

Beyond the Buzzwords

Do Users Care About the Science Behind Chatbots?

WHITEPAPER

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Introduction

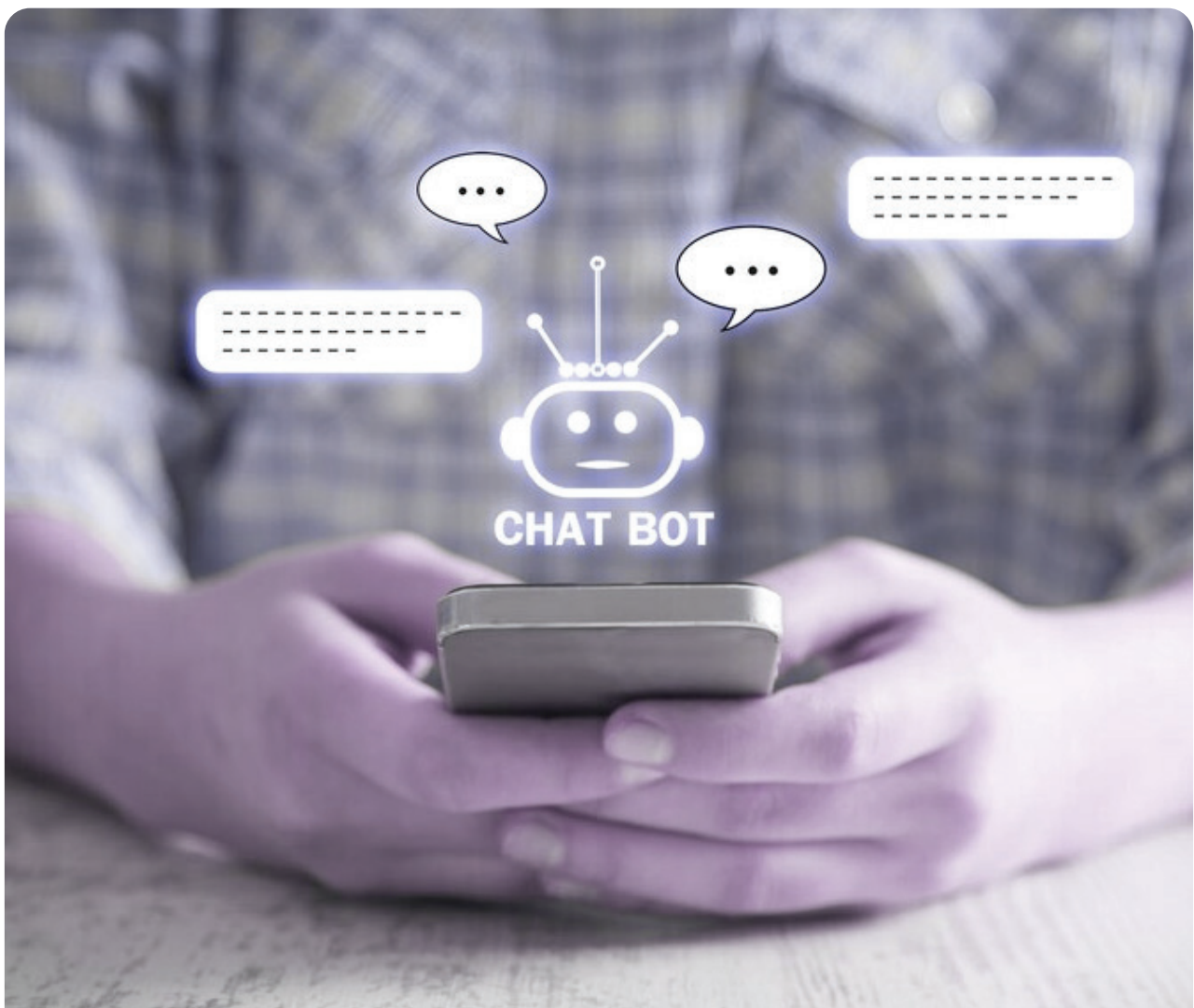
Mental health care is undergoing a transformation, with therapy chatbots playing an increasingly important role in providing support. These AI-driven tools are designed to help people navigate mental health challenges by offering a convenient and accessible way to engage in therapeutic practices. With the rise in mental health concerns worldwide, therapy chatbots have gained significant traction.

In fact, the global market for mental health chatbots is experiencing substantial growth. In 2023, the market was valued at **USD 1.3 billion**, and it is projected to reach **USD 2.2 billion** by 2033, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of **5.6%** between 2024 and 2033. This expansion reflects a rising awareness of mental health issues and the demand for more accessible mental health solutions.

Recent statistics highlight the increasing use of therapy chatbots. In 2021, **22% of adults** reported using a mental health chatbot, with **47%** indicating interest in using one if needed. Moreover, nearly **60% of users** began engaging with chatbots during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring how the global mental health crisis has accelerated the adoption of digital health tools.

However, with therapy chatbots becoming more popular, an important question arises: Do users care about the science behind these tools? Many of these tools are built on evidence-based approaches like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), but does that framework matter to users, or are they more concerned with factors like ease of use, personalization, and accessibility?

This white paper explores user preferences and perceptions regarding therapy-oriented chatbots, particularly whether the type of therapeutic approach, such as CBT, influences user engagement and satisfaction. Understanding these preferences is essential for developing more effective mental health support systems that truly resonate with users.



Different Types Of Therapy- Orientation

Therapeutic interventions for mental health issues are built on various psychological frameworks, each designed to address emotional and behavioral challenges through distinct approaches. Understanding these orientations is essential to grasp how therapy-oriented chatbots function and the impact they may have on users.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

An extension of CBT, Dialectical Behavior Therapy emphasizes the regulation of intense emotions and the development of interpersonal effectiveness. DBT incorporates mindfulness and acceptance techniques, teaching users how to navigate emotional turbulence. It is especially useful for individuals dealing with borderline personality disorder, self-harm, or chronic emotional dysregulation. Through a balance of acceptance and change strategies, DBT-based tools guide users toward emotional resilience.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

ACT is grounded in the concept of accepting difficult thoughts and emotions while committing to actions aligned with one's personal values. Rather than trying to change how individuals think, ACT encourages them to acknowledge their emotions and work through discomfort by focusing on meaningful goals. It is particularly effective for stress, anxiety, and chronic pain, as it helps individuals reduce the struggle with unwanted feelings and thoughts. ACT-oriented chatbots may prompt users to explore their values and take mindful action in the face of emotional challenges.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

ACT is grounded in the concept of accepting difficult thoughts and emotions while committing to actions aligned with one's personal values. Rather than trying to change how individuals think, ACT encourages them to acknowledge their emotions and work through discomfort by focusing on meaningful goals. It is particularly effective for stress, anxiety, and chronic pain, as it helps individuals reduce the struggle with unwanted feelings and thoughts. ACT-oriented chatbots may prompt users to explore their values and take mindful action in the face of emotional challenges.

Psychodynamic Therapy

Psychodynamic therapy focuses on understanding unconscious processes that influence behavior. This approach delves into past experiences, particularly childhood events, to uncover patterns in relationships and emotions that may contribute to current mental health challenges. Although less commonly found in chatbot therapy, this orientation highlights the importance of self-reflection and deep insight in mental health treatment.

Person-Centered Therapy

Also known as client-centered therapy, this orientation emphasizes unconditional positive regard, empathy, and self-acceptance. It focuses on creating a supportive environment where users feel free to express themselves without judgment. While typically practiced in human therapy, person-centered approaches can be adapted into chatbot interactions to foster an emotionally safe and supportive atmosphere.



Overview Of Therapy Chatbots

Therapy chatbots are AI-driven tools designed to provide mental health support through structured conversations and therapeutic exercises. These chatbots aim to simulate interactions one might have with a therapist, helping users manage their mental health challenges by offering guidance, emotional support, and coping strategies.

How Therapy Chatbots Work

Most therapy chatbots use natural language processing (NLP) to understand and respond to users' inputs. They guide users through therapeutic exercises based on different frameworks such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). These conversations are designed to mimic real-life therapy sessions, though typically shorter and more focused on specific concerns like managing stress or anxiety.

What sets therapy chatbots apart from traditional therapy is their accessibility. They are available 24/7, can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection, and often provide immediate responses, making them convenient for users who may not have access to or feel comfortable seeing a therapist in person.

AI Therapy: A New Frontier

Beyond these specific therapy frameworks, some chatbots are moving toward AI therapy, which adapts to user behavior over time. These chatbots can analyze user data to provide more personalized, dynamic interactions. They can also learn from user input to refine their responses, making the experience more relevant and engaging. This adaptability allows AI therapy chatbots to cater to a wide range of mental health needs, offering support that feels more tailored and individualized.

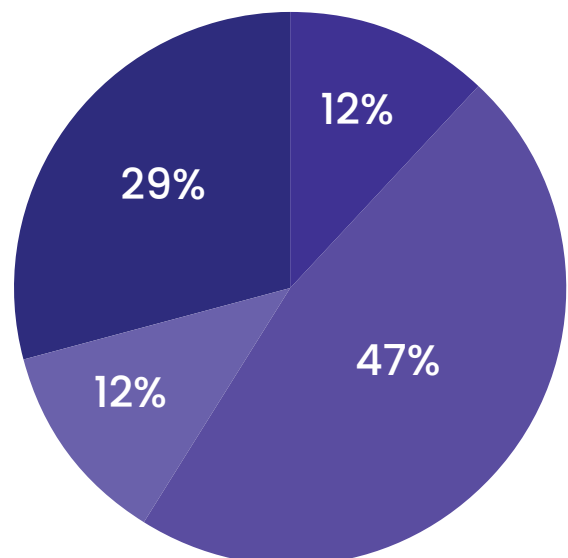
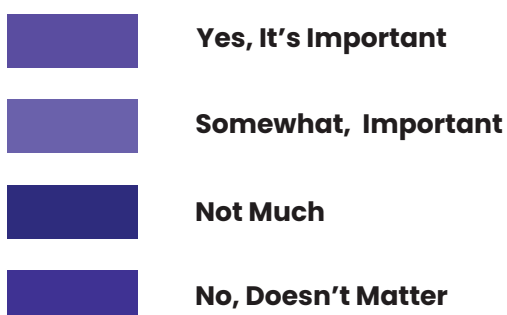
As therapy chatbots continue to evolve, understanding what users prioritize in these tools—whether it's the therapeutic model, personalization, or ease of access—becomes increasingly important in shaping the future of mental health support.

User Perspectives

To better understand what users prioritize when interacting with therapy chatbots, a poll was conducted asking the question: "Does the science behind therapy chatbots influence your choice?" The responses shed light on how much users value evidence-based approaches like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) compared to other factors such as ease of use and personalization. Here are the poll results:

From Response Chart

Question : Does the science behind therapy chatbots influence your choice ?



These responses reveal that nearly half of the users (47%) believe the scientific foundation of therapy chatbots is important, suggesting that a significant portion of users value the therapeutic approach, particularly evidence-based models like CBT. However, a notable 29% of users stated that the science behind these tools doesn't influence their decision much, and another 12% felt it didn't matter at all.

This divergence indicates that while some users are conscious of the framework being used—such as CBT—many prioritize other aspects of the experience. The combined 41% of users who responded with "Not much" or "No" underscores that convenience, accessibility, and personalization may weigh more heavily in their decision-making process.

The poll shows that although the science behind therapy chatbots is valued by some, a significant number of users place greater importance on the practical aspects of the tool. This suggests that while evidence-based therapy frameworks like CBT are important, they may not be the primary factor influencing the majority of users when selecting a mental health chatbot.

Recommendations

The future of digital mental health care lies in striking a balance between scientific credibility and user-centered design. United We Care's tools like Stella and Clinical Co-Pilot (CCOP) are perfect examples of this balance.

- **Stella:** A wellness assistant designed for personalized care, Stella leverages AI to adapt to the user's needs, offering both emotional support and therapeutic exercises. While grounded in evidence-based practices, Stella's focus on customization and accessibility allows it to cater to a wide range of mental health concerns. It offers users what they value most—anonymity, ease of use, and personalization—without requiring in-depth knowledge of the therapeutic framework being used.
- **Clinical Co-Pilot (CCOP):** This AI-driven tool goes beyond typical therapy chatbots by offering an enhanced support system for clinicians. Clinical Co-Pilot doesn't just aim to assist users directly, but works alongside clinicians, providing them with insights and tools to better manage their patients' mental health. By integrating AI into the clinical workflow, it supports both the therapist and the client, blending human intuition with AI's analytical capabilities.

Conclusion

The rise of therapy chatbots represents a significant advancement in the accessibility and delivery of mental health support. While tools like Stella and Clinical Co-Pilot (CCOP) showcase the potential of AI-driven solutions to offer personalized and immediate assistance, it is crucial to recognize that these technologies do not replace human clinicians. Instead, they serve as valuable adjuncts to traditional therapy, enhancing the overall mental health care landscape.

The insights gathered from user preferences indicate that while many appreciate the scientific foundation of therapy chatbots, a considerable number prioritize convenience, accessibility, and personalization. This underscores the importance of designing AI tools that not only provide evidence-based interventions but also align with users' practical needs and preferences.

Ultimately, the future of mental health support lies in a collaborative model where AI-driven chatbots complement the expertise of human clinicians. By integrating the strengths of both, we can create a more comprehensive, responsive, and effective mental health care system that meets the diverse needs of individuals seeking help.

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