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Assertive or submissive? How consumers respond to different dominance patterns in smart voice-based service encounters

Timo Koch  ; Jonas Foehr ;
Lara Riefler ;
Claas Christian Germelmann 

[+ Author & Article Information](#)

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Purpose

Marketing research has demonstrated that consumers tend to attribute human-like roles to smart voice-interaction technologies (SVIT), such as Amazon's Alexa. However, smart service research has largely ignored the effects of such role

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to design more purposeful smart services.

Design/methodology/approach

A series of two online experiments was conducted. In Study 1, a Wizard-of-Oz approach was employed to examine the direct effect of role attribution on service satisfaction and re-use intention. Study 2 then focused on the contextual influence of personal relevance on this effect. Across all studies, consumers engaged in fictional and scripted yet biotic service encounters with SVIT.

Findings

Our analyses provided support for the impact of role attributions on (voice-based) service encounters. In both studies, we found that a service provided by a SVIT that is perceived to be submissive had a positive effect on service satisfaction. Study 2 demonstrated that this effect is robust across contexts. Building upon these findings, future research should examine whether these effects persist when the outcome of the service

encounter is of high stake or if a highly personal context, such as a patient-doctor interaction, yields

patient–doctor interaction, yields different results. In such cases, users may require a professional guiding hand rather than a submissive counterpart.

Originality/value

This work introduces a role-centered perspective on smart voice-based service encounters. It empirically demonstrates that the roles consumers attribute to SVIT significantly impact service satisfaction. By shedding light on the implicit effects of SVIT in service triads (user–SVIT–provider), we explicate how marketers can prime role perceptions to enhance customer experience. The findings offer implications for empathic and customer-oriented voice-based service design that incorporates paternalistic aspects.

Keywords: Role attribution, Smart services, Assertiveness, Submissiveness, Smart voice interaction technology, Context

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