毕 业 论 文（设计）开 题 报 告

题 目(Topic): The Impact of AI Literacy on Upward Influence Behavior among Generation Z Employees: A Resource Dependence Perspective

一、选题意义及国内外研究状况

I. Research Background

ChatGPT was released in November 2022. In less than two years, generative AI has evolved from a niche curiosity into workplace infrastructure—not because of hype, but because of measurable productivity gains. On graduate-level science questions (GPQA Diamond), accuracy rose from 39% (GPT-4, 2023) to 93% (GPT-5.2, 2025); on complex coding tasks (SWE-bench), from 50% to 80% (OpenAI, 2025; Rein et al., 2023). These are not incremental refinements but qualitative leaps. Organizations have responded accordingly: 92% plan to increase AI investment over the next three years (McKinsey, 2025).

This explains why AI literacy has become a strategically valuable resource. When AI tools can dramatically accelerate knowledge work, employees who leverage them effectively become what Tripathi (2021) calls 'hosts of tacit resources'—individuals possessing capabilities that organizations depend on.

Yet this capability is unevenly distributed. Generation Z employees use AI daily at 57%, with 70% actively investing time in skill development (Deloitte, 2025). The generational gap is stark: 41% of Gen Z workers in Germany regularly use AI tools, compared to 13% of Gen X (Nebgen & Kurz, 2024). Perhaps more telling, 59% of Gen Z report 'reverse mentoring' older colleagues on technology (IWG, 2025), while managers underestimate their teams' AI usage by a factor of 3.25 (McKinsey, 2025).

This asymmetry raises a question: existing research has not adequately addressed: when younger employees possess competencies that organizations need, how does this resource advantage reshape their interactions with supervisors?

II. Research Objective

(1) Explore the current state of AI literacy among Generation Z employees in workplace contexts.

(2) Examine how AI literacy influences their upward influence behaviors toward supervisors.

(3) Investigate the moderating role of supervisor openness in this process.

III. Research Significance

Theoretical Significance. This study contributes in three ways. First, it extends resource dependence theory by 'reversing the lens' (Tripathi, 2021)—examining employees as resource holders rather than passive recipients of direction. Second, it addresses a gap in AI-and-work literature, which has predominantly adopted threat-focused perspectives; this study conceptualizes AI literacy as enabling rather than threatening. Third, it responds to temporal validity concerns: findings from GPT-4-era research may not generalize to current systems with severalfold capability improvements.

Practical Significance. For organizations navigating generational AI gaps, this study offers insight into emerging influence dynamics. For managers, it informs responses to input from digitally fluent subordinates. For Gen Z employees, understanding conditions under which AI literacy translates into influence can help them navigate workplace relationships effectively.

IV. Research Review

AI Literacy: Conceptual Development. AI literacy as a construct has evolved through several phases. Early definitions emphasized technical skills—programming, data handling, algorithm understanding (Long & Magerko, 2020). Subsequent work broadened the scope: Ng et al. (2021) proposed the ABCE model, encompassing Affective (attitudes toward AI), Behavioral (learning engagement), Cognitive (knowledge hierarchies based on Bloom's taxonomy), and Ethical (responsibility, transparency) dimensions. However, the ABCE model was developed for K-12 education contexts with adolescent samples, limiting its applicability to workplace settings.

This study adopts Zhong et al.'s (2024) three-dimensional framework—knowledge, affect, and thinking—for two reasons. First, it was developed in a Chinese context, offering better cultural fit. Second, it emphasizes dynamic transformation among dimensions (grounded in Piagetian genetic epistemology), rather than treating them as parallel factors. Crucially, as Zhong et al. note, 'knowing how to use AI is not the same as being AI literate'—the latter requires critical evaluation and adaptive engagement with evolving tools.

Resource Dependence Theory and 'Hosts of Tacit Resources.' Resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) holds that power flows toward those controlling needed resources. Tripathi (2021) extends this to employee-supervisor dynamics: 'a manager is dependent on an employee in proportion to the need for resources that the employee can provide, and in inverse proportion to the availability of alternatives.' Two conditions determine dependency: how much the manager needs the resource, and whether alternatives exist. When employees possess scarce, organizationally valued capabilities—like AI literacy—they become 'hosts of tacit resources,' gaining potential leverage.

The Claiming-Granting Mechanism. How does resource advantage translate into influence? DeRue and Ashford (2010) offer a mechanism through leadership identity construction. Leadership emerges when individuals 'claim' expertise through their actions, and others 'grant' recognition. Claiming refers to 'actions people take to assert their identity'; granting refers to 'actions that bestow identity onto another person.' Gen Z employees' upward influence can be understood as claiming expertise in AI domains. Whether claims succeed depends on supervisors' willingness to grant recognition—connecting to supervisor openness.

Supervisor Openness. Detert and Burris (2007) conceptualize supervisor openness as the extent to which leaders listen to, are interested in, and act on employee ideas. This serves as a boundary condition: supervisors with 'shared' leadership schemas (DeRue & Ashford, 2010)—viewing leadership as fluid rather than hierarchy-fixed—may be more willing to grant expertise-based claims from subordinates.

Generation Z: Expectations and Dynamics. Gen Z brings distinctive workplace expectations. Schroth (2019) documents that having ideas valued ranks as their top desired benefit; 'disrespect to them is not listening to their ideas or being dismissive.' Zahra et al. (2025) find that Gen Z does not automatically grant respect based on position: 'trust should be earned through professionalisation rather than being automatically granted based on position.' This aligns with the claiming-granting logic—Gen Z may be more inclined to claim expertise when they perceive themselves as holding valued resources.

The Chinese Context: High Power Distance as Theoretical Tension. China's high power distance culture (Hofstede, 2001) creates a theoretically interesting tension. Deference to hierarchy is normative; upward influence is, in a sense, counter-cultural. Research confirms that power distance suppresses voice behavior in Chinese organizations (Chen et al., 2013). Yet when AI becomes a strategic resource that younger employees disproportionately possess, does technological empowerment override cultural constraints? This tension makes China an ideal research site—testing whether resource dependence logic holds even in contexts where

upward influence faces cultural barriers.

Research Gaps. Three limitations characterize existing scholarship. First, attitudinal framing: the dominant perspective treats AI as threat, emphasizing anxiety and job insecurity (Tong et al., 2024). Sun et al. (2025) stand as a rare exception, finding that employee-AI collaboration enhances proactive behavior—but even they note that 'those with limited AI literacy may struggle to adapt, viewing AI as a threat.' This study adopts an enabling perspective.

Second, sample limitations: prior studies often include participants with unclear AI familiarity. Tong et al. (2024) observe that 'for most studies it remained unclear how familiar people were regarding AI,' creating confounds between 'knowledge of AI, novelty effects, technological anxiety, and a variety of other constructs.' This study specifically targets high-AI-literacy employees.

Third, temporal validity: research conducted during the GPT-4 era tested systems achieving 39% on graduate-level benchmarks; current systems exceed 93%. Conclusions based on 2023-era tools may not apply to 2025 capabilities.

V. Reference

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二、研究内容和方法

I. Research Framework

Chapter 1: Introduction

- 1.1 Research Background
- 1.2 Research Questions
- 1.3 Research Significance

Chapter 2: Literature Review

- 2.1 AI Literacy: Conceptual Evolution and Framework Selection
- 2.2 Resource Dependence Theory and Upward Influence
- 2.3 Leadership Identity Construction: The Claiming-Granting Mechanism
- 2.4 Generation Z in the Workplace
- 2.5 Research Gaps and Theoretical Integration

Chapter 3: Methodology

- 3.1 Research Philosophy: Interpretivism
- 3.2 Research Design: Parallel Exploratory Design
- 3.3 Data Collection: Survey and Semi-structured Interviews
- 3.4 Sampling Strategy and Participant Criteria
- 3.5 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis
- 3.6 Quality Assurance

Chapter 4: Findings

- 4.1 RQ1: The Current State of AI Literacy among Gen Z Employees
- 4.2 RQ2: AI Literacy and Upward Influence Behaviors
- 4.3 RQ3: The Moderating Role of Supervisor Openness

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

II. Research Methodology

Research Design. This study adopts a parallel exploratory design combining survey and semi-structured interviews. The rationale is twofold. First, the research questions require both breadth (how widespread are AI-informed influence attempts?) and depth (through what processes do they unfold?). Neither method alone suffices. Second, the survey serves a practical function: identifying interview candidates with substantive experience rather than relying on convenience sampling.

Implementation. The survey will be distributed through professional networks and social media platforms targeting Gen Z knowledge workers. It includes: (1) demographic and work context items; (2) AI usage frequency and self-assessed literacy; (3) Likert-scale items on perceived resource advantage and supervisor openness; (4) open-ended prompts asking respondents to describe influence attempts. Respondents indicating relevant experience and interview willingness will form the interview pool. Interviews (45-60 minutes, online or in-person) will follow a semi-structured protocol organized around the three RQs.

Sampling. Target sample: 100+ survey responses; 15-20 interviews (until thematic saturation). Inclusion criteria: born 1995-2010, ≥6 months full-time employment, regular AI tool usage, knowledge-intensive work.

Analysis. Survey: descriptive statistics for structured items; thematic coding for open-ended responses. Interviews: Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Cross-method comparison will identify convergence and divergence.

Quality Assurance. Credibility: member checking, triangulation. Dependability: audit trail. Transferability: thick description. Confirmability: reflexive journaling.

三、写作进度与安排

Time	Tasks
2026.01.10	开题报告定稿与提交；访谈提纲初稿设计
2026.01.25	发问卷；访谈提纲修订；伦理审批；招募受访者；完成 Pilot Interview
2026.02.15	正式访谈（第一轮 8-10 人）；同步转录与初步编码
2026.02.28	问卷回收处理；正式访谈（第二轮 5-7 人）；完成全部转录
2026.03.15	主题分析（编码整合、主题提炼）；撰写 Findings 章节
2026.03.31	论文初稿撰写；初稿提交

指审 导核 教意 师见	签名： 年　月　日