

A Sense of Touch Can Boost Social Robots' Persuasiveness: Social Robots as a Promotional Tool

Mark Yim

University of Massachusetts Lowell

Ja Kyung Seo

University of Alabama

Hye Jin Yoon

University of Georgia

Cite as:

Yim Mark, Seo Ja Kyung, Yoon Hye Jin (2026), A Sense of Touch Can Boost Social Robots' Persuasiveness: Social Robots as a Promotional Tool. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (133675)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



A Sense of Touch Can Boost Social Robots' Persuasiveness: Social Robots as a Promotional Tool

Abstract

Riding the wave of artificial intelligence (AI), the social robot industry is advancing rapidly by integrating increasingly sophisticated AI capabilities across entertainment, education, and healthcare support. This study examines the potential of social robots as a novel marketing channel, given that they may be perceived as entities endowed with artificial consciousness, thereby enhancing their persuasiveness. In particular, we predict that the sense of touch that enables tangible interactions with consumers makes them perceive social robots' artificial consciousness, and in turn, it strengthens the persuasiveness of robots, resulting in favorable behavioral responses from consumers. However, this touch effect disappears in the context of a zoomorphic robot, where users experience strong empathy toward it. A lab experiment confirms our predictions and reveals the superior effectiveness of touch-based physical interactions with a robot in persuading consumers to act, as well as the boundary condition of the robotic morphology. This study presents new theoretical constructs regarding artificial consciousness and offers fresh insights into the potential of social robots as a novel promotional medium.

Track: Pricing & Promotions