The Mediation of Help-Seeking Behavior Between Hiya and Emotional Reliance on AI Among First-Year Information Technology Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the mediation of help-seeking behavior between *hiya* and emotional reliance on artificial intelligence (AI) among first-year Information Technology students. Grounded in Erving Goffman's Face Theory and Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, the research explained how culturally rooted feelings of embarrassment and fear of negative evaluation influence students' tendencies to avoid interpersonal support and instead turn to AI as a safer emotional outlet. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was employed. Using standardized questionnaires, the researchers surveyed 150 BSIT students to measure levels of hiya, help-seeking behavior, and emotional reliance on AI. Correlation and mediation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among the variables. Results revealed that higher levels of hiya were significantly associated with lower interpersonal help-seeking and higher emotional reliance on AI. Mediation analysis showed that both the direct effect of hiya on emotional reliance on AI and the indirect effect through help-seeking behavior were significant, indicating partial mediation. These findings suggest that students experiencing higher levels of hiya may be less likely to seek help and may instead rely on AI for emotional support. The study contributes theoretically by extending Face Theory and Social Comparison Theory in explaining culturally influenced help-seeking behaviors in the context of emerging technologies. Practically, the findings highlight the need for educational institutions to strengthen mental health initiatives, encourage help-seeking, and promote responsible AI use. Furthermore, the study supports Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being by emphasizing accessible psychosocial support and student mental well-being in the digital age.

Keywords: Cultural stigma, Emotional reliance on AI, Hiya, Help-seeking behavior, Mental health support

INTRODUCTION

In today's generation, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) is widespread among young adults, continually evolving from assisting with practical tasks to touching our emotional lives in ways that provide mental health support and companionship. According to Juanillo (2025), compared to the older generation, Filipinos aged 18 to 34 have shown greater vulnerability to mental health symptoms and diagnoses. Moreover, individuals in this demographic show resilience in coping through AI-based mental health tools, with 39% relying on such technologies, a figure even higher than the global average of nearly 28%.

In the Philippine context, Ramos and McNally (2024) stated that Filipinos view *hiya* as a cultural value that greatly influences their behavior, especially when it comes to mental health care. The majority of them avoid seeking professional help due to fear of shame or social judgment. This emergence of cultural and technological factors underscores the need for research on how *hiya*, as a cultural value, shapes emotional reliance on AI, particularly when help-seeking behavior is discouraged.

The Problem and Its Background

The study investigates emotional reliance on AI in relation to hiya and help-seeking behavior within the context

of mental health support. *Emotional reliance* is a behavioral tendency in which individuals willingly and often excessively rely on another person to provide emotional support and meet psychological needs (Lynch, 2013), and with the rise of technological developments, this reliance has extended to AI companions through chatbots and digital platforms. (Nizamani et al., 2025; Wu, 2024). These platforms are often perceived as private, accessible, and judgment-free, making them appealing alternatives to counseling, particularly in contexts where individuals are motivated to avoid social exposure, evaluation, or feelings of shame.

Hiya is a Filipino cultural value often described as a sense of shame, embarrassment, or propriety in the presence of others, which functions as a social regulator that discourages individuals from behaviors that may result in loss of face or bring dishonor to the self or family (Bulatao, 1964; Lasquety-Reyes, 2016). As a deeply ingrained cultural construct, hiya shapes how Filipinos manage emotional disclosure and approach sensitive issues such as mental health, often discouraging open expression and the pursuit of professional psychological help.

Help-seeking behavior refers to the proactive behavior of reaching out to others, particularly professionals, for advice, counseling, or psychological care when facing personal distress (Bryant et al., 2021). When help-seeking is constrained by cultural or emotional barriers, individuals may delay or avoid formal psychological services and instead turn to alternative, less socially risky forms of support such as AI-based platforms.

Collectively, these constructs highlight a cultural-psychological pathway in which hiya may discourage help-seeking behaviors, thereby redirecting individuals toward alternative forms of support. In contexts where social stigma and feelings of shame inhibit access to professional psychological services, AI-based platforms emerge as appealing alternatives because they offer a private and low-risk space for emotional expression. Unlike traditional help-seeking contexts that involve face-to-face interaction and potential social evaluation, AI-based support allows individuals to disclose personal concerns anonymously, at their own pace, and without fear of being judged or socially labeled.

The rapid rise of the internet, AI, and mobile technologies has transformed the way people live, work, consume, and communicate (Maphosa, 2024). Beyond its role in assisting with functional tasks, AI has started to occupy a more personal space in people's lives. Wu (2024) highlighted this shift, noting that AI is no longer just function-driven but now fosters "pseudo-intimacy", where individuals form emotional-like bonds with machines to meet social and emotional needs, especially during times of loneliness. This trend has grown into the use of AI as companions, not just tools. Nizamani et al. (2025) observed that many individuals turn to AI for comfort, underscoring how people are beginning to depend on technology for psychological as well as practical support. Similarly, Merrill et al. (2022) found that the social presence and warmth of AI companions make them feel more useful and trustworthy, particularly for lonely individuals who may recommend them to others.

Recent studies show that AI technologies like chatbots are increasingly designed for everyday human interaction. For instance, Wang (2024) explored how ChatGPT is being used as a tool for everyday conversations and interactions. Additionally, the study by Yuan et al. (2024) also revealed the role of Replika chatbot in supporting users' social engagement. Building on these findings research also points to a broader trend of turning to AI technologies for support beyond functional tasks. AI companions and chatbots are now seen as reliable sources of connection, offering users comfort, support, safety, and convenience in their everyday lives (De Freitas et al., 2024; Maples et al., 2024; Todd, 2024). Their perceived warmth and social presence further encourage trust and reliance (Chung-En, 2018), while their accessibility and round-the-clock availability make them appealing alternatives when human support is limited (Ningrum et al., 2024; Kuhail et al., 2024). Taken together, these studies highlight how AI has become an emerging presence in people's social and emotional worlds.

The usage of AI for emotional reliance offers many benefits but it also raises a significant amount of global concerns. Klingbeil et al. (2024) stated that AI is becoming a key part of decision-making by improving efficiency and reducing human error. However, this study shows that humans tend to overtrust AI even though its advice counters their own judgment, usually resulting in poor decisions. Weakening of interpersonal relationships, the risk of replacing human interaction with artificial connection, and the possibility of encouraging avoidance of real-world coping mechanisms are one of the potential issues identified by using AI. Song et al. (2022) states that even though chatbots are common in digital customer service, their usage raises

concerns about replacing genuine human interaction with artificial connections that reduces real relationships and encourages avoidance of real-world coping. Concerns like data privacy, ethics, and manipulating users' emotions have also been widely debated. The interpretation and use of sensitive emotional data from biometric information raised ethical concerns in a study conducted by Gremsl and Hödl (2022). This study highlights the issues of privacy, consent, potential misuse, and the challenges of linking emotion recognition with value judgments affecting individual rights and societal norms.

In the Philippines, cultural values play a huge role in shaping help-seeking behaviors, especially mental health issues. The cultural construct of *hiya*, which translates roughly as shame or embarrassment, functions as a powerful social mechanism that discourages individuals from openly expressing emotional distress or pursuing formal psychological help. This limitation comes largely from the fear of stigma, shame and embarrassment of dishonoring oneself or one's family, and the possible loss of face. *Hiya* is not just a negative emotion but it can also be understood as a virtue, an active form of self-control that holds back personal desires for the good of others that further influences the interpersonal dynamics and decision-making around help-seeking (Lasquety-Reyes, 2016).

Reyes (2024) revealed that *hiya*, public stigma, and self-stigma significantly reduce the intentions of Filipino emerging adults to seek professional help, which is compounded by limited access to mental health facilities, financial limitations, and the stigma associated with mental health issues. The fear of social judgment linked to *hiya* acts as a significant barrier to formal help-seeking, which can intensify the emotional and psychological distress due to delayed or poor intervention (Martinez et al., 2020). Due to these challenges, the AI-driven emotional support platforms present a viable option for Filipinos facing such barriers. AI provides non-judgmental, anonymous, and easy access to emotional expression and self-help without feeling ashamed or embarrassed, because it does not have the barriers caused by *hiya*. AI's non-human conversation also reduces shame or embarrassment associated with seeking help, with possible increased emotional reliance mediating access to formal or informal help-seeking (Salcedo, 2023).

There is a limited literature examining the mediating role of help-seeking behavior in the influence of *hiya* on emotional reliance on AI. With this, the present study aims to examine how deeply rooted cultural values such as *hiya*, shape the ways Filipino youth cope with emotional distress in a rapidly digitalizing world. Understanding this relationship is vital in a society where mental-health challenges among the youth are rising, yet cultural stigma continues to hinder open help-seeking. The findings further provide meaningful contributions to mental health initiatives by identifying culturally specific interventions to formal help-seeking and by exploring how AI can supplement, rather than replace, human psychological support.

Through this integrated approach, this study responds directly to the global and national call to promote mental well-being under Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), which emphasizes health promotion, psychological wellness, and equitable access to care, while also advancing the academic discourse on social psychology and human-AI interaction. Ultimately, it contributes to both scientific understanding and practical innovation in fostering healthier, more inclusive, and culturally responsive approaches to mental-health care in the age of artificial intelligence.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section presents literature relevant to the claim that *hiya*, as a Filipino cultural value, discourages help-seeking behavior and may foster emotional reliance on AI as an alternative source of psychological support.

Emotional Reliance on AI

Emotional reliance has been defined as a behavioral tendency in which an individual willingly and excessively relies on another person to receive emotional support and meet their psychological needs (Lynch, 2013). In the context of technology, this concept has been extended to artificial intelligence systems such as chatbots and virtual companions. Nizamani et al. (2025) describe this reliance, where individuals turn to AI for comfort and reassurance in managing their emotions. This can be further explained by Wu (2024), who notes that emotional AI is changing how people interact with machines, moving beyond functional use toward deeper connections

that feel emotional. Taken together, these perspectives define emotional reliance on AI as the growing practice of treating technology as a companion in meeting emotional needs.

Building on these definitions, studies have also explored the reasons why people choose to rely on AI for emotional support. Many people turn to AI for emotional support because it offers companionship, privacy and easy access. De Freitas et al. (2024) found that AI companions can reduce feelings of loneliness just like human interactions, while Maples et al. (2024) reported that students using the chatbot Replika felt supported, and in some cases, even prevented self-harm. Privacy is also an important factor, since people often feel safer talking to AI than to family or friends, as it avoids judgement and shame (Todd, 2024). Similarly, Chung-En (2018) showed that AI can feel warm and socially present, which makes people more likely to trust and depend on it. Accessibility also adds to AI's appeal, as online counseling saves time and cost (Ningrum et al., 2024). In another study, Kuhail et al. (2024) revealed that students value AI's round-the-clock availability, especially when professional counselors are not available. These factors could explain why many individuals rely on AI for emotional support.

Although there are already studies that provide evidence on why individuals emotionally rely on AI, most of this literature has been conducted in foreign settings. Research from the Philippine contexts remains very limited. The existing studies mentioned above mostly highlight factors such as loneliness, privacy, and accessibility as reasons for AI use, but these are drawn from western or global samples. As a result, there is little understanding of how local conditions–such as cultural attitudes toward mental health and technology adoption shape the way Filipinos may turn to AI for support. More localized studies are therefore needed to explore how individuals in the Philippines may rely on AI for emotional support.

Hiya as a Filipino Cultural Value

Hiya is a Filipino cultural concept referring to experiencing shame, embarrassment, or propriety in the presence of others. Bulatao (1964) defined *hiya* as a feeling of awkwardness preventing individuals from speaking out or taking action for fear of losing social acceptance or being different from everyone. This feeling typically occurs in face-to-face interactions in which individuals fear what people would say or think about them. A study by Lasquety-Reyes (2016) distinguished *hiya* as a passion, an involuntary, uncomfortable emotion that can lead to avoidance behaviors and fear of social judgment and *hiya* as a virtue, which represents active self-control that prioritizes community welfare and the Filipino concept of *kapwa* over individual desires. However, this can also create problems, especially when people avoid seeking help for sensitive issues like mental health because they fear being judged or labeled as "*walang hiya*" (shameless) by their community (*Hiya*: Understanding the Filipino Sense of Shame and Propriety, 2024).

Hiya greatly influences Filipino actions especially in expressing emotions, seeking help and social interactions. Some studies suggest that *hiya* hinder Filipinos from seeking support from professionals. A study by Ramos and McNally (2024) indicates that Filipinos encounter greater levels of stigma on mental issues and are less likely to seek assistance than Americans since counseling is a sign of weakness based on culture, which incorporates *hiya*. This pattern is supported by Martinez et al. (2020) systematic review, revealing that *hiya* and fear of public judgment often prevent Filipinos from accessing formal mental health services to protect their families from shame and retain their social reputation.

Pinggolio and Mateo (2018) found that college students hesitate counseling services regardless of recognizing their importance, revealing the cultural influence of *hiya* and loss-of-face, while the study of Fu and Lopez (2025) described how *hiya* increase silence on mental issues by framing mental disorders as shameful, leading people to endure difficulties privately rather than seek professional care. Besides help-seeking, *hiya* further influence how an individual reveals themselves by promoting indirect communication styles, conflict avoidance, and social conformity to prevent being labeled "*walang hiya*" (shameless). Thim (2025) reveals that while maintaining the respect and harmony within a group is partially linked to *hiya*, it restricts individual freedom, resulting in Filipinos avoiding actions that may bring shame to themselves or their families, ultimately impacting their psychological well-being and access to necessary mental health resources.

Help-Seeking Behavior in the Philippines

Help-seeking behavior refers to the intentional act of reaching out for advice or support when facing problems or emotional distress. According to Bryant et al. (2021), it is the proactive process of seeking advice or supportive action in response to a problem or distressing experience. In the Philippine context, this process is shaped by powerful cultural and social dynamics. Filipinos often experience challenges in seeking professional psychological help due to several barriers. According to Martinez et al. (2020), these barriers include stigma surrounding mental health, financial constraints, limited access to mental health services, and the cultural value of *hiya* which is a deep sense of shame or fear of losing face when revealing personal struggles. Because of these barriers, many Filipinos tend to rely on informal help, through their family and peers for emotional support rather than consulting mental health professionals.

Recent studies show that there are several contributing factors that affect people's help seeking behavior. A study by Villamor and Dy (2022) revealed that Filipino college students are often hesitant to seek counseling because of the strong fear of being judged, misunderstood, or socially labeled, which reflects the significant influence of *hiya* and stigma on their decisions. In line with this, De Leon (2025) found that young adults are more willing to engage in help-seeking behaviors only when strict confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. This highlights how privacy and a safe, non-judgmental environment are important factors in encouraging Filipinos to seek professional help.

In the absence of such conditions, many Filipinos avoid help-seeking and may turn to alternative coping mechanisms instead. In this context, *hiya* often discourages open discussion of personal struggles, leading to rely more heavily on private and free of judgement platforms like AI chatbots and other apps to fulfill their emotional needs.

Emotional Reliance on AI, Hiya, and Help Seeking Behavior

Emotional reliance on AI has emerged as a form of mental health support, particularly in contexts where individuals seek emotional safety and reduced social risk. Research on AI companions demonstrates their capacity to fulfill emotional needs by providing accessible and non-judgmental support. De Freitas et al. (2024) showed that AI companions reduce loneliness by making users feel heard, while Maples et al. (2024) reported that Replika users relied on chatbots for companionship, therapeutic support, and even suicide prevention. Similarly, Beatty et al. (2022) found that Wysa, a CBT-based chatbot, was able to establish therapeutic relationships comparable to those in human therapy. These findings position emotional reliance on AI as a meaningful outcome in contemporary mental health support.

One cultural factor that may contribute to this outcome is *hiya*, a form of embarrassment or shame that discourages open emotional disclosure and professional help-seeking. Empirical studies confirm that hiya often leads individuals to avoid face-to-face counseling, as seeking professional help may be perceived as a loss of face. Omondi (2024) found that stigma significantly reduces willingness to seek support, Helmert et al. (2023) showed that higher levels of mental health shame correspond to lower intentions to pursue care, and Martinez et al. (2020) identified *hiya* as a central cultural barrier to professional help-seeking among Filipinos.

The influence of *hiya* is further reflected in help-seeking behavior, which serves as a key mechanism linking cultural values to patterns of support seeking. When help-seeking behavior is constrained by shame and fear of social evaluation, individuals may avoid formal psychological services, leaving emotional needs unmet. Under these conditions, individuals may turn to alternative, less socially risky sources of support, such as AI-based platforms that offer privacy, accessibility, and freedom from judgment (Pantaleon et al., 2022). Overall, emotional reliance on AI is positioned as an outcome influenced by hiya, with help-seeking behavior functioning as the intervening mechanism through which this cultural value shapes patterns of mental health support.

Synthesis

The concept of *hiya* deeply shapes how Filipinos approach emotional struggles, often discouraging open help-seeking due to fear of judgment and social shame. Many therefore turn to AI companions as discreet and

emotionally supportive alternatives that offer privacy, accessibility, and a non-judgmental space. Emotional reliance on AI is growing, particularly among individuals who feel uncomfortable seeking traditional mental health services. Goffman's Face Theory helps explain why AI is perceived as both socially present and emotionally safe. Meanwhile, Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) clarifies the psychological roots of *hiya*, showing how self-evaluation against others heightens sensitivity to social expectations. Understanding this mediating role can offer valuable insights that can guide the development of more inclusive and effective mental health strategies that integrate both cultural values and technological tools.

The Research Gap

Based on previous studies, *hiya* negatively affects help-seeking behaviors, and AI is increasingly used as a source of emotional support. However, while various studies have examined stigma, shame, and the role of AI in mental health, there are no existing direct studies that specifically use help-seeking behavior as a mediating variable in this context. Existing research separately addresses these concepts, thus the mediating role of help-seeking behavior remains unexplored. This gap highlights the need for research that directly investigates the mediating role of help-seeking behavior in the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI. By addressing this empirical gap, the current study contributes not only to social psychology but also to the growing field of human-AI interaction. Moreover, the findings may provide insights for educators, counselors, and policymakers in developing culturally sensitive approaches that integrate technology into mental health support systems.

The Current Study

This study aims to examine the mediating role of help-seeking behavior between the Filipino cultural value of *hiya* and individuals' emotional reliance on AI. It focuses on the psychological and cultural aspects of these variables among Filipino college students or young adults, who are both strongly shaped by cultural norms and highly engaged with emerging AI technologies. Specifically, Filipino college students or young adults are emphasized as a relevant population because of their frequent engagement with digital platforms and their limited social interaction. These characteristics make them particularly suitable for examining how *hiya* may influence help-seeking behavior and, in turn, shape emotional reliance on AI, allowing the study to capture key cultural psychological processes underlying emotional coping in the context of emerging technologies. Lastly, the study is limited to this cultural–psychological pathway and does not extend to clinical interventions or the technical development of AI systems.

Research Objectives

General

To analyze how *hiya*, as a Filipino cultural value, influences emotional reliance on AI for mental health support, and to examine the mediating role of help-seeking in this relationship.

Specific

1. To examine the influence of *hiya* on emotional reliance on AI, clarifying how this cultural value contributes to the acceptance of AI as an alternative source of mental health support.

2. To analyze the influence of *hiya* on help-seeking behavior, identifying its role as a cultural barrier to professional counseling.

3. To assess the relationship between help-seeking behavior and emotional reliance on AI, determining how a reduced willingness to seek professional care may redirect individuals toward technological alternatives.

4. To investigate the mediating role of help-seeking behavior in the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI.

These goals are aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), as the study promotes mental wellness, culturally sensitive interventions, and the ethical use of technology to support

equitable and accessible mental health care.

Statement of the Problem

General

Does help-seeking behavior mediate the relationship between hiya and emotional reliance on AI among First-year BS Information Technology students?

Specific

1. What are the levels of *hiya*, help-seeking behavior, and emotional reliance on AI among first-year information technology students?

2. Does a significant correlation exist between:

2.1. *Hiya* and emotional reliance on AI among first-year information technology students

2.2. *Hiya* and help-Seeking behavior among first-year information technology students

2.3. Help-seeking behavior and emotional reliance on AI among first-year information technology students

3. Does *hiya* and help-seeking behavior significantly predict emotional reliance on AI?

4. Does help-seeking behavior mediate the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI?

Hypotheses

H_1: *Hiya* significantly correlates with emotional reliance on AI. H_2: *Hiya* significantly correlates with help-seeking behavior.

H_3: Help-seeking behavior significantly correlates with emotional reliance on AI.

H_4: *Hiya* and help-seeking behavior significantly predicts emotional reliance on AI.

H_5: Help-seeking behavior mediates the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded on Erving Goffman's (1955) Face Theory, which explains how people manage their social image, or "face," in interactions. Face represents the positive social value that individuals want to show and protect. Face-work includes the strategies people use to protect or repair their face when it's threatened. In Filipino culture, hiya represents a cultural form of face. Filipinos tend to value and work hard to keep it, as being seen as walang hiya can harm a person's social standing and the peace of a community.

In the present study, help-seeking behavior is viewed as a face-threatening situation. Sharing personal or emotional difficulties can lead to negative judgments from others. People with a strong sense of hiya might see asking for help as a risk and therefore avoid it. Using artificial intelligence for emotional support is seen as a modern form of face-work. This approach provides a secure way to meet emotional needs, thus avoiding potential social awkwardness or disrupting the balance in social interactions.

Leon Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory explains the importance of hiya. This theory suggests that people naturally compare their abilities, behaviors, and social status to those of others. In the Philippines, these comparisons seem to increase people's awareness of hiya. They become more aware of how others perceive their actions. Together, these theories clarify how hiya influences emotional reliance on AI through help-seeking behavior, supporting the mediation model proposed in the study.

Conceptual Framework

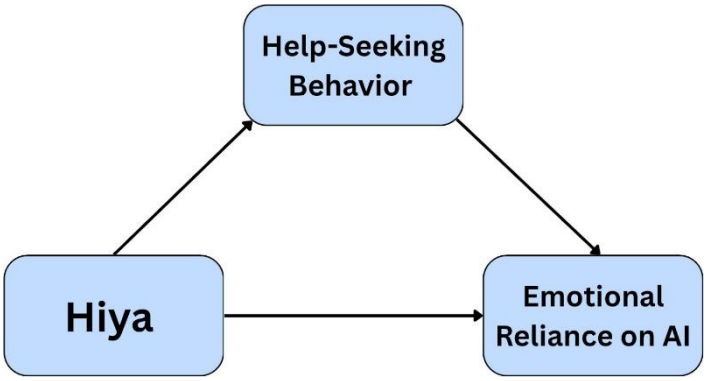

Figure 1. A Mediation Model on the relationship of Hiya, Help-Seeking Behavior, and Emotional Reliance on Al.

This study examines the influence of *Hiya* on individuals' Emotional Reliance on AI. *Hiya* is treated as the independent variable, while Emotional Reliance on AI serves as the dependent variable. In addition, Help-Seeking Behavior acts as a mediating variable that explains how *Hiya* affects individuals' tendency to rely on AI for emotional support. Specifically, the presence of *Hiya* may discourage individuals from seeking help from others, thereby increasing their likelihood of turning to AI as an alternative source of emotional support.

METHODS

This section presents the research design, participants, instruments, procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations that were employed in the conduct of the study.

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research design, specifically a non-experimental correlational design as classified by Johnson (2001). This design was appropriate because the study did not involve manipulating variables or randomly assigning participants to experimental conditions. Instead, it focused on identifying patterns and examining associations among the variables, the Filipino cultural value of *hiya*, help-seeking behavior, and emotional reliance on AI through participants' responses. The study was anchored in the positivist paradigm, which assumed that reality is objective and measurable. Under this worldview, knowledge is obtained through systematic observation and statistical analysis. Guided by this paradigm, the research sought to provide an empirical and structured understanding of the relationships among the variables, specifically examining whether help-seeking behavior mediated the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI.

Participants

The participants of this study were first-year students of Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT) at Bulacan State University. Based on the profile of the participants, the average age the study had was 18.25 years old, comprising 35.33% female and 64.67% of male participants. This group was chosen because of their familiarity with digital technologies such as AI due to their academic background and their cultural context reflected the influence of *hiya*, which often discourages help-seeking behavior. The participants also belonged to a generation that is deeply shaped by the rapid technological change. A study by Tamayo et al. (2025) found a significant correlation between the use of AI tools and student engagement among IT students. The participants should have prior experience and or at least considered using AI chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT, Replika, Meta AI, Gemini) as a form of emotional support and be able to complete all of the survey questionnaires. Letters were formally submitted to the CICT college dean to request permission for the data collection. Upon approval, the total population of the first-year BSIT students (N=476) was obtained from the Local Student Council (LSC) and from the class mayors from each section.

The study employed Simple Random Sampling to guarantee that every member of the study's population had an

equal chance of being selected. Using the Green's (1991) rule-of-thumb for multiple regression, the sample size was determined. Green (1991) recommended that the minimum sample size exceed N > 104 + m, where the m represents the number of predictors in the regression model. A minimum sample size of 106 was needed for the study's simple mediation model, containing the independent variable one mediator as predictors of the dependent variable, m = 2. In order to provide sufficient statistical power for assessing individual predictors and identifying the potential indirect effects, the proposed sample was 150 participants which is larger than the minimum. This sampling procedure provided rich and relevant data for examining the mediating role of help-seeking behavior between hiya and emotional reliance on AI.

Measures

Hiya. The level of *hiya* was measured using the *Panukat ng Hiya bilang Pagpapahalaga (PHP)* by Clemente, Galang, and Arpon (2017), a 16-item self-report scale. It measured *hiya* as a value, and assessed the extent to which individuals considered the thoughts and feelings of others about themselves before taking any action, especially in contexts with normative-moral implications. The items were answered using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Hinding-hindi ako 'yan to 6 = Akong-ako 'yan), with statements such as *"Mahalaga para sa kanya na malaman kung paano siya nakikita ng ibang tao."* The highness or lowness of *hiya* depended solely on the distribution of scores within a given sample. Scale scores were computed by averaging all item responses per participant to obtain an overall *hiya* score and then calculating the group mean. The scale had demonstrated strong reliability, with an internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.89$. In the current study, the PHP yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Help-seeking Behavior. The General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) developed by Wilson et al. (2005) was a 22-item scale designed to measure individuals' intentions to seek help from various sources, both formal (such as mental health professionals) and informal (such as friends and family), for specific problems like personal or emotional difficulties and suicidal thoughts. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely), with higher scores indicating stronger intentions to seek help. Scores were summed or averaged, with subscales that distinguished between formal supports and informal supports. A sample item included *"would not seek help from anyone."* While no standard cutoffs existed, interpretations were typically made relative to the sample distribution. The GHSQ had also demonstrated strong reliability and validity, with good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.83 to 0.89), stable test-retest reliability, and significant correlations with related measures. In the current study, the GHSQ showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Emotional Reliance. The Emotional Reliance Scale (ERS), adapted from Ryan et al. (2005), assessed the extent to which individuals relied on AI for comfort, reassurance, and guidance during emotionally challenging situations. The original ERS consisted of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all true to 5 = Very true) for multiple relationship targets (e.g., mother, father, best friend, roommate, or "no one"), with items presented in the form *"When I'm feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities and commitments, I would turn to (my) ."* In this adaptation, the blank was replaced with AI, resulting in a single AI-focused version of the scale. Scores were calculated by averaging the 10 items, with higher scores reflecting greater emotional reliance on AI. The original scale had demonstrated excellent psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.91 to 0.97 across different targets, indicating high internal consistency. In the current study, the adapted ERS showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Procedures

The study followed a structured set of procedures to ensure methodological rigor and validity of results. It employed a quantitative non-experimental correlational design guided by the positivist paradigm and was measured through systematic observation and statistical analysis. For the selection of participants, simple random sampling guided by Green's rule-of-thumb for multiple regression was employed to ensure that every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected. The measures used in the study consisted of survey questionnaires, which measured participants' levels of *hiya*, help-seeking behavior, and emotional reliance on AI.

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 60 first-year BSIT students who were selected through simple random sampling. The pilot survey was administered through Google Forms to assess the clarity, reliability, and appropriateness of the survey items. The pilot respondents were guided by their class mayors, who were contacted beforehand to facilitate participation and ensure smooth administration. The pilot testing results underwent a data cleaning process to identify and remove incomplete or invalid responses, ensuring that the dataset was accurate and suitable for analysis.

For the main data collection, self-report surveys were administered through both Google Forms and paper-based questionnaires to the target population of first-year BSIT students. To formally authorize these procedures, formal letters were submitted to the Dean of College of Information and Communications Technology (CICT) and their local student government. The study also secured approval from the BulSU-CSSP Local Ethics Review Committee. To ensure an organized and timely distribution, coordination with the participants' classes was conducted during the data-gathering phase to arrange appropriate schedules for administering the survey to randomly selected students.

The data collected underwent a data cleaning process and were then analyzed to provide an overview of the study variables and to examine the hypothesized relationships. Lastly, the study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the participants' rights and well-being. Confidentiality and anonymity were upheld throughout the process, and all data were used solely for academic purposes.

Data Analysis

The data was collected and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses were conducted to provide an overview of the data and examine associations among the study variables. A median split was also conducted to categorize the scores into high and low groups. Assumptions for mediation were checked to ensure suitability for regression-based analysis. Mediation analysis was then conducted in jamovi using the medmod module, with the indirect effect examined using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Results were considered statistically significant at $p < .05$. Evidence of mediation was evaluated based on whether the bootstrapped confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero. The type of mediation was determined based on whether the direct effect remained significant (partial) or nonsignificant (full) after the mediator was included.

The pilot test data were analyzed using jamovi to assess reliability, descriptive statistics, and normality. Internal consistency was initially examined in the pilot data to evaluate the measures. The measures demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.88 for Hiya, 0.86 for Help-Seeking Behavior, and 0.80 for Emotional Reliance on Al. Descriptive statistics further provided a preliminary overview of the pilot data, with mean scores of 4.93 (SD = 0.59) for Hiya, 3.64 (SD = 0.83) for Help-Seeking Behavior, and 3.64 (SD = 0.49) for Emotional Reliance on AI.

The Shapiro–Wilk test was employed to assess the normality of each variable's data. The findings revealed that Hiya (W = 0.96, p = 0.06), Help-Seeking Behavior (W = 0.984, p = 0.61), and Emotional Reliance on AI (W = 0.98, p = 0.43) all yielded p-values above the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the distributions fell within the acceptable range for normality. The results suggest that the variables met the assumptions required for parametric analyses, supporting the readiness of the measures for full implementation in the main study.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards to ensure the rights, safety, and dignity of all participants. Informed consent was obtained before any data collection, and participants were clearly informed about the purpose, procedures, and scope of the study, including their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. All personal information was kept strictly confidential and was used only for academic purposes, in full compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, which upholds the protection and privacy of personal data. The study was designed to avoid any physical, emotional, or psychological harm. By adhering to these ethical principles, the study aimed to uphold the highest standards of integrity while contributing meaningful insights to the academic community.

RESULTS

This section presents the study's statistical findings organized as follows: descriptive statistics for all study variables, correlation analyses among the variables, and a mediation analysis testing the indirect effect of *hiya* on emotional reliance on AI through help-seeking behavior. The results are summarized in the tables that follow.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

	Mean	Median	SD	Interpretation
Hiya	4.68	4.88	0.84	Low
Help-Seeking Behavior	2.86	2.48	1.21	High
Emotional Reliance on AI	3.68	4.00	0.92	Low

N = 150

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the study variables among first-year BS Information Technology students. For *hiya*, the mean score was

4.68 (*SD* = 0.84, *Mdn* = 4.88), which is lower than the median, indicating that most participants reported relatively low *hiya*. For help-seeking behavior, the mean score was 2.86 (*SD* = 1.21, *Mdn* = 2.48), which is higher than the median, indicating that most participants reported relatively high help-seeking behavior. Lastly, for emotional reliance on AI, the mean score was 3.68 (*SD* = 0.92, *Mdn* = 4.00), which is lower than the median, indicating that most participants reported relatively low emotional reliance on AI.

Table 2. Correlation among Hiya, Help-seeking Behavior, and Emotional Reliance on AI

	1	2	3
1. Hiya	-	-	-
2. Help-Seeking Behavior	-0.69***	-	-
3. Emotional Reliance on AI	0.70***	-0.81***	-

** p < .05, ** p < 0.1, *** p < .001*

Table 2 shows the results of the Pearson correlation analysis among first-year BS Information Technology students. The findings showed that *hiya* was positively correlated with emotional reliance on AI ($r = 0.70$, $p < .001$). This relationship was significant, which means that participants who experienced higher levels of *hiya* were more likely to rely on AI for emotional support. The findings also showed that *hiya* has significant negative correlation with help-seeking behavior ($r = -0.69$, $p < .001$). This relationship was also deemed significant, indicating that participants who experienced higher levels of *hiya* were less likely to seek help from others. Moreover, help-seeking behavior was negatively correlated with emotional reliance on AI ($r = -0.80$, $p < .001$), which was also significant, indicating that participants who tended to seek less help from others were more likely to rely on AI for emotional support. Overall, the results showed significant relationships among *hiya*, help-seeking behavior, and emotional reliance on AI. These findings suggest that as *hiya* increases, help-seeking behavior decreases, while emotional reliance on AI increases.

Assumption Checking for Mediation Analysis

Prior to performing the mediation analysis, Fein et al. (2022) stated that there are a number of assumptions that should be met. In this study, the assumptions evaluated include the measurement of variables on a continuous scale, linearity, absence of multicollinearity, the absence of spurious outliers, and normality of residuals, ensuring the validity and reliability of the present study's findings. *Hiya*, Help-Seeking Behavior, and Emotional Reliance on AI were measured using composite mean scores derived from multi-item scales, which produce a range of numerical values that can take on decimal points, allowing for meaningful differences between participants. Therefore, the variables were treated as continuous, making them appropriate for the statistical procedures used in this study (Huh & Gim, 2025).

Linearity was assessed through visual inspection of scatterplots for each pair of variables, which indicated approximately linear relationships. The data points followed straight-line patterns with no evidence of systematic curvature. Therefore, the assumption of linearity was considered satisfied. Multicollinearity was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance statistics. Kim (2019) states that multicollinearity is present when VIF values exceed 5 to 10 or tolerance values fall below 0.1 to 0.2. In this study, both Hiya and Help-Seeking Behavior had VIF values of 1.93 and tolerance values of 0.518, which are within acceptable limits. These results indicate that both the independent variable and the mediator do not exhibit multicollinearity.

Multivariate outliers were examined using Mahalanobis distance with a conservative criterion of $p < .001$ (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019), and no cases exceeded the critical value. Influential observations were assessed using Cook's distance (Cook, 1977), with all values below 1 (maximum = 0.356), indicating no undue influence. Therefore, the assumption of no spurious outliers was satisfied. Lastly, normality of residuals was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which is appropriate for samples larger than 50 participants. The test yielded a non-significant result, $D = 0.09$, $p = 0.17$, indicating that the residuals did not significantly deviate from normality. Thus, the assumption of normality was satisfied. Overall, the findings indicate that all assumptions underlying the regression-based mediation analysis were met.

Table 3. The Mediation of Help-Seeking Behavior Between Hiya & Emotional Reliance on AI

Mediation Estimates

					95% CI				
Effect	Path	Labels	*β*	*SE*	Lower	Upper	*z*	*p*	%
Total	Hiya → Emotional Reliance on AI	c + a x b	0.77	0.09	0.58	0.91	8.93	<.001***	100
Indirect	Hiya → Help-Seeking Behavior → Emotional Reliance on AI	a x b	0.47	0.07	0.33	0.61	6.56	<.001***	60.8
Direct	Hiya → Emotional Reliance on AI	c	0.30	0.09	0.12	0.47	3.52	<.001***	39.2

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Path Estimates

95% CI							
Path	Labels	β	SE	Lower	Upper	*z*	*p*
Hiya →Help-Seeking Behavior	a	-1.00	0.10	-1.18	-0.81	-10.52	<.001***
Help-Seeking Behavior → Emotional Reliance on AI	b	-0.47	0.05	-0.05	-0.36	-8.69	<.001***
Hiya → Emotional Reliance on AI	c	0.30	0.09	0.12	0.47	3.52	<.001***

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

A mediation analysis was conducted to test whether help-seeking behavior mediated the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI among first-year BS Information Technology students. Table 3 shows that the total effect of *hiya* on emotional reliance on AI was significant, $\beta = 0.77$, 95% CI [0.58, 0.91], $z = 8.93$, $p < .001$. This relationship was significantly mediated by help-seeking behavior, $\beta = 0.47$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.61], $z = 6.56$, $p < .001$, accounting for 60.8% of the total effect. The direct effect of *hiya* on emotional reliance on AI remained significant, $\beta = 0.30$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.47], $z = 3.52$, $p < .001$, even after the mediator was accounted for, indicating partial mediation. The findings revealed that participants with higher levels of *hiya* tend to report greater emotional reliance on AI, and this relationship was partly explained by having lower levels of help-seeking behavior.

Table 3 also shows the path estimates: *hiya* negatively predicted help-seeking behavior, $\beta = -1.00$, 95% CI [−1.18, −0.81], $z = -10.52$, $p < .001$. Help-seeking behavior also negatively predicted emotional reliance on AI, $\beta = -0.47$, 95% CI [−0.57, −0.36], $z = -8.69$, $p < .001$. The results indicated that participants who reported higher *hiya* tended to have lower help-seeking behavior, and those who reported lower help-seeking behavior tended to rely more on AI emotionally. The overall findings revealed that the effect of *hiya* on emotional reliance on AI was partly explained by lower help-seeking behavior. It should be noted, however, that *hiya* was directly related to emotional reliance on AI beyond what was explained by help-seeking behavior.

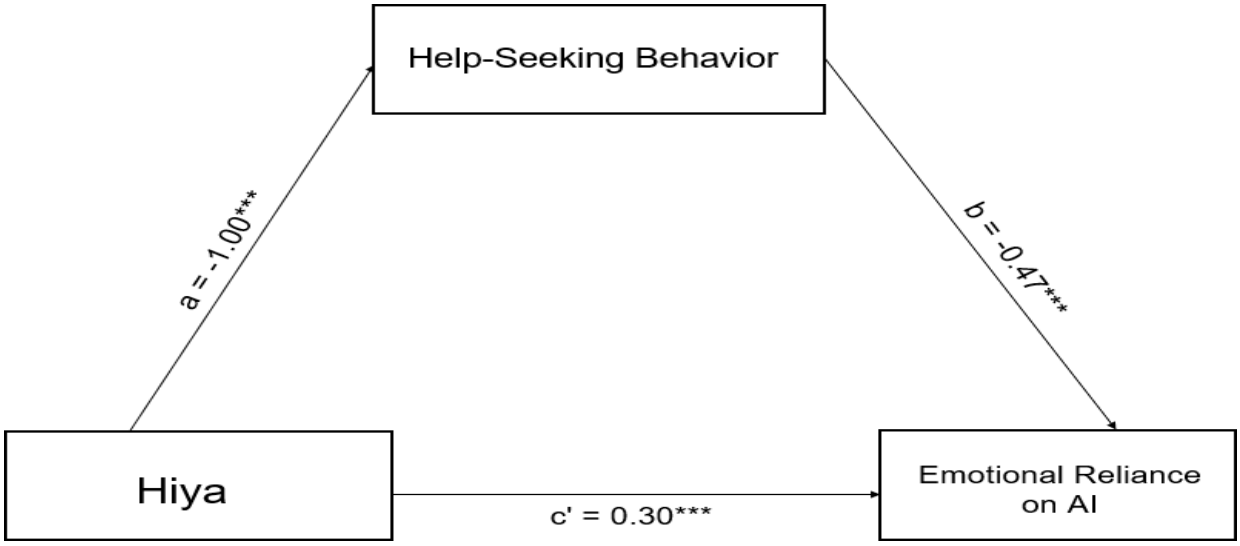

Figure 1. The estimated path coefficients for the mediation model of Hiya, Help-Seeking Behavior, and Emotional Reliance on AI.

The figure presents the mediation model examining the role of help-seeking behavior in the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI. *Hiya* negatively predicted help-seeking behavior (a = −1.00***), which in turn negatively predicted emotional reliance on AI (b = −0.47***). The direct effect of *hiya* on emotional reliance on AI remained significant (c' = 0.30***), indicating partial mediation.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether help-seeking behavior mediates the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI among first-year BS Information Technology students. Overall, the findings indicate that *hiya* is linked to emotional reliance on AI, and that this relationship is partly explained by students' willingness to seek help. The results suggest that participants who report stronger *hiya* also tend to show greater emotional reliance on AI, particularly when help seeking behavior is less likely.

Levels of Hiya, Help-Seeking Behavior, and Emotional Reliance on AI

The descriptive findings provide context for the sample's overall levels. In terms of their general profile, the results suggest that first-year IT students tend to show a pattern characterized by relatively low *hiya*, a high tendency to engage in help-seeking, and generally low emotional reliance on AI. This implies that, for most first-year IT students, AI is not functioning as a primary emotional support source; interpersonal support remains a viable option. Nevertheless, the observed relationships among variables imply that even within this context, students who experience higher *hiya* may be more vulnerable to using AI as an emotionally safer alternative, especially when seeking support from other people feels uncomfortable or risky. This situates the main findings by suggesting that emotional reliance on AI may be less about general AI use and more about how students manage vulnerability and perceived social evaluation when they need support.

Associations among Hiya, Help-Seeking Behavior, and Emotional Reliance on AI

The associational findings show that hiya, the tendency to avoid seeking help, and emotional reliance on AI, are closely related. people with strong feelings of hiya tend to avoid approaching peers, instructors, or support

systems, often due to their worry about being judged or feeling embarrassed. This is often due to their worry about being judged or feeling embarrassed. They may also see AI as a safer choice when it comes to sharing emotions. This aligns with what previous studies have found about hiya, as a barrier, refraining people from seeking support. Martinez et al. (2020) and Ramos and McNally (2024) noted that individuals fear judgment, stigma, or losing face when reaching out for help. Villamor and Dy (2022) further reported that Filipino college students often delay asking for emotional support due to shame and anxiety about being evaluated negatively.

Another pattern seen is that choosing AI over human interaction for seeking emotional support aligns with prior research. De Freitas et al. (2024) and Maples et al. (2024) found that AI companions offer comfort and help reduce loneliness, which might explain why students go to AI when real-world connections feel hard to face. Additionally, Chung-En (2018) and Todd (2024) emphasized that privacy reduces the fear of negative responses, which makes it easier for individuals to share emotions with AI chatbots than with real human connections. In line with these findings, the present study suggests that higher hiya tends to co-occur with lower help-seeking behavior and greater emotional reliance on AI.

Hiya and Help-Seeking Behavior as Predictors of Emotional Reliance on AI

The predictive findings indicate that *hiya* and help-seeking behavior both help explain greater emotional reliance on AI, each in its own way. Participants who experience stronger hiya may be more likely to rely on AI emotionally because AI can feel more private and less socially exposed for sharing personal concerns. The findings are also supported by Chung-En (2018) and Todd (2024), who reported that people are more willing to disclose sensitive emotions to AI or digital agents when they expect less judgment and greater privacy. In line with these studies, the present study suggests that students higher in *hiya* may show greater emotional reliance on AI because it can feel safer than interpersonal disclosure.

Help-seeking behavior also helps explain greater emotional reliance on AI. Participants who are less inclined to approach other people for support may be more likely to turn to AI as an alternative source of comfort. This pattern is consistent with Pantaleon et al. (2022), who discussed that when traditional help-seeking is constrained by cultural or social barriers, individuals may shift toward other forms of emotional support. Relatedly, Helmert et al. (2023) reported that higher levels of shame is linked to lower willingness to seek psychological help, showing that socially loaded emotions can discourage reaching out to people. Taken together, the findings suggest that greater emotional reliance on AI may reflect both hiya-related discomfort and reduced interpersonal help-seeking.

Help-Seeking Behavior as a Mediator Between Hiya and Emotional Reliance on AI

The mediation findings indicate that help-seeking behavior partially explains the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI. This suggests that one pathway connecting *hiya* to emotional reliance on AI involves reduced willingness to seek help from other people. This interpretation is consistent with prior studies and literature showing that hiya can discourage help-seeking due to concerns about judgment, embarrassment, and social consequences (Martinez et al., 2020). De Leon (2025) similarly noted that when individuals feel socially exposed in interpersonal settings, they may prefer more private forms of support, which supports the findings that reduced help-seeking can lead to greater reliance on AI.

The partial mediation indicates that help-seeking behavior does not account for the entire relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI. This indicates that *hiya* may still be connected to emotional reliance on AI through additional mechanisms beyond help-seeking behavior. In line with this, Nizamani et al. (2025) and Ningrum et al. (2024) reported that emotional reliance on AI can be strengthened by perceived emotional safety, anonymity, and controllability in AI interactions. In the same way, students higher in hiya may prefer AI not only because they are less likely to seek interpersonal support, but also because AI can provide emotional interaction that minimizes embarrassment and social exposure and offers greater control over self-expression. Future studies may clarify these additional pathways by examining other potential mediators.

The findings of the study reflect broader trends seen in recent studies where students use AI not only for academic tasks but also for emotional support. For example, according to Suriá-Martínez et al. (2025), university students

report that AI-based technologies are perceived as useful for both informational and emotional support, suggesting that many learners turn to AI as a resource when traditional support may feel inaccessible or uncomfortable. Additionally, studies indicate that higher comfort and perceived empathy in AI interactions can lead individuals to engage more with AI for personal or emotional topics, even when human support may be available (Chandra et al., 2025). This is similar to the present findings, which show that students with higher *hiya*, who may feel uneasy seeking help from others due to fear of embarrassment or judgment are more likely to rely on AI for emotional support. Cultural research also supports this pattern in Filipino populations, where *hiya* and related stigma are recognized barriers to formal help-seeking, often leading individuals to delay or avoid reaching out to others (Martinez et al., 2020). Taken together, these studies help explain why many young people today are turning to AI not just for information, but also for emotional support, especially in educational settings.

The findings indicate that emotional reliance on AI among first-year BS Information Technology students is shaped by culturally rooted social-emotional processes, particularly *hiya* and help-seeking behavior. Higher *hiya* was associated with reduced interpersonal help-seeking and increased emotional reliance on AI, suggesting that students who fear judgment or embarrassment may avoid direct social support and instead engage with AI as a safer alternative, consistent with Goffman's Face Theory (1995) and Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954). Although help-seeking behavior accounted for part of this relationship, the persistence of a direct effect suggests that *hiya* also operates through additional mechanisms beyond simple avoidance.

Students high in *hiya* may be more inclined to use AI because it allows them to process emotions privately, regulate the depth and timing of self-disclosure, and reflect on concerns without immediate social consequences. This engagement may represent a shift in how students manage vulnerability, wherein AI functions as a space for emotional meaning-making rather than merely a substitute for human interaction. In this way, emotional reliance on AI can be understood as part of a broader adaptive process shaped by cultural sensitivity to social evaluation. Taken together, these findings suggest that students' use of AI for emotional support reflects an ongoing negotiation between cultural values, emotional needs, and available support environments, a process of transformation that echoes the call to *"not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).*

Implications

This findings of the study are significant for both theory and practice, helping to understand how cultural values and AI-based emotional support affect the mental health of Filipino youth. Theoretically, the study fills a gap by examining help-seeking behavior as a mediator between hiya and emotional reliance on AI. While previous research has examined cultural stigma and AI use separately, the findings of the study further extends by clarifying the psychological process that links the two. The results also extend Goffman's Face Theory (1955) by showing that higher levels of hiya discourage help-seeking and shift emotional coping toward AI support. This corresponds to Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) in explaining the sensitivity linked to hiya. By providing collected data from a Filipino youth sample, the study contributes to existing theoretical frameworks in social psychology and human–AI interaction, showing how traditional cultural values continue to influence emotional coping even when support comes from modern technologies like AI.

Practically, the findings provide valuable insights for mental health practitioners, educators, policymakers, and AI developers. For reasons that hiya and stigma makes formal help-seeking risky, and influence reliance on AI for emotional support, mental health interventions must focus on confidentiality, non-judgmental spaces, and culturally sensitive methods to lessen perceived social risk. Educational institutions can utilize AI tools as a support while still ensuring there are clear paths to professional psychological services. Furthermore, AI developers have the responsibility of promoting responsible use and awareness of the importance of real human and emphatic support. These principles were applied through a learning support seminar titled, "PAGDULOG: Exploring Help-Seeking Behavior and Emotional Reliance in the Age of AI." where the advantages and disadvantages of AI as a platform for emotional expression were emphasized, as well as the potential of hiya to make formal help-seeking discouraging. These implications, which are aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), contribute to the advancement of safer, more inclusive, and ethically sound mental health practices within the age of AI.

Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the researchers only surveyed the first year Information Technology students at Bulacan State University meaning that the findings may not apply to the students in different programs, other year levels, or other institutions. They may experience different levels of hiya, help-seeking behavior, and emotional reliance on AI due to academic demands, exposure to different technologies, and developmental stages. Second, other potential confounding variables such as students' mental health history, family income, and access to professional help and support networks were not considered, limiting the ability to really isolate the unique effect of *hiya* and the usage of AI. Finally, this study examined emotional reliance within a non-clinical framework and therefore should not be interpreted as evidence of AI's therapeutic efficacy or suitability for treating diagnosed mental health conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, educational institutions and guidance offices may develop programs that promote healthy help-seeking behaviors while considering the cultural value of *hiya*. Since *hiya* may influence students' emotional reliance on AI, schools may provide orientations on responsible and balanced AI use, emphasizing that AI should serve as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for professional or interpersonal support.

Mental health practitioners and educators may also integrate discussions about *hiya* during counseling sessions to better understand students' reluctance to seek help. By acknowledging this cultural factor, interventions can be designed to reduce barriers to help-seeking and encourage appropriate use of both human and technological support systems.

Building on these findings, future research may broaden the sample population by including students from various academic programs, year levels, and universities, as well as non-student populations. Expanding the participant group would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon across diverse groups. Additionally, adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus group discussions, may offer deeper insights into how *hiya* and help-seeking behavior influences emotional reliance on AI within the Filipino cultural context.

Future studies are also encouraged to examine other potential mediating or moderating variables that may further explain the relationship between *hiya* and emotional reliance on AI. While the present study focused on help-seeking behavior as a mediating variable, other psychological factors or cultural values beyond *hiya* may also influence individuals' emotional reliance on AI.

Furthermore, future studies may examine the clinical and ethical dimensions of emotional reliance on AI, including its impact on professional help-seeking, potential boundaries in AI use, and the broader ethical implications for mental health care. By exploring these areas, future research can provide clearer and more practical guidance for both educational and psychological interventions.

CONCLUSION

The study examined whether help-seeking behavior mediates the relationship between the cultural value, *hiya*, and emotional reliance on AI among first-year BS Information Technology students. The findings show that students with higher levels of *hiya* are less likely to seek help from others and are more likely to rely on AI for emotional support. In addition, help-seeking behavior is closely linked to emotional reliance on AI, indicating that a reduced willingness to seek help explains how *hiya* leads to greater emotional reliance on AI, thereby supporting its role as a mediating variable in the relationship.

These results highlight how Filipino cultural values influence the ways individuals cope with mental health concerns, especially in situations where feelings of shame and fear of being judged discourage seeking help from

others, leading people to turn to AI platforms as a more private and judgement-free source of emotional support.

Future research may examine more diverse populations, include additional variables, and employ different methods to further clarify the relationships identified in this study. Further studies may also examine clinical and ethical implications of emotional reliance on AI, including its effects on professional help-seeking and appropriate boundaries in AI use to better inform culturally responsive educational and psychological interventions.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of understanding cultural influences on help-seeking behaviors and the emerging role of AI as a source of emotional support. By recognizing these dynamics, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers can develop interventions that respect cultural values while promoting healthy coping strategies, ultimately supporting the well-being of the youth and other individuals in similar contexts.

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