The Economics of Faith-Based Music: Revenue Models in the Contemporary Gospel Industry

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Abstract- ***This study investigates the economic structures of contemporary gospel music, situating it at the intersection of cultural economics, musicology, and faith-based creative industries. While gospel is often framed as a purely spiritual practice, the research demonstrates its dual identity as both a ministry and an economic enterprise. Through case studies of Nigerian and U.S. gospel markets, the analysis highlights how regional infrastructures, such as collective management organizations, copyright enforcement, and institutional sponsorship, shape artists' ability to monetize their work. The study highlights differences between African gospel economies, where piracy and weak rights management hinder financial stability, and the U.S. gospel industry, where diversified revenue streams, stronger licensing mechanisms, and hybrid ministry-business models provide more sustainable outcomes. The article situates gospel music within broader debates about intellectual property, streaming economies, and cultural value. This research contributes to understanding how faith-based creative industries negotiate authenticity, mission, and market forces. The findings suggest that future growth may depend on leveraging technological innovations, including AI-driven streaming personalization, blockchain-enabled licensing transparency, and transnational digital collaborations. In doing so, the study reframes gospel music as a major case for examining the evolving economics of culture in a globalized digital age.***

Keywords- ***Gospel Music, Cultural Economics, Musicology, Faith-based Industries, Piracy, Copyright, Streaming, Blockchain, AI, Transnational Collaboration***

I. INTRODUCTION

Gospel music occupies a dual position in modern societies as it functions both as a spiritual mission rooted in worship, message, community, and transcendence, and as a commercial enterprise shaped by streaming platforms, concert promoters, merchandise, and licensing. More than its devotional role, gospel music contributes to cultural and economic development, creating jobs, providing entertainment, and spreading messages of hope and truth (The Guardian, 2022). Yet this duality generates tension. Artists, record labels, and churches must strive to remain faithful to their spiritual and ethical commitments while also meeting the financial demands necessary to sustain production, expand audiences, and maintain influence. The central question is how the contemporary gospel industry can remain financially viable without compromising its spiritual mission.

The challenge lies in balancing economic sustainability with authenticity. Artists and institutions must secure revenue to offset costs such as studio recording, production, promotion, and touring. In Nigeria, for example, rising Afrobeats artists face significant barriers as production and promotional costs often run into millions of naira, limiting access to industry success despite surging talent (BusinessDay NG, 2024). While this example comes from the Afrobeats sector, gospel artists confront similar financial pressures. At the same time, over-commercialization or misaligned incentives risk distorting the message, alienating audiences, and eroding spiritual credibility. Ghanaian gospel musician Sonnie Badu has warned against this trend, urging artists to balance financial pursuits with spiritual integrity and preserve gospel music's role as a vessel of faith and redemption (First Newsroom, 2024). McGinnis (2023) similarly notes that worship music, while spiritually powerful, is increasingly treated as intellectual property within a booming global market, where acquisitions of royalty streams, including worship hits, are aggressively pursued for profit. Simeon and Saale (2025) further argue that although the prosperity gospel resonates with African socio-economic aspirations, it raises enduring theological and ethical concerns. These tensions frame a crucial question: how do revenue models such as streaming, live performances, merchandise, and licensing support or hinder this balance, and what synergies or trade-offs emerge?

The purpose of this article is to analyze the revenue models sustaining the modern gospel industry. It will examine streaming platforms, live performances, merchandise, synchronization and licensing, brand partnerships, and related income streams, with attention to both developed markets such as the United States and the United Kingdom and rapidly growing sectors in Africa, particularly Nigeria. The discussion will evaluate the long-term sustainability of these models not only in financial terms but also in their spiritual and cultural implications.

Despite the scale of gospel's cultural impact, scholarship on the economics of faith-based music remains limited. While secular music markets have been studied extensively, covering album life cycles, streaming economics, concert revenues, and artist income models, research on gospel music tends to focus more on theological, cultural, or musicological dimensions, leaving its financial frameworks comparatively underexplored. Reliable data on streaming revenues, artist profit margins, and comparative performance with secular genres are especially scarce in non-Western contexts.

Some empirical insights illustrate both opportunity and challenge. In Nigeria, gospel streams on Spotify among Gen Z listeners rose by 1,228 percent between 2022 and 2024, while faith-based podcast consumption grew by 482 percent over the same period (BusinessDay NG, 2024). The broader Nigerian music streaming market is projected to generate about US$22.88 million in 2025, with expected annual growth of 7.51 percent to reach approximately US$32.86 million by 2030 (Statista, 2025). Globally, the Christian music industry generated an estimated US$1.1 billion in the United States in 2022, accounting for roughly 13 percent of the national music market (WifiTalents Team, 2025). These figures signal growth potential, particularly in digital platforms and younger demographics, but they also highlight ongoing challenges: revenues often remain modest compared to production costs, and financial imperatives must continually be reconciled with the gospel's spiritual mission. The analysis that follows will unpack these revenue models, assess their constraints, and explore how the gospel music industry may chart a sustainable path forward.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly research on the economics of music has expanded in recent years, focusing heavily on how digital technologies, market structures, and new business models reshape artist compensation and industry sustainability. For example, Economics of Streaming & the Rise of the Music Artists' Rights and Compensation (Afzana, 2025) shows that while streaming has broadened global access and boosted overall revenues, a disproportionately small fraction of artists capture the majority of financial gains. Similarly, Ramesh (2024) underscores the intensification of income inequality in digital markets, where superstar artists dominate streaming profits while the majority earn negligible returns. Anglada-Tort et al. (2023) highlight that economists often approach music markets through neoclassical frameworks like consumer theory, producer theory, and game theory, addressing issues such as piracy, market competition, and the economics of live events. These perspectives document the structural shift from physical sales to streaming, the rise of crowdfunding, and the transformation of revenue distribution through digitalization. In emerging markets, studies such as Badicu (2022) show how digital tools and harmonization of accounting standards within BRICS economies shape music production, distribution, and reporting practices, illustrating the globalization of industry frameworks.

In contrast, research on faith-based or gospel music remains comparatively sparse and largely qualitative. Much of the literature emphasizes historical and cultural evolution, tracing how globalization, media, and shifting audience tastes have moved gospel from church-based repertoires into popular music circuits. Adeola (2025) applies musical semiotic theory to Nigerian gospel music, identifying recurring symbolic structures and compositional techniques rooted in local socio-cultural contexts. Ayorinde and Ajose (2022) argue that spirituality in urban Lagos extends beyond sonic worship, as gospel artists cultivate superstar personas that function as public performances of faith and identity. Olatayo (2024) explores the tensions between spiritual calling and material reward, showing how some artists embrace commodified lifestyles while still claiming ministerial authenticity. Similarly, Babarinde (2022) examines blurred boundaries between gospel and secular practices in Nigeria, pointing to overlaps in instrumentation, dance, and audience perception that complicate both cultural and economic positioning.

Comparisons between secular and gospel industry structures consistently reveal asymmetries. Secular music benefits from higher investment, global distribution, aggressive promotion, and sophisticated infrastructures for revenue capture, including major label networks, extensive touring circuits, and high-value brand partnerships. Gospel industries, especially outside the U.S. and Europe, often rely on denominational networks, informal promotional channels, smaller-scale performances, and less reliable access to lucrative streaming royalties or corporate sponsorships. Importantly, while qualitative accounts abound, few studies provide systematic quantitative comparisons of revenue margins, cost structures, or returns on investment between the two sectors.

Several challenges in monetizing faith-oriented art recur across the literature. One is audience expectation, gospel listeners often assume music should be freely accessible as a ministry rather than treated as a commercial product. For example, in Ghana, promoter Frank K. Owusu has argued that the belief gospel music should be “free” undermines marketing and artist compensation (3Music, 2023), while in Nigeria, Pastor Femi Lazarus has spoken publicly against charging fees for performances (BusinessDay, 2025). Artists like Nacee confirm that event organizers often expect gospel performers to serve primarily out of spiritual duty, with little or no pay (Vaultz News, 2024). A second challenge is infrastructure, unreliable distribution, weaker bargaining power with streaming platforms, limited market analytics, and weak copyright enforcement hinder effective monetization. Piracy and ineffective collective management organizations further erode artist revenues (Idoko, 2023). Finally, there are ethical tensions as artists must maintain message integrity and resist pressures to dilute spiritual content for broader market appeal, while simultaneously avoiding perceptions of “selling out” in religious communities (Olatayo, 2024).

Limitations in prior scholarship are also evident. First, quantitative financial modeling of gospel music economics remains scarce; few studies examine revenue streams, break-even points, or profit margins in detail. Second, the bulk of research is concentrated in Western or African contexts, leaving many regions underrepresented. Third, comparative fiscal benchmarking between gospel and secular music industries is limited. Fourth, most studies prioritize cultural or theological analysis over business model architecture, rarely addressing how streaming splits, licensing deals, merchandising strategies, or tour revenues function specifically in gospel. Finally, there is little longitudinal analysis to capture how revenue models evolve under technological disruption, such as streaming algorithms, social media marketing, or hybrid live–digital events.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts an interdisciplinary conceptual framework that integrates cultural economics, hybrid mission models, and platform economics to examine the business structures of gospel music in comparison to secular music industries.

Cultural Economics Theory

Cultural economics provides the foundation for understanding how value is created, circulated, and consumed in cultural industries. Music, as a dynamic and resilient cultural industry, operates across symbolic, political, and economic dimensions, evolving alongside technology, shaping identity, responding to shifting consumer trends, and serving as both a tool for education and a catalyst for local development through adaptive business models and public policy support (de-Miguel-Molina & Santamarina-Campos, 2021). Music, as a cultural good, carries both economic worth and symbolic meaning, setting it apart from standard commercial products. For gospel music, the dual valuation is especially evident as audiences seek both spiritual edification and communal connection alongside entertainment, while artists balance the demands of ministry with the realities of market exchange (Umonko & Solomon, 2025; Solomon, 2025). This framework allows for an analysis of how sacred authenticity influences pricing power, consumer expectations, and revenue diversification.

Hybrid Mission Models

The hybrid mission approach, drawn from nonprofit and social enterprise literature (Romain et al., 2024), is useful for analyzing gospel artists’ strategies to balance spiritual imperatives with economic sustainability. Gospel music operates in a liminal space where ministry goals, such as worship, evangelism, and revival, intersect with industry needs like sponsorships, live events, and intellectual property rights. Ayorinde and Ajose (2022) contend that spirituality extends beyond sound and emotion, emerging through the social lives and self-fashioning practices of gospel musicians as expressions of personal and communal spiritual identity. Hybrid models capture this dual orientation, illustrating how gospel initiatives often blend donations, corporate partnerships, and community goodwill with conventional revenue streams.

Platform Economics

The digital transformation of the music industry is best examined through the lens of platform economics. Streaming platforms, social media, and digital distribution have reconfigured how value is captured, shifting power toward intermediaries that control network effects (Gianluca et al., 2025; Alexander, 2024; Colbjørnsen, 2020). For gospel artists, these platforms create both unprecedented opportunities, like global visibility, lower distribution costs, and significant vulnerabilities, including unfavorable royalty splits, algorithmic biases, and limited bargaining power compared to secular superstars.

Analytical Categories

Drawing from these theoretical perspectives, the study defines four analytical categories that structure the comparative analysis of gospel and secular music industries. These categories provide a comprehensive lens for assessing how gospel artists innovate within constrained infrastructures, negotiate the balance between sacred mission and commercial necessity, and position themselves within global music economies.

i. Streaming and Digital Distribution, which examines royalty structures, platform visibility, and audience access.

ii. Live Performances and Tours, that assess revenue potential, cultural expectations about pricing, and sponsorship dynamics.

iii. Merchandise and Ancillary Products, which analyzes how identity, ministry, and community engagement shape brand extensions.

iv. Licensing and Rights Management – evaluating synchronization, copyright enforcement, and the ethical dimensions of commercialization.

These categories are beyond theoretical abstractions but resonate with existing scholarship on gospel music. Adeola (2025) highlights how Nigerian gospel functions as both symbolic language and cultural economy, while Olatayo (2024) examines the tension between spirituality and commodification in artists' material practices. Similarly, Babarinde (2022) shows that gospel and secular performance models increasingly overlap in style and audience perception, yet diverge sharply in economic positioning. Integrating these insights ensures that the framework remains grounded in the lived realities of gospel artists, while still drawing on broader cultural economics and platform theory.

IV. REVENUE MODELS IN THE CONTEMPORARY GOSPEL INDUSTRY

Streaming and Digital Distribution

Streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, and Boomplay have become crucial to gospel music distribution, providing visibility and revenue opportunities. In Africa, Boomplay reported gospel as one of its fastest-growing genres, with Nigeria recording a 1,228% surge in streams among Gen Z listeners between 2022 and 2024 (BusinessDay NG, 2024). Globally, Christian and gospel music generated about US$1.1 billion in U.S. revenues in 2022, accounting for roughly 13% of the recorded music market (WifiTalents, 2025). Eklund (2023) notes that variations in platform content libraries reflect how streaming services conceptualize and strategically target audiences across global, regional, and local levels.

Despite these opportunities, royalty economics remain a structural barrier. Average per-stream payouts US$0.003–0.005 on Spotify and slightly higher on Apple Music translate into modest income unless artists reach a massive scale (Ditto Music, 2025). Algorithmic curation deepens the disparity: secular hits are reinforced through editorial playlists and recommendation systems, while faith-based music, often tagged as niche, receives less exposure and consequently fewer streams (McGinnis, 2023). This imbalance creates a two-tiered system in which only top-tier gospel artists generate substantial digital revenue, while mid-tier and independent musicians frequently struggle to recover production costs.

Live Performances and Tours

Live events remain the most dependable revenue stream for gospel artists, encompassing concerts, worship nights, international tours, and festivals that combine ticket sales with sponsorship opportunities. In the U.S., major tours such as Kirk Franklin's Kingdom Tour grossed millions, rivaling earnings from smaller secular acts (Shore Fire Media, 2022; Cluver, 2022). In West Africa, mega-concerts like The Experience in Lagos, attracting up to 500,000 attendees at Tafawa Balewa Square, function as both spiritual gatherings and also as economic drivers, boosting tourism, hospitality, and corporate sponsorship (House On The Rock, 2022). Yet, pricing structures remain uneven. In wealthier markets, gospel tickets can command premium rates, while in many African contexts, cultural expectations that faith-inspired music should be freely accessible limit commercial flexibility (3Music, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted the live circuit, accelerating hybrid formats such as ticketed livestreams, virtual worship concerts, and digital conferences. These models continue to supplement in-person performances but have yet to replicate the scale and profitability of large physical tours.

Merchandise and Ancillary Products

For gospel artists, merchandise serves not only as a revenue source but also as an extension of ministry and identity. Branded apparel, devotionals, books, and digital tools such as worship guides or mobile apps strengthen community ties while diversifying income streams. In the U.S., Christian retailers generated over US$4.6 billion in product sales in 2022, with a significant portion linked to music personalities who expand their brands through lifestyle products (Christian Retail Association, 2023). Artists such as Travis Greene and Sinach exemplify this integration, offering devotionals, branded apparel, and partnerships with church organizations to deepen engagement (BusinessDay, 2023; Keep The Faith Magazine, 2024). Unlike secular merchandise, which often foregrounds fashion trends or celebrity culture, gospel merchandise frequently incorporates scripture, worship imagery, and faith-based symbolism, functioning simultaneously as a revenue stream and as a reinforcement of collective religious identity.

Licensing and Rights Management

Synchronization and licensing represent growing yet underutilized opportunities within the gospel industry. The placement of gospel tracks in films, advertising, worship apps, and digital devotional platforms not only generates royalties but also expands exposure to broader audiences. In the U.S., licensing revenues account for a significant portion of publishing income, with Christian labels increasingly pursuing sync deals with streaming platforms and film producers (Sarachik, 2021). However, enforcement challenges undermine these opportunities. In many African markets, weak copyright infrastructure, rampant piracy, and ineffective collective management organizations diminish gospel musicians' ability to safeguard and monetize their intellectual property (Idoko, 2023). Ethical considerations further complicate licensing: artists and churches often resist commercial use of sacred music in secular contexts, fearing dilution of the theological message. These tensions underscore the fragile balance between diversifying revenue streams and preserving spiritual authenticity.

V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: GOSPEL VS. SECULAR MUSIC MODELS

Though contemporary gospel industry shares structural parallels to secular music industries with similar business models, gospel artists often face tighter limits on commercial opportunities because their work is expected to reflect spiritual authenticity, making it harder to fully tap into the same revenue streams. Enabling collaboration between gospel and secular artists, alongside educational programs on rights and financial literacy, enhances visibility, audience reach, and empowers gospel musicians to secure fair compensation and sustainable careers (Vaultz News, 2024). Gospel musicians often face narrower advertising opportunities compared to their secular counterparts, since mainstream consumer brands tend to view faith-based music as occupying a niche market. Gospel artists like Sinach have harnessed the power of social media and global collaborations to expand their reach worldwide, while the Nigerian gospel music industry itself has become a significant economic force, driving revenue, creating jobs, and attracting both tourism and foreign investment (GospelSong, 2024). Yet within their ecosystem, Christian labels and artists replicate diversification strategies, from worship tours to licensing music for film and faith-driven media productions.

Audience motivations further differentiate the two markets. Secular audiences often consume music primarily for entertainment, escapism, or lifestyle signaling, whereas gospel audiences emphasize spiritual edification and communal worship. Walter and Altorfer (2022) experimentally demonstrate that worship music significantly enhances believers' sense of divine presence, reinforcing the idea that gospel audiences prioritize spiritual edification over entertainment. This divergence in consumption patterns influences pricing elasticity. While secular fans may pay premium ticket prices for festivals or celebrity-driven concerts, gospel audiences often expect more accessible entry points, shaped by the perception that faith-inspired music should remain freely or affordably available as a ministry tool (Oladokun, 2024; BusinessDay, 2025). As a result, secular music models typically maximize revenue through aggressive upselling and exclusivity, whereas gospel models tend to balance accessibility with sustainability.

Market dynamics reveal further distinctions. Gospel music functions as a niche segment but has demonstrated crossover potential when artists such as Kirk Franklin, Mary Mary, or Lecrae entered Billboard mainstream charts. Artists like Kirk Franklin, Lecrae, and Mary Mary have successfully blended contemporary sounds and cultural influences, helping gospel music resonate with younger audiences and expand its fan base globally (FasterCapital, 2025). These cases illustrate the possibility of international appeal when gospel blends with contemporary genres like hip-hop, R&B, or pop, effectively narrowing the commercial gap with secular music. However, the gospel's global reach remains uneven compared to secular genres like pop or hip-hop, largely due to distribution constraints and limited exposure on mainstream media channels. Various media reports suggest that while secular artists often access a wider promotional infrastructure, including mainstream radio, large-scale media, corporate sponsorships, and global labels, gospel artists frequently rely on denominational networks, church concerts and faith conferences, regional radio, and social media within faith communities for visibility (Tribune Online, 2025; Vaultz News, 2024). While both gospel and secular music industries share structural similarities, gospel artists often operate with limited promotional infrastructure, relying on faith-based networks instead of global platforms, and must balance ministry values with commercial strategies, navigating fewer resources but often enjoying deeper community loyalty.

VI. CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

The economics of gospel music are shaped by persistent structural and cultural constraints that complicate revenue generation. At the core of these challenges is the tension between ministry and monetization. Many gospel artists grapple with reconciling their spiritual calling with the practical need for financial sustainability. Ayorinde and Ajose (2022) argue that many Nigerian gospel musicians, caught in the currents of neoliberal capitalism, pursue fame and financial gain through branding and social media visibility that often mirror secular entertainment norms, sometimes at odds with the spiritual essence of their music. Cultural expectations often position gospel music as a form of ministry that should be freely accessible, rather than a commercial product. This leads to accusations of "selling out" when artists charge for concerts or pursue licensing opportunities, creating ethical dilemmas that secular musicians rarely face (Olatayo, 2024; BusinessDay, 2025; 3Music, 2023). The outcome is reduced pricing power and a narrower margin for profit.

Piracy and weak digital rights management further undermine financial stability. In markets such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, widespread music piracy, inadequate collective management organizations, and weak copyright enforcement limit gospel artists' ability to monetize intellectual property (Idoko, 2023). Even as digital distribution expands, inadequate metadata management and low awareness of publishing rights restrict artists from capturing full value from streams, sync deals, or cross-border royalties (Katsaus,2023; Vibert, 2023).

Another constraint is limited institutional support compared to secular industries. While secular artists thrive on global labels, international distribution, and corporate sponsorships, gospel musicians, often reliant on church networks and grassroots platforms, deserve greater support from corporate organizations to bridge the promotional and financial gap (Tribune Online, 2022; Aremu, as cited in Tribune Online, 2022). This disparity reduces access to capital, market analytics, and professional management structures, placing faith-based musicians at a competitive disadvantage in global music markets.

Lastly, gender and equity considerations add another layer of complexity. Female gospel musicians often face systemic barriers to visibility and economic opportunity. Studies show that women in the gospel music sector face unequal access to performance opportunities, reduced sponsorship, and intensified scrutiny over personal presentation, mirroring broader industry-wide gender disparities rooted in discrimination, power imbalances, and the intersecting pressures of religious conservatism and societal norms (Goodwin, 2025; Okpara, 2022; Walter & Altorfer, 2022). Despite these constraints, female artists like Sinach and Mercy Chinwo have achieved significant international success, but their trajectories highlight the extra negotiation required to balance cultural expectations with commercial viability.

VII. CASE STUDIES

In His Presence

In His Presence began in 2020 as a monthly online worship and praise encounter, conceived as a spiritual reset to mark the start of each new month. Initially produced in studio sessions and streamed live via Instagram, the initiative soon expanded to YouTube and Facebook, drawing thousands of participants from across the globe.

As digital engagement intensified, audiences began requesting physical gatherings. Responding to this demand, Abidemi Ogunmolu and the organisers staged the first in-person meeting in September 2023 for an expected 500 people. Attendance exceeded projections, with more than 2,000 worshippers arriving at the December 2023 edition, despite the weekday morning schedule of 7:00–9:00 a.m. Attendees began queuing from 5:00 a.m. this point to the deep hunger for communal worship and confirming the program's transition from a virtual experience to a physical movement.

The growth trajectory accelerated in 2024 and 2025, with large-scale gatherings hosted across Nigeria. On May 23, 2024, the University of Lagos event attracted 8,500 participants. The Onikan Stadium edition on September 1, 2024, drew a record 15,000 attendees. And by July 2025, the campus tour reached 7,000 worshippers at the University of Ibadan, followed shortly by a July 6, 2025, gathering at The Marquee, Chrisland University in Abeokuta. The platform has since expanded beyond Nigeria, with international editions staged in the United States, affirming its global resonance. The initiative's coordination required structured planning and oversight. Responsibilities included supervising technical and support teams, providing program management, and cultivating strategic partnerships. These partnerships proved important for sustaining the scale of the gatherings. Stakeholders included Shalom Park Estate, The Bridge, GNT, Premium Trust Bank, LASAA, Bank 78, Dukiya, Blaaiz, NSML, and university institutions that provided venues and logistical support. The outcomes of In His Presence were both spiritual and socio-economic. Spiritually, testimonies of salvation, revival, healing, deliverance, and renewed faith abounded. Economically, the events generated activity for host cities, boosting hospitality, transport, and local media engagement, while sponsorships helped offset operational costs.

Overall, In His Presence demonstrates how a faith-based initiative can scale from a digital ministry into a cultural movement. Its hybrid model nature of being anchored in online accessibility, physical gatherings, and corporate partnerships, offers a sustainable framework for balancing ministry with monetization. Integrating authenticity with strategic growth, this approach offers a replicable blueprint for contemporary gospel initiatives operating at the crossroads of spirituality, cultural relevance, and creative industry economics.

Kirk Franklin and The U.S. Gospel Industry

Kirk Franklin represents one of the most commercially successful gospel artists globally, describing revenue diversification and how it sustains long-term viability. His Kingdom Tour in 2022, co-headlined with Maverick City Music, grossed millions in ticket sales, rivaling smaller secular acts and demonstrating gospel's capacity to compete in the broader live music economy (Shore Fire Media, 2022; Cluver, 2022). Franklin's success cites examples of how live performances remain a cornerstone revenue model in the U.S., particularly through premium ticketing structures, brand sponsorships, and cross-market appeal.

In addition to touring, Kirk Franklin has leveraged digital platforms to expand his reach. His catalog consistently ranks among the most-streamed gospel works, with gospel and Christian music generating approximately US $1.1 billion in U.S. recorded music revenues in 2022, or about 13% of the total market (WifiTalents, 2025). Unlike many African gospel artists, Franklin benefits from stronger copyright enforcement, access to established distribution networks, and the ability to secure lucrative licensing deals.

Franklin also demonstrates innovation in ancillary branding. Beyond traditional merchandise, he has launched podcasts, authored books, and engaged in multimedia collaborations that reinforce his role as both a spiritual leader and cultural entrepreneur. According to Hafi (2025), Kirk Franklin's total audience reached over 3.2 million, with estimated monthly earnings ranging from $17,360 to $23,800, primarily driven by Instagram sponsorships. His annual income from these digital streams was projected between $208,320 and $285,600, reflecting steady growth across recent months.

In contrast to the African context, where artists such as Sinach or Travis Greene often rely on faith-based networks, church platforms, or international conferences for expansion (BusinessDay, 2023; Keep The Faith Magazine, 2024), Franklin's model is embedded within a mature infrastructure of mainstream labels, established touring circuits, and robust digital monetization. This regional variation highlights the uneven playing field between the U.S. and African gospel industries. While both ecosystems depend on hybrid ministry-business models, the U.S. context allows for more robust institutional support, whereas African artists frequently depend on sponsorships and informal networks for sustainability.

VIII. POLICY AND INDUSTRY IMPLICATIONS

The sustainability of gospel music as both a spiritual vehicle and a cultural economy depends on coordinated action from industry stakeholders, including record labels, churches, and streaming platforms. Each is strategically significant in shaping how faith-based music is produced, distributed, and monetized. The rapid rise of digital platforms has transformed worship into hybrid and virtual experiences, with churches increasingly merging sacred traditions with modern musical styles to broaden accessibility and cultural relevance (Umonko & Solomon, 2025).

While digital platforms have empowered independent artists and expanded access, structural barriers persist. Monetization gaps, licensing challenges, digital inequality, and the growing influence of AI-generated content and algorithmic curation complicate efforts to preserve authenticity and theological depth in gospel music (Solomon, 2025). Record labels, churches, and streaming platforms each have distinct yet complementary roles in advancing the gospel music ecosystem—through artist development, rights and licensing strategies, sustainable funding models, cultural integration, and digital innovation that honors gospel's dual identity as both spiritual ministry and commercial art.

However, balancing financial stability with the gospel's spiritual mission requires nuanced policy choices. Over-commercialization risks alienating core audiences who view gospel primarily as ministry, while under-commercialization threatens the livelihood of artists. The increasing commercialization of modern worship, evident in high-cost, performance-driven events resembling secular concerts, raises concerns about the commodification of sacred experiences and the erosion of Christian identity through the appropriation of entertainment culture into worship practice (Falconer, 2023). A balanced approach may involve tiered pricing models that keep gospel music accessible while attaching premium value to exclusive offerings. Complementary policy measures, such as transparent royalty systems, tax incentives for faith-based creativity, and partnerships among cultural ministries, intellectual property offices, and music industry stakeholders, can further support sustainable growth.

At the global level, gospel markets remain underdeveloped despite growing demand across Africa, Latin America, and diaspora communities in Europe and North America. With platforms such as YouTube, Boomplay, Audiomack, and Spotify facilitating unprecedented reach, international expansion is both feasible and strategically necessary (Solomon, 2025). Stakeholders can learn from the export strategies behind Afrobeats' global success, implementing government-supported showcases, international festivals, and cultural exchange programs that situate gospel as a vital component of the global creative economy.

CONCLUSION

The economics of faith-based music, as illustrated through contemporary gospel practices, reveals a complex negotiation between spiritual mission and commercial enterprise. The gospel industry mirrors many of the revenue models in secular music, including streaming, touring, merchandise, and licensing, yet operates within tighter cultural and ethical constraints. While secular markets freely exploit exclusivity, brand partnerships, and global promotion networks, gospel artists often balance accessibility with sustainability, constrained by audience expectations that ministry should remain freely available. This duality positions gospel music as both a ministry tool and a cultural industry, where authenticity is as vital as profitability.

Case studies such as In His Presence in Nigeria and Kirk Franklin's U.S. success describe this balance in practice, showing how hybrid models, institutional sponsorship, live events, and digital platforms enable gospel artists to expand audiences and generate revenue while preserving theological integrity. Regional differences also highlight the unequal infrastructures as basics to gospel economies. African artists face weaker copyright systems and reliance on informal networks, while U.S. artists benefit from stronger institutional support, diversified brand partnerships, and more lucrative licensing ecosystems.

The broader insight is that gospel music economies thrive not just by replicating secular industry structures but by embedding ministry at the core of their business models, generating both spiritual and material value. The challenge remains sustaining growth without diluting authenticity. Future research should examine how emerging technologies, such as AI-driven recommendation systems in streaming, blockchain for transparent rights management, and transnational digital collaborations, may reshape faith-based music industries. Addressing these areas will expand understanding of how gospel music can continue to navigate its dual identity, offering a framework for sustainable growth that honors both mission and market.

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