

The human connection: Using technology to create a better customer experience

Executive summary

Attitudes are shifting when it comes to AI, according to Longitude and Verizon research.

Digital experiences are getting more sophisticated as artificial intelligence (AI) delivers more responsive and human-like automated guidance.

Still, the growing prevalence of these interactive technologies that display human characteristics has elicited angst from some consumers, for reasons that include potential privacy issues, poor functionality and personal unease with the idea of human-like bots.

At the same time, use of AI within the digital experience is growing rapidly, leading us to ask:

- How comfortable are consumers with the roles played by humans and machines in their online interaction with brands?
- How do consumers feel about data use?
- Is it possible to have a “human” interaction in an automated experience?

We sought answers to these questions and more in our latest research, which was conducted by Longitude on behalf of Verizon and gathered input from 5,600 people across 16 countries.

Ultimately, we discovered that, as long as human agents remain accessible, consumers are more willing than ever to accept the automated guidance from AI chatbots and other intelligent tools driven by machine learning and natural language processing.

When it comes to the use of AI, building trust and strengthening customer relationships takes finding the right balance between the technological and human elements in interactions, and ensuring transparency in the use of AI and the consumer data it uses to learn.



Machines are winning friends.

Consumers are increasingly at ease with technology-only interactions: 56% of respondents are comfortable with fully automated interactions, and just 16% express discomfort. Almost half of the respondents (47%) have grown more positive about such interactions in the past two years.



A human connection is absolutely vital.

While 78% of respondents consider blended technology-human interactions a better experience than those that are human-only, consumers still want to be able to speak or chat with a human agent if they need to.



Careful use of data is key to building consumer trust.

Consumers are generally forgiving of technology malfunctions in interactions. However, using personal data obtained from third parties could have serious consequences for brands. It's by far the most likely reason for consumers to stop interacting with a company.



Be transparent or lose customers.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) want companies to be honest about using AI-powered bots to guide interactions and 41% of respondents would reduce their involvement with a company if it were not transparent.



Younger consumers say it's possible for a machine to create a “human connection.”

Few consumers today consider a chatbot or other automated interaction to offer a “human connection,” but younger respondents are more likely than older respondents: 48% of those between the ages of 18 and 34 (and 41% overall) say it is entirely possible to have a human connection in a fully automated interaction.

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