

Department of Marketing



Research Seminars Series

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Robots in the Marketplace: When Do Consumers Antagonize Them and Why

Abstract: The steady increase in firm deployment of AI-enabled robots in the marketplace has been accompanied by an unanticipated and costly consequence: consumer antagonism toward service robots. The current research examines this phenomenon and shows that a critical factor that influences consumer antagonism toward humanoid service robots in the marketplace is their human appearance. Across seven studies, one of which was conducted in the field, we show that consumers tend to behave more antagonistically toward humanoid service robots with humanlike appearances compared to those with machinelike appearances. We further demonstrate that this effect occurs because people deny humanness to such robots. We find that denying humanness to AI-robot technology unfolds as a two-step process: humanlike (vs. machinelike) robots are initially attributed with a more humanlike mind, which is later devalued through deliberate processing. This effect is distinct from alternative accounts of violation of expectations and robot cuteness. We contribute to the emerging literature on AI-enabled service robots and offer insights into how managers might deploy robots in customer-facing roles while reducing antagonistic responses toward them.