

Wow, that's great! The effect of phatic cues in chatbot conversations.

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Abstract

Firms increasingly use chatbots along the customer journey. Despite the importance of language for these conversational systems, a systematic analysis of the effects of language are missing. The present study aims to close this gap. Drawing from communications research and the fundamental functions of language, we examine how the phatic function of language - also known as the social function - affects consumers' perceptions of chatbot conversations and interactions. We test this effect in an online experiment where participants had to chat with a dating bot that used either functional language or humanized language (i.e. with phatic cues like "aha", "hm"). Results indicate that consumers interact longer and write more with a humanized chatbot using phatic cues than a more functional bot. However, results also show that the phatic language increases consumers' perceived sensitivity of content and consequently their concerns for presenting themselves in a good light.

Keywords: *chatbot; language; social*

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