Only Human: Voicebot Accent, Perceived Anthropomorphism, and Consumer Acceptance

Mohammadhesam HAJIGHASEMI
ESSEC Business School
Amir Sepehri
ESSEC Business School
Cait Lamberton
University of Pennsylvania, Wharton Business School

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Abstract

People prefer humans over AI, so it is questionable whether voicebots will be accepted as substitutes to human agents. In this paper, we propose that one way to overcome resistance to this substitution is to endow English-speaking voicebots with non-standard English accents. Ten pre-registered experiments suggest that voicebots communicating with non-standard accents are readily anthropomorphized, influencing users' attitudes, resulting in a preference for voicebots over live agents, and heightening perceived service evaluation. Evidence further suggests that this effect emerges because accented voicebots activate awareness of human diversity, which in turn triggers greater anthropomorphization. We also show the limits of these effects: the positive effect of voicebot accent does not hold when the voicebot also includes countervailing dehumanizing attributes, when the wait time for a substituting human agent is lower as opposed to higher, or when users hold a strong unfavorable attitude toward AI.

Keywords: anthropomorphism, voicebots, accent

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