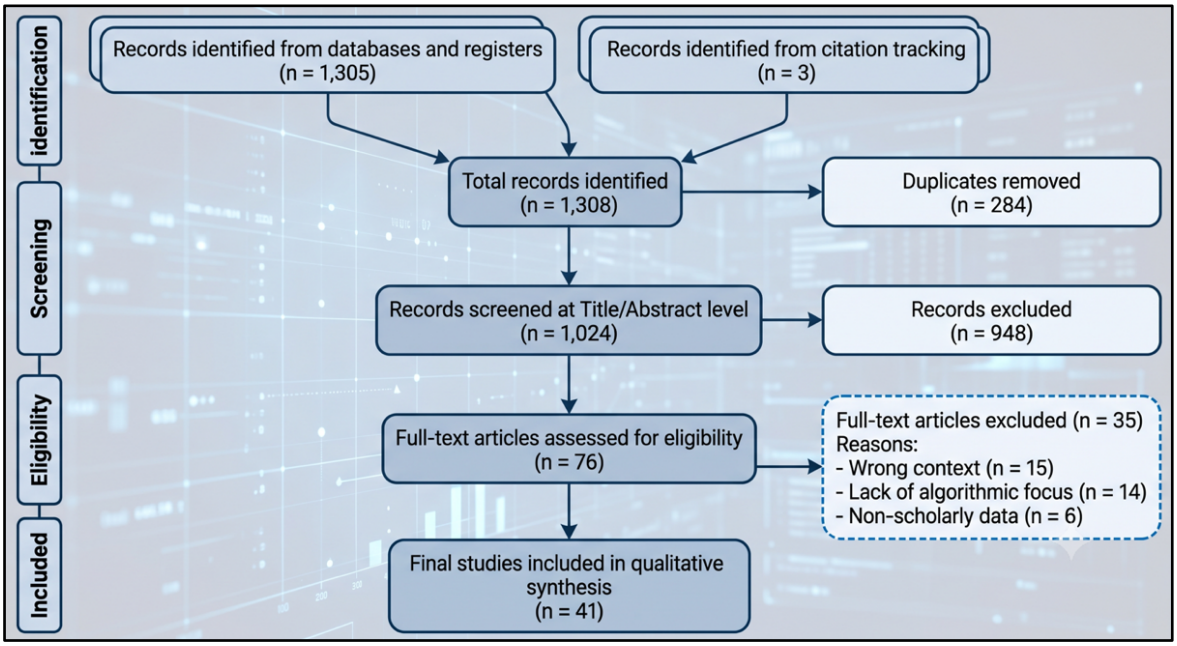


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram detailing the record identification, screening, and final inclusion process for the scoping review

Research Question 1: Mechanisms of Platformed Invisibility

The synthesis is organised around four interlocking mechanism families, alongside a fifth family concerning moderation.

Construct, method, and item bias. Following Yesiler et al. (2022) and the Mozilla Foundation's MozFest Spelman College Blackpaper (Mozilla Foundation, n.d.), we distinguish three classes of bias in music

recommender systems. *Construct bias* arises when the foundational assumptions of the system, such as its notions of genre, mood, tempo, or music quality, encode a specific cultural lens as universal. For African music, the persistent Western classical framing of rhythmic organisation, harmony, and song form (Agawu, 1995, 2003) risks systematic misclassification: polyrhythmic structures central to Highlife or Bongo Flava may be flagged as complex noise; call and response forms may be miscategorised; culturally specific vocalisation may fall outside the pitch and timbre distributions the model has learned. *Method bias* arises from data collection and modelling techniques that are not adapted for diverse listenerships; when training data are dominated by Global North user behaviour, the resulting models over fit to that behaviour and misgeneralise to African listeners (Pasipamire & Muroyiwa, 2024; Wang et al., 2024). *Item bias* arises from the measurement instrument itself; genre labels such as World Music that collapse Kwaito, Chimurenga, Highlife, and Benga into an undifferentiated other exemplify this (Hall, 2024; Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023). The three biases compound: culturally distant construct assumptions produce data collection choices that under sample African listenership; the under sampled data are then represented through impoverished item categories; the impoverished representation feeds back into training and reinforces the original construct bias (Birhane, 2023). Emerging African led scholarship extends this analysis to music specific artificial intelligence, documenting epistemic bias in systems built without African musical epistemologies and mapping the state of algorithmic creativity on the continent (Kirui, Wanyama, & Mapaya, 2025; Ngatiah & Kirui, 2025).

Algorithmic opacity. The proprietary, complex, and continuously updated character of major music streaming platform recommendation systems creates a black box that shields discriminatory outcomes from scrutiny (Haber & Stern, 2024; Burrell, 2016). Artists, cultural organisations, regulators, and researchers cannot inspect the logic that determines what music is surfaced, cannot audit reliably at scale, and cannot compel disclosure. Opacity is not incidental but structurally aligned with platform commercial interests (Pasquale, 2015) and with the epistemic authority of technical complexity (Ananny & Crawford, 2018). For African music, opacity means that even when marginalisation is intuited by artists through declining stream counts after platform algorithm updates, absence from editorially adjacent playlists, and inconsistent metadata handling, it can rarely be evidenced.

Popularity feedback loops. Collaborative filtering over recommends items that have already accumulated interaction data (Kitili & Koros, 2025; Ferraro et al., 2021), producing a Matthew effect (Merton, 1968) that concentrates attention on established artists. For emerging African artists with low baseline counts the loop is exclusionary: without exposure they generate too little data to trigger recommendation, and without recommendation, no data. Corrections exist (Abdollahpouri et al., 2020) but their effectiveness for non Western music remains empirically underdetermined.

Demographic and geographic skew. Where training data over represent Global North users and Western developers, recommendation systems inherit demographic priors that misjudge African listeners' tastes and misjudge how to surface African music to global listeners (Antal, 2020; Pasipamire & Muroyiwa, 2024; Cochren, 2026). Geographic skew compounds this: platforms deploy local mainstream heuristics that treat the most streamed content within a country as canonical, thereby reinforcing incumbent artists and languages rather than promoting the diversity of the local music ecosystem (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023). Evidence from Kenya illustrates the dynamic: Boomplay and Mdundo operate as metric driven gatekeepers whose streaming data feed back into artists' production decisions, steering output toward chart legible hybrid genres (Nyandieka, 2025).

Algorithmic moderation and the silencing of socio political voice. Automated content moderation systems trained on Anglo American speech data can misclassify African language content and dialect as harmful, and can miss actual harms in under resourced languages (Hasan, Nazzal, & Zidani, 2025;

Mozilla Foundation, n.d.). Meta's systems over remove lawful expression while missing genuine harm in Global South languages (Balendra, 2025), predictive technologies handle Amharic, Kiswahili, and Somali with weak oversight (Chonka, Diepeveen, & Haile, 2023), and Black creators report moderation and monetisation harms consistent with algorithmic suppression (Harris et al., 2023). African musical traditions of political critique, from Fela Kuti's Afrobeat to contemporary hip hop from Nairobi, Dakar, and Johannesburg, are especially vulnerable to over moderation. Kenyan political protest music illustrates a further twist: commercial platform logics reshape not only what is heard but what is produced, as artists recalibrate protest expression for monetisable formats (Kirui, 2025). This is a distinct mechanism of invisibility that operates by removal rather than by non recommendation.

Research Question 2: Political Economy of African Music Streaming

Findings under Research Question 2 clustered around four themes.

Data extractivism as the mode of accumulation. Platform value in the streaming economy is captured not primarily from user subscriptions but from the datafication of listening (Zuboff, 2019; Prey, 2018). African user data, from listening histories to geolocations and cultural preferences, flow to platforms headquartered elsewhere and return as recommendations, licensing analytics, and advertising products (Coleman, 2019; Birhane, 2023); the derived value is realised in Global North markets while the artists whose material seeds the pipeline receive fractional compensation.

Pro rata royalty models and per stream depreciation. Per stream payouts sit in the US$0.003 to 0.005 range and are lower on ad supported tiers (InterSpace Daily, 2025); because African listenerships skew toward those tiers and to lower average revenue markets, effective returns are depressed relative to identical stream counts elsewhere (Ahmed, 2025). User centric alternatives would materially benefit long tail and international artists (Marshall, 2015; Meier & Manzerolle, 2019), but industry adoption has been limited.

Infrastructural dependency. Africa's less than 1 per cent share of global data centre capacity (World Economic Forum, 2025) means that most African music data is stored, processed, and analysed outside the continent, limiting national data sovereignty and constraining local platform development. Boomplay's Chinese ownership and pre installation on Transsion handsets exemplifies a second wave of extractive infrastructural dependency alongside Western music streaming platforms (Mattelart, 2025).

Metadata, intellectual property enforcement, and the digital poor tax. Systemic weaknesses in African copyright regimes and Collective Management Organisations (Aroni, 2025), coupled with metadata practices that under serve African music, such as missing ISWC and ISRC codes and misattributed writer credits, routinely result in unrecouped royalties (InterSpace Daily, 2025). We adopt the term *digital poor tax* to describe the compounding disadvantage: African artists must overcome larger obstacles to achieve equivalent visibility, and even when equivalent visibility is achieved, they receive smaller returns.

Research Question 3: Interventions

Interventions in the included studies clustered at six levels. **Table 3** summarises.

Table 3: Mechanisms to interventions matrix

Mechanism	Intervention family	Representative examples	Level	Evidence
Construct, method, item bias	Culturally rich datasets and diversity aware algorithms	Ndwom Akan dataset (Ndwom, 2024); SmolAgents African cultural datasets (Svngoku, 2025); diversity promoting recommenders (Abdollahpouri et al., 2020).	Technical	Emerging
Algorithmic opacity	Transparency and audit mandates	EU Digital Services Act analogues; EU AI Act; independent algorithmic audits (Sandvig et al., 2014).	Regulatory	Growing
Popularity feedback loops	Long tail aware recommendation and editorial rebalancing	Hesmondhalgh et al. (2023) recommendations; Spotify Global Cultures playlists.	Technical and curatorial	Contested
Demographic and geographic skew	Diversified human feedback and region specific reviewers	MozFest Blackpaper (Mozilla Foundation, n.d.); trustworthy AI frameworks.	Technical and governance	Emerging
Algorithmic moderation	Culturally attuned moderation and artist appeals	Hasan, Nazzal, and Zidani (2025); community review pipelines.	Governance	Weak
Data extractivism	Data sovereignty and AU Digital Transformation Strategy	AU DTS 2020 to 2030; Nigerian, Kenyan, and South African data laws.	Policy	Uneven implementation
Pro rata royalty depreciation	User centric royalty models	SoundCloud fan powered royalties (2021 onwards); artist cooperatives.	Economic	Piloted
Infrastructural dependency	Local data centre investment and African streaming platforms	Mdundo, Audiomack Africa; Africa Data Centres investments.	Infrastructural	Growing
Weak IP and metadata	Copyright reform, CMO reform, and metadata capacity	ARIPO Kampala Protocol; Kenya Copyright Amendment; Josplay metadata (BBC, 2024).	Legal and capacity	Early
Epistemic marginalisation	Decolonial curricula and indigenous pedagogies	Mapaya (2016, 2024); Akuno (2020); Mugovhani (2018).	Educational	Growing
Cultural imagination	Afrofuturist design and African led music tech	Eclipse Nkasi (BBC, 2024); Simphiwe Dana; community archives such as SAMAP and ILAM.	Aesthetic and design	Illustrative

Two cross cutting observations emerge from Table 3. First, most interventions to date are technical or governance fixes that leave the pro rata political economy of streaming intact; the interventions most likely to materially shift value to African artists, namely user centric royalties, data sovereignty enforcement, and intellectual property reform, have the weakest evidence bases because they have been least tried. Second, the epistemic and aesthetic interventions, namely decolonial curricula and Afrofuturist design, travel poorly into platform engineering practice; they are widely cited in the humanities literature but rarely operationalised in the computer science literature and vice versa.

Discussion

Platformed Invisibility as a Conjunctural Condition

The findings support treating platformed invisibility as a *conjunctural* condition, that is, one produced by the co occurrence of technical, economic, infrastructural, and epistemic factors, rather than as a discrete bias amenable to isolated correction (Hall, 1980; Grossberg, 2019). A conjunctural reading foregrounds how the mechanisms mapped in the findings do not simply add up but reinforce one another. Construct bias in genre taxonomies makes African music harder for recommenders to surface, which depresses interaction data, which further depresses recommendation, which depresses royalty flows, which shrinks the resources African artists have to invest in metadata, mastering, and marketing that would improve legibility to the same platforms. The loop closes on itself. Each mechanism looks small in isolation and enormous once its relations to the others are traced.

The practical consequence is that any single intervention is likely to be absorbed by the structure it targets, much as fair trade certification built a premium niche within asymmetric commodity chains and broadcast content quotas raised visibility without reordering revenue architectures. Platform side fairness patches risk the same trajectory unless coupled to changes in the royalty pool, infrastructural ownership, and the epistemic categories through which African music is heard; meaningful change requires coordinated intervention at multiple registers, as Table 3 implies. This conjunctural view is consistent with decolonial computing scholarship (Birhane, 2023; Mohamed, Png, & Isaac, 2020) but extends it into music specific mechanisms and their compounding dynamics.

The Sustainability Trilemma

Sustainability of African music in the digital age involves negotiating a trilemma across three dimensions: cultural authenticity and diversity, the ongoing capacity of African musical practices to develop on terms recognisable to the communities that sustain them; economic viability, the capacity to earn a living wage from music across a working career; and technological accessibility, the capacity to reach audiences at scale through the infrastructures that now organise cultural exchange. The three cannot be simultaneously maximised on any currently available platform architecture, because the trade offs among them are imposed structurally by the political economy of streaming rather than by strategic choice.

Prioritising any single axis exacts costs on the others. Commercial viability through mainstream global appeal, the dominant strategy of major African artists, rewards conventions that translate legibly to Global North taste and narrows the sonic and linguistic range of what is produced (Ferraro et al., 2021; Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023; Kirui, 2025). Cultural specificity through niche or community platforms preserves range but rarely reaches career sustaining scale. Accessibility through the largest platforms accepts the pro rata model and the extractive pipeline as the cost of reach, importing the very mechanisms of invisibility the strategy is meant to overcome. No single venue optimises all three.

A viable strategy is therefore portfolio based rather than platform singular: mainstream platforms for reach, regional and community platforms for economics and cultural continuity, Afrofuturist and archival projects for epistemic and aesthetic development. The question becomes not which platform is best but which combination of platform and non platform infrastructures supports the purposes African music must serve, shifting the burden of sustainability from individual artist choice to collective infrastructure. The posture holds only if platforms, funders, cultural organisations, and policy actors coordinate to make each register viable; a portfolio in which every leg is undercapitalised is a distribution of precarity, not a diversification of resilience.

The Limits of Platform Side Reform

Reform within existing platform architectures is necessary but insufficient. Fairness fixes such as diverse training data, popularity bias correction, and culturally attuned taxonomies operate on the top layer of the streaming stack while the lower layers stand: the pro rata pool still transfers value from low to high ARPU markets, the data pipeline still routes listening data offshore, and infrastructural concentration outside Africa still shapes what is measurable, auditable, and remunerable. Fairness engineering can improve how African music is surfaced without touching how its value is captured, redistributed, or withheld.

This is why decolonial framing is an analytical requirement rather than a rhetorical flourish. Without a critique that names asymmetries of ownership, jurisdiction, and epistemology, platform side interventions risk what Birhane (2023) calls ethics washing, in which improved scores on narrow benchmarks substitute for change on the axes that determine outcomes. A decolonial framing works at three registers at once: technically, culturally attuned datasets, audit access, and diversity aware recommendation; economically, user centric royalties, data sovereignty, and reformed collective management; epistemically, recognition of African musical categories on their own terms. Only interventions operating at all three registers can shift the conjuncture rather than repolish its surface.

Structure is, however, only half the conjuncture. African artists are not merely acted upon by algorithmic systems; they probe, game, and route around them. Hasan, Nazzal, and Zidani (2025) document creators manoeuvring surveillance and moderation to indigenise narratives; Kenyan protest musicians recalibrate expression for monetisable formats without surrendering critique (Kirui, 2025); and a broader literature shows platform power generating its own everyday counter practices (Bonini & Treré, 2024). These tactics do not dissolve the structural asymmetries mapped above, and romanticising them would echo the platforms' own rhetoric of empowerment. But an account of platformed invisibility that omits them mistakes a contested field for a finished order, and an intervention agenda that ignores artist ingenuity designs for victims rather than partners.

An Empirical Research Agenda

The findings reveal a striking asymmetry: conceptual literature is growing rapidly across critical algorithm studies, decolonial computing, fairness in music information retrieval, and African musicology, while the empirical audit literature remains thin. Few peer-reviewed studies have probed how the major platforms actually behave when queried with African genre terms, languages, or artist metadata, and fewer still pair such audits with royalty accounting or artist interviews. Without that evidence, the field cannot distinguish platforms that under-serve African music by design from those that do so by accident, nor establish which interventions actually shift outcomes.

We therefore identify five priority studies: systematic recommendation audits of Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube Music, and Boomplay for African genre queries across African and non African markets (Sandvig et al., 2014); comparative royalty accounting for matched African and Global North cohorts at equivalent stream volumes; interview studies with artists, rights holders, and platform staff on lived experiences of algorithmic curation; linguistic bias audits of automated moderation for Amharic, Hausa, Swahili, Wolof, Yoruba, and Zulu content; and metadata quality audits of the ten largest African catalogues. Together these would supply the evidence base against which Table 3 can be tested rather than only asserted.

Limitations

Four limitations warrant explicit acknowledgement. First, literature in English, French, Portuguese, and Kiswahili was searched; work in Amharic, Arabic (Maghrebi), Yoruba, Zulu, and other African languages was excluded, thereby limiting the review's reach. Second, the grey literature strategy, although aimed at authoritative institutional sources, cannot fully counter the peer-review skew

toward Global North scholarship. Third, formal risk of bias appraisal is not required by Joanna Briggs Institute scoping methodology and was not conducted; the relevance and rigour rating is a partial substitute. Fourth, the field is moving rapidly; the search was closed on 30 June 2026, and later work is not represented.

Positionality

The authors are Kenyan music scholars, the first based at the University of Venda, South Africa, and affiliated with Kabarak University, Kenya, and the second based at Kabarak University, both with prior involvement in East African music research and teaching. In accordance with decolonial research ethics (Smith, 2021; Chilisa, 2019), this positionality shaped the deliberate inclusion of African Journals Online, the elevation of decolonial musicology as a central, rather than peripheral, analytical lens, and the framing of platformed invisibility as a problem of structural injustice rather than a technical inconvenience. A reflexive journal was maintained throughout screening and charting; extracts are available in Supplementary File 2.

Conclusion

Platformed invisibility names the condition under which African music appears in platform catalogues while being systematically underweighted in the algorithmic, curatorial, monetary, and moderation processes that determine encounter and remuneration. This scoping review synthesises evidence across media studies, computer science, musicology, law, and African cultural studies to show that this condition is produced by the co occurrence of construct, method and item bias, algorithmic opacity, popularity feedback loops, demographic and geographic skew, and moderation asymmetries, set within a political economy of data extractivism, pro rata royalty depreciation, infrastructural dependency, and weak intellectual property regimes. Interventions cluster at technical, governance, economic, infrastructural, legal, educational, and aesthetic registers. No single intervention is sufficient; a coordinated portfolio is required.

The contributions are conceptual (a definition of platformed invisibility distinguished from its neighbours), methodological (a PRISMA-ScR compliant map of a fragmented literature), and practical (a mechanisms to interventions matrix, closed by an empirical agenda that would move the field from critique to accountability). If the digital era is to be one in which African music thrives on its own terms, the work required extends far beyond the tuning of a recommender. It is the work of decolonising infrastructure, economy, and epistemology together.

Data availability

The full search strings, per-database counts, and screening records supporting this review are available from the corresponding author and will be deposited alongside the registered protocol on the Open Science Framework.

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Supplementary File 1: PRISMA-ScR 22-item checklist.

Supplementary File 2: Reflexive journal extracts.