

WRIT 3371

Professor Bruch

Abbey Brady

DJ X: AI Integration in Music

On February 22, 2023, streaming giant Spotify launched its AI-powered DJ feature ‘DJ X.’ This service promises to be a “personalized guide that knows you and your music taste so well that it can choose what to play for you.” (Spotify, 2023) The idea of personalized music recommendations based on listening habits driven by algorithms is nothing new; Spotify itself has been creating playlists based on user behavior for over a decade. The addition of an AI personality supposedly adds a new layer to the listening experience. The experience of using DJ X is akin to listening to one of these playlists, but with interjections from the AI approximately every five songs. DJ X introduces the next string of songs, offers comments about the artist or song recently played, and, on occasion, DJ X offers a joke or other commentary. Essentially, DJ X performs all of the functions of a human DJ, just without the human. Through DJ X and its corresponding marketing materials, Spotify is asking its user base to forgo the human element of both music recommendations, along with the context of both curating and discovering music, and encouraging them to take on a passive role in their exploration of music.

In a statement regarding the launch of an AI DJ in the United States, Spotify released a statement on their website detailing the experience, including how DJ X functions and how users can interact with DJ X. In “Meet Your DJ,” Spotify provides a type of mission statement for the DJ X project: “Ready for a brand-new way to listen on Spotify and connect even more deeply with the artists you love? The DJ is a personalized AI guide that knows you and your music taste so well that it can choose what to play for you.” This sentiment, that the AI guide knows the user

and their taste, frames the gathering of user data and information as akin to getting to know a friend. The use of 'choose' and 'knows' in this statement is also significant, as it implies that the AI DJ is making an organic decision based on what it thinks the user will enjoy, again, the way a friend would. In actuality, the AI is presenting the user with songs most likely to keep the user listening. While these may seem like small distinctions, they contribute to understanding AI as a thinking entity rather than a good-guess-generator.

In tandem with the statement made on their website, Spotify released a commercial across multiple social media platforms, including Instagram, X, and TikTok. The video showcases a user being transported through different 'vibes,' an upbeat party sequence, a relaxing beach sequence, and a melancholic wallowing sequence. Each of these sequences occurs within the same space, a visual representation of listening to music. The advertisement presents each of these sequences with their corresponding DJ X intro, with shots of the user's phone sitting on the bed or sticking out of the bed. The separation of the user from their device, in tandem with shifting genre sequences and DJ X transitions, creates an understanding of the experience as entirely passive for the user; it happens to them. The user has next to no input on the stark changes in genre or mood, aside from the data Spotify has gathered on them. Granted, this commercial was created for the product's initial launch, prior to the integration of a request feature; the lack of agency provided to the user both in conceptualization and in practice is significant.

The combination of the statement released on the Spotify website and the commercial released by the company established the language to be used when speaking about DJ X, and based on Spotify's dominance in the music streaming industry, AI-driven music curation as a whole. Both the statement and advertisement released by Spotify position AI-driven DJs as

equivalent to an infinite personalized DJ set; this is, of course, not the case. The AI DJ has no understanding of *why* a user likes a given song, or *why* a user queues one song after another, just that they do. The generation process DJ X engages in is fundamentally different from the curation process an individual would engage in. Former DJ Vee Fidati wrote for Trill Magazine, “DJ X just isn’t really a DJ. He can sort of recommend songs, but he doesn’t know how to crack jokes or draw listeners in with personal anecdotes ... He’s essentially just the “On Repeat” playlist with insubstantial remarks peppered in.” The ‘insubstantial remarks’ Fidati alludes to include gems such as “Charli XCX, you know how to make music.” These comments from DJ X were discussed in the initial statement from Spotify, “we put this [OpenAI technology] in the hands of our music editors to provide you with insightful facts about the music, artists, or genres you’re listening to. The expertise of our editors is something that’s really important to our philosophy at Spotify.” The inclusion of this in the official launch statement for the companies AI DJ service reads as a reassurance to their user base that editor employed by Spotify won’t be losing their jobs to DJ X. A tough sell considering that the voice of DJ X is Xavier Jernigan, host of the defunct Spotify morning show “The Get Up,” which ended in April of 2022. It is also difficult to believe that a Spotify editor contributed to the comment about Charli XCX.

In the three years since the initial launch, Spotify has integrated a requests feature into the service, and many users have requested the ability to mute the interjections from DJ X, which Spotify is reportedly working on; each of these changes fundamentally alters the service and negates the role of the AI. This suggests that users of the service are seeking something that the service is not providing. While a human DJ likely would not fill this need, based on the continued evolution of Spotify’s AI DJ, users desire the ability to curate their own selections without the interruptions.

Sources

Fidati, Vee. "I Tried Spotify's AI DJ Feature as a Skeptic and an Ex-DJ. Here's What I Thought.| Trill." *Trill Magazine*, 14 Aug. 2025,
www.trillmag.com/entertainment/music/i-tried-spotifys-ai-dj-feature-as-a-skeptic-and-a-real-ex-dj/.

Grace, Demi. "Make Your Day." *TikTok*, 23 Feb. 2023,
www.tiktok.com/@iamdemigrace/video/7203404144672214318?is_from_webapp=1.

"Spotify Debuts a New AI DJ, Right in Your Pocket." *For the Record*,
<https://newsroom.spotify.com/2023-02-22/spotify-debuts-a-new-ai-dj-right-in-your-pocket/>