

Japan firm sells human pillow cellphone holder

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What's shaped like your friend and even sounds like your friend, but isn't actually your friend? Why, a human-shaped pillow with a slot in its head for a cellphone, of course.

One Japanese venture is looking to solve that problem of feeling distant when speaking on the telephone by offering cushions that look a little like small people, with a skin-like texture, that can hold your mobile device.

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Users put their phone inside the Hugvie when making call, and then embrace it, in what one researcher dubbed "cushion-style communication media".

Engineers at the Advanced Telecommunications Research Institute International (ATR) said they worked on the principle that people feel closer to whomever they are speaking when two or more senses are engaged, such as hearing and touch.

"Hugvie is a simple device that uses voice and tactile senses. It creates a strong sense that the user is hugging the other person, a feeling that cannot be attained via mobile phones," ATR and its collaborators Kyoto Nishikawa and industrial materials maker Toyobo said.

And it actually is rooted in science: research has shown that physical contact with a simple, inanimate object decreased levels of cortisol, the hormone associated with stress.

The Hugvie—a portmanteau of "hug" and the French word for "life"—measures 80 centimetres by 55 centimetres (31 inches by 21

inches), and will sell for 10,000 yen (\$80) in Japan when it goes on sale in September.

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