

New Findings in Mental Health Screening: Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair Speaker Dr. Alan R. Dennis Challenges AI Applications

Campus focus

On June 19, the Department of Information Management at Tamkang University's College of Business and Management held a Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair Lecture, inviting Dr. Alan R. Dennis, Professor of Information Systems at the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University Bloomington, to deliver a keynote address titled "Judgmental Bot: Conversational Agents for Online Mental Health Screening." Prof. Dennis shared insights on how AI can be flexibly applied in the mental health field, emphasizing that people's perception of AI as judgmental significantly influences their willingness to accept AI-driven mental health screenings.

Vice President for Academic Affairs, Prof. Hui-Huang Hsu, introduced Dr. Dennis as a former President of the Association for Information Systems (AIS), author of over 150 research papers, and a globally recognized scholar in AI, team collaboration, and misinformation on social media. In 2021, citation analysis ranked him in the top 1% of the most influential researchers across all scientific fields, with his work featured nearly 1,000 times in media outlets. He was named an AIS Fellow in 2012 and received the prestigious LEO Award in 2021.

Dr. Dennis began by highlighting the current mental health crisis in the United States, where nearly half the population is expected to experience a mental health issue in their lifetime, especially anxiety and depression. Due to a shortage of professional counselors, AI is being considered a vital support tool for screening. However, the fear of being judged poses a psychological barrier to seeking help. Although studies show that text-based chatbots can outperform human professionals in judgmental tasks, patients tend to be less willing to use such services, disclose personal information, or follow AI-generated advice.

Using the structured questionnaire PHQ-9 as an example, Dr. Dennis noted that many medical institutions are digitizing mental health screening

processes and incorporating AI chatbots for preliminary assessments. After multiple experiments, it was found that even when AI and human professionals provided identical responses during the screening process, participants generally perceived AI chatbots as lacking emotional authenticity. This perception reduced their willingness to use AI services and their level of trust in them. This finding challenges the common belief that AI is inherently neutral.

Further qualitative interviews revealed that while AI can accurately analyze responses, it struggles to convey genuine understanding and emotional support. Participants expressed that since AI lacks real-life experiences, it cannot truly empathize with users' emotions or social contexts, making it difficult for people to feel "heard" or "understood." This sense of disconnect remains a key reason why AI cannot fully replace human interactions, although its ability to generate quantifiable data remains a valuable asset.

Dr. Dennis emphasized that emotional support is still indispensable in mental health care. He recommended using online forms as an alternative to conversational AI or innovating AI systems to overcome limitations in delivering empathy and recognition. 1st-year graduate student Yo-Cheng Tu remarked that while AI was assumed to be a stress-free communication partner, the results suggest otherwise, offering critical insights for future AI-based mental health tools.

Assistant Professor Yu-Hua Chen from the Graduate Institute of Educational Psychology and Counseling raised a question: "Do modern individuals, due to loneliness and social isolation, mistakenly project emotions onto AI, only to feel judged or hurt when the emotional connection fails?" Dr. Dennis affirmed that emotional projection does occur but is disrupted once users realize that AI responses are generated from large language models, leading to feelings of detachment. He concluded that future AI development in mental health should prioritize emotional support and human-like response designs.

Assistant Professor Yuan-Cheng Cheng, who researches medical technology, expressed a keen interest in how AI chatbots are used in mental health

diagnosis. Dr. Dennis' s experiments helped him understand the differences between online AI chatbots and human physicians, as well as the varying levels of acceptance in conducting mental health assessments. It is evident that AI applications are becoming increasingly widespread, with many healthcare services incorporating AI, thereby increasing users' willingness to consider diagnostic AI bots or apps.

In addition to the lecture and meetings, Dr. Dennis engaged in academic exchange with the department' s faculty. He was accompanied by Prof. Sheng-Pao Shih to attend the 2025 Taiwan Summer Workshop on Information Management (TSWIM), held from July 1 - 3 by the AIS Taiwan Chapter and Chang Gung University, where he served as a keynote speaker and session chair to share his latest research findings.

Dr. Alan R. Dennis, Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair Professor invited by the Department of Information and Communication, and a professor in the Department of Information Systems at the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University Bloomington, visited President Huan-Chao Keh and Chairperson Flora Chia-I Chang on June 19 at 2:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m., respectively. He was accompanied by College of Business and Management Dean Li-Ren Yang, Department of Information Management Chair Sheng-Pao Shih, Associate Professor Ching-Chiang Chou, and Assistant Professor Yuan-Cheng Cheng. They also toured the Tamkang History Gallery to learn about the development and promotion of Tamkang University and its culture.

President Keh warmly welcomed Dr. Dennis and introduced the university' s environment and its AI transformation journey. He explained how AI has been integrated into both teaching and administrative processes to enhance learning outcomes and operational efficiency. Dr. Dennis praised the campus' s beauty and expressed excitement about his planned sightseeing in Taiwan. Chairperson Chang explained the origins of the Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair, and both sides exchanged views on the lecture topic. Dr. Dennis expressed appreciation for Tamkang' s use of the 0365 real-time translation system, which helped faculty and students better understand his talk. He was moved by their enthusiastic response. As a token of appreciation, President Keh and Chairperson Chang presented a Panda trophy

and a commemorative vase featuring calligraphy by masters Chi-Mao Li and Ben-Hang Chang, along with images of the campus and lyrics of the school anthem. The Department of Information Management also gave Dr. Dennis a 40th-anniversary souvenir to thank him for his academic contributions and visit.

















