

CAN COMPUTERS PROVIDE EMPATHY?



The **5** Minute
Digital-First Question
Countdown



Transcript

The Answer

Well, without question, humans are better than computers at feeling empathy, since a computer is - well a computer and can't really feel anything. No matter how many times you may compliment Alexa, she can't actually blush. But let's consider this question in the context of experience design and frame it slightly differently. A more relevant question may be: "can computers be designed to deliver empathic experiences?" This is still a challenging question because it requires the computer to detect the emotional state of the customer. Am I anxious? Angry? Disappointed? Excited? Etc. To achieve this, the computer needs to be trained to recognize the different emotional states of the customer, typically through Natural Language Processing, and through other techniques.

For example, bots or virtual assistants that have been trained in a specific domain, tend to be more effective than those only fielding general interactions with customers, basically acting as a screener to confirm the customer's eligibility such as, do they have a customer number, and then directing them to the right support resource.

But bots or virtual assistants, especially those using proactive, conversational AI dedicated to a specific domain can be designed to deliver something more than screening. Let me share two examples.

A good example is from one of our case study companies: Lemonade, the insurance industry disrupter. In an interview with podcast host, Jim Marous, Lemonade's CEO and Cofounder Daniel Schreiber said,

"There are things that bots already do today, and that list of things is growing and growing that they can do cheaper, better, faster and without less empathy than humans, at least not from the experience point of view. "

He goes on to point out how in just a quick Q&A session with claims bot, AI Jim, you press I'm done, and AI Jim tells you:

'Your claim has been approved. The money is in your bank account. Schreiber then notes: Are you begrudging the system for not being more empathic? I don't think so. You're feeling thrilled that the level of service was what you needed in your hour of need.'

And so there you have it. Your 'hour of need'. Because that really is the point isn't it. If you have ever worked a double shift in the service industry, you know humans aren't perfect, we can get annoyed hearing customer after customer repeat the same issue and that bright cheerful demeanor during hour one can descend to something different by hour 8 on the job. But computers never get annoyed, they never get angry with a customer.

No, the better question that companies like Lemonade are answering with their digital-first experience is this:

How can we design digital solutions that provide scalable, empathic experiences, to produce a positive emotional peak?

Did that Lemonade customer who got their claim approved in less than a minute feel empathized with? Maybe but the more important feeling they had was joy from not having to battle with their insurance company to get their claim approved.

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This question: “Can a computer provide empathy?” is a bit like “is the customer always right?” It isn’t the point, our job is not to question customers, it is to serve them, by whatever means fits the situation in that particular moment.

But especially in their hour of need. Empathy can go a long way, but so can delivering the result people are looking for as conveniently and quickly as possible.

Implications

The implications of this are significant. Organizations using digital front-ends with bots may be reluctant to explore them further than as a simple screener, which would be unfortunate. This technology has yet to mature, it gets better as new forms of AI and Machine Learning are introduced, and for many customer segments, is the preferred channel for accomplishing many of their goals.

3 Takeaways

Three takeaways from this digital-first question include:

1. Don’t let the performance of chat bots from the past, skew your assumptions about what they can do today. Depending on the problem to be solved, they could provide a powerful solution to delivering a more scalable, consistent and empathic experience.
2. Avoid the debate on whether humans are better than computers at providing empathy. It isn’t relevant. What is relevant is to determine the design, at your key Moments of Truth for which you will consistently exceed customer expectations, and the optimum way to deliver it - human or otherwise.
3. Recognize that consumers are more demanding of digital interactions that are more personalized and create more convenience than ever before. Put this to your advantage because not paying attention to this is risking letting a competitor define the new table stakes, in your industry.

That’s a wrap! To view other 5-minute countdown videos, visit cxdigital.ai