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FoMo, AI Companions, and emotional isolation: the changing landscape of human connection in post-Chatgpt India

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study examines the interplay between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), AI companions, and emotional isolation among India's Gen Z (18–24 years) in the post-ChatGPT era. Grounded in Social Comparison and Attachment Theories, it explores how FoMO drives loneliness and whether AI companions (e.g., ChatGPT, Replika) mitigate this effect. Data from 350 participants were collected via surveys (FoMO Scale, UCLA Loneliness Scale, AI Usage Scale), 25 semi-structured interviews, and social media analysis. Results reveal a strong FoMO–loneliness correlation ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), with AI companion use moderating this relationship ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < 0.001$) and reducing isolation ($\beta = -0.30$, $p < 0.001$). Qualitative insights highlight AI as an emotional refuge (18 mentions), though dependency concerns (10 mentions) suggest risks. In India's collectivist, tech-driven context, AI companions address mental health stigma but risk over-reliance. Findings inform digital literacy, mental health interventions, and AI design, offering global insights for youth-facing digital pressures. Longitudinal research is needed to assess long-term impacts.

Keywords: AI companions, ChatGPT, digital literacy, digital youth culture, emotional isolation, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Gen Z, India, loneliness, mental health interventions