Algorithmic Delegation in Service Encounters: The Underlying Role of Impression Management Concern

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to alleviate burdens for frontline service employees by improving efficiencies and automating routine tasks and decisions. Yet, little is understood about why and under what conditions service employees might delegate decisions to an AI during social interactions with customers. Across two experiments (N=477; N=1,634) we show that frontline workers are more likely to delegate decisions to an AI when the decision context is public and therefore visible to customers (vs. private), because of heightened impression management concerns. In a third study (N=616), we test customer responses to service encounters in which frontline workers delegate a decision to an AI (vs. human). While our results show that AI delegation has no impact on customer satisfaction, we find that customers perceive outcomes derived by an AI as fairer. The findings advance our understanding of the social antecedents of algorithmic delegation.

Subject Areas: *Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Services, Decision-Making, Decision Support Systems, Service Marketing*

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