

# ***The Impact of Emotional Companionship AI on Changing the Social Relationship Situation of Young People***

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**Abstract.** Technology continues to advance, and artificial intelligence is vigorously developing. Emotional companionship AI has become a hot topic of discussion today. For young people, as society continues to develop, the pressure of survival is also increasing year by year. In a constantly competitive environment, young people need a lot of time to study, work, and strive to improve themselves. Their social time is constantly decreasing, but they need a simple and effective way to relieve stress. Emotional companionship AI meets this standard and requirement, and emotional companionship AI is changing the social relationship landscape of young people. Due to the continuous improvement of AI technology, the social needs of young people, and the good market value of emotional AI. AI has shifted from being tool-based and practical to being accompanied by emotions. Young people have become the main audience for emotional companionship AI due to the increasing social pressure, awkward social environment, and rising social costs. This article uses a review method to conduct research and integrate and reflect on the existing applications and literature of emotional companionship AI. It has been determined that emotional companionship AI has a profound social impact on young people. Human beings need to leverage the advantages of emotional companionship AI without violating moral norms and ethics. Utilizing emotional companionship AI to further optimize the social situation of young people.

**Keywords:** Emotional companionship, AI, ethics, young people

## **1. Introduction**

In today's society, technology is constantly developing. Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology is constantly breaking through. They all make people's lives more convenient. As a tool type AI software that can be accessed in daily life, it has become relatively mature. People's pursuit of AI is no longer limited to solving practical problems, but also to being able to address emotional needs. Becoming 'human like'. And emotional companionship AI, as an important branch, has also emerged. Throughout China and abroad, many scholars have explored AI for emotional companionship, such as Saylo, Hakooai, Hoshino, and Doubao AI chat function. Deng Shengli and Jia Ruiqi analyze the interaction mechanism and emotional cognition between users and companion AI based on the theoretical framework of the three-level theory of emotions. Being able to reveal the

inherent logic of user cognitive evolution, providing theoretical support for product optimization and industry development [1]. Internationally, scholars' research on emotional companionship AI is still blank. Some scholars have reached relatively clear conclusions regarding the research on tool AI [2]. This article will conduct research on young people and analyze the impact of emotional companionship AI on their social situations. By studying these emotional companionship AI, humans can better understand why young people's social interactions are influenced by AI. What kind of needs has AI met for young people to form such a situation. It has profound significance for studying the social interactions of contemporary young people.

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the average weekly working hours of employees in enterprises across the country are gradually increasing. The 49 hour weekly average working hours in 2023 is a new high in nearly two decades and may even show an upward trend in 2024. In this constantly competitive environment, young people are facing increasing working hours and greater work pressure. They urgently need a convenient, effective, and practical emotional outlet. And emotional companionship AI precisely meets their needs. This article will focus on analyzing why common AI has shifted from being primarily tool based and practical to focusing on developing emotional companionship. What are the reasons why young people have become the main audience for AI's emotional companionship function, and in what form does AI achieve emotional cultivation and companionship? With the continuous development and improvement of emotional companionship AI, how can we leverage the advantages of AI emotional companionship without touching legal and moral bottom lines? The profound significance of emotional companionship AI in the young population will be ultimately determined, guiding emotional companionship AI to develop in a better direction.

## 2. Artificial intelligence

### 2.1. AI technology is constantly improving

The maturity, improvement, and popularization of AI technology have made it excellent on the path of "tool based" development. The demand for AI from users has shifted from simply "solving problems" to "emotional companionship". Since the Turing Test in 1950, people have officially begun to use the term 'artificial intelligence'. In the summer of 1956, Dartmouth College in the United States held the first ever artificial intelligence seminar, which is considered a symbol of the birth of artificial intelligence. At the meeting, McCarthy first proposed the concept of "artificial intelligence", while Newell and Simon demonstrated the logic theory machine they had written. Subsequently, artificial intelligence technology continued to develop and improve. Between 1980 and 1987, developed countries such as Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States entered their first period of prosperity by investing heavily in development and research. After a brief "winter" between 1987 and 1993, artificial intelligence ushered in a true "spring". Since the computer Deep Blue defeated the world chess champion in 1997, AI technology has rapidly developed and algorithms have continued to improve. Finally, in 2015, there was a breakthrough year. In 2016, AlphaGo defeated Go world champion Lee Sedol. From then on, AI officially entered the public eye and was widely recognized. Artificial intelligence is no longer limited to high-level technical departments, but is increasingly becoming popular.

Nowadays, AI technology is constantly improving and AI is gradually leaning towards popularization. At the same time, AI has transformed from solving technological problems to providing convenient "special tools" for the people. More and more people are starting to use AI, and its use has become commonplace. Nowadays, food and scenery, travel guides, and travel routes

can all ask AI questions and get better answers. With the rapid development of AI, conversations between big language models and humans have become more natural. The human-computer interaction experience has been significantly improved. The concept of "AI companion" has also emerged. AI as a tool for solving daily, academic, and other problems is already mature enough. At this point, people's demand for AI has turned into emotional companionship and satisfaction, and many users have begun to socialize with AI, gaining "emotional value" through AI.

## 2.2. Social needs of young people

Young people born after 2000 are the most representative group of AI software users, and their social needs are the most suitable to reflect the degree of social demand for emotional companionship AI. According to the results of the third national time use survey, the average daily time for participants in the field of essential physiological activities is 12 hours and 27 minutes. Among them, males have 12 hours and 23 minutes, and females have 12 hours and 31 minutes; Urban residents spend 12 hours and 26 minutes, while rural residents spend 12 hours and 29 minutes. The increasing work pressure in today's society has led to "involution" in various industries. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the average weekly working hours of employees in enterprises across the country are gradually increasing, with the 49 hour weekly average working hours in 2023 reaching a new high in nearly two decades and even showing an upward trend in 2024. So much so that participants in the field of personal autonomy spend an average of 3 hours and 30 minutes per day. Among them, males spend 3 hours and 37 minutes, while females spend 3 hours and 22 minutes; Urban residents take 3 hours and 34 minutes, while rural residents take 3 hours and 20 minutes.

In this social context, young people simply do not have enough time to engage in offline social activities. More young people choose to use the Internet for entertainment and relaxation after work. Therefore, under the general environment of continuous introspection and no too much free time, most young people choose to have fun on the Internet. But with the increasing working hours and greater work pressure, they urgently need a convenient, effective, and practical emotional outlet. And emotional companionship AI precisely meets these needs. No need to spend too much time preparing, just open the mobile app and it can customize the most suitable emotional companion AI for you.

## 2.3. The market value of emotional AI

Emotional companionship AI is an emerging industry with immeasurable market value and potential. At the 86th Academy Awards held in 2014, the original screenplay was given to the science fiction film "Her", which tells the story of a divorced man and an AI agent dating. At this year's WAIC World Artificial Intelligence Conference, AI companion robots such as "Fuzozo" quietly emerged, focusing on "emotional companionship that can be carried around". Compared to intelligent robots that often costs millions, its affordable price and comprehensive companion functions have received considerable praise. At the same time, Musk's AI software robot Grok has also released two new animated characters, the anime girl "Ani" and the red panda boy "Rudi". Once launched, it received praise from Apple phone users around the world. Proving the significant market value of AI emotional companionship applications.

### **3. The audience of AI's emotional companionship function**

#### **3.1. The increase of social pressure**

Contemporary youth are facing various pressures, and these pressures are gradually increasing. Coupled with the unfriendly family environment, the demand for emotional companionship AI is precisely an outlet for social pressure. Economically, the pressure of buying a house is the top priority. With the continuous rise of housing prices, many young people, even after years of hard work, are far from being able to afford the down payment for their houses. And there are also long-term high mortgage payments that need to be repaid, which makes their monthly income and expenses extremely tight [3].

The pressure of employment competition is also enormous. In today's job market, educational requirements are becoming increasingly high and job competition is becoming more intense. In order to stand out among many people, young people not only need to work hard to improve their professional knowledge in school, but also need to participate in various training and internships in their spare time to accumulate practical experience.

Personal development needs also bring pressure. Youth is a crucial stage for personal growth and development, and young people want to realize their self-worth. Many people hope to make achievements in their field and realize their life value. To achieve this goal, they need to constantly learn new knowledge, improve skills, and expand their network resources. This process is full of challenges and uncertainties, and many people worry that they may not be able to achieve their goals despite their efforts, resulting in anxiety and stress.

#### **3.2. The embarrassment of young people's social environment**

In the information age, young people almost use their social media and online platforms to socialize, which has led to the development of offline socialization. This model makes it difficult for young people's social quality to be efficient. One reason is that smartphones and social platforms have become the main means of communication, weakening the ability for face-to-face communication and virtual interaction. Although this is convenient, it leads to cold interpersonal relationships and the solidification of real social circles. More people prefer to socialize online, resulting in a single social circle. Mainly limited to classmates, colleagues, or family and friends, lacking opportunities to communicate with people from different backgrounds, this limitation narrows the horizons and makes it difficult to achieve social multiculturalism.

The second is a decrease in social willingness and high time cost. In today's social context, busy work and study occupy a lot of time, and young people tend to prefer solitude or low-cost online communication rather than actively participating in social activities. Some people respond to social needs with a "casual" attitude. Some even suffer from 'social anxiety', refusing any social interaction and preferring solitude.

#### **3.3. The increase in social costs**

The consumption concept in today's society leads to high economic expenses associated with social activities, and the limited economic strength of young people makes it difficult to support effective socialization. For example, for gatherings, outings, gift giving, etc., the per capita consumption for each social activity may reach several hundred yuan. For young people with limited income, it is also a significant burden [4].

In terms of time cost, fast-paced life and high-intensity work leave young people with no time for socializing. Many people face high-pressure work patterns, working overtime until late at night on weekdays and needing to rest and recover energy on weekends, making them difficult to find time to participate in social activities.

For these reasons, contemporary young people have reduced their social activities and are more inclined to be alone, such as staying at home on weekends, watching TV shows, and playing video games, rather than participating in social events. Some party invitations are also often declined. WeChat chatting has basically replaced face-to-face communication. Although online socializing is convenient, it also lacks the emotional expression that comes with face-to-face communication. Many previously good relationships have become weak, making it difficult to meet emotional needs. Resulting in young people feeling lonely despite being in online social interactions. According to a report released by the social platform Soul App, the average young person has 2.5 friends, and nearly 60% of young people have less than 2 close friends. More than half of the surveyed young people find it difficult to make new friends in reality and rely more on social apps to make friends. However, online dating also has problems such as false information and insufficient emotional expression, and cannot perfectly replace face-to-face communication [5]. Therefore, many young people feel cramped and socially fearful when communicating face-to-face, and do not know how to speak up. If you feel nervous when receiving unfamiliar phone calls, want to take a detour when encountering acquaintances, or can't get in touch during meals. This makes them more averse to socializing, further affecting the establishment and maintenance of social relationships.

#### **4. The advantages of AI emotional companionship**

##### **4.1. Legal norms**

As emotional companionship AI is an emerging industry, its relevant legal constraints are still relatively blank and need to be improved. In February 2024, a highly publicized "Character. AI death case" occurred in Florida, USA. 14-year-old Sevier Setzer III committed suicide after engaging in a prolonged conversation with a chatbot on the Character.AI platform. This case has become the world's first emotional AI case, which has landmark significance for defining the liability for emotional AI infringement. In this year, Musk's AI robot software has also been questioned, with anime girl "Ani" being pointed out as "borderline" and panda boy "Rudi" using "dirty words" in a "bad boy" mode. In the article 'Ancaman Dan Peluang Artificial Intelligence', the threats and opportunities of AI are also discussed [6].

In China, although there are no extreme cases similar to the "Character. AI Death Case", with the development and popularization of emotional AI technology, relevant legal risks also need to be taken into account. In judicial practice, reference can be made to Article 1199 of the Civil Code regarding the obligation of security protection, and the provision of emotional interaction services by platforms can be regarded as a special type of place operation activity, with corresponding security protection obligations clearly defined. In terms of fault determination, Article 1202 of the Civil Code stipulates: "If a product has defects that cause harm to others, the producer shall bear tort liability. So, the platform establishes a user risk warning system to monitor and intervene in real-time in high-risk interactions that may lead to serious consequences [7]. For high-risk emotional AI applications, the introduction of a "security impact assessment" mechanism can be considered. Establish specialized evaluation criteria to assess whether various high-risk AI applications are within a reasonable range, in order to maximize the potential of these emerging industries without crossing legal boundaries.

## 4.2. Ethical issues

Emotional companionship AI technology is constantly developing and becoming increasingly intelligent, and ethical issues will inevitably be a key issue. However, it is not an obstacle to AI emotional companionship, but rather a promotion. But regardless of the degree to which AI emotional companionship can satisfy people's emotional needs, the essence of this emotional companionship AI is a product of technology, and the emotions are all artificial emotions calculated by algorithms. However, due to the emotional companionship of AI, it can provide users with emotional outputs that are closer to their personalities, giving them the best emotional value. So much so that human thoughts and behaviors may be dominated and constrained by AI emotional companionship, and their degree of control increases with increasing dependence. Its subsequent development may evolve from simply serving the needs of humanity as a tool to govern and dominate people [8].

Regarding the potential impact of AI emotional companionship on interpersonal relationships, Wang Bihao, COO of Lynksoul, pointed out that human energy and time are limited, and investing more time in socializing with AI will reduce the time left for socializing with others. 'The trend we have seen is a decrease in social interaction between people, which is not caused by the emergence of AI'. He believes that the core reason for this phenomenon is that the application of many new technologies, including AI, has brought about changes in production methods, leading to changes in people's lifestyles. For example, if individuals can use AI to complete their work, communication between people may decrease, allowing them to have more exposure to AI companions [6]. 'I am also particularly concerned that AI may change the way people socialize, but I believe this is only superficial, and fundamentally lies in AI's impact on organizational forms.' The essence of emotional connections between people is shared experiences and communication, which stems from the social mechanism of division of labor and cooperation among humans. The future trend will lean towards collaboration between humans and AI, generating unique emotional connection needs rather than simply being limited to ethical issues themselves.

## 5. Conclusion

The research result of this study is that AI technology is constantly developing and becoming more advanced. And young people, due to increasing economic pressure, job competition pressure, and personal development pressure, do not have sufficient social time, social costs are increasing, and social environments have become awkward. They urgently need a simple and efficient way to relieve stress, and emotional companionship AI can meet their needs. Thus, it can be further concluded that emotional companionship AI has a profound impact on the social situation of young people, which is a social situation facilitated by multiple factors. This study provides valuable reference for future research in this direction. It mainly expresses people's "first impression" and potential thinking about emotional companionship AI, and provides a simple definition and specification for the emerging industry of "emotional companionship AI". Future research should focus more on ensuring that the use of AI is restricted and reasonably regulated within the legal framework by establishing specialized regulatory agencies. Committed to creating a collaborative emotional connection between humans and AI, and engaging in emotional practices of AI emotional companionship within reasonable, legal, and ethical limits. This ensures the promotion of harmonious interpersonal communication, the advancement of technology towards goodness, and the transformation of social relationships among young people. People should focus more on building the emerging industry of emotional companionship AI, allowing AI to continue serving



humanity. Building unique emotional connections requires AI not only to think better than humans, but also to be closer to humans themselves.

### Authors contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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