

An Archaeology of the Affinity System: From Game to AI Products

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ABSTRACT

Emotionally interactive AI products, such as Awen from the virtual companionship application EVE (Natural Selection Labs 2024) and the companion robot Ani from Grok (xAI 2023), represent one of the most popular application scenarios for Large Language Models (LLMs) today. A common feature of these products is that their mechanism design is largely inherited from dating simulation games. However, during the migration of the Affinity Mechanism, the validity of its original design goals has been challenged by technological upgrades, shifts in social contexts, and changes in product positioning.

Employing the method of Game Mechanism Archaeology (Reinhard 2018), this paper delineates the development history of the Affinity Mechanism into three stages. The first stage is the Nascent Period (1983-1987), where the initial form of the mechanism was established within Japanese adult games such as Love Adventure (T&E Soft 1984) and Yellow Lemon (PSK 1985). The second stage is the Formative Period (1987-1995), marked by the rise of dating simulations such as Tokimeki Memorial (Konami 1994), during which Affinity became one of the most crucial numerical mechanisms in the genre. The third stage is the Generalization Period (1995-present), where the mechanism expanded into a wider range of game genres and coupled with other systems (such as combat and collection) to form complex interactive dimensions, like Final Fantasy VII (Square Enix 1997).

Historical analysis reveals three initial design objectives for Affinity System. First, at the mechanism level, it provided criteria for judging game progress that were clearer and more quantifiable than text alone. Second, at the user experience level, it aimed to transform narrative aesthetics into numerical gameplay objectives, thereby enhancing "gameplay." Third, constrained by the technological boundaries of the era, Affinity served as a simplified model for character relationships.

However, within emotionally interactive AI products, the "game clearance" ending disappears, rendering the traditional notion of progression obsolete. Furthermore, the objective of facilitating naturally occurring emotional experiences conflicts with the pleasure derived from strategic gameplay, and the aforementioned technological boundaries have long been broken. Consequently, the migration of the Affinity Mechanism to emotionally interactive AI products is proven to be invalid.

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In conclusion, product design in the AI era should be premised on the functional boundaries of LLMs and grounded in actual user needs. By employing mechanism archaeology to critically evaluate the validity of mechanism migration, designers can return to original needs and explore AI product design solutions that embody greater humanistic care.

BIO

Song Han is a co-founder of Hubei Kuanglingling Network Technology Co., Ltd. and an independent researcher. As a graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts and the Communication University of China, she focuses her research on video game ontology and narrative design. Her current work aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and creative game development.

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