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Appendices

Exploratory Qualitative Analysis: Interviews

Appendix 1. ID 1: Male, 30 to 44 years old, Tertiary Education, Employed

Interviewer: Hello! How are you?

Interviewee: Hello! [Personal information]

Interviewer: How is your job proceeding?

Interviewee: [Personal Information]

Interviewer: As to avoid eating up any of your time, I would like to start with the interview. Is this ok for you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I anticipated via WhatsApp, I have organised this interview within the context of my thesis. This meeting is completely voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem relevant or appropriate. For scientific reasons, I will record this interview. The audio tape will not be made public and is kept by myself only. Are you ok with this? Please note that any reference to our conversation will be purely descriptive and anonymised.

Interviewee: Yes, you have my green light.

Interviewer: Great! Let's start! Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: The last time I have required customer service was a few days ago. I contacted a bank because an incoming transaction in my account was rejected. I decided to ask support online via the bank app. At start I was answered by a chatbot which proposed general questions to understand the nature of my enquiry. As I could not solve the issue, I was connected with a human agent, who verified the reason for the transaction blockage. Then, the agent provided a solution, and the matter was solved in the following days.

Interviewer: Could you specify what was the goal of your contact with customer service?

Interviewee: The goal was to solve an issue that was directly generated by the bank. It was not generated by an external partner to the transaction.

Interviewer: Thank you for the clarification. Could you explain how you felt during the process? Were you treated with empathy, was support prompt, was information accurate and useful?

Interviewee: The interaction with the chatbot was very frustrating. I had to answer a bunch of general enquiries. However, I ended up making a mistake and as a result start the process again after a few minutes. On my second attempt, I managed to get into contact with a human agent. Customer service at this point became kind and prompt. The operator was helpful, and the knowledge base was sufficient to identify the issue in a matter of seconds. I perceive the overall experience to be positive.

Interviewer: We can now move to a second set of questions. What is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: I have not had any experience of customer care via social media. I have always contacted customer service via phone or website chats.

Interviewer: Why is that the case?

Interviewee: I perceive customer service in social media as less direct. I believe it is a last resource and therefore I pose customer service issue on traditional contact channels. I would use social media only if I do not receive a response through direct calls and corporate websites. I do not consider social media as a first aid for customer service.

Interviewer: Ok, that is reasonable. I understand you do not have any experience, but I would like to propose you a fictional scenario. Assume you would contact a corporation for customer service via social media. Assume such corporation would respond utilising artificial intelligence. This could take the form of a chatbot or automated replies. How would you perceive the response of AI on social media?

Interviewee: From a company perspective, I understand the use of AI. It is a first filter for customer service, and it provides quick solutions. Instead, I would perceive it as a waste of time if the issue I would report is complex. From a general perspective, AI does not bother me. My priority is always to solve a problem as quickly as possible.

Interviewer: We reached our final question. When would the support of AI be more appropriate and more challenging for your requests on social media?

Interviewee: I think it would be appropriate to solve fast, simple issues. I believe AI is a first aid solution and could be suitable to deliver a precise piece of information on which a brand possesses enough data and standard answers. It is a quick, efficient system. It will be more challenging for complex issues, such as the one I had with my bank. I also think that AI would be more appropriate for tech-oriented brands as their clients would be even happier to interact with AI.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Interviewee: You are welcome! Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any other questions. Could you let me know if [Personal Information]?

Interviewer: [Personal Information].

Interviewee: Ok, have a nice day!

Interviewer: Thank you once again! Bye!

Appendix 2. ID 2: Female, 15 to 29 years old, Tertiary Education, Unemployed

Interviewer: Hello! How are you? How is it going?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal information]

Interviewer: How is your exam session proceeding? Are you going on exchange next year?

Interviewee: [Personal Information]

Interviewer: That's interesting! I hope you [Personal Information]. And how are your parents doing?

Interviewee: [Personal Information]

Interviewer: Ok, sounds like everything is fine. Can we start with the interview?

Interviewee: Sure.

Interviewer: As I suggested in my texts on WhatsApp, I have arranged this virtual meeting as it is part of my second Master thesis. I would like to stress once again that it is completely voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you would like. For scientific reasons, I will write down your words during this interview. The script will not be made public and is kept by myself and other researchers. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes, no problem.

Interviewer: Oh I almost forgot an important piece of information: any reference to our conversation will be descriptive and anonymised. Is this fine by you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Super! The first question is the following. Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: Recently I had to repair a broken backpack. I physically reached out to customer service in a central shop for the brand as the bag's warranty did not yet expire. This was the second instance in which I requested repair for the bag. The agent in the shop assisted me in a kind manner as it immediately started the process to send the bag back to the factory. In addition, it explained all the various solutions when a bag is repaired, including reimbursement oriented to future purchase, repair or substitution with another equivalent model.

Interviewee: Ok, thank you. What was the goal of your contact with customer service?

Interviewer: My objective was to receive a reimbursement.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: Because I was not satisfied with the product as I had to repair it twice in less than a year from the purchase date.

Interviewee: How did you feel during your last aid request to a brand? Could you share if you were treated with empathy, if support was prompt, if information provided was accurate and useful?

Interviewer: Information on the possible solutions were explained in a clear and simple manner. However, the brand was not able to guarantee full reimbursement. From my perspective, this was a considerable drawback. I felt the agent was empathic as I was assured that any solution would have been considered to satisfy my request.

Interviewer: Ok, let's move on to a new topic. What is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: I do not have any experience of customer service on social media. I think contacting a company on social media is the final resource.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you for your clarification. Can I propose a hypothetical scenario?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Imagine you contact a brand via social media to solve an issue on a product or service. Imagine that you would receive a response from artificial intelligence, therefore either an automated response or a chatbot. This is made clear to you on your response. How would you perceive a response of AI on social media when requesting support for a product or service?

Interviewee: I think that AI would not be an issue. I do not have any distinction between AI or a human agent. I only care that the issue for which I am contacting the firm is resolved. Given that I believe social media is a last resource, in such circumstances receiving an answer would be positive.

Interviewer: That is clear. When would the support of AI be more appropriate and more challenging for your requests on social media?

Interviewee: If the company is very active on social media, then probably the use of AI would be very useful, and I would welcome the solution. If the company was not active on social media, I would be very reluctant to ask customer service enquiries.

Interviewer: The interview is finished. Thank you for your time.

Interviewee: You are welcome. See you soon!

Appendix 3. ID 3: Male, 45 to 60 years old, Secondary Education, Employed

Interviewer: Hi! How are you?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal information]

Interviewer: How was your day? Did you enjoy your recent break from your job?

Interviewee: [Personal Information]

Interviewer: Yes, [Personal Information]

Interviewee: [Personal Information]

Interviewer: Ok, sounds like everything is fine. Can we start with the interview?

Interviewee: Sure.

Interviewer: As I on our call a few days ago, I have arranged a conversation as part of my second Master thesis. Do you remember the core topic?

Interviewee: Yes, it should be about customer service.

Interviewer: That is correct. I have some housekeeping to do before our interview. I would like to stress that this conversation is completely voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you would like.

For scientific reasons, I will record and write down your words. The script will not be made public and is kept by myself and other researchers. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes, no problem.

Interviewer: And any reference to our conversation will be descriptive and anonymised. Is this fine by you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Super! The first question is the following. Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: I contacted customer service of an online marketplace as a product was not delivered. I contacted their client service, but the experience was negative because I did not receive the product back.

Interviewer: How did you contact the customer service?

Interviewee: I contacted them via website. I guess it did not work out because the company is from Asia, and they were translating the issue in their local language and then replying in my own language. I don't know.

Interviewer: How did you feel whilst interacting with customer service?

Interviewee: I feel the service was very broad. I had to contact them several time. I decided to not use the company after the experience. The decision was also based on the quality, variety and price of the products sold on the marketplace. I was dissatisfied with other products. For example, I purchased some batteries which had lower duration compared to those I bought in traditional shops around my area of living.

Interviewer: Thank you for your explanation. I would like to change topic ever so slightly. What is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: I have never contacted a company on social media. Maybe I contacted Microsoft.

Interviewer: By any chance are you referring to the support website of Microsoft?

Interviewee: Yes, the blog.

Interviewer: I see, then this differs from the definition of social media I am using for my thesis. I am strictly referring to social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Did you contact any organisation for customer service purposes on these platforms?

Interviewee: No no, I did not contact any company on Facebook. I use it only for personal reasons, such as posting images of my family or trips.

Interviewer: Ok. In the field of customer service, artificial intelligence is delivered to customers via chatbots and automated replies. How would you perceive a response of AI on social media when requesting support for a product or service?

Interviewee: I would not like the use of AI. I think a human agent would be easier to deal with. It would enable to understand the issue quickly. I would never perceive artificial intelligence as useful. I have only solved issues with human agents. I do not think the technology is advanced enough.

Interviewer: Ok, so your position of complete closure with respect to AI in social media customer care, correct?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you very much for your time. Our interview is finished.

Interviewee: No problem. If you have any other question, you can call me at my number.

Interviewer: Thank you! Have a nice day!

Interviewee: You too!

Appendix 4. ID 4: Male, 45 to 60 years old, Secondary Education, Employed

Interviewer: Hi! I am Riccardo, how are you?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal information]

Interviewer: Thank you for dedicating to me some of your time today. It is really appreciated.

Interviewee: No worries. I am always keen to help out an acquaintance if necessary.

Interviewer: Thank you once again. May I start the interview?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I on our call a few days ago, I have arranged a conversation as part of my second Master thesis. I would like to remark, as I previously told you via call, that this meeting is completely voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem relevant or appropriate. For scientific reasons, I will be recording this interview. The audio tape will not be made public and is kept for transcription into the thesis. Any reference to our conversation will be purely descriptive and anonymised. Is this fine by you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Perfect. Let's start! Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: A few days ago I contacted the call centre of a popular online payment platform because my card was about to expire, and I did not receive a notification of renewal or a new card as I experienced in the past. I spoke with a human operator to whom I explained the issue and with which I tried to identify a solution.

Interviewer: Ok, what exactly was the goal of your contact with customer service? Were you aiming to receive a new card or suspend the service?

Interviewee: The goal was to understand why I did not receive communication of renewal or the new payment card.

Interviewer: Thank you for your specification. How did you feel during your aid request? Could you share if you were treated with empathy, if support was prompt, if information provided was accurate and useful?

Interviewee: The call centre kindly explained that the company was not going to renew the card and I was required to proceed with the reimbursement of the money still left in the bank account. I was not given any notice of this change in policy. Therefore, my feedback on the experience was twofold. On one side, customer service was very empathic and respectful. On the other side, I felt dissatisfied and the overall interaction with the company was negative. In fact, I had to adapt to a situation I did not foresee and did not know before the call.

Interviewer: Thank you for your answers. I would like to dive deeper into your experience with customer service. Have you ever used customer service on social media?

Interviewee: I have never experienced customer social on social media. I prefer contacting a company either through phone call or through the website.

Interviewer: Why is that the case?

Interviewee: I reckon that direct human interactions are more efficient and empathic. I can explain the issue in more detail, and I believe that a human agent can understand the problem at stake more easily. I also prefer websites because interactions are longer, and I feel I can make follow-up questions compared to the standard question-and-answer format I expect from social media. In addition, I believe that social media are a form of entertainment and content sharing rather than a business platform.

Interviewer: Ok, let me suggest you a fictional scenario. In the field of customer service on social media, artificial intelligence is delivered via chatbots and automated replies. How would you perceive the response of AI on social media?

Interviewee: If I were to contact a company on social media, I would perceive an automated reply very negatively. I would form the assumption that the company is not taking my query seriously. As I said before, my opinion of social media is that they are a platform for entertainment.

Interviewer: Ok, is there any scenario in which the support of AI be more appropriate on social media and any occasion in which it would be highly detrimental for you?

Interviewee: I believe it would be useful for simple problem solving if the algorithm is able to provide effective answers. Complex issues that involve creative solutions or considering multiple options would be challenging for AI. A human agent would be more efficient in identifying a solution. The reason I have formed this opinion is that my experience with bots is not always positive. It has occurred that bot would not be able to identify the issue at stake even for simple and straightforward

questions. This makes customer service time consuming and requires multiple interactions, which is not ideal for social media platforms.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for answers and time. This is the end of our interview.

Interviewee: You are welcome. I wish you a positive continuation to your day.

Interviewer: You too. Bye.

Interviewee: Bye.

Appendix 5. ID 5: Female, 15 to 29 years old, Secondary Education, Unemployed

Interviewer: Hello! How are you?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal information]

Interviewer: How did school go this year?

Interviewee: [Personal Information]

Interviewer: Ok, nice. I asked your help because I am conducting a series of interviews for my Master degree. I anticipated to you via text messages that it concerns customer service. I asked permission to your parents regarding the possibility to take notes on our meeting. You can stop the conversation at any time you deem appropriate and any reference to it is completely anonymised.

Interviewee: Ok.

Interviewer: Let us start. Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: I have not frequently contacted customer service. The last I required help was from a fashion shop to which I returned a present for a friend. The operator at the shop immediately changed the shirt without any issues.

Interviewer: How did you feel during the request for support? Could you share if you were treated with empathy, if the aid was prompt, if information provided was accurate and useful?

Interviewee: At the time of purchase I was explained the solutions for a potential change of item. I was surprised that I was not given the chance to receive reimbursement for my purchase. I had to settle for a change. Overall, the worker was kind. I was satisfied with the experience.

Interviewer: Ok. Have you ever used customer service on social media?

Interviewee: No, I have never used customer service on social media. I always prefer to ask information directly to a company via their website or a telephone help line.

Interviewer: Why is that the case?

Interviewee: I am not used to contacting companies for support and therefore I do not have the chance to do so on social media. My parents usually take care of issues. However, I would still prefer to contact a company through a call centre.

Interviewer: Ok, let us use your imagination. Companies are using artificial intelligence for customer support on social media. This means that you can receive an automated answer: no human takes care

of your issue, you interact with a computer. How would you perceive the response of AI on social media?

Interviewee: I would perceive it as quick fix from the company. I would assume the company does not care about the client, but I understand that large multinationals cannot answer all the enquiries they receive in a brief amount of time. I would prefer to interact with a human being who might have specific abilities and knowledge to help me solve my problem.

Interviewer: We have one last question. When do you think that AI would be more appropriate and more challenging for your requests on social media?

Interviewee: I think the use of AI is more acceptable when it is relevant to issues of delivery, but it is more challenging to use when you require a change of product or reimbursement. In this last case, I would prefer to speak with a human being. Personally, I have a bad perception of artificial intelligence.

Interviewer: Thank you for answering to my questions. Please thank your parents for allowing me to speak with you today.

Interviewee: You are welcome.

Interviewer: Have a nice day.

Interviewee: Bye.

Appendix 6. ID 6: Female, 30 to 44 years old, Tertiary Education, Employed

Interviewer: Hi! How are you? Am I disturbing you?

Interviewee: Hi! No problem, we can speak.

Interviewer: How was your day? How is your project going?

Interviewee: [Personal Information]. How about you? What are you up to these days?

Interviewer: [Personal Information]

Interviewee: Sounds challenging. Everything will be fine, do not worry.

Interviewer: I hope so. Can we start with the interview?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I anticipated to you via WhatsApp, I have arranged a conversation as part of my second Master thesis. I would like to ask a couple of questions on your experience with customer service. Please note that this meeting is completely voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem relevant or appropriate. For scientific reasons, I will be recording this interview. The transcript will only be used for the scope of the thesis. Any reference to our conversation will be purely descriptive and anonymised. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes, no problem.

Interviewer: Ok, then I will dive into the first question. Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: The last time I have used customer service was, I mean, quite some time ago. Anyway I purchased a flight from a low-cost airline, which was then cancelled. The flight was postponed to a date which frankly was quite absurd. Therefore, I had to contact the company to change the flights.

Interviewer: How did you feel during this aid request? Could you share if you were treated with empathy, if support was prompt, if information provided was accurate and useful?

Interviewee: To be sincere, I felt angry because the change of dates was unforeseen, and the dates were absolutely horrendous. I must say I appreciated the support from the company as the available options were explained quite clearly. In the end, I managed to solve the issue.

Interviewer: Thank you. The next question is: what is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: I do not use social media much. In the past, I happened to contact a transportation company. I tried to contact on social media some government agencies and institutions to receive some specific details on documents and modules to fill in.

Interviewer: What have you found helpful or troubling in your exchanges?

Interviewee: I found troubling that social media is not really an option if I am seeking for highly precise information, which does not form part of the FAQs defined by the organisation or standard processes, or even any request for which greater attention is required.

Interviewer: Ok. In the field of customer service, artificial intelligence is seldom delivered to customers via chatbots and automated replies. How would you perceive a response of AI on social media when requesting support for a product or service?

Interviewee: AI has similar limits to what I just described before: it does not give enough value compared to a human support.

Interviewer: I understand. When would the support of AI be more appropriate and more challenging for your requests on social media?

Interviewee: Chatbots might be helpful, but I believe this is the case only for standard and frequent responses in which questions are pretty simple and straight forward; for example: what are the steps I should take to solve this issue? What are the papers I need to comply with? Where can I check a piece of information?, and so on. In my opinion it could be challenging for difficult, non-ordinary requests. The bot could be unable to understand the problem, specific terminology or the explanation should be extremely precise because the customer is in pain even with little aspects of the problem.

Interviewer: This is the end of our interview. Thank you very much for answers and time.

Interviewee: You are welcome.

Interviewer: Goodnight.

Interviewee: Goodnight.

Appendix 7. ID 7: Male, 15 to 29 years old, Tertiary Education, Employed

Interviewer: Hi! How are you? How is university going? Have you completed the exam session yet?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal Information]. What about you?

Interviewer: [Personal Information]

Interviewee: These are the final steps for our journey. We need to push for another few months.

Interviewer: Indeed. Can we start with the interview?

Interviewee: Absolutely.

Interviewer: As I anticipated to you via WhatsApp, I have arranged a conversation as part of my second Master thesis. I would like to ask a couple of questions on your experience with customer service. Please note that this meeting is completely voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem relevant or appropriate. For research purposes, I will be recording this interview. The transcript will only be used for the scope of the thesis. Any reference to our conversation will be purely descriptive and anonymised. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yep.

Interviewer: Ok, then I will start. Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: Sure. The last time I contacted customer service was to repair my personal computer. My screen was turning red and therefore I searched for client support centres in my city. After a 45-minute trip via public transportation I reached the local store.

Interviewer: Are there any further details to your experience?

Interviewee: Unfortunately, I was told that the customer service in the store did not know how to the repair the display as the company stopped selling personal laptops in the country a year ago. I forgot to mention that I purchased the computer in another nation. I was advised to call a shop associated to the company. This asked me to personally transport the PC to their location, which was a 30-minute car trip away from my house. And they computed the repair would cost around a third of the new computer price. It was unacceptable. I had to contact the support service in the nation where I bought the computer and they proposed to change the display for free as they extended the warranty for a couple of months. I just sent the computer back to the local service. Hopefully, I can solve the issue.

Interviewer: How did you feel during this aid request? Could you share if you were treated with empathy, if support was prompt, if information provided was accurate and useful?

Interviewee: I felt incredibly frustrated. I need my personal computer to perform some urgent operations for my volunteering work. And I also felt angry that the displayed burnt pixels after just 2 years from the purchase date. I also felt astonished by the lack of support offered by the company and

the limited interest towards the issue. I was not advised to call the national support service of the country in which I purchased the PC. I will not purchase a computer from the company again.

Interviewer: Ok. The next question is: what is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: I have limited experience of customer service in social media. I think I posted a complain just once. If I remember correctly, a flight I purchased was cancelled last minute due to restrictions imposed by the Covid pandemic. I tried to contact the customer service via telephone call but waited more than 30 minutes to receive a response. As the issue was urgent, I reverted to using social media.

Interviewer: What did you find helpful or troubling in your exchange?

Interviewee: I believe social media offers another support option compared to traditional channels, such as telephone calls or website chats. I feel like a complaint on social media is an urgent matter for a company because it affects its reputation. Just imagine what would be the effect of my contacts on Facebook seeing my complaint. I doubt their perception of the firm would not change. However, I think that it is not always possible to receive a response. I guess companies receive hundreds of thousands of aid requests in social media and prioritising issue could be challenging. You could end up without a response even in social media.

Interviewer: Thank you. I would like to add a variable to the questions. In the field of customer service, artificial intelligence is seldom delivered to customers via chatbots and automated replies. How would you perceive a response of AI on social media when requesting support for a product or service?

Interviewee: I have never received a response from AI in social media or, at least, I was not communicated about the interaction with technology. It did not appear to be the case in that one occasion, but I might be wrong. I believe that it would be interesting to receive a response from AI because it would offer a reply in very limited time. This would help the firm's reputation and satisfy at least momentarily the client. To be fair, I might be biased. I really do not care if I receive a response from AI or a human agent on social media. Solving the issue is the only relevant matter for me. I recognise that others might perceive to be treated unfairly if they are communicated that artificial intelligence is helping with their query.

Interviewer: I see. And when would the support of AI be more appropriate and more challenging for your requests on social media?

Interviewee: I think it would be appropriate for companies that are characterised by early adopter customers. I believe these clients have less bias towards the technology. I guess established or luxury brands might struggle in convincing their customers that AI can help with their problem. It would probably require a considerable awareness or marketing campaign.

Interviewer: Our interview has come to an end. Thank you very much for helping me.

Interviewee: No problem. [Personal Information].

Interviewer: Have a nice dinner.

Interviewee: You too.

Appendix 8. ID 8: Female, 30 to 44 years old, Secondary Education, Employed

Interviewer: Hello! So nice to have a chat with you today. How are you?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal information]. How are you?

Interviewer: [Personal Information]. How is your job at [Personal Information] proceeding?

Interviewee: [Personal Information]

Interviewer: Great, I am sure you will have success in this new career path. Would you like to kick off our interview?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I anticipated via phone call, I have organised this meeting as I need your help for the completion of my thesis. Before starting I would like to lay down some ground rules. This meeting is completely voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem relevant or appropriate. For scientific reasons, I develop a transcript of our conversation. Any reference to it will be purely descriptive and anonymised. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes, no problem.

Interviewer: Great! We can officially start! Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: Let me think. I have not contacted customer service in a while to be honest. Oh no that is a lie! I almost forgot about earlier this morning. I had a call with the customer service from a health insurance company in my home nation. I contacted them as I have recently renovated my contract and received an awkward confirmation via mail. The contract specified it would have started its validity in six-months' time. You can imagine that it is a bit of a problem in a state where you are mandated to have private health insurance.

Interviewer: Could you specify what was the goal of your contact with customer service?

Interviewee: The goal was to request an explanation for the unforeseen selection of date and potentially find a solution to start the contract as of today.

Interviewer: That is clear. Could you explain how you felt during the process? Were you treated with empathy, was support prompt, was information accurate and useful?

Interviewee: I was calm and positive during the process. The call centre replied immediately: I think I waited for a response just for a few seconds. I was treated with empathy by the human agent as I was explained how to solve the issue and was provided with additional information to simplify the

process which I did not even ask in the first place. Overall, it was a very positive and straight-to-the-point experience.

Interviewer: We can now move to a second set of questions. What is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: I posted a complaint to a company on social media once. I was very angry with a mobile internet provider with whom I entered into a contract only a year prior. My price was significantly increased without any notice. The company did not reply.

Interviewer: What do you think is helpful or troubling about customer service in social media?

Interviewee: The people I follow on social media usually use the platforms for sever complaints or issues that require immediate attention. Maybe people think that by making the problem public the company will reply immediately, otherwise it would risk brand perception. So, I would say it is helpful to solve emergencies. However, I assume that companies receive a considerable number of messages each day and it could be difficult to reply, as it happened in my case, and you usually always tend to receive an answer if you call a company

Interviewer: Ok, that is reasonable. I would like to suggest a fictional scenario. Assume you would contact a corporation for customer service via social media. Assume such corporation would respond utilising artificial intelligence. This could take the form of a chatbot or automated replies. How would you perceive the response of AI on social media?

Interviewee: I never thought about AI in social media. That is an interesting question. Maybe I would perceive the technology as inherently bad. Automated replies not always provide a useful solution, in my experience. This might create an issue for the brand as the customer will display its anger publicly. It can also create an issue for the customer: I believe it would be very difficult for AI to respond to various questions effectively on social media. Just think what would happen if another a customer interferes in the conversation, how would that pan out?

Interviewer: When would the support of AI be more appropriate and more challenging for requests on social media?

Interviewee: AI could be useful to provide an answer to all customers in a very quick manner and it might be accepted if the issue is not very important for the customer. For example, it could be useful for general enquiries that the customer could find with a quick research on the company's website. I think it would be challenging to create a good experience if the issue is complex. A human agent would have to intervene in this case. That is for sure.

Interviewer: This last answer marked the end of our interview. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Interviewee: You are welcome! I hope to hear from you again soon. Good luck with your thesis.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. Have a nice evening!

Interviewee: You too! Bye!

Interviewer: Thank you once again! Bye!

Appendix 9. ID 9: Male, Europe, 60 years old, Secondary Education, Employed

Interviewer: Hi! How are you?

Interviewee: Hello! [Personal information]

Interviewer: Are you still in vacation?

Interviewee: [Personal Information]

Interviewer: Given that it is quite late in the night, and I would not like to waste your time, I would start with the interview. Is this ok for you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I anticipated when we last met each other, I have organised this interview within the context of my thesis. This meeting is completely voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem relevant or appropriate. For scientific reasons, I will record this interview. The audio tape will not be made public and is kept by myself only. Please note that any reference to our conversation will be purely descriptive and anonymised. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Thank you! Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: Let me think for a second or two. [Brief pause] To be fair, I cannot recall any recent experience at the moment. [Brief pause] Oh yes, ok I have got once example for your question. A couple of weeks ago, I drove my company and personal car to the dealership in which I bought it. Just a quick explanation: my company and personal vehicle are the same as I am a self-employed sales agent. Specifically, I selected the dealership in which I bought the car. The reason for such trip was that the sat-nav broke down. I entered a very agitated discussion with the dealer as he was not willing to repair the device. Actually, he was not willing to repair the satellite navigation for free as the warrantee expired just a few weeks earlier. Indeed, I was quite unfortunate to lose the device soon after the end of the warrantee period. I still thought that a large car manufacturer should repair the issue without costs for myself as the piece itself is very expensive, more than one thousand Euros. After a few days, the dealer called me to let me know that given my loyalty to the brand the company was willing to contribute for half the cost of the repair. I refused the offer and did not install a new sat-nav as I am convinced that the company should have fully taken care of the issue and relative expense.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you for your explanation. If I understood correctly, your goal was to repair the sat-nav without any charged costs as the warrantee was expired by just a few days.

Interviewee: Yes, exactly. My objective was to receive a new sat-nav for free.

Interviewer: How did you feel during this request for support?

Interviewee: I was very disappointed. The value of the car is very high. It belongs to the category of the so-called work vehicles and therefore its purchasing cost is considerably expensive. I would sort of understand their position if the value of the car was limited or if the car was an entry-level model. This was not my case. I felt like they did not respect my value and worth as a client.

Interviewer: I am guessing you did not feel like there was empathy in this experience and that support was not informative or prompt, right?

Interviewee: Mmm, that's not completely true. It is a 50-50 type of situation. Overall, the behaviour of the dealer was kind and positive. The interaction per se, or if you prefer the human relation, was positive. I felt there was enough empathy in our discussion. Yet, the fact that they did not help and did not provide the support I desired quickly made the interaction negative. In other words, the solution was missing, not the relationship. For this reason, I felt they were making fun of me.

Interviewer: Ok. I would like to shift our attention to a related, yet new, topic: customer service on social media. What is your experience of social media client support?

Interviewee: I have no experience of this.

Interviewer: By social media customer care, I mean that you can contact a company on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn to present the issues you have with their products and services. Have you ever had this experience before?

Interviewee: I have never felt the need to use social media for customer care.

Interviewer: Can I ask why this is the case?

Interviewee: I have simply never felt the need to use social media. I do not have much else to say. I do not understand your question.

Interviewer: I just would like to understand why you actively decide to contact customer service via phone or in person than using social media.

Interviewee: I never had issues or problems that could be tackled online.

Interviewer: Oh, please let me explain. I am asking if you contacted organisations on social media for support, not if you needed to solve an issue online. Is that clear?

Interviewee: Well, in this case I decide to use other solutions for customer service. I first search for a personal, human interaction. If this is not possible, I would pick up the phone and call the company. I would consider social media as a last option. Instinctively, I would not use it. I must be forced to adopt the solution.

Interviewer: Why do you prefer traditional communication channels?

Interviewee: I prefer personal interaction because they allow to describe issues, objectives in detail as well as to negotiate the conditions you would like to enforce during the repair of the product. Traditional channels allow a full conversation with a human being rather than limiting interactions. Just think about Twitter in which you cannot write more than a certain number of characters. And I am used to using traditional solutions. This is my habit and mindset. I am very reluctant to change method.

Interviewer: Ok. Could you still explain to me when you would find helpful and troubling to contact customer service on social media?

Interviewee: I think I would use social media only I were obliged by the organisation. I would use it only when other options are not available or viable. It is fundamentally incomprehensible to use them to seek support.

Interviewer: We have finished the second section of the interview. I would like to present you now with a scenario and collect your opinions on it. Please immerse and imagine yourself in what I am describing. Two final questions will follow.

Interviewee: Ok.

Interviewer: Imagine you would contact a company on social media for customer service. Imagine you would receive a reply from AI, for example a chatbot or an automated reply. How would you perceive a response from an algorithm when requesting support on social media?

Interviewee: I would not appreciate it. Why is the company using AI? I have a problem and the firm replies through an algorithm, I do not understand it. I do not have a mentality that is suitable for this type of solution. I would use AI only if I were obliged to do so, if no other alternative is possible. I think it is suitable only for young people. Algorithms are not capable of supporting a conversation and helping with a problem. I really would not appreciate it.

Interviewer: Why is that the case?

Interviewee: Simply because my personal culture and age do not allow me to think AI is suitable for customer service. I think this interview is not suited for me. I am not the correct target for this type of questions. You should only speak with people that are 30 years or younger. Other individuals are not able to use technologies.

Interviewer: Thank you for your insight and suggestion. I believe a company targets a wide audience and is rarely limited to a specific age group. For this reason, my interviews are open to any consumer. In your case, your opinion is very valuable as it allows to point the perspective of someone who is not open to the solutions I am suggesting. If you are available to continue our interview, I would like to ask when you believe AI would be useful. Is there any possibility in which you would prefer AI in social media?

Interviewee: I do not know. I have no idea. I am not prepared to answer this question. If you do not explain me what the current opportunities in the market are, I cannot answer. I have never studied this issue.

Interviewer: Sure, AI could be useful in answering urgent matters on social media. If a company uses an algorithm to reply, you would not have to wait for a human agent to read your post. In fact, you would directly receive help.

Interviewee: I understand. I still think there are no positive aspects in AI. I believe that a consumer could easily fake an issue and oblige the company to send a reimbursement or a new product through AI. Maybe even a competitor could ask a product or information through AI. Another possibility is that a competitor shames the company in public and the firm replies through AI not solving the issue or realising the potential threat. There is too much risk for the company. I do not see any benefit in using AI for customer service on social media. I am completely against it. AI is easy to manipulate.

Interviewer: Anything you would like to add?

Interviewee: No. I do not have anything to add other than repeating that I really cannot accept AI for helping clients.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you for your time. Our interview is over.

Interviewee: You are welcome. Have a nice evening.

Interviewer: You too. Bye!

Appendix 10. ID 10: Male, Europe, 24 years old, Tertiary Education, Unemployed

Interviewer: Hi! How are you?

Interviewee: Hello! [Personal information] How are you? It has been a long time since we last spoke. How is your job and university going?

[Personal Conversation]

Interviewer: Given that my time is limited today, I would start with the interview. Is this ok for you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I anticipated via WhatsApp, I have organised this interview within the context of my thesis for the Master in Business Engineering. This meeting is completely voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem relevant or appropriate. For scientific reasons, I will record this interview. The audio tape will not be made public and is kept by myself only. Please note that any reference to our conversation will be purely descriptive and anonymised. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Super! Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: The last time I contacted customer service was a few nights ago. I ordered my dinner through a popular delivery app. I purchased a hamburger and donut from a fast-food chain restaurant.

However, when I received the meal, the donut was not there. It was Saturday night and the sweet represented a personal compensation for the week. It was quite important for me. Therefore, I contacted the customer service of the delivery company via the chat on the application. After a quick conversation, I was reimbursed of the cost of the donut and was gifted of a small bonus for future purchases.

Interviewer: What was your objective during your conversation with customer service? Would you have preferred a reimbursement or a new order with the donut?

Interviewee: I was ok with the solution the delivery company opted for. All in all, receiving your money back is expected and fair. To be fair, I would have preferred to order a new donut. But I should repeat myself, I thought the solution was appropriate.

Interviewer: Ok. And how did you feel during this request for support?

Interviewee: Are you asking about my emotions?

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: At start, I was angry because I did not understand if the donut was stolen by the delivery man or if it got forgotten by the fast-food restaurant. However, I was calmed down by the customer service of the delivery company. The reply was very fast and kind. This contributed to creating a positive perception of the customer service. A few days after I realised that the problem must have been caused by the fast-food chain as the food was delivered in a sealed bag, hence the delivery man could not have been responsible for the issue.

Interviewer: Ok. Did you feel like you were treated with empathy, that support was prompt and information was useful to your objective?

Interviewee: Yes. I feel like I was treated with respect. The human interaction was actually better than what I expected. I received an answer after a few minutes, which was not expected. A new order would have been appreciated but the solution adopted was acceptable.

Interviewer: Ok. We can now move on to the second chapter of our interview. Do you have any experience of contacting customer service on social media?

Interviewee: No, I do not have any experience of contacting customer service via social media. I am not prone to using social media for help with issues in products or services. I prefer to contact organisations with a website chat or an email. I usually rely on what is suggested in the bill I receive at time of purchase. Overall, I prefer traditional communication channels.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: It feels more spontaneous to use the customer service on the company's website. I reckon it is more direct rather than using a third-party platform such as social media. [Brief pause] Yes, traditional channels are just more direct. To be fair, I never bumped into an organisation that clearly

stated they had a page for customer service enquiries on social media and the client was recommended to using it for any support enquiry.

Interviewer: I understand. If you were to use social media for customer service, when do you think it could be useful and when it could be challenging?

Interviewee: I am not sure. I feel that it could potentially be useful for some people. It is difficult for me to answer this question as I have never used social media for customer service. Every company I interacted with advocated traditional channels for requesting help with product or service faults. I was never advised to use social media. If I were to be suggested by a firm to use their accounts on Twitter or Facebook for any issue, I would consider the solution.

Interviewer: Sure. Ok, we have reached the final section of our interview. I would like you to imagine a situation and provide your thoughts. Imagine you would contact a company on social media for customer service. Imagine you would receive a reply from AI, for example a chatbot or an automated reply. How would you perceive a response from an algorithm when requesting support on social media?

Interviewee: I do not feel satisfied. That is for sure. My reasoning is the following. I compare AI to automatic replies on telephone calls to customer service. In such cases, you frequently have to select a number of options in your phone before find a solution or speaking to a human agent. I think AI would entail the same issues and discomforts. I understand that large companies might prefer artificial intelligence to answer to their clients because it is cost effective and allows to reply quickly. However, my preference would be to speak directly to a human agent.

Interviewer: When do you believe AI would be useful and when would it be challenging for you as a customer on social media?

Interviewee: It really depends on the type or level of AI. If the technology is sufficiently complex to solve all kinds of problems (including complex ones), it might be useful. But my experience with AI is that this is not the case and most of the times it ends up being a challenge. For example, I had an experience of AI when I contacted a TV service provider earlier this year. I received an answer from a bot. I wasted a lot of time to explain the problem and navigate the different options AI suggested. I could have used such time to speak with a human agent and solve the problem directly. I feel AI on social media would be the same experience. It would not be suitable for complex issues. I feel that AI is used by the company to reduce costs for answering to very simple and repetitive enquiries. Technology allows to employ fewer human workers and therefore decrease costs. As I said before, if my issue is complex, I want to speak with a worker of the company.

Interviewer: Can you describe any instances in which AI could be useful?

Interviewee: I feel it could be useful for simple problems. For example, I might order a ceramic cup online and at reception it is broken into pieces. Thus, I might want a new one and AI could quickly fix the problem by making a new order as the probability of this issue verifying to a customer is very high. With complex problems, valuable or costly products, AI is not a solution. A person is more flexible and can understand the issue very easily. It is just more efficient.

Interviewer: Anything you would like to add?

Interviewee: No, I have no idea of what else I could add. I have limited experience.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you for your time. Our interview is over.

Interviewee: You are welcome.

Interviewer: Bye!

Appendix 11. ID 11: Female, Europe, 57 years old, Secondary Education, Employed

Interviewer: Hi! How are you? How is your vacation going?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal information]

Interviewer: Thank you for your time today and for letting me interview you.

Interviewee: No problem, I am happy to help.

Interviewer: I would start with our conversation. Is this ok for you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I anticipated the last time we met, I have organised this interview as part of my qualitative research for the completion of the thesis. This interview is voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem appropriate. I will record this interview and transcribe our conversation. Any reference to our yourself or your experience will be made descriptive and anonymous. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok. We can move to the first set of questions. Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: What do you mean by customer service?

Interviewer: Any contact you have had with a company to solve a problem with their products or services.

Interviewee: Ok, that is clear. I have contacted the customer service of my dishwasher's company. The device was not cleaning anymore as it did not pump water in the main cleaning area. I contacted the national customer service via phone as I was provided with this help line at purchase. I told the customer service that the dishwasher was blocked. They answered by providing a phone number of a local repair centre near my place of living. I proceeded to call this new number. I explained the same issue. They replied by offering a consultation at my place of living for the next day. I accepted as I

was working from home. The workers arrived at my house, opened the dishwasher and identified the issue was linked to a faulty water pump. They specified that the dishwasher had to be brought to the local repair lab. I accepted and the device was removed from my kitchen. Therefore, I was left without the dishwasher. The day after I received a phone call specifying that the repair would cost around 200 euros. The price included the new water pump and the relative installation job. I was asked if I would accept the price and would like to follow through with the repair. I agreed. After a week, I received another call specifying that the dishwasher was now working. The device was then delivered at my house and installed. Before leaving, the technicians and myself made a couple of trial washings to ensure everything was working correctly.

Interviewer: What was the goal of your contact with customer service?

Interviewee: As I said, I wanted to repair the dishwasher. My objective was fulfilled.

Interviewer: How did you feel during your aid request to the brand?

Interviewee: I felt very positive. I think it is expected and I forecasted that the repair would involve several steps and different calls before the solution was achieved. It is inevitable with such a complex issue and expensive machinery. The human agents with which I interacted were very professional and accommodative, especially the local ones. This is not guaranteed as large companies usually are not able to enforce their culture throughout each branch.

Interviewer: Could you share if you were treated with empathy, if support was prompt, if information provided was accurate and useful?

Interviewee: I felt the information provided was correct. The first customer service was very prompt and kind. The local repair also was empathic, and we managed to have a laugh during the installation of the product or after the repair was completed. This shows that human relations are highly valued by the company.

Interviewer: Ok, we can now move to the second section of our interview. What is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: I have never had experience of customer service on social media.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: I never felt the need to use social media. It is not my cup of tea to use social networks for customer assistance. I always search for companies' contacts on their websites as to speak in person or via telephone with a human agent.

Interviewer: Why is that the case? Why do you prefer traditional communication channels?

Interviewee: Because I do not use social media on a frequent basis. I only use Facebook and Instagram for personal reasons, such as reading newspapers and catching up with what my family and friends are doing. To be fair, I really do not use social networks often.

Interviewee: Let us assume you would contact a company on social media for an aid request. What would you find helpful or troubling in this situation?

Interviewee: Actually, I would never use social media. I feel like it is of no use to contact customer service on social media. The reason is that I really am not used to this communication channel. I would not feel at ease with them. I would not even think about contacting customer service on social media. It is not a mental process I go through. I simply avoid social media for such objective.

Interviewer: Ok, we have concluded the second section of the interview. I would like to describe you a potential scenario. Please imagine yourself as part of it and reply to my question. In the field of customer service, artificial intelligence is delivered to customers via chatbots and automated replies. How would you perceive a response of AI on social media when requesting support for a product or service?

Interviewee: I do not understand the question. You are suggesting that I use Facebook to ask help to a company and I get a response from AI. What is the question?

Interviewer: Exactly. In this scenario, I would like to ask how you would perceive a response from AI.

Interviewee: I would not be satisfied. I prefer to speak with a human agent. The reason is that I feel that if I do not have a clear idea of the problem, AI cannot answer me and probably cannot help me in identifying the correct solution with a product or service. That is the only problem I can think about, but it is a big one. It is very easy to have a misunderstanding with technology. This results in time losses or, in the worst-case scenario, a situation in which the problem is not identified. I would then have to revert to another communication channel. Just think about the example of the dishwasher I described before. I did not know the issue was linked to the water pump, how could AI have solved it?

Interviewer: When would the support of AI be more appropriate and more challenging for your requests on social media?

Interviewee: I think AI is never of any help. For example, when I contact companies via phone and receive a reply from an automated service to navigate various options, I tend to hang up and search other ways to talk with an employee in the company. I really cannot think about any situation in which AI could be helpful.

Interviewer: AI would be a burden in any scenario according to your opinion, is that correct?

Interviewee: Maybe it could be helpful with very simple enquiries as it can provide an answer in a very quick time. But in any case, I always prefer to interact with a human agent.

Interviewer: Anything you would like to add?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you for your time. Our interview is over.

Interviewee: You are welcome. Have a nice day.

Interviewer: You too. Bye!

Appendix 12. ID 12: Male, Europe, 70 years old, Secondary Education, Unemployed

Interviewer: Hi! How are you? What have you been up to lately?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal information] What do you think of the latest news development?

[Personal Conversation]

Interviewer: Can we now shift our attention to the interview now? Oh, I would like to thank you in advance for the time you are dedicating to me today.

Interviewee: I am happy to help.

Interviewer: I would like to start with our interview. Is this ok for you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I anticipated via WhatsApp, I have organised this interview as part of my qualitative research for the completion of the thesis. This interview is voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem appropriate. I will record this interview and transcribe our conversation. Any reference to our yourself or your experience will be made descriptive and anonymous. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Ok. We can move to the first set of questions. Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: I contacted my local dealership a few weeks ago as I received an invite to perform a car inspection. This is a routine check after two years of car usage. We fixed an appointment together. Then, I went to the dealership with my car to both complete the inspection and ask a number of questions on specific issues and functions of the car. In detail, I asked about some devices included in the car because I could not understand what their functions were. I must specify that I have a very professional relationship with my car dealer. I do not usually entertain any friendly conversation. In fact, our interaction was cold hearted, distant and structured. I expect a dealer to create a pleasant and friendly environment with the client. I feel like I was taken advantage as a customer because I can bring money to the organisation. This was my experience.

Interviewer: What was the goal of your contact with customer service? Where your questions a secondary objective to the inspection or were those important for you customer service experience?

Interviewee: The primary objective was to solve the issues and questions that I thought about when using the car. For example, I asked about the cruise control which I was not sure could respond as I expected. In detail, I asked if the car was able to brake on its own in case of obstacles in a highway. They gave a very professional and fast response, which was appreciated, but they did not do a step

further by explaining the functioning of the device. I thought this was required to complete the question. The inspection was mandatory. I did not consider it the main reason I wanted to speak with customer service of the dealership.

Interviewer: How did you feel during your interaction with the car dealership?

Interviewee: I said before, the relationship was excessively professional. I asked questions and received direct replies. I expected something more. To fully eradicate my doubts on the questions I had, I was obliged to check online forums. As you can imagine, internet is a source of guidance, but it does not always provide clear and satisfying information.

Interviewer: Could you share if you were treated with empathy, if support was prompt, if information provided was accurate and useful?

Interviewee: I received accurate information but not as useful as I expected. I mean, I can understand that the dealer is not there to help me for various hours. He has other clients to support. I guess information was useful. The conversation however was not empathic as I described before.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you. Let us now shift to another topic. What is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: I have no experience of customer service on social media. The reason is that I was slowly driven away from social media in the last few years due to philosophical and moral reasons. I feel I do not really belong to this online world. I use WhatsApp as a medium for personal communication, but that is about it nowadays.

Interviewer: Imagine you were to contact a company on social media for customer support. What would you find helpful or troubling in your exchanges?

Interviewee: I would find social media useful if I pose an issue and receive an empathic, personalised reply. I think social media involve cold human relations. I perceive social media as inherently negative. Companies might use them to falsely inform the client. I feel a lot of companies do this because they have already made the sale and are not interested in retaining the customer. I would use social media customer service only with local, small companies that I already have a relationship with and that I can fully trust. I also would not use social media for issues with products that could involve me performing any action. For example, I would not use Facebook if I need to perform a modification to my computer and I was explained the solution with a post. Many steps could fail, it is better to have a human agent to guide me through the process.

Interviewer: Ok, we can now move to the last section of our interview. In the field of customer service, artificial intelligence is delivered to customers via chatbots and automated replies. How would you perceive a response from AI on social media when requesting support for a product or service?

Interviewee: This is worst possible situation. AI offers just pre-defined solutions and does not interpret my issues in the correct way. Therefore, I think that my expectations of support would rarely be met. In addition, even if AI is well structured and well coded, it will never understand the full scope of the issue that the client has. I also believe that predefined answers make the conversation incredibly cold and distant.

Interviewer: I understand. When would the support of AI be more appropriate and more challenging for your requests on social media?

Interviewee: AI could be helpful, for example, in assisting the human agent to understand my issue but not in replying.

Interviewer: Anything you would like to add?

Interviewee: I cannot think about anything else at the moment. Maybe I could add something in five minutes time but for now I said everything I can think of.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you for your time. Our interview is over.

[Personal Conversation]

Interviewee: You are welcome. Have a nice day.

Interviewer: You too. Bye!

Appendix 13. ID 13: Male, Europe, 65 years old, Secondary Education, Unemployed

Interviewer: Hi! How are you?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal information]

Interviewer: I contacted you because I would like to conduct the interview for my Master thesis.

Interviewee: Sure.

Interviewer: Can we start the interview straight away?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I anticipated via phone call, I have organised this interview as part of my qualitative research for the completion of the thesis. This interview is voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem appropriate. I will record this interview and transcribe our conversation. Any reference to our yourself or your experience will be made descriptive and anonymous. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: We can move to the first set of questions. Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: Let me think. I do not really remember. I hardly contact any company because I usually fix myself any problem that I have with a product. I am an electrician and I have a practical, technical background. Let me think. I can maybe present an experience I had whilst working. When I was employed in a local hospital, I contacted a company to understand their technical health device. The

hospital recently purchased the product and I was tasked with its installation. I had no information or user manual available. Therefore, I called the company to request help for the installation process. As I represented an important client, I always received quick replies. Health companies understand their impact on the patients and usually provide prompt support to local hospitals.

Interviewer: What did you speak about during your call with the company?

Interviewee: I just asked for the installation procedure of the device. To ease the conversation, I presented the identification number printed on the product.

Interviewer: What was the goal of your contact with customer service?

Interviewee: Well, I tried to install the product myself before contacting the company. So, I called them to answer specific, direct questions concerning the roadblocks I encountered. I wanted to be as effective as possible in my work. I quickly understood that I could not install the product due to a design issue. The technical operators of the company suggested how to solve the problem. As it was a machine I had never operated before, this was vital.

Interviewer: How did you feel during your conversation with the company?

Interviewee: I phoned the technical office. The answer was very kind and prompt. It is in the company's interest to provide fast replies. This increases their reputation and likelihood to sell the hospital other products in the future.

Interviewer: Could you share if you were treated with empathy, if the information provided was accurate and useful?

Interviewee: The information provided was complete. I felt I was treated very well and with empathy. They answered to each question with politeness, they never said: "This person is annoying me". But I guess this is expected, especially when the cost of the device is exceptionally high just like in this experience.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing your experience. I would like to switch topics. What is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: I have never contacted any company on social media.

Interviewer: Why?

Interviewee: I have never had the opportunity. I never contacted any company even for personal reasons on other communication channels.

Interviewer: I understand. Imagine you were to contact an organisation on social media to request support. What would you find helpful or troubling?

Interviewee: I do not know. I have no idea what to answer. I think it would be very time consuming. I expect to be bounced from one side to the other, from social media to traditional communication channels. In any case, I feel that there is not much to repair in modern objects. They usually last until

the expiration of the warranty and then you have to through them away because any repair is too complicated. This is a strategy that most companies use, believe me. Therefore, I expect social media customer service not to help at all.

Interviewer: Please imagine yourself in the following scenario and let me know how you would react and think as a customer. You need to repair a product and decide to use social media to contact the company. You receive a reply from an artificial intelligence bot. How would you perceive the response from AI on social media when requesting support for a product or service?

Interviewee: I think this is very bad. Mmm, I recently had an experience of AI for customer service. It did not pop into my mind earlier. I contacted an airplane transportation company via telephone. I received a reply from an automated voice asking me to choose between several options. I hanged up the call soon after because after several minutes of option selection I still had not found a solution. I expect that AI on social media customer service would work similarly. I have a very bad experience of AI. The technology does not work.

Interviewer: When would the support of AI be appropriate in any scenario for your requests on social media?

Interviewee: I fell that AI would never work. I am biased by my negative experiences.

Interviewer: Anything you would like to add?

Interviewee: I do not really have much else to say. I am struggling to think about something else.

Interviewer: Ok, our interview is over then. Thank you for your time.

Interviewee: Ok, I need to rush away as my dinner is ready.

Interviewer: Ok, bye!

Appendix 14. ID 14: Male, Europe, 25 years old, Tertiary Education, Employed

Interviewer: Hi! How are you? How was your exam the other day?

Interviewee: Hi! [Personal information] How are you combining work and thesis? It must be tough. [Personal Conversation]

Interviewer: Thank you in advance for the time you are dedicating to me today.

Interviewee: I am glad to help.

Interviewer: I would like to start with our interview. Is this ok for you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: As I anticipated via WhatsApp, I have organised this interview as part of my qualitative research for the completion of the thesis. This interview is voluntary, and it can terminate at any time you deem appropriate. I will record this interview and transcribe our conversation. Any reference to our yourself or your experience will be made descriptive and anonymous. Are you ok with this?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Great! We can move to the first set of questions. Could you explain your last experience with customer service?

Interviewee: Let me think. Can it be anything?

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewee: Ok then. I will talk about a very negative experience I have had recently. Before starting my exchange semester in the US, I made the error to book the flight tickets from a third-party website as it offered a very convenient price. Therefore, I did not purchase them via the website of the airline company. The price was very cheap so I opted for the third-party website. It was the first time I tried this service. I paid the flight plus luggage. After a few days, I checked the website of the airline company to verify that my booking had been officially registered. I realised that my seat was booked but I did not have any luggage available. I tried to contact the airline company, which specified I should refer to the third-party website for any complaint. Contacting such intermediary was quite complicated. The website presented several phone numbers each one associated to a different geographical region and language in the EU. I first contacted the Italian number but nobody answered, even if I waited for hours on the phone. I tried in different occasions. I waited and waited. Therefore, I decided to call the English number. I spoke with a human agent which was quite kind. This was positive considering how angry I was. He acknowledged my payment and tried to include the luggage. After 24 hours the problem was not solved. I contacted the third-party website again on the English number. I waited and waited. I eventually received an answer from a human agent. I communicated that I had already talked with a colleague of his and no solution was achieved. He created a new flight ticket and managed to solve the issue straight away. I will not purchase anymore from this or any other third-party website: it is clear that airline companies do not communicate effectively with intermediaries.

Interviewer: How did you feel during this aid request?

Interviewee: I was very angry before and during the phone calls. I felt quite useless as I did not receive any response via telephone for quite a long time. I feared I could not solve the problem and potentially lose the money. I did not use emails for the purpose of reaching the company as I had an urgency to register a flight with luggage. I even felt stupid because for just a small premium I could have purchased the ticket from an airline company and avoid such inconveniences. The fact that the third-party employees were very kind calmed me down and made me hopeful that a solution was possible. This was the only positive aspect of a negative experience.

Interviewer: Could you share if you were treated with empathy, if the information provided was accurate and useful?

Interviewee: The employees were very empathic and available to find a solution. I did not have huge difficulties in communicating with them. The problem was linked to contacting the people in customer service. Take, for example, the fact that I had to perform three calls to solve the issue. Another difficulty was linked to the long waits and the necessity to call in two different languages. This created frustration. What happens if a client does not speak English? Does that mean that they do not solve the issue and simply lose their money? Language is a big barrier. A final negative aspect was the speed of resolution as I suggested before.

Interviewer: Ok, let us now introduce a new segment of the interview. What is your experience of customer service via social media?

Interviewee: Let me think about it. I contacted a telephone company to improve internet speed on social media. I had to change my home Wi-Fi contract to take advantage of 5G internet. It had been recently installed in my hometown. I contacted the telephone company on Facebook. I did not receive a reply directly from a human agent but AI.

Interviewer: I am going to stop you there because this experience might be interesting later in the interview. Before going into AI, I would like to ask why did you choose social media for this help request?

Interviewee: I used social media because telephone calls to customer service with this company usually involve long waits. The chat on social media allows to fasten the process.

Interviewer: Ok. What have you found helpful or troubling in social media customer service?

Interviewee: In this case, I found useful that I did not need to wait long for an answer. AI replied straight away. Rather than waiting on the phone, I can simply post a message and when a reply is sent, I get a notification. But, of course, bots do not always understand the issue fully potentially resulting in multiple posts before a solution is identified.

Interviewer: And what was challenging in this experience?

Interviewee: From my perspective, it is not challenging to contact a company on social media, except for the fact that you do not always receive an answer from a human agent. I tend to prefer chats, either on social media or company websites, than traditional customer service channels.

Interviewer: As you experienced, artificial intelligence is increasingly being used for customer service on social media. How would you perceive a response of AI in this context? If you wish, you can elaborate on your experience with the internet provider company.

Interviewee: Indeed, my answer is based on my experience. When I contact customer service, I typically have already performed research to find a solution to my problem. I contact customer service only if I really need help and cannot solve the issue on my own. For example, I frequently contact customer service if I have no internet access. In the experience I described before, the chatbot asked

a generic question in response to my post. The subsequent answer was a list of simple solutions. I think they were just FAQs that I could have find in the company's website. This was very negative for me. As I said before, I contact customer service when I need advanced solutions. This usually implies that I need to speak with a human agent, who can perform creative problem solving. AI gives generic advice to generic issues. I am not stupid. I perform simple solutions, such as recharging or disconnecting the internet source, before contacting the company. Therefore, when I acknowledge that AI is answering to my query, I directly ask to interact with a human agent.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing this. What is your perception of AI then?

Interviewee: My perception is negative. Up to now, I have never found an AI that was developed enough to solve a complex issue. I feel like AI is suitable just for standard answers. The help it provides is not personalised. That is logical: an algorithm cannot be extremely precise and adapt to single, individual issues, at least in my experience. If in future I encounter any bot that provides satisfactory answers to complex issues, I would gladly change perception. I am sure such technology would save me time and efforts.

Interviewer: We reached the final question. When would the support of AI be more appropriate and more challenging for your requests on social media?

Interviewee: As I contact customer service only when I have completed enough research, I feel AI is helpful only when it is advanced enough to provide personalised answers, rather than suggesting simple FAQs resolutions. However, I understand that some other clients might contact customer service without trying on their own to fix a problem. Overall, I feel that no AI is developed enough to solve complex issues.

Interviewer: Anything you would like to add?

Interviewee: Not really.

Interviewer: Ok, our interview is over then. Thank you for your time.

Interviewee: That is great!

[Personal Conversation]

Interviewee: Have a nice day!

Interviewer: Ok, bye!

Empirical Quantitative Analysis: Survey

Appendix 15. Survey Structure and Questions

Welcome!

You are invited to participate in this online survey on AI in Social Media Customer Service. My name is Riccardo Casarin; I am a master student at Louvain School of Management and this study is part of my master thesis.

It takes less than 5 minutes to complete this survey.

Before we begin, please read the information below and provide your consent for participation in this study.

- There is no obligation to participate in this study. You can end your participation at any time. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study.
- Your responses will be anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. All information provided is used solely for the purposes of this research, including any resulting publications.
- The anonymous database, as well as the identifying data, will be kept for the necessary duration of the research, in accordance with the applicable privacy legislation (including Regulation 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of April 27, 2016 on the protection of individuals concerning personal data usage and sharing, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC).

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher via email at riccardo.casarin@student.uclouvain.be

ELECTRONIC CONSENT:

Please select your choice below. Clicking on the “I agree” button indicates that you are aged 18 or older, have read the above information, that you understood this information and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

- A. I agree
- B. I disagree

Before moving forward and answering the survey questions, please carefully read the scenario below and imagine yourself in this situation; *how would you feel, how would you react, what would you think?*

Survey 1: AI – Innovative Brand

You are a customer of an up-and-coming technology firm. The company has recently launched a new product. It is in everyone’s mouth. It is normal for such a tech-oriented brand. You jumped to their shop and bought a product for yourself. However, after a few weeks of use your product breaks down. You decide to contact the customer service of the brand via social media. You receive a reply from an **AI customer service agent** (i.e., a chatbot).

You write the following post: “@_brandname_ your product is faulty. It just broke down! This is very inconvenient”.

The brand replies to your post: “Hi Customer. I'm sorry about the issue. I'm going to solve this. I would be happy to send you a new shipment of the product, a refund or some different items of your choice. Let me know how I can improve this situation. Thank you for writing! – **Kobe, AI customer service agent**”

Survey 2: AI – Sophisticated Brand

You are a customer of a luxurious, well-known firm. The company has recently launched a new product. It is in everyone's mouth. It is normal for a classy and elegant brand. You jumped to their shop and bought a product for yourself. However, after a few weeks of use your product breaks down. You decide to contact the customer service of the brand via social media. You receive a reply from an **AI customer service agent** (i.e., a chatbot).

You write the following post: “@_brandname_ your product is faulty. It just broke down! This is very inconvenient”.

The brand replies to your post: “Hi Customer. I'm sorry about the issue. I'm going to solve this. I would be happy to send you a new shipment of the product, a refund or some different items of your choice. Let me know how I can improve this situation. Thank you for writing! – **Kobe, AI customer service agent**”

Survey 3: Human Agent – Innovative Brand

You are a customer of an up-and-coming technology firm . The company has recently launched a new product. It is in everyone's mouth. It is normal for such a tech-oriented brand. You jumped to their shop and bought a product for yourself. However, after a few weeks of use your product breaks down. You decide to contact the customer service of the brand via social media. This is the easiest communication channel for you. You receive a reply from a **human customer service agent**.

You write the following post: “@_brandname_ your product is faulty. It just broke down! This is very inconvenient”.

The brand replies to your post: “Hi Customer. I'm sorry about the issue. I'm going to solve this. I would be happy to send you a new shipment of the product, a refund or some different items of your choice. Let me know how I can improve this situation. Thank you for writing! – Alex, customer service employee”

Survey 4: Human Agent – Sophisticated Brand

You are a customer of a luxurious, well-known firm. The company has recently launched a new product. It is in everyone's mouth. It is normal for a classy and elegant brand. You jumped to their shop and bought a product for yourself. However, after a few weeks of use your product breaks down.

You decide to contact the customer service of the brand via social media. This is the easiest communication channel for you. You receive a reply from a **human customer service agent**.

You write the following post: “@_brandname_ your product is faulty. It just broke down! This is very inconvenient”.

The brand replies to your post: “Hi Customer. I'm sorry about the issue. I'm going to solve this. I would be happy to send you a new shipment of the product, a refund or some different items of your choice. Let me know how I can improve this situation. Thank you for writing! – Alex, customer service employee”

Questions

Given the situation just described...

Overall satisfaction (adapted from Van Vaerenbergh et al. 2013)

- I am satisfied with my customer service experience with this company
- I am not satisfied with this company
- How satisfied are you with the quality of this customer service?

--- break page ---

Repurchase intentions (adapted from Van Vaerenbergh et al. 2013)

- In the future, I will continue using this company for these products.
- As long as this company delivers its current products and services, I will not switch to a competitor.
- In the near future, I will NOT use this company any longer

--- break page ---

Customer service quality (adapted from Van Vaerenbergh et al. 2013)

- Overall, this company's customer service quality is:

Poor – excellent

Inferior – superior

Of low standards – of high standards

--- break page ---

Think back about the scenario

Manipulation checks

- The customer service agent who handled my complaint was: (1) an AI assistant (chatbot), (2) a human employee
- The company from which I bought the product was: (1) a luxurious, well-known brand, (2) an up-and-coming technology brand.

Scenario realism (adapted from Van Vaerenbergh et al. 2013)

- This scenario seems realistic
- What happens in this scenario could also happen in real life

--- break page ---

The survey is almost done. Please tell us a bit more about yourself

Sociodemographic questions:

Gender: Male/ Female/ Non-binary/ Prefer not to say

Region of Residence: EU/ Non EU

Age Group: What age are you?

Education: Secondary or lower/ Tertiary or higher

Employment: Employed/ Unemployed