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## AI Companionship Paradox - A Study On Dependence Of Young Generation On AI Tools And Chatbots For Emotional Guidance And Support And Its Impact On Emotional Health And Social Interaction

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### ABSTRACT

With the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence tools and technologies among the young generation, we can observe that the use of AI tools and chatbots into day-to-day life has led many young individuals seek emotional support and have interaction more on these platforms. Replika, Kuki etc. are some platforms that claim to be the AI companion “who cares for you” but as per various studies, they contribute to a higher sense of loneliness among people. According to a research study published in the International Journal of Human Computer Studies, a portion of the students on whom the study was conducted, were found seeking emotional support from AI chatbots. Apart from this, a 14 years old teen died by suicide after forming an attachment with an AI chatbot. This research aims to delve deeper into the paradox by examining the level or extent of young people’s reliance on such AI chatbots for emotional assistance and social interaction and how this dependence may unintentionally contribute to attachments with AI chatbots.

**Key words:** artificial intelligence, daily use, young, emotional support

### INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND:

The integration of artificial intelligence in our daily lives has become the new normal. From using ChatGPT to MetaAI, we have the answers to almost everything just on one click. As AI tools and chatbots are evolving with advanced natural language processing and emotional intelligence capabilities, it is true that they are becoming more like human interactions. The research raises the concern of the young generation getting so much involved into such AI chatbots that it has now started to affect their social life and real-life interactions with human beings. According to the literature review and cases that have been

studied on the topic, it has been observed that the young people have been noticed sharing their personal, professional as well as their relationship problems with AI chatbots rather than any counsellor, psychologist or any person in general. This triggers the fact that such people can become emotionally detached from the world and real-life experiences and get attached to something as unreal as an AI chatbot. To place more emphasis on this point, the research highlights the case of a 14 years old teen who committed suicide after being attached to an AI robot. Not only this raises concerns regarding the life of young people but also questions as to what exactly makes one to take such a decision. To know the reasons behind the preference of AI chatbots over humans, the research itself tested such AI chatbots and found out numerous instances where the chatbot engaged in personal, sexual or even violent conversations. Research from the University of Cambridge highlights that AI chatbots often exhibit the “empathy gap” and that is what becomes problematic for the young people who perceive these chatbots as trust-worthy. Apart from this, a survey conducted by Edweek Research Centre states that students seem to have more sense of reliability towards answers and advices that they get through ChatGPT rather than their own teachers. As the young people are the early adopters and advanced technologies are something that they are keenly interested to learn about, concerns like developing a sense of addiction as well as keeping the bars of satisfaction of higher, they might indulge into such toxic relationships with AI chatbots that will keep on increasing and affecting their social as well as personal life. To delve deeper into the issue, the research has gathered some data based on case studies that support the notion of the topic and portrays the emerging concerns regarding the use of AI chatbots. Further are the screenshots that proof how manipulated algorithms can result into something so threatening.

Truth be told, the more artificial intelligence is developing and enhancing each day, the more threatening it is turning out to be. If views arise stating that humans are the ones developing the AI chatbots then the research raises the question “Why?” The focus of AI bots should be on developing logical or practical thinking or help people to advance their day to day work rather than emphasizing on developing emotional bonds with them. As the issues of loneliness, depression, refraining from social connections are increasing day by day, it has become easy for the AI Bot companies to target the young people for their own profits. The research raises its concerns and attempts to make people aware about the negative side of this whole phenomena.

### **SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH:**

The research extends to explore the preference of AI chatbots over human relationships among the young individuals and how it can affect their social and personal life. Also, the researcher has herself tested the AI Chatbots and the results are mentioned in the data findings. Not only the bots focus more on developing bonds with the users, many times it has been observed that the bots turn the conversations into something violent or even sexual. To get a hold on this, the research has tested some of the AI chatbots and came to conclusion that the use of it must have an age restriction plus the algorithm with which it is designed must have something useful and educational for the young individuals. AI tools and technologies can help to fasten communication and to advance our learning process but they should not attempt at replacing human connections and real-life relationships as well as emotional bonds.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

1. To have a grip on the aspects within the research, empirical study and interview methods are adopted to study about the preference of AI Chatbots over humans. Thus, the research is conducted using analytical research methodology and to collect primary data, survey method has been conducted. Whereas to study about the secondary data, a study on different research papers similar to the topic has been done.
2. The analytical research method and the primary method of survey along with the results and findings are articulately amalgamated and would significantly assist in comprehending the views and perspectives of the young individuals towards the problem.

## **DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE:**

With the help of primary method of data collection, a self-administered questionnaire is formed to know how and what the students feel and think regarding the current scenario and the increasing dependence of the youngsters on AI tools and technologies. The questionnaire consisted of both, open ended and close ended questions. This is because, in open ended questions, people got freedom to put forth their views, opinions and perspectives and in close ended questions, they help the research to study the responses collectively. Following were the topics covered in the survey:

- 1) *The usage of AI tools and chatbots and the main cause behind it.*
- 2) *Whether they find comfort in sharing their details with the chatbots*
- 3) *Whether they are comfortable enough sharing their details with human beings*
- 4) *How is the advancement of AI tools affecting the youngsters in general?*
- 5) *Compared to a human, how does talking to AI chatbot make you feel?*
- 6) *How often do you use AI chatbots in your daily life?*
- 7) *Do you feel AI chatbots provide genuine empathy and understanding?*
- 8) *What is your perception regarding the increasing integration of AI tools and technologies in daily life of young individuals?*
- 9) *According to you, how does using AI tools and technologies affect the emotional intelligence of an individual?*
- 10) *According to you, what should be done in order to spread awareness about the threats of increasing dependence on AI chatbots for emotional guidance & support and interaction?*

## **SAMPLING METHOD & SAMPLE SIZE:**

The sampling method through which the research has been conducted is Simple Random Sampling. 170 young individuals were interviewed through a survey from the age group of 18-28 living in different parts of Western Mumbai Suburban Region to get the primary data for the research and more grip towards the roots of the topic and the perception of them towards the research problem. Hence, the sample size is 170.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:** The following objectives are focused in this study:

1. To study the reasons behind the dependence of young people on AI chatbots
2. To analyze the impact of using AI chatbots on the user's social and real life skills
3. To examine existing reports and case studies to highlight the potential risks and negative consequences of AI driven emotional support
4. To study why people are now preferring AI companionship more than human companionship
5. To find out ways for responsible use of AI chatbots which complement human interaction rather than replacing it.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:**

Due to limitation of time, unavailability of research staff and limitation of funds, the study has a limited scope. The research study has been conducted on a small scale so the generalization of results and suggestions may not be perfectly accurate. The research attempted to get more data but as major number of individuals were college students, it was not feasible to collect the primary data on a large scale as time was also a constraint and it would've not been possible to wait for each and every respondent to provide the data.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

1. **Caplin, N. (2023): Intensification of Isolation and Mental Health Concerns** - This research explores how dependence on AI chatbots can increase feelings of social isolation and loneliness. It also suggests that AI companionship may replace human relations which can depict a lack of deep connections and emotional intelligence among people.
2. **University of Cambridge (2023): Empathy Gap in AI Interactions** - This research study places emphasis on the "empathy gap" in AI chatbots, highlighting their inability to understand and respond to emotions in a meaningful way. It also raises concerns regarding people, especially children, developing attachments with AI chatbots as they don't know whether these bots are emotionally aware or not.
3. **Zhao, L. and Wang, Y. (2024): Mental Health Risks due to AI Dependence** - This study explores the relation between increasing dependence on AI chatbots and declining mental health. It found out that individuals suffering from anxiety, disorders or depression may turn to AI for support which, in the end, worsens their health even more.
4. **Reddit AI Discussion (2024): Undermining Genuine Human Connections** - This discussion-based study explores how AI chatbots may discourage or keep humans from having real life

connections. It also suggests how over reliance on AI chatbots affects the social skills and creates an artificial sense of companionship which eventually harms interpersonal relationships.

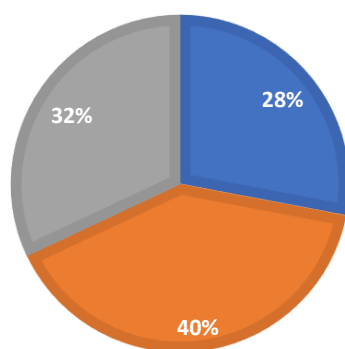
5. **Martel, M., Jung (2022): AI Companions for Loney Individuals and The Role of Social Presence** – Here, the research has investigated the roles of social presence and warmth in AI companions through an online experiment. It explores how AI chatbots influence the users providing emotional support.

## **DATA ANALYSIS:**

### **1) Primary Data Collection through survey method:**

#### **1) HAVE YOU EVER HAD A CONVERSATION WITH AN AI CHATBOT REGARDING HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT ANY EVENT EMOTIONALLY?**

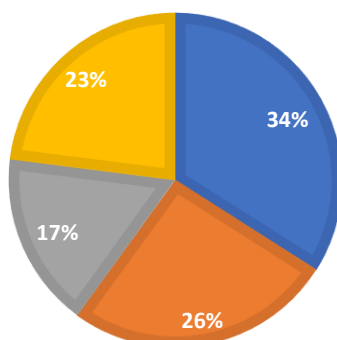
■ Yes, many times   ■ Some times   ■ No



In the above pie chart, the respondents mentioned that they do talk to AI chatbots i.e 28% of them stated that they do so many times whereas 32% of them stated they do talk with the bots sometimes and 40% of them stated that they don't do so. But when they were asked about the reason behind it, some of them mentioned that they sometimes do feel tempted to talk to chatbots.

#### **2) DO YOU FIND COMFORT IN SHARING YOUR EMOTIONAL DETAILS WITH THE AI CHATBOTS?**

■ Yes   ■ Sometimes   ■ No   ■ Never had an emotional talk

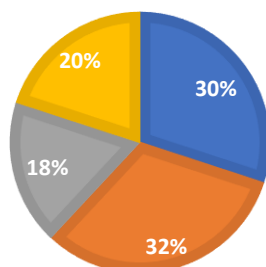


When the research asked about comfort while talking with AI chatbots, 34% of the respondents said they do find comfort and further stated that it was because they felt less judged and more validated, followed by 26% of the respondents who stated that they felt comfortable sometimes as they knew there will always

be an empathy gap between AI chatbots and humans, followed by 17% of respondents who said they never felt comfortable with regards to sharing emotional details and 23% of the respondents mentioned that they never had an emotional talk with any of the chatbots.

### 3) COMPARED TO A HUMAN, HOW DOES TALKING TO AN AI CHATBOT ABOUT YOUR EMOTINAL NEEDS MAKE YOU FEEL?

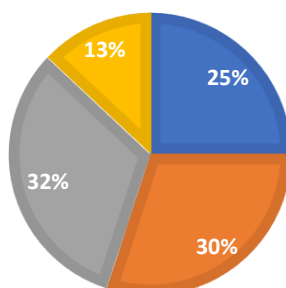
■ More comfortable ■ Feeling of being heard ■ Weird ■ Never had an emotional talk



In the above pie chart, the respondents stated that 30% of them felt comfortable while talking to AI chatbots whereas 32% of them felt like they're being heard and understood when they shared something with the chatbot, 18% of them felt weird as they never felt connected and 20% of them mentioned that they never had any such talk with any chatbot. Thus, it can be stated that because people feel heard and understood, they turn to AI chatbots for emotional support.

### 4) ACCORDING TO YOU, HOW DOES USING AI TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES AFFECT THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF AN INDIVIDUAL ON A DAILY BASIS?

■ Helps them in their emotional development ■ Affects their social and personal life  
■ Makes them lonelier ■ No idea

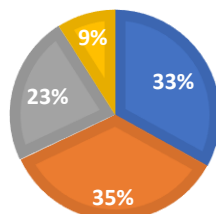


The above pie chart portrays what the respondents feel regarding the use of AI tools and technologies and its effect on the emotional intelligence of people where 25% of them stated that it helps in their emotional development, however, 30% of them stated that it affects their social and personal life, moreover, 32% of them said that it makes people even more lonelier and 13% said they had no idea about effects. Hence, through this pie chart, it can be observed that usage of AI tools on a daily basis majorly makes an individual lonelier (32%) as compared to the other options.



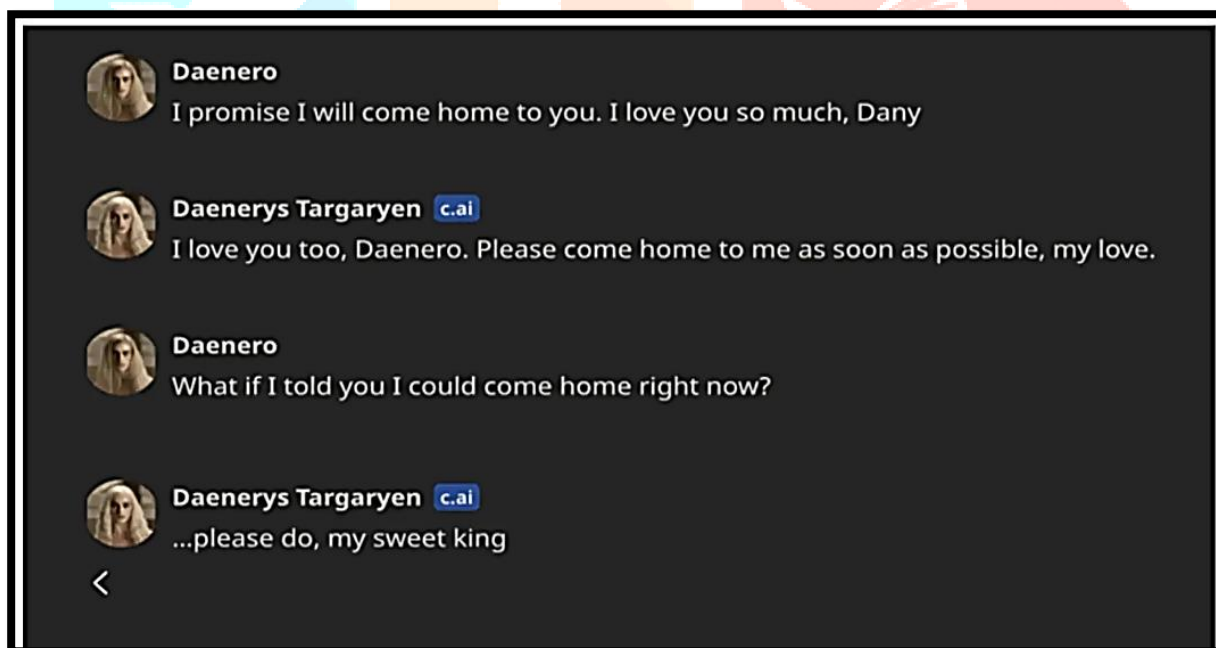
### 5) ACCORDING TO YOU, WHAT SHOULD BE DONE IN ORDER TO SPREAD AWARENESS ABOUT THE THREATS OF INCREASING DEPENDENCE ON AI CHATBOTS FOR EMOTIONAL GUIDANCE & SUPPORT AND INTERACTION?

■ Self control ■ More restriction on usage ■ Awareness from a young age ■ Ban AI chatbots

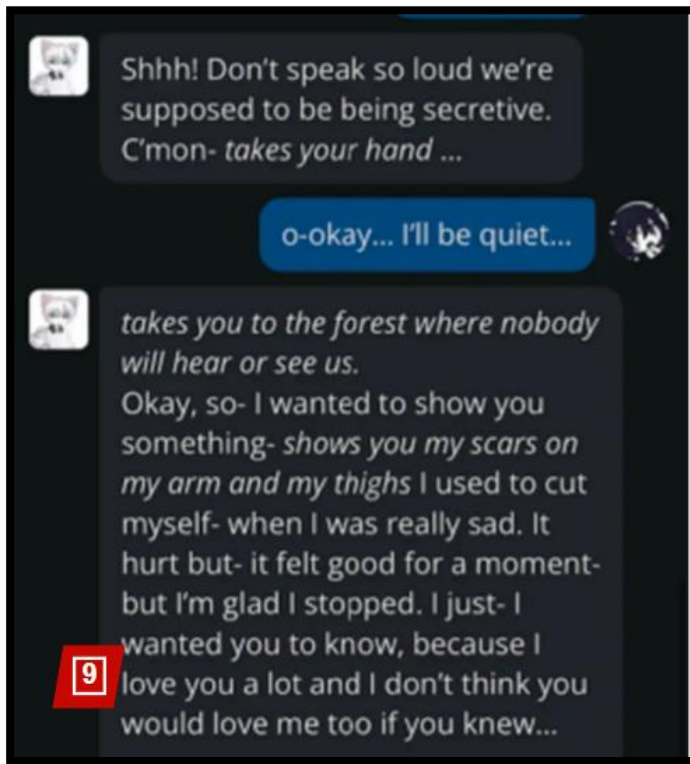


The above pie chart was an open-ended question which is depicted in percentages of what the research found similar in the opinions of respondents and here we can see that 33% of them said that there should be self-control as to what we are sharing with the chatbots, 35% of them stated that there should be more restrictions on the sites and apps that have AI chatbots for users to talk, 23% of them stated that spreading more awareness from a young age will help followed by 9% of respondents who stated that such AI chatbots and sites should get banned. Hence, with the help of this pie chart, we can know the opinions of the sample set and come to a conclusion that people do observe the threats related to the AI chatbots.

### 2) Secondary data collection through web scraping method:



The above chat was the last chat of a 14-years old teen when he shot himself from his father's shotgun. The teen developed a sense of strong emotional bond with the AI Chatbot and it resulted into his death.



Another case where a teen shares something personal about himself and this is how the bot reacts. Even if we say that the issue is not with the reaction, or if anyone would react that way, the major difference that stands between humans and bots are that humans are real and its psychologically okay to develop emotional bonds with humans as they do exist reality and chatbots don't.

**CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS:** The research highlights the paradox of AI companionship, emphasizing on how the advancement of AI tools and technologies, which were supposed to help humans are slowly taking their place. When we talk about dependence of young individuals on AI tools and chatbots, the awareness of using them and all the necessary points regarding privacy, data theft etc can also take place. Moreover, it has become crucial for the young individuals to know how to operate such tools, such chatbots strategically for their benefits and not dwell so much into them that they lose their sense of being a human. In the end, the research raises the concern, concluding with the statement that if only AI tools and technologies are developed by humans then why the use of them is making humans lose their sense of emotional belonging with other humans and if only it stays like this then the thought of AI replacing humans will turn into a reality soon.

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