Analytical or Affective Response? The moderating role of loneliness in shaping AI companion agent credibility

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AI companion agents are emerging as conversational systems designed to provide relational interaction rather than purely functional assistance. Building on the Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) paradigm, this study examines how an AI companion agent's response orientation—analytical versus affective—influences users' perceptions and behavioral intentions. We propose that analytical responses enhance perceived credibility by signalling competence, while loneliness moderates how users interpret these cues. A 2 × 2 experiment (N = 321) tested the effects of response orientation and visual embodiment. Results show that analytical responses increase perceived credibility, which in turn stimulates curiosity and strengthens intentions to use and recommend the AI companion agent. This credibility advantage weakens as loneliness increases. Agent type (human-like vs. animated) did not produce significant effects, indicating that conversational style rather than visual embodiment primarily shapes users' evaluations of AI companion agents.

Keywords: AI companion agent, response orientation, loneliness, credibility, curiosity, behavioral intentions