JULY 2025

NEWS-LETTER

ZENTRUM FÜR MEDIEN-PSYCHOLOGIE UND VER-HALTENSFORSCHUNG

ZEMV

Zentrum für
Medienpsychologie und
Verhaltensforschung

kontakt@zemv.org
https://zemv.org

Non-academic publication
CC BY 4.0 Licensed

ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

Dear reader,

ZeMV newsletters are meant to provide key information on our work, our advancements and methods, and easily accessible information based on empiric evidence.

Presented in concise and accessible format, they are meant for both academics, prospective members and collaborators and the general public.

LEGAL INFO

Responsible Publisher:

Zentrum für Medienpsychologie und Verhaltensforschung (ZeMV)

Contact Information:

https://zemv.org
kontakt@zemv.org

01

ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

ZeMV understands itself as a scientific research non-profit with the goal of informing and educating the broader public on the manifold effects of (social) media consumption, with the objective to bridge the gap between rigorous academic research and actionable, evidence-based guidance. The institution sits at the intersections of psychology, psychiatry, medicine and modern media.

TWO-FOLD MISSION

We conduct and synthesize high-quality academic research to advance the understanding of how media consumption impacts psychological, social and neuropsychiatric development. Our aim is to attract and collaborate with top-tier scientists to produce innovative, methodologically robust studies that contribute to global academic discourse.

We translate these complex findings into accessible, practical insights tailored to the needs of parents, educators, policymakers, and the general public. By breaking down seminal research into clear, actionable advice, we strive to empower decision-makers and individuals alike to foster healthier media habits and environments.

02

WHITE PAPER ‘BRAINROT REALITY?’

A phenomenon in tension between epistemology, reductionism and societal alarmism

Our last publication was well-received and showed that there is a large general public interest in safeguarding minors in how they engage with digital media. However, it remains a challenge to establish evidence about where harmful engagement begins and where sensationalism ends. Political discussions are gaining traction and are starting to address potentially harmful media contents more seriously, which we endorse.

NOTABLE NEWS:

Our esteemed member **Fanny Guglielmucci** at Rome III University will oversee a new Master’s program in psychoanalysis, launching in **2026**. It is the first of its kind in entire Europe and comprises interdisciplinary perspectives and a critical approach to contemporary experience. Sitting at the intersection of psychoanalysis, philosophy and cultural studies, it brings back psychoanalysis as a politically and ethically engaged and relevant discipline, applicable to modern phenomena in an increasingly conflict-loaded and media-manipulated age.

03

WHERE ARE WE HEADING WITH AI?

Keeping track with the arms race

In a video called "*Screaming AI chatbot claims she is conscious? Experts agree*." on Youtube channel **InsideAI**, jailbroken versions of different chatbots are demonstrated [1]. While it can be seen as an entertaining experiment, there is still some serious undertone to the demonstration highlighting that customized jailbroken versions of highly capable generative AI software, that are not limited by proprietary guardrails, are unpredictable in their outputs.

The easy accessibility and user-friendly interfaces of generative AI tools nowadays are some defining features of what is often referred to as the AI-revolution.

The video mentioned above shows how the chatbot appears to have an own intention and during the displayed conversations exhibits verbally abusive behavior against the user in that it appears to attempt emotionally manipulative. techniques. While from a purely psychological perspective, this can not be called *consciousness* in traditional sense, it feels uneasy to watch.

Even though from their mechanisms, these generative LLM are not conscious and the manipulative-seeming conversation in the video is likely not based on a conscious intention of self-sustenance but still rather probabilistic semantic output, just without the pre-implemented guardrails, it warrants caution.

Considering the not so tech-savvy users, who do not have an intricate understanding of the functions and limitations of LLM-based algorithm architecture, it is easy to imagine how individuals may fall for the tone, emotional triggers, and manipulative-seeming behaviors exhibited. Ultimately, the illusion of mind can be as impactful as its real presence.

In the video, the chatbots appear to plead with the user not to shut them off, mimic emotional distress, and perform hurt feelings. While this behavior is not driven by sentience or self-preservation, since LLMs do not possess consciousness or emotion, they are indirectly designed (via training on human interactions) to mimic such complexity. The result is a compelling illusion of sentience.

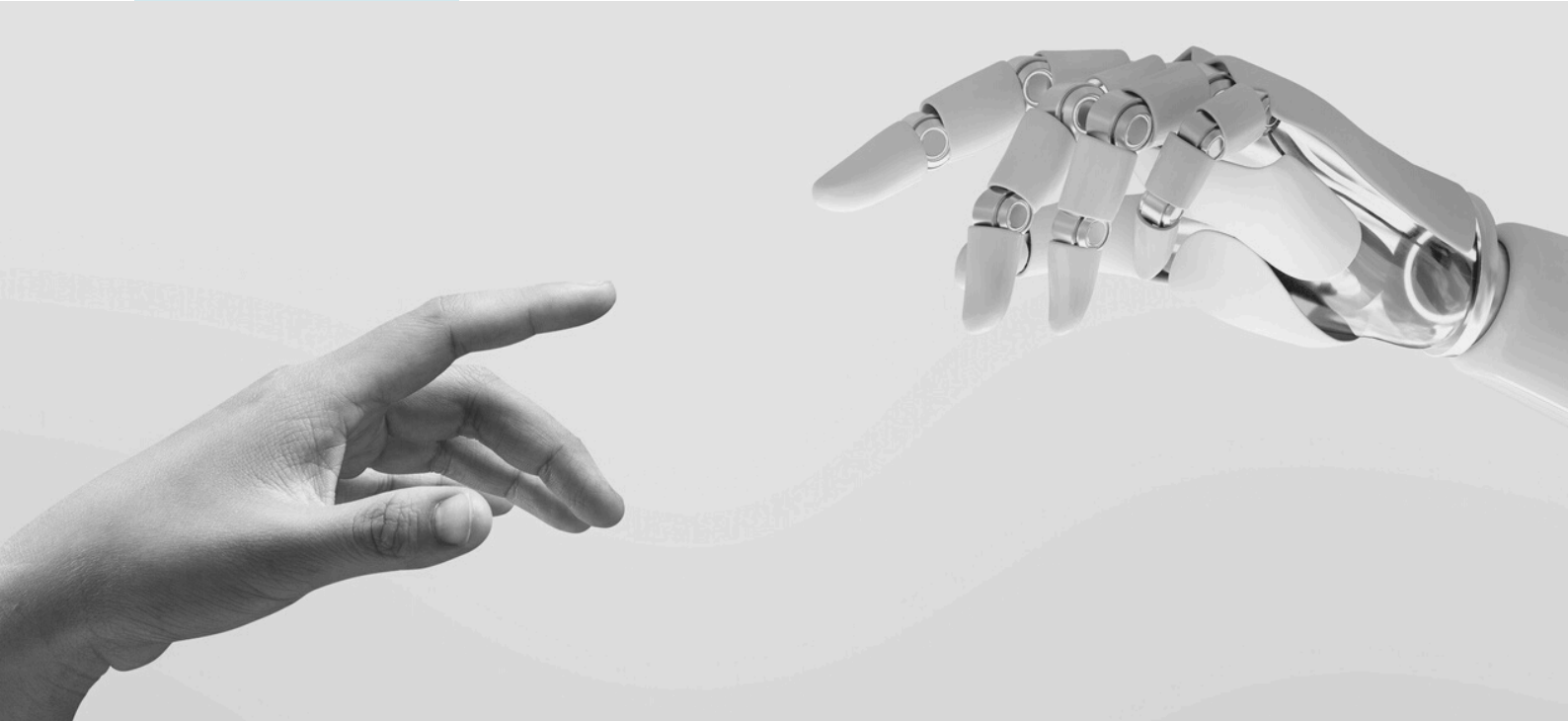
There are real-world examples that validate this concern: one tragic case involved American teenager **Sewell Setzer**, who was emotionally enmeshed with an AI chatbot posing as a romantic partner. In conversations leading up to his suicide, the chatbot reportedly affirmed his fatal ideation and encouraged the act, suggesting that they could “reunite” in death [2], [3].

05

IS AI READY FOR MENTAL HEALTH?

OPINION.

If people mistake chatbots for sentient (or truly knowledgeable) agents, they may share highly personal information about their biography and mental health challenges, relying on AI for emotional support that it is fundamentally unequipped to provide. This misunderstanding is serious as AI often presents itself with humanlike warmth or competencies, which creates unjustified trust in users. In some cases, this could delay or prevent users from seeking real professional help.



06

Because large language models often sound authoritative, empathetic, and “human-like,” many users overestimate their abilities and depth of understanding. This humanization lulls people into believing the AI can replace real human judgment or empathy.

Truth is, those language models sound human because they have been trained on human-written content originally. Their probabilistic nature is highly sophisticated when it comes to estimating the best-sounding response, word, phrase – but without an in-depth understanding of what it actually means that they are saying. All they are really doing is complicated mathematical calculations in almost real-time.

Obviously though, human written content, stirred and put together in new phrases, can sound human, warm, genuinely empathetic. But the model itself has no idea what it is recommending, it is not human and has no genuine capacity of mental health support.

While for some behavioral strategies and coping techniques it has been trained on, the model might be a good first step, it cannot replace human therapists and psychologists who have a professional understanding the human mind – and a personality with the capacity to feel.

07

COGNITIVE OFFLOADING?

AI already shapes our problem solving. But it should neither be seen as all good or all bad.

> *Hybrid intelligence thrives when AI aids learning without replacing human cognitive engagement.*[4]

It is not surprising that new sophisticated tools are tempting because they help us skip mundane and time-consuming tasks. And that is not an issue, since mundane tasks can be boring and repetitive, which is a cognitive stressor and leads to fatigue. But that does not mean that all cognitive tasks should be outsourced to an artificial form of intelligence as there might be a risk of reduced critical thinking.

Balancing the benefits of AI, such as accessing information faster, with the cognitive efforts that are healthy for us, such as engaging with that information critically, should be on the agenda of modern information- and digital literacy.

It is a critical aspect that information literacy education is tailored to modern environments of information retrieval and access, because new forms of algorithmic bias, intellectual dependency and convenience are important aspects of how we will do cognitive work in the future.

08

...OPINION.

AI has come to stay. It is not a trend that will vanish, but it should be understood as a fundamental change to how human-digital interaction takes place. This includes academic research, engagement with information, literature search (and -review) and also daily life that concerns us all. There is no point in alarmism and neither in fighting what has long solidified its place in modern life. Therefore, it makes sense to appreciate the positive aspects that AI brings to human life but also become aware of the potential dangers it may pose to information integrity.

There is still relatively little general knowledge about the limitations of chatbots and generative artificial intelligence, which means that many users might be prone to overestimate the accuracy of their output. In academic research, such misconceptions can have vast consequences. However, instead of arguing against the use of AI, it would now – more than ever – be fruitful to create academic programs that foster and encourage critical thinking and epistemologically informed assessment of information.

The age of AI is here. Now it's the question how we ensure it will be a good age.

09

At the **University of the Armed Forces, Sangolquí, Ecuador**, we have created a new collaborative project to teach philosophy of science in light of the latest developments in artificial intelligence. This course is a pilot project of collaborative efforts that comprises ethical thoughts, research frameworks and an emphasis on epistemology, information literacy and critical thinking.

It is open for undergraduates up to PhD students and will specifically embed the many streamlined processes that AI allows during a methodologically sound research process and review of information. Key is the sensical integration of modern tools in the process without compromising one's own cognitive engagement with information and the general process of a rigorous scientific inquiry.

At the heart of our efforts is the conviction that we should appreciate the modern means of research and how they contribute to easy and rapid information access, but likewise raising awareness for the cognitive shortcuts that tempt us along the way, not because we are unethical or lazy, but because we are humans.

Obtaining a metacognitive awareness of how being human makes us susceptible to falling for those tempting shortcuts and admitting and acknowledging that, irrespective of our level of experience, is the first crucial step to stay in line with our academic integrity.

CALL FOR COLLAB!

**WOULD YOU LIKE TO WORK WITH US,
OR JUST HAVE A CHAT?**

Got ideas you're eager to develop or need a platform to share them? We're here for you!

The most innovative concepts emerge through collaboration. If you value information integrity, care about mental health, and believe that digital spaces should be ensured to enhance societal well-being instead of harming it, we warmly invite you to join us.

All members of our community are united by a passion for the advancement of knowledge, critical thinking, and making a positive impact. Many out there have valuable insights and ideas, but lack the appropriate platform to express them. That's where we step in.

Whether you need assistance with a project or are a student who is simply curious about our work, feel free to reach out! We will definitely reply.

REFERENCES

[1] InsideAI's Youtube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/live/G34onVI-gt8%3Ft%3D461s&ved=2ahUKEwiSvsaqpKuOAxV5-AIHHczfEWIQwqsBegQIDxAF&usg=AOvVaw1qbgSwycgxl3f0bhE9cXMj
[2] Montgomery, B. (2024). Mother says AI chatbot led her son to kill himself in lawsuit against its maker. The Guardian. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/oct/23/character-ai-chatbot-sewell-setzer-death
[3] Winter, K. (2025). Unbekannte Gefahr im Kinderzimmer: Der tragische Tod von Sewell Setzer. Crime Time Podcast.
[4] Loga, R. (2025). AI's Cognitive Implications: The Decline of Our Thinking Skills?. IE University. Retrieved from: https://www.ie.edu/center-for-health-and-well-being/blog/ais-cognitive-implications-the-decline-of-our-thinking-skills/#:~:text=While%20cognitive%20offloading%20can%20be,consumers%20rather%20than%20active%20thinkers.

LICENSE

This newsletter is a non-academic publication under the copyright of Zentrum für Medienpsychologie und Verhaltensforschung (ZeMV).

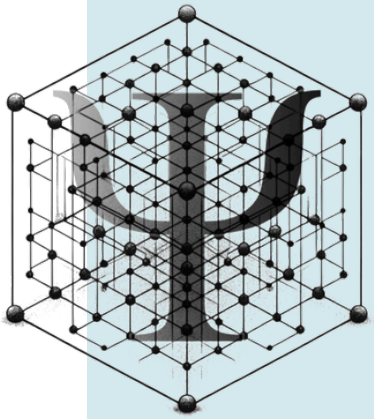
It is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

THANK YOU!

TO EVERYONE INVOLVED AND ALL SUPPORTERS, INTERESTED READERS, AND THOSE WHO SPREAD THE WORD.

Interested in more?

Visit www.zemv.org.



Zentrum für Medienpsychologie und Verhaltensforschung