

How People Are Really Using Gen AI in 2025

Marc Zao-Sanders | Harvard Business Review | April 9, 2025

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Key Finding: Therapy/Companionship is the #1 Use Case

This annual analysis draws on thousands of Reddit posts and community discussions to identify how people are actually using generative AI. The 2025 edition finds that Therapy and Companionship has risen to the top use-case category — up from #2 in 2024.

Direct quote from the article:

"Therapy and Companionship is now the #1 use case. This use case refers to two distinct but related use cases. Therapy involves structured support and guidance to process psychological challenges, while companionship encompasses ongoing social and emotional connection, sometimes with a romantic dimension. I grouped these together last year and this year because both fulfill a fundamental human need for emotional connection and support."

On Accessibility and Why Users Prefer AI Therapy:

The article highlights three structural advantages driving adoption of AI-based therapy: availability (24/7 access), cost (often free), and absence of social judgment.

"Many posters talked about how therapy with an AI model was helping them process grief or trauma. Three advantages to AI-based therapy came across clearly: It's available 24/7, it's relatively inexpensive (even free to use in some cases), and it comes without the prospect of judgment from another human being."

Representative User Testimony:

"Where I'm from, in South Africa, mental healthcare barely exists; there's a psychologist for 1 in every 100,000 people and a psychiatrist for 1 in every 300,000 people. Large language models are accessible to everyone, and they can help."

Broader Pattern — AI and Human Emotional Needs:

"Most experts expected that AI would prove itself first and best in technical areas. While it's doing plenty there, this research suggests that AI may help us as much

or more with our innately human whims and desires."

Note: This document is a structured excerpt from the Harvard Business Review article for research annotation purposes. Full article accessible at the URL above (subscription may be required).