


Chapter 6

Emotional Hacking and Artificial Intelligence Tools: The Digital Revolution or Emotional Disaster in Mental Healthcare?

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ABSTRACT

AI is revolutionizing mental health care, offering tools to democratize access and personalize support. However, this digital transformation presents risks, especially concerning emotional data and the blurring line between care and control. It argues for human-centric AI principles, emphasizing user dignity, cultural sensitivity, and emotional nuance. This chapter explores the different viewpoints of “emotional hacking” and the need to prevent exploitation. It argues that emotional AI must be designed with empathy, governed with ethics, and deployed with transparency. This chapter emphasizes the importance of ethical frameworks, user perspectives, and continuous evaluation to safeguard user rights and enhance the effectiveness of mental health interventions. By prioritizing ethical standards, fostering collaboration, and ensuring continuous evaluation, it aims to provide a roadmap for the responsible and beneficial deployment of AI in mental health.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-4307-5.ch006

INTRODUCTION

The chapter focuses on how artificial intelligence (AI) is affecting emotional well-being in mental health care. The intersection of emotional hacking and artificial intelligence (AI) tools in mental health care represents a growing frontier that promises to revolutionize the landscape of psychological support and intervention. As mental health challenges continue to escalate globally, the integration of AI technologies offers extraordinary opportunities for enhancing therapeutic practices, personalizing treatment plans, and improving patient outcomes. However, this innovation is not without its complexities and ethical considerations. The potential for emotional hacking or manipulating emotional responses through digital means raises critical questions about the implications of AI in mental health care.

This chapter aims to explore the dual-edged nature of AI tools in this domain, assessing whether they sign a new era of mental health care or pose significant risks that could undermine the very essence of therapeutic relationships. This chapter also introduces the idea of “emotional hacking,” where AI is used to influence or control people's emotions. According to Tavory (2024) Emotional hacking introduces serious ethical issues, especially those related to manipulation, data privacy, and the potential decline of genuine human interaction within therapeutic environments. Bakir et al (2024) also emphasized AI-driven emotional hacking may lead to manipulation and mental health issues. It is therefore essential to include ethical considerations, especially those related to the ethics of care, when developing AI-driven therapeutic tools. This will help to reduce the risk of emotional manipulation and other dangers.

This chapter looks closely at both sides of emotional AI, how it can make mental health support more accessible, but also how it risks turning our deep emotional lives into just numbers on a screen. This transformation presents both opportunities and challenges, necessitating careful evaluation of digital tools to ensure they effectively meet the needs of users and enhance mental health outcomes. This evaluation must consider user perspectives and experiences, as these insights are crucial for developing effective digital interventions that address the complexities of mental health needs. The ongoing evolution of digital health interventions highlights the importance of user engagement and personalization to improve mental health outcomes effectively.

Mental health is now seen as essential to overall health, and problems like depression are becoming more common around the world. Traditional ways of providing mental health care, which depend on face-to-face meetings, are increasingly seen as insufficient to meet the rising number of mental health issues (Poudel et al., 2025). The field of digital mental health is now well-established, and there is ongoing and new work on AI-driven solutions for mental health, as the mental health care field, like many others, has been affected by the revolution in digital technology and artificial. AI tools are now being used more often in therapy, emotional assessments,

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