

Finding love: Would you let AI help you make the first move?

February 15 2024, by Ryan Macasero, The Mercury News



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

For better or worse, artificial intelligence is permeating our lives. It can edit student term papers, help playwrights craft dramas and assist doctors in treating patients.

But could it help you find love—or maybe just a date—on Valentine's Day?

For Volar start-up co-founder Ben Chiang, AI may not be the end-all solution to escaping perpetual singleness, but it can assist in overcoming the often awkward hurdle of initiating conversations with strangers on matchmaking apps.

Chiang, a former Snap and Uber executive, said he came up with the concept for Volar, which is headquartered in Venice, Calif., but has a team in Mountain View, in response to his [personal experience](#) on other dating applications.

"Finding photos is fast and easy," Chiang said. "The hard part was constantly reaching out. And often, not getting a response."

Volar, "to fly" in Spanish, is among the latest apps on the market that incorporate AI technology. Even apps that don't use AI can be incredibly useful for those looking for love in difficult dating scenes like the Bay Area.

But for Volar, which was launched in December, AI only does half of the job. And that's by design.

Here's how it works: users answer a series of questions, which takes five to 10 minutes, to train its "AI assistant." Following that, users upload photos, and the app provides three matches daily for each user, along with an AI-generated conversation based on the user's questionnaire.

The other half of the job still belongs to the humans.

"Every day, you can browse through a completely unique simulated conversation between your AI and the other person's AI," Chiang said. "

This allows you to determine if there's any chemistry or shared interests. You can either take over from the AI, attempt to build a human connection from the AI, or simply ignore it if you don't feel it's a good fit."

While even the widely popular Bumble and Tinder have integrated AI features into their applications, Chiang said he wanted to make sure Volar treats users' privacy with care. He also wants it to maintain transparency so that users always know when they are engaging with AI-generated content, which might not always be clear on other applications.

"In our case, we're explicit. The font is different, and everything after that is different. Dating still requires human connection," Chiang said. "I want to be very clear; AI helps you get started, but it's human afterward, and there's no AI after that."

And sometimes, even when the AI assistant gets it wrong—as AI applications often do—that in itself can be a great organic conversation starter,

"Immediately, it's a point of connection. Most people continue conversation easily," Chiang said.

The Bay Area is currently Volar's third-largest market, following Austin, Texas, where the app first launched, and New York, Chiang said. The region registers thousands of new users weekly and stands out as one of the fastest-growing areas since the app expanded nationwide and into Canada.

But just how likely is it that AI can help single people develop long-lasting love?

Silicon Valley-based dating coach Julia Malakiman said that Volar's AI technology would "be a good way for people to overcome that first hurdle in dating" but she called it a "band-aid fix."

"I personally see long-term problems with such technology," Malakiman said. "The issue is we're trying to do human things like find connection and intimacy through the means of AI, which is not going to work."

"While AI is great for solving problems in current society, for dating, it requires interpersonal and [communication skills](#) like honesty and open communication," she said.

Avigail Lev, a [clinical psychologist](#) at the Bay Area Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Center, said that as far as dating profiles go, AI could be "extremely effective in giving people questionnaires, taking specific psychological data related to relationships, and matching people based on psychological and emotional compatibility."

But she remains skeptical about using AI technology as a conversation starter.

"Relying on AI to initiate conversations might not be the most effective long-term strategy in the context of dating," Lev said. "This is because, even if the initial conversation goes well, it doesn't necessarily lead to genuine compatibility. The person isn't being their authentic self, which can result in inauthentic interactions."

Chiang is aware there are doubters surrounding the use of AI in starting conversations that lead to love, but he insists that at the end of the day, developing a romantic connection is still the job of a human.

"The way that it was built, you still need to build a human connection," Chiang said. "You can miss people you might have a connection with [by

swiping based on photos]. I'm very much in the camp of humans needing to build a connection."

2024 MediaNews Group, Inc. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Finding love: Would you let AI help you make the first move? (2024, February 15) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2024-02-ai.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.