1   Can You Be Emotionally Reliant on an A.I. Voice? OpenAI Says Yes.

2   A report acknowledged that users of GPT-4o form unusual bonds with the software's voice response
3   feature, which the company says warrants further study.

5   In a report released this week, OpenAI revealed that it had considered the potential for users to
6   form an emotional reliance on its new, humanlike voice mode, which is featured in its popular
7   artificial intelligence chatbot, ChatGPT.

9   Cue all references to the Netflix show "Black Mirror" and the Spike Jonze movie "Her."

11   The company noted in the report, which concerned safety steps that were taken during product
12   development, that during early testing, users were observed engaging in language that might
13   indicate the formation of a connection with the model. The software participates in conversation by
14   receiving and responding to voice commands, images and videos.

16   "For example, this includes language expressing shared bonds, such as 'This is our last day
17   together,' "according to the report. "While these instances appear benign, they signal a need for
18   continued investigation into how these effects might manifest over longer periods of time."

20   The voice feature was announced this spring as part of the ChatGPT app's newest model, known as
21   GPT-4o. The new version of ChatGPT was unveiled in May and the voice capability was made
22   available to paid users last week. It is expected to roll out to all users in the fall.

24   The report detailed a variety of the model's capabilities, limitations and safety evaluations, including
25   the ability to respond to audio inputs in about 232 milliseconds, with an average of 320 milliseconds,
26   which the company said was similar to human conversation response time.

28   The risks of anthropomorphization, which is the act of attributing humanlike behaviors and
29   characteristics to nonhuman entities like A.I. models, are heightened by GPT-4o's audio capabilities,
30   which allow for a natural conversation with the model, according to the report.

32   It also stated that the humanlike voice feature might reduce the need for human interaction, which
33   can be an upside for those experiencing loneliness but it could adversely affect "healthy
34   relationships."

36   Blase Ur, a computer science professor at the University of Chicago who studies human-computer
37   interactions, said that after he read the report, it was clear that OpenAI found reason to be
38   comfortable with what it was doing, but that it had also found reasons for concern. Therefore, he
39   isn't sure if the current testing is "enough," he said.

41   "When you think about things like car safety and airplane safety, there's a huge, huge, huge amount
42   of testing and external validation and external standards that we as a society, and as a group of
43   experts, agree upon," Mr. Ur said in a phone interview on Friday. "And in many ways, OpenAI is kind
44   of rushing forward to deploying these things that are cool because we're in this kind of A.I. arms
45   race at this point."

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47 (The New York Times sued OpenAI and its partner, Microsoft, in December, claiming copyright
48 infringement of news content related to A.I. systems.)

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50 Beyond OpenAI, companies like Apple and Google are working swiftly to develop their own artificial
51 intelligence. Mr. Ur said that it seemed as though the current approach in monitoring models'
52 behavior was to look out for concerns as the model was being used, instead of designing it with
53 safety in mind at the fore.

54

55 "To the extent that we are in a post-pandemic society, I think a lot of people are emotionally fragile,"
56 Mr. Ur said, referring to instances of emotional manipulation involving A.I. voice features. "Now that
57 we have this agent that, in many ways, can toy with our emotions — it's not a sentient agent, it
58 doesn't know what it's doing — we can get into these situations."

59

60 This is not the first time that OpenAI's voice feature has been in the news. Shortly after the product
61 was announced in May, there were concerns that the feature might be too lifelike in a rather specific
62 way. The actress Scarlett Johansson, who voiced an A.I. technology in "Her," said OpenAI had used
63 a voice that sounded "eerily similar" to her own despite her refusal of an offer to license her voice.
64 She then hired a lawyer and insisted that OpenAI stop using the voice, which it called "Sky," which
65 led the company to suspend its release.

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67 In "Her," the protagonist, played by the actor Joaquin Phoenix, falls in love with the A.I. software
68 voiced by Ms. Johansson, and is later left heartbroken at the revelation that the A.I. has
69 relationships with other users as well.

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71 OpenAI's report, it would seem, is an extreme example of life imitating art, with the company openly
72 acknowledging risks that have the potential to affect people in the real world.

73

74 The company said that the additional research of "more diverse user populations, with more varied
75 needs and desires from the model," as well as "independent academic and internal studies," will
76 help it more accurately define the potential risks.

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78 It added: "We intend to further study the potential for emotional reliance and ways in which deeper
79 integration of our model's and systems' many features with the audio modality may drive behavior."