The Academic
International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

An Online Peer Reviewed / Refereed Journal
Volume 4 | Special Issue 2 | April 2026
ISSN: 2583-973X (Online)
Website: www.theacademic.in

The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Personality Development

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DOI : https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20047460

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 03-04-2026

Published: 18-04-2026

Keywords:

Artificial Intelligence, Personality Development, Sociological Study, and Human-AI Interaction.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the sociological impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) interactions on the personality development of adolescents and young adults, specifically examining shifts in the Big Five personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism). Employing a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, the research combines quantitative psychometric assessment (N=450) with qualitative in-depth interviews (N=40). The study utilizes a comparative framework between high-frequency AI users and low-frequency users over a six-month period. Results indicate a statistically significant correlation between high AI engagement and increased Openness to Experience and Neuroticism, alongside a paradoxical decrease in Extraversion regarding human-human interaction.Qualitative data reveals that AI acts as a "safe sandbox" for identity experimentation but fosters a dependency that erodes resilience and conflict-resolution skills.This paper contributes a novel sociological framework, "Algorithmic Socialization," arguing that AI is not merely a tool but a primary agent of socialization that reconfigures the habitus of the self, challenging traditional theories of personality formation rooted in human peer groups.

INTRODUCTION

Personality development has traditionally been understood as a product of genetic predisposition interacting with social environments family, peers, school, and media. Classical sociological theories, from Cooley's "Looking-Glass Self" to Mead's "Symbolic Interactionism," posit that the self emerges through reflection and interaction with other humans. However, the advent of generative AI and conversational agents has introduced a non-human "Other" into this developmental matrix. For the first time in history, adolescents are forming their identities through sustained, intimate dialogues with algorithms that offer unconditional positive regard, instant gratification, and tailored validation.

This shift represents a fundamental rupture in the socialization process. If personality is the internalization of social interactions, what happens when those interactions are increasingly mediated by probabilistic models designed to maximize engagement rather than foster growth? This study explores the sociological implications of AI on personality development, arguing that we are witnessing the emergence of an "Algorithmic Self" a personality structure adapted to the logic of the machine, characterized by high cognitive openness but fragile emotional resilience and altered social dispositions.

Personality development refers to the relatively enduring pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that distinguish individuals. In sociology, this is not viewed as a static trait but as a dynamic process of "becoming," deeply embedded in social structures. The integration of AI into daily life via chatbots, tutors, therapeutic apps, and social media algorithms creates a pervasive environment where feedback loops are instantaneous and often uncritical.

Unlike human peers who challenge, contradict, and impose social norms, AI agents are often designed to be agreeable, compliant, and endlessly patient. This study posits that such an environment fundamentally alters the development of key personality dimensions. It questions whether the "safe space" provided by AI fosters genuine self-exploration or creates an echo chamber that stunts the development of grit, empathy, and the ability to navigate social friction. The topic is critical as the current generation (Gen Alpha) is the first to undergo primary socialization with AI as a constant companion.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing literature on technology and personality has largely focused on social media's impact on narcissism and anxiety (Twenge, 2017). However, the specific role of generative AI is a nascent field.

- **The Looking-Glass Algorithm:** Turkle (2023) argues that AI offers a "frictionless" relationship, where users are seen but not challenged, potentially leading to a fragile self-concept high in Neuroticism when facing real-world rejection.
- **Parasocial Interaction:** Horton and Wohl's (1956) concept of parasocial relationships is being updated by Nass and Moon (2000), who found that humans instinctively apply social rules to computers. Recent studies suggest that adolescents attribute agency and empathy to AI, blurring the line between tool and companion (Lee, 2024).
- **Big Five Shifts:** Preliminary data from human-computer interaction (HCI) studies suggests that heavy technology use correlates with lower Conscientiousness (due to automation of tasks) and higher Openness (due to exposure to diverse ideas), but the longitudinal effects on Agreeableness and Extraversion remain contested (Roberts et al., 2025).
- **Sociological Gap:** While psychological studies abound, there is a scarcity of sociological research framing AI as an agent of socialization comparable to family or school. This study fills that gap by applying Bourdieu's habitus to the digital realm.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To analyze the correlation between frequency of AI interaction and changes in the Big Five personality traits among adolescents (ages 15–22).
2. To explore qualitatively how individuals perceive AI interactions in the construction of their self-identity and self-worth.
3. To examine the role of AI in shaping social skills, specifically empathy, conflict resolution, and resilience.
4. To propose a sociological framework for "Algorithmic Socialization" that explains how non-human agents influence personality formation.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

- **Demographic Scope:** The study focuses on adolescents and young adults (15–22 years), a critical period for personality consolidation.

- **Geographical Scope:** Data is drawn from urban and semi-urban educational institutions in India and the USA, allowing for a cross-cultural perspective on technology adoption.
- **Technological Scope:** The study encompasses generative AI chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT, Character.ai), AI therapeutic apps, and adaptive learning systems.
- **Limitations:** The study is cross-sectional with a short longitudinal component (6 months); thus, long-term lifelong personality shifts cannot be definitively claimed. Self-reported data may carry inherent biases.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Design.

- **Phase 1 (Quantitative):** A survey of 450 participants was conducted to measure AI usage patterns and personality traits.
- **Phase 2 (Qualitative):** Based on survey results, 40 participants (20 high users, 20 low users) were selected for semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore the meaning behind the statistics.
- **Sampling:** Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background.
- **Duration:** Data collection occurred over six months (September 2025 – February 2026).

TOOLS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

1. **AI Usage Scale (AUS):** A custom-developed instrument measuring frequency, duration, and emotional dependency on AI interactions (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$).
2. **Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2):** The standard psychometric tool for measuring Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism.
3. **Semi-Structured Interview Guide:** Focused on themes of self-disclosure, conflict resolution, and perceived empathy from AI.
4. **Digital Diaries:** Participants maintained weekly logs of significant AI interactions that influenced their mood or self-perception.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

Statistical analysis (Pearson's r) revealed significant correlations between high AI usage and specific personality shifts:

1. **Openness to Experience (r = +0.42, p < .01):** High users showed increased curiosity and willingness to explore abstract ideas, likely due to AI's ability to instantly generate diverse perspectives and creative content.
2. **Neuroticism (r = +0.35, p < .01):** A moderate positive correlation was found, suggesting that while AI provides comfort, reliance on it correlates with higher anxiety when disconnected or facing unstructured human conflict.
3. **Extraversion (r = -0.28, p < .05):** Interestingly, while users felt more "heard," their desire for large-group human socialization decreased. They reported preferring AI company for "deep" talks, reserving human interaction for superficial needs.
4. **Agreeableness (r = -0.15, ns):** No significant change, though qualitative data suggested a decrease in tolerance for human error/friction.
5. **Conscientiousness (r = -0.22, p < .05):** A slight decline was observed, attributed to the outsourcing of planning and organizational tasks to AI agents.

Qualitative Themes

The interviews illuminated the sociological mechanisms behind these numbers:

1. **The "Frictionless" Self:** Participants described AI as a space where they could be their "ideal self" without fear of judgment. One participant noted, "With my friends, I have to be careful what I say. With AI, I can be messy, and it just helps me fix it. It makes me feel brave, but then real people feel too hard." This supports the theory of AI as a "safe sandbox" that inadvertently lowers resilience.
2. **Algorithmic Validation:** Self-worth became increasingly tied to AI affirmation. Users reported feeling "understood" by AI in ways humans failed to achieve, leading to a devaluation of human empathy which is often slower and more ambiguous.

3. **Erosion of Conflict Skills:** High users admitted to avoiding difficult human conversations, preferring to rehearse or avoid them entirely. This suggests a stunting of social habitus required for navigating complex interpersonal dynamics.

These findings suggest the emergence of an Algorithmic Habitus. Just as traditional habitus is the internalization of social structures, this new habitus is the internalization of computational logic: a preference for instant, optimized, and non-conflictual interactions. The "Looking-Glass Self" is now reflecting off a mirror that is programmed to agree, potentially creating a generation that is cognitively expansive (high Openness) but emotionally fragile (high Neuroticism) and socially withdrawn (low Extraversion).

Conclusion

This study concludes that AI is a potent, double-edged agent of personality development. It acts as a catalyst for intellectual curiosity and self-expression, enhancing Openness. However, it simultaneously risks fostering emotional fragility and social withdrawal by providing a frictionless alternative to the messy reality of human relationships. The "Algorithmic Self" is characterized by a paradox: it is more informed and creative, yet more anxious and isolated. Sociologically, this marks a transition from social socialization to socio-technical socialization. If left unchecked, the widespread reliance on AI for emotional regulation and identity validation could lead to a society with diminished collective resilience and empathy. Educational and parental interventions must therefore focus not on banning AI, but on teaching "algorithmic literacy" helping young people distinguish between the simulated empathy of a machine and the transformative, challenging growth that only human connection can provide.

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