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ChatGPT, My AI Friend: Humanising AI for Real-World Impact

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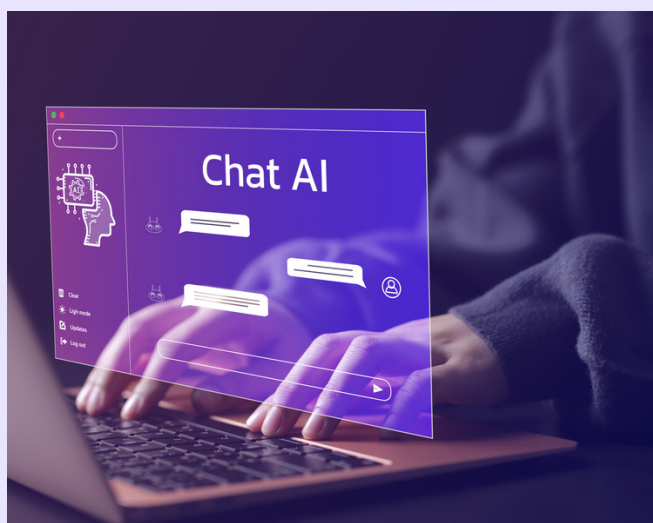
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Do we remember when we used to talk to our pets or even our phones? Today, many of us are talking to ChatGPT, and some even give it a name. My friend calls hers “Ami,” turning a line of code into something that feels like a companion. While this may seem playful, it reflects a growing area of research: how humans form social-like connections with artificial intelligence and what this means for real-world impact.

Initially, ChatGPT functions as a tool for checking grammar, brainstorming ideas, or explaining concepts. However, repeated interaction often leads to subtle behavioural shifts. Users begin to greet the AI, express gratitude, and personalise their engagement. Naming the system further enhances this effect, transforming it into a perceived social presence.

This behaviour is supported by research in human-computer interaction. The Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) paradigm suggests that people naturally apply social rules to technology when it demonstrates human-like communication (Reeves & Nass, 1996). Even when users know they are interacting with a machine, they still respond socially.

Several factors explain why these interactions feel personal. First, adaptive responsiveness allows AI to mirror tone and intent, creating a sense of being understood. Second, psychological safety enables users to ask questions or express ideas without fear of judgment. Third, constant availability fosters familiarity, which is key to relationship-building behaviours. Research on social chatbots further shows that users may develop emotional engagement due to perceived responsiveness and companionship (Følstad et al., 2018).

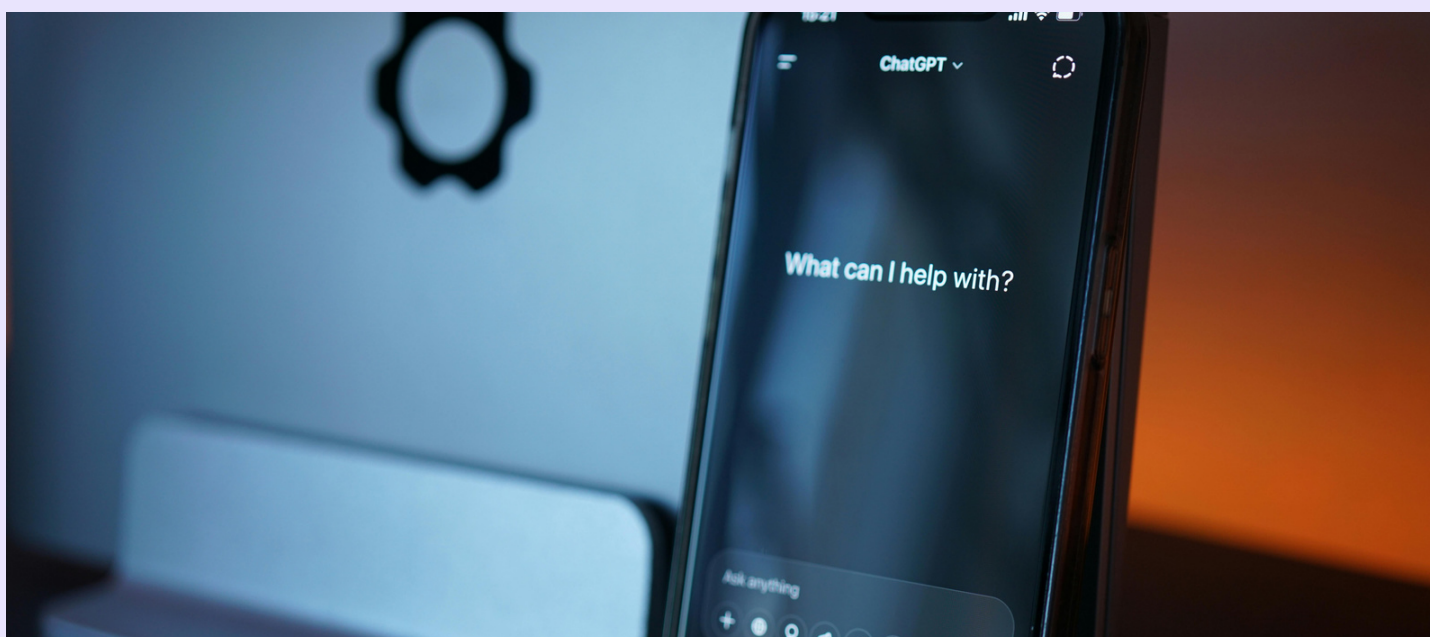


Understanding these dynamics opens up important opportunities for real-world application. In education, AI can function as a low-risk conversational partner. Students, especially language learners or those lacking confidence, can practise communication without anxiety. Studies suggest that such environments can enhance participation and reduce fear of negative evaluation (Warschauer, 1996). For teachers, AI can support lesson planning, idea generation, and differentiated instruction. It can also serve as a reflective tool, allowing educators to simulate interactions or test explanations.

In terms of mental well-being, while AI should not replace professional support, it can offer an immediate space for reflection, helping users organise thoughts or rehearse difficult conversations. Research indicates that conversational agents can provide perceived emotional support, though ethical boundaries remain important (Shum et al., 2018).

At the same time, these developments highlight the need for AI literacy. As users increasingly humanise AI, they must also understand its limitations. AI does not possess emotions, intentions, or consciousness. Without this awareness, there is a risk of over-reliance or misunderstanding. Ultimately, the sense of “connection” users feel may reveal more about humans than machines. The act of naming, thanking, or chatting with AI reflects fundamental human tendencies toward social interaction. In this sense, AI acts as a mirror, reflecting our need for communication, affirmation, and understanding.

The bottom line is that ChatGPT is not a person. Yet, the way people interact with it offers valuable insights for research and practice. By understanding these behaviours, we can design more effective educational tools, support systems, and digital environments. What may seem like a simple “Good night, Ami” is, in fact, a small but meaningful example of how humans adapt to technology and how that adaptation can be harnessed for real-world impact.



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