

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Teaming Up with Anthropomorphized AAs: Transference of Employee Creativity to Artificial Agents in Service Teams

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## Abstract

Creative employees are crucial for firms' performance, particularly in design services. While teaming up employees with artificial agents (AAs) is becoming more common, customers generally hold unfavorable views of the creativity of AAs. Relatively little attention has been paid to improving customer perceptions of AA creativity and service outcomes of teams consisting of an employee and an AA, especially when AAs are anthropomorphized by giving them physical human features. Drawing on literature on anthropomorphism and group stereotyping, this research proposes a trait transference effect from the employee to the AA in design teams. We reasoned that anthropomorphism increases the perceived entitativity of the employee-AA team, facilitating trait transference. Nevertheless, the effect of anthropomorphism on perceived AA creativity and customers' evaluations of the design services is bounded to customer characteristics as well as features of the employee-AA team. We propose that the trait transference effect will attenuate when customers' lay beliefs about group entitativity is undermined, when customers have utilitarian (vs. hedonic) consumption goals, when the temporal stability of the employee-AA team is low, and when the valence of trait creativity is negative (uncreative). This study also explored whether traits can be transferred from AAs to humans. Findings from seven experiments in different design service contexts support our hypotheses. We also conducted an exploratory study on the reversed transference from the AA to the employee. The results showed that regardless of anthropomorphism, the AA's traits (analyticity) cannot be transferred to the employee. This research mainly contributes to three lines of literature. First, we add to the knowledge of human-AA collaborations by introducing the trait transference effect and entitativity as its underlying mechanism. In doing so, we shed light on customer evaluations of employee-AA teams in design services. Second, we enrich the

literature on anthropomorphism. Although anthropomorphism alone is insufficient to enhance AA creativity, we provide initial evidence that people adopt group perceptions to make inferences about anthropomorphized entities and their creativity. Finally, we broaden stereotype literature by identifying lay beliefs about group entitativity and the valence of traits as boundary conditions of the trait transference effect. Our findings have important implications for marketers. We unravel the trait transference effect and shed light on ways to manage employee–AA service teams. Anthropomorphic designs of AAs increase customer acceptance of AAs when they team up with creative employees in design teams. We suggest that marketers increase the entitativity of employee–AA teams to leverage the influence of both anthropomorphism and human employee creativity, encourage trait transference of creativity, and improve evaluations of AA-generated service outcomes.

**Keywords:** anthropomorphism, artificial agents (AAs), creativity, trait transference, entitativity, employee–AA team, design industry