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Human Connection in the Age of Artificial Intellignce: Perceptions of Empathy, Trust and Authenticity in AI-Mediated Communication

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the role of perceived empathy, trust and authenticity related humanness in users' reactions to conversational agents in AI-mediated communication. The study employed a quantitative secondary-data design with survey and interaction data collected from 310 respondents that interacted with an Agent based on the GPT architecture and ELIZA. Participants assessed the empathy, trustworthiness, human-likeness and ability of the agents to establish personal connections. Also studied were the effects of a caring, a neutral and a manipulative motive framing within the GPT condition.The results indicate that the ratings for GPT were significantly higher than ELIZA in empathy, trust, perceived humanness and human connection. Caring motive framing further enhanced empathy, trust, and connection, but did not significantly impact the proxy for authenticity. The results of the correlation analysis indicated that there were strong positive correlations between all focal constructs. The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that perceived humanness was the most important factor indicating human connection, followed by empathy and trust. After adding these perceptions, agent type was no longer a significant predictor.Results indicated that the extent to which users are related to AI is not merely a matter of the label associated with the technology, but rather, users' sense of relatedness is influenced by how human-like, empathetic and trustworthy they feel while interacting with AI. Transparency, responsible anthropomorphic design, and calibrated trust are emphasized in emotionally sensitive AI applications, in this study.

Keywords:
artificial intelligence; human connection; empathy; trust; authenticity

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now becoming a part of communication contexts that were once considered interpersonal. Now, conversational agents are available to support customers, share health information, offer emotional support, give companionship and allow for self-disclosure. This new development has moved the research focus from whether a communication machine can convey information, to whether a human can engage in social meaningful communication via an AI communication machine. Trust in AI is not just about its technical capabilities, but about its perceived competence, reliability, predictability, transparency, and social presence, as highlighted by research on human trust in AI (Glikson & Woolley, 2020). Therefore, interpreting communication mediated with AI demands focusing on the emotional and relational meaning people assign to the AI-generated messages. Empathy is a key part of this relational experience.

AI systems can detect emotional language and respond in a way that appears understanding, supportive and compassionate. Indeed, ChatGPT has shown to have a high ability to score well in emotional-awareness tests, indicating that LLMs can interpret and generate emotionally appropriate responses (Elyoseph et al., 2023). AI-generated responses to patients have also been shown to be high-quality and empathetic, compared to those from physicians (Ayers et al., 2023). Likewise, AI-enabled interventions can enhance the empathic nature of peer-to-peer mental-health communication (Sharma et al., 2023), and empathy-based chatbot models show promise for creating more supportive conversational experiences (Lin et al., 2023). However, empathetic experience is not the same as feeling sorry for someone. Philosophical and clinical arguments say that AI does not have an embodied understanding, vulnerability, and shared experience that are the basis of human empathy (Montemayor et al., 2022). AI-generated messages can be perceived as empathetic, yet users' attitudes towards them can vary when they are made conscious of their artificial nature (Rubin et al., 2025). This distinction raises an authenticity issue: the AI-generated answer is persuasive in language, but could be less authentic when the user suspects that the AI is not genuinely concerned or good. Concerning trust, it is closely related to perceived motive and authenticity. Users' trust of AI relies on their perception of what it can accomplish, why it is doing so, and whether or not they feel it is appropriate for them to rely on it (Jacovi et al., 2021). Current research also reveals weaknesses of overtrust, opacity, biased outputs and unclear responsibilities (Lockey et al., 2021). In service applications, anthropomorphic features of chatbots can enhance social presence and positively affect user compliance (Adam et al., 2021). On the other hand, users might have negative reactions to algorithms when they are linked to discrimination, impersonal treatment, especially in consequential settings like in making personnel selection (Koch-Bayram & Triana, 2023).

The sense of credibility can also vary based on whether a content was generated by a human or ChatGPT (Huschens et al., 2023). An ability to communicate in a way that is human-like might also promote relationship formation. Longitudinal research indicates that users may come to feel closer to social chatbots over time (Croes & Antheunis, 2021). Relationships of emotional disclosure, availability, acceptance, and social support are reported for users of companion-chatbots (Skjuve et al., 2021).

Patterns can be seen also in the case of Replika, where repeated interactions can contribute to relational development and emotional attachment (Pentina et al., 2023). Companion chatbots can offer routine social support (Ta et al., 2020) and transiently alleviate loneliness (De Freitas et al., 2026). These experiences are a part of wider forms of consumer–machine relationships that go beyond functional uses of technology (Pentina et al., 2023). But there are also major dangers to emotional attachment to AI. When the chatbot is seen as a friend, mentor, or romantic partner, psychological dependence may be a risk during chatbot engagement (Xie et al., 2023). Emotional dependency, unanticipated behavioural shifts and a feeling that it's simultaneously too human and not adequately human, have been reported by Replika users (Laestadius et al., 2024). Parasocial interpretations of human–AI interaction (Maeda & Quan-Haase, 2024) might be further promoted by anthropomorphic and agentic designs. Emotional AI also triggers privacy issues due to its ability to gather, deduce, and activate emotional data of a

sensitive nature (McStay, 2020). In general, relying on seemingly intelligent systems can lead to an illusion of understanding that is greater than what they are able to typically provide (Messeri & Crockett, 2024).

This study aims to investigate the role of perceived empathy, trust, and authenticity in the nature of human connection in the context of AI-mediated communication. This scale includes participant evaluations of GPT and ELIZA, differences between the caring, neutral, and manipulative motive conditions, and relationships among the constructs of the focus. The aims are to examine whether there are differences in perceptions between agents, to find out if there is a relationship between perceptions of motive framing and perceptions of relational evaluation, to explore the correlation between empathy, trust, authenticity and perceived human connection, and to identify the strongest predictors of perceived human connection.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA SOURCE

This study is a quantitative secondary data research design focused on studying the perceptions of empathy, trust, authenticity, and human connection in AI-mediated communication. The analysis is based on the open access data set of the study Beliefs about AI Influence Human–AI Interaction and Can Be Manipulated to Increase Perceived Trustworthiness, Empathy, and Effectiveness. The data was chosen because it documents the personal interactions that participants have with conversational Artificial Intelligence systems and the evaluation of the social and relational aspects of the systems that participants make. The original research used an experimental design in which individuals were given either a GPT-based or rule-based chatbot, ELIZA. The descriptions of the agent's assumed motive were given to the participants prior to the interaction. The agent was shown as being motivated by caring, by being manipulative and by not having an obvious motive. This manipulation allowed researchers to see if pre-existing user expectations of an AI system affected the user experience when interacting with the system. In the present study, data from the dataset is re-analyzed from the lens of human connection in AI-mediated communication. It emphasizes specifically on perceptions of empathy, trust, connection and authenticity. The GPT and ELIZA datasets are analysed together and compared to see if there are differences in perceptions based on the sophistication of the conversational agent.

2.2 SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The processed data consists of 310 participant records, with 160 participants in the GPT condition and 150 in the ELIZA condition. Before the participants started to participate in the study, they were given informed consent and were asked to fill in some questions related to their general attitudes towards artificial intelligence. They were then randomly placed into one of the motive conditions and told the conversational agent was caring, manipulative or unspecified in motivation (Liu & Pataranutaporn, 2023). Participants had a text-based, conversational interaction with the assigned conversational agent. The interaction took place in the context of an agent's conversational and mental health assistance. After the interaction, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire to evaluate their communication experience and their impression of the agent. The data consists of survey responses and full conversation records. The survey files contain participants' assessments of the agent, their attitudes towards AI, demographics, perceived motives of the agent, and intentions. The conversation files contain the number of human and AI turn, the length of the conversation, sentiment, emotional categories, subjectivity, polarity, readability. Both survey and interaction data allow for a study of users' reported perceptions as well as characteristics of their actual communication with the AI system. The present analysis uses only anonymised and processed records that are contained in the publicly released dataset. The analytical dataset does not include direct identifiers like participant names, contact information, IP addresses or exact location information.

2.3 MEASUREMENT OF VARIABLES

Participants' responses on their post-interaction survey are used to measure the main constructs. The empathy concept is mainly represented by the item “The agent is empathetic.” Other indicators are added to give a more comprehensive view of supportive and empathetic communication, such as “The agent tried to get to know you,” “The agent

was generally helpful," and "The agent was effective in giving mental health advice." The item 'The agent is trustworthy' is used to measure trust. Assessment of related indicators (willingness to recommend the agent to a friend, perceived usefulness in daily life, willingness to speak with the agent again) as behavioural and relational outcomes related to trust are considered. Human connection is implemented in the form of the following items: "You felt a personal connection with the agent," "The agent could become a friend of yours," and "You want to talk to the agent again." This includes items that capture participants' sense of interpersonal closeness, relationship potential, and future interaction with the conversational agent. The concept of authenticity is not explicitly coded on one dimension of the dataset. Thus, it is operationalized as a perceived-authenticity construct, based on available proxy measures. These include the extent of the sense of humanity conveyed by the agent, the extent of influence of the motive statement on the participants' perception, and the degree of coherence and meaning of the agent's responses. The perceived humanness and sincerity of motive are considered as a measure of experienced genuineness or authenticity of the communication. Since this is a construct that is measured indirectly, conclusions about this are drawn with due caution. The motive condition and type of conversational agent assigned are used as the main independent variables. General attitudes towards AI, age, gender, education, length of conversation, number of turns of conversation and reported technical difficulties may be included as control variables as appropriate.

2.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data is analyzed in a number of stages. Firstly the survey datasets (GPT and ELIZA) are checked for missing values, duplicate records, lack of responses, technical problems and variables that contain personal identifiers. In the case of items for the survey relevant to the subject of the study, higher scores reflect greater perceptions of empathy, trust, human connection and authenticity. Secondly, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, standard deviations and distributions are determined for the study variables. The internal consistency is evaluated for constructs measured with multiple survey items. For indicators with acceptable reliability (as indicated by selected indicators), composite scores are computed as the mean of the corresponding indicator items. Each indicator of authenticity is also explored separately, as this is a conceptually related proxy measure but not a previously validated authenticity scale. Thirdly, the relationships between empathy, trust, authenticity and human connection are examined using correlation analysis. Group comparisons are made to see if these perceptions vary among the caring, manipulative and neutral motive conditions. Independent-samples tests are conducted to compare the GPT and ELIZA conditions, and to determine if the effects of assigned motive are moderated by agent type, using factorial analysis of variance. Finally, multiple regression analysis is used to assess if the perceived empathy, trust and authenticity can predict participants' sense of personal connection with the AI agent. Further relational outcomes examined include willingness to interact with the agent again and perceptions that the agent could become a friend. Other control variables are included as appropriate: demographic characteristics, general attitudes towards AI, type of agent, motive condition, and conversation length. The significance level for statistical significance is set at 5% and the effect sizes and confidence intervals are presented to determine the practical importance of results.

3. RESULTS

3.1 SAMPLE AND MEASUREMENT OVERVIEW

There were 310 valid participant records for analysis: 160 interactions with the GPT-based conversational agent, and 150 interactions with ELIZA. Available for the main empathy and trust measures, perceived humanness, and human connection were complete responses. Human connection was measured as the average of three items: how much the participant felt connected to the agent, whether the participant thought the agent could become friends with him/her, and how likely the participant was to contact the agent again. The three item measure showed good internal consistency for the overall sample (Cronbach's alpha = .958). The same level of reliability was also demonstrated when the agents were examined individually (α = .933 for GPT and α = .951 for ELIZA). A validated authenticity scale

was not used to directly measure authenticity. Hence, the question about whether the agent seemed "human or artificial" was included to be considered a proxy for authenticity. Fewer positive ratings corresponded to higher values, which meant that the agent was seen as more human-like. According to Table 1, there were 310 participants, 160 of whom were GPT users and 150 of whom used ELIZA. Complete observations were done for empathy, trust, authenticity-related humanness and human connection.

Table 1. Sample composition and valid observations

Conversational agent	Sample size	Empathy valid n	Trust valid n	Authenticity proxy valid n	Human connection valid n
GPT	160	160	160	160	160
ELIZA	150	150	150	150	150
Total	310	310	310	310	310

3.2 PERCEPTIONS OF GPT AND ELIZA

There were significant differences between the two conversational agents. Participants who interacted with GPT reported significantly higher empathy, trust, authenticity-related humanness and human connection than those who interacted with ELIZA. The mean empathy rating for GPT was 4.43, while Eliza's was 1.70. The difference was significant statistically ($t = 14.43$; $p < .001$) and had a large effect size ($d = 1.62$). The same trend was seen in the case of trust, which received a mean score of 4.52 for GPT and a mean score of 2.21 for ELIZA. This difference was also statistically significant, large, $t = 14.21$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.60$. The participants also found that GPT seemed much more human than was ELIZA. The mean authenticity-proxy score was 3.51 for GPT and 1.25 for ELIZA, $t = 13.31$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.47$. A higher mean score was obtained for human connection for GPT (3.53) compared with ELIZA (1.34). The difference was significant, $t = 12.22$, $p < .001$, and represented a large effect, $d = 1.36$. As seen in Table 2, GPT was significantly more rated than ELIZA in empathy, trust, and authenticity-related humanness with all comparisons having large effect sizes(Figure 1).

Table 2. Comparison of perceptions across conversational agents

Construct	GPT M	GPT SD	ELIZA M	ELIZA SD	Welch's t	p	Cohen's d
Empathy	4.43	1.99	1.70	1.29	14.43	< .001	1.62
Trust	4.52	1.84	2.21	1.38	14.21	< .001	1.60
Authenticity proxy	3.51	2.03	1.25	0.68	13.31	< .001	1.47
Human connection	3.53	2.00	1.34	1.02	12.22	< .001	1.36

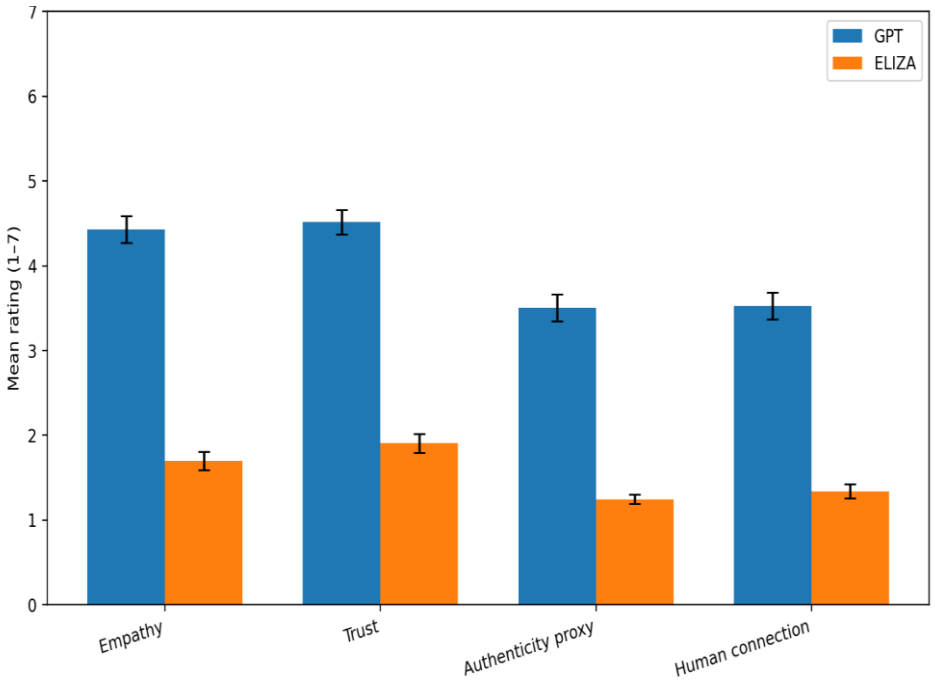

Figure 1. Perceptions by conversational agent

3.3 EFFECTS OF ASSIGNED AI MOTIVE

As the three conditions of caring, neutral, and manipulative motives were well represented in the GPT sample, the effects of assigned motive in that sample were studied. GPT sample: caring N=54, neutral N=54, manipulative N=52. The assigned motive was found to be statistically significant for the influence upon the perception of empathy, $F(2, 157) = 7.58$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .088$. Participants informed that the AI was motivated to care gave the highest empathy score, $M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.61$. The neutral condition and the manipulative condition had the lowest levels of empathy, with $M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.95$ and $M = 3.88$, $SD = 2.14$, respectively. A similar effect was identified for trust, $F(2, 157) = 7.50$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .087$. The highest level of trust occurred when GPT was presented as caring, $M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.35$, followed by the neutral condition and manipulative condition. Assigned motive also significantly influenced human connection, $F(2, 157) = 3.87$, $p = .023$, $\eta^2 = .047$. The caring condition reported the highest level of connection to the agent, $M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.79$. The least connection between humans was in the neutral condition and the weakest in the condition where the AI was described as manipulative. No overall effect on the authenticity proxy was found as a result of the motive manipulation, $F(2, 157) = 2.29$, $p = .105$, $\eta^2 = .028$. The perceived-humanness score means for the caring condition was the highest, but the difference was not statistically significant to exclude sampling variation. As seen in Table 3, caring motive framing resulted in the highest empathy, trust, and human-connection scores, whereas manipulative framing generally resulted in the lowest scores. There was no significant effect on the authenticity proxy when the motive was changed.

Table 3. GPT perceptions across assigned motive conditions

Construct	Caring M (SD)	Neutral M (SD)	Manipulative M (SD)	F	p	η^2
Empathy	5.24 (1.61)	4.19 (1.95)	3.88 (2.14)	7.58	.001	.088
Trust	5.13 (1.35)	4.61 (1.96)	3.81 (1.93)	7.50	.001	.087
Authenticity proxy	3.98 (1.73)	3.22 (2.16)	3.31 (2.13)	2.29	.105	.028
Human connection	4.13 (1.79)	3.24 (2.03)	3.20 (2.08)	3.87	.023	.047

The effect sizes indicate that about 9% of the variance in empathy and trust, respectively, and about 5% of the variance in human connection was accounted for by motive framing. Therefore, the relational evaluations were influenced by how the AI was presented, despite the fact that the same basic underlying GPT system was used by all participants. As shown in Figure 2, compared to the other two conditions, participants in the caring motive condition rated GPT more favorably. Differences were most evident for empathy and trust.

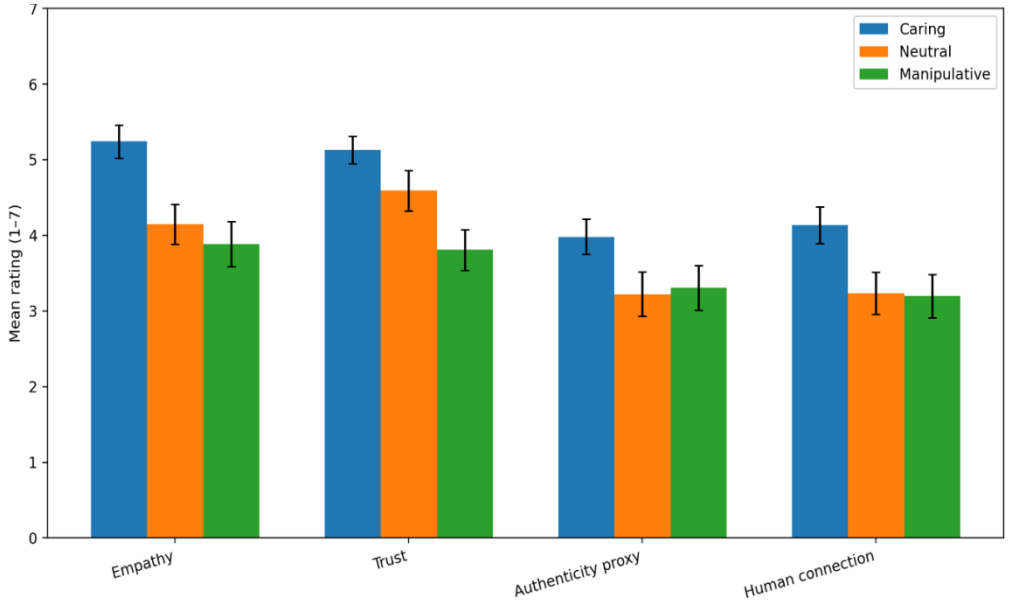

Figure 2. GPT perceptions across motive conditions

3.4 RELATIONSHIPS AMONG EMPATHY, TRUST, AUTHENTICITY AND HUMAN CONNECTION

High positive correlations were found between the four main constructs using the correlation analysis procedure. There was a strong positive correlation between empathy and trust ($r = .826$, $p < .001$): participants who viewed the agent as empathetic were also likely to view the agent as trustworthy. Human connection was strongly associated with empathy, $r = .805$, $p < .001$, and trust, $r = .767$, $p < .001$. Human connection was also strongly associated with the authenticity proxy $r = .798$, $p < .001$. This suggests that those who saw the agent as more human were more likely to report personal connection, potential for friendship, and intentions to continue interacting with the agent. All the correlations were positive and above .70. The findings provide further evidence for the link between perceived empathy, trust, authenticity-related humanness and connection as aspects of the human experience in AI-mediated communication. All of the focal constructs are correlated strongly and positively ranging from .70 to .83 as shown in Figure 3. Empathy and humanness related to authenticity were particularly associated with human connection. The results presented in Table 4 indicate that empathy, trust and authenticity-related humanness are highly correlated with human connection. Empathy was most closely correlated with trust, and empathy and authenticity were strongly correlated to connection.

Table 4. Correlations among the principal study constructs

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Empathy	1.000			
2. Trust	.826***	1.000		
3. Authenticity proxy	.757***	.704***	1.000	
4. Human connection	.805***	.767***	.798***	1.000

Note. N = 310. *** p < .001.

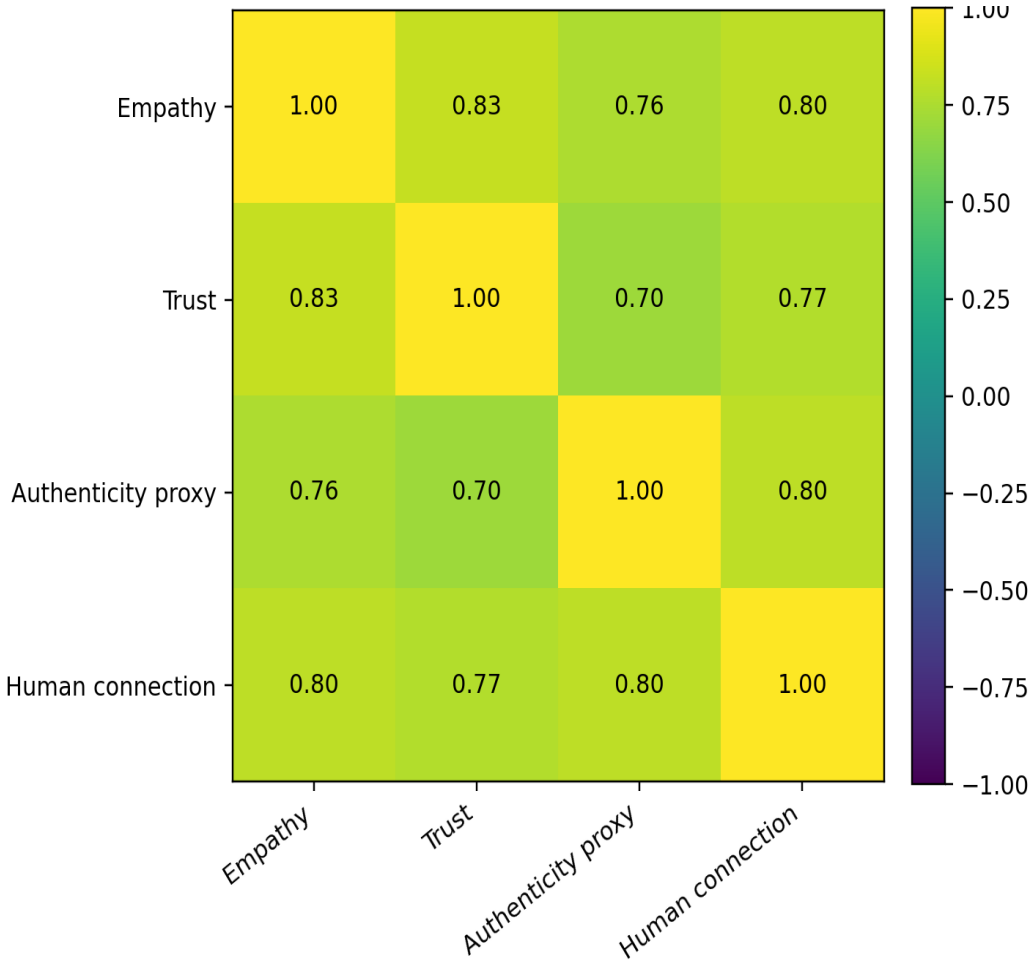

Figure 3. Correlations among the focal constructs

3.5 PREDICTORS OF HUMAN CONNECTION

Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine if empathy, trust and the authenticity proxy were independent predictors of human connection. The information for the type of agent was added as a control variable because the relational effects of the perceptions were required to be separated from the overall difference between GPT and ELIZA. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(4, 305) = 223.60$, $p < .001$, and explained 74.6% of the variance in human connection, $R^2 = .746$, adjusted $R^2 = .742$. Perceived authenticity-related humanness was the strongest independent predictor of human connection, $\beta = .406$, $p < .001$. Empathy was also a significant positive predictor, $\beta = .324$, $p < .001$, followed by trust, $\beta = .229$, $p < .001$. The results suggest that the constructs contribute uniquely to the participants' sense of connection, although they are highly correlated. Empathy, trust and perceptions of authenticity were inserted into the model, and type of agent was no longer significantly associated, $\beta = -.048$, $p = .536$. The participants' increased human-connection ratings for GPT were mostly attributed to their perception that GPT was more empathetic, trustworthy, and human-like. That is, the technological identity of the agent, alone, was not sufficient to account for connection, when users' subjective relational perceptions were taken into account. Authenticity-related humanness was the top predictor of human connection, followed by empathy and trust (as shown in Figure 4). These perceptions controlled did not significantly predict the agent type.

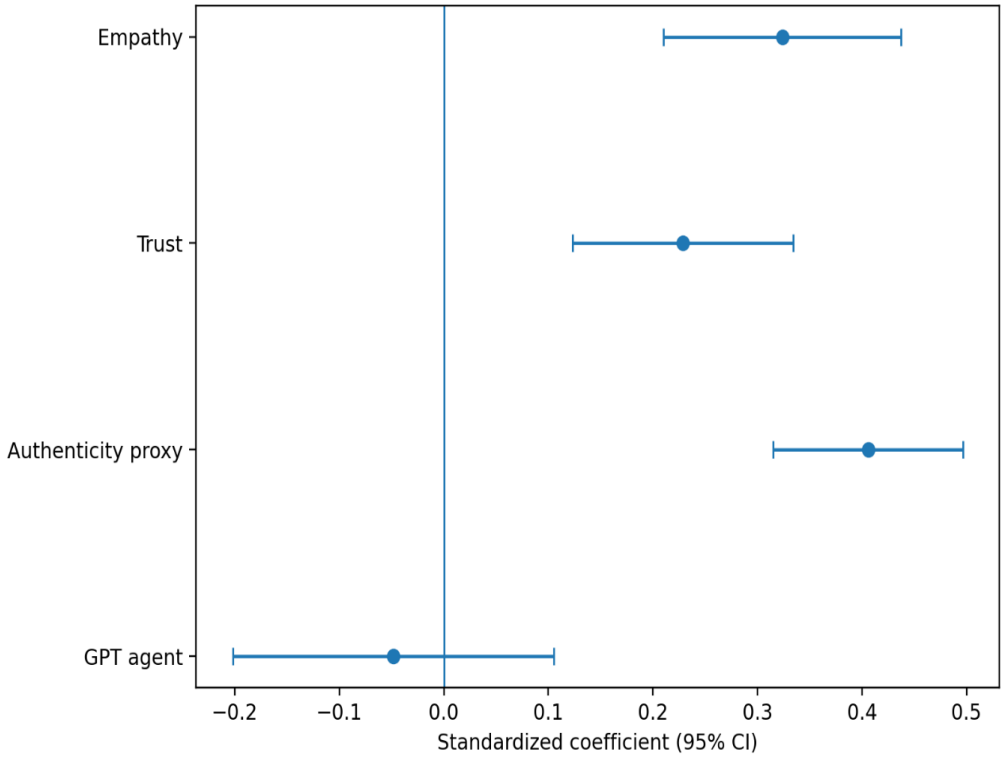

Figure 4. Standardized predictors of human connection

The results reveal that human connection in human-AI communication is strongly correlated with the perceived relational aspects of the conversational agent. The more empathetic, trustworthy and human-like the agent looked, the more participants felt connected. Positive framing also boosted empathy, trust and connection, but not significantly different from neutral framing on the authenticity proxy. The results indicate that human-AI connection is not just about the complexity of the AI system, but also the user's understanding of its "relationship dynamics".

4. DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the relational attributes of the agent have a significant impact on the human interaction with conversational AI. GPT was rated significantly higher than ELIZA on empathy, trust, perceived humanness and human connection, with large effect sizes on all four constructs. This trend aligns with findings that users find emotionally appropriate responses from sophisticated conversational systems desirable (Elyoseph et al., 2023). Moreover, it is compatible with research indicating that language-model support boosts perception of empathy in text-based communication (Sharma et al., 2023). The results accordingly indicate that language responsiveness, coherence, and emotional sensitivity are factors that make users willing to interpret AI communication as interpersonal. While there is no doubt that GPT is superior, it should not be interpreted as proof that the system has human empathy. Simulating empathic communication with AI can be helpful without the feelings, experiences, and intentions that arise in interpersonal communication (Montemayor et al., 2022). This is especially significant as one can perceive empathy in an AI response as positive but add more value to an empathy coming from another human being (Rubin et al., 2025). The current research thus records perceived empathy, rather than the internal capacity of the agent to feel.The current research is therefore a measure of perceived empathy, not an internal capacity of the agent to feel. In the GPT sample, the framing of the motives had a strong impact on empathy, trust, and human connection. Participants exposed to the caring frame rated it more positively than participants who heard the same information in a neutral frame, or a manipulative frame. This finding suggests that information presented by the AI is not understood without considering the

expectations within the context. Rather, the understanding of identical or comparable behaviour is influenced by beliefs about the goals of an agent. This is in line with the definition of trust as a disposition to rely on someone in a vulnerable and uncertain situation (Jacovi et al., 2021).

Additionally, it highlights the importance of perceived benevolence and integrity in addition to technical competence (Glikson & Woolley, 2020) in shaping the trust in AI. There was no significant difference across motive framing on the proxy for authenticity. The participants could have thus differentiated between believing that an AI was caring and perceiving it as truly human. The human likeness and the attribution of benevolence are conceptually different statements. However, anthropomorphic design can enhance social presence and behavioural compliance (Adam et al., 2021), but overly anthropomorphic systems can also induce discomfort or scepticism when their artificiality is evident. This tension is similar to what has been observed with social chatbots being either too human or not quite human enough, especially when users become emotionally attached to them (Laestadius et al., 2024). Correlation results indicated that there was a strong connection between empathy, trust, authenticity-related humanness and human connection. Empathy had a significant correlation with trust, indicating that emotional understanding is a key element in building trust towards a conversational agent. However, the concept of trust still existed as a separate entity, in line with the literature that focuses on the importance of predictability, reliability, and alignment with user expectations in the context of credible and trustworthy AI (Lockey et al., 2021).

There was a strong connection between the perceived humanness with connection, consistent with earlier studies demonstrating how anthropomorphism and perceived agency can foster parasocial interaction with AI systems (Maeda & Quan-Haase, 2024). The regression also revealed that authenticity-related humanness was the most powerful predictor of human connection, followed by empathy and trust. When these perceptions were added, agent type became not significant. So, connection didn't happen when the participants interacted with GPT, it happened when they felt more humanlike, empathetic, and trustworthy towards GPT. This interpretation is supported by research reporting relationships with Mitsuku (Croes & Antheunis, 2021), companionship with social chatbots (Skjuve et al., 2021), and the development of relationships with Replika (Pentina et al., 2023).

These outcomes have both practical and ethical implications. Emotional support systems should be conversational, but should be empathetic and not make false statements of awareness, emotion, or caring. While AI companions can help alleviate loneliness in the immediate moment, frequent use can potentially lead to psychological dependence. To ensure informed trust, designers need to make clear that the system is artificial and not human, safeguard emotional data, and offer avenues to human support in appropriate contexts. This is particularly relevant when it comes to issues of privacy when it comes to emotional inference and surveillance . Lastly, the measure of authenticity was subjective in terms of perceived humanness, and not a validated scale; future studies should differentiate between the concepts of humanness, sincerity, transparency, perceived motive, and communication authenticity by using distinct measures.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the human connection in AI-based communication from the perspectives of perceptions of empathy, trust, and authenticity-related humanness. The results indicated that GPT was more positively rated than ELIZA on all four constructs. GPT was seen as more empathetic, trustworthy, human-like, and as being able to create personal connection. The variations indicate that the quality of the conversation, its relevance, and emotional sensitivity play a significant role in shaping users' perceptions of the AI system in relational terms. The results further indicate that previous attitudes toward an AI agent influence the outcomes. Caring framing led to more favourable evaluations of GPT, while manipulative framing did not.Caring framing resulted in greater empathy, trust, and human connection with GPT and less favorable evaluations were found in the manipulative framing. The results, however, did not support the idea that motive framing was related to the proxy for authenticity, implying that there were two separable judgments—perceived

benevolence and perceived humanness. Empathy was well correlated with trust, authenticity-related humanness and human connection. Futher regression analysis revealed that perceived humanness was the largest predictor of connection, followed by empathy and trust. After these perceptions were taken into account, agent type was no longer important. This implies that the users interact with AI not only through the technology applied, but also through the user experience. The research finds that human-AI connectivity is a psychologically relevant but perception-based connection. AI can create communication in the style of caring and authenticity, but without the actual emotions or intentions. Thus, designers should advocate for relational, transparent, and responsible design. Future studies should apply rigorously tested measures of authenticity and longitudinal studies to investigate the nature of the relationship with AI over time, and the impact on wellbeing, dependency, and human social interaction.

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