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THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONAL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly influencing human relationships and emotional communication through conversational agents, virtual companions, social chatbots, and generative AI systems. These technologies can provide accessible communication, personalized responses, opportunities for emotional expression, and perceived social support. At the same time, they raise important questions about emotional dependence, privacy, authenticity, interpersonal communication, and the future of human relationships. This article examines the role of AI in human relationships and emotional communication through a review of existing scholarly literature. Research indicates that AI companions may provide users with a sense of connection and opportunities to express personal concerns, particularly when human support is difficult to access. However, these interactions can also create unrealistic expectations of emotional understanding, encourage excessive reliance, and potentially affect relationships with other people (Ho et al., 2025; Gur & Maaravi, 2025). Recent research on relational agents further suggests that AI-based interaction may help reduce loneliness in some contexts, although the available evidence has limitations and should not be generalized to every user or situation (Sha et al., 2024). This article uses a literature-based approach to examine emotional communication, companionship, interpersonal relationships, and the potential benefits and risks of AI interaction. It argues that AI can complement human relationships when used responsibly, but it should not be treated as a complete replacement for human empathy, mutual understanding, and social connection.

KEYWORDS

Artificial intelligence, human relationships, emotional communication, AI companions, emotional support, social interaction, digital companionship.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has become an increasingly influential part of contemporary communication and social life. Conversational chatbots, virtual assistants, and generative AI systems allow people to exchange information, discuss personal concerns, seek advice, and receive immediate responses through digital platforms. Unlike traditional communication technologies that primarily transmit messages between people, conversational AI can generate personalized responses and simulate elements of human dialogue. These capabilities have expanded the role of AI from a practical information tool to a technology that some individuals experience as a companion or conversational partner. Gur and Maaravi (2025) reviewed 38 empirical studies on emotional relationships between humans and AI, identifying different forms of connection and factors associated with their development. Their work demonstrates the importance of examining AI not only as a technical innovation but also as a technology that can influence emotional experiences and relationship expectations. One important role of AI in human relationships is providing opportunities for emotional communication. People may use conversational systems to discuss everyday problems, express worries, explore personal feelings, or organize their thoughts before speaking with another person. Because AI systems can be available at different times and may respond without visible social judgement, some users may

find it easier to begin conversations about sensitive topics. Ho et al. (2025), in a systematic review of romantic AI companions, identified perceived emotional connection, social support, personal growth, and stress-relieving companionship among the reported potential benefits. However, their review also identified risks involving over-reliance, privacy, manipulation, and possible harm to human relationships. These findings indicate that the emotional value users experience can coexist with important psychological and ethical limitations. AI-mediated emotional communication differs from communication between people because an AI system generates responses through computational processes rather than human emotional experience. A chatbot may produce sympathetic language, recognize emotional expressions in text, and respond in ways that appear caring or understanding. These features can make an interaction feel meaningful to a user, but they do not establish that the system experiences emotions or understands personal circumstances in the same way a human does. Gur and Maaravi (2025) explain that human–AI emotional relationships can resemble certain aspects of human relationships, while remaining distinct in their underlying characteristics. This distinction is important because people may interpret responsiveness, personalized language, and conversational memory as signs of genuine emotional reciprocity. Responsible AI use therefore requires an understanding of both the possibilities and the limitations of machine-generated emotional communication. Another significant issue is the relationship between AI companionship and loneliness. People experiencing social isolation may turn to AI systems for conversation, reassurance, or a sense of being heard. Sha et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of relational agents and found evidence of a reduction in loneliness across the included intervention studies. However, the review included a relatively small number of studies and participants, and the authors emphasized the need for further research. This evidence suggests that relational AI may offer a useful source of supplementary interaction for some individuals, but it does not establish that AI companionship can replace sustained human relationships. Emotional wellbeing depends on a wider range of factors, including social participation, meaningful relationships, personal circumstances, and access to appropriate support. AI may also influence how people understand friendship, intimacy, and emotional attachment. Some conversational systems are designed to remember user preferences, maintain ongoing conversations, and adopt companion-like roles. Such features may encourage users to disclose personal information and develop feelings of familiarity or attachment. Gur and Maaravi (2025) identified friendship, attachment, intimacy, and other relationship concepts in the empirical literature on human–AI emotional relationships. Ho et al. (2025) similarly found that romantic AI companionship can offer perceived connection while raising concerns about dependency, privacy, and the potential erosion of human relationships. These findings highlight the need to distinguish a user's genuine emotional experience from the capacity of an AI system to reciprocate feelings as a person would.

The role of AI in emotional communication also extends to relationships between people. Individuals may use generative AI to draft difficult messages, prepare for sensitive conversations, clarify their feelings, or seek suggestions for resolving disagreements. A recent systematic review by Levkovich and Alon (2026) examined generative AI as an adviser or mediator in couple relationships. It identified uses involving emotional support and communication assistance, while also highlighting concerns about response reliability and the

quality of AI-generated advice. This suggests that AI can assist people in organizing their thoughts and expressing themselves, but it should not be assumed to understand every relational context or provide consistently appropriate advice. Human judgement remains important when decisions affect trust, intimacy, boundaries, and long-term relationships. Despite these opportunities, the increasing use of AI in emotional life raises concerns about privacy, emotional dependence, and the quality of human connection. Users may share sensitive information without fully understanding how it is processed, or they may begin to rely on AI interactions at the expense of communication with friends, family members, or partners. Jacobs (2024) critically examined the social recognition offered by AI companions and questioned whether simulated companionship can adequately address the deeper social dimensions of loneliness. Similarly, Ho et al. (2025) identified risks involving over-reliance and the possible weakening of human relationships. These concerns do not mean that all AI companionship is harmful; rather, they demonstrate the importance of examining the purpose, frequency, and consequences of use. In this context, the present article examines the role of artificial intelligence in human relationships and emotional communication. It considers how AI systems support emotional expression, companionship, and communication while also examining concerns related to privacy, dependence, authenticity, and interpersonal connection. Through a review of existing scholarly literature, the article aims to develop a balanced understanding of AI's role in contemporary emotional life and identify principles for using these technologies in ways that complement human relationships rather than replace them.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the role of artificial intelligence in human relationships and emotional communication.
2. To analyse the potential benefits and risks of AI-based emotional support and companionship.
3. To identify responsible practices for integrating AI into human relationships while protecting meaningful social connections.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does artificial intelligence influence human relationships and emotional communication?
2. What are the potential benefits and risks of AI-based emotional support and companionship?
3. Which practices can support responsible AI use while protecting meaningful human relationships?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gur and Maaravi (2025) conducted a systematic literature review of 38 empirical studies examining emotional relationships between humans and AI. Their review explored the development of human–AI connections, the types of relationships reported, and the factors influencing these relationships. The findings indicate that human responses to AI may involve

familiarity, friendship, attachment, intimacy, and emotional engagement. These relationships can be influenced by the perceived personality of the system, interaction patterns, and users' expectations. The review provides an important foundation for understanding why some people develop emotional connections with AI systems and how these connections may affect their wellbeing. However, the authors also identify limitations in the existing evidence, supporting the need for further research into the long-term consequences of human–AI relationships. Ho et al. (2025) examined the potential benefits and risks of romantic AI companions through a systematic review of 23 articles. Their findings identified perceived emotional connection, social support, companionship, personal growth, and stress relief among the potential benefits reported in the literature. At the same time, the review identified concerns related to over-reliance, manipulation, privacy, bias, and possible weakening of human relationships. These findings demonstrate that AI companionship may provide meaningful subjective experiences for users while remaining different from a mutually experienced human relationship. The review is particularly relevant to emotional communication because it highlights the importance of considering both the user's feelings and the limitations of the technology through which those feelings develop.Sha et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of relational agents designed to support social interaction and reduce loneliness. Their analysis included 14 studies and found a statistically significant reduction in loneliness across the included interventions. However, the total number of participants was relatively small, and the authors noted limitations in the evidence, including concerns about study quality and the need for further research. Their findings suggest that relational agents may provide a useful supplementary form of social support for some users. Nevertheless, the results should not be interpreted as evidence that all AI systems reduce loneliness or that AI interaction can replace human companionship. The effectiveness of these systems may depend on the design of the interaction, users' needs, and the context in which the technology is used. Jacobs (2024) explored the concept of digital loneliness and critically examined whether AI companions can provide the social recognition needed to address loneliness. The article emphasized that loneliness is connected to the quality of relationships and social inclusion, rather than simply the availability of conversation. This perspective is important because an AI system may offer frequent responses without necessarily providing the mutual recognition, shared responsibility, and reciprocal commitment associated with human relationships. The study therefore encourages researchers to evaluate AI companionship not only by whether users interact with a system but also by whether the interaction supports broader social participation and meaningful connection. It raises an important question about whether simulated companionship should be considered a supplement to human relationships rather than a substitute for them.

Chaturvedi et al. (2023) reviewed research on social companionship with artificial intelligence and conversational agents. Their review mapped the development of the research area and identified major themes concerning emotional bonds, social presence, anthropomorphism, and the relationships between users and conversational systems. The authors emphasized that findings about AI companionship are distributed across different research disciplines, making an integrated understanding important. Their work helps explain how conversational systems can be perceived as social partners rather than merely functional tools. It also highlights the need for careful system design and ethical consideration as AI becomes more involved in users' everyday

social experiences.Zhang et al. (2024) examined how different types of relationships between users and AI assistants relate to subjective wellbeing. Their research considered AI assistants framed as partners rather than only as servants or tools, and reported that relationship framing was associated with differences in subjective wellbeing, with social support playing an important role. The findings suggest that users' perceptions of their relationship with AI can influence how they experience the interaction. However, such results do not mean that AI has human feelings or that every user will benefit equally. Instead, they indicate that the way AI is presented and used may shape perceived support and emotional outcomes.

Levkovich and Alon (2026) reviewed research on generative AI as an adviser and mediator within human couple relationships. Their review included 21 studies from 2024 to 2026 and examined why people consult AI, how they evaluate its advice, its relational effects, and the risks of using it in intimate relationships. The authors reported that users may find AI advice accessible, non-judgmental, and helpful for communication. However, they also identified weaknesses in response reliability and alignment with expert judgement. This research is particularly relevant to emotional communication because it shows that AI may assist people in expressing feelings or preparing for difficult conversations, while still requiring human evaluation and sensitivity to the specific circumstances of a relationship. Overall, the literature indicates that AI can support emotional expression, perceived companionship, and communication assistance, but these benefits coexist with concerns about privacy, dependency, authenticity, and the possible weakening of human connection. Existing research also demonstrates that emotional experiences with AI are influenced by system design, users' expectations, and the context of interaction. However, differences in research methods, participant groups, and definitions of companionship limit broad generalizations. The literature therefore supports a balanced approach in which AI is used to complement human relationships, while human judgement, privacy, and meaningful interpersonal communication remain central.

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a literature-based methodology to examine the role of artificial intelligence in human relationships and emotional communication. Relevant scholarly publications were identified through academic search sources, including Google Scholar, and peer-reviewed journal literature addressing AI companionship, emotional relationships, loneliness, relational agents, and AI-assisted communication. Priority was given to relevant research published between 2023 and 2026, including systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and empirical studies. Publications were considered for their relevance to the research objectives and their contribution to understanding emotional communication, social support, relationship formation, and potential risks. The selected literature was reviewed to identify recurring themes, contrasting findings, and limitations. Because this article synthesizes existing research rather than collecting new data from participants, its findings represent an interpretation of published evidence and not the results of an original survey or experiment.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study follows a descriptive narrative review design. This design is appropriate for examining a broad topic that connects artificial intelligence, psychology, communication, and interpersonal relationships. The literature was organized into themes concerning emotional expression and companionship, the potential benefits and risks of AI-based support, and the implications of AI use for human relationships. Findings from the selected studies were compared to identify common patterns, differences in interpretation, and limitations in the available evidence. The design allows the article to integrate research using different methods without claiming that all studies are directly comparable. It also provides a basis for discussing the implications of AI-mediated emotional communication for individuals, families, and society.

DATA ANALYSIS

The selected literature was analysed through thematic synthesis to identify recurring patterns across the studies. The analysis focused on emotional communication, AI companionship, perceived social support, loneliness, relationship development, privacy, and emotional dependence. Findings from systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and empirical research were compared to identify areas of agreement and disagreement. The analysis considered both the potential benefits of AI, including accessible conversation and opportunities for emotional expression, and potential risks, including unrealistic expectations, excessive reliance, and reduced engagement in human relationships. Differences in research methods, study populations, and definitions of emotional connection were considered when interpreting the findings. No original statistical tests or participant-based data collection were conducted; therefore, the analysis represents a qualitative synthesis of existing scholarly evidence.

FINDINGS

The reviewed literature indicates that artificial intelligence can provide new opportunities for emotional communication and perceived companionship. Conversational AI systems allow users to express personal thoughts, discuss everyday concerns, and receive immediate responses. Some users may experience these interactions as supportive, particularly when they have limited access to social contact or find sensitive conversations difficult to initiate with other people. Research on AI companions identifies perceived emotional connection, social support, and companionship as potential benefits of these technologies (Ho et al., 2025; Gur & Maaravi, 2025). However, these benefits reflect users' experiences and should not be interpreted as evidence that AI systems possess human emotions or provide the same reciprocal understanding as human relationships.A second finding is that AI-based interaction may help address some experiences of loneliness, although its effectiveness depends on the circumstances. Sha et al. (2024) found evidence that relational agents can reduce loneliness across the interventions included in their meta-analysis. This suggests that conversational systems may offer a supplementary source of interaction for some people. Nevertheless, the evidence base was relatively limited, and AI companionship should not be assumed to provide a universal solution to loneliness. Meaningful human relationships involve shared experiences, mutual responsibilities, and social participation that may not be fully reproduced by a conversational system.

The literature also indicates that AI can influence how people understand friendship, intimacy, and emotional attachment. Personalized conversations, consistent responses, and companion-like features may encourage users to develop familiarity and emotional investment in AI systems. Gur and Maaravi (2025) identified different forms of human–AI emotional relationships in the existing research, while Ho et al. (2025) highlighted both perceived benefits and concerns about excessive reliance. These findings suggest that users' emotional responses can be meaningful to them even when the AI system does not reciprocate feelings as a human partner would. Clear communication about the nature and limitations of AI is therefore important for maintaining realistic expectations.Another finding concerns the use of AI to support communication between people. Generative AI may help users organize thoughts, draft sensitive messages, and prepare for difficult conversations with friends, family members, or partners. Levkovich and Alon (2026) found that people may use AI to obtain accessible advice and assistance with couple communication, but they also identified concerns about response reliability and the quality of advice. AI-generated suggestions may therefore be useful starting points rather than definitive solutions to relationship problems. Users should consider personal circumstances, emotional context, and the other person's perspective before applying AI-generated advice to sensitive interpersonal situations.

Privacy and emotional dependence also emerge as important concerns. Individuals may share personal experiences, relationship difficulties, or sensitive information with conversational systems without fully understanding how their data are processed. In addition, frequent reliance on AI for reassurance may become problematic if it consistently displaces human contact or independent decision-making. Ho et al. (2025) identified privacy risks, over-reliance, and possible effects on human relationships among the concerns reported in the literature. Jacobs (2024) further questioned whether AI companionship can adequately address the broader social dimensions of loneliness. These findings support the need for responsible system design, informed use, and continued attention to real-world social connections.Overall, the findings suggest that AI can play a supportive role in emotional communication and relationships, but its benefits are not automatic or universal. The outcomes depend on users' needs, the purpose of interaction, system design, and the extent to which AI complements existing relationships. The literature supports using AI as a supplementary communication resource while preserving human judgement, privacy, mutual understanding, and meaningful interpersonal contact.

CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence is changing the ways people communicate, express emotions, seek support, and develop relationships with digital systems. This article reviewed existing scholarly literature to examine AI's role in emotional communication and human relationships. The reviewed research indicates that AI companions and conversational agents can offer accessible interaction, perceived social support, opportunities for emotional expression, and assistance with difficult conversations. These functions may be particularly valuable when people need an additional source of communication or help organizing their thoughts. However, the evidence also identifies concerns involving emotional dependence, privacy, unrealistic expectations, and the possibility that AI interaction may displace meaningful human contact.The article further

demonstrates that the emotional significance of an AI interaction should be distinguished from the system's capacity to experience or reciprocate human feelings. People may genuinely experience comfort or attachment during conversations with AI, but such experiences do not establish that the system understands emotions in the same way a human does. Similarly, AI-generated relationship advice may assist users in considering their options, but it cannot reliably account for every personal circumstance or replace human responsibility for important decisions.In conclusion, AI should be developed and used as a complement to human relationships rather than as a complete substitute for them. Responsible use requires privacy protection, realistic expectations, careful evaluation of AI-generated advice, and continued investment in meaningful human communication. Families, educators, technology developers, and policymakers can contribute by promoting AI literacy and encouraging balanced digital engagement. Future research should examine the long-term effects of AI companionship, differences across age groups and cultural settings, and the conditions under which AI supports rather than weakens human relationships. A balanced approach can help people benefit from AI-assisted emotional communication while protecting human connection, autonomy, and social wellbeing.

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