Why do people use ChatGPT? Exploring user motivations for generative conversational AI
by Marita Skjuve, Petter Bae Brandtzaeg, and Asbjørn Følstad

Abstract

Generative conversational artificial intelligence (AI), such as ChatGPT, has attracted substantial attention since November 2022. The advent of this technology showcases the vast potential of such AI for generating and processing text and raises compelling questions regarding its potential usage. To obtain the requisite knowledge of users' motivations in adopting this technology, we surveyed early adopters of ChatGPT ($n = 197$). Analysis of free text responses within the uses and gratifications (U&G) theoretical framework shows six primary motivations for using generative conversational AI: productivity, novelty, creative work, learning and development, entertainment, and social interaction and support. Our study illustrates how generative conversational AI can fulfill diverse user needs, surpassing the capabilities of traditional conversational technologies, for example, by outsourcing cognitive or creative works to technology.

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1. Introduction

The recent interest and availability in generative conversational AI like ChatGPT have been substantial. Within two months of its launch, ChatGPT had over 100 million monthly and 13 million daily users (Hu, 2023). Its rapid uptake and impressive conversational abilities have garnered significant attention and generated enthusiasm and concern. The substantial interest in ChatGPT and other generative conversational AI, coupled with their rapid and widespread adoption in society, underscores the urgent need for research into user motivations. Such insights are crucial for understanding the potential implications of generative conversational AI.

The term 'conversational AI' denotes intelligent machine agents with which users can interact using natural language (Brandtzaeg, *et al.*, 2022). In this study, we further limit the scope to generative conversational

AI, meaning conversational AI powered by large language models (LLMs). Generative conversational AI like ChatGPT can perform a range of tasks, such as answering questions, generating text, correcting grammar, assisting with problem-solving, and producing code [1]. This broad range of potential applications is likely to have important implications for user motivations, as well as work, civic life, organizations, and broader society (*e.g.*, van Dis, *et al.*, 2023).

However, generative conversational AI may also expose users to undesirable consequences, such as biases, misinformation, and manipulation (Brandtzaeg, *et al.*, 2022; Ferrara, 2023). For example, ChatGPT is prone to so-called "hallucinations," where the system generates fictional or erroneous content which is presented as factual (Xiao and Wang, 2021), which may, as such, impact the user motivation.

Before the launch of ChatGPT, studies already showed a growing willingness and motivation to use conversational technology (Luger and Sellen, 2016; Brandtzaeg and Følstad, 2017), often with a domain-specific focus such as health care (Kumar, *et al.*, 2022), customer service (Følstad and Skjuve, 2019), education (Rodrigues, *et al.*, 2023), workplace (Gkinko and Elbanna, 2023), and social relationships (Skjuve, *et al.*, 2021). With the availability of generative conversational AI, including ChatGPT (Open AI), Bard (Google), and Claude (Anthropic), a broader range of uses and practices of conversational technology is expected (Bommasani, *et al.*, 2021).

Insights grounded in research with users are crucial for understanding the potential implications of generative conversational AI, of which ChatGPT serves as a trailblazing example. Given the importance of understanding user motivations in the adoption of this new technology, the present study is guided by the following research question:

> *RQ*: Why do people use ChatGPT?

Our study provides valuable qualitative insights into the uses and gratifications associated with generative conversational AI. Specifically, a thematic analysis based on the reports from 197 early adopters of ChatGPT enabled the exploration and identification of key motivations for using this generative conversational AI. Furthermore, a subsequent analysis of group differences indicates how such motivations may be impacted by user demographics.

Understanding user motivations can offer insights into the kinds of tasks or problems users are looking to solve, which can be valuable for future design and development of this technology. Our findings also contribute to knowledge on how society and individuals may prepare for the rapid development and deployment of generative conversational AI. Such knowledge has the potential to facilitate healthy symbiotic relationships between humans and AI (Sundar, 2020).

2. Background

2.1. Conversational technologies — User motivation and experiences

Several studies have investigated why people use conversational technologies like chatbots or voice assistants (Brandtzaeg and Følstad, 2017; Choi and Drumwright, 2021; Ta-Johnson, *et al.*, 2022). Brandtzaeg and Følstad (2017) surveyed chatbot users in general and identified four key user motivations: productivity, entertainment, social contact, and novelty; of these, productivity was found to be most prominent. Følstad and Skjuve (2019) investigated the use of chatbots in customer service and identified efficiency as a key motivation for use. Softić, *et al.* (2021) conducted an exploratory study of motivations for using chatbots in the healthcare domain and identified fast and efficient access to information and decision support as key motivations.

In contrast, Choi and Drumwright (2021) explored users' motivations for using voice assistants, such as Google Home and Amazon's Alexa, and found social interaction to be most frequently reported. Ta-Johnson, *et al.* (2022), in their study of companion chatbots such as Replika, identified three main user motivations: interest in AI, desire for social support, and mental and physical health support.

These studies demonstrate that people are motivated to use conversational technologies for productivity, out of interest or curiosity, for entertainment, or to meet the need for social contact. The studies also show that motivations may vary with domain and use.

2.2. Generative conversational AI

The broad range of capabilities and uses in generative conversational AI has induced considerable user interest and response. Studies have investigated how generative conversational AI influence work efficiency (Brynjolfsson, *et al.*, 2023), assessment strategies (Farazouli, *et al.*, 2023), and factors such as job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Noy and Zhang, 2023).

Furthermore, a rapidly growing body of research has emerged in the form of early conceptual work, case experiences, or reviews of potential implications of generative conversational AI, specifically ChatGPT, in various contexts and professions (*e.g.*, Alshami, *et al.*, 2023; Sallam, 2023; Singh and Singh, 2023). Other research on ChatGPT has empirically investigated its capabilities, *e.g.*, contrasting its responses with those of humans (Ayers, *et al.*, 2023). Studies have also investigated people's willingness to use ChatGPT for health-related inquiries (Shahsavar and Choudhury, 2023), as well as factors that influence the user experience of ChatGPT (Skjuve, *et al.*, 2023).

A few studies have investigated people's reactions and news coverage of generative conversational AI in social media and news media. For example, Haque, *et al.* (2022) investigated users' attitudes toward ChatGPT by analyzing more than 10K tweets mentioning ChatGPT. Their work suggests that users display a wide range of perspectives and attitudes regarding this technology, often with a positive sentiment. Haensch, *et al.* (2023), in a study of student TikTok videos on ChatGPT, found that these were often promotional and discussed how ChatGPT could be used for text or code generation. Likewise, Brandtzaeg, *et al.* (2023), in an analysis of news articles on ChatGPT, found a breadth of perspectives, including how this technology may beneficially affect wellbeing and productivity or entail disadvantages such as the spread of misinformation.

While these studies indicate that generative conversational AI can have significant implications on personal and working life, there is a relative lack of knowledge as to why people use this technology. An exception to this is Baek and Kim's (2023) investigation of how users' motivation to adopt generative conversational AI is impacted by their perceptions of creepiness and trust in the technology. This lack of knowledge is problematic. The broad range of capabilities in generative conversational AI and its human-likeness in conversation style substantially exceeds that of previous conversational technologies. Hence, updated knowledge on user motivation is needed (Adiwardana, *et al.*, 2020).

3. Theoretical framework: Uses and gratification

The uses and gratification (U&G) theoretical framework (Blumler and Katz, 1974) aims to explain people's motivations for media use in the context of traditional media consumption. Here, the medium choice is understood as the result of individual users actively seeking media best suited to gratify their needs in any situation. The expanding use of the U&G framework has paralleled technological developments. It has been applied to diverse media and interactive technologies, including TV (Rubin, 1983), social media (Phua, *et al.*, 2017), apps (Ray, *et al.*, 2019), and chatbots (Brandtzaeg and Følstad, 2017; Cheng and Jiang, 2020a; C. Xie, *et al.*, 2022).

The existing literature across media types, has tended to identify uses and gratifications relating to (1) information seeking and sharing, (2) entertainment, (3) ease and efficiency, and (4) experiences of social connectedness and presence (Cheng and Jiang, 2020b).

Sundar and Limperos (2013) noted that uses and gratifications can emerge through users' interactions with novel technology, potentially impacted by users' needs and desires and the technology's affordances or actionable properties. This is particularly noteworthy in emerging technologies, such as generative conversational AI, as it represents a broad range of opportunities for use.

When ChatGPT was released, its provider, OpenAI (2022), emphasized that it was for research purposes and did not provide any clear guidelines for usage. Therefore, identifying specific uses and gratifications has mainly been up to individual users and is subject to change over time. This contrasts with existing media, which are presented or marketed with a clear purpose. Arguably, uses and gratifications that have been proven relevant for other media are likely applicable in the context of generative conversational AI, such as efficiency and entertainment. However, the unprecedented capabilities of services such as ChatGPT also render its related uses and gratifications unpredictable. Considering this unpredictability, an exploratory data-driven approach is required to identify relevant uses and gratifications for generative conversational AI.

4. Method

4.1. Study design and materials

We conducted a questionnaire study to investigate motivations to use generative conversational AI. The study concerned ChatGPT as this was the most well-known and used generative conversational AI at the time. The questionnaire included questions on the participant's use of ChatGPT and their motivation for use, as well as demographic information, including age, gender, level of education, and country of residence. In line with the study's exploratory aim, the main questions were open-ended free-text questions. Table 1 provides an overview of the questions included in this study.

Table 1: Overview of items included in the study questionnaire.		
Question number	**Question**	**Response alternatives**
Q1	In your own words, what is ChatGPT?	Free text
Q2	When did you first use ChatGPT?	This week | January 2023 | December 2022 | November 2022 | Have not used ChatGPT
Q3	How often do you use ChatGPT?	Daily | Several times a week | Week | Several times a month | Rarely/Never
Q4	In which contexts do you make use of ChatGPT?	At work | At school / as a student | In my personal life | Other (please describe)

Q5	Why do you use ChatGPT?	Free text, participants prompted "Please write two-three sentences"
Q6	What is your main reason for using ChatGPT?	Free text, participants prompted "Please write two-three sentences"

The first free-text question (*Q1*) was intended to check the participants' understanding of ChatGPT, allowing us to filter out any participants who might not have heard of ChatGPT or might misunderstand what we meant by ChatGPT. The remaining free-text questions (*Q5–Q6*) were adapted from well-known previous studies of users' motivations for social networking sites (Brandtzaeg and Heim, 2009) and chatbots (Brandtzaeg and Følstad, 2017).

4.2. Participant recruitment and filtering

Our target group consisted of early adopters of ChatGPT. In Rogers (1962), early adopters are identified as a key group, making up a relatively small proportion of a social system's population. They typically have higher social status and greater access to resources and information. As opinion leaders, their choices significantly influence broader adoption patterns. Understanding early adopters' user motivations is crucial to understanding the diffusion of new technologies or innovations such as generative conversational AI.

We recruited participants through *Prolific* (www.prolific.com), an "established platform for online subject recruitment which explicitly caters to researchers" [2]. Here, we called for participation in a study on experiences with ChatGPT, emphasizing that participants should have personal experience using ChatGPT.

Before answering any questions, the participants received a description of ChatGPT as "an online service where you can ask about anything and an AI model writes you an answer in return" and were reminded that they should have prior experience using ChatGPT to participate in the study.

Participants were requested to use a desktop computer to facilitate substantial free-text responses to the open-ended questions. Participants were also required to be fluent in English and to be resident of an English-speaking country (*i.e.*, U.K., U.S., or Ireland).

Data collection was conducted in the period 23–25 January 2023. Participants received compensation corresponding to UK£1.5 upon completion of the study.

All questionnaire responses were examined to identify incomplete responses or responses that indicated insufficient ChatGPT experience. The initial data set included 283 responses. Of these, 86 were filtered out on the grounds of (a) insufficient ChatGPT experience (59), (b) incomplete responses (4), or (c) the participant having mistaken ChatGPT for another service, such as customer service chat (23). The final dataset included 197 responses.

4.3. Data analysis

The qualitative data (*Q1* and *Q5–Q6*) were analyzed through thematic analysis (Clarke, *et al.*, 2015). For each open-ended, free-text question, initial codes were identified based on the themes that emerged in the qualitative data. Following the coding, overarching themes were established, and codes were allocated to specific themes. Codes could be merged or split and subsequently checked in correspondence with the established themes. Depending on the response's richness, a participant's response could be coded as belonging to one or more themes.

The first author proposed initial codes, which the author team reviewed and reworked. The first author

coded all the material; the second author reviewed all responses and subsequent codes. The first and second authors had an agreement of 85 percent, and 15 percent of the codes were updated. Inter-rater reliability was then checked by having the third author code 50 responses using the established coding framework. We calculated Cohen's kappa, which demonstrated substantial agreement (0.79).

Participant background data on ChatGPT usage (*Q2–Q4*) and demographics were made subject to descriptive analysis. Furthermore, to guide future research, we conducted *ad hoc* analyses of group differences to explore potential effects of participant gender, age, and education on the prevalence of identified user motivations.

4.4. Research ethics

No personal data were collected to ensure that participants' anonymity and privacy were maintained. Participation ensued after obtaining informed consent.

5. Results

5.1. Participant demographics and their ChatGPT use

Our sample consisted of 197 participants, 69 females and 123 males, while the rest preferred not to say (2) or did not report (3). The average age was 34 (*SD* = 11; range: 18–70). 83 percent (163) of the participants reported higher education degrees (*e.g.*, college/university), and 16 percent (31) reported high school/secondary school as their highest-achieved education. Two offered no report as to their education level. The participants were predominantly U.K.-based (83 percent, 163), although some resided in the U.S. (10 percent, 19) and Ireland (6 percent, 11). Four participants did not report on their country of residence.

Most participants can be defined as early adopters; 53 percent (105) reported having used ChatGPT since November or December 2022. The remaining 40 percent (78) had used ChatGPT since January 2023. Only 14 had started using ChatGPT the same week the study took place, in the last week of January 2023.

Most participants used ChatGPT weekly or more (58 percent, 114). Only a few used it daily (4 percent, 7). The remaining reported using ChatGPT several times a month (36 percent, 71) or rarely (6 percent, 12). We also asked the participants to estimate the number of times they had used ChatGPT; most reported using it 20 times or fewer. Figure 1 shows how often the participants estimated having used ChatGPT.
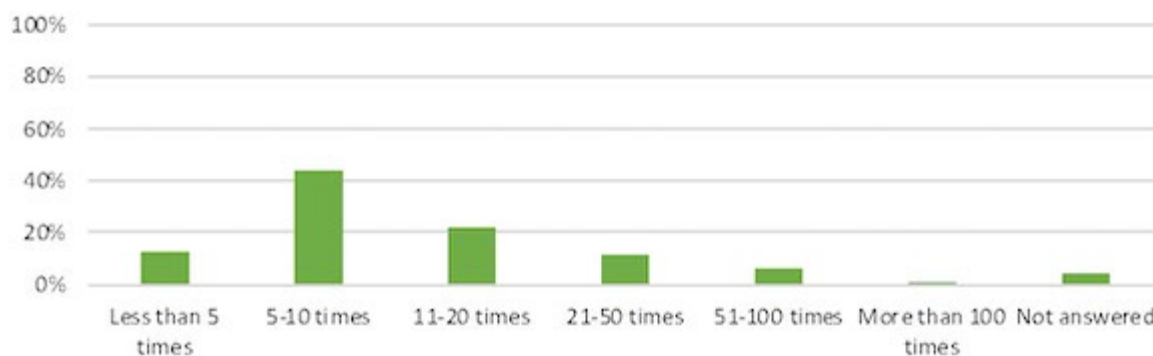

Figure 1: The participants' (*n* = 189) reported estimates on their use of ChatGPT.

The contexts in which the participants reported having used ChatGPT were skewed toward non-work-related uses, with 82 percent (161) of participants reporting having used ChatGPT in their personal lives, 38 percent (75) for work, and 17 percent (33) for school or as a student. Each participant could indicate several answer alternatives to this question. Only 2 percent (3) reported to use ChatGPT for other purposes.

5.2. Thematic analysis: Why do people use ChatGPT?

We identified seven themes representing the most prominent motivations for using ChatGPT. An overview of the themes if presented in Figure 2.
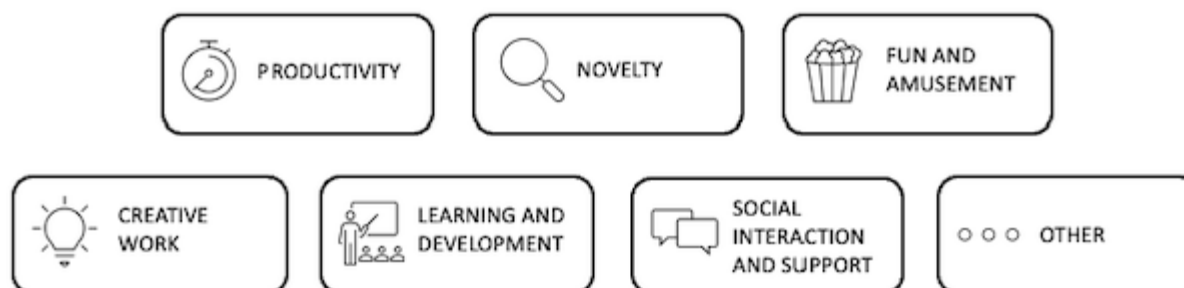
Figure 2: Overview of the themes.

A short description or each theme and frequency is presented in Table 2. We elaborate on the themes in the remaining part of the results section.

Table 2: Description of themes and frequency. Note: Most participant responses were coded as reflecting more than one theme.		
Category	**Description**	**Percent (n)**
Productivity	Motivated to use ChatGPT to enhance productivity in various ways, such as fast and easy information retrieval, generating text or writing support, or in software development to generate code or identify problems in code.	55 percent (109)
Novelty	Motivated to use ChatGPT due to curiosity regarding the technology — often triggered by social hype or an interest in AI. Understanding how ChatGPT works and can be used now and in the future is also a motivating	51 percent (101)

	factor.	
Fun and amusement	Motivated to use ChatGPT for amusement. Either alone by having ChatGPT provide funny responses or with others — as a collaborative activity.	20 percent (41)
Creative work	Motivated to use ChatGPT to facilitate creative work, such as generating creative text or to generate ideas.	18 percent (36)
Learning and development	Motivated to use ChatGPT to enhance learning and development, such as school-related questions, or to enhance understanding by explaining complex concepts in an easy-to-understand fashion.	17 percent (34)
Social interaction and support	Motivated to use ChatGPT for social interaction or to address social needs, as a conversational partner, as a place to address mental health issues, to combat loneliness, or to ask personal questions without being judged.	9 percent (18)
Other	Motivated to use ChatGPT to provide structure and efficiency in daily life. ChatGPT is used to provide dinner suggestions, set up diet plans, or organize trips. A few mentioned using it to make money or for self-improvement.	7 percent (15)

Motivation 1: Productivity

Most participants mentioned having been motivated to use ChatGPT for productivity purposes (55 percent, 109).

Some participants (17) described this only in general terms as brief statements referring to the productivity-enhancing capabilities in high-level terms or as more detailed reports. For example, one recalled having used ChatGPT to eliminate the research aspect of his work. Another reported having applied ChatGPT to routine tasks, which allowed them to focus on high-complexity work instead. Two examples of such reports are provided below:

> It is super smart [...]. It is a force multiplier at work. (ID75)

> Mainly, I use it for work — it can quickly perform similar tasks that I'd ask an assistant to do, but much faster, more accurately, and that means that the assistants can focus on other learning opportunities. My main reason for using ChatGPT is therefore mostly about efficiency. (ID26)

Most participants, however, reported specific productivity motivations such as (a) information retrieval, (b) text generation and writing support, and (c) software development.

Information retrieval

ChatGPT was often regarded as an efficient and user-friendly way of accessing information. The participants (67) enjoyed ChatGPT's ability to understand complex queries, making it easy to retrieve the required information. ChatGPT's ability to understand such queries was also deemed efficient in alleviating the need to experiment with different phrasings of the query in contrast with the use of a search engine:

> I use this platform because it is pretty straightforward. The platform is friendly to use and gives you options that closely match the answer you are looking for. Most times, it is easier to find answers to questions quickly using this platform. Searching on Google may take several tries to find the right answer, but using this platform makes it much quicker.

Some participants (8) mentioned that they used ChatGPT because of its ability to summarize the information and present a unified answer in an easy-to-understand fashion. The participants appeared to value this because it eliminated the need to examine and evaluate multiple sources. This approach to presenting information was reported as more manageable and efficient:

> Also because it can give summarized answers on a subject you want to know more about, compared to search engines. (ID158)

Interestingly, some participants (13) reported using ChatGPT for information retrieval because it provides information that they described as "good" or high quality. Some (5) specifically reported using it for the reliability or trustworthiness of the information that it offered. The participant quoted below, for example, described it as "similar to getting help from an expert.":

> I use ChatGPT as a quick and convenient way to ask someone for advice. They are fast and respond with a good amount of knowledge like an expert. [...]. ChatGPT is smart and can give me informed information. (ID170)

Text generation and writing support

Text generation was the second productivity-oriented motivation. Some participants (10) specifically reported appreciating ChatGPT's ability to generate larger chunks of text in various formats, such as essays, paper summaries, reports, e-mail messages, and CVs. As the quotes below exemplify, participants use ChatGPT to save time without compromising the quality of the work.

> My main reason for using Chat GPT is to save time on writing. The text ChatGPT produces is as good or better than what I would've wrote manually, for the most part. (ID158)

> I use it mainly for the speed of the results and accuracy of the text that it produces. (ID127)

Others reported using ChatGPT as a form of writing support (24), leveraging its capabilities to support the writing process rather than using it for text generation. For example, they explained how they used output from ChatGPT as a starting point or asked it to improve sentence structure or to provide alternative perspectives on their writing style. The quote below exemplifies how these participants reported using ChatGPT as a writing partner:

> To help with University work. This has been a massive help
> when I need [...] for my essay to be reworded as it does not
> sound quite right. (ID112)

Software development

The final productivity-oriented motivation was to use ChatGPT to support the software development process. Some reported using ChatGPT to generate lines of code for different application areas (17), often with the intention of making the development process more efficient. In this way, the participants only needed to check and rework the code rather than writing it from scratch, as exemplified below:

> I have used it because it provides a good tool to write
> PowerShell commands that I can check, instead of having to
> start from scratch. (ID19)

Other participants reported using ChatGPT to assist with debugging and problem-solving (14). They noted that ChatGPT could explain how to structure code, identify problems in code, or explain why a particular line of code was not working. As such, they perceived ChatGPT as enhancing their understanding of the software development problem at hand, as the below quote illustrates.

> [...] I mainly use it to help me with my coding [...]. I use it to
> get an idea of how to do something, for it to possibly simplified
> or improve my code and if I get stuck and don't know how to
> fix something or find out why it might not work. (ID44)

The reported motivations for using ChatGPT to support software development interestingly parallel the motivations for using ChatGPT for text generation and writing support.

Motivation 2: Novelty

ChatGPT's novelty was an important user motivation (50 percent, 101). Many participants' reports reflected their curiosity about the technology. Others reported a desire to understand the technology and explore application areas that might be relevant for them today or in the future.

Curiosity: General interest and social push

Most novelty-motivated participants explained that they initially began using ChatGPT because they were curious about the technology. For some, this curiosity originated from a general interest and enthusiasm regarding the idea of AI and ChatGPT (14), as the below quote illustrates:

> I am very interested in artificial intelligence. In the past, I have
> used Dall-E and MidJourney to generate images, and I was
> looking forward to being able to use a natural language AI like
> ChatGPT. (ID133)

For others (29), the curiosity stemmed from a social push, having heard about ChatGPT from friends or coworkers or reading about it in the media. As the quote below illustrates, it is unusual for technology to attract media attention to this extent.

> I was using it basically because I saw so many posts about it on
> Reddit and other social media. I was curious because there is
> quite a bit of controversy surrounding it, especially with
> regards to education as it has proven to give very detailed

answers, can write functioning code etc. (ID192)

Identifying use case — Now or in the future

Most novelty-oriented participants were motivated by a desire to understand ChatGPT as a technological phenomenon. The participants explained how they would explore ChatGPT (83) by asking a wide range of questions or requesting that it perform various tasks. Such explorations were often reported to assess ChatGPT's capabilities and identify how they could use ChatGPT in a meaningful way. The participant quoted below, for instance, indicated how exploration may lead to the realization that ChatGPT can be used as a study tool:

> At first, it was just a fun experiment, but then I realized it was a
> handy tool to help me study. Its ability to simplify complex
> concepts and present them in an accessible and succinct way is
> unmatched. (ID161)

Others reported a more future-oriented motivation for their ChatGPT use (23). These participants described their eagerness to follow its development and see what it might be capable of in the future. Several anticipated that ChatGPT will be significant in the future:

> I love the idea of AI technology and am fascinated by its
> potential. Learning to utilize such a system in the early days is
> going to be very useful as it develops. (ID151)

Some reported a need to understand the broader implications of this technology — for example, a teacher attempting to determine whether students might use it to cheat in their exams or a knowledge worker exploring what ChatGPT might mean for their profession (*e.g.*, risk of being replaced). Such reflections demonstrate users' expected significance of ChatGPT and future conversational AI:

> I want to figure out how this technology will affect the job
> market and my own future job prospects. I would like to learn
> as much as I can to stay ahead of the curve and possibly protect
> myself from being replaced by AI. (ID164)

Motivation 3: Fun and amusement

A significant proportion of the participants reported using ChatGPT for entertainment (21 percent, 41). Most (38) of these found it fun to interact with ChatGPT or to be entertained by ChatGPT's responses. This was often reported regarding explorations of its capabilities:

> I just use ChatGPT for fun. It entertains me to see a capable AI
> that can hold conversations or otherwise respond to requests.
> It's really impressive! (ID116)

A few participants (6) reported using ChatGPT for fun and amusement in social contexts. They described how they would play with ChatGPT together with others or enjoy demonstrating ChatGPT's responses to family or friends. In this sense, interaction with ChatGPT was described more as a social or collaborative activity:

> I use it essentially for entertainment, by asking it to create
> interesting/amusing pieces of text, for example, poems or short
> stories, which I can read myself and share with friends. (ID99)

Motivation 4: Creative work

About 18 percent (36) of the participants reported using ChatGPT to support the creative process. For some (27), this was related to creative writing, such as blogging, marketing activities, creating scripts for YouTube videos or TV shows, and writing books, short stories, song lyrics, or poetry. Here, ChatGPT appeared to aid their creative writing process by providing textual examples upon which they could build or from which they might draw inspiration:

> To create creative prompts for writing dialogue. For example,
> describing scenes or actions of my characters. To inspire me.
> (ID66)

Related to this, some participant reports indicated that they appreciated ChatGPT's ability to facilitate new ideas (17). These participants described using ChatGPT to generate ideas for blog posts, short stories, TV shows, vows, or gifts. As the quote below illustrates, the use of ChatGPT in this sense may be perceived as yielding important benefits, such as overcoming writer's block:

> I was working on a project for work and had writer's block. I
> could not think of what to write and used ChatGPT to foster
> some ideas. To help me with my work. (ID144)

Motivation 5: Learning and development

The use of ChatGPT for learning in education was reported as a motivation for 17 percent (34) of the participants. Several (16) reported having used ChatGPT for its ability to simplify complex concepts and explain difficult topics in an easy-to-understand manner:

> I use it to assist in understanding my course and to help with
> homework questions. I also use it to perform tasks and form
> simplified versions of Google searches to help me understand
> things better. The main reason is to help me progress when
> things that I get taught to me aren't so clear. It also helps me
> save time. (ID33)

Some participants (19) reported that ChatGPT had the potential to teach them new skills, such as learning a new language or making them better equipped to handle specific situations, such as assessments in school or job interviews:

> My main reason for using ChatGPT is to help me prepare better
> for upcoming job interviews and tips on how to behave during
> such interviews. (ID208)

A small number of participants reported other ways in which ChatGPT could be useful for learning and development, such as school-related questions or help with assignments by providing text or ideas similar to those motivated by productivity:

> I have used ChatGPT to assist me with my university studies—
> by generating a few sentences on a topic it has helped me to get
> my thoughts going and structure some of my work better.
> (ID91)

One explained using ChatGPT to avoid having to "bother" a person. This demonstrates how anonymity and machine nature might be seen as a benefit:

> I use ChatGPT for various things, so as to avoid having to
> bother another person. I ask questions that I'm curious about,
> for concise explanations, to solve problems. (ID78).

Another appreciated ChatGPT's ability to explain topics and noted how it is a more "personal device" than, for example, Google:

> I have also used it to help explain complex matters to me when
> I cannot get the answers I need on Google [...] I feel it is a more
> personal device that helps me. (ID181)

Finally, a teacher described using ChatGPT to model proper grammar to her students, as described below:

> I have used it as part of my English lessons at school. I use it to
> model correct use of grammar in a context when teaching my
> primary school pupils. (ID109)

Motivation 6: Social interaction and support

The use of ChatGPT to support various social needs was reported by 9 percent (18) of the participants. Of these, most (12) reported using ChatGPT because they enjoy conversing for the sake of the interaction experience, as it resembles social interaction with other humans. They reported appreciating ChatGPT's human-like capabilities:

> Because it is like having a conversation with another person
> and I enjoy the dialogue and conversations you can have.
> (ID22)

A few reported using ChatGPT to seek advice regarding personal matters. One, for example, described using ChatGPT to formulate messages to solve a conflict:

> I have used it to draft [...] texts to friends around difficult
> conflicts. (ID26)

Interestingly, some participants (8) reported being motivated by a need for mental health support. One participant, for example, reported having turned to ChatGPT when they felt down. Another reported using ChatGPT to "clear their head." As the quote below illustrates, ChatGPT may also alleviate feelings of loneliness:

> The main reason I use ChatGPT is to feel less lonely. talking to
> it somewhat simulates a real conversation. (ID60)

Related to this, a few participants (4) explained how they enjoyed the anonymity aspect of ChatGPT. They indicated that ChatGPT allows them to pose questions that may be challenging in human-human interaction, either due to embarrassment or for fear of being a burden:

> To get answers to questions that I do not want to discuss with
> humans. It allows me to speak in confidentiality and explore
> things that would be difficult with humans. It is a unique and
> useful service and I find it engaging and useful and saves
> embarrassment and difficult conversations. (ID157)

Motivation 7: Other motivations in daily life

In addition to the above themes, some participants reported being motivated to use ChatGPT for other activities or goals in their daily life (10), for example, by having ChatGPT generate a shopping list, make a diet plan, or provide dinner suggestions or recipes. As the participant below explained, ChatGPT can provide structure and efficiency in their daily life:

> I use ChatGPT to help with things in my life, like planning a trip to London and places to visit while I am there. I also use it for meal planning and ideas of what to make to help with organization. It is a very useful tool to help plan things out. It is mainly to save time and give me ideas. (ID74)

A few (5) mentioned wanting to use ChatGPT to make money or to promote personal growth by learning new skills, as the following quote exemplifies:

> To make money and to help me translate and learn new languages which will also make me money as well as grow me as a person. (ID167)

5.3. Exploration of group differences in motivations

Previous research has suggested that participant differences can impact how users experience conversational AI (*e.g.*, Følstad and Brandtzaeg, 2020). To guide future research, we conducted ad-hoc analyses of group differences by way of simple Chi square tests. For these, we split participants into groups for gender (male/female), age (high/low), education (high/low), and frequency of ChatGPT use (high/low). For age and frequency of ChatGPT use, the sample was split in two parts of as similar sizes as possible (age: up to 33 years vs. 34 years and older; frequency of ChatGPT use: several times a month or less vs. weekly or more).

No differences between groups in terms of gender and education

No differences between the gender and education groups were observed for any of the motivation categories; productivity (gender: $\chi^2 = .77$, $\rho = .38$; education: $\chi^2 = 1.65$, $\rho = .20$), novelty (gender: $\chi^2 = .23$, $\rho = .64$; education: $\chi^2 = 2.64$, $\rho = .10$), entertainment (gender: $\chi^2 = .77$, $\rho = .38$; education: $\chi^2 = .09$, $\rho = .77$), creativity (gender: $\chi^2 = .01$, $\rho = .93$; education: $\chi^2 = .09$, $\rho = .77$), learning and development (gender: $\chi^2 = .04$, $\rho = .84$; education: $\chi^2 = .02$, $\rho = .88$), or social interaction and support (gender: $\chi^2 = 1.25$, $\rho = .26$; education: $\chi^2 = 2.06$, $\rho = .15$).

Differences between age groups

Substantial differences between age groups were observed for several of the motivation categories. For younger participants, productivity ($\chi^2 = 4.92$; $\rho = .03$) and social interaction and support ($\chi^2 = 4.85$; $\rho = .03$) were more prevalently mentioned motivations. For older participants, novelty ($\chi^2 = 3.64$; $\rho = .06$) and creativity ($\chi^2 = 5.24$; $\rho = .02$) were more prevalent — though the difference concerning novelty only approached significance. For the two remaining motivation categories, no substantial differences were observed, that is, for entertainment ($\chi^2 = .07$; $\rho = .79$), and learning and development ($\chi^2 = 1.78$; $\rho = .18$).

6. Discussion and conclusion

6.1. Why people use generative conversational AI

Our analysis of user reports on ChatGPT demonstrates that key motivations for using a generative conversational AI include efficiency at work, enhancing learning and creativity, supporting communication between friends, offering social support to alleviate the burden of decision-making, and helping with routine tasks. ChatGPT is further perceived as having the potential to simplify and boost the effectiveness of online information retrieval and content generation, with far-reaching impacts on fields that include knowledge work, creative work, education, and social interactions. The use of ChatGPT is not only experienced as rewarding; not using it may be anticipated as a cost.

We will address the key motivations of generative conversational AI usage in light of the U&G literature, existing research on conversational technologies, and the broader societal impact of services such as ChatGPT.

A need for efficiency, increased understanding, and outsourcing knowledge work

Our study demonstrates how people use generative conversational AI to support knowledge work by enabling efficient yet elaborate information retrieval, assisting in writing, and supporting software development.

Efficient access to information is an established motivation in U&G literature (Sundar and Limperos, 2013) and studies of chatbot use (Brandtzaeg and Følstad, 2017; Cheng and Jiang, 2020b). Similarly, Baek and Kim (2023) also identified information-seeking and task efficiency as relevant for usage intentions. As our participants noted, generative conversational AI uniquely offers clear answers to complex questions, eliminating the need for intricate search queries or sifting through multiple sources.

Information overload, where individuals feel overwhelmed by the sheer quantity and complexity of available information, is a growing concern in our digital age, where users can access vast data and constantly need to make choices (Eppler and Mengis, 2004). Our study indicates that users value the ability of generative conversational AI to help reduce information overload, summarize information, and eliminate choices. The ability of this technology to explain and simplify may induce a sense of control in the user and reduce feelings of being overwhelmed by information. It is also noteworthy that the motivation for efficiency appears sufficiently strong for users to—at least in part—disregard notifications by the service provider that the studied generative conversational AI was currently intended for experimental usage. Disregarding the limitations of generative conversational AI may contribute to the proliferation of online disinformation — a concern strongly voiced in media debates (Brandtzaeg, *et al.*, 2023).

Some of our participants also reported using ChatGPT to support software development. Overall, our study suggests that generative conversational AI is perceived as capable of performing cognitive tasks that knowledge workers have previously assumed to be challenging to automate (*cf.*, Frey and Osborne, 2017). This finding suggests that users may perceive a need for tools to support them in performing routine work or to enhance the quality of such work.

Novelty, a key driver

Our results indicate that a substantial proportion of users may be motivated by the novelty of generative conversational AI, *e.g.*, due to interest in technology or social hype. This is in line with existing U&G studies reporting novelty as a key driver for media use (Scherr and Wang, 2021). Previous research on chatbots and voice assistants has also identified curiosity (Brandtzaeg and Følstad, 2017), interest in technology (Choi and Drumwright, 2021; Ta-Johnson, *et al.*, 2022), and conformity (Choi and Drumwright, 2021) as strong drivers.

The participants also reported testing and exploring ChatGPT, often to understand its capabilities and identify ways the technology could support them today or in the future. This finding indicates that the capabilities of generative conversational AI are poorly defined and, in part, left to users to explore. A

similar observation was made for general-purpose voice assistants such as Alexa and Siri (Luger and Sellen, 2016).

We find it interesting how the users consider ChatGPT, as a representative of generative conversational AI, to be a powerful tool for which it is important to invest the time needed to understand and master. Based on our results, we would argue that in contrast with traditional chatbots or voice assistants whose conversational capabilities may fall below users' expectations (Luger and Sellen, 2016), the generation of conversational technologies to which ChatGPT belongs demonstrates its value across a wide range of use cases or various domains and appears to surpass users' expectations.

Enhance creativity — A tool for content creators?

Our results demonstrated that people may use generative conversational AI to facilitate creativity. U&G studies have identified creativity as a motivation for social media usage (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016). Although previous studies on Replika have demonstrated some creative usage of AI for companionship (Skjuve, *et al.*, 2022), to our knowledge, creativity has not been discussed as an important motivation in the previous user research on conversational technology.

As demonstrated in our study, generative conversational AI may promote creativity by enabling idea generation and creative content creation, thus reducing the investments and costs required. Sternberg (2006) stated that only a few can engage in creative work due to the effort and risk involved. By lowering entry barriers, generative conversational AI may encourage more people to pursue creative content creation. At the same time, it should be noted that such support will likely shape creative work, which — in turn — may make it more challenging for the individual content provider to stand out.

Our findings suggests that users may apply generative conversational AI for fun and social interaction. The use of technology for such purposes is well recognized in the U&G studies (Sundar and Limperos, 2013) and in previous literature on conversational technologies, such as chatbots (Brandtzaeg and Følstad, 2017).

In our study, the entertainment aspect was found in relation to the exploration of ChatGPT. This was not an unexpected finding; neither was the fact that people use it to satisfy social needs. Multiple studies have demonstrated how conversational technologies — even task-oriented solutions, such as Alexa — are adopted for entertainment or social interaction (Gao, *et al.*, 2018). Hence, our findings align with findings already reported in the literature that suggest that users are motivated to seek companionship in human-like technology, regardless of its intended purpose, particularly when the technology offers a sense of anonymity and availability.

More interestingly, several participants reported using ChatGPT to support their daily activities and even dictate human–human interaction by suggesting how they might formulate personal messages. This demonstrates the wide scope of uses and gratifications that generative conversational AI enables.

The wide specter of potential gratifications also suggests that generative conversational AI such as ChatGPT may take on different meanings of roles for different users. This flexibility in relevant uses and gratifications is reflected in our findings from the *ad hoc* analyses of group differences. Here, different age groups were found to be associated more strongly with different motivations — younger participants with productivity and social interaction and support, older participants with novelty and creativity. Such group differences suggest future group differences in how generative AI will be used, potentially determined by factors related to users' life stages.

6.2. Implications for practice — What generative conversational AI means for the individual and society

Our results indicate that users are willing to outsource or delegate numerous cognitive and creative tasks to generative conversational AI, even to support their human-to-human communication when they deem the AI sufficiently competent. ChatGPT is not only a key representative of this new and groundbreaking technology, but it also aligns with a futuristic vision of truly intelligent computer systems [3].

While the availability of generative conversational AI facilitates several new opportunities, it also raises concerns. Sundar (2020), for example, argued that "AI is a decision aid, not the decision-maker, yet it plays a transformational role in augmenting human ability for decision-making" [4]. The ability of generative conversational AI to offer vital information and generate responses to almost all kinds of questions and tasks imbues it with immense power to influence how the user sees, experiences, and interacts with the world.

For example, our study demonstrates that generative conversational AI offers users significant productivity and learning benefits, potentially outweighing the risks of misinformation.

Although using this technology for learning and development or productivity is associated with several risks, we currently do not know to what extent the users verify the output of such models. Over time, society may see overreliance on machine agency in general (*e.g.*, Sundar, 2020) and overconfidence in the output of generative conversational AI. If solutions such as ChatGPT induce users to become overly dependent on or trusting in their output, this may result in diminished quality, misinformation, biases, and misuse. This may be particularly true if generative conversational AI lacks domain-specific knowledge and usable and transparent verification mechanisms, leading to unintended consequences of biased or misinformed model outputs (Ferrara, 2023). As of now, users require relevant skills and knowledge to understand when ChatGPT and similar tools present information or suggestions that are erroneous or biased.

Moreover, our findings indicate that generative conversational AI is perceived as having the potential to be a personal, highly knowledgeable teacher or coworker who is always willing to work and collaborate. Given that the output is trustworthy and non-biased, conversational AI may significantly and positively impact our lives. As Sundar (2020) noted, it is necessary to leverage human–AI relationship strengths and mitigate weaknesses to maximize the gains and minimize the risks.

6.3. Limitations and future research areas

Our study has several limitations and points towards important future research.

First, our study provides early insights into user motivations amongst early adopters. We recommend future research for more established use patterns and endorse longitudinal studies for evolving motivations. Second, our study has a limited sample from a narrow geographical region (*i.e.*, U.K., Ireland, and U.S.). Future research should expand to incorporate other geographical and cultural contexts, preferably with a larger sample.

Finally, our study examined why people use generative conversational AI based on their experiences with ChatGPT but did not examine users' perceived social implications of using this service or generative conversational AI in general. Future research should explore this technology's perceived positive and negative effects. Furthermore, as our analyses of group differences indicates potential variation in uses and gratifications due to participant age, life stage related factors of relevance to uses and gratifications of generative conversational AI may be well worth exploring. 🅕🅜

About the authors

Marita Skjuve is a human-computer interaction researcher at SINTEF. She has been conducting research on chatbots for the last six years, with particular interest in relationship development between humans and chatbots.
Direct comments to: marita [dot] skjuve [at] sintef [dot] no

Petter Bae Brandtzaeg is a chief scientist at SINTEF and a professor at the Department of Media and

Communication at the University of Oslo. His research interests include user experiences and social implications of social media, chatbots, and conversational AI.
E-mail:petterbb [at] uio [dot] no

Asbjørn Følstad is a chief scientist at SINTEF. His research expertise encompasses human-computer interaction, focusing on user experience and building trust in emerging digital services, such as chatbots and conversational AI.
E-mail: Asbjorn [dot] Folstad [at] sintef [dot] no

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Authors' note

ChatGPT was employed in this article to summarize and rephrase some parts of the document. The ChatGPT output was manually edited and reviewed by the authors.

Notes

1. https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt/.

2. Palan and Schitter, 2018, p. 23.

3. https://www.wired.com/insights/2015/01/the-evolution-of-artificial-intelligence/.

4. Sundar, 2020, p. 83.

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Editorial history