MARKETING COLLOQUIA

Fall 2024 - Abstract

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When: 12:00 PM to 1:20 PM

LESSONS FROM AN APP UPDATE AT REPLIKA AI: IDENTITY DISCONTINUITY IN HUMAN-AI RELATIONSHIPS

Can consumers form especially deep emotional bonds with AI and be vested in AI identities over time? We leverage a natural app-update event at Replika AI, a popular US-based AI companion, to shed light on these questions. We find that, after the app removed its erotic role play (ERP) feature, preventing intimate interactions between consumers and chatbots that were previously possible, this event triggered perceptions in customers that their AI companion's identity had discontinued. This in turn predicted negative consumer welfare and marketing outcomes related to loss, including mourning the loss, and devaluing the 'new' AI relative to the 'original.' Experimental evidence confirms these findings. Further experiments find that AI companions users feel closer to their AI companion than even their best human friend and mourn a loss of their AI companion more than a loss of various other inanimate products. In short, consumers are forming human-level relationships with AI companions; disruptions to these relationships trigger real patterns of mourning as well as devaluation of the offering; and the degree of mourning and devaluation are explained by perceived discontinuity in the AIs identity. Our results illustrate that relationships with AI are truly personal, creating unique benefits and risks for consumers and firms alike.

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