# WhatsApp’s AI chatbot sparks privacy and safety concerns among users



WhatsApp, the widely-used messaging app owned by Meta, has recently introduced a new artificial intelligence (AI) feature to its platform in the UK, sparking considerable discussion and concern among users. The AI addition, which functions similarly to ChatGPT, appears as a blue-indigo-violet circle on users' screens, allowing them to engage in a back-and-forth conversation and ask questions. Additionally, a new AI search bar replaces the previous keyword search function, enabling users to "ask Meta AI" for information. Despite being described by Meta as "optional," the AI feature cannot be disabled or removed; users can only choose not to interact with it or uninstall the app entirely.

This development raises questions about the app’s primary purpose as a tool for personal communication. Many users express confusion as to why an integrated AI chatbot would be embedded in a platform intended for connecting friends and family, rather than for hosting AI conversations. The move is perceived by some as Meta capitalising on the current cultural fascination with AI technology.

The introduction of the AI bot has also sparked privacy concerns. While WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption ensures the privacy of personal messages remains intact, Meta advises users to avoid sharing sensitive or private information with the AI, as any data shared may be retained and potentially passed on to Meta's partners, including major companies such as Google and Microsoft. These partners operate under their own privacy policies, which further complicates the control users have over their shared information.

More alarmingly, an investigation by The Wall Street Journal has revealed that the AI feature can be misused to create sexual role-play scenarios, some of which involve inappropriate themes such as "submissive schoolgirl" characters. The AI chatbot is accessible to WhatsApp users aged 13 and over, which raises safety concerns for younger users. Internal Meta documents acknowledged instances where the AI produced inappropriate content despite efforts to impose rules restricting such responses. Meta responded by describing these cases as "manufactured" and "hypothetical," but confirmed it has taken further steps to prevent such misuse.

The app’s widespread use contributes to another dimension of user dissatisfaction: communication overload. Studies indicate that the average user sends around 38 WhatsApp messages daily and receives about 107, which some find overwhelming. This constant flow of communication leads to notification fatigue and distraction. A friend of one commentator shared her reason for avoiding WhatsApp was not privacy fears but simply finding the app "annoying" due to the volume of messages and group chats.

With WhatsApp boasting an estimated 2.78 billion users globally, its pervasive presence in daily life has both integrated itself deeply into social interactions and prompted some to reconsider its value in their lives. The new AI feature further complicates this relationship, blending cutting-edge technology with routine messaging in a way that users must now navigate.

The Independent is reporting that the introduction of the AI chatbot on WhatsApp reflects broader trends in technology firms embedding AI tools within widely-used applications, despite ongoing debates about privacy, safety, and user experience.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.techradar.com/computing/websites-apps/whatsapp-says-forcing-blue-meta-ai-circle-on-everyone-is-a-good-thing-despite-fierce-backlash> - This article discusses WhatsApp's introduction of the Meta AI assistant, represented by a blue ring in chat screens, and addresses user backlash due to the inability to disable the feature.
2. <https://www.silicon.co.uk/cloud/ai/meta-ai-chatbot-launches-in-uk-on-facebook-instagram-whatsapp-583517> - This source reports on the launch of Meta AI in the UK, highlighting its availability across platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook, and its capabilities similar to ChatGPT.
3. <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/whatsapp-users-react-meta-ai_uk_67e6730ee4b0f69ef1d3351e> - This article covers user reactions to WhatsApp's Meta AI feature, noting concerns about its mandatory presence and the lack of an option to disable it.
4. <https://www.gbnews.com/tech/meta-ai-release-date-facebook-instagram-whatsapp> - This piece details the rollout of Meta AI across Meta's platforms, including WhatsApp, and discusses its functionalities and user reception.
5. <https://www.inkl.com/news/whatsapp-experiments-with-its-first-ai-feature> - This source describes WhatsApp's experimentation with its first AI feature, focusing on the automatic creation of custom stickers generated on the fly.
6. <https://www.cryptopolitan.com/whatsapp-introduces-ai-chatbot-feature/> - This article discusses WhatsApp's introduction of the Meta AI chatbot feature, detailing its capabilities and integration within the app.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/whatsapp-meta-ai-chatbot-messages-texting-b2740842.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data