Executive Summary

Understanding the Influence of Chatbot Human-Likeness on User Satisfaction in Erroneous Customer-Chatbot Interactions
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Increasingly, businesses rely on AI-driven tools like chatbots to facilitate customer communication. However, chatbot services might not always run flawlessly, yet there remains a gap in comprehensive research regarding consumer responses to such errors. We assume that in successful human-chatbot interactions, a high degree of human-likeness is welcomed whereas in flawed situations, the high resemblance to an actual human might prove counterproductive.

In an experimental between-subjects design (N = 232), we manipulated the type of chatbot (robot-like vs. human-like) and the absence vs. presence of an error to investigate the interplay between visual chatbot human-likeness and error occurrence on user satisfaction and subsequent attitudinal and intentional variables. We discover that highly human-like chatbots increase satisfaction in error-free situations, but in error-prone scenarios, less-human-like designed chatbots might be the better choice. We further investigated the ascription of responsibility as a potential explanatory construct. Our observation revealed a tendency among consumers to ascribe more responsibility to the human-like chatbot, which is in line with prior literature on human-computer interaction.

From a managerial perspective, we advise that chatbots should incorporate human cues, while acknowledging limitations. Marketers should prioritize adaptability, user expectation management, and a user-centric approach to enhance the overall effectiveness and user satisfaction with chatbot-based customer service. Future studies should consider different errors, contexts, and explanatory variables to deepen the understanding in this area of research.