

Two Peas in a Pod: Customers Perceived Trait Transference between Anthropomorphized Artificial Agents and Employees in Service Teams

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Abstract

Teaming up employees with artificial agents (AA) is becoming prevalent in creative service contexts. Yet, relatively little attention has been directed to how customers perceive such service teams, especially when the AA is anthropomorphized. Drawing on literatures of anthropomorphism and group stereotype, we investigate customer perception of AA and evaluation of creative service outcomes from an AA-employee team. The findings of a field experiment and three laboratory experiments show that, when AA is anthropomorphized (vs. nonanthropomorphized) in a service team with a creative employee, customers perceive the AA and its service outcome as more creative. The effect of anthropomorphism on customer perception is mediated by higher perceived entitativity of the team, which facilitates trait transference between the employee and AA. Nevertheless, when the employee teammate is not creative, customer perception relies less on heuristic trait transference, and therefore the effect of anthropomorphism on customer perception of AA's creativity is eliminated.

Keywords: *anthropomorphism; trait transference; artificial agent*

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