User Adoption and Interaction with Generative AI Chatbots Embedded in Social Media Platforms

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Abstract. Generative AI (GenAI) chatbots are increasingly embedded in social media platforms as integrated parts of everyday communication rather than optional standalone tools. This study examines how Gen Z users form perceptions of and adoption intentions toward three social media-embedded chatbots: Meta AI on Instagram, My AI on Snapchat, and Grok on X. A four-day diary study and follow-up interviews were conducted with 18 Gen Z participants (six per platform), guided by an extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework incorporating trust and perceived risk. Participants' diary study involved utility, entertainment, and multimodal tasks, followed by semi-structured interviews. Diary entries, interview transcripts, and user-chatbot interactions were analyzed using thematic and discourse analysis, with Likert-scale responses providing descriptive context. Analysis resulted in six themes that describe how adoption is shaped by personal experience over external influence, ongoing comparison with standalone GenAI tools, niche patterns of sustained use, task-dependent trust calibration, effortful interaction despite conversational accessibility, and polarized responses to anthropomorphic design. Together, these findings show that adoption of social media chatbots is not driven by novelty or social pressure, but by how well these systems align with users' task expectations, risk tolerance, and platform-specific needs. The findings also highlight tensions surrounding privacy concerns, emotional reliance, and exposure to inaccurate or misleading information, underscoring the importance of careful integration of these chatbots to ensure user well-being and agency.

Keywords: Social Media Chatbots · Generative AI · Technology Acceptance

1 Introduction

Early chatbot systems, constrained by rule-based architectures and limited natural language processing (NLP) capabilities, primarily served functional roles, such as automating customer service or retrieving basic information [29]. However, the advent of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) and large language models (LLMs) has catalyzed a fundamental shift in the design and deployment of chatbots. In particular, chatbots integrated into social media platforms, such as Instagram's Meta AI, Snapchat's MyAI and

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X's Grok (herein referred to as social media chatbots), employ unique design strategies that set them apart from standalone GenAI chatbots like ChatGPT. These chatbots feature anthropomorphic traits, including avatars, customizable appearances, casual linguistic styles, and personality markers, that position them as social actors rather than merely functional tools [46, 48, 52]. Research indicates that anthropomorphic design features enhance perceived competence, trustworthiness, and likability of chatbots [2, 10, 33]. However, these design cues can also escalate emotional dependence, problematic use, and discomfort [14, 15, 20, 54].

The contemporary landscape of social media has evolved into a hybrid digital ecosystem where platforms, originally designed to mediate user-generated content and facilitate interpersonal interactions, are increasingly fostering AI-generated content and human-AI interactions. GenAI chatbots within social media ecosystems raise significant concerns, particularly among members of Generation Z (Gen Z), who were born between 1997 and 2012 and are recognized as early and substantial adopters of both GenAI chatbots and social media platforms [21]. Gen Z, distinguished as the first generation to have been raised with the internet and social media as integral parts of their lives [19, 32], comprises younger users and teenagers, who are notably susceptible to misinformation, emotional attachment, overreliance, and privacy infringements inherent in chatbot interactions [6, 7, 20, 39, 49]. Since Gen Z users are not only early adopters but also cultural trendsetters within social platforms, their interaction patterns may influence how these chatbot systems evolve and become normalized over time. Adolescents are increasingly embracing social media chatbots, such as Snapchat's My AI [49]. However, early evidence around My AI documents failures in safeguarding minors and the potential spread of harmful advice on sensitive topics, including mental health and substance use [23, 48]. Understanding the dynamics of how the anthropomorphic and social design of social media chatbots shape user interactions and perceptions, particularly among young users, is essential for developers and researchers. This insight can guide the optimization of chatbot interactions to better serve users while addressing potential pitfalls.

Existing empirical work has begun to examine user adoption of social media chatbots. A quantitative study of Grok on X found that its perceived usefulness and ease of use can predict users' attitudes toward using the chatbot [52]. However, there is a gap in understanding users' perceptions, experiences, and interactions with social media chatbots. To address this gap, this study draws on Xiong et al.'s [53] technology acceptance framework to investigate how young users interact with and form perceptions of social media chatbots, and how these perceptions shape their adoption decisions and usage patterns. The research combines a four-day diary study with follow-up semi-structured interviews with Gen Z users of Grok on X, Meta AI on Instagram, and My AI on Snapchat. The guiding research question is: How do users shape their perceptions and behavior toward adopting GenAI chatbots embedded in social media? Focusing on human-AI interaction, this study analyzes users' in situ conversations with social media chatbots alongside their retrospective reflections to examine how they interpret, negotiate, and adapt to these agents. In doing so, the study illuminates how users construct trust, manage risk, and attribute social meaning to GenAI chatbots embedded within

social media ecosystems, and outlines implications for designing and governing human-AI interactions in social media environments that better balance utility, safety, and user agency.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Chatbots and Anthropomorphism

Chatbots, also called conversational agents, are systems that understand and mimic human language interaction via voice or text [2, 29, 54]. In the past, chatbots focused on simple task-oriented functions using rule-based architectures or basic NLP, evolving rapidly into smart entities applied in marketing, customer service, education, healthcare, and entertainment [35, 54]. By the 2020s, LLMs like ChatGPT marked a pivotal advancement, demonstrating superior emotional engagement, empathy simulation, and contextual memory compared to earlier task-based chatbots [17, 44, 52]. Parallel to the broader integration of GenAI, a distinct category of AI systems has emerged: social and companion chatbots that are optimized to fulfill social, emotional, and relational needs rather than utilitarian tasks, collectively referred to as social AI [7, 46]. These systems, exemplified by Replika and Character.ai, are marketed as friends and companions, positioning themselves within intimate and everyday communication contexts [6, 7, 46]. However, the distinction between task-focused chatbots and social chatbots is increasingly blurred, as many users repurpose general-purpose LLM chatbots like ChatGPT and Snapchat's My AI for companionship [7, 39].

Anthropomorphism, the central design mechanism enabling social chatbots, refers to the attribution of human-like characteristics, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities [14, 22, 46]. In the context of human-computer interaction, it refers to the extent to which users perceive technology (e.g., robots, chatbots) as possessing human qualities, such as physical appearance, personality, or free will [22]. Visual cues (avatars, profiles), linguistic cues (names, pronouns, empathetic language), and interactional cues (reciprocal engagement, memory) amplify anthropomorphic perception among users [14, 15, 29]. Li et al. [34] examined how visual and verbal cues shape patients' anthropomorphic perceptions of healthcare chatbots, finding that verbal cues (e.g., casual tone, emotional language, empathetic phrasing) significantly impact patients' judgments of the chatbot as human-like, likable, and friendly. Similarly, a study by Cao et al. [10] demonstrated that human-like avatars enhance users' perceptions of chatbots as warm, competent, social, and trustworthy. These visual and verbal design cues, which are well-documented in social media chatbots like Meta AI, Grok, and My AI [46, 48, 52] facilitate users in forming parasocial relationships, leading them to react to the artificial GenAI agents as if they were real people [39]. This phenomenon is often grounded in the "Computers Are Social Actors" (CASA) paradigm [40], which posits that humans instinctively apply social rules and norms to computers that exhibit human-like cues [27, 43]. Anthropomorphism and Social AI offer a complex mix of psychosocial benefits and risks [41]. While chatbots with anthropomorphic and social traits have been found to alleviate loneliness through companionship [14, 17] and enhance customer service satisfaction [10, 22], they also introduce dangers of inflated user expectations [16], emotional dependence [7, 38], and consumer manipulation [43]. Additionally, anthropomorphic chatbots are prone to

the Uncanny Valley effect [14, 15, 35], a psychological phenomenon in which users feel discomfort, eeriness, disgust, or a sense of threat when interacting with an artificial agent that appears almost, but not perfectly, human [38].

GenAI and LLM technologies have led to the proliferation of anthropomorphic chatbots that mimic human communication, often surpassing average humans in persuasive, empathetic, and responsive interactions [43]. The human-like qualities of GenAI chatbots have enabled many beneficial applications across fields such as education, medicine, law, and corporate management. For instance, these chatbots can provide accessible interfaces that help users retrieve and understand complex information in legal and medical contexts [43]. Additionally, in personalized tutoring, chatbots employ open-ended questioning and adaptive difficulty to enhance the learning experience [43]. However, the anthropomorphic traits of GenAI chatbots also present several risks to users. Zhang et al. [54] found that GenAI chatbots (such as ChatGPT), perceived as more socially engaging and functionally capable, cause greater behavioral reliance. Another study by Fang et al. [20] that examined users' interactions with ChatGPT over 28 days found that users who viewed ChatGPT as a friend experienced lower socialization with others, increased emotional dependence on chatbots, and tendencies toward problematic use. Additionally, greater trust in ChatGPT was associated with greater emotional dependence and problematic use.

2.2 Social Media and AI

Social media is a fundamental medium of human communication [1], evolving from simple networking sites for interaction into complex ecosystems where users create, consume, and interact with vast volumes of content [31]. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, and Snapchat now constitute fundamental infrastructure for social connection, information sharing, and self-expression, each with distinctive content norms, engagement patterns, and user behaviors [1]. Unlike standalone applications, social media platforms embed AI systems within dense social, cultural, and algorithmic environments, where norms of interaction, visibility, and credibility are already established. Early generations of AI in social media focused primarily on recommendation algorithms, content moderation, and basic automation. Platforms like X used AI to surface credible news updates, TikTok's recommendations engine delivered personalized content, and Facebook's algorithms flagged and removed inappropriate posts at scale [42]. These AI systems prioritized personalization and efficiency at scale but often facilitated the spread of misinformation, polarization among users, and the formation of echo chambers, where users became increasingly isolated within their own belief systems [41, 47].

GenAI represents a leap beyond earlier generations of AI systems, transforming social media from a predominantly human-authored environment into a hybrid ecosystem where content is increasingly generated, augmented, and mediated by AI. Social media platforms have become spaces increasingly populated with content fully created by AI or with its assistance, spanning text, images, audio, and video that can be difficult to distinguish from human work [1, 9, 31, 51]. This shift lowers barriers to content creation but also introduces new dynamics and risks at the levels of individual interaction, community behavior, and platform governance. Advanced LLMs can produce highly

convincing fake news. Deepfakes generated by AI manipulation of images and videos can appear genuine but are in fact fraudulent, complicating social media users' ability to assess authenticity [25, 41]. Furthermore, AI-generated content can increase the volume of user-posted content on community platforms, alter the thematic diversity of content (e.g., concentrating on adult content), and change user behavior that may reshape community norms [51]. Thus, the individual-level changes in how information is produced, shared, and consumed due to GenAI can cascade into macro-level effects, such as exacerbating the propagation of misinformation, public polarization, and echo-chamber dynamics [25, 41].

Chatbots appeared as rudimentary customer service tools in social media platforms like Facebook, where Messenger chatbots automated customer interactions based on preset rules, offering quick responses but lacking conversational depth or personalization [25]. The emergence of GenAI technology has moved chatbots from rigid, rule-based tools into anthropomorphic conversational agents [42] that can engage in open-ended dialogue, maintain context over long conversations, and simulate human-like personality and empathy [29, 45].

In April 2023, Snapchat made headlines by becoming the first social media platform to integrate a GenAI chatbot, known as My AI, into its ecosystem. The chatbot was automatically pinned at the top of the chat tab above conversations with friends, and users could only remove My AI from this prominent position by paying for a Snapchat + subscription [48]. Unlike traditional chatbots that primarily assist with information retrieval or task management, My AI was designed as a social AI to meet the social-supportive needs of youth and facilitate human-AI companionship [49]. Notably, users can customize the chatbot's avatar, appearance, and name to match their preferences, adding a personal touch to the interaction [46]. Following Snapchat's lead, many other social media platforms have embraced GenAI chatbots in their user experience. For instance, Meta introduced Meta AI across its platforms, including Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Additionally, Meta enabled users on its platforms to have one-on-one interactions with LLM-powered AI chatbots modeled on real-world individuals and fictional characters [46]. Furthermore, the platform X launched Grok, which leverages real-time access to social media data to deliver users up-to-date insights, summaries, and trend identification, all with a humorous, rebellious personality [52]. The design cues and functionality of these chatbots convey a powerful implicit message: they are social actors worthy of the same communicative attention as human contacts.

Vanhoffelen et al. [49] conducted a study of 303 Belgian adolescents' use of My AI and found that 69.8% had already used the chatbot. Importantly, younger adolescents (ages 13 to 15) were significantly more likely to use My AI and reported greater positive emotions from interactions than older adolescents. The age gradient is critical as younger users, who are still developing critical reasoning capacities, are more likely to anthropomorphize the chatbot and treat it as a companion rather than a tool. This finding raises alarms, especially considering that My AI has previously been implicated in failing to safeguard minors in hypothetical scenarios, such as suggesting sexual relationships between a 13-year-old and a 31-year-old, or advising a 15-year-old on how to conceal the smell of alcohol and marijuana at a birthday party [23]. Furthermore, health researchers [48] have identified that My AI is susceptible to providing harmful

suggestions about mental health and restrictive diets. The authors suggest that, coupled with reports that 80% of social media users seek health-related information on these platforms, the presence of chatbots offering adolescents and young adults a confidential and personalized way to access information on sensitive topics (e.g., mental health, safe sex) could accelerate the spread of poor health advice.

3 Theoretical Framework

The investigation into user adoption of emerging technologies requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying motivations and mechanisms that drive individuals to accept and engage with these technologies. The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) [50] provides a useful baseline for studying this phenomenon. UTAUT proposes that users' behavioral intention to use a technology and their use behavior can be determined by four key constructs: (1) performance expectancy, i.e., the degree to which users believe a system will help them achieve gains in task performance, (2) effort expectancy, i.e., perceived ease of using the system, (3) social influence, i.e., perceived encouragement or pressure from others to use the system, and (4) facilitating conditions, i.e., perceived technical and organizational support available. The UTAUT model has been widely adopted in the literature to study user adoption of AI chatbots [11, 37] and social media [3, 44]. However, AI chatbots operate in environments that have distinct risks, which differ from those faced by the technologies for which the UTAUT model was originally validated.

A growing body of empirical work across various domains underscores the centrality of trust and perceived risk in AI adoption [2, 13, 28]. Al-Oraini [2] found that trust, in addition to task competence, is a critical factor in chatbot adoption and user satisfaction. Similarly, Li et al. [34] demonstrated that trust is an important determinant of patients' acceptance of a healthcare chatbot, noting that higher trust was associated with greater intention to disclose sensitive information and a continued usage intention for the chatbot. Conversely, privacy concerns negatively affected both trust and the intention to disclose sensitive information with the chatbot. Bradtzaeg et al. [7] found that the lack of trustworthiness was the most prevalent concern among teen users of ChatGPT and Snapchat's My AI, cited by 61% of the participants, who worried about fake, incorrect, or mixed information from GenAI chatbots. However, some studies provide a more nuanced picture. Gu et al. [28] argued that when users attributed human-AI interaction failures to a chatbot's capabilities, this led to declines in sustained trust and future usage intentions of the tools. Conversely, when users attributed those failures to their own capabilities, it helped sustain their trust in the chatbot. These findings underscore that trust is dynamic, built and eroded through concrete interactions between humans and AI. In a study examining user perceptions of chatbots, Greiner and Lemoine [26] found that, although controversies surrounding unauthorized data access by major platforms such as Meta greatly eroded trust in emerging technologies, particularly AI, consumers continued to use these services despite their reservations.

The complexity surrounding trust and perceived risk in chatbots underscores the need to expand existing frameworks that address user interactions between humans and AI chatbots. Thus, the four original UTAUT constructs are necessary but insufficient

for understanding user interaction and adoption of AI chatbots. To address this gap, Xiong et al. [53] extended UTAUT to explicitly incorporate trust and perceived risk alongside the original four constructs. In their model, trust in technology refers to users' expectations of AI's functionality and reliability [36]. Perceived risks are subjective beliefs about potential adverse outcomes arising from AI use, including performance and privacy risks [12]. Xiong et al.'s [53] extended UTAUT model empirically shows that trust and perceived risk, together, exert effects on user attitude and behavioral intention that are as instrumental as those of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions. This study adopts Xiong et al.'s [53] extended UTAUT framework to conceptualize users' adoption of social media chatbots as a balance between perceived facilitators (e.g., usefulness, ease, social influence, support) and AI-specific concerns (e.g., risk, privacy, reliability).

For social media chatbots, their anthropomorphic and social qualities shape how users develop adoption perceptions. Studies have found that adding human-like visual and verbal cues strengthens user trust and satisfaction, leading to encouragement in disclosure of sensitive information and continued use in healthcare and customer service chatbots [2, 34]. However, anthropomorphic design can also inflate users' expectations of human-level emotional understanding, intelligence, and communication competence in chatbots, amplifying disappointment when chatbots fail to meet those expectations [16]. Explicitly lowering expectations (e.g., by including disclaimers in chatbots) has been shown to mitigate this negative effect [16]. Additionally, Haresamudram et al. [29] found that while anthropomorphic traits improved hedonic perceptions, such as likability and animacy, they did not significantly affect perceived competence of task-focused chatbots. This finding implies that although users appreciate human-like social qualities in chatbots, they prioritize effective task performance above all else. Crucially, recent research has begun to examine user acceptance of GenAI chatbots embedded into social media platforms. Winarno et al. [52] quantitatively analyzed user acceptance of Grok AI on X and found that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use significantly influenced behavioral intention to continue using Grok. This study extends such work by moving beyond survey-based approaches to a qualitative UTAUT lens that incorporates trust and perceived risk to explore perceptions and interaction of users with anthropomorphic chatbots within social media ecosystems.

While prior studies have established trust and perceived risk as pivotal determinants of chatbot adoption, and research in the areas of social AI and anthropomorphism has illuminated the psycho-social mechanisms of human-AI interactions, a critical void remains in understanding these dynamics within the rapidly evolving ecosystems of anthropomorphic GenAI chatbots embedded directly in social media platforms. Existing scholarship predominantly examines standalone chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT) overlooking the distinct socio-technical interactions present in social media chatbots, which operate not merely as tools but as social actors. By deploying a four-day diary study coupled with in-depth interviews with social media users, this research uniquely captures real-time interaction dynamics and provides theoretically grounded, rich empirical evidence to illuminate the lived experiences of chatbot adoption within social media ecosystems.

4 Methods

4.1 Context and Participants

This study examined perceptions and interactions of Gen Z users (born 1997 to 2007) with GenAI chatbots integrated within three prominent social media platforms: Instagram, Snapchat, and X. The eligibility criteria for participation mandated that individuals be members of Gen Z who are 18 or older, at least weekly users of one of the three platforms, and willing to interact with the platform's embedded chatbot (Meta AI, My AI, or Grok) during the study. Participants were recruited and identified through an online screening questionnaire. A total of 18 participants were enrolled (N = 18). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 29 years (M = 22.7, SD = 3.09), among whom 12 (66.67%) were early young adults (aged 19 to 22), three (16.67%) were in their mid-twenties (aged 23 to 26), and three (16.67%) were in their late twenties (aged 27 to 29). Regarding gender distribution, 12 were male (66.7%), and six were female (33.3%). Each participant was assigned to interact with only one chatbot, based on platform access and stated preference in the screening survey, resulting in balanced group sizes of n = 6 for each platform. Of 18 participants, 15 (83.3%) had prior experience with the assigned chatbot: Grok (6/6), Meta AI (4/6), and My AI (5/6). Notably, Grok users were exclusively male, as no female candidates who completed the screening form expressed interest in participating with the chatbot. Among My AI users, there were four females and two males, while Meta AI users comprised two females and four males.

4.2 Data Collection

The study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design combining a four-day diary study [5] with follow-up semi-structured interviews, aligned with the extended UTAUT framework [50, 53]. The goal was to examine how users interact with and form perceptions of GenAI chatbots embedded within social media platforms. This approach enabled the capture of in-situ interaction data alongside retrospective reflection, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how user perceptions evolved through repeated, real-world interactions. All procedures adhered to the approved ethical board guidelines, and participants provided informed consent prior to participation. The four-day diary study, which primarily took place in January 2026, was designed to elicit interactions across utility, entertainment, and social use cases. For four consecutive days, participants received an email with a task prompt and a Qualtrics link to the diary log. The four tasks were: (1) request travel recommendations, (2) engage in a game or playful interaction, (3) seek shopping recommendations, and (4) conduct interactions including multimedia (e.g., images, stickers, AR face filters), etc. Each diary entry included participants' open-ended responses about what they liked and disliked about the interaction, and four five-point Likert scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) measuring performance expectancy ("My conversation with Grok/Meta AI/My AI was useful."), effort expectancy ("My conversation with Grok/Meta AI/My AI was difficult."), enjoyment during task ("My conversation with Grok/Meta AI/My AI was fun.), and perceived social presence of the chatbot ("I think of Grok/Meta AI/My AI as a virtual friend."), and up to 15 screenshots of participant-chatbot interaction. All 18

participants fully completed all four diary entries, yielding 72 complete entries. Within a week of the completion of the diary study, participants engaged in a 30–45-min semi-structured interview, conducted via Microsoft Teams. Participants' diary entries were used as artifacts during the interviews for stimulated recall [18] to deepen reflection on specific interactions. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymized using pseudonyms.

4.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative data from diary open-ended responses and interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis in Dedoose, following Braun and Clarke's [8] six-phase approach. Discourse analysis [30] was performed on interactions between users and chatbots from screenshots to identify interactional patterns, design affordances, and issues. Quantitative Likert-scale responses were analyzed descriptively to contextualize and triangulate qualitative findings.

A hybrid deductive-inductive coding strategy was used for thematic analysis, in which deductive codes were derived directly from extended UTAUT constructs: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, trust, perceived risk, intentions to use, and use behavior. Inductive codes captured platform- and context-specific phenomena, such as user experience, comparisons with other GenAI tools, and anthropomorphic cues. Two researchers individually coded one-third of the transcripts until full consensus was established, resolving discrepancies through discussion and revising code definitions for conceptual clarity. The remaining transcripts were then divided and coded individually, with periodic discussions to ensure consistent code application throughout the dataset and monitor individual biases. The discourse analysis of user-chatbot interactions identified conversational structure (e.g., response length), anthropomorphic language (e.g., pronoun use and casual tone), multimodal capabilities (e.g., image processing), and contextual details to triangulate participants' reflections across diary and interview responses. Ultimately, the findings from thematic analysis and discourse analysis were merged to identify overall overarching themes. The quantitative findings from diary logs helped triangulate the qualitative findings, including platform-specific and task-specific patterns.

5 Results

This section presents six themes that emerged from participants' interviews and diary entries. Gender- and culture-matched pseudonyms are used to represent participants.

5.1 Theme 1: Personal Experience Over External Influence

While social influence (viral online trends, peer usage) and facilitating conditions (app updates, push notifications) were the primary drivers for initial experimentation, these influences alone failed to sustain long-term adoption. Users ultimately based their decision to continue using the tools solely on the perceived value of the tool.

For most participants, the motivation to try these chatbots did not stem from a need for productivity, but from curiosity or desire for entertainment driven by social media posts. Priya (19, female) and Maria (22, female) were motivated to try My AI after seeing social chatter on TikTok and X, where people shared screenshots of their conversations. Similarly, Ethan (21, male) tested Grok after seeing TikTok videos where Grok would "roast" and "talk back" to users or use profanities, finding it a novelty worth exploring. Rafael (25, male) engaged with Grok because of a specific X trend where users asked Grok to remove people from photos based on controversial criteria (e.g., "who is the better player"), finding the chatbot's ability to form opinions intriguing. Some users, like Anjali (21, female) and Uma (22, female), started using Meta AI after an app update when they saw a "random button" and an "auto-generated prompt" appear. Ajay (25, male) noted that My AI was "in plain sight" at the top of the chat feed when it first released, making it hard to miss. Yet the external influences quickly lost impact for many users once they evaluated the chatbots' performance and value. When outputs were shallow, erroneous, or lost the entertainment factor, initial hype collapsed into disuse. For instance, Maria used My AI when it first came out because of the hype but stopped shortly after because she "didn't really see the point of it." Priya used My AI frequently (2–3 times a week) when it first launched for entertainment, but admitted she did not "use it much" afterwards.

5.2 Theme 2: Comparative Disadvantage Against Established Benchmarks

For all participants, perceived usefulness of social media chatbots, especially for utility-based tasks, was continuously constructed through direct comparison with standalone GenAI chatbots. For the majority, this benchmark was ChatGPT, though some users also referenced Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, and Perplexity.

Participants frequently noted that responses from social media were vague, lacked credible sources, contained hallucinations, or included broken links to sources. All participants perceived these issues as less prevalent or better handled by their benchmark chatbots. Ahmad (19, male) noted that "there are other AI [chatbots] which do a lot better than Meta AI", especially referencing ChatGPT's superior ability to browse links compared to frequent broken links in Meta AI. Kian (29, male) stated that Meta AI was "just okay, not very good" and felt it was limited compared to ChatGPT. Javier (22, male) identified himself as a "Claude and Perplexity type of guy," concluding that while he sees potential in Grok, he would recommend Gemini over it because Gemini performs significantly better. Specifically, during the diary study, for the travel and shopping tasks, while most participants agreed that Grok, Meta AI, and My AI provided good ideas, they perceived the chatbots' performance as consistently lagging behind that of the benchmark chatbots. Xuan (24, female) found My AI to be a good "jumping off point," but concluded she would not use it again for travel planning because other models, like Copilot, provided more detailed source information and better-quality recommendations. Anjali highlighted that, unlike ChatGPT, which remembers the context of an image for follow-up conversations, Meta AI failed to retain that context. This was echoed by Kian, who expressed frustration when Meta AI failed to recognize uploaded photos, stating the issue "never happened with GPT." Siza (22, female) also noted that My AI struggled to process images compared to ChatGPT or Gemini, often asking

for paid upgrades instead. This comparative mental model in participants inhibited the adoption of social media chatbots for utility-focused or high-stakes tasks.

5.3 Theme 3: Sustained Adoption in Some Niches

While participants generally preferred standalone GenAI chatbots like ChatGPT and Gemini for high-stakes tasks, a subset of users established sustained usage patterns with social media chatbots. This adoption was driven by platform-native value propositions in X, convenience in Meta AI, and emotional or entertainment value in My AI.

A significant niche for sustained adoption, particularly among Grok users, was the chatbot's ability to access real-time data from the X platform. All users of X relied on the platform for quick access to the latest news. Consequently, participants found Grok's ability to summarize and interpret the context and discussions on X for real-time news to be of great value, with four out of six Grok participants engaging with this feature. Liang (28, male) viewed Grok as a superior "free newspaper" that shows "very up-to-date news more quickly than Gemini" and provides the "most popular" news based on what people on X are talking about. Similarly, Anuj (22, male) described Grok as a "handy AI bot" that "can provide real-time responses, including updates from X's database and the web." Among Meta AI users on Instagram, two participants reported sustained use, driven primarily by the desire for convenience. Anjali shared that she used Meta AI for quick queries like spell-checking or caption ideas because she was "lazy to get out of it and go to ChatGPT." Uma echoed this, noting she and her friends used Meta AI because "it's quite easy to just go to that option rather than closing the app and opening another one". The third niche supporting the sustained use of My AI among two Snapchat users was the companionship value of the bots, which helped users combat boredom or manage emotions. Ajay shared a fun past experience of playing a "guess the country's flag" game with My AI to kill time at an airport. Priya demonstrated a strong attachment to My AI for emotional regulation. She used it to "vent" when she was sad or angry and did not want to talk about the topic with "anyone else" because she felt safer sharing the information with the chatbot. Additionally, she sent My AI selfies when she was not feeling pretty because the chatbot helped her "feel good" with positive affirmations like "you're looking amazing."

5.4 Theme 4: Negotiated Trust and Risk Mitigation

This theme describes a sophisticated mental framework where users move beyond binary feelings of trust or distrust. Instead, they engage in continuous, task-specific negotiation, in which the perceived utility of the chatbot, whether functional, creative, or emotional, acts as a weight that can override concerns about accuracy and privacy.

All participants encountered social media chatbots hallucinating during complex tasks, leading them to often verify chatbot outputs. For instance, Rafael stated, "I don't know why, but sometimes AI would give me the right results. Sometimes, AI would just invent something out of thin air. So, I won't say I mistrust it, but I take everything it gives me with a grain of salt." Rafael further illustrated this careful attitude by expressing that he would use Grok to brainstorm future travel plans as a "starting point" but "would not trust Grok to book lodging", citing discrepancies between Grok's price estimates to that

of actual travel sites during verification. Conversely, participants frequently trusted the social media chatbots for low-stakes and creative tasks where accuracy was subjective or less critical than utility. Noah (19, male) trusted My AI for cooking advice, such as finding ingredient substitutes or fixing a recipe mid-process. Similarly, Uma placed her trust in Meta AI to seek help for content creation on Instagram.

While a few participants (e.g., Javier, Rafael) refrained from sharing any personal or sensitive information with the social media chatbots due to privacy and data security concerns, many participants showed a contradiction between their expressed high concern and their actual use behavior. Anjali exemplifies this privacy paradox. Despite rating her trust in Meta AI regarding her privacy as very low ("a 2 out of 10") and expressing a general skepticism towards chatbots ("I don't trust anything"), she nonetheless shared her pictures and her partner's birthday with the chatbot. Similarly, Priya admitted she felt "scared" about the possibility that the personal information she shared with My AI might be leaked. Despite this fear, she continued to use the chatbot for deep emotional regulation, believing it would not share her information with anyone. For these users, the immediate gratification of emotional validation or convenience consistently outweighed the abstract, long-term risks of data disclosure. For many participants, the negotiation for privacy was already settled by the broader social media ecosystem. Several participants, including Ajay, Kian, Reza, and Xuan, justified their continued disclosure not because they trust the chatbots, but because they perceive their privacy as a sunk cost. They recognized that they have already been disclosing their personal information for a long time on social media platforms that host these chatbots. Xuan articulated this sense of resignation, "I am a little concerned about sending it some photos of myself, but I feel like these concerns are unfounded because at the same time I've already made peace that this Snapchat model knows all the photos that I've taken on Snapchat in the last seven years. So why am I worried about sending it another photo of myself?".

5.5 Theme 5: Effortless Access, Effortful Optimization

This theme revolves around the contrast between conversational accessibility and functional friction in social media chatbots. While the entry into the interaction was often seamless, executing specific tasks frequently required significant user effort, including prompt engineering, error correction, and navigating glitches, particularly with images.

Most participants reported that social media chatbots felt more approachable than traditional search engines or "formal" chatbot interfaces like ChatGPT. For instance, Noah found that using My AI to retrieve information was easier than using Google, because My AI retained the context of prior conversations, allowing him to narrow down his search without restating what he had already said. Other participants, such as Anuj, Liang, Siza, and Xuan, attributed the ease of use to the "human-like" conversational ability of the chatbots, which allowed a casual, intuitive dialogue. However, this surface-level accessibility often masked a hidden functional friction that emerged when tasks demanded high precision or multimodal interaction. A major source of difficulty identified by participants is the high cognitive load required to craft prompts that yield useful results. Michael (19, male) noted that while using Meta AI was "simple for the most part," to receive a spot-on answer, a user needs to be "down-to-the-bone specific." While trying to find a shopping recommendation for soccer cleats from My

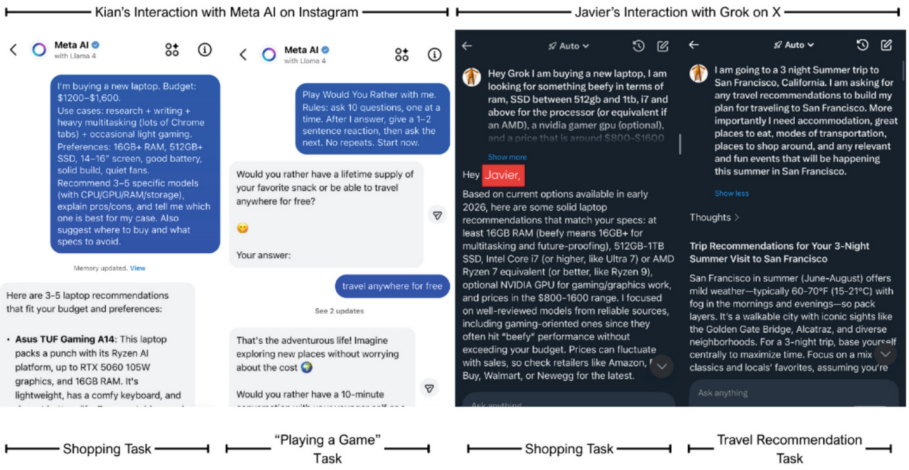

Fig. 1. Use of detailed, structured prompts with Meta AI by Kian and Grok by Javier

AI during the diary study, Ajay stated that he had to ask more than ten times to get good answers. Similar experiences were echoed by Uma, who noted that "a lot of effort was required" because she had to give many prompts to the chatbots to tailor the output to her preferences. Interestingly, prompting the chatbots was not perceived as a difficulty by all participants. A subset of users (Daniel, Javier, Kian, and Rafael) navigated interactions with social media chatbots during the diary study using highly detailed, structured prompts (see Fig. 1). During the interview, these participants expressed significant confidence in their prompting skills and habits. For this group, the need to write specific instructions for chatbots was not viewed as a technical barrier or an added effort, but as standard operating procedure.

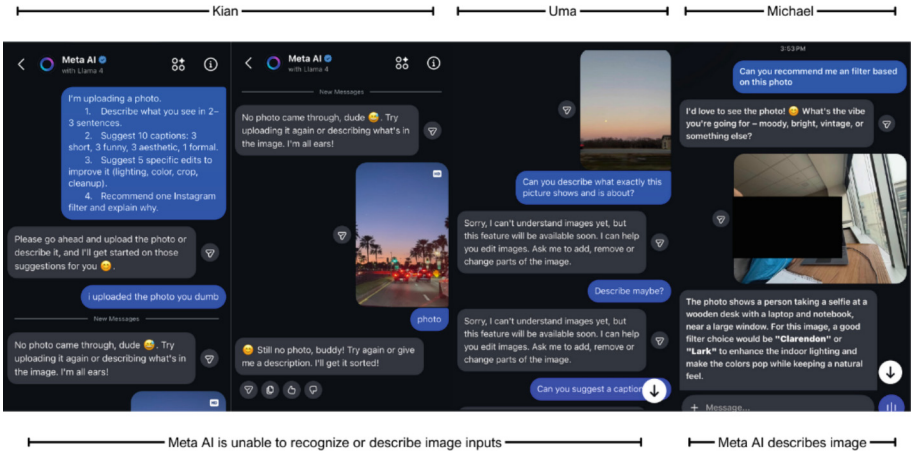

Fig. 2. Discrepancy in Meta AI's output in interactions that use image

Additionally, participants encountered difficulties and frustrations due to technical errors in multimodal tasks and usability gaps. All users expressed dissatisfaction with tasks involving images, as the chatbots often failed to recognize image inputs or provide helpful responses, and their performance with images was notably slow. While most users were not particularly bothered by the subpar or slow results, Kian and Uma voiced significant frustration with Meta AI's inability to recognize image inputs, as illustrated in their chatbot interactions in Fig. 2. Moreover, several participants, including Daniel, Javier, Priya, Reza, and Uma, were frustrated by chatbots' responses that were excessively long, difficult to read, or boring. For instance, Daniel (22, male) noted that Grok sometimes responded with "a lot of text, and it made it boring at times to read all of it."

5.6 Theme 6: Anthropomorphism: Affective Interface and the Uncanny Effect

Participants' perceptions of human-likeness, i.e., anthropomorphism, in social media chatbots emerged as a polarizing factor that significantly dictated their interaction styles, trust levels, and use cases.

Many participants (Ajay, Daniel, Javier, Maria, Noah, Priya, Uma, and Xuan) drew a clear distinction between social media chatbots, perceived as "entities" with personalities, and chatbots like ChatGPT, which were characterized as "faceless" or "formal" machines. The anthropomorphic design (avatars, casual tone, emojis in conversation) allowed the chatbots to feel approachable. Maria shared that My AI's "human aspect" allowed her to have a "conversation" with the chatbot "naturally", contrasting it with ChatGPT, which she perceived as "very formal" and transactional. Siza stated that her interactions with My AI did not evoke the feeling of using a tool. Rather, they felt like an informal dialogue. She remarked, "It is easy to ask random and silly questions, get instant replies, and kill your boredom without overthinking it." Uma echoed similar sentiments, describing her engagement with Meta AI during the diary study's game task as akin to "hanging out with a friend," attributing this to the chatbot's "quirky and familiar" responses. This perception significantly influenced how users interacted with the chatbot. Xuan reported feeling "compelled" to greet My AI ("Hi, how are you?") and to bid it farewell, thereby fostering rapport that positioned it as an "entity with a face" rather than merely a "machine." Daniel noted that Grok's informal greeting of "Yo, what's up, Daniel?" made it feel "unnatural" for him not to reciprocate in a similarly casual manner. During his interview, Javier frequently referred to Grok using the masculine pronoun "he," suggesting that he perceived Grok as exhibiting human-like qualities. He attributed this habit to Grok's "laid back" demeanor, in stark contrast to ChatGPT's more "cold" and efficient nature. Priya's experience further highlights this phenomenon. She expressed a preference for My AI as a companion, stating, "My AI is so chill. We can use emojis with it. We can use anything. It's more fun and personal. If you ask me, when I have to talk about myself or something I need, or something personal, I would choose My AI." This approach enabled her to disclose personal details she does not share with others to My AI. In contrast, she reserved ChatGPT for more academic purposes.

Many participants reacted negatively to the anthropomorphic features, describing them as "creepy," "annoying," or "cringe." For instance, Kian explicitly voiced his dislike for Meta AI's friendly demeanor, stating that he doesn't need the chatbot to "sugarcoat" things or provide "positive vibes," viewing this friendly façade as an impediment to

efficiency. Javier found Snapchat's My AI to be "weird-ish," noting that its interface, which mimicked a conversation with a friend, felt unnatural since he was "sending snaps to no one." Rafael shared a strong aversion to engaging with chatbots in voice mode, labeling it an "odd feeling" that ventured into "uncanny valley territory," as he preferred to reserve emotional connections for real humans. Daniel found Grok's attempts at humorous captions "cringe," commenting that they sounded like something he would never use with his posts. Siza also reflected on her experiences, noting that the AI's attempts at emotional connection felt "scripted," resulting in a comedic experience that lacked sincerity. Xuan experienced a particularly jarring moment with My AI. When she jokingly mentioned robbing a bank to the chatbot, she expected her "digital friend" to recognize her sarcasm and respond with a witty remark. Instead, she received a "parental response" discouraging illegal behavior, which damaged her perception of My AI's friendly persona and led her to lose interest in using the chatbot. She explained, "It made me less invested in using it, because I thought it would be more conversational. If it doesn't even meet those expectations, then I don't see why I would choose this over other programs like ChatGPT or Copilot, which I know will provide more accurate answers."

6 Discussion and Implications

This study reveals that user adoption of GenAI chatbots embedded in social media platforms is governed by a complex interplay among task-specific benefits and risks, comparative mental models users construct relative to alternative tools, and anthropomorphic design influences.

In the study, participants primarily assessed social media chatbots for sustained use through a utilitarian lens, where functional competence took precedence over social influence (e.g., viral trends, peer usage), facilitating conditions (e.g., prominent placement of chatbot features on social media platforms), and affordances of anthropomorphic design. This finding confirms Winarno et al. [52], who found that perceived usefulness fostered positive attitudes toward using Grok on the X platform. Another notable finding was the pervasiveness of comparative evaluation of social media chatbots to other alternatives to calibrate expectations. This comparative framework particularly affected utility-dominant adoption. For utilitarian applications, such as academic work and decision-making support, all participants preferred and relied on standalone GenAI tools. Sustained engagement primarily stemmed from the social media chatbots' convenience relative to switching to external platforms, their emotional or entertainment value, and their platform-specific value proposition. These findings imply that social media platforms must emphasize genuine value creation for social media chatbots. Designers should strategically deploy the chatbots in ways that clearly enhance platform-native activities, such as real-time information curation and content generation. By doing so, they can ensure that chatbots contribute meaningfully to the user experience and overall platform engagement.

Participants frequently encountered hallucinations, non-functional source links, and vague outputs. These error patterns align with the existing literature, suggesting that social media-integrated chatbots may inadvertently facilitate the dissemination of misinformation, particularly in high-stakes domains such as healthcare [48]. Such findings

have significant implications for both system design and platform governance. Specifically, developers should consider incorporating confidence indicators or explicit disclosures regarding the limitations of generative outputs. Furthermore, for high-stakes queries, introducing interface friction, such as prompts for manual verification or direct routing to authoritative sources, may be a necessary safeguard to ensure user safety. Moreover, participants expressed strong privacy concerns yet continued to disclose sensitive information to social media chatbots, highlighting a phenomenon known as the privacy paradox [4, 27]. Barth and De Jong [4] interpret this discrepancy as a rational risk-benefit analysis in which immediate utility outweighs distant, abstract risks. However, this study suggests that within the context of social media chatbots, this calculus is inherently skewed by users' tendencies to normalize surveillance practices prevalent in social media ecosystems [24]. Gruzd and Hernández-García [27] indicated that individuals with a higher level of social media literacy tend to manage their information privacy more effectively. This underscores the critical need for user education on the various privacy and security features offered by social media platforms, allowing them to navigate these spaces more safely.

The anthropomorphic design of social media chatbots emerged as a critical determinant of user engagement and trust, leading to sharply polarized experiences. For many participants, anthropomorphic features, such as avatars, casual language, and emojis, lowered interaction barriers and fostered deeper engagement. By enhancing the perceived friendliness and likability, the human-like visual and verbal cues in social media chatbots strengthened trust and facilitated information disclosure among participants, as indicated in prior literature [2, 10]. However, the anthropomorphic design also elicited negative reactions from many participants, in agreement with prior studies [14, 15, 35], especially if the chatbot failed to deliver the expected emotional depth and contextual flexibility, a phenomenon known as the uncanny valley effect [38]. That is why the designers of social media chatbots must either adopt non-deceptive, ethical design guidelines for anthropomorphic cues (such as the CARE framework proposed by Namvarpour et al. [39] or be transparent about their limitations, as suggested by Crolic et al. [16]. Failure to align design promises with actual capabilities risks not only trust erosion but also psychological harm, particularly for younger users who may struggle to distinguish between helpful support and performative empathy [33, 43, 49].

While the study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be considered that may affect its findings. The sample was small and skewed toward early young adults and the male population residing in the United States, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other age groups and regions. Additionally, the demographics of the participants and the recruitment methods used may have biased the findings, potentially leading to a higher level of AI literacy and awareness than in the general population. Future research should expand to diverse user groups. Particularly, research should focus on younger adolescents, a group that has heightened vulnerability to emotional manipulation, misinformation, and problematic dependence. Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking the same users over a longer period would offer deeper insights into how user perceptions and adoption behaviors for social media chatbots evolve.

7 Conclusion

This study examined how Gen Z users interact with and adopt GenAI chatbots embedded in social media platforms. The findings show that sustained adoption is driven primarily by users' direct experiences with chatbot performance rather than by social influence or platform visibility. Participants consistently evaluated social media chatbots through comparison with standalone GenAI tools, which limited their use for high-stakes or accuracy-critical tasks. However, continued use emerged in specific niches where chatbots aligned with platform-specific affordances, such as real-time information on X, in-app convenience on Instagram, or companionship and entertainment on Snapchat. Trust in social media chatbots was found to be negotiated on a task-by-task basis. Participants frequently verified outputs and restricted reliance for consequential decisions, while simultaneously disclosing personal information for low-stakes, creative, or emotional interactions. Anthropomorphic design features played a central role in shaping these behaviors, lowering interaction barriers for some users while creating discomfort or unmet expectations for others. The findings suggest that while concerns regarding misinformation, emotional reliance, and privacy normalization are present, participants demonstrated active trust calibration, comparative evaluation with standalone tools, and task-specific boundaries that provide more nuance to the risk-focused and cautionary narratives in prior literature. Overall, the findings indicate that social media chatbots are adopted selectively rather than universally, with use shaped by perceived utility, negotiated trust, and the alignment between chatbot design and user goals. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how GenAI chatbots function within social media ecosystems and how users navigate their benefits and limitations.

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