Overcoming the Uncanny Valley: Android vs. Humanoid Robots in Online Hotel Booking

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Abstract

As service robots enter tourism and hospitality, their portrayal in online booking becomes critical. This study examines how consumers respond to highly humanlike robots (androids vs. humanoids) in digital pre-purchase contexts. Across four studies, we find that contrary to the uncanny valley effect, androids are perceived as more likeable and intelligent in digital pre-purchase contexts, boosting booking intention. Likeability has a greater influence in hedonic contexts, while perceived intelligence matters more in utilitarian ones. Yet, when consumers are prompted to imagine close-proximity interactions with service robots, androids yield lower booking intention, which supports the uncanny valley effect. This research reveals that the uncanny valley effect is context-dependent: it is diminished in digital booking environments but reactivated through imagined close-contact scenarios, offering actionable insights for presenting service robots in online hotel platforms.

Track: Tourism Marketing