Machine Talk: How Conversational Interfaces Promote Brand Intimacy and Influence Consumer Choice

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Abstract

This work examines the effects of conversational interfaces on consumers' brand perceptions and purchase decisions. We introduce a conceptual model of technology-mediated communication that builds on insights from prior work on human-to-human conversations and mind perception, and that incorporates both structural aspects of conversations (turn-taking and system autonomy) and design features of the interface (the extent of linguistic formality and anthropomorphic appearance), to advance our understanding of how conversational interfaces transform consumer-firm interactions. Based on a series of five studies conducted in the field and the lab, we show that consumers perceive conversational interfaces as substantially more human-like than comparable non-conversational interfaces, and that this greater perception of human-like characteristics results in more intimate consumer-firm relationships, leads to higher prices paid for target products, and renders consumers more likely to accept recommended options.

Keywords: *Chatbots; Anthropomorphism; Personalization*

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media