

Study Finds Customer Preference for Robots or Humans Depends on Situation

Although many of us are still skeptical of chatbots, algorithms, and robots, the AI-agents actually do well with customers. Sometimes even better than humans.

AALBORG, DENMARK, October 2, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- When we shop online, a chatbot answers our questions. A virtual assistant helps us track a package. And an AI system guides us through a return of our goods.



We have become accustomed to technology being a customer service representative. But is it actually important to us as customers whether a human or a machine is helping us?

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Artificial agents, contrary to what you might expect, have certain advantages in situations where a negative response must be given. This may be the case when an algorithm rejects a loan application”

*Holger Roschk Professor,
Aalborg University Business
School*

[A new international meta-analysis](#) shows that artificial agents are in many cases more positively received than you might think. They are not necessarily perceived as better than flesh-and-blood employees – but the difference between them is often smaller than we might expect.

The study was conducted by four researchers, including [Professor Holger Roschk from Aalborg University Business School](#). Along with Katja Gelbrich, Sandra Miederer and Alina Kerath from Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, he analyzed 327 experimental studies with almost 282,000 participants and published the results in the prestigious Journal of Marketing.

"At a time when AI is being integrated everywhere – from banking to healthcare – it is crucial to know when and how we as humans accept machines. It is often postulated that customers

prefer to talk to a human, and many are skeptical of machines. But when we look at customers' actual behaviour – whether they follow advice, buy something or return – the differences are often small," says Holger Roschk.

-- Context determines effect --

The human element has previously been highlighted when research has discussed whether an artificial agent is good or bad. But according to Holger Roschk, this approach lacks nuance, and there is a big difference in what the different agents are good at. The human element is not always crucial – it depends on the task and the situation.



For example, chatbots perform particularly well in situations that customers may perceive as embarrassing - for example, when buying health-related or intimate products. In these transactions, many people prefer a discreet digital contact to a human.

"We may have overestimated the need for artificial agents to be human-like. This is not always necessary – in fact, it can be an advantage that they appear as distinct machines," says Holger Roschk.

He adds that algorithms work well in situations where, for example, you need to calculate the shortest route or estimate waiting time. They also perform well for recommendations like getting the right clothing sizes on a web shop.

Robots that have a physical presence perform best in tasks where motor skills and practical help are needed – for example, room service in hotels or tasks in a warehouse.

"We also see that artificial agents, contrary to what you might expect, have certain advantages in situations where a negative response must be given.

This may be the case when an algorithm rejects a loan application," says Holger Roschk, adding that this is probably because the machine's "insensitivity" can have a disarming effect.

-- Technology with clear limits --

Holger Roschk emphasizes that artificial agents are not a substitute for humans. Technology has clear limits. In situations where empathy, spontaneity and situational awareness are particularly necessary, it is crucial to have people in the shop and behind the screen.

"We recommend that companies focus on using artificial agents in situations where they can

relieve employees of physically or mentally demanding tasks. It's not about replacing people – it's about using technology where it makes sense," says Holger Roschk.

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