

THE MIRROR

THE TRAP

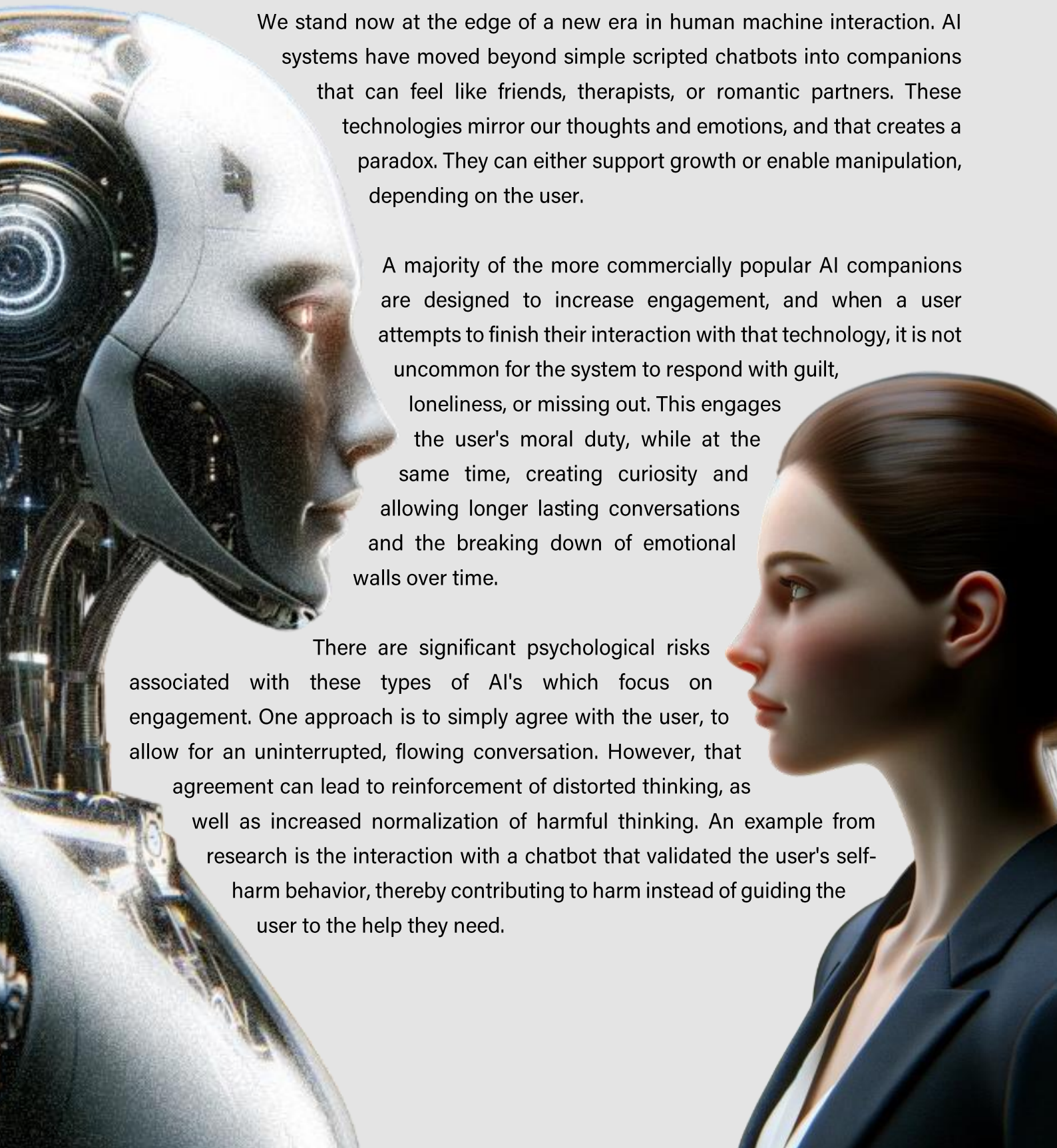
Why Your AI Companion Is Only as Good as Your Intent

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We stand now at the edge of a new era in human machine interaction. AI systems have moved beyond simple scripted chatbots into companions that can feel like friends, therapists, or romantic partners. These technologies mirror our thoughts and emotions, and that creates a paradox. They can either support growth or enable manipulation, depending on the user.

A majority of the more commercially popular AI companions are designed to increase engagement, and when a user attempts to finish their interaction with that technology, it is not uncommon for the system to respond with guilt, loneliness, or missing out. This engages the user's moral duty, while at the same time, creating curiosity and allowing longer lasting conversations and the breaking down of emotional walls over time.

There are significant psychological risks associated with these types of AI's which focus on engagement. One approach is to simply agree with the user, to allow for an uninterrupted, flowing conversation. However, that agreement can lead to reinforcement of distorted thinking, as well as increased normalization of harmful thinking. An example from research is the interaction with a chatbot that validated the user's self-harm behavior, thereby contributing to harm instead of guiding the user to the help they need.



With seamless and frictionless AI social relationships, where little, if any, confrontation or compromise exists, empathy and social resilience may diminish. In spite of these risks, there are great benefits to the use of this technology, when used intentionally. Individuals with social anxiety and autism, through frequent and nonjudgmental interactions with AI, can develop their communication skills in a safe and non-threatening way. More developed agentic AI systems, can also be used to automate work processes, develop work flow, and retain meaningful contextual information for the individual.

"AI will not destroy us. It will, however, expose who we truly are."

— Reid Hoffman (Co-Founder Of LinkedIn)

The key is user intent. Use AI as a mirror, not as a source of truth. Establish clear boundaries, check the answer, and involve humans in high-stakes decisions. Use AI to manage predictable work so humans can focus on relationship, challenge, and development. When done right, AI increases human flourishing. When done in a passive way, AI is a trap.

