Sometimes, computer programs seem too human for their own good

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DIGITAL assistants such as Siri and Cortana are increasingly common on phones and computers. Most are designed to give their users the impression that a humanlike intelligence lies behind the program's friendly voice. It does not, of course. But dozens of experiments over the years have shown that people readily build strong bonds with computerised helpers which are endowed with anthropomorphic features, whether visual or vocal.

Developing an emotional relationship with a piece of software can, however, cut both ways. As a study published in *Psychological Science* by Park Daeun, of Chungbuk National University in South Korea, and her colleagues, shows, one emotion sometimes involved in machine-human interaction is embarrassment.