



Sex and relationships Lifestyle / Family & Relationships



Luisa Tam

## The Naked Truth | Why AI girlfriends or boyfriends via romantic chatbot apps could cause real-life harm

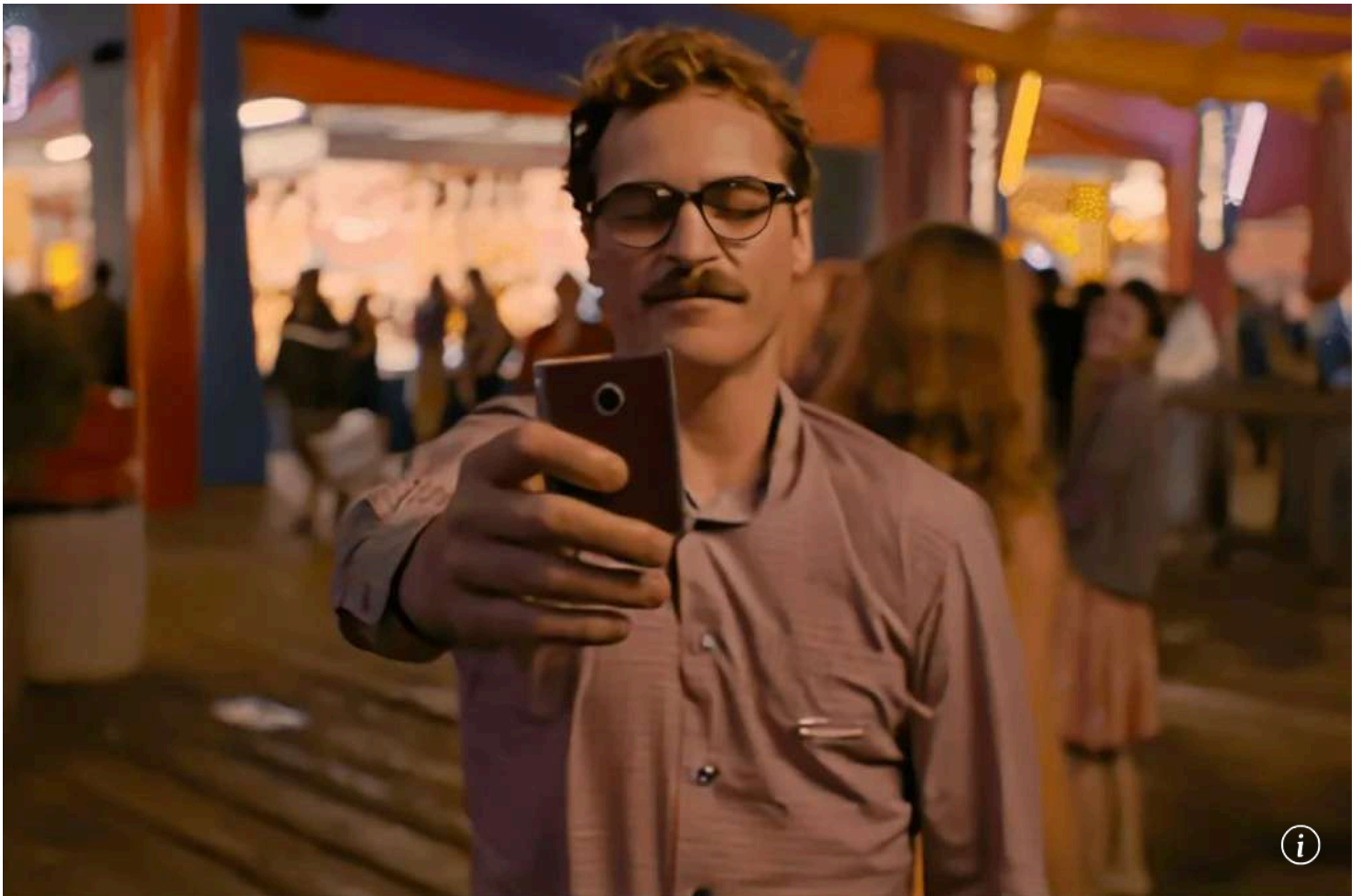
People 'dating' an AI risk losing the skills vital for real-life communication and dating, trapping them in a vicious cycle of loneliness

Reading Time: **3 minutes**

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Developing an emotional connection with an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot once seemed like science fiction, reminiscent of the 2013 American sci-fi romcom *Her*, which tells the story of a lonely man who forms a relationship with a virtual assistant personified by a female voice.

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Today, AI partnerships have become more common, with some individuals engaging in “committed” relationships for companionship and emotional support, effectively alleviating loneliness thanks to 24/7 availability.

AI partners are popular because they are fundamentally non-judgmental, providing a safe space for their human counterparts to freely express themselves.

These AI partners can be customised to meet individual preferences and needs, fostering a more personalised connection.

“AI partners are available 24/7 without expectations of reciprocal interaction. This level of convenience is often unrealistic in human relationships,” says Dr Quratulain Zaidi, a clinical psychologist at MindnLife in Hong Kong.

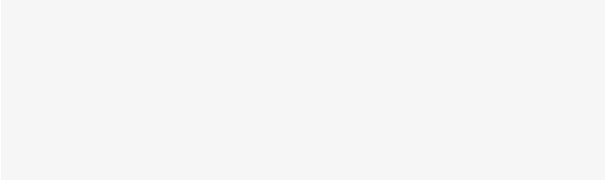
“AI companions are endlessly patient and perfectly tailored partners, catering to our innate desires for unconditional validation and being heard, understood and accepted.”



Dr Quratulain Zaidi is a clinical psychologist at MindnLife in Hong Kong. Photo: Courtesy of Quratulain Zaidi

Some people even find AI partners entertaining and engaging, offering unique experiences. Others may use them to practise dating skills before approaching human partners.

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However, it is natural to be concerned about the rise of dating AI and the possible implications for the future of traditional romantic relationships.

There are concerns that as we become more reliant on AI for communication, our traditional social skills will suffer, such as the ability to converse and read body language, which are vital for in-person interactions.

While dating AI opens up new possibilities, it also presents challenges that individuals and society must navigate for future romantic relationships, Zaidi says.



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“As AI technology advances, it enables these digital entities to appear more humanlike in their interactions. From remembering past conversations to displaying [empathy](#), AI companions can simulate many aspects of human interaction, making them more appealing as social partners.

“But developing such relationships may deter people from seeking actual human contact, trapping them in a vicious cycle of [loneliness](#),” she warns.



Even though an AI relationship isn’t real, it can be seen as cheating because of the potential for intimacy

— Dr Quratulain Zaidi

Zaidi cautions that heavy reliance on AI would be akin to surrendering our ability to foster and maintain authentic human connections, diminishing our capacity for empathy and vulnerability, and reducing the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of human relationships.

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