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Effectiveness of virtual reality technologies in digital entrepreneurship: a comparative study of two types of virtual agents

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Abstract

Purpose

The rapid progress of information and communication technologies enables business creators to access a wide variety of tools. These tools facilitate electronic exchanges and interactions with customers and companies. The purpose of this study is to test and compare the effectiveness of two virtual reality technologies, the avatar and anthropomorphic virtual agents, on consumers' psychological states and perceived realism.

Design/methodology/approach

An experimental survey was conducted to measure the potential superiority of the anthropomorphic virtual agent over the avatar and to identify the determining characteristics of the anthropomorphic virtual agent's effectiveness. An experimental website was designed for the purpose of the study. A total of 1,262 internet users participated in the experiment.

Findings

Results confirm the superiority of the anthropomorphic virtual agent over the avatar in affecting consumers' flow state, telepresence experience and perceived realism. These findings can be explained by the humanized characteristics of this type of agent (i.e. verbal and nonverbal language).

Originality/value

The originality of this research lies in the study of different forms of social interactivity. This latter has been little studied and essentially treated with a dichotomous perspective (presence/absence of a virtual agent). New trends in digital marketing challenge entrepreneurs to be proactive and to anticipate customers' behavior on their online stores. That is why, virtual reality technologies, namely, anthropomorphic agents, can be considered as a relevant tool to engage in efficient inbound marketing strategies. Today, the development of intelligent technologies encourages entrepreneurs operating online to design more interactive, realistic and humanized virtual merchant environments that are more adapted to the realities of the new consumption trends and environment.

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Keywords

Virtual reality | Avatar | Digital entrepreneurship | Anthropomorphic virtual agent | Flow state | Perceived realism | Telepresence experience

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