Call Me Robot: The Effect of Automation Name on Consumers' Evaluation of Service Failure

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Abstract

Businesses all over the world are investing in automation to increase efficiency and minimize costs. However, in a future not far away, made even closer by the Covid-19 global pandemic, consumers will have to interact only with machines. How will consumers react then to automation in service contexts? While previous research mostly focuses on consumers' reactions to robots rather than humans, we focus on the comparison between robots and automated machines. We propose that people attribute different levels of agency to automation depending on how automation technologies are named (robot vs. automated machine). In turn, the perceived level of agency influences how consumers respond to the technology during a service failure. Consumers are more likely to be indulgent toward a robot than an automated machine because they attribute more agency to the robot. We tested our hypothesis in three studies. The paper contributes to our understanding of human-computer interactions, shading light on how consumers respond to robots and automated machines during service failure.

Keywords: *automation; robot; service failure*

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