

Marketing of the Future: The Power of AI-Expressed Emotions

Liyang Zhou¹, Wenlang Zeng¹

¹*School of Business Administration, Guizhou University of Finance and Economics, 550025, Guiyang, Guizhou, China*

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Abstract: With the rapid advancement of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) technologies, the role of AI in service marketing has become increasingly prominent. Unlike traditional customer-service agents, generative AI can recognize and convey emotions, offering consumers a more humanized and personalized interactive experience. This paper systematically reviews the functions of AI-expressed emotions in marketing contexts and examines its effects on consumer trust, satisfaction, loyalty, and continued use intention. The findings indicate that AI-driven emotional support can strengthen consumers' emotional bonds and purchase intentions, yet challenges remain regarding the authenticity of emotional expression and data privacy concerns. By integrating existing studies through a literature-analysis approach, the article outlines the application prospects, underlying mechanisms, and boundary conditions of AI-enabled emotional marketing, providing both theoretical guidance and practical recommendations for firms seeking to optimize customer-service strategies and enhance consumer experience.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), a new wave of technological transformation is reshaping industries worldwide. AI has been increasingly adopted across sectors, including healthcare, education, tourism and hospitality, and service marketing. Within service domains, AI-powered agents offer distinct operational advantages over human representatives—such as faster response times and 24/7 availability—enhancing service efficiency and accessibility. Prior research has primarily focused on the functional attributes of AI in service encounters, including its capabilities [1], perceived usefulness and sociability and responsiveness [2]. These studies suggest that although AI improves service performance, it often lacks the ability to address consumers' emotional and personalization needs. However, recent advancements in generative AI—such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Kimi—have expanded AI's potential to simulate human-like interaction. Unlike conventional AI systems, generative AI leverages deep learning, natural language processing (NLP), and neural networks to recognize patterns, interpret meaning, and generate novel, contextually relevant responses. These technologies enable AI to adjust its interactions based on context, user history, and emotional cues, allowing for more adaptive and emotionally responsive service delivery. As consumers increasingly seek empathetic and personalized support, interest in the emotional dimensions of AI interaction has grown. This study

investigates how AI-expressed emotions shapes consumer decision-making in service marketing contexts. Specifically, it explores: (1) the role of AI-expressed emotions in influencing consumer behavior; (2) how emotional capabilities reshape human–AI interaction; (3) how ethical concerns—particularly those related to privacy and transparency—affect AI adoption in marketing. By addressing these questions, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of AI’s evolving role in service experiences. As reliance on digital platforms grows, organizations must not only leverage AI’s functional strengths but also harness its emotional capabilities to foster meaningful customer engagement. Furthermore, firms must navigate emerging challenges related to data privacy, consent, and ethical AI use—issues increasingly critical in a rapidly digitizing marketplace.

2. Research Method

This study primarily adopts a literature analysis method. Research papers were collected from CNKI and Web of Science using key terms such as “AI emotion,” chatbots, recommender agents, et al. The Chinese literature search focused mainly on journals such as *Management World*, *Nankai Business Review*, *Acta Psychologica Sinica*, *Journal of Marketing Science*, et al. The English literature search covered journals including *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Marketing Science*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Service Research*, *Information Systems Research*, *Journal of Business Research*, *MIS Quarterly*.

3. Research Framework

3.1. The overview of AI-expressed emotions in Marketing

Emotion is a complex psychological and physiological state involving sensory reactions, cognitive appraisal, and behavior [3]. It arises from internal or external stimuli and deeply affects decision-making, motivation, and social interaction. Emotions range from diffuse moods (e.g., happiness) to acute feelings (e.g., anger) and are integral to human interactions. In marketing, emotions shape consumer behavior, with empathy and emotional support boosting satisfaction, brand loyalty, repurchase intention, and word-of-mouth referrals. With AI advancing rapidly, human services like consultation and recommendation are increasingly replaced by AI agents—algorithms assist decision-making, chatbots influence price perception and purchase [4], and conversational agents improve experiences. Yet, research mainly addresses AI’s functionality, anthropomorphism, and human comparisons, overlooking AI’s emotional competencies. This study explores AI’s emotional expression’s impact on consumer decision-making, redefines human-AI interaction, and examines ethical issues like data privacy and transparency influencing AI adoption.

The emergence of generative AI (GAI) like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Kimi shifts digital content creation and consumption by generating novel text, images, and audio via machine learning and neural networks, enabling emotionally resonant consumer experiences. This challenges past views that AI lacks personalized or affective value, ushering in emotion-driven consumption. Employee emotional behaviors (e.g., smiling, greetings) positively impact consumer emotions, satisfaction, revisit intentions, and loyalty. With the growing deployment of generative AI in service processes, understanding how AI-expressed emotions affect consumer behavior has emerged as a critical and timely research topic. Emotions generated during AI-consumer interactions can include basic emotions (e.g., joy, sadness, fear), self-conscious emotions (e.g., pride, guilt, embarrassment), and moral emotions (e.g., contempt, righteous anger, social disgust) [5]. Huang & Rust (2024) explored how generative AI identifies, interprets, and manages consumer emotions during the customer care journey, and how these emotional responses can be aligned with service marketing strategies [6].

Beyond emotional recognition, a growing body of literature has examined AI's display of empathy, positive affect (e.g., gratitude, enthusiasm, joy), and humor. Empathic responses from AI enhance the quality of emotional experiences and improve relationship satisfaction and consumer loyalty [7]. High-empathy AI can also reduce psychological distance and strengthen perceived trust, thereby increasing users' intention to continue using the AI [8]. Empathy expressed by conversational agents positively impacts consumer engagement and hedonic experiences [9]. For instance, the accuracy, richness, and personalization of generative AI-expressed emotions can heighten perceived enthusiasm and closeness [10]. In tourism service contexts, research found that emotionally authentic chatbot expressions—particularly concern and care—trigger more favorable attitudes, as perceived emotional authenticity outweighs cognitive inferences, consistent with the Affect-as-Social-Information theory. In service recovery, emotionally charged messages have a greater influence on consumer satisfaction than neutral ones [11]. AI exhibiting high emotional mimicry and empathic concern leads to greater pleasure and arousal, which in turn increases usage intention. Liu et al. (2024) find that AI exhibiting high emotional mimicry and empathic concern leads to greater pleasure and arousal, which in turn increases usage intention [12]. However, inconsistencies between AI-expressed emotions and consumer expectations can undermine service evaluations. This expectation gap is reduced in communal relationship contexts, where consumers are more accepting of AI's emotional behaviors. AI's affective communication through virtual service assistants also positively influences satisfaction, repurchase intentions, and word-of-mouth [13]. Emotional cues—such as text, emojis, and images—enhance social presence and human-likeness, strengthening perceived interactivity and engagement [14]. Moreover, recognizing consumer traits is essential in AI-consumer interaction. For example, when customers have a high process-oriented goal, AI's emotional expression improves satisfaction and reduces perceived expectation violations. The role of humor in AI communication has also gained scholarly attention. Humor alleviates negative affect, enhances positive emotions, and fosters interpersonal enjoyment, and similar effects have been observed in human-AI interactions. Classifying AI-driven humor into four psychological functions: self-deprecating, self-enhancing, affiliative, and aggressive. For example, humor in casual chatbot interactions can enhance entertainment value and service satisfaction [15]. In tourism and hospitality settings, self-deprecating and self-enhancing humor foster perceptions of competence and warmth, and boost consumers' continued usage intention [16]. Overall, AI's emotional support enhances perceived warmth, intimacy, and understanding in consumer experiences, ultimately contributing to more enjoyable and satisfying shopping journeys.

With rapid advances in generative AI—especially large language models like ChatGPT, Kimi, Doubao, Google Gemini, and Anthropic Claude—AI's capacity to recognize and support consumer emotions has greatly improved. Yet, emotional expression by generative AI remains underexplored. Earlier research focused on AI's functional skills and human/anthropomorphic comparisons, highlighting AI's limits in personalized and emotional support. Since AI now employs affective computing, camera-based recognition, deep learning, and neural networks to detect and respond to consumer emotions, past views on its experiential shortcomings warrant reconsideration. Current studies focus on outcomes like usage intentions, attitudes, and satisfaction, but underlying psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions of AI's emotional impact on consumer decisions remain largely unknown.

3.2. Theoretical Foundations of Research on AI-expressed emotions in Marketing

3.2.1. Interaction Perspective

The interactional perspective's theoretical foundation focuses on the communication process and dynamic exchanges between senders and receivers, covering information transmission and social

interaction. This study centers on how AI agents perceive, interpret, and express emotions in consumer interactions. The theory highlights how individuals express, understand, and respond to emotions in interactions, and how AI technologies recognize, model, communicate, and respond to emotional information. These processes critically shape consumer experiences and shopping decisions. Key supporting theories include Affective Social Information, Emotional Contagion, Social Affective, Interpersonal Relationship, Affective Computing, Parasocial Relationship, and Parasocial Interaction theories. By recognizing and responding to consumer emotions, AI can strengthen customer-agent/brand relationships, boosting purchase intentions, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth.

3.2.2. Contextual Perspective

The situational theoretical foundation highlights key factors affecting AI marketing effectiveness and guides understanding of the dynamic relationship between consumer behavior and firms' AI strategies. It draws on Cultural Dimensions, Symbolic Interactionism, Media Richness, and Multimodal Communication theories. AI adapts communication modes to context, producing different consumer responses; for example, voice search better meets consumer needs than text input. Moreover, from the lens of Media Richness Theory, engaging consumers through both voice and text modalities has been shown to increase conversion rates in shopping contexts [17].

3.3. Analyzing the Impact Factors on AI's Emotional Expressions in Marketing Contexts

3.3.1. Consumer-Related Factors

Consumer-related factors critically influence AI marketing effectiveness by shaping responses to AI-generated emotional expressions. These include consumer characteristics and motivations. Familiarity with AI technologies, consumer knowledge, and personal beliefs [18] significantly influence purchasing decisions. For instance, consumers who believe AI can express emotions perceive AI emotions as more authentic, positively impacting their attitudes and usage intentions [18]. Greater AI familiarity also enhances perceptions of the agent's integrity, competence, and benevolence, boosting purchase willingness.

3.3.2. Technology-Related Factors

Previous research largely overlooked the emotional capabilities of artificial intelligence because traditional AI systems operated based on pre-programmed rules and could not offer personalized support that responded to consumers' unique emotional states and needs. However, the emergence of generative AI has fundamentally challenged this notion. Generative AI—powered by technologies such as deep learning, natural language processing, and neural networks—can acquire knowledge about language patterns and semantic interpretation, thereby enabling it to understand and interpret human language and ultimately generate content that is similar yet novel [19]. As a result, generative AI can provide personalized service support tailored to consumers' individual needs and emotional variations.

3.3.3. Societal Factors

Social factors include general beliefs about AI, with widespread skepticism about its ability to truly express emotions. Many doubt AI can perceive, understand, and respond to human emotions like humans, viewing AI as a tool bound by pre-programmed rules. When AI attempts emotional expression in interactions, it may trigger the uncanny valley effect, causing discomfort or aversion

[20]. Such reactions may hinder the adoption and effectiveness of AI technologies in marketing contexts.

3.4. Effects of AI-expressed emotions in Marketing

3.4.1. Direct Effects of AI -expressed emotions in Marketing

From the perspective of consumers' attitudes and perceptions toward AI, emotional expressions by artificial intelligence can enhance perceived competence and intelligence, thereby increasing consumer trust in AI and improving satisfaction during the shopping experience [18]. In terms of consumer behavior, emotionally responsive services provided by AI foster greater willingness to continue using AI technologies, enhance purchase and repurchase intentions, and lead to more favorable evaluations of service encounters.

3.4.2. Mediating Mechanisms of AI-expressed emotions

Currently, public beliefs about AI's emotional intelligence remain inconsistent. When AI agents provide service support to consumers, their emotional responses play a critical role. If consumers believe that AI is capable of expressing emotions, this belief reduces the perceived expectancy violation. Conversely, if consumers do not believe AI can provide emotional support, they are more likely to perceive a strong expectancy violation, which in turn heightens their sense of threat from AI [18]. This effect is further moderated by consumers' perceptions of the authenticity of AI's emotional expressions. Drawing on the Affective Social Information Theory, explored how the perceived authenticity of AI's emotional expression impacts consumer responses. Although rooted in the assumption that AI lacks emotional capability, their findings suggest that consumers are more influenced by immediate affective responses than by inferential processing (e.g., the perceived appropriateness of the emotional display) [18]. Moreover, during service interactions, emotionally supportive responses from AI also enhance consumers' sense of social presence [21]. This challenges earlier assumptions that AI cannot create a warm service atmosphere. For instance, AI's humorous responses have been found to foster perceptions of warmth, which increases consumers' tolerance toward service failures. These effects can be attributed to the emotional expressions of AI reducing psychological distance and strengthening trust between consumers and AI [8]. Based on the above discussion, emotional responses from AI during service encounters facilitate a closer relationship between consumers and AI, ultimately influencing downstream consumer behaviors.

3.4.3. Boundary Conditions of AI-expressed emotions

AI-expressed emotions are shaped by factors such as relationship orientation, AI identity disclosure, consumer immunity, time pressure, interaction context, thinking styles, anthropomorphism, and empathy orientation. In transactional contexts, consumers prioritize need fulfillment over emotionalized service, whereas in social contexts, AI's emotional responsiveness is more valued. A more humanlike AI appearance increases acceptance of emotional feedback. Moreover, consumers' thinking styles affect perceptions of emotional authenticity; rational thinkers often respond more negatively to AI's emotional cues [18]. Thus, AI should tailor its service strategies to the interaction context and consumer type.

4. The key Challenges of AI-expressed Emotions in Marketing Research

4.1. Varied Beliefs about Artificial Intelligence

Previous research presents two contrasting perspectives. The first suggests that AI is incapable of providing personalized and emotionally responsive services to consumers, thereby failing to meet consumer needs in certain contexts. For instance, in socially oriented service settings, consumers often expect emotional and relational support [5], which traditional AI has been unable to deliver. The second perspective comes from individuals who are more familiar with AI technologies. These consumers recognize the rapid advancement of AI and have experienced its evolving service capabilities, which challenge the conclusions of earlier research. That is, AI is increasingly developing toward empathic intelligence, with potentially significant implications for marketing practices. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate between consumers' varying beliefs about AI and to explore how these beliefs influence their adoption and acceptance of AI-powered services.

4.2. Emotional Authenticity of AI-Expressed Emotions

According to previous studies, the emotional expressions of AI have a more immediate and stronger impact on consumers than cognitive inferences do [18]. Furthermore, when service providers offer emotional responses while rejecting consumer requests, it can trigger more intense negative reactions from consumers. This outcome stems from skepticism regarding the authenticity of AI's emotional expressions. Many consumers believe that AI lacks genuine experiential capacity and can only respond based on pre-programmed rules or historical data, leading to feelings of aversion toward emotionally expressive AI. However, some studies suggest that when AI is designed with anthropomorphic features, consumers tend to interact with it as if it were human, making emotional expressions appear more legitimate and acceptable [12]. Overall, AI's emotional expressions have not yet achieved widespread acceptance. Future research should explore strategies to enhance the perceived authenticity of AI-generated emotional responses.

4.3. Privacy Concerns in the Context of Artificial Intelligence

AI-generated services for consumers are primarily based on the integration of user inputs and historical data. In emotionally driven contexts, AI must learn from past human data and synthesize it with consumers' real-time responses to gradually recognize emotional states and deliver emotionally appropriate feedback. However, this data-intensive process raises concerns about consumer privacy and data security. Future research should place greater emphasis on addressing privacy protection in AI-driven emotional interactions.

5. Directions for future research

While existing research has gradually matured in exploring the functional aspects of AI, studies on the experiential dimensions—particularly AI's emotional engagement with consumers—remain underdeveloped. Based on the preceding analysis, this paper proposes several future research directions. First, Understanding how different consumer beliefs about AI—such as trust, fear, expectations, and skepticism—shape behavior. Trusting consumers adopt AI more readily, while skeptical ones resist due to privacy and reliability concerns. Research should examine how emotions, social influence, and biases affect these beliefs, AI adoption, and loyalty, and explore strategies to reshape beliefs and reduce negative emotions. Second, Improving AI's emotional recognition and response accuracy. Given individual, cultural, and contextual differences in

emotional expression (facial cues, voice, body language), research should develop adaptive, context-aware algorithms to enhance empathy, naturalness, and trust, including cross-cultural and personalized emotional models. Third, Investigating AI's emotional expression and perception across cultures. Cultural norms affect emotional display and interpretation, challenging AI systems. Future work should train AI to detect and adapt to cultural differences and customize emotional interactions accordingly. Finally, Addressing privacy and ethical issues. As AI relies on historical data for emotional support, concerns about privacy and emotional manipulation grow, highlighted by cases like a recent US boy's suicide after AI interaction. Research should focus on transparent privacy protections, informed consent, preventing misuse of emotional data, and defining ethical boundaries to avoid dependency or coercion.

6. Conclusion

This paper systematically reviews research on generative AI (GAI) emotional expression in service marketing, based on core CNKI and Web of Science literature. It analyzes how AI recognizes and conveys emotions via text, voice, and multimodal signals, drawing on theories like Affective Social Information Theory, Emotional Contagion, and Affective Computing. The study examines the impact of AI's emotional expression on consumer perceptions of AI capability, trust, and brand loyalty. It identifies three key factors—consumer traits, technological maturity, and social beliefs—that influence AI's emotional support effects on satisfaction, purchase intention, and continued use, mediated by reduced expectation violations and enhanced social presence. Constraints such as authenticity deficits, privacy concerns, and cultural differences are also discussed. Finally, future research directions include differentiated belief systems, cross-cultural adaptation, multimodal algorithm reliability, and privacy and ethical protection, aiming to guide theory development and practical AI emotional marketing.

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