

# Additional Option or Additional Concern? Consumer Prosocial Reactions to the Introduction of Automation Technologies

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## **Abstract**

Firms increasingly automate frontline services using automated agents (AA) and self-service technologies (SST). While prior research emphasizes individualistic consumer preferences, we investigate prosocial reactions to automation – specifically, how consumers infer consequences for frontline employees and evaluate the brand. Across three large-scale secondary data studies ( $N = 30,713$ ), we show that introducing AA (vs. SST) elicits more negative consumer responses due to stronger perceptions of employee job threat. Planned experiments test the causal mechanism and a managerial intervention (framing technology as tool vs. actor). This research enriches the literature on consumer reactions to service automation by reconceptualising service automation as a process, identifying automated social presence as a driver of perceived employee harm, and offers guidance for strategic and communication decisions surrounding frontline automation.

**Track:** Service Marketing & Service Innovation