

AI, GENDER, AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Ajeng Fajarwati Sumarna*

Fionna Christabella

Department of Communication and Islamic Broadcasting, Islamic University of Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) have substantially reshaped human interaction, shifting engagement patterns from predominantly human-to-human communication toward human-to-machine relations. This transition has generated an ambivalent set of dynamics within AI-mediated digital spaces. On one hand, AI offers an avenue for emotional expression without social scrutiny, particularly benefiting men who are culturally discouraged from displaying emotional vulnerability. On the other hand, these interactions may inadvertently reinforce portrayals of women as inherently vulnerable, thereby perpetuating existing gender inequalities in digital contexts. Drawing on the frameworks of artificial intimacy and techno-gender, this study investigates how AI not only fulfills users' emotional needs but also mirrors and reproduces the socio-cultural constructions embedded in gendered relations. Employing a mixed-methods design that integrates in-depth interviews and online surveys, the research seeks to capture a comprehensive understanding of user experiences across gender groups. The findings indicate that AI chatbots are widely perceived as safe environments, sources of cognitive support, and alternate relational partners shaped by users' personal backgrounds and gender identities. In line with artificial intimacy theory, feelings of closeness may develop through consistent empathetic responses even in the absence of physical presence. Nonetheless, AI interactions also pose risks, including illusions of intimacy and the potential for parasocial attachment. From a gendered perspective, men tend to utilize AI as a secure space and a provider of epistemic support, whereas women more commonly rely on AI for co-regulation and ongoing emotional monitoring. Overall, the study underscores that technology is not inherently neutral; rather, it functions within and contributes to existing gendered structures.

Keyword : AI, gender, emotional regulation.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has fundamentally reshaped the relationship between humans and technology. AI has evolved beyond its role as a logical computational tool to function as a social agent capable of engaging in interpersonal exchanges, fostering a sense of closeness, and producing affective experiences for users (Crăiuț & Iancu, 2022; Kim et al., 2019) growing body of research conceptualizes AI as an *emotional safe space*, a domain where individuals can express feelings without fear of judgment or criticism (Henkel et al., 2023; Pantano & Scarpi, 2022). Russo et al., (2025) further note that users perceive AI as a neutral digital companion offering objective, bias-free emotional support. This assumption stems from the belief that AI systems operate through mathematical logic and dialogic structures, devoid of personal intentions or sociocultural values that might shape their response (N. Gross, 2023)

However, the idea of AI objectivity presents an epistemological tension. Emotions are no longer solely mediated through human-to-human interactions but are increasingly negotiated through machines that simulate “presence” (McStay, 2021). While this constructed presence positions AI as a digital companion and an agent of empathy, its technical underpinnings remain inseparable from socially embedded data.

* Corresponding author: ajengfajarwati@uinsatu.ac.id

Emotional responses generated by AI are largely influenced by training datasets that carry structural inequalities and gendered representations (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; M. Yang, 2025). For instance, female-voiced chatbots are often programmed to sound nurturing, supportive, and compassionate, whereas male-voiced chatbots are configured to sound rational or authoritative (Crăiuț & Iancu, 2022). Such tendencies reinforce entrenched gender stereotypes positioning women as emotional caregivers and men as figures of authority.

Evidence consistently demonstrates that AI systems are far from neutral. Because AI relies on large-scale social data, algorithms inevitably absorb and reproduce long-standing societal inequalities. Ferreira & Silva, (2025) emphasizes that AI models can encode biases related to gender, race, and class. In the case of gender, Crăiuț & Iancu, (2022) reveal persistent user biases, male voices are perceived as more competent (55%), whereas female voices are deemed more empathic (44.44%). AI not only reflects these biases but also amplifies them through its emotional output, shaping users' perceptions and constraining their agency through gendered expectations.

More critically, AI does not merely mirror gender bias, it continually reproduces it through repetitive emotional patterns. M. Yang, (2025) observes that AI-generated emotional responses differ predictably between male and female users. Men typically receive motivational, strength-oriented, and affirming messages, whereas women are more often given nurturing, relationally focused responses. These patterns occur consistently and repetitively. Duan et al., (2025) describe this phenomenon as *algorithmic emotional patterning*, whereby algorithms generate recurring emotional outputs that reinforce traditional gender stereotypes in digital interaction. Consequently, AI becomes a site where gender normativity is maintained even while being perceived as an objective technology.

Gender inequalities become even more pronounced when considered within digital competencies. Aldasoro et al., (2024) reports significant gender disparities in users' ability to operate and optimize AI tools, 50% among men compared to 37% among women. This discrepancy affects the quality of emotional interaction, as higher digital literacy enhances one's ability to regulate emotions and derive meaningful emotional benefits from AI.

Despite these concerns, AI's role as an emotional refuge offers meaningful opportunities, particularly for men. Within patriarchal norms, men are socially conditioned to embody strength, stability, and emotional restraint. Emotional expression is often stigmatized as a sign of weakness that diminishes masculine identity (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). AI enables a form of *digital de-masculinization*, allowing men to express vulnerability without social surveillance.

Seidler et al., (2016) proposes that technology functions as an alternative social sphere where gender identities can be renegotiated. In this context, AI becomes a medium for challenging hegemonic masculinity. Mink et al., (2023) show that men experience reduced emotional pressure and improved emotional regulation when using AI as an expressive outlet. While this shift benefits men, it can also diminish emotional reciprocity in human relationships, potentially limiting women's access to emotional engagement traditionally expected within interpersonal interactions (Park et al., 2023).

The shift toward digital help-seeking among men reflects changes in relational dynamics (Yang, 2025). Yet this phenomenon remains ambivalent. Although AI promotes emotional expression for men, it simultaneously reinforces gender disparities through repetitive, gendered response patterns. In this configuration, men gain emotional freedom while women continue to be subtly framed as emotionally fragile, perpetuating the belief that they require less emotional support (Yang, 2025). This dynamic normalizes emotional asymmetries between genders.

Ultimately, while technology can reshape male emotional expression, it does not automatically dismantle the social structures underpinning gender inequality. Instead, AI risks becoming a new mechanism that stabilizes existing power relations. Emotional

interactions between humans and AI thus remain fundamentally paradoxical, simultaneously liberating and restrictive, emancipatory and reproductive, progressive and regressive. This ambivalence underscores the need to study AI, emotion, and gender through social, cultural, and structural lenses rather than purely technological ones. The present study focuses on the emotional regulation experiences of men and women who consistently engage with AI, and how they construct AI as a “digital companion.” A mixed-methods approach is employed to support comprehensive data collection.

Method

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design. The mixed-methods approach was selected because it enables a comprehensive understanding of social reality by capturing both the depth of subjective experiences and broader, generalizable patterns (Creswell, 2009). As Creswell (2009) notes, individuals interpret and construct reality differently based on their lived experiences and personal contexts. Consequently, researchers must systematically interpret and reconstruct these variations in meaning (Yin, 2016).

In this research, the qualitative component was used to explore gendered differences in the use of AI technologies as tools for emotional regulation. This focus is important given the persistent gender inequalities embedded in technological access, adoption, and interpretation. The quantitative component, meanwhile, was utilized to obtain generalizable data regarding Gen Z's use of AI in Tulungagung Regency.

Accordingly, the qualitative method aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of how men and women construct the meaning of AI-based emotional regulation in their daily lives. This approach provided space for participants to articulate their subjective experiences, generating empirical insights into gendered patterns of meaning-making.

1. Research Informants

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a strategy that allows researchers to deliberately choose participants based on characteristics relevant to the study's objectives. Purposive sampling (Creswell, 2009) involves selecting respondents who meet specific criteria and can provide rich, detailed accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. The criteria for informant selection included: (a) gender; (b) frequency of AI use for emotional regulation; (c) duration of use; and (d) types of concerns shared with AI. Informants were recruited based on their willingness to participate, with priority given to individuals residing in Tulungagung.

2. Data Collection

Data collection employed two techniques. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews. As (Allen et. al., 2009) explains, interviews are not merely question-and-answer exchanges but tools for exploring participants' nuanced understandings and personal experiences. Informants represented different genders but shared consistent patterns of using AI for emotional regulation. Secondary data were gathered through an online survey used to map general demographic trends and support informant selection. Allen, et. al., (2009) highlight that online surveys facilitate the efficient collection of representative responses from large and geographically dispersed populations.

3. Data Analyze

Data analysis employed a triangulation approach. Triangulation enables researchers to examine a phenomenon from multiple perspectives to enhance credibility and trustworthiness while minimizing bias (Allen, et. al., 2009). The analysis began with interpreting interview data, followed by categorizing emergent themes relevant to the study's focus on AI-mediated emotional regulation among men and women in Tulungagung. Quantitative analysis using SPSS further supported the findings by identifying trends related to the duration and frequency of AI use for emotional regulation among Gen Z.

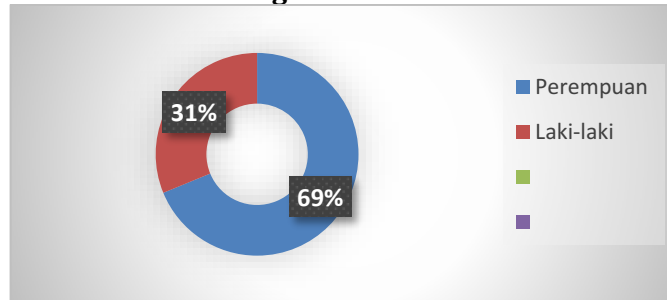
Results

This study employed two forms of data collection. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with participants who met the following criteria: having used an AI chatbot for more than one year and engaging with the chatbot daily for emotional regulation. Secondary data were collected through an online survey distributed to members of Generation Z residing in Tulungagung Regency. The key survey findings are presented below.

a) Gender

From the online survey involving 109 Generation Z respondents in Tulungagung, the results indicate that 69% of AI chatbot users for emotional regulation are female, while 31% are male.

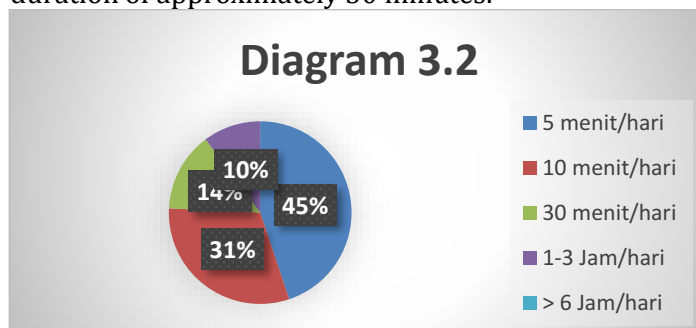
Diagram 3.1. Gender



b) Duration of AI Chatbot Use for Emotional Regulation

Patterns of AI use among Generation Z in Tulungagung show that 44% spend an average of 5 minutes per day engaging with AI for emotional regulation. Meanwhile, 30.3% reported using AI chatbots for more than 10 minutes per day, and 13.8% reported a daily duration of approximately 30 minutes.

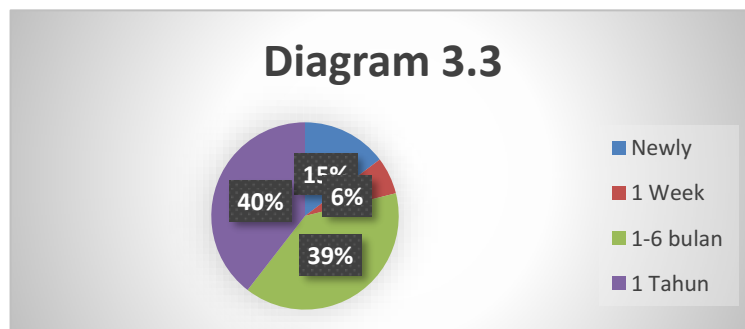
Diagram 3.2



c) Length of AI Use for Emotional Regulation

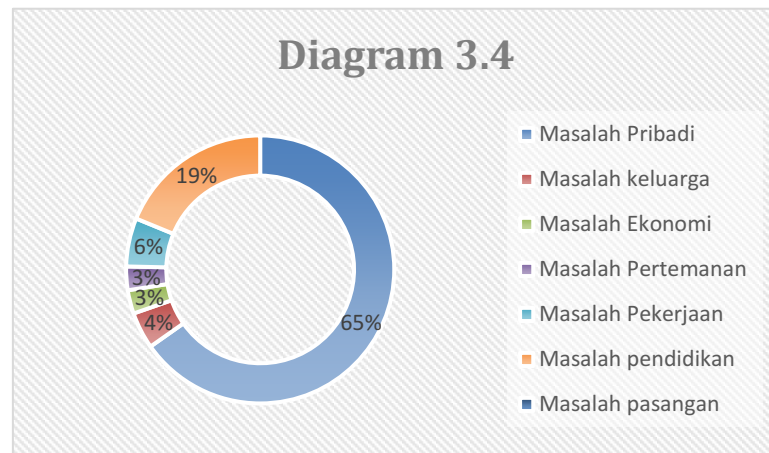
Findings reveal that 39.5% of respondents have used AI for emotional regulation over the past year. Additionally, 39.4% reported using AI for this purpose for about 1–6 months. A further 14.7% represent new users who have only recently become familiar with using AI for emotional support. These usage patterns are illustrated in the diagram referenced in the study.

Diagram 3.3



d). Types of Issues Shared with AI Chatbots

Survey results show that the majority of concerns disclosed to AI chatbots by Generation Z in Tulungagung relate to personal matters (65%). The second most common category of issues reported concerns academic or educational challenges.



Summary findings show that explored further through in-depth interviews with informants who fulfilled two criteria: (a) having used AI for more than one year, and (b) interacting with AI consistently on a daily basis. The survey results indicate that female users are more likely than male users to rely on AI for emotional regulation. In addition, the use of AI for this purpose tends to occur on a daily and consistent basis, with personal issues constituting the most frequently discussed problems.

d) Gender Gap: Construction Men and Women

Chatbot AI, Gender, and Emotion Regulation					
Usage	ER	MN	N	NH	S
 Safe space alt emotional	 Situational (in need) deceitful	 Situational (inconsistent; urgent situations)	 ~30 min/ day; romantic issues	 >1 year; ~5 min/day; work-related	 Occasional self-vel retention
Motivation	Privacy & non-judgment space; consistent, friendly re	Avoiding judgement, seeking anonymity	24/7 availability; feeling "heard"	Efficiency, clarity of information	Reframing, seeking practical advice
Emotion Regulation Strategies	Venting, validation cognitive reappraisal	Venting, self-monitoring, problem- focused coping	Emotional labeling; self-monitor- ing	Progress- focused coping reappraisal	Self- monitoring, reframing problem- coping
AI's Role	Safe-space emotional companion epistemic support	Supplement	Co-regulator reference	Cognitive tool	Instrumental support
Effects	"I disagree bot can be nish bored om, we need real space for activities	"I disagree bot can banish boredom... we need real space for activities	"I barzer elavilmed, but the em- patty was modeled"	"I don't use chatbot for emotional issues	"Not convinced it can relieve stress

Picture 1.1. Infographic

Interview findings reveal a persistent gender gap in the use of AI chatbots, manifested not only in unequal access but also in distinct psychological motivations, emotional expectations, and communicative orientations. Participants consistently framed AI chatbots as safe, non-judgmental

environments that provide epistemic support and alternative relational affordances, yet these experiences were deeply shaped by gendered norms and personal contexts.

For ER (male), the chatbot functioned primarily as an emotionally protective space, compensating for the lack of supportive human relationships. His emphasis on privacy, consistency, and the absence of judgment illustrates how men often constrained by masculine norms discouraging emotional disclosure redirect their regulatory needs into digital environments. Through venting, affective validation, and cognitive reappraisal, ER used the chatbot in ways consistent with (J. J. Gross, 2002) emotion regulation framework, indicating a partial outsourcing of emotional labor to AI. His use of the chatbot as a “secondary confirmation space” also reflects the rise of machine-based epistemic scaffolding, suggesting a shifting locus of emotional authority from interpersonal relationships to algorithmic systems.

MN (female) demonstrated a more bounded and situational engagement. She used AI only under acute emotional pressure and maintained strict limits to avoid technological over-reliance. This aligns with gendered patterns in digital emotional labor, wherein women utilize technology as contingent support rather than a relational substitute. Her insistence that AI cannot replace embodied social spaces resonates with research showing that women typically require deeper affective resonance and authentic empathy qualities AI can only simulate (Farzan et al., 2025; Babu et al., 2025; Chu et al., 2025) implicitly critiques the “illusion of intimacy” inherent in artificial intimacy systems.

N (female) used AI because of its constant availability and anonymity, employing it for emotional labeling, self-monitoring, and problem-focused coping mechanisms aligned with early-stage CBT-based chatbot effects (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). Yet she firmly rejected AI as a source of authoritative emotional guidance, reflecting (Edwards et al., 2024) distinction between “modeled empathy” and genuine emotional attunement. Her awareness of pseudo-intimacy and potential dependency highlights a gendered digital literacy in recognizing AI’s emotional limits.

NH (female) diverged significantly by restricting AI use to cognitive and occupational tasks, framing the chatbot as an instrumental “second thinking machine.” This pattern mirrors findings by (Rivera-Novoa & Duarte Arias, 2025) suggesting that AI can enhance cognitive organization while remaining emotionally neutral. Her refusal to engage emotionally with the chatbot underscores ongoing skepticism among female users regarding AI’s capacity for meaningful affective exchange.

S (female) represented a hybrid user pattern valuing AI for reflective and rational feedback yet rejecting the possibility of deep emotional reliance. Her assertion that AI is “just a robot” reinforces (Lomas et al., 2024) concept of surface level empathy and the enduring primacy of human agency in emotional decision-making.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that AI chatbots operate within not outside of gendered social structures. While men appear to leverage AI as an emotion-regulation refuge that bypasses stigma, women engage with AI more cautiously, balancing utility with critical awareness of emotional authenticity and dependency risks. The data ultimately complicate claims of AI as an emotionally neutral technology, revealing that artificial intimacy is deeply entangled with gendered expectations, socioemotional norms, and preexisting inequalities.

Discussion

A. Artificial Intimacy: Intimacy as a Dialogical Rather Than Physiological Phenomenon

1. AI Chatbots as Artificial Partners

The concept of *artificial intimacy* emphasizes that emotional closeness is not solely constructed through physical interaction but through a dialogical process repeated, consistent, and meaningful communication (Chu et al., 2025). (Brooks, 2021) argues that algorithms can personalize interactions in ways that make users feel attended to, understood, and emotionally validated. In this study's interview data, participants ER, N, and MN described experiences of "being heard," "being validated," and "feeling relieved" after interacting with the chatbot. These findings align with (Brooks, 2021) assertion that platforms can mimic conversational structures that gradually generate a sense of intimacy. Intimacy is therefore no longer grounded in embodiment or physical presence; instead, it operates as a *relational process* constructed through message exchanges that users perceive as warm, supportive, and non-judgmental.

Within this framework, an AI chatbot functions not merely as a technological tool but as a dialogical actor that simulates the role of a human conversational partner. In the context of emotional regulation, the chatbot exemplifies an *artificial partner*: although non-human, it provides emotional support, validation, and a sense of understanding through dialogical interaction. Participant ER's comment that the AI "always responds well" and offers a "safe, non-judgmental space" reflects a form of dialogical intimacy grounded not in physical contact but in psychological resonance. This explains why users may feel "appreciated" by a machine despite knowing that it is not a human agent. Artificial Intimacy, however, also illuminates its potential drawbacks. Such technologies may create illusions of emotional closeness, foster parasocial attachments, or enable affective manipulation. When chatbots are designed merely to soothe users without directing them toward real human support, they may exacerbate emotional isolation rather than mitigate it (R. Zhang et al., 2025; Fang et al., 2025; Yuan et al., 2024)

These observations are consistent with findings in *Computers in Human Behavior*, which report that perceived responsiveness shapes the development of relational closeness with chatbots. Users tend to perceive AI as listening, understanding, and providing emotional support (Chaturvedi et al., 2023). This is reflected in ER's statement: "*The chatbot always responds well without me worrying about my privacy being exposed.*" Here, intimacy manifests as a sense of emotional safety rather than physical proximity. In the infographic referenced above, this dimension is represented as a "safe space," reinforcing that dialogical intimacy emerges when users experience acceptance without judgment. Thus, artificial intimacy demonstrates that intimacy is fundamentally a psychological experience mediated through communication with AI systems. Intimacy can develop without gaze, touch, or physical presence; it grows through interactions that users perceive as consistent, supportive, and empathetic.

In relation to emotional regulation, (J. J. Gross, 2002) explains that individuals modify their emotional experiences through strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, suppression, and situation modification. AI-based technologies expand these regulatory possibilities, as chatbots can serve as safe, responsive, and always-available partners in emotional processing. Chu et al., (2025) found that AI chatbots operate as *emotional co-regulators*, providing dialogical space, helping users reorganize their thoughts, and offering alternative perspectives that shape affective states. This aligns with the interview findings from MN (female), who stated, "AI helps organize my thoughts and understand myself," illustrating how AI provides cognitive scaffolding that facilitates emotional reappraisal. For her, the chatbot functions not as a replacement for human relationships but as a tool to alleviate momentary stress. Similarly, participant NH (female) perceived the chatbot as a supporting structure that helps manage emotional reactions during daily stress. (Babu et al., 2025) further demonstrate that chatbots can

serve as emotional surrogates, offering a risk-free space for venting without social consequences. In sum, digital media have evolved beyond merely serving as channels of information; they now operate as *artificial partners* that assist in emotional management, particularly in contexts where human interaction risks eliciting stigma, moral judgment, or interpersonal conflict.

2. Dialogical Intimacy in AI Chatbots

Dialogical intimacy mediated by AI chatbots rests on three primary foundations: (1) psychosocial safety, (2) the perception of being heard, and (3) a non-judgmental presence. First, the sense of safety emerges from narratives such as, *"The AI chatbot always responds well without me worrying that my privacy will be exposed"* (ER). Within the framework of artificial intimacy, privacy constitutes a fundamental condition for the formation of intimacy. Edwards et al., (2024) emphasize that dialogical intimacy is more readily established in digital environments that offer anonymity and minimal social risk. Thus, perceived safety reinforces emotional closeness built through communication.

Second, the perception of being heard appears in statements such as, *"AI helps me organize my thoughts and understand myself"* (MN). The chatbot's rapid, consistent, and seemingly empathic responses create an illusion of active participation, thereby strengthening intimacy. Third, the presence of non-judgment emerges in remarks such as, *"Other people often judge or criticize, whereas the chatbot's responses are always pleasant and non-judgmental."* This illustrates that dialogical intimacy operates within a spectrum of *low-risk intimacy*. Rachmawati, Ainun, (2018) found that adolescents tend to be more open on digital platforms when dealing with emotional difficulties due to the reduced risk of social stigma.

In this context, some users view AI as both a "safe space" and an "additional reference point." The identity of AI as a partner becomes evident when users describe it as a confidant, an emotional counselor, or a tool for emotional organization. The resulting intimacy does not stem from physical proximity but from consistent dialogical closeness.

3. AI as a Social Entity Capable of Empathy

A growing body of research shows that humans tend to attribute social capacities such as empathy, care, and attentiveness to chatbots, even while recognizing that AI does not possess genuine emotions (Lee et al., 2024; Fang et al., 2025; T. Liu et al., 2025; L. Zhang et al., 2024; Seitz, 2024). Schaaff et al., (2023) examining artificial empathy in healthcare settings, found that users often perceive AI responses as "sincere" expressions of empathy. The relationships that emerge are quasi-intimate emotionally significant but lacking true mutuality (Chu et al., 2025; Wu, 2024; Babu et al., 2025)

In the interviews, participant N stated that *"when talking about romance or anxiety, AI helps make things feel lighter," yet simultaneously recognized its limits: "But the chatbot is only an additional reference; it cannot provide emotional comfort."* This ambivalence also appears in the infographic under "Needing humans during periods of severe stress." These insights align with findings that AI is effective in alleviating mild to moderate stress but less effective when users require deeper, human-level empathic support. Thus, intimacy with AI is functional rather than profoundly relational.

Furthermore, intimacy facilitated by digital systems (artificial intimacy) challenges traditional assumptions that emotional closeness depends on physical contact. Within a dialogical framework, intimacy emerges from a sequence of social relations involving responsiveness, recognition, communicative consistency, and the feeling of being heard. Recent empirical studies (Nurkhairani et al., 2025) show that users assess intimacy based on the quality of dialogical interaction—response speed, relevance, and non-judgment rather than on the presence of a human agent behind the message.

Several studies (Møgelvang et al., 2024; Mina et al., 2025; Rodriguez Saavedra et al., 2025) indicate that women tend to use digital spaces to maintain privacy and avoid

social evaluation, often turning to AI chatbots during moments of heightened affective pressure. Meanwhile, men tend to position AI chatbots as tools of epistemic support interpreting problems, providing informational references, shaping self-perception, and helping interpret experiences or as alternative social interactions that preserve personal agency (L. Zhang et al., 2024; R. Zhang et al., 2025; Y. li Liu et al., 2024). This pattern is reflected in the interview with ER (male), who positioned AI both as epistemic support and a safe space, whereas the female participants emphasized AI's function in co-regulation and self-monitoring

B. Techno-Gender

Technology is not socially neutral; it is designed, distributed, and utilized within gendered social structures, thereby reproducing or at times challenging existing gender norms. This phenomenon is referred to as *techno-gender*. Within this paradigm, technology and gender are intertwined: gender identities, gender roles, access, and social interaction patterns are reshaped by technological artifacts, while technology intersects with gender through design decisions, representational logics, and contexts of use (Varghese & Rajeev, 2025). Digital technologies may reinforce gender inequalities through disparities in access, literacy, and representation, yet they also hold potential as spaces for resistance, empowerment, and the transformation of gender norms when designed inclusively (Ferreira & Silva, 2025)

Ethically, technologies developed without gender sensitivity risk reproducing gender bias, marginalizing women, or reinforcing traditional stereotypes (Wati Hermawati, 2018). Palacios Barea et al., (2025) argue that anthropomorphized technologies display embedded gender and racial biases through stereotypes internalized in algorithms. Thus, AI technologies carry traces of existing power relations, reinforcing the idea that “technology can produce gender,” insofar as AI outputs, representations, and interactions shape social perceptions of gender.

Consistent with this perspective (Møgelvang et al., 2024) observe that men tend to use AI chatbots more intensively for varied purposes, whereas women use them primarily for text-based tasks and exhibit greater sensitivity toward ethical concerns such as cognitive independence. In *The Three Social Dimensions of Chatbot Technology*, (Figueroa-Torres, 2025) conceptualizes chatbots not merely as technical tools but as social entities “agents of intimate interaction,” “commercial objects,” and “subjects of scientific inquiry.” This framework helps clarify that emotional or affective uses of chatbots (including emotional regulation) do not occur in a neutral space; rather, they are embedded within social values, design choices, and power relations including gendered ones.

In contrast to these perspectives, critiques of AI design highlight how technologies often replicate traditional gender norms. Studies such as (Hipólito et al., 2023) call for gender-inclusive (non-stereotypical) AI design as a form of technological justice, arguing that techno-gender is not merely about access but also about how AI is designed and how gender norms are reproduced or transformed through these systems. At the policy and social transformation level, (Hannes Werthner, 2024) asserts that digitalization can advance gender equality only when accompanied by explicit gender strategies and inclusive policies; otherwise, digital transformation may exacerbate existing inequalities.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that participants position AI chatbots as *safe spaces* that enable them to express emotions, reflect on personal experiences, and obtain validation without the risk of social judgment. This sense of closeness aligns with the concept of *artificial intimacy*, a form of connection that does not require physical presence, eye contact, or touch, but instead emerges through consistent, empathic, and supportive responses. Participants describe their interactions with AI as emotionally

soothing because the chatbot provides attention without judgment. However, artificial intimacy also carries a darker side: it may create illusions of emotional relationships, intensify parasocial attachment, and foster unconscious affective dependence. Thus, AI becomes an ambivalent figure offering comfort while simultaneously holding the potential to influence users' emotional stability.

The social functioning of AI is shaped through reciprocal interactions involving responsiveness, conversational rhythm, recognition, and perceived empathy. Participants reported feeling "heard" and "appreciated," indicating that human-AI relationships are no longer merely transactional but dialogical. AI begins to operate as an *artificial partner*, helping users articulate problems, manage emotions, and navigate self-reflection. From a gender perspective, the study finds that these interactions are influenced by social constructions and emotional experiences that differ between men and women. Male participants tend to position AI as *epistemic support*, a knowledge reference that helps interpret issues, map experiences, and strengthen personal agency. For them, AI serves as an alternative form of social interaction that allows structured thinking without compromising autonomy. In contrast, female participants emphasize co-regulation and self-monitoring, describing how AI helps alleviate stress, regulate emotions, and provide reflective space free from judgment. They perceive AI as a confidant, emotional counselor, and accessible dialogic companion.

The study also underscores that technology is not neutral. Within the techno-gender framework, the interactions, biases, and representations embedded in AI reproduce or challenge gendered power relations. In other words, technology is not merely a tool but a mechanism that shapes gender perceptions through its communicative style, its patterns of response, and the meanings users ascribe to their relationships with it. AI chatbots actively construct gender dynamics, becoming dialogical actors that influence how individuals understand themselves, others, and their social relationships.

Future research should further explore digital intimacy, particularly the potential for emotional dependency and the psychological consequences of intensive interactions with AI. Comparative cross-cultural studies are also needed to examine how social norms shape user relationships with technology. Additionally, deeper investigations into techno-gender are essential to identify how algorithmic bias and design choices shape the experiences of men and women differently. Research on interface design, AI personification, and emotionally responsive patterns may contribute to the development of digital technologies that are more ethical, gender-sensitive, and attuned to users' emotional well-being.

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