The following paper was researched and written as part of LSE GROUPS 2025.

LSE GROUPS takes place during the final fortnight of the LSE Spring Term. Undergraduate students are placed in small groups; these are cross-year, interdisciplinary, and group members do not know one another in advance. Each group must then devise its own research question and carry out every stage of a small-scale research project, in less than two weeks.

LSE GROUPS is part of the LSE commitment to students learning through enquiry and developing the skills needed for knowledge creation.

The overall theme of LSE GROUPS 2025 was *Visions for the Future*

This paper was submitted on the final Thursday afternoon of the project. Students then presented their work at a conference, on the closing Friday.

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London School of Economics and Political Science

You, me ... and AI: The impact of AI on romantic interpersonal relationships

Group 1

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Abstract

While existing discourse on artificial intelligence (AI) in romantic contexts often centers on human–AI relationships, this study shifts focus to explore how AI may impact human–to–human romantic interpersonal relationships. Addressing this gap, the research investigates the extent to which generative AI influences romantic dynamics among university students. Using a qualitative methodology, data was collected through semi–structured interviews with participants across diverse relationship statuses. Thematic analysis reveals that although various social factors – such as family background, personality, and appearance – shape who individuals choose to date, AI plays a distinct and emerging role in how romantic relationships are navigated and maintained. Participants described using AI tools for communication support, emotional guidance, and online dating interactions. These findings suggest a potential causal association between AI use and the conduct of romantic interpersonal relationships, highlighting the need to further consider the sociotechnical mediation of intimacy in contemporary contexts.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, qualitative research, interviews, romantic interpersonal relationships, university students*

Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has proliferated in use and become ubiquitous since the early 2020s (Dwivedi et al., 2023). The rapid rise of generative AI has led to it reshaping not just interactions within the public sphere, but also interactions within the private sphere including the most intimate ones – romantic relationships. Generative AI was mainly utilized in academic and professional contexts; however, it has since migrated from the public sphere to the private sphere. Literature on AI has focused on its applications in the academic and professional fields, however significantly less attention has been paid to its role in romantic relationships.

Moreover, when analysing the role of AI within romantic relationships, significant literature has focused on human-AI relationships, instead of how AI is used as a tool to aid communication within romantic interpersonal relationships. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on AI's more nuanced effects on interpersonal dynamics and emotional experiences in romantic contexts. The aim of this project is to examine the relationship between the use of generative AI and romantic interpersonal relationships. As such, our research question is '*To what extent does AI impact romantic interpersonal relationships?*'.

There is also a lack of qualitative insight into how individuals perceive and emotionally respond to AI-mediated and AI-influenced romantic interactions. Therefore, by using semi-structured interviews on young people, we aim to uncover their perceptions and insights into how AI impacts their current and future romantic interpersonal relationships. This involves an analysis of how people employ AI in romantic interpersonal relationships, how often they use it, and the motivation behind their use. Moreover, we seek to uncover the reasons why people do not use AI within their relationship, and whether there are alternative factors that impact romantic interpersonal relationships.

Literature Review

As generative artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, emerging literature has begun exploring its impact on romantic interpersonal relationships. Our theoretical framework draws from interpersonal communication theory, social exchange models, and new research on AI-mediated interaction. Romantic relationships are generally understood as emotionally intimate, interdependent bonds involving mutual investment (Zimmermann, Janhonen, & Beer, 2024; Kelley et al., 1983). According to Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory, these relationships are shaped by intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Traditional scholarship identifies several key factors that shape the development of romantic bonds. First, early socialization is critical. Family dynamics and observed parental relationships often serve as templates for adult relational behaviour. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977)

posits that individuals learn interpersonal behaviours by observing role models. Jamison and Lo (2020) show that young adults often emulate the relationship dynamics of parents they admire, suggesting a strong intergenerational influence on romantic engagement. Second, mental health plays a substantial role in relationship formation and maintenance. Anxiety and depression are consistently linked to lower relational satisfaction and greater conflict (Postler et al., 2022). These effects are particularly pronounced in adolescence and early adulthood (Mirsu-Paun & Oliver, 2017), suggesting a feedback loop: poor mental health strains relationships, and relational instability worsens psychological wellbeing.

Third, socio-economic status (SES) continues to shape relationship formation. Illouz (2012, 2022) argues that romantic choice is now structured by an "architecture of choice" shaped by neoliberal and capitalist logics. In dating app contexts, individuals are evaluated quickly through metrics of efficiency, abundance, and market-based value. As SES influences both relational opportunity and technological access, it becomes a key structural factor – and a potential confounder in our study since AI access also depends on economic resources. While these variables are well documented, the role of AI in human romantic relationships remains underexplored. Existing research has focused largely on AI as a surrogate partner – examining companionship, emotional simulation, and the illusion of empathy. However, far less attention has been paid to AI as a mediator within human-to-human romantic relationships. This is the core research gap our study addresses.

Generative AI – such as ChatGPT – is defined as a computational model capable of producing novel content, including text and images, based on learned data (Feuerriegel et al., 2014). In relational contexts, concerns have been raised about AI's emotional realism. Cuadra et al. (2024) describe an "empathy illusion," in which users attribute emotional understanding to AI agents. Zimmerman et al. (2024) note that such interactions challenge norms of emotional reciprocity. Bishop et al. (2022) warn that AI may leave users vulnerable to surveillance, manipulation, and emotional confusion.

However, this literature has yet to account for AI's growing use in mediating communication between partners. For example, Vowels et al. (2024) examine AI as a relationship therapist. Their findings suggest that AI offers clarity and structure, with advantages such as 24/7 availability and judgment-free advice. However, the responses often lack nuance and emotional resonance. While limited, this research suggests AI can serve a therapeutic function – albeit with emotional limitations.

AI is also playing a larger role in everyday romantic communication. Smart reply to features (Kannan et al., 2016) are now commonplace in messaging platforms, and increasingly used for personal interactions. A McAfee (2023) survey found that 45% of men considered using AI to craft Valentine's Day messages. Saga et al. (2025) report that students who use AI to process

romantic challenges experience improved relationship satisfaction, suggesting that AI may enhance emotional clarity and self-expression.

In dating contexts, Furlo et al. (2021) show that AI-generated prompts help users approach complex topics, such as consent. This suggests AI can enable more meaningful interactions. However, Hohenstein et al. (2023) demonstrate that when people become aware they are receiving AI-assisted messages, trust decreases significantly. The same message, if believed to be human-written, is perceived as more sincere and authentic. This introduces a paradox: AI can enhance communication quality, but its visibility often undermines relational trust. The tension is further illustrated by dating app design. Hinge, for instance, now offers an AI-powered "Prompt Feedback" feature to improve user profiles (Hinge, 2025). While this enhances clarity and presentation, Wu and Kelly (2020) find that when AI involvement is detected, perceptions of authenticity decline, reducing user trust. These findings reinforce the idea that AI's benefits are conditional on its invisibility.

Taken together, these studies suggest a dual mechanism. AI can aid users in articulating emotions, navigating conflict, and managing communication. Yet the disclosure or detection of AI involvement frequently undermines key relational qualities such as authenticity and trust – particularly in romantic contexts that prize emotional sincerity.

Causal Mechanism

We propose the following causal mechanism: AI is increasingly used as a tool to support communication and emotional processing in romantic relationships. When used discreetly, it may enhance clarity, confidence, and expression. However, if a partner perceives or becomes aware that communication is mediated by AI, trust and emotional intimacy may deteriorate. This outcome is consistent with research on emotional dissonance, empathy illusion (Cuadra et al., 2024), and relational authenticity (Hohenstein et al., 2023; Wu & Kelly, 2020).

Hypothesis

Generative AI use in romantic communication improves perceived relational quality when undisclosed. However, awareness of AI mediation decreases trust and perceived authenticity, thereby weakening interpersonal relationship quality.

Methodology

Given the sensitive and uncertain nature of the research topic, semi-structured interviews were determined to be the only viable methodological approach. The personal, subjective, and evolving aspects of participants' experiences made quantitative methods insufficient, as they would not capture the nuance, emotional tone, or variability of responses necessary for a meaningful analysis. A qualitative and primarily retrospective approach enabled participants to reflect on their own experiences and expectations, offering valuable insight into how generative AI intersects with intimacy, identity, and communication in modern dating.

Qualitative Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed for their ability to generate rich, context-sensitive data while allowing for conversational flexibility. This format enabled interviewers to probe deeper into responses, follow up on emerging themes, and adapt the interview structure to each participant's comfort level and communication style. Building rapport during interviews was essential, as it encouraged participants to speak openly about potentially sensitive topics, such as sexuality, dating history, and perceptions of AI. The interviews focused on individuals aged 18–24, a demographic particularly engaged with both digital technologies and evolving romantic norms.

Sampling Methodology

A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. While random sampling is typically favoured for its ability to reduce selection bias, it was not feasible for this study, nor would it have been desirable given the need for trust between interviewer and interviewee. By deliberately selecting participants with some level of pre-existing rapport, the study sought to create a comfortable environment that reduced the likelihood of social desirability bias. This sampling strategy prioritised the reliability and authenticity of the data over generalisability.

Interview Structure

The interviews were structured to allow participants to respond freely and at length, encouraging them to share both concrete experiences and broader attitudes. Although key themes – such as personal AI use, general exposure to generative AI, and perceived or anticipated impacts on romantic relationships – were introduced consistently across interviews, participants had significant freedom to elaborate and steer the conversation. This balance ensured comparability while preserving the depth and individuality of each account.

Quality Criteria

In designing the interview process, particular attention was paid to the quality criteria outlined by Irvine (2012), including building rapport, ensuring attentiveness, and accurately recording responses. These factors were essential in creating a x`safe and open environment for participants, which in turn improved the depth and reliability of the data collected.

Interview transcripts were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns, categories, and themes. Codes were then grouped and ranked by frequency to provide a clearer picture of participants shared concerns and points of divergence. These findings were compared against existing literature to support, refine, or contest existing claims. A more detailed discussion of the coding strategy and empirical themes is provided in the Empirical Analysis section that follows.

Empirical Findings

Our interview data suggest the existence of two potential causal pathways: social factors such as family background, personality, and physical appearance appear to influence who individuals choose to date, while generative AI influences how romantic interpersonal relationships are conducted.

The Role of Family in Romantic Partner Selection

Family emerged as a salient social factor in shaping dating preferences. While family members may not always share a household, they remain deeply embedded in social identity and decision-making (Sharma, 2013). Many interviewees explicitly stated that family values played a decisive role in their dating choices, as evident in figures 1 and 2. For example, one participant commented that if a potential partner held "different values and morals," including "family values," they "might not get along." Similarly, another interviewee remarked that "family dynamics" can "shape a person."

These findings resonate with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that family upbringing and early socialisation critically influence behavioural development, including in romantic contexts. Therefore, while family appears to be part of a distinct causal pathway affecting *who* individuals date, this is not the primary focus of our research. Our study is instead concerned with how AI affects *how* people engage in romantic relationships – a separate and more relevant causal mechanism in this context.
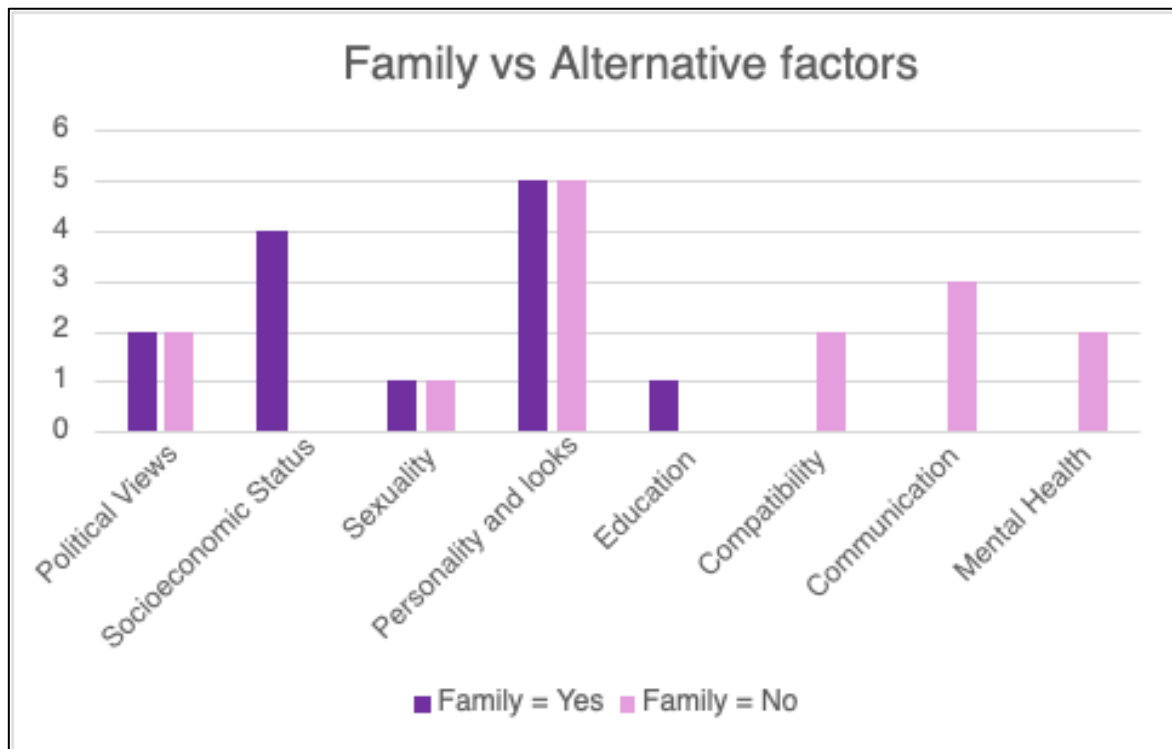
Figure 1: this bar chart titled "Family vs Alternative factors" compares how individuals prioritize different relationship factors depending on whether family approval is considered ("Family = Yes") or not ("Family = No").
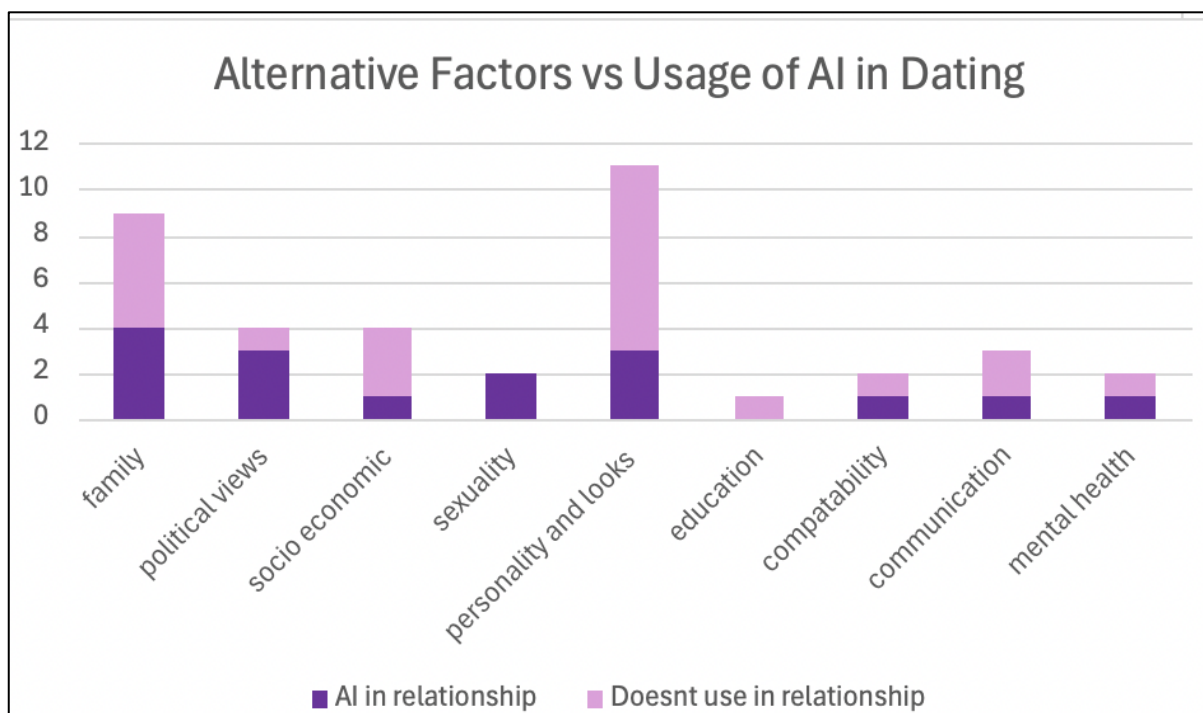

Figure 2: this bar chart titled "Comparative Factors vs Usage of AI in Dating" compares how various relationship factors differ between people who use AI in their relationships (dark purple bars) and those who do not use AI (light purple bars).

The Influence of Personality and Physical Appearance

Our findings also reaffirm the importance of personality and physical appearance in partner selection. As illustrated in the figure 2, these were the most frequently cited factors. One participant noted, "Looks is definitely important. Obviously, how the two of us get along… it's a very generic answer" – a view echoed by many others.

While personality and physical appearance are relatively self-explanatory variables, it is important to note that each participant interpreted these traits subjectively. Specific characteristics such as ambition and shared hobbies were repeatedly mentioned. This reflects the academic consensus that similarity and physical attraction are fundamental to romantic relationships (Vangelisti, 2012). Although these variables are highly relevant to *who* people date, they remain conceptually and empirically distinct from the role of AI, which, as our findings suggest, influences *how* romantic relationships are conducted.

The Role of Generative AI in Romantic Relationships

Our data indicates that individuals in ongoing relationships are more likely to use generative AI tools to enhance or sustain romantic communication. Several participants described using AI to obtain relationship advice. For instance, one participant reported turning to AI for help when unsure how to support a partner who was emotionally struggling. Others acknowledged AI's limitations: one interviewee noted that the advice lacked personalization, while another pointed out that AI-generated suggestions were biased based on previously entered information.

These reflections align with Vowels et al. (2024), who argue that AI lacks emotional nuance and challenges the "empathy illusion" which proposes that users misperceive AI agents are sentient beings (Cuadra et al., 2024). Similarly, Zimmerman et al. (2024) have shown that AI-based relationship support remains limited in therapeutic depth.

Interestingly, single participants were much less likely to use AI for initiating romantic connections. As shown in the data, there is a stark contrast between single and partnered individuals in terms of AI use. This finding challenges the assumption in our theoretical framework that single people are most likely to use AI to enhance attractiveness. Instead, it appears that AI is more commonly employed for maintaining rather than initiating relationships.

AI Use in Casual Dating

In the context of casual relationships – defined here as mutually acknowledged romantic and/or sexual interactions without expectations of commitment – AI tools were found to be more widely used. Participants engaged in casual dating reported higher levels of AI use in romantic settings than both single individuals and those in committed relationships.

On dating apps, interviewees described using AI-driven platforms or chatbots to draft messages or initiate conversations. These tools were primarily used to enhance first impressions or improve match potential, indicating that AI is perceived as a means to optimize romantic interactions rather than deepen emotional intimacy. This usage is consistent with the theoretical framework outlined earlier in the paper. Additionally, other casual daters improved communication through using AI to overcome language barriers, analyse and understand complex messages.
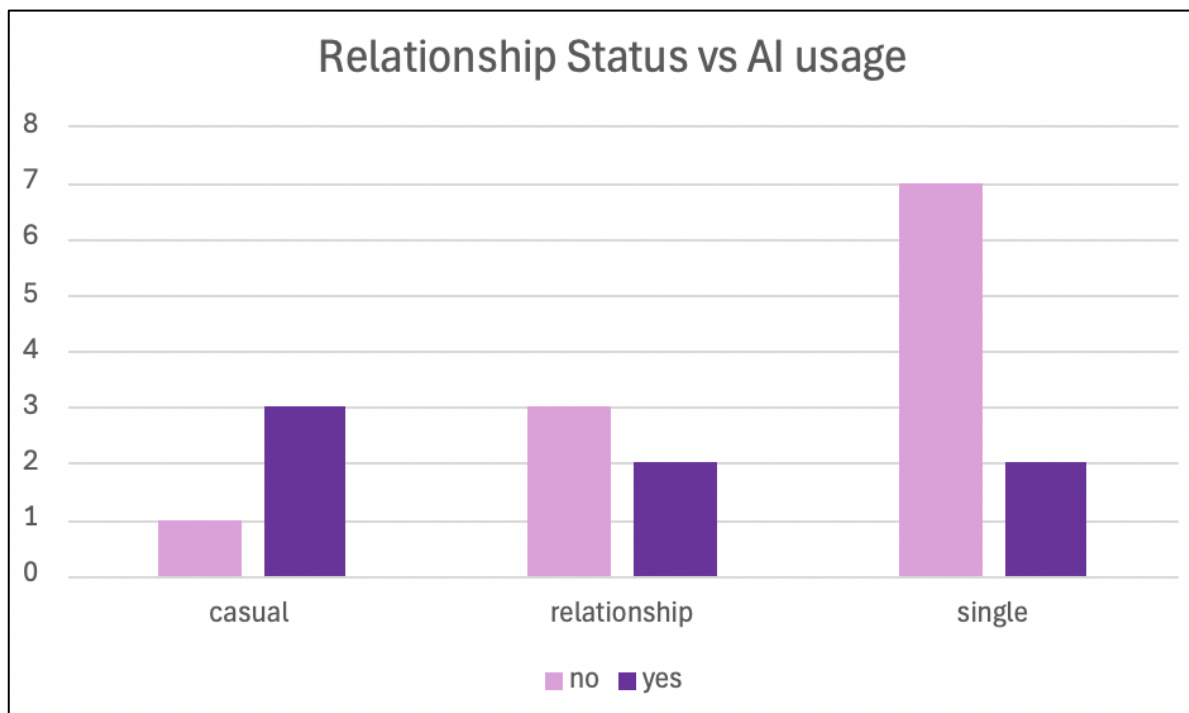

Figure 3: This bar chart titled "Relationship Status vs AI usage" illustrates AI usage in dating across different relationship statuses, where pink represents non-users and purple represents users.

Gender, Sexuality, and AI Use

Our data also reveal that queer participants and women reported the highest use of AI in romantic contexts, as illustrated in the figure. This finding runs counter to existing research suggesting that men generally hold more positive attitudes toward AI (Grassini, 2023). While further exploration of the intersections between gender, sexuality, and AI usage would be valuable, such inquiry lies beyond the scope of this study.
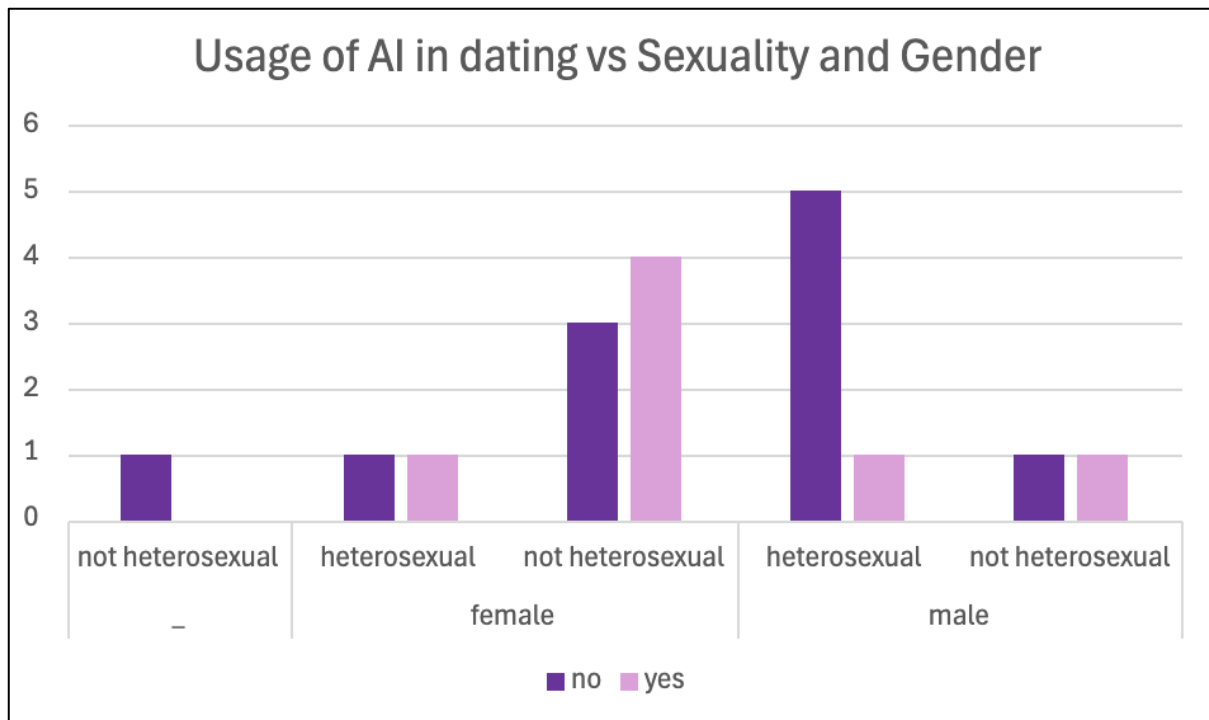
Figure 4: This bar chart titled "Usage of AI in Dating vs Sexuality and Gender" explores how individuals of different gender and sexual orientation groups use AI in dating.

The Four Hurdles of Causality

Establishing causality using qualitative methods is inherently challenging – not impossible, but methodologically complex due to the interpretive and non-experimental nature of the data. This study approached causal inference with a high degree of caution and methodological care, recognising the limitations and advantages of qualitative inquiry. While definitive causal claims cannot be made, the empirical evidence and analysis presented here address the four hurdles of causality with sufficient rigour to justify a discussion of potential causal associations between generative AI use and how romantic interpersonal relationships are conducted.

1. Credible Causal Mechanism

Our theoretical framework proposed a causal mechanism whereby AI shapes how romantic interpersonal relationships are conducted. This mechanism was empirically observed in our data: participants described using AI to manage communication, provide emotional support, or optimize engagement in both committed and casual contexts. A second potential causal mechanism also emerged during data collection, namely that social factors – family, personality, and physical appearance – affect *who* people choose to date. While this pathway is relevant, it falls outside the main analytical focus of our research. Therefore, the original causal mechanism concerning AI and *how* people date appears valid and unchallenged.

2. Covariation

We observed clear covariation between relationship status and AI usage. In the context of qualitative research, covariation of course does not mean statistical covariation, but rather are patterns of associations and consequent empirical regularities that could suggest causal relations – we have observed this in our data. Participants involved in casual dating reported more frequent and targeted use of AI for romantic purposes – especially for crafting messages or improving dating profiles – than those who were single or in long-term partnerships. Although covariation alone does not establish causality, it is a necessary precondition and supports the inference that AI use is meaningfully related to *how* individuals engage in romantic relationships.

3. Alternative Explanations

To mitigate the impact of socioeconomic status as a confounding variable, we selected a relatively homogeneous sample: university students. All participants had comparable access to technology – including smartphones, internet connectivity, and AI-based tools. By focusing on a group with similar technological and educational environments, we aimed to ensure that observed differences in AI use were not primarily driven by disparities in digital access.

Additionally, family, personality, and physical appearance emerged as non-confounding alternative explanations, as their influence appears largely restricted to *who* individuals choose to date. In contrast, AI's impact is concentrated on *how* individuals conduct their relationships. These findings suggest that while multiple factors shape romantic behaviour, they operate on different axes and do not undermine the core causal mechanism under investigation.

4. Reverse Causality

To mitigate concerns about reverse causality, we examined broader patterns of AI use among participants. All respondents – regardless of relationship status – reported using AI primarily for academic tasks and logistical planning (e.g., travel). This consistency indicates that being in a relationship does not significantly influence general AI usage, thereby reducing the likelihood that romantic behaviour is driving AI adoption rather than the other way around.

Limitations and future research

A primary concern during data collection was the risk of sample bias. Although convenience and snowball sampling were deemed most appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study, these methods inherently carry a degree of selection bias, as participants were deliberately recruited rather than randomly selected. This lack of randomisation limits the study's external validity, as the sample is not nationally representative. Another challenge related to the use of semi-structured interviews was the potential for unreliable or unrepresentative data, particularly given the personal and sensitive nature of the topic. Participants may have been influenced by social desirability bias, potentially modifying their responses when discussing

issues such as dating history, sexuality, and gender identity. While efforts were made to mitigate this risk through careful question framing and rapport-building, the possibility of biased responses cannot be entirely ruled out. Additionally, the relatively small sample size may have constrained the range of perspectives captured, limiting the generalisability of the findings. The reliance on convenience sampling also resulted in a sample heavily composed of first-year undergraduate students at London universities. A broader sample, both geographically and demographically, would likely have provided a more comprehensive understanding of variations in dating culture and AI usage across different contexts.

Ethical considerations

Conducting interviews on the topic of romantic interpersonal relationships raises several ethical concerns, primarily due to the sensitive and personal nature of the subject matter. Participants may be asked to reflect on intimate aspects of their lives, which can provoke discomfort, emotional distress, or a sense of vulnerability. To mitigate these risks, this study adhered to standard ethical guidelines for qualitative research involving human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the nature of the research, their right to withdraw at any time, and how their data would be used. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained to protect participants' identities and personal disclosures. Interviews were conducted in a respectful, non-judgmental manner, with careful attention paid to language and tone to avoid coercion or undue influence. Where appropriate, questions were phrased sensitively, and participants were given the option to skip any topics they felt uncomfortable discussing. By following these ethical protocols, the research aimed to create a safe environment for honest dialogue while upholding the dignity and autonomy of all participants.

Future research

Future research should aim to include participants from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds to explore how disparities in access to technology, education, and digital literacy may influence the use of AI in romantic interpersonal relationships. As this study focused exclusively on university students, the findings may not be generalisable to the broader population. Subsequent research could therefore benefit from engaging with more diverse age groups, educational backgrounds, and life stages to capture a more representative picture of AI's role in romantic life. Additionally, our data revealed intriguing patterns in AI usage along the lines of gender and sexual identity, suggesting that these social categories may play a meaningful role in shaping how individuals engage with AI in romantic contexts. While these associations fell outside the primary scope of this study, they present compelling avenues for further investigation.

Answers to research question

The research question guiding this study sought to examine whether and how AI impacts romantic interpersonal relationships. While we hypothesised that AI would influence such relationships, our findings suggest that its role is more pronounced in the maintenance of existing relationships than in their initiation. Participants reported using AI as a support tool –

seeking advice, gaining alternative perspectives, and navigating emotionally complex situations. However, consistent with our theoretical expectations, this reliance on AI was accompanied by a degree of distrust. Participants acknowledged that AI-generated insights often lacked personalisation and emotional depth. This tension became more apparent when individuals were asked how they would feel if their partner used AI in the relationship: many expressed discomfort when aware of such use, yet described enhanced relational dynamics when unaware of it. These findings suggest that while AI does influence romantic interpersonal relationships, its impact is more significant in sustaining them than in forming them, and its presence remains a contested issue among users.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that AI's influence operates primarily on how individuals conduct relationships rather than whom they choose to date. Through qualitative analysis of university students, we identified that while traditional social factors continue to shape partner selection, generative AI has emerged as a novel mediator in relationship maintenance and communication. Our findings reveal a paradox in AI-mediated romantic communication. Participants relied more heavily on AI tools when already partnered, challenging assumptions that AI primarily facilitates relationship initiation. Crucially, the study confirmed the authenticity dilemma: while AI can enhance communication quality and provide relationship guidance, awareness of its involvement undermines trust and perceived sincerity— fundamental pillars of romantic connection.

These findings have significant implications for understanding sociotechnical mediation of intimacy. As AI becomes increasingly sophisticated, its invisible integration into romantic communication may reshape expectations of authenticity in intimate relationships. However, the persistent tension between AI's utility and users' discomfort suggests that the technology's role in romantic contexts remains contested and evolving, warranting further research across diverse populations.

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