

People prefer their intelligent personal assistants to be competent rather than warm

Submitted by: BlueSky Education

Tuesday, 18 May 2021

People are more likely to continuously use intelligent personal assistants (IPA), such as Amazon's Alexa or Apple's Siri, if they are competent rather than warm, according to new research by emlyon business school.

After customers used the smart products with excitement, some of them will not continuously use products, which is a challenge for today's smart products.

The research, conducted by Yeming Gong, Professor of management science and of the Head of Artificial Intelligence and Management Institute at emlyon and his co-authors, investigated the impact of artificial autonomy, such as sensing, thought, and action autonomy, on the perception of IPAs' competence and warmth.

Drawing on the mind perception theory to analyse user's perception of these IPAs, the researchers first conducted a content analysis on 690 user comments on 'Xiaomi classmate', and then surveyed the users familiar with IPAs, including Apple's Siri, Google Assistant, Microsoft's Cortana, Xiaomi's Xiaoai Classmate, Alibaba's Tmall Genie, and Baidu Duer.

They found that the perception of both competence and warmth in virtual assistants were enhanced by artificial autonomy and this had a positive effect on consumer usage, implying that users consider the Amazon Alexa as a personal assistant rather than a fun toy.

However, the research also found that IPAs with a high level of competence were more likely to be used continuously, rather than those that attached more importance on warmth.

Furthermore, the study revealed that individual characteristics of the user such as age, gender, or educational level, did not contribute to enhanced usage of virtual assistance – only humanlike features such competence did.

"Our results suggest that companies operating in the IPA field should attach more importance to the critical role that human-likeness plays in customer's usage intention and artificial autonomy is likely to improve this.

It not only reflects the competence of IPAs to afford great convenience to users by allowing them to perform tasks with hands-free access but also imparts the same feeling of warmth experienced in natural interactions," says Professor Gong

The researchers also found that students were less likely to continue using their virtual personal assistant than those in full-time work because they had more free time than those who work to operate applications, devices, and services in their daily life.

This research was led by the AIM institute at emlyon business school, the first institute that focuses on

understanding the opportunities and implications of AI specifically in management.

The research was published in the International Journal of Information Management.

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