

The Comforting Machine: Evaluating User Trust and Emotional Relief in Empathetic AI Astrologers vs Blunt Human Practitioners

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Abstract

Astrological consultations can create anxiety when adverse predictions are communicated through direct or fatalistic language particularly in culturally subjective contexts where users may attach personal meaning to such predictions. This empirical study investigates whether empathetic AI mediated communication can influence user trust, anxiety and emotional relief when compared with conventional blunt communication by human practitioners. The study introduces two complementary contributions. An AI based semantic reframing approach and an emotional Human Computer Interaction interface framework. The AI approach uses a safety constrained large language model to identify catastrophic or deterministic elements in astrological narratives and transform them into constructive, non-deterministic and growth-oriented interpretations. The HCI framework examines how conversational language, reduced textual density, supportive formatting, and non-deterministic interface structures can contribute to a more emotionally supportive user experience while preserving user agency. A multi demographic user survey was conducted in which participants evaluated identical stressful astrological scenarios presented through a traditional blunt human practitioner script and a safety constrained AI generated narrative. Participants assessed perceived trust, anxiety, emotional relief and overall experience across the two conditions. The findings indicate that human practitioner communication retained a perception of authenticity whereas the AI mediated condition was associated with lower reported anxiety and greater emotional relief. The combination of empathetic linguistic reframing and supportive HCI presentation also showed a positive relationship with experiential trust and perceived user agency. These findings suggest that the emotional impact of AI mediated communication depends not only on the content generated but also on how that content is structured and presented to users. The study contributes to research on empathetic AI, emotional HCI and responsible conversational design by demonstrating how safety constrained language generation and supportive interface design can facilitate less deterministic, emotionally supportive and user centered experiences in culturally sensitive domains. The findings provide a foundation for further investigation of responsible AI communication in emotionally subjective digital environments.

Keywords: *Empathetic AI, Emotional HCI, User Trust, Emotional Relief, Semantic Reframing, Conversational AI*