

I, Me and the Bot: Forming a theory of symbolic interactivity with a Chatbot

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Abstract : The rise of artificial intelligence has numerous and far-reaching consequences. In addition to the obvious consequences for entire professions, the increasing interaction with chatbots also has a wide range of social consequences and implications. We are already increasingly used to interacting with digital chatbots, be it in virtual consulting situations, creative development processes or even in building personal or intimate virtual relationships. A media-theoretical classification of these phenomena has so far been difficult, partly because the interactive element in the exchange with artificial intelligence has undeniable similarities to human-to-human communication but is not identical to it. The proposed study, therefore, aims to reformulate the concept of symbolic interaction in the tradition of George Herbert Mead as symbolic interactivity in communication with chatbots. In particular, Mead's socio-psychological considerations will be brought into dialog with the specific conditions of digital media, the special dispositive situation of chatbots and the characteristics of artificial intelligence. One example that illustrates this particular communication situation with chatbots is so-called consensus fiction: In face-to-face communication, we use symbols on the assumption that they will be interpreted in the same or a similar way by the other person. When briefing a chatbot, it quickly becomes clear that this is by no means the case: only the bot's response shows whether the initial request corresponds to the sender's actual intention. This makes it clear that chatbots do not just respond to requests. Rather, they function equally as projection surfaces for their communication partners but also as distillations of generalized social attitudes. The personalities of the chatbot avatars result, on the one hand, from the way we behave towards them and, on the other, from the content we have learned in advance. Similarly, we interpret the response behavior of the chatbots and make it the subject of our own actions with them. In conversation with the virtual chatbot, we enter into a dialog with ourselves but also with the content that the chatbot has previously learned. In our exchanges with chatbots, we, therefore, interpret socially influenced signs and behave towards them in an individual way according to the conditions that the medium deems acceptable. This leads to the emergence of situationally determined digital identities that are in exchange with the real self but are not identical to it: In conversation with digital chatbots, we bring our own impulses, which are brought into permanent negotiation with a generalized social attitude by the chatbot. This also leads to numerous media-ethical follow-up questions. The proposed approach is a continuation of my dissertation on moral decision-making in so-called interactive films. In this dissertation, I attempted to develop a concept of symbolic interactivity based on Mead. Current developments in artificial intelligence are now opening up new areas of application.

Keywords : artificial intelligence, chatbot, media theory, symbolic interactivity

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