

-----? What AI can teach us about listening better

Emily Kasriel



AI chatbots don't interrupt and aren't judgemental – so what can they teach us about deep listening?

"I am aware it's a machine but it's super convenient and knows how to listen well whenever I need it," says Anna, a Ukrainian living in London. She is talking about her regular use of the premium version of ChatGPT, a chatbot powered by artificial intelligence.

What Anna – the BBC is not using her real name to protect her identity – finds particularly valuable isn't necessarily the AI's advice, but its ability to give her space for self-reflection.

"I have a history with it, so I can rely on it to always understand my issues and communicate with me in a way that suits me," she says. She is aware that this might seem odd to many people, including her friends and family, which is why she has asked to remain anonymous.

But when she recently broke up with her boyfriend she found the AI's patient listening offered something that her protective friends and family couldn't provide with their immediate judgments about her ex-partner – "he's an idiot". Instead, the absence of judgement created an opportunity for self-understanding as she unpacked her mixed emotions. (...)

Strikingly, studies show AI-generated text responses are now rated as more compassionate than those written by humans – even when those humans are trained

responders from crisis hotlines. This isn't because AI is genuinely more compassionate, but rather a sobering indictment of how rarely we listen in a non-judgmental way.

When researchers disclosed the identity of the response authors, evaluators still judged responses from ChatGPT responses to be more understanding, validating and caring – revealing how hungry people are for uninterrupted, non-defensive listening. In another study, people reported experiencing more hope, less distress and less discomfort after interacting with AI-generated responses compared to humans. It is worth remembering that these AI chatbots are not displaying real empathy, but rather simulating it based on what they have learned from huge datasets of human interactions.

The irony that an algorithm powered by a large language model – the type of machine learning that underpins many AI chatbots – might be perceived as a better listener than an authentic human reveals important insights about our human listening shortcomings. It's when our agendas, backstories and emotional triggers run the show, that true deep listening becomes thwarted.

None of this is to suggest we should trade real person relationships for large language models. But it does suggest there are some lessons that we humans can learn from these code-based listeners.

Perhaps the most fundamental lesson from AI is simply allowing others to speak without interruption. Humans interrupt for countless reasons: fear of an awkward silence, attempts to "help" find words, saving time with our "superior" responses or subconsciously asserting dominance. These interruptions, however well-intended, rob speakers of their autonomy and opportunity to develop their thoughts. Interruptions during a phone conversation, for example, have been found to lessen perception of empathy in the person speaking.

Large language models don't have motivations or desires. They are programmed to be compliant so that people will continue to use them. They therefore exhibit perpetual patience – never suffering from empathy fatigue. While such a feat is not something we humans can or should aspire to, holding back from interruptions can be powerful. (...)

Humans instinctively avoid acknowledging difficult emotions, both our own and others. So, for example, when our cousin tells us about the tragic death of his cat, we jump in to reassure with comments such as: "Luna had a long happy life and was well loved till the end." But this fails to acknowledge our cousin's feelings of distress. AI systems show particular advantage in responding to scenarios involving suffering and sadness compared to positive emotions. People often fear burdening human listeners with their worries, explains Dariya Ovsyannikova, a

cognitive health researcher at the University of Toronto, Canada, who has studied how people perceive AI as compassionate. (...)

Our survival as a species has historically depended on making quick judgments – distinguishing friend from foe is an evolutionary imperative. (...) In contrast, AI seems to offer users anonymity and freedom from social judgement, creating psychological safety that enables open sharing. (...)

Many of us, particularly in leadership or parental roles, believe our value lies in sharing the pearls of our wisdom and offering helpful advice. And men are more likely than women to jump in unsolicited to provide solutions to fix someone else's problems. Yet in studies, AI's restraint from offering practical suggestions in favour of emotional support makes people feel heard more effectively – something humans can consciously choose to do.

When someone shares their challenging experience – a miscarriage, an impossible boss, a leak in their roof – we so often respond with our own similar story. But in doing so we are turning the spotlight away from them and onto us. When we start to tell our story, we stop listening to theirs.

A large language model can not fall into this trap because it has no experiences. Humans can, which is why we can choose to be more intentional about keeping the spotlight on the speaker, not reverting to our own story.

Despite these advantages, there are also a multitude of dangers of over-reliance on AI as a listening tool. As technology advances towards human-like avatars who look, sound and feel like our fantasy listener – even conveying tactile responses – both potential benefits and dangers increase. (...)

AI can certainly inspire us to become better listeners and even help train us in greater compassion. It can serve a valuable resource, if there are appropriate safeguards in place, for those who have no one to turn to. However, the experience of deeply listening to another human with curiosity to understand their full humanity – and being listened to in return – has a transformative potential that AI interactions cannot yet match. And, as anyone who has ever experienced the transformative impact of feeling truly heard by another human being will realise, it may never do so.

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20251218-how-ai-can-teach-us-to-really-listen>

QUESTÕES

- Qual é a pergunta que inicia o título do artigo?

- a) **They hear, but do they care?**
- b) How long will the machines last?
- c) Will they ever understand?
- d) Is it difficult to identify?
- e) Are these questions always artificial?

- De acordo com as informações do artigo, por que algumas pessoas consideram a IA uma ouvinte interessante?

- a) **Porque permite desabafos sem interrupções.**
- b) Porque tem informações técnicas mais precisas que as humanas.
- c) Porque imita completamente as relações familiares.
- d) Porque possui emoções muito semelhantes às autênticas.
- e) Porque seu objetivo é mitigar problemas psicológicos.

- Abaixo há afirmações verdadeiras (V) e falsas (F) sobre o tema. Segundo o que foi lido, qual alternativa apresenta a ordem correta?

I- Pesquisas indicam que respostas da IA são avaliadas como mais compreensivas.

II- Surpreendentemente, há IA que expressam empatia e sentimentos próprios.

III- Interrupções humanas reduzem a percepção de empatia do interlocutor.

IV- Muitas pessoas relatam menos angústia após interagir com respostas geradas por IA.

- a) **V – F – V – V**
- b) V – V – F – F
- c) F – V – V – F
- d) V – F – F – V
- e) F – F – V – V

- O que NÃO é afirmado no texto?

a) Os chatbots foram projetados para compreender casos clínicos.

b) Anna utiliza o ChatGPT para organizar suas emoções após o término do namoro.

c) As respostas da IA são percebidas como mais compassivas que as humanas.

d) A IA apenas simula empatia com base em grandes bancos de dados.

e) As pessoas valorizam a ausência de julgamento nas interações com a IA.

- De acordo com a leitura, por que os seres humanos costumam interromper conversas?

a) Por motivos como medo do silêncio ou desejo de ajudar.

b) Porque não costumam se interessar de forma real pelas histórias alheias.

c) Porque são treinados socialmente desde a infância para corrigir o outro.

d) Devido à incapacidade biológica de manter a atenção focada nos demais.

e) Por acreditarem inconscientemente que são inferiores ao interlocutor.

- Observe as afirmações abaixo. Quais delas condizem com o que é dito no artigo?

I– Modelos de linguagem percebem bastante bem as experiências pessoais.

II– A IA tende a simular ter desejos e oferece conselhos incompletos.

III– Humanos costumam responder com suas próprias histórias.

IV– A escuta humana profunda é a que tem potencial transformador.

a) III e IV.

b) I e III.

c) II e IV.

d) I, III e IV.

e) II e III.

- A partir do que foi lido, qual a reação dos avaliadores ao saberem que as respostas eram da IA?

- a) Continuaram achando-as mais compreensivas e cuidadosas.
- b) Passaram a rejeitá-las por não serem humanas.
- c) Julgaram que eram tecnicamente corretas, porém frias e distantes.
- d) Preferiram certamente as respostas escritas por atendentes de crise.
- e) Consideraram impossível comparar psicólogos com máquinas.

- O que o texto afirma sobre a relação entre julgamento social e compartilhamento pessoal?

- a) A ausência de julgamento favorece a abertura emocional.
- b) O julgamento é necessário para orientar boas decisões.
- c) Pessoas preferem críticas diretas a comentários neutros.
- d) A exposição pública aumenta a confiança no diálogo.
- e) A IA incentiva julgamentos mais rígidos que os humanos.

- De acordo como o que foi lido, usar a IA como interlocutor implica

- a) receber respostas diretas de quem não tem experiências prévias.
- b) acreditar que muitas emoções negativas são sempre reais.
- c) aceitar que a cultura digital demonstre tristeza.
- d) lidar melhor com as respostas técnicas recebidas.
- e) ampliar o desconforto emocional por não escutar boas soluções.

- Qual é a posição final da autora?

- a) A experiência humana de escuta profunda envolve curiosidade pelo outro.
- b) Muitos desejam que a IA possa substituir com êxito as relações presenciais.
- c) Os humanos nunca tiveram grande capacidade de empatia real.
- d) O uso de avatares não deverá representar nenhum perigo.
- e) A tecnologia pode alcançar um real nível emocional nos próximos anos.