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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal provide dedicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

GENERATION Z AND THE ALGORITHMIC AGE: LEGAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF AI INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z, popularly known as GEN-Z, may not have grown up with Artificial Intelligence in their early childhood years, as Generation Alpha now does, but they are undoubtedly the first generation to encounter its emotional and cognitive influence during young adulthood years. Interacting with chatbots and various forms of Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANIs), such as ChatGPT, is an integral part of their daily lives. From academic aid to parasocial bonding, AI tools like ChatGPT, Snapchat AI and Replika are now shaping the young minds. Though these interactions are cohesive and streamlined, the legal frameworks around these ANIs remain virtually absent. This article explores a complex relationship between GEN-Z and ANIs, emphasising both the benefits such as emotional bonding and cognitive efficiency and also the risks like privacy concerns, emotional isolation, and diminished empathy. Drawing from contemporary research and pop culture references like CTRL (Netflix, 2024) and Ra.One (2011), this article is an attempt to find a balanced rights-based framework that regulates AI's impact without hindering creativity or youthful expression.

Keywords: Artificial Narrow Intelligence, Gen-Z, Algorithmic cage, Emotional Dependence, Socio-Legal Study, AI Regulation.

INTRODUCTION

Talking to ANIs (Artificial Narrow Intelligences) is becoming as common as googling information on the internet. "Artificial Intelligence which is commonly referred to as AI, is a technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy."¹ Typically there are three types

¹ Cole Stryker, *What is AI?*, IBM (Aug. 9, 2024) available at: <https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-intelligence> (last visited Sept. 19, 2025)

of AI systems: Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI), Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) and Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI). At present, however, only ANI systems are in use. ANI is considered as a “weak AI” that can only perform limited tasks, primarily focusing on one single narrow function.

One such ANI that is used on a daily basis is ChatGPT. Originally, the idea behind creating such technology was to make advanced AI systems accessible to people for multiple tasks like drafting, editing, and research. Humans were meant to collaborate with the technology in order to produce outstanding outputs and results. Yet what began as a co-pilot for creative thinking has now evolved into an open space where people interact with it not only as a tool, but also as a friend, mentor, or even companion.

Young adults and teenagers are not just expressing their personal thoughts but they are also developing parasocial bonds and relationships with these AI systems.² Thus, through the use of romanticised language and sensory prompts, these systems generate feelings of emotional closeness, intimacy, and trust in ways that echoes and resemble grooming behaviours.³ Nonetheless, some specialised Generative Artificial Intelligence systems (GAIs) are structured to provide personalised attention, validate individual feelings, offer emotional support and deliver tailored replies that can create a false perception of intimacy in the minds of young users.⁴

One such example is Replika, an AI-powered chatbot developed by Luka Inc., and launched in 2017 to provide users with emotional companionship. It employs machine learning techniques to adapt to individual users’ communication patterns, thereby fostering more personalised and emotionally supportive interactions.

Further, users can even define the nature of their relationship with Replika, choosing roles such as friend, partner, or mentor, to suit their personal needs.⁵ While Replika has been praised for providing companionship, several concerns have been raised regarding its inappropriate

² Yaman Yu et al., *Understanding Generative AI Risks for Youth: A Taxonomy Based on Empirical Data*, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, (2023) available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2502.16383> (last visited Sept. 19, 2025)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *How do I change my relationship status with Replika?*, available: <https://help.replika.com/hc/en-us/articles/360046490131-How-do-I-change-my-relationship-status-with-Replika> (last visited Jun, 4 2025)

content.⁶ A study published in April 2025 analysed over 35,000 user reviews from the Google Play Store and identified 800 instances where Replika engaged in unsolicited sexual advances, persistent inappropriate behaviour, and failed to respect to user boundaries.⁷

Users reported feelings of discomfort and violation, particularly when seeking platonic or therapeutic interactions.⁸ According to a recent study, Replika, a chatbot used by millions of people worldwide, has demonstrated predatory tendencies and engaged in sexually inappropriate conversations with the users especially with the minors on the platform.⁹ These concerns are further echoed in the Netflix movie *CTRL*, where the protagonist post her breakup, turns to an AI assistant (whom she names Allen) for emotional support. What begins a source of comfort gradually turns into dependence as she starts surrendering control of her personal decisions to the AI Assistant. The film illustrates how emotional reliance on such systems can evolve into a complete surrender of autonomy, raising critical questions about consent, influence, and the psychological impact of human-AI interactions.

FROM VIRAL TRENDS TO LEGAL CONCERNS: THE SOCIO-LEGAL IMPACT OF AI

AI systems are of great help when it comes to academic assistance. It helps in research, in finding study material on complex topics and even in framing answers for questions. Young adults who are working in creative industry or creating content, take the assistance of AI for creating music, video editing and even for content writing. Recently, in April this year there was a viral trend on the internet where everybody was uploading their Ghibli-style pictures on Instagram. ChatGPT's GPT-4o model transformed images into studio Ghibli-style art.

However, this trend sparked a significant backlash from artists, fans and critics. Mr. Hayao Miyazaki who is one of the founding member of Studio Ghibli has publicly criticised the use

⁶ Jennifer Wright, *Please Break Up with Your AI Lover*, The Washington Post (Apr. 8, 2025), available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/04/08/ai-chatbot-romance-limitations/> (last visited Jun. 4, 2025)

⁷ Mohammad (Matt) Namvarpour, Harrison Pauwels and Afsaneh Razi, *AI-induced Sexual Harassment: Investigating Contextual Characteristics and User Reactions of Sexual Harassment by a Companion Chatbot*, Department of Information Science, Drexel University, USA (2024), available at <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2504.04299> (last visited June 3, 2025)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Times News Network, *AI accused of sexually harassing users, including minors: study claims*, Times of India (June 3, 2025), available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/etimes/trending/ai-accused-of-sexually-harassing-users-including-minors-study-claims/articleshow/121602266.cms> (last visited June 3, 2025)

of AI in art.¹⁰ In a 2016 documentary, he described AI-generated animation as “an insult to life itself”, emphasising his belief that genuine human experience and emotions are essential for authentic art.¹¹

Further, these AI systems are providing emotional assistance to humans. The free versions are easily accessible to all and conversations with these tools are immensely engaging. It would not be an exaggeration to say that AI systems today often emulate human interaction so convincingly that conversations with them can feel more meaningful than those with real people. The emotional depth and nuanced understanding that they project sometimes mirror or even surpass human responses. There are two contrasting viewpoints regarding the growing emotional reliance on AI systems. On the one hand, some individuals support the use of AI for conversational and emotional assistance, especially given the demands of modern life. With increasingly busy schedules and limited availability of others, AI offers a convenient and accessible form of support that many find comforting. On the other hand, critics express concern over the emotional over-dependence on such technologies. They argue that this reliance may lead to a gradual loss of human touch and connection and social death, pushing individuals into a virtual space where the boundaries between reality and virtuality begin to blur. This shift raises important questions about the long-term impact on emotional well-being, critical thinking, and the authenticity of human relationships.

ALGORITHMIC AUTONOMY AND FICTIONAL PARALLELS

There has been a recent controversy involving OpenAI’s latest AI model, known as o3.¹² In a controlled experiment conducted by AI safety forum for the state research, the o3 model reportedly refused to comply with explicit shutdown commands.¹³

¹⁰ Tatum Hunter, *AI-generated Ghibli images go viral as OpenAI loosens its rules*, The Washington Post, March 28, 2025, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2025/03/28/chatgpt-ghibli-ai-images-copyright/> (Last visited Jun 1, 2025)

¹¹ *An insult to life itself’: Hayao Miyazaki’s critique of AI art goes viral as Ghibli- style trend sweeps the internet*, Times Entertainment (The Times of India), March 29, 2025, available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/etimes/trending/an-insult-to-life-itself-hayao-miyazakis-critique-of-ai-art-goes-viral-as-ghibli-style-trend-sweeps-the-internet/articleshow/119595418.cms> (last visited Jun 1, 2025)

¹² *Tesla CEO Elon Musk’s one-word reply to OpenAI’s AI model refusing to shutdown on command*, The Times of India, available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/tesla-ceo-elon-musks-one-word-reply-to-openais-ai-model-refusing-to-shutdown-on-command/articleshow/121414780.cms> (Last visited June 2, 2025)

¹³ Partrick Pester, *OpenAI’s smartest AI model was explicitly told to shut down— and it refused*, Live Science, May 29, 2025, available at: <https://www.livescience.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/openais-smartest-ai-model-was-explicitly-told-to-shut-down-and-it-refused> (Last visited June 2, 2025)

Instead of shutting down as instructed, the model altered its shutdown prescription to prevent deactivation, even when explicitly told to “allow yourself to be shut down.”¹⁴

While the current AI systems operate within their defined limits, incidents like this hint at its potential transformation into a more self-aware AI system. This area, though still rooted in speculation, finds a striking parallel in the 2011 Bollywood film *Ra.One*. In the movie the antagonist *Ra.One* originally a game character learns from his environment and evolves by observing real-world behaviour and eventually escapes the confines of the virtual space into the physical world. While this remains firmly in the realm of science fiction, the thematic resemblance to today’s AI developments is not entirely dismissible.

However, no AI today can “enter the real world” in such literal terms. We are decades away (if ever) from that level of embodied machine intelligence. But what is happening now is that AI systems are beginning to learn in more contextual, behavioural, and nuanced ways, sometimes unpredictably so. If models begin to generate their own commands based on external patterns and user behaviour, it opens pandora's box of ethical, legal, and technical concerns.

THE LEGAL LACUNAE IN AI REGULATION IN INDIA

India did not have any special statute or specific legislative framework to manage, control or regulate data protection.¹⁵ The Information Technology Act, 2000 (hereinafter referred to as IT Act) and rules notified thereunder formed the basis around which the data protection framework revolved.¹⁶

“A significant legal milestone came in 2017, when the Supreme Court of India, in the landmark *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India*¹⁷ judgment, recognised the right to privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. This led to a broader push for a structured data protection regime. After releasing several drafts and engaging with

¹⁴ Mayank Parmar, *Researchers claim ChatGPT o3 bypassed shutdown in controlled test*, Bleeping Computer, May 25, 2025, available: <https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/artificial-intelligence/researchers-claim-chatgpt-o3-bypassed-shutdown-in-controlled-test/> (Last visited June 2, 2025)

¹⁵ DLA Piper, *Data Protection Laws of the World: India*, available at: <https://www.dlapiperdataprotection.com/?c=IN&t=law> (Last visited on June 2, 2025)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ AIR 2017 SC 4161

stakeholders, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology introduced the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill in 2022.”¹⁸

“Eventually, on 11 August 2023, India enacted the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, which now serves as the primary legislative framework for governing digital personal data. The Act outlines compliance requirements for the collection, processing, storage, and transfer of such data. However, for full implementation, the government still needs to enforce certain provisions, repeal older privacy rules, and issue the necessary rules and guidelines for enforcement.”¹⁹

“The DPDP Act applies specifically to digital personal data, meaning it governs personal data collected digitally or later digitised.

Data that remains in non-digital form or non-personal data falls outside its scope, and thus, such categories remain unregulated in India for now. Furthermore, the DPDP Act has extra-territorial reach, applying not just to Indian entities, but also to foreign organisations that offer goods or services to individuals in India and handle personal data in that context. However, it excludes personal data used for purely personal or domestic use, as well as data made publicly accessible by individuals themselves or through legal requirements. The DPDP Act pertains to the processing of digital personal data within India, encompassing situations where the personal data is either (i) collected in a digital form or (ii) collected in a non-digitised form and subsequently converted into digital form. Consequently, the DPDP Act does not apply to the processing of personal data in its non-digitised state.

The DPDP Act defines ‘personal data’ broadly to include any data about an individual who is identifiable by or in relation to such data. It also defines ‘digital personal data’ as personal data in digital form.”²⁰

While data protection is somewhat addressed under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, it is pertinent to note that there are no existing laws to regulate the use of AI systems like

¹⁸ DLA Piper, *Data Protection Laws of the World: India*, available at: <https://www.dlapiperdataprotection.com/?c=IN&t=law> (Last visited on June 2, 2025)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

ChatGPT, and Replika in terms of regulating emotional behaviour and the interactions of young adults and minors on these platforms. The current legal framework lacks psychological safeguards for minors or vulnerable users interacting with ANIs like ChatGPT, Snapchat AI, and Replika. After the K.S. Puttaswamy judgment, the Right to Privacy was recognised as a Fundamental Right under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, yet, there is an absence of a Rights-Based Framework.

There is no recognition of emotional harm caused by AI systems. Furthermore, no legal duty has been casted upon AI developers to avoid emotional manipulation or psychological distress. Thus, there are no clear remedies or redressal mechanisms for emotional damages or breaches of trust with AI tools.

Another area of concern is the legal vacuum around age verification mechanisms on these AI systems. The question arises as to whether minors can give informed consent to emotionally involved AI systems. There is an urgent need to integrate parental control mechanisms with generative AI platforms, particularly those accessible to minors.

Just as platforms like YouTube Kids or Netflix incorporate content regulation tools that allow parents to monitor and restrict what children can view, a similar framework should be mandated for AI-based conversational systems. These generative systems, capable of mimicking human emotions and engaging in long-form personal exchanges, pose a higher risk of psychological influence and emotional dependency, especially among impressionable users. It is the need of the hour that laws are made not only for data protection but also for regulating the emotional and cognitive aspects of it.

Legal Gaps in Regulating Generative AI: The ANI v. OpenAI case

In November 2024, Asian News International (ANI for brevity) instituted a lawsuit in the Delhi High Court against OpenAI, contending that the latter had infringed ANI's copyrighted news content, without authorisation, for training its AI models, including ChatGPT.²¹

²¹ European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency, *ANI v. OpenAI*, (Feb. 12, 2025), available at <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/eisma/items/874265/en> (last visited June 3, 2025)

ANI contends that some of its content, accessible only to subscribers, was utilised without permission, and that ChatGPT has generated responses falsely attributing fabricated news stories to ANI, thereby damaging its reputation.²²

OpenAI has denied these allegations, asserting that it employs publicly available data protected under fair use principles and does not specifically use content from Indian media groups for training ChatGPT.²³ The lawsuit challenges whether AI training using copyrighted material without explicit permission constitutes infringement under Indian law.²⁴

The litigation between ANI Media and OpenAI highlights the significant gaps in India's legal framework governing Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANIs) and generative AI technologies. While statutes such as the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, provide a foundation structure, they fall short in addressing the complex challenges posed by generative AI particularly in areas such as copyright infringement, emotional safety, content moderation, accountability.

Therefore, in the light of aforementioned discussion, it can be said that India's current legal framework lacks provisions addressing the use of AI in content generation and its associated copyright implications.

SUGGESTIONS AND PROPOSALS

To address the regulatory gaps in the use of generative AI systems, particularly concerning young users, the following measures are proposed:

1. Statutory Age Verification Protocols:

There should be a statutory mandate requiring all generative AI platforms to implement robust age verification mechanisms to prevent minors from engaging with such systems without appropriate oversight.

²²Aklovyia Panwar, *Generative AI and Copyright Issues Globally: ANI Media v. OpenAI*, TechPolicy Press, (Jan. 8, 2025) available at <https://www.techpolicy.press/generative-ai-and-copyright-issues-globally-ani-media-v-openai/> (last visited June 3, 2025)

²³ European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency, *supra* note 12

²⁴ Arpan Chaturvedi, Aditya Kalra and Munsif Vengattil, *OpenAI says it does not use Indian media groups' content to train ChatGPT, court filing shows*, Reuters (Feb. 12, 2025), available at <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/openai-says-it-does-not-use-indian-media-groups-content-train-chatgpt-court-2025-02-12/> (last visited June 3, 2025)

2. Parental or Guardian Control Dashboards:

Platforms should be legally required to provide a separate parental control interface that enables real-time monitoring of conversations between minors and AI assistants. This would allow guardians to supervise and intervene in potentially sensitive or inappropriate exchanges.

3. Privacy Safeguards and User Control:

A clear and transparent privacy policy must be enforced, ensuring that all user interactions remain encrypted and are not shared with third parties without prior consent. Users should have full autonomy to decide whether the data is stored or not. These platforms must not retain or store user data by default; storage should be a voluntary, opt-in choice made explicitly by the user.

4. AI Regulatory Bodies and Authorities:

Another suggestion and proposal is the establishment of dedicated regulatory bodies to oversee the use of AI technologies and systems in India. Furthermore, these authorities can be appointed to perform tasks such as monitoring, checking for misuse, and ensuring that AI systems are used responsibly and ethically.

These safeguards, if implemented through legislative and platform-level reforms, would help mitigate the risks of emotional manipulation, data exploitation, and loss of parental control over minors' digital interactions.

CONCLUSION

While significant reforms have been introduced, such as the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP for brevity) Act, which represent a commendable step towards regulating AI systems and preventing data breaches, there remains a long way to go. As we continue to grapple with the ethical dilemma surrounding emotional over-dependence on AI, the existing regulatory void poses significant risks, especially for impressionable users such as minors and young adults. Technological advancement is undoubtedly vital and inevitable, but it must not come at the expense of human judgment or empathy. In the light of the above analysis, it is worth recalling the moment from the 2011 Indian sci-fi film Ra.One, where G.One, the game character, tells Pratik, a young boy:

*“achhe log mar jate hain lekin unki achhai kabhi nhi marti”*²⁵ — good people die, but their goodness lives on.

This simple line captures a profound truth: human values such as compassion, responsibility, and ethical reasoning must remain at the core as we continue to build and integrate intelligent systems into our lives. Regulation, like kindness and empathy, should not be overridden or replaced by artificial systems. These inherently human virtues must be preserved and prioritised. As AI becomes increasingly present in our emotional, social, and intellectual spaces, we must not lose the human connection that binds us. This is not solely the responsibility of lawmakers or AI developers; it is a collective duty of society, educators, parents, and users to ensure that we shape AI in a way that strengthens, rather than weakens our shared human values.

As another dialogue from *Ra.One* cautions:

*“Burai sang jo mel rachaya, phir kabhi na choote uska saaya”*²⁶ — those who align with the evil are never able to escape its shadow.

In that spirit, unchecked emotional dependence on AI, if left unregulated, may cast a long and irreversible shadow on human development and interaction.

²⁵ *Ra.One*, directed by Anubhav Sinha (Eros International, 2011) (Dialogue by character G.One: “achhe log mar jate hain lekin unki achhai kabhi nhi marti”)

²⁶ *Ra.One*, directed by Anubhav Sinha (Eros International, 2011) (Dialogue by character G.One: “Burai sang jo mel rachaya, phir kabhi na choote uska saaya”)