

Editorial

The two papers in this issue both explore the fundamental challenge of integrating potential customers in innovation processes. They revolve around the idea that involving customers early in innovation projects ensures that firms can reduce the number of flop projects. Understanding early what customers want (and also what they do not want) helps to develop products that actually solve potential customer problems instead of being merely a distraction.

In this domain, like in so many others, Artificial Intelligence, could be a huge facilitator. One of the many ways in which it could potentially be useful in this domain is by providing a cheap way of testing new product concepts. The core idea is that the AI could simulate respondents to market research studies, providing companies with „silicon samples” of AI participants that test new ideas and concepts. However, will these silicon samples generate results that resemble the results from studies with human participants? This is what the first paper in this issue explores. With their study „Choice-Based Conjoint for Designing Home Appliances: Human Versus Silicon Samples of Respondents”, Daniel Baier, Danilo Randazzo, and Maximilian Unger look at the validity of results obtained through AI conjoint participants. Specifically, they employ digital twins of human participants to respond to CBC choice sets. Their results are only somewhat encouraging. Results are helpful only, if additional information from experts and/or a pre-study is provided to the AI, otherwise results (especially at the individual level) are quite off (and close to random response behavior). In sum, it is too early to delegate concept testing to the AI.

There are also threats from employing AI in the innovation process. On the one hand, there is early evidence

that the different AI models all think alike in creative tasks (Jiang et al. 2026), making it more difficult to achieve true differentiation through innovations. On the other hand, employing AI may also become damaging to customer-firm relationships that may rely on establishing human connections. These processes are indirectly illuminated by the second paper in this issue. „Empowering Consumers, Building Brands: How Crowdsourcing Contests Strengthen Brand Passion.” In this research, Volker Bilgram, Alexander Hahn, and Johann Füller explore the consequences of involving customers innovation processes for the development of customer-firm relationships. They use survey data from participants in a real crowdsourcing project where customer developed new product ideas. Importantly, their results illustrate that the extent to which customer feel empowered through participating in crowdsourcing is positively associated with brand passion. This relationship is more pronounced if they have a high relationship motivation. Importantly, reward motivation is not linked to this relationship. Hence, it is possible that crowdsourcing initiatives where consumers are directly involved in the innovation process not only create new product ideas. They also strengthen the relationship with the customer base. It seems quite likely that this is something that AI idea generation will not be able to deliver.

Martin Klarmann and Udo Wagner

Editors-in-Chief

Reference

Jiang, L., Chai, Y., Li, M., Liu, M., Fok, R., Dziri, N., Tsvetkov, Y., Albalak, A., and Choi, Y. (2026). Artificial hivemind: The open-ended homogeneity of language models (and beyond). *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems*, 38.

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Editors-in-Chief: Prof. Dr. Martin Klarmann, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), Institute for Customer Insights (CIN), Kaiserstraße 12, D-79181 Karlsruhe, Germany, Phone: +49 721 608 43726
Prof. Dr. Udo Wagner, Modul University, School of International Management, Am Kahlenberg 1, A-1190 Wien, Austria, Phone: +43 1 320 3555 431
E-Mail: marketing-zfp@beck.de

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