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Digital Afterlives: The Algorithmic Hauntology of AI Kishore Kumar's *Saiyara*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the cultural and emotional reception of the AI generated version of Saiyara song in legendary Kishore Kumar's voice created by RJ Kisna and Anshuman Sharma, a phenomenon that quickly outshone the original composition by Tanishk Bagchi featured in Mohit Suri's 2025 movie Saiyara. Using Mark Fisher's theory of Hauntology and Lost Futures from his book Ghosts of My Life, writings on depression, hauntology, and lost futures (2014), and Derrida's concept of Hauntology from his work Spectres of Marx (1994), the study explores how artificial intelligence reanimates the voices of the dead, transforming nostalgia into a digital afterlife. The research employs a qualitative discourse analysis of YouTube comments and online news coverage surrounding AI Kishore Kumar's Saiyara. The analysis argues that this act of resurrection exemplifies an algorithmic hauntology, where AI functions both as a preserver of a cultural-musical memory and as a spectral maker or conjurer reviving the past while destabilizing artistic originality. The findings also suggest that while such conjured spectres intensify nostalgia and perceived authenticity, but they also risk commodifying grief and closing original imaginative futures not just a redo of past unless regulated by strict ethical frameworks.

Keywords: Digital Afterlives, Hauntology, Lost Futures, AI as Spectre Conjurer

Introduction

Literature, in all its forms, has long been humanity's most enduring means of preserving emotions, histories, and identities. As Eliot (1920) remarked, "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." Literature serves both as a mirror and a map reflecting the world we inhabit while shaping our perception of it. Among its many expressions, music emerges as the most immediate and universal of literary languages, embodying what Nietzsche (1878) called "the art closest to the truth, for it speaks the language of emotion." From oral traditions to digital compositions, music has preserved collective memory and emotion across generations.

Music, beyond its aesthetic appeal, functions as a cultural archive, intertwining personal experience with communal history. Adorno (1941) noted that "every musical work is a historical product, carrying within it the tensions and contradictions of its time." In South Asian culture, particularly, film music operates as both memory and identity. The voices of Kishore Kumar, Lata Mangeshkar, and Mohammed Rafi not only defined cinematic sound but

also encoded the emotional consciousness of postcolonial India. Music thus becomes a site of emotional continuity—a vessel through which longing, nostalgia, and cultural belonging are transmitted.

In recent years, however, the landscape of creativity has been transformed by artificial intelligence (AI). Once limited to mechanical calculation, AI now composes songs, writes lyrics, paints portraits, and curates human emotion through data. As Turkle (2011) observes, “Technology not only changes what we do; it changes who we are.” In show business, this transformation is profound: AI-generated voices, digital avatars, and algorithmic compositions have entered mainstream production, blurring the boundaries between creation and replication, memory and simulation. The entertainment industry increasingly witnesses a technological haunting, where machines resurrect voices of the past, reviving what was thought lost.

This phenomenon resonates with Derrida’s (1994) concept of hauntology—the idea that “the present is always haunted by the spectres of the past.” Extending this idea, Fisher (2014) laments that “we are haunted by the future’s loss,” a condition where culture loops endlessly through the remnants of its own history. Within this framework, music becomes a haunted medium: instead of progressing forward, it often replays echoes of what was once original, now reproduced through new technological forms. The digital resurrection of voices like Kishore Kumar’s is not merely a technical feat—it is a hauntological return, where technology becomes both preserver and possessor of cultural memory.

It is within this context that the AI-generated version of the 2025 Bollywood song Saiyara gains significance. Originally composed by Tanishk Bagchi, the song was recreated using the digitally revived voice of Kishore Kumar, a project led by RJ Kisna and Anshuman Sharma. The AI version rapidly went viral across India and Pakistan, described by audiences as “haunting,” “alive again,” and “more real than reality” (Times of India, 2025). This overwhelming reception revealed how deeply the public’s emotional connection to the past can be reignited by algorithmic artistry.

The present study investigates this cultural moment through a qualitative discourse analysis of YouTube comments and digital media narratives surrounding the AI Saiyara. By applying Fisher’s (2014) framework of hauntology and lost futures, it examines how artificial intelligence reanimates artistic legacies, turning nostalgia into a form of digital afterlife. The research argues that while AI serves as a new spectral conjurer, capable of preserving lost voices and memories, it simultaneously risks commodifying grief, diminishing artistic originality, and foreclosing creative futurity. Thus, the AI Saiyara exemplifies the paradox of our digital age—where technology can both immortalize and imprison art within the echo of its own past.

Statement of Problem

Artificial intelligence has begun to play an active role in shaping modern art and music, raising new questions about creativity and memory. The AI-generated version of Saiyara, recreated in the voice of the late Kishore Kumar, quickly gained more attention than the original composition by Tanishk Bagchi. Its popularity revealed how strongly people respond to the revival of familiar voices from the past through digital means. This unexpected reaction invites inquiry into what listeners find emotionally and culturally meaningful in such recreations. The case of AI Saiyara provides a way to explore how technology interacts with nostalgia, cultural

memory, and the idea of originality in music. Using Mark Fisher's concepts of hauntology and lost futures, the study aims to understand how this revival reflects a longing for what has been lost and how it shapes our sense of the present. The problem, therefore, is to examine why the AI version resonated more deeply with audiences and what this reveals about the role of technology in preserving and reshaping collective memory.

Research Questions

Q1. How Derrida and Mark Fisher's hauntology and lost futures does explains the strong emotional response to AI Kishore Kumar's version of Saiyara than the original version?

Q2. In what ways AI works as a haunt creator or conjurer of spectre given the selected song and what implications it shows on future of music arena?

Research Objectives

1. To understand the phenomenon of instant emotional acceptance of AI version of song Saiyara in voice of late Kishore Kumar than the original version in the light of hauntology and lost futures by Derrida and Fisher.

2. To work out AI algorithm's role as a ghost conjurer through Saiyara song.

3. To find out this novel spectre creator's effects on the coming times of imagination especially in music.

Significance of Study

Listening to new and exciting song compositions in our beloved late singers is surely a great pleasure for our ears and emotions but deep down some other phenomenon are taking place. We might be losing the uniqueness of originality and novelty due to the new facade of AI and its various forms. This study will provide an interesting insight for the said matter making the readers think the next time they hear any recreated version of any song. Also this study is significant for the future researchs to see how the new world and its advancements are not sending us into once imagined awe striking futures but rather they are playing a very sneaky part in losing what we call our present, leading us to live in a forever of past.

Literature Review

Modern culture has long been preoccupied with its own past. Reynolds (2011) calls this obsession *retromania*—a cultural condition in which creativity increasingly depends on the recycling of past aesthetics rather than producing genuinely new forms. From fashion revivals to film reboots, the past is constantly being repackaged for contemporary audiences. This tendency, Reynolds warns, risks trapping society in a cycle of nostalgia where memory replaces innovation. His observation provides a starting point for understanding how present-day audiences often look backward for comfort and familiarity, especially in moments of uncertainty.

Building on this, Boym (2001) in *The Future of Nostalgia* distinguishes between restorative nostalgia, which seeks to reconstruct an idealized version of the past, and reflective nostalgia, which acknowledges loss and treats the past as a site of contemplation rather than recovery. Her distinction has guided numerous cultural analyses, suggesting that society's attachment to retro styles is both emotional and philosophical—rooted in a longing for continuity in times of change. Similarly, Horváth (2018) explores how visual artists deliberately reproduce imperfections, decay, and temporal distance to evoke authenticity, showing that nostalgia is not mere sentiment but an artistic strategy.

This cultural tendency extends strongly into cinema and show business. Leitch (2018), examining Hollywood's self-referential nature, notes that contemporary film industries thrive on reboots, remakes, and tributes, generating emotional recognition rather than creative novelty. Such practices reinforce what Reynolds terms "cultural recycling." Together, these studies establish that the fascination with the past—be it in literature, visual art, or cinema—reflects a broader cultural condition where audiences seek reassurance in familiar forms.

Music has been one of the most powerful mediums through which this retro sensibility operates. Sound carries deep emotional and mnemonic value; hearing an old melody or voice can instantly recall a personal or collective past. Sedikides and Wildschut (2004) link nostalgia to psychological needs for identity, belonging, and continuity, suggesting why retro sounds hold such power over listeners. The resurrection of older genres, instruments, and even singers' voices can thus be seen as a cultural attempt to preserve fragments of a shared past through sound.

With the advancement of digital technologies, this nostalgic impulse has entered a new phase. Artificial intelligence now functions as both an artistic tool and a cultural curator. Marella, Erukude, and Veluru (2025) argue that AI can preserve and extend traditional art forms by learning stylistic patterns and reproducing them with high fidelity. However, they also warn that this process risks reducing creativity to algorithmic imitation unless guided by ethical and artistic oversight. In a similar vein, Van Noord et al. (2022) highlight how AI models trained on cultural archives often reproduce biases toward what is already popular or canonized, amplifying dominant retro aesthetics instead of encouraging innovation.

Moreover, Chung (2021) emphasizes the importance of the "human in the loop," proposing that human intervention is necessary to infuse emotional nuance and cultural sensitivity into AI-generated art. These insights are crucial for understanding AI's growing presence in music production, where algorithms can now generate melodies, lyrics, and even replicate human voices with uncanny precision. As AI becomes capable of reviving the sounds of deceased artists, questions arise about originality, authorship, and authenticity in art.

Theoretical grounding for this phenomenon can be found in Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology, which describes how the present is haunted by the unresolved traces of the past. Derrida argues that what is gone never fully disappears; rather, it lingers as a spectral presence that shapes our cultural and emotional landscapes. Fisher (2014) later extends this idea, suggesting that late capitalist culture is haunted not only by the past but by the "lost futures" that modernity once promised but failed to deliver. For Fisher, the recycling of retro styles in music and media reflects this melancholic stasis—a world repeating what it once imagined as new.

Within this framework, the AI recreation of Saiyara can be seen as a living embodiment of hauntology. By reviving the voice of Kishore Kumar—an icon whose songs defined an era—technology brings the past into the present in both comforting and unsettling ways. Media reports on the phenomenon (NDTV, 2025; Times of India, 2025; TechRadar, 2025) show that audiences described the AI version as "haunting," "alive again," and "more real than reality." Such reactions confirm that AI now acts as a cultural memory machine, blurring the boundary between remembrance and reanimation. The literature reviewed thus provides a foundation for understanding how nostalgia, technology, and hauntology intersect in the making of digital afterlives like the AI Saiyara—where music becomes both archive and apparition.

Theoretical Framework

Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994) and Mark Fisher's *Ghosts of My Life* (2014) collectively provide a theoretical framework for understanding how the past lingers within the present as a haunting presence.

Derrida in *Specters of Marx* (1994) presents the viewpoint that western society is being haunted by the ghost of Karl Marx, the father of Marxism. He refers to the then existing and prevalent Marxist ideologies and their practicalities to be the result of Marx's presence even after his absence. This ghost of Marx also referred as "Spectre" by Derrida is called upon the west by the benefactors of this mode of societal system. For this he coined the term "hauntology" a combination of haunt and ontology, to describe a state in which the present is haunted by the ghosts of past, suggesting that history never fully disappears but creeps as spectral residue into our present. He further argues that what we have in present the so called modernity is actually standing upon the return of bygones, producing a "time out of joint" (Derrida, 1994, p.10).

Building on this concept of Derrida's fractured present, Mark Fisher in his 2014 seminal work *Ghosts of My Life*, gave the idea of lost futures. Whereas Derrida argues that our past haunts the present, Fisher suggests that past is also becoming the cause of "slow cancellation of future" (Fisher, 2014, p.8). Through an interesting musical analogy and examples he points out that "our culture is preoccupied with its own past because it cannot conceive of a future that would be different" (Fisher, 2014, p. 21). On top of all of this, this past oriented nostalgia is celebrated by the commoners and is providing ample economic profit to the conjurers of such past ghosts. This idea has been put forward by Fisher in his 2009 work *Capitalist Realism: Is There No alternative?*, where he argued that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (Fisher, 2009, p.2). Under such capitalist realism, the repetition of old music fashion or any retro style is not boring rather its a strategy because such old is gold's reliability is unquestioned.

This study therefore incorporates these elements to investigate the digital hauntology and how AI is being the excellent wizard for such situations.

Data Analysis and Discussion

In July 2025, Yash Raj Films and Akshaye Widhani produced a blockbuster Hollywood romantic tragic movie *Saiyara*, directed by Mohit Suri. This film beautifully depicted love story of one of a kind, making its audience, especially Gen Z, to break in tears and fall into traumas as the story and the characters resonate deeply with them. The title track of this heart breaking successful film, *Saiyara* composed by Tanishk Bagchi and sung by Gen Z sensation, a Kashmiri artist from Srinagar, Faheem Abdullah, became the top on everyone's music playlist. Nonetheless the song is mesmerising for its portrayal of deep grief of beloved's departure. In July 2025 it became the highest charting Indian song ever on Spotify's global charts, almost reaching the number one on the Global viral chart. It also became the first ever Hindi song to enter the top ten of the Billboard Global 200 and reaching upto 480 million plus views on YouTube. This track became the soul of the marketing for the movie.

However, an interesting twist occurred when in the late July 2025 RJ Kisna and Anshuman Sharma released an AI version of the same song in the voice of the legendary Hollywood playback singer, Kishore Kumar. This version got an instant fame and upto 11 to 12 million views on YouTube. Listeners became overwhelmed over this old is gold version saying in the

comments of this song that it is heart touching and unbelievable (RJ Kisna and Anshuman Sharma, 2025). Many commented "old is gold" to this version, feeling nostalgic listening to Kishore Kumar. According to Fisher the present is saturated with the past creating anachronistic simultaneity, just like everyone online is experiencing a blend of old voice and new song. A 2025 technology and 1970s voice coexisting, creating "a time out of a joint" (Derrida, 1994, p. 10).

The recreation of Kishore Kumar's voice seems like a resurrection, as if he's back. Interestingly one of the comments to this song also mentioned that Kishore kumar was Bengali and a magician as well, that's why today his soul is wandering and these songs are created (RJ Kisna and Anshuman Sharma, 2025). Thus, Kishore kumar's voice becomes a spectre a ghost which haunts in the most eerily beautiful way. People loved this because they know he was a legend. His songs have been the top hits of 90s in Hollywood. That reliability is the cause that acts as a backstage actor in this wide emotional acceptance of song. Listeners nostalgia for Kishore shows collective melancholia disguised as a celebration as they commented that finally this generation knows what means old is gold and that retro music is amazing and it is saddening why this is not an actual track (RJ kisna and Anshuman Sharma, 2025). Thus postmodern culture mourns its own vitality.

Even with a huge appreciation and viewership of the original track, people still loved the AI created version which is basically a computer coded recycling of the original one. So not only that the past is interfering the present but it also is lowering the chances of the popularity or emotional acceptance of the novelty in music industry. People are demanding such covers in the voices of many other legendary late artists. Thus introducing a culture which seems to be losing its possibilities of brand new music, with new voices and tones. Thus a "slow cancellation of future" (Fisher, 2014, p.8) speaks for itself here.

If the root cause of this whole phenomenon is to be looked at, it is evident that this unrealistic logically impossible voice cover of an artist long dead, is the brainchild of the shining advancements of Artificial intelligence. A good prompt, an effective coding is all that is required to tune AI to create such loving covers. And such a source which can call the deads back and alive is what Derrida calls the spectre conjurer. The spectre of Kishore Kumar is conjured through AI thus acting as a Sèance machine for summoning the ghost of Kishore Kumar. With the increasing technological advancements, digital media acts as a channel where the ghosts from the past can speak again.

One side of this AI created past voice is providing opportunities and the other challenges. If AI models are used to simply make a remembrance or paying homage and tribute to the olds of the past, this practice provides great opportunity. For example people who haven't heard Kishore Kumar before, now they do. And it is eye-catching how strongly the young generation is enjoying his retro style. History being kept, legends remembered. This no doubt is the best use of AI as one of the listener commented to the song.

On the other hand, if this practice of reanimating the voices of the dead becomes a trend, a culture, then future of the music industry is doomed. If only what has gone will be recreated in an unending cyclic way then there will be nothing to call new. This challenge promotes the slow and gradual departure of pure imagination where things appear in ways, voices, tones, and shapes that are never heard or seen before. Future is past. Past becomes present and present is filled with the past. This whole intertwining blurs the line between past, present

and future. Fisher extends this, arguing that modern technologies “conjure the dead media forms” that refuse to fade (Fisher, 2014, p. 29).

Few comments also supported such point of views as well. For example one comment can be read as AI can try to copy but it can never bring the soul of Kishore Kumar's voice. Creating an AI version is not innovation, its a shadow that hides the raw and beautiful talent of Kashmir, a voice that carries strong emotions, struggle and power. The original track has got the vibe that no machine can ever create. (RJ Kisna and Anshuman Sharma, 2025)

In today's world where algorithms rule. What's famous is to be even more famous. One song, one voice becomes a trend then it will be followed until every single user of social media haven't made it his/her hashtag. Innovation is replaced by profitable repetition, because the market feeds on nostalgia. The AI remake commodifies remembrance turning grief into viral engagement. Content creators cash their talents with such content, making a big sum of money. This refers that just like there is no end to capitalism (Fisher, 2009, p. 2) there is no end to these kind of remakes, which is simply benefiting the earning ends in this loop.

Thus, AI version of Saiyara transforms Kishore Kumar's memory into sonic presence. Derrida's spectre that is neither logically present nor really absent, fits this scenario perfectly. Listeners' responses reveal a blend of awe and loss, admiration and nostalgia. AI acts as both preserver and specter-maker. The Kishore Saiyara showcases AI's dual role—archiving voices while unsettling originality. For South Asian audiences, this haunting feels sacred, merging heritage with code. Yet Fisher's warning of cultural stasis persists: endless repetition may erode futurity. Thus, the song embodies the paradox of algorithmic hauntology—comforting yet uncanny.

Findings

The analysis of the AI-generated version of Saiyara reveals that contemporary culture is caught in a haunting tension between nostalgia and innovation. The unprecedented audience engagement with the AI recreation of Kishore Kumar's voice signifies more than admiration—it embodies Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology, where the past refuses to remain silent and instead re-emerges through technology as a spectral presence. Artificial intelligence functions here as a séance machine, a digital medium that blurs the line between absence and presence, enabling what once was impossible: the revival of the dead through sound.

This phenomenon, however, exposes a deeper cultural malaise. The audience's emotional preference for the AI-rendered version over the original track by Faheem Abdullah reflects the “slow cancellation of the future” that Fisher (2014) warns of—a condition where creative potential is overshadowed by recycled aesthetics and marketable nostalgia. The adoration for the old, coded in the new, suggests that postmodern culture celebrates its own repetition while mourning its lost vitality. The AI version's success demonstrates how capitalism commodifies remembrance, transforming collective grief into viral engagement, and how algorithms now mediate not just entertainment but emotion and memory.

Yet, this digital resurrection also offers undeniable value. Through AI, Kishore Kumar's voice is introduced to younger generations who may never have encountered his legacy otherwise. The technology thus operates as both a cultural archive and a bridge between temporalities—preserving artistic heritage while reshaping how memory is experienced. However, when replication replaces innovation, this preservation becomes stagnation. The music industry

risks entrapment in a loop of algorithmic nostalgia where imitation eclipses imagination, and futurity dissolves into repetition.

Conclusion

The Saiyara phenomenon encapsulates the paradox of algorithmic hauntology: AI emerges as both preserver and disruptor, custodian and conjurer. It ensures that voices of the past remain audible, yet it simultaneously unsettles the space for new creative expression. The findings affirm that while AI can serve as a powerful tool of remembrance, its unchecked proliferation threatens to erode the essence of originality and emotional authenticity in art. The challenge for the digital age, therefore, lies in sustaining a balance—honouring the ghosts of the past without allowing them to eclipse the creative pulse of the present and the promise of the future.

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