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If you have ever tried to contact a company through a representative at a call center, you know how slow and frustrating the process can be.

Chatbots are the latest addition to the digital marketer's bag of tricks. Though chatbot is the buzz word from fast two years, it's still a bit unclear how conversational UIs can be helpful in the current scenario.

What is a chatbot? Are chatbots really that intelligent? Can they really replace a human? And what are the trends?

What is a Chatbot?

A chatbot is a conversational interface, infused with the artificial intelligence, cognitive abilities and the power of natural language processing. In simple words, chatbots are computer programs that include AI components and have the ability to converse with a user via messages or speech.

"Bots are the new apps, and it will fundamentally revolutionize how computing is experienced by everybody" - declared Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella in 2016, and they are considered to be one of the breakthrough technologies of 2016 and continuously trending in top technologies. A chatbot interacts with the user for a number of purposes like customer service, providing quick assistant or information, analysing the huge amount of data, get customer insights and feedback.

Trends

Provides 24*7 service availability, Instant replies

Chatbots provides a quick response instead of delayed automated answers. They hold immense potential in different verticals ranging from marketing, sales to customer retention and engagement.

Support for Chatbots by Facebook and Microsoft

One of the important initiative made by Facebook and Microsoft is the introduction of Messenger platform and Bot Framework for automated bots in 2016. Since then, more than 200,000 third-party bots have been introduced, from shopping assistants to bots for conversation, marketing, and other purposes.

From social networking to social messaging

Messaging platforms have seen a rapid growth in active users than social media in 2017.

Social messenger applications are now bigger than social networks. With the rise of messaging apps and chatbots, the way we are using social media to interact has changed and is driving chatbot marketing.

Customer engagement As E-commerce shopping assistants

E-commerce offers great opportunities for experimenting with chatbots. From a dealing with basic queries to complicated shopping assistants, the industry is very receptive to chatbots and associated technologies.

An example is eBay ShopBot, eBay has developed its bot to operate as a shopping assistant. It operates via Facebook Messenger, and it helps in suggesting items based on what the customer said. It learns user's preferences to better tailor its future suggestions and show more relevant products. It also allows users to purchase from within the app.

Human-like approach, Personalization

As a social animal, humans are always looking for a personal touch in the conversation. With competition and need for engagement increasing by the day, companies will need to make personalization actually feel personal.

Chatbots in Data Analytics by gaining customer insights

"Data never sleeps" – with an increase in social messaging, the huge amount of data is generating every second. Chatbots are basically being used to analyse the type of questions asked by the customer. Companies can use them further to understand their customers and improve different levels of marketing and interaction with customers. This also makes the bot better prepared to answer future questions.

Because of advancement in Machine learning and AI techniques, chatbots can be skilled to automate the process and improve themselves by learning from previous conversations.

Analysis: Are chatbots really that intelligent?

How can one define the intelligence of a chatbot? How are the precisions attained? Are the bots that make some query via responses given by user on button clicks, artificially intelligent?

Definitely, but they are just not far along the conversation axis. A chatbot is intelligent when it is able to understand user needs. Its intelligence is the ability to handle any scenario of a conversation with ease and responds like a human. It could be done with NLP (Natural Language Processing) and AIML (Artificial Intelligence Markup Language) understanding where it is able to understand sentences that you structure in the wrong way.

Because of Artificial Intelligence, the top examples of Chatbots are no longer a simple greeting tool which sends "hello" or "how are you", but in fact is stimulating a better customer service for businesses across all industries.

In the era of marketing and business, where customer service is a key area, modern chatbots can prove to be of prime importance by giving a faster solution to the queries of customers. It has been found out that 65% of consumers are willing to interact with a company via chatbot, indicating a strong opportunity for brands.

As we move into 2018 and beyond, chatbots will continue to change and evolve, providing better customer service, a more seamless experience, and more human-like performance. It surely indicates that chatbots are going to be a leading tool for businesses in the years to come, but are also powerful tools right now.