

Identity Negotiation in AI Styling Interactions on Short-Video Platforms

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Abstract. After generative AI entered everyday decision-making, how algorithmic aesthetic evaluation affects the identity construction of young users has become a question worth attention. This study adopts content analysis and examines 109 interaction units from 15 AI styling videos on short-video platforms. The findings show that identity negotiation in AI styling interactions mainly takes three forms, accommodative confirmation, collaborative adaptation, and defensive repair, and shows the feature of a separation between action power and interpretive power. While adopting AI suggestions, users maintain the interpretive power over the meaning of their own image through questioning, adjustment, and irony, and they turn algorithmic mismatch into performative content production. This study provides a new perspective for understanding human-machine communication and subjectivity construction in the era of generative AI.

Keywords: AI styling, identity negotiation, human-machine communication

1. Introduction

As generative AI gradually enters everyday life, AI has begun to take part in the individual's processes of choice, judgment, and self-presentation. Among these, AI applications in the domain of styling involve external image management and identity expression, and have become an important setting for observing human-machine interaction. When AI takes part in this process through verbal suggestions and image evaluation, what users face is not only the choice among outfit options, but also a re-understanding of the boundaries of their own image. Therefore, AI styling interaction has become a human-machine communication practice in which algorithmic evaluation, self-perception, and identity expression are intertwined.

2. Literature review

Goffman's dramaturgy holds that the individual's external image forms an important part of his or her social performance [1]. Clothing, as a social symbol with high visibility, can quickly convey information about a person's occupation, aesthetic taste, and so on, and this information constitutes the person's social identity. Therefore, styling, as a form of self-display, has a natural identity attribute.

Current research on human-machine communication has shown that AI has the possibility of taking part in identity interaction. The CASA paradigm proposed by Nass and Moon points out that even when people know that computers are not human, they still apply some interpersonal rules to human-machine interaction [2]. As generative AI advanced, Guzman and Lewis further proposed that communicative AI is shifting from a tool for information transmission to a communication participant that can be perceived and responded to by users [3]. Cheng Ming and Zhao Jingyi also pointed out that intelligent technology has the attributes of both a tool and a quasi-communication subject [4]. The above research findings also show that AI has begun to take part in the user's process of meaning construction through feedback. However, existing research pays more attention to the formation process of AI as an interaction subject and to the changes taking place in communication relationships, and there is still a lack of further discussion on how users respond to such external judgment and adjust their self-perception when AI begins to take part in or evaluate people's everyday decisions and self-presentation.

Identity negotiation theory provides a new perspective for understanding this question. This theory concerns how the individual responds to external evaluation in the process of interaction and continuously adjusts his or her own identity positioning. Therefore, when the object of interaction extends from traditional social members to intelligent systems with feedback capacity, the process of identity negotiation still has room for theoretical explanation. Swann holds that identity is not entirely granted by others, and the object of interaction will actively take up expression, selection, and revision so as to bring external evaluation into coordination with self-perception [5]. Ting-Toomey further emphasized that when external evaluation matches self-perception, the individual more easily obtains identity security, and when the evaluation is misaligned, identity vulnerability, explanation, adjustment, and defense may appear [6]. Ma et al. on AI companion platforms also found that users jointly shape human-machine roles through setting, correcting, and continuous interaction, and at the same time take on the functions of the identity "performer" and the interaction "director" [7].

Based on the above theories, generative AI has gradually become an important interaction subject that affects the individual's self-perception and identity construction. However, existing research pays relatively little attention to how users adjust their identity and negotiate interaction boundaries under the AI aesthetic evaluation system. Therefore, this paper raises the following questions around the research topic: what motivates users to engage in AI styling interactions, and how do they understand and position the role of AI? Faced with the aesthetic evaluation and styling suggestions generated by AI, what identity negotiation strategies do users adopt? How does the consistency between AI evaluation and the user's self-perception affect the user's emotional response and subsequent interaction behavior?

Based on the theory and the specific situations of AI styling videos, this paper understands AI styling identity negotiation as follows. After generative AI intervenes in the user's styling decision as a source of external image evaluation, the user compares the image judgment generated by AI with his or her own style perception, bodily experience, and situational expectations, and reinterprets the boundaries of his or her own image through confirmation, adjustment, questioning, or irony. It should also be noted that what this paper examines is short-term identity confirmation and boundary maintenance in specific situations, and it does not infer from this that the user's long-term identity has changed.

3. Research design

3.1. Sample selection

This paper takes the AI styling interaction videos on the Douyin platform as the research object, and carries out stratified purposive sampling by AI tool type, selecting three types of tools, Doubao, Wenxin Assistant, and Qianwen. During sample collection, the AI-related styling videos of each type were sorted by like count, and the top 5 videos by like count were selected for each type, giving a total of 15 video samples.

3.2. Content analysis

The study adopts content analysis, transcribes the 15 videos, takes the complete styling task and the continuous AI response as the coding unit, and completes coding and data analysis according to the codebook. The specific criterion for division is as follows. When the user and AI conduct an exchange around the same styling task and form a complete meaningful interaction of "AI image judgment—user response," it is divided into one interaction unit. When the discussion turns to a new item of clothing, body part, scene requirement, or core need, it is divided into the next unit. On this basis, different interaction features in the videos, such as verbal expression, behavioral choice, and emotional response, are coded, analyzed, and counted quantitatively, and their identity meaning is explained in combination with the specific context.

The study builds the coding framework by combining theoretical deduction with material induction. The primary categories mainly draw on the ten core propositions proposed by Ma et al. on the basis of Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation theory, and operationalize human-machine identity negotiation into four dimensions of motivation, communication, identity, and emotion. In combination with the specific situations of AI styling videos, this paper divides it into four dimensions, usage motivation, identity positioning, negotiation process, and emotional outcome.

3.3. Codebook

Table 1. Codebook for identity negotiation in AI styling

Analysis level	Module	Variable name	Specific coding items
Video level (multiple coding)	Usage motivation	Motivation type	1 practical help-seeking; 2 scene adaptation; 3 entertainment/testing AI; 4 content display; 9 undeterminable
		Identity negotiation judgment	0 instrumental interaction (non-negotiation); 1 implicit identity negotiation; 2 explicit identity negotiation; 9 undeterminable
Unit level	Identity positioning	Whether identity expression exists	0 no; 1 yes; 9 undeterminable
		Mode of identity expression	1 direct/serious; 2 irony/performance; 3 mixed; 8 not applicable; 9 undeterminable

Table 1. (continued)

		Tool/advisor		
		Friend/companion		
Unit level	Identity positioning	AI role	Aesthetic judge	0 not present; 1 present; 9 undeterminable
			Entertainment object	
		Perceived consistency		1 consistent; 2 partially consistent; 3 inconsistent; 9 undeterminable
		Degree of constraint information		1 low; 2 medium; 3 high; 9 undeterminable
		Negotiated confirmation		0 not present; 1 present; 9 undeterminable
	Negotiation process	Degree of plan adjustment		0 no adjustment; 1 partial adjustment; 2 overall reconstruction; 8 did not enter adjustment; 9 undeterminable
		Whether the AI is questioned		0 not questioned; 1 questioned; 9 undeterminable
		Degree of final adoption		0 did not enter execution; 1 full adoption; 2 partial adoption; 3 explicit rejection; 9 undeterminable
		Sequence of questioning and adoption		1 questioning first then full adoption; 2 adoption first then regret/questioning; 3 questioning then partial adoption; 4 multiple rounds; 8 not applicable; 9 undeterminable
		Communication depth		1 shallow; 2 intermediate; 3 deep; 9 undeterminable
Emotional outcome		Emotional valence		1 positive; 2 neutral; 3 negative; 4 mixed positive and negative; 9 undeterminable
		Emotional intensity		1 low; 2 medium; 3 high; 9 undeterminable
		Humor/entertainment response		0 none; 1 genuinely amused; 2 embarrassment/irony; 3 mixed; 9 undeterminable
		Identity vulnerability		0 not present; 1 present; 9 undeterminable

4. Findings

4.1. Motivation and identity in AI styling interactions

Table 2. Statistics of the motivation and identity modules

Coding item	Result
Identity negotiation judgment	instrumental interaction 7; implicit identity negotiation 57; explicit identity negotiation 45 (total n=109; identity-negotiation units n=102)
Usage motivation	practical help-seeking 15; scene adaptation 14; entertainment/testing AI 11; content display 2
AI role	tool/advisor 95; aesthetic judge 61; entertainment object 35; friend/companion 7
Identity expression	identity expression present in 44, of which direct expression 8, irony/performance 36
Identity judgment	among determinable units, perceived inconsistency 50; consistency 21; partial consistency 8
AI role and identity expression	tool/advisor 95, identity expression 34 (35.8%); aesthetic judge 61, identity expression 25 (41.0%); entertainment object 35, identity expression 21 (60.0%); friend/companion 7, identity expression 5 (71.4%).

Note: motivation is multiple coding at the video level, and the rest is coding at the unit level.

Judging from usage motivation, AI styling interactions mainly unfold around practical help-seeking and scene adaptation, which shows that users usually enter AI interaction under concrete styling needs and situational requirements. But judging from the interaction results, among the 109 interaction units only 7 belong to instrumental interaction, and the remaining units all show identity negotiation to different degrees. This indicates that AI styling interactions generally involve the user's concern with his or her own image, and that styling suggestions in the process of interaction further connect with the user's understanding of his or her own style and situational role.

At the same time, the role positioning of AI in the interaction shows multiple features. Although tool/advisor is still the main role type (95), roles such as aesthetic judge and entertainment object also appear in large numbers, and this also shows that users do not treat AI only as a provider of plans, but assign it different functions in different interaction situations. Looking further, identity expression appears in 44 interaction units, among which irony/performance accounts for 36, clearly higher than direct expression, which shows that users in AI styling interactions often present their own attitude in relatively indirect and performative ways.

4.2. The identity negotiation process in AI styling interactions

Table 3. Overall structure of the negotiation process variables (identity negotiation units n=102)

Coding item	Result
In-depth follow-up	65/102 units had at least 1 follow-up question (63.7%)
Degree of constraint information	among 101 valid units, low constraint 88 (87.1%)
Negotiated confirmation	52/102(51.0%)
Plan adjustment	partial adjustment 22, overall reconstruction 6, total 28/102 (27.5%)

Table 3. (continued)

Questioning the AI	38/102(37.3%)
Interaction orientation	adoption 42; collaborative adjustment 33; defensive/confrontational 6; mixed/wavering 20; valid n=101
Communication depth	shallow 21; intermediate 44; deep 37

4.2.1. The unfolding of the identity negotiation process

At the level of the negotiation process, AI styling interactions show the features of continuous advancement and dynamic adjustment. Among the 102 identity negotiation units, 63.7% of the interactions had in-depth follow-up, and 79.4% of the interactions reached intermediate or deep communication, which shows that users usually improve AI's understanding of their own image by adding information and keeping up the exchange. At the same time, the user's response to AI suggestions appears more as collaborative adjustment than as direct rejection, with plan adjustment accounting for only 27.5%, while negotiated confirmation reaches 51.0%. However, users questioned the AI in 37.3% of the interactions, and this also reveals that users still make comparisons and judgments between algorithmic suggestions and their own aesthetic perception. On the whole, identity negotiation in AI styling mainly appears as a gradual process of "adoption—revision—reconfirmation." In the process of interacting with AI, users not only respond to the image judgment generated by AI, but also combine their own aesthetic taste, situational expectations, and platform expression needs, and continuously adjust and present their own image.

4.2.2. three types of identity negotiation

Table 4. Three negotiation types (n=102)

Type	Main basis for classification
Accommodative confirmation	adoption orientation, full adoption, negotiated confirmation, low-conflict emotion
Collaborative adaptation	collaborative adjustment, partial/overall modification, partial adoption, intermediate or deep communication
Defensive repair	defensive/confrontational and mixed orientation, questioning, inconsistency, negative emotion, identity vulnerability

Based on the user's way of responding to AI suggestions, the degree of adoption, and the interaction orientation, this paper divides identity negotiation in AI styling into the above three types. The three types of negotiation reflect the user's response strategies at different degrees when facing AI image judgment. Accommodative confirmation appears as the user accepting AI suggestions and completing the confirmation of his or her own image. Collaborative adaptation appears as the user making modification and optimization on the basis of referring to AI suggestions. Defensive repair appears as the user redefining his or her own image through questioning, irony, or rejection when facing AI judgment that does not match his or her own perception. This classification can also show that AI styling interaction is not simple adoption or resistance, but presents a dynamic negotiation process among confirmation, adjustment, and boundary maintenance.

4.2.3. The separation between action power and interpretive power in the identity negotiation process

Table 5. Degree of adoption and the questioning-adoption sequence (n=101)

Coding item	Result
Full or partial adoption	98/101(97.0%)
Adoption still occurred after perceived inconsistency	47/50(94.0%)
Adoption still occurred after questioning the AI	34/38(89.5%)
Adoption still occurred in explicit identity negotiation	41/44(93.2%)
Questioning-adoption sequence	regret/questioning after adoption 16; full adoption after questioning 9; multiple rounds 6; partial adoption after questioning 3 (valid n=34)

Further analysis found that the users' adoption of AI suggestions does not necessarily indicate agreement with AI-generated identity judgments. Among the 102 valid units involving identity negotiation, 101 involved an adoption decision, and 98 of them (97.0%) finally adopted AI suggestions fully or partially. Even among the 50 units with perceived inconsistency, 47 (94.0%) still continued to adopt; among the 38 units in which the AI was questioned, 34 (89.5%) also finally chose adoption. This shows that the user's adoption of AI suggestions such as "wearing pajamas outside" and "rolling up trouser legs again and again" reflects action-level adoption rather than full agreement with the AI's image judgment. Users can use AI plans to carry out styling practice and image exploration, and at the same time maintain their own judgment of image meaning through questioning, adjustment, and reinterpretation. Judging from the questioning-adoption sequence, among the 34 valid questioning units, regret/questioning after adoption accounts for 16, more than the 9 of full adoption after questioning, which shows that users often form further judgment after coming into contact with or trying out AI suggestions. Questioning therefore appears more as an adjustment mechanism in the process of interaction, and not as a complete rejection of AI suggestions. Therefore, AI styling interactions show the feature that adoption at the level of execution coexists with negotiation at the level of identity, and users have not completely given up their own interpretive power over identity.

4.3. Emotional outcomes of AI styling interactions

The emotional outcome part takes the 102 identity negotiation units as the basis of analysis, and counts the 79 units that have a clear perceived consistency judgment.

Table 6. Cross-analysis of perceived consistency and emotional outcomes (n=79)

Perceived consistency	Negative/mixed emotion	Humor response	Identity vulnerability
Consistent/partially consistent (n=29)	2/28(7.1%)	3/27(11.1%)	1/29(3.4%)
Perceived inconsistency (n=50)	27/50(54.0%)	47/49(95.9%)	15/49(30.6%)

The cross-analysis of perceived consistency and emotional outcomes shows that the degree of match between the image judgment generated by AI and the user's self-perception affects the user's

subsequent way of emotional response. When AI suggestions are consistent or partially consistent with the user's self-perception, users less often show obvious negative emotion and identity vulnerability, with negative/mixed emotion accounting for only 7.1% and identity vulnerability at 3.4%. By contrast, in the units with perceived inconsistency, negative/mixed emotion rises to 54.0% and identity vulnerability reaches 30.6%, which shows that deviation in image judgment more easily triggers the user's re-examination of his or her own identity, and this finding also happens to confirm Swann's self-verification view.

Faced with the unpredictability and the new interaction changes that AI brings to the identity negotiation process because of its disembodiment, users develop a certain degree of distrust and expectancy violation. This situation reflects the tension between the predictability and unpredictability of interaction proposed by Ting-Toomey in identity negotiation. As the data show, perceived inconsistency does not simply lead users to withdraw from the interaction, but is more often regulated through humorous and performative ways. In the units with perceived inconsistency, the humor response reaches 95.9%, clearly higher than the 11.1% of the consistent/partially consistent units. This shows that in the context of short videos, when users face the deviation between AI evaluation and their own perception, they often handle identity mismatch by means of irony, teasing, and the like, and turn the negative experience that might otherwise arise into content expression and interaction resources. The appearance of the entertainment effect further merges with the user's entertainment-oriented deconstruction of identity maintenance, and is enlarged or exaggerated against the background of platform preferences and algorithmic recommendation, forming a kind of performative content production and labor.

5. Discussion

Based on the above phenomena and analysis, we can find that the key of the discussion in AI styling interactions does not lie only in whether the machine truly possesses aesthetic sense, but in how the individual will view the role of AI in human-machine communication, in what way he or she accepts or questions it, and whether he or she still keeps the ability to interpret the self, when artificial intelligence is entering the field of people's everyday life and becoming a new "evaluation environment." This study finds that the user's adoption of AI suggestions and his or her agreement with AI judgment are not synchronized, and this reveals a subject relation in human-machine communication that differs from the traditional imagination of technology. Users do not maintain autonomy by refusing algorithmic intervention, but, while referring to algorithmic suggestions and through negotiation or repeated confirmation, still keep in the end the ability to judge and the interpretive power over the meaning of their own image. This process can be seen as a kind of "algorithmic resistance," but this resistance does not appear as a rejection of technology, but as a subjective adjustment in the process of using algorithms, forming an interaction pattern in which "pragmatic adoption" and "symbolic resistance" coexist. This micro-adjustment of algorithmic authority also reflects the micro-rebellion of the individual in the environment of intelligent communication.

Looking further, short-video platforms turn AI styling into a self-presentation process that faces the public. When the algorithmic output deviates from the user's self-perception, users reorganize this deviation through complaining, irony, and exaggerated execution, and turn the inaccuracy and unpredictability of the negotiation themselves into watchable and shareable content. In this, humor is not a simple entertainment response, but an identity strategy for handling algorithmic mismatch. Therefore, algorithmic error does not necessarily weaken the user's subjectivity, and on the contrary may become a resource for the user to strengthen self-expression, and promotes subjectivity to be

confirmed in a new way. Identity negotiation in AI styling short videos finally forms a dynamic relation among algorithmic evaluation, personal experience, and public visibility.

What technology changes is the conditions of identity construction, not the final source of identity meaning. In the process of interacting with algorithms, people continuously re-answer the two questions of "how I am seen" and "how I define myself," and this also constitutes an important issue of the relation between people and technology in the era of intelligent communication.

6. Conclusion and directions for future research

This study finds that AI styling interaction is not a simple process of technical assistance, but an identity negotiation process in which the user and the algorithm take part together. It is a process in which the user, while adopting AI suggestions in behavior, maintains his or her own interpretive power over identity through adjustment, questioning, and irony. Although algorithmic evaluation has intervened in the user's self-presentation, it has not replaced the person's meaning construction, but in the interaction prompts the user to reconfirm his or her own experience, aesthetic boundaries, and mode of identity expression.

This study still has certain limitations. The sample mainly selects high-popularity videos on Douyin, and may present in a more concentrated way interaction content with stronger conflict and performative character. At the same time, factors in public videos such as editing, script design, and guidance of AI replies are difficult to identify completely, and may affect the authenticity of the interaction. In addition, the coding of the study mainly relies on visible text and behavior, and it is difficult to grasp in depth the user's real motivation and the effect on long-term identity positioning. Future research can combine interviews, original interaction records, cross-platform comparison, and long-term tracking for further verification.

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