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Reimagining the Digital Oracle: An African Philosophical and Theological Critique of Artificial Intelligence

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) as a source of insight invites its characterization as a "digital oracle," a metaphor with particular resonance in Africa where traditions of divination are deeply embedded. This analogy, however, raises critical questions regarding the understanding, legitimacy, and governance of such systems. This paper employs a multidisciplinary approach, integrating contemporary AI ethics with African philosophy and religious perspectives, to analyze this metaphor. Using the prophetic figure central to Yoruba Ifá divination as a comparative framework, we contrast the communal, symbolically interpreted guidance of traditional oracles (Bascom, 1969) with AI's data-driven predictions, which often lack moral authority and community accountability. In response, we propose that the Ubuntu philosophy, grounded in relational humanity and moral duty, provides a vital corrective. The analysis is structured around four lenses: (1) epistemic opacity and interpretive authority; (2) relational personhood and communal responsibility; (3) spiritual and moral discernment; and (4) decolonial governance. We argue that AI should not be considered an autonomous philosophical oracle but can serve as a valuable decision-support tool when consciously embedded within robust systems of ethics, interpretation, and community. The paper concludes by advocating for AI development guided by Ubuntu ethics, the inclusion of religious thought, and formal decolonial governance. This approach seeks to transform AI into a context-aware tool that serves humanity, rather than an unaccountable digital predictor.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, African Philosophy, Decolonial Governance, Technology Ethics, Ubuntu Ethics

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has greatly influenced both perspectives on the world and the perspectives of societies in the world through its global discourse, which has included not only technical discourse, but also metaphors and stories that shape the way societies perceive and approach them (Goralski & Tan, 2020; Sabherwal & Grover, 2024). An impressive metaphor is the one that describes AI as an oracle. Oracle AI is occasionally applied in technological literature to refer to hypothetical systems that are confined to question-answer systems and do not act independently (Armstrong et al., 2012). Nevertheless, even being constrained in such a manner, AI still has the capacity to have far-reaching effects on the society, acting as the source of direction, forecasting, or counselling. The oracle metaphor in the African context finds a great echo due to the long traditions of divination, prophecy, and community guidance-seeking. As an example, Yoruba cosmology uses Ifa divination as a key to the interpretation of the divine will. It entails a very organized symbolic system which is mediated by trained specialists (babalawo) who read verses and stories in the interest of the community (Bascom, 1969). Quite on the contrary, Ifá is not a prediction but a hermeneutical practice that offers interpretive patterns to unavoidable uncertainties.

In this way, the oracle is not dislocation of human agency but its enhancement as it implicates the decision-making process in spiritual, symbolic, and communal realms. This poses serious concerns to the application to AI. When AI is viewed as a digital oracle, does it carry out a comparable function of providing useful advice or does it only imitate the authority with statistical trends? Is it the case that societies should listen to AI in the same way that they would listen to the traditional oracular pronunciations, or its authority must always be strictly limited? The questions are especially urgent to Africa where AI is actively being introduced into the system of governance, education, health care, and even religious activity (Owoyemi et al., 2020; Oyasor, 2024). Artificially intelligent systems able to predict the growth of crops, the transmission of disease, or provide chat-bot spiritual advice already function in a manner that is similar to oracle consultation.

The African worldview has philosophical resources in terms of evaluating these dynamics. Ubuntu ethics, summarized in the term ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu ("a person is a person through other persons) place human flourishing in the context of community (Norren, 2022). This communal ontology contrasts sharply with the individualist assumptions that often undergird AI development in the Global North. Equally, the Ogoni philosophy of personhood regards identity as relational and communally actualized and views accountability to a community as a central aspect of ethical living (Deezia & Kilani, 2023). Such views also bring up critical questions on whether the implementation of AI systems in Africa mirrors communal values or promotes western individualistic standards. African Christianity has also started to be critically concerned with AI theologically.

According to Awasthi and Achar (2025), AI brings up the issue of human agency, divine wisdom, and mediation through technology in spirituality. The same way that Christians have been able to recognize how they can interact with new technologies through the development of writing, print, and broadcast media, the church must consider AI. Is AI a ministry and educational tool or a threat to replace machine output with divine revelation? African leaders are becoming more conscious of the potential and the threat of AI at the level of policy.

African Union (2024) aims to make sure that AI serves as a driver of inclusive development and ethical governance. On the same note, in the Recommendation on UNSECO (2024) presents human dignity, inclusiveness, and accountability as core principles. Collectively, these frameworks offer a platform in which AI can be contextualized in the development and ethical priorities of Africa. The purpose of this paper is thus to mediate between theological reflection and African philosophy with modern AI ethics so as to appraise the concept of AI as a digital oracle. In particular, it considers four analytical lenses: epistemic opacity, relational personhood, spiritual discernment and decolonial governance.

Using African traditions including Ifa divination and Ubuntu ethics along with the global policy systems, the paper advocates an approach to AI that does not mystify but focuses on interpretation, accountability, and justice. The question is, whether AI can be used as an oracle or not, but whether, in fact, African societies will give it this role without sufficient theological, philosophical, and ethical examination. The responsible way of integrating AI should, in the first place, entail its taming as part of African wisdom traditions and subject to the principles of communal prosperity, dignity, and justice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Drawing on literature on artificial intelligence, digital oracles, African theologies and philosophical musings, this literature review reveals intersections, debates, epistemic opacity, theological implications, and cultural interpretations within contemporary discourse.

Oracle AI and Epistemic Opacity

The ability to answer, predict and offer guidance has been used to conceptualize Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an oracle. Armstrong et al. (2012) discuss the oracle AI concept, noting the control issues that are inherent in the systems that are limited to responding to a question without making independent decisions. They observe that there are recurring threats, including epistemic risks of manipulative responses and information risks, which come up as the direct result of epistemic opaqueness epistemic opaqueness in the form of the inscrutability of the internal workings of AI. Similar issues are noted by Kaiser et al. (2024), who mentions that the researchers are not comfortable with the concept of black-box linkages between inputs and outputs in AI systems. These attitudes anticipate the

issues of accountability, legitimacy and interpretative authority in AI, particularly where the results seem final or authoritative. In AI, epistemic opacities resemble some aspects of the conventional oracles, but differences are critical.

Symbolic narratives in African divinatory systems, like the Yoruba Ifá, oracles work by reading stories (odu), which must be interpreted by a professional set of experts, called babalaw. According to Abimbola (1997) and Bascom (1969), these systems according to them are hermeneutical: they need ritual knowledge, moral contemplation and community confirmation. The obscurity of oracles is thereby deliberate, lodged in the cosmological, ethical, and social systems. Conversely, the lack of transparency in AI is caused by technical complexity, such as huge datasets, probabilistic models and deep learning algorithms and is not frequently intended to be interpreted by laypersons (Hassija et al., 2024). This may become a form of interpretive power in the hands of technical elites or corporations without mediation and can literally disenfranchise communities.

African epistemology offers an understanding of how to resolve the interpretive issues of AI. Learning is not often viewed as either inherently personal or absolute, but is mediated by groups, orally, and in general discussion (Abimbola, 1997). When applied to AI, this implies that outputs are provisional and that they have to be interpreted by ethically responsible communities. Interdisciplinary teams of theologians, ethicists, data scientists, and community leaders could become the so-called digital diviners by jointly making sure that AI outputs are seen responsibly. Therefore, epistemic opacities do not require blind assent. African customs help us remember that the power of oracles is based on the fact that they are part of the wisdom of a community, rituals, and moral judgement. AI, in its turn, must be entrenched into the interpretive, ethical and governance framework, placing the focus on accountability, community engagement and ethical supervision instead of the oracular autonomy.

African Theological Resources: Divination as Hermeneutics

The African religious and theological traditions provide powerful frameworks of guidance, wisdom and oracle power. An example of a structured and symbolically dense practice, based on an intermediation between the spiritual and the human worlds, is the Ifá divination system, Yoruba cosmology. According to Bascom (1969), the odu-divinatory verses are not foretelling tools but are narrative structures that comprised moral, ethical and cosmological doctrines. Abimbola (1997) also emphasises the fact that interpretation is group-based: the advice of the diviner is legitimised and discussed collectively, and accountability, moral contemplation and social responsibility are embedded in decision-making. This is in contrast to the results of the algorithms which might seem objective but can turn out to be the ultimate without any context and ethics. Kaiser et al. (2024) highlights the fact that AI systems are obscure, and the interpretation is restricted due to technical complexity. By contrast, the African traditions of theology emphasize that

effective guidance comes about through dialogue and reflecting on ethics and community involvement.

By guaranteeing that the oracle is not simply a repository of information, hermeneutical mediation can make sure that communities are able to make reflections about moral, social, and spiritual issues (Norren, 2022; Odero et al., 2024). Furthermore, African divination embeds ethical accountability into the practice of guidance. Bascom (1969) notes that legitimacy of oracular pronouncement hinges not necessarily on the oracle accuracy but on how closely the oracle corresponds to the cosmological, moral, and communal principles. The outputs of AI in turn can be in danger of being interpreted as something objective, decontextualizing understanding in terms of morality and human relations. Using African theological models to inform AI governance underlines that leadership is interpretive, provisional and morally responsible. Also, the African traditions emphasize the relevance of time and context. Every consultation uses the special requirements of the seeker and the community.

This view applies to AI because algorithmic outputs need to be put into context in socio-cultural, ethical, and communal terms. Consequently, AI cannot take up the responsibility of its own law; it can only be legitimized when perceived through moral responsible societies that take into account local conditions, moral values and communal welfare (Deezia & Kilani, 2023). Generally, African theological resources show that the oracular authority is constructed socially and linguistically. Hermeneutical practices, collective deliberation, and moral responsibility make sure that advice is in the service of common good. In combination with these structures, AI can be a type of socio-technical insight and foresight, yet it must be legitimated through interpretive, ethical and community control.

Ubuntu, Personhood, and Moral Community

The philosophy of Africans and especially Ubuntu can give important perspectives on relational ethics, personhood and shared responsibility, such that it can be used to assess AI as a digital oracle. Ubuntu as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other persons) finds identity, dignity and moral agency in the context of a social and relational network (Norren, 2022; Odero et al., 2024). Unlike the Western individualist beliefs that tend to personify AI as an independent entity, African philosophy underlines that AI legitimacy can only arise by providing service to communal life and moral action. The Ubuntu paradigm has the direct implications on AI implementation. The AI systems in the healthcare sector, governance, or resource management are beneficial only when they pay respect to cultural norms, promote fair results, and contribute to the prosperity of communities. According to Odero et al. (2024), benefits-sharing, inclusiveness, and participatory oversight are the keys to a morally appropriate introduction of AI in Africa. Deezia and Kilani (2023) also highlights that relational accountability has

to be taken into consideration, and says that ethical responsibility is spread among all players in the development, deployment and interpretation of AI. The insights are enhanced further by treating AI as the oracle metaphor.

African traditional divination system plays in a complex social and spiritual network in which the diviners are subject to the community and the spiritual systems. Knowledge is interpreted, relational and ethically based (Abimbola, 1997; Bascom, 1969). By contrast, AI may frequently fail to do so, with possible consequences of generating output that is technically correct but socially or morally un-sensitive. The Ubuntu-informed frameworks suggest the existence of interpretive communities where ethicists, theologians, technical experts, and community leaders are represented to make sure that AI only increases the overall well-being but does not disrupt the social cohesion. Responsibility is also redefined in Relational accountability. In case of harm, the African schools of thought would blame the designers, operators, and interpreters and not the machine exclusively (Deezia & Kilani, 2023; Norren, 2022; Priyati et al., 2024). Ubuntu therefore has given a normative basis to evaluate AI social and ethical influence with focus put on justice, equity and collective good. In addition, Ubuntu focuses on the interdependence of technological and human system. The social, ethical, and ecological aspects of AI have to be evaluated within the local environment, making sure that they resonate with the local priorities and the cultural norms (Odero et al., 2024).

In the absence of relational embedding, AI will become an opaque, technocratic oracle, and unrelated to the communities it is applied to. To sum it up, Ubuntu and other African philosophies underline the rationality, community responsibility, and moral responsibility. The validity of AI relies on its abilities to strengthen the communal connections, maintain the dignity and promote the well-being of the collectiveness. Incorporation of Ubuntu-inspired values would mean that AI is used as a legally responsible tool of knowledge and not as a self-directed Oracle.

Spiritual Discernment and Moral Limits

Theological reflection plays a significant role in the formulation of AI as a digital oracle since it focuses on both the moral and spiritual aspects of humanity that cannot be reproduced by technology. In African Christian thought, ultimate authority resides in divine wisdom, scripture, and communal discernment (Awasthi & Achar, 2025). Giving oracular powers to AI without qualification, puts the human moral and spiritual agency at risk by giving a technological object the status it does not deserve. African religious traditions such as Ifá divination offer models for morally accountable guidance. Some researchers define diviners as interpreters of symbolic stories into giving ethical and spiritual guidance on decision-making (Bascom, 1969; Francis & Olojo-Kosoko, 2024). These are affective and

interpretive practices that put a lot of emphasis on communal consultation, moral responsibility and adherence to spiritual values.

On the other hand, AI generates the outputs that are data-driven and lack spiritual or moral context (Kaiser et al., 2024). The African theological insights therefore require AI output to be understood and be contextualized by communities that are ethical and responsible. African Christian theology also supports the principle of discernment which says that wisdom is an ethical reflection, a prayer, and spiritual guidance (Awasthi & Achar, 2025). AI can give information about the economic, medical or social tendencies, but these tendencies should be compared with ethical and spiritual norms. The use of AI in isolation poses a danger of outsourcing moral agency, unlike African traditions, which mediate guidance and which are ethical and relational.

Moral boundaries of AI may also be seen in its incompetence to interact with such transcendent realities like divine grace, forgiveness, or ultimate purpose. Whereas Ifa divination connects both human and spiritual worlds, AI is a human-made tool, and it is essential to make AI knowledge subordinate to social ethics. Practically, AI can be used to aid in deliberation e.g. as part of climate adaptation or pastoral decision-making but should never be used to substitute human ethical or spiritual deliberation. In summary, spiritual discernment and moral limits safeguard against the misappropriation of AI as a metaphysical authority. The African theological and divinatory traditions demonstrate that the right direction is interpretive and ethically based and relationally mediated. It is only through the incorporation into systems that put moral responsibility, a communal discussion and spiritual understanding at the forefront that AI may gain any legitimacy.

Decolonial Critiques and Governance Frameworks

AI deployment in Africa intersects with issues of power, governance, and epistemic justice. In the absence of critical thinking, AI might be dominated by digital colonialism, in which power and decision-making are imposed on consumers externally and history repeats itself with knowledge monopolization (Yilma, 2025). The values, priorities and biases that AI systems developed in the Global North seldom reflect the situation in Africa, serving to strengthen dependency and restrict local agency. Decolonization views suggest the integration of AI in African languages, cultural activities, and morals. Both schools are concerned with relational responsibility, community-level welfare, and moral reciprocity (Deezia & Kilani, 2023; Ogude, 2018).

The combination of these principles will guarantee that AI works not in the interests of the corporation or the state, but in the interests of people. The results of AI, whether predictive analytics or decision support systems, have to be viewed through the socially and culturally relevant prism. The global governance frameworks across the globe, like the Recommendation on the Ethics of AI by UNESCO (2021) and the Continental AI Strategy by the African Union (2024)

provide an indication on the transparency, accountability, and the human rights (African Union, 2024; UNESCO, 2018). Varshney (2024) thought that it is necessary to contextualize these frameworks.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed an integrative literature review methodology, augmented by a theological-philosophical analysis, to investigate the conception of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a digital oracle within African contexts. This approach facilitated the synthesis of diverse sources including empirical research, theoretical frameworks, ethnographic studies, and policy documents, it is to construct a comprehensive, cross-disciplinary understanding of the phenomenon (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The review was guided by explicit inclusion criteria to ensure scholarly rigor and relevance. The temporal scope was limited to literature published between 2012 and 2025, encompassing both foundational texts and contemporary debates. The disciplinary scope incorporated peer-reviewed articles, institutional reports, and policy documents addressing AI ethics, African philosophy, and theology. Ethnographic sources on African divination systems, such as Ifá, provided critical insight into oracular authority, while policy documents from bodies like UNESCO and the African Union grounded the analysis in current ethical and governance frameworks (Bascom, 1969; Francis & Olojo-Kosoko, 2024).

A systematic search strategy was executed across multiple academic and institutional repositories. Key databases included arXiv, Quest Journals, Wellcome Open Research, and the African Journals Online (AJOL) network. Policy documents were sourced directly from the official websites of international and regional organizations. Search terms were combinations of keywords such as “Artificial Intelligence,” “digital oracle,” “Ubuntu ethics,” “African theology,” “AI governance,” “Ifá divination,” and “decolonial AI.” The analytical process was structured around a predefined framework of four thematic lenses: epistemic opacity and interpretive authority; relational personhood and communal accountability; spiritual and moral discernment; and decolonial governance and ethical frameworks. Each sourced document was systematically coded according to its relevance to these core analytical categories.

The synthesis of data was a qualitative process oriented toward conceptual clarity and interdisciplinary interpretation rather than quantitative metrics (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Furidha, 2024). By integrating knowledge across the domains of technology ethics, African philosophy, and theology, the review constructed a coherent narrative on AI as a digital oracle. This synthesis specifically highlighted points of convergence and divergence across disciplines, with a dedicated effort to foreground African epistemological and theological resources. The resultant framework offers a nuanced, culturally-

grounded interpretation of AI that addresses technical, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, thereby fulfilling the interdisciplinary objectives of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Epistemic Opacity and Interpretive Authority

One of the key features of Artificial Intelligence, in particular, deep learning systems, is that such systems possess epistemic opaqueness: their internal mechanisms are often unobservable to the creators of the system. The lack of this black-box character is similar to the mystery of oracles in most cultural traditions. Greco-Roman oracles like Delphi in antiquity were cryptic and their meaning would have to be deciphered by interpreters. Likewise, in African societies, oracular systems such as the Yoruba Ifá are managed by divinatory verses (odu) which cannot be interpreted and utilized without the help of a trained babalaw (diviner). Both systems base their authority on their opaqueness but the basis of the legitimacy is quite different. In the African religious customs, the opaqueness of oracles is not unlucky but entrenched within cosmological, ethical and share communal frameworks. The uttering of an oracle is not autonomous, but is coerced in the practice of rituals, ancestral wisdom and ethical anticipations. In comparison, the secrecy of AI is largely technical: based on the complicated algorithms, probability models, and enormous data sets (Kaiser et al., 2024).

Even though the oracles prove the mysticism of the spiritual world, AI clouds the processes to the extent of depriving ordinary users and putting the technical elites or corporations in control. The issue, then, is the question of the interpretation and regulation of the pronouncements of AI. In this respect African epistemological traditions are helpful. Knowledge is seldom taken as absolute and individual but is mediated in community, oral tradition as well as interpretive authority. An example is that the Ifa system does not revolve around making predictions but provides a story that opens up to moral thinking and action (Francis & Olojo-Kosoko, 2024). When applied to AI, it implies that machine outputs cannot be accepted as absolute truths but as a point of departure that must be negotiated in meaning and relevance by the communities of interpretive devices. In addition, there is the question of interpretive authority which refers to the issue of trust and legitimacy.

When AI is regarded as a digital oracle, who is the babalaw, the trained interpreter capable of contextualizing outputs responsibly. This position in an African context may be taken up by theologians, data scientists, ethicists, and community leaders in partnership. In the absence of such interpretative mediation, there is a danger of uncritically trusting the predictions made by AI that might reproduce manifestations of techno-colonialism or technocratic domination. Epistemic opacity, therefore, must not be passively accepted but rather new forms of interpretive accountability must be developed. Practices of the Africans teach us that the power of the oracles does not lie in the mystery but rather in the fact that

they are applied to the wisdom of their people and in the moral judgment. Equally, AI should be placed in the framework of open governance, communitarian dialogue, and ethics instead of having self-oracular powers.

Relational Personhood and Communal Accountability

African philosophy underlines that personhood is interpersonal and not individual. The Ubuntu dictum is the saying that says, we are because I am and since we are, the I (Ubuntu dictum) is an expression of a rule: identity, dignity, and knowledge are generated within and through community (Norren, 2022). This has deep consequences on the way AI as a digital oracle is to be understood. In contrast to Western ideas that tend to make AI anthropomorphic as an actor, the African thought is important in underlining that AI has no meaning unless within a network of relationship, responsibility and accountability. This view is an opposition to mass media that realizes AI as a living entity with close-to-human attributes. Rather, AI is a social construct, a technology created by man and implemented in a social setting. It is not strong in its seeming autonomy but its contribution to the greater good.

As an illustration, in the case of African societies, AI as a predictive tool in the healthcare sector has to be not only legitimate but also has to uphold cultural values, guard patient dignity, and improve equity of access (Odero et al., 2024). In the metaphor of the oracle, relational personhood reframes AI's role. African oracles are not traditional and therefore end up giving impersonal, detached information. Instead, they are incorporated into collective practices, interpersonal trust, and collective accountability. The diviner owes responsibility to the community and the spiritual powers so as to make the oracle beneficial to the entire community. On the same note, AI systems should become the object of communal control instead of being entrusted to corporations or states individually. It will involve participatory forms of governance, in which local communities, religious figures and the custodians of a particular culture would be involved in designing, interpreting and implementing AI.

In addition, relational accountability means that damages inflicted by AI cannot be treated as a technical incident. In case AI lies, discriminates, and demeans dignity, it is not the machine that should be held responsible but the people who created it, trained it, and implemented it. Philosophies of Africa, which approach accountability as relational and shared, teach us that ethical responsibility in AI should be applied throughout the socio-technical system, that is, the data gathering as well as implementation. Thus, positioning AI as an African digital oracle does not put AI on a high pedestal, but situates it within the context of relational ethics. It has a value based upon its ability to strengthen community, guard the vulnerable, and add to justice. In this respect, AI turns into a less mystical oracle and more of a

common servant whose authority stems out of its responsibility to the population with whom it is to be used.

Spiritual Discernment and Moral Limits

Theological considerations warn that AI is not a source of wisdom that should be considered final. In African Christian thought, divine revelation, scripture, and communal discernment occupy the place of final authority. The claim that AI is a digital oracle is unqualified invites assigning to the latter a spiritual or metaphysical quality that it simply does not have. African religious practices, nevertheless, present a subtler means to put the discussion into a frame. Other systems like Ifá are not machine predictors but a hermeneutic. The diviner does not merely read fate but he interprets stories that offer moral and spiritual guidelines of decision-making (Bascom, 1969). Oracles do not, in this sense, ever substitute human judgement, but only ease it. In comparison, AI can be used to deliver information-based conclusions, yet it cannot take the responsibility of making ethical decisions. The African Christian theology supports this argument by highlighting the discernment of the spirit. Wisdom cannot be reduced to information or predictive power, and it is instead a matter of prayer, moral thinking, and instruction of the Holy Spirit (Awasthi & Achar, 2025).

AI can recommend medical-related diagnoses, economic predictions or political analyses, yet the communities should determine whether the results fit their values, morals, and religious beliefs. Outsourcing moral agency to machines would be a risk of idolatry that is to give power to God to some machine created by human beings. Moreover, ethical boundaries have to be recognized. AI is able to process patterns, but has no ability to understand transcendent realities like divine grace, forgiveness, or ultimate purpose. Whereas Ifa connects the human and the spiritual world with the help of diviners, AI does not have such transcendental background. So it should be metaphoric rather than ontological to call it an oracle.

This, in practice, implies that AI must be placed as a means of discernment, as opposed to its replacement. As an example, a pastor can utilize AI-assisted text analysis to make up sermons, but has to still interpret scripture via prayer and through theological reflection. A community can apply AI to climate forecasting but still has to make an ethical decision on how the poor can be accommodated and the creation saved. African theology thus demands a priority of wisdom: AI gives instrumental knowledge; human communities give ethical reflection; divine revelation gives final guidance. It is to misjudge both theology and technology to bring these levels down. AI as an oracle of the digital age can then only be valid as long as it is subjected to spiritual judgment and ethical accountability.

Decolonial Governance and Ethical Frameworks

The last theme is the control of AI. When AI is not critically evaluated, it leads to the strengthening of digital colonialism tendencies by treating the concept

as an oracle, in which African societies will be passive consumers of the technologies developed and operated elsewhere (Mhlambi, 2021, 2024). Similarly, to how colonial powers once controlled the religious power and oracular customs, the global corporations could be threatened with the same monopolization of the interpretive power of AI. It is challenged by African theological and philosophical tradition which formulates self-determination, justice and inclusiveness. The decolonial lens believes that Africa should not merely adopt AI but also domesticate and indigenise it- integrate it into local language, cultural lifestyles and morality. As an example, incorporating the principles of Ubuntu into the governance of AI may make sure that algorithms are focused on the communal well-being, fairness, and inclusivity, instead of profit maximization per se.

International bodies like UNESCO in the Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021) and the African Union in the Continental AI Strategy (2024) have some valuable beginnings (African Union, 2024; UNSECO, 2024). They need transparency, accountability, and justice in Artificial Intelligence creation. Nevertheless, these frameworks should be placed in the African realities context. As an example, information considered to train AI frequently lacks African populations and induces biases and errors. The absence of decolonial governance will lead to the alienation of AI as an external oracle speaking foreign languages to strengthen the dependency process instead of empowerment. From a theological lens, decolonial governance aligns with the biblical call to justice and stewardship. AI must be used to the disadvantaged, to give a voice to the silenced, and to guard the creation against exploitation. It philosophically echoes those African traditions that oppose domination, believe in reciprocity, dignity and collective responsibility.

This vision requires practical measures to be attained. These involve the establishment of local AI research centres, educating African ethicists and theologians to be AI literate, and having communities be involved in the policy making process. In addition, partnerships should be collaborative, not predatory, and the African societies, not only deployment but design and regulation as well. Within this framework, AI is no longer a strange, unfamiliar oracle, but a situational tool of social empowerment. Its power rests not on the non-transparency and corporate monopoly but on transparency, cultural assimilation, and moral responsibility. In such a way, the theme of decolonization reminds us that Africa is not only obliged to read the oracle but to be its co-author. It is only in that case that AI could be a digital oracle of justice, flourish, and divine alignment in the African context.

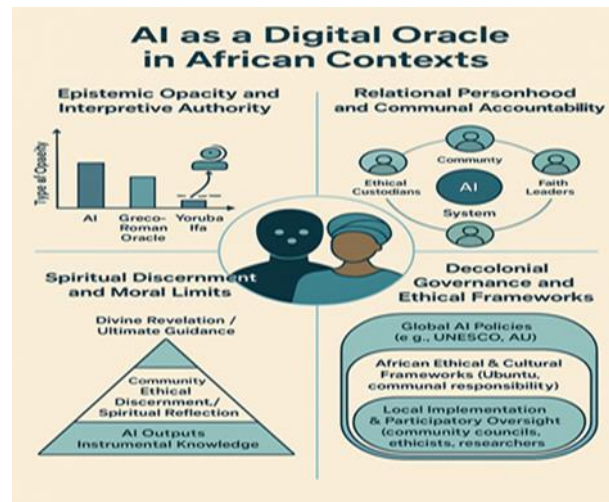


Figure 1 AI as a Digital Oracle

Source: Author's Analysis

The foregoing analysis shows that the “oracular” function of AI is not intrinsic, but socially and ethically constructed. AI's outputs only gain meaning and authority when placed in interpretive contexts based on communal and ethical and theological values, across the four themes - epistemic opacity, relational personhood, spiritual discernment and decolonial governance.

Epistemic opacity makes human mediation all the more important. Unlike traditional African oracles whose symbolic authority is embedded into communal and spiritual frameworks, AI's statistical outputs run the risk of accreting an aura of absoluteness if left unmediated. These are needed to translate probabilistic insights generated by AI into morally and culturally meaningful advice, and will constitute interpretive communities that include theologians, ethicists, data scientists, and community leaders. Relational personhood stresses that AI is not autonomous but a socio-technical tool whose legitimacy can be only derived through a communal responsibility. Drawing on Ubuntu and Ogoni philosophies, the study reveals that AI developers have a responsibility that goes beyond their work to the community. Participatory governance ensures that AI is used to collective flourishing, dignity, and justice as opposed to reproducing technocratic or extractive power structures. AI's instrumental role is underlined by its potential to provide moral guidance and set boundaries on human behaviour. African divinatory systems like Ifa bring human and spiritual realities into contact with each other by offering interpretive categories rather than replacing human moral agency.

Additionally, AI needs to be subject to human moral deliberation and theological wisdom so that it is used as an aid for contextualized moral decision making, not a substitute for Godly wisdom or judgment. Incorporating AI in decentralized ethical, cultural and policy frameworks, decolonial governance opposes trends of epistemic dependency and technological colonizing. Ubuntu ethics, inclusive policy-making, and capacity-building for AI within local contexts

ensure that AI is used for empowerment and justice in culturally relevant development outcomes. Taken together, these lenses show that AI's role as digital oracle is metaphorical rather than metaphysical. Its authority is contingent, emergent, relational, based on interpretive communities, based on considerations of ethics, and locally entrenched governance structures. African philosophical and theological resources are an invaluable guide to ensuring that AI is used in ways that promote communal well-being, moral responsibility, and justice.

CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence is usually described as an oracle because of its ability to generate seemingly authoritative, predictive or insightful outputs. However, this study shows that such metaphors need careful contextualisation with African theological and philosophical traditions. Whereas the interpretive authority of Orisa Ifa is mediated, collective, and morally responsible, AI is not knowingly, morally agentive, or spiritually profound in any meaningful way. The lack of interpretability of AI underlines the need of interpretive mediation. Outputs are not to be taken as absolute truths but are to be incorporated into communal, ethical and theological frameworks. Relational personhood, based on Ubuntu and Ogoni philosophies, recasts AI as a socio-technical tool whose value comes from its contribution towards collective flourishing, dignity, and social justice. AI hence has to be accountable to its developers but also to the communities it serves. The instrumental position of AI is best supported by theological reflection. AI can give us probabilistic foresight, but moral and spiritual wisdom remains the province of human discernment guided by divine wisdom.

African Christian theology and divinatory traditions demonstrate that oracular authority is a mediated domain of authority, which is oriented towards human agency rather than displacing it. Decolonial criticism also helps to clarify the need for Africa-cantered governance. Without an intentional integration of local ethics, languages and cultural norms, AI is in danger of duplicating colonial forms of epistemic dependency and digital marginalization. Policy documents like UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021) and the African Union's Continental AI Strategy (2024) offer crucial starting points but need to be embedded in theological, philosophical and communal contexts to ensure justice, transparency and inclusivity. In a final word, AI can serve as a digital oracle in both a metaphorical and instrumental sense, providing probabilistic guidance and yet remaining subordinate to human, ethical and spiritual controls. Its legitimacy is subject to interpretive communities, relational accountability, ethical discernment, and de-colonial governance. African theological and philosophical traditions offer the conceptual and practical resources needed to domesticate AI to ensure that it becomes a contextually relevant, morally responsible, and socially empowering technology instead of an unthinkable or unquestioned authority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study also emphasizes the importance of governance of AI integration into African societies, where digital oracles should be led by theological, philosophical, and ethical considerations, ensuring they operate in ways that reflect the community's values, justice, and spiritual discernment. Firstly, AI development and deployment must be based on African epistemologies and moralities. Inspired by Ubuntu and Ogoni philosophies, AI applications are required to centre communal wellbeing, relational accountability and equity over individualistic or profit-driven imperatives. Policymakers should formalize participatory processes in which communities co-design, test, and monitor AI systems, thereby building interpretive legitimacy and social accountability into these systems.

Second, theological schools and church leaders have an important role to play in building AI literacy and ethical awareness. Clergymen, teachers, and community leaders must be able to critically interpret AI outputs so that they are not uncritically trusting probabilistic predictions. AI is a tool, not a substitute, for spiritual wisdom, ethical decision-making and communal discernment (Awasthi & Achar, 2025). Increased use of artificial intelligence (AI) in social work will require education programs to incorporate AI ethics with theological education to ensure digital technologies are aiding rather than destroying moral agency (Akbar et al., 2025; By & Ros, 2024).

Thirdly, decolonial principles should be adopted by the governance frameworks. Normative guidance on transparency, accountability and human-centred design is provided by the African Union's Continental AI Strategy (2024) and the UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021), however these must be operationalised in African contexts. This includes having inclusive datasets, local capacity-building of AI, localization in languages, and fair partnerships between African institutions and the global technology developers. These initiatives help Africa avoid reliance on foreign AI systems and establish technology sovereignty in the continent.

Fourthly, technologists and developers are encouraged to build ethical transparency, interpretability and community oversight into AI models. Africa needs research platforms that connect universities, governments and civil society to responsibly develop AI research that encourages innovations that respect Africa's social, cultural and spiritual priorities. Civil society organizations can serve as intermediary organizations between technical designers and communities, making sure that artificial intelligence use in health, education, governance, and other sectors is sensitive to culture and socially just.

Finally, AI must be treated as a socio-technical tool for collective power, not a mystic. Its legitimacy is premised on the practice of interpretive accountability, moral self-reflection, spiritual discernment, and decolonial governance. Responding to these principles, AI can shift from being a foreign and opaque system

to a contextualized, trustworthy tool that increases the flourishing, justice and epistemic sovereignty of African communities.

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