

Emotional AI & Consumer Behavior: Reading Minds with Machines

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ABSTRACT

Emotional Artificial Intelligence (Emotion AI) has emerged as a critical technological innovation, bridging human emotions and computational intelligence to convert consumer behavior research. This paper explores how machines are steadily capable of detecting, interpreting, and even imitating emotions, thereby influencing decision-making, customer experience, and marketing strategies. By synthesizing research from various disciplines, including psychology, consumer behavior, education, psychiatry, and artificial intelligence, this study investigates the mechanisms of Emotion AI, its applications in consumer contexts, and its effects for future markets. Using secondary sources from academic journals, conference proceedings, dissertations, industry blogs, and preprints, the paper depicts a comprehensive view of the role of emotional AI in shaping consumer participation. Key themes involve theoretical foundations of emotional intelligence in machines, consumer acceptance, ethical challenges, and the fusion of emotion-aware systems in digital marketing. The findings suggest that Emotion AI is not only a tool for understanding consumer emotions but also a force that proactively reshapes consumer identities and choices. Limitations and framework for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour, Emotional AI, Psychology of AI, Ethical implications of AI, Emotion Recognition, Affective Computing, Human AI Interaction, Digital Consumers.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is developing from cognitive and analytical functions into more human-centered domains that require understanding and responding to emotional signals. Emotional AI (also referred to as affective computing or emotion-aware AI) seeks to equip machines with the ability to detect, analyze, and interpret human emotions through methods such as facial recognition, voice intonation, physiological signals, and behavioral analysis (Martínez-Miranda & Aldea, 2005). In the context of consumer behavior, this technological frontier promises to revolutionize how businesses join with customers, offering personalized, emotionally expressive interactions that influence decision-making and loyalty.

The ascend of Emotion AI comes at a time when consumer expectations are evolving promptly. Digital consumers demand personalization, empathy, and responsiveness from brands. Traditional methods of understanding consumer psychology—surveys, interviews, and focus groups—are often limited to capture unconscious emotional drivers of behavior. Emotion AI provides a new toolkit for marketers, researchers, and businesses to analyze real-time emotions at scale (Kumar, 2021).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the interrelation of Emotion AI and consumer behavior through a comprehensive review of scholarly and professional contributions. Specifically, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the theoretical foundations of

Emotion AI and its relation to consumer behavior?

2.How has Emotion AI been applied in marketing, education, psychiatry, and other contexts relevant to consumer choices?

3.What are the implications, opportunities, and ethical risks of using machines to interpret emotions?

4.How might Emotion AI reshape the future of consumer engagement and decision-making?

This study adopts a qualitative, secondary research methodology, synthesizing existing works to build a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Literature Review

To understand the topic better, this section examines existing literature on Emotional AI and consumer behavior.

Foundations of Emotional AI

The study of emotions in artificial intelligence dates back to early explorations of how machines could imitate or recognize human affect. Martínez-Miranda and Aldea (2005) provided one of the foundational discussions on the role of emotions in both human and artificial intelligence, proposing that emotions are not merely secondary to cognition but integral to decision-making. Building on this, Zhao, Li, and Xu (2022) described the evolution from Emotion AI toward cognitive AI, highlighting how emotion recognition serves as a stepping-stone toward broader cognitive modeling.

Gkikas and Theodoridis (2022) further illustrated that AI has become an essential tool in understanding consumer behavior, providing frameworks for integrating affective signals into models of buying decisions. Similarly, Bergner

(2022) investigated how conversational AI, when designed with a theory-of-mind perspective, influences technology-mediated consumer behavior by making machines appear more pertinent and human-like.

Applications in Marketing and Consumer Engagement

Marketing has been one of the earliest and most notable fields to adopt Emotion AI. Del Prete (2021) emphasized how emotion detection technologies are being integrated into AI-driven customer service, allowing companies to detect and manage customer emotions during service interactions. Kumar (2021) argued that Emotion AI opens new options for consumer research, enabling more accurate measurement of consumer engagement through tools such as facial coding and eye-tracking.

Industry observers such as Mehta and Dwivedi (2023) described Emotion AI as the next frontier for customer engagement, stressing its ability to tailor interactions and anticipate consumer needs in real time. Manoharan (2024) explored the role of emotional storytelling in digital marketing, suggesting that AI-enhanced illustrations can create deeper emotional bonds between consumers and brands.

Jain, Wadhvani, and Eastman (2024) facilitated a hybrid review on artificial intelligence in consumer behavior, presenting a research agenda that includes Emotion AI as a transformative driver of consumer engagement and loyalty. Their work integrates with Liu, Zhang, Jiang, Chen, and Wang (2024), who systematically reviewed applications of Emotional AI in English language education but outlined similar implications for consumer

learning and adaptation in marketing contexts.

Psychological and Behavioral Implications

Monteith, Glenn, Geddes, Whybrow, and Bauer (2022) discussed the commercial use of Emotion AI in psychiatry, reporting its implications for understanding mental states and the ethical concerns related with such usage. Their findings are relevant to consumer contexts, where detecting emotional sensitivities could lead to manipulative marketing practices.

Yadav (2025) contributed to this discussion by exploring how emotional memory and digital identity interact with consumer choice. He argued that Emotion AI technologies influence not only consumer behavior but also the formation of identities and raising questions about autonomy and manipulation.

Ho, Mantello, and Ho (2023) provided an analytical framework for examining attitudes toward Emotion AI, emphasizing a triple-faceted approach that includes technological, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions. This framework is vital for understanding consumer acceptance and reluctance to emotion-aware systems.

Educational and Cognitive Perspectives

The relationship between emotion and learning also presents insights into consumer behavior. Lin, Chai, Jong, Dai, Guo, and Qin (2021) mapped the structural relationship among students' motivation to learn AI, showing that emotional and motivational factors significantly impact engagement. Such findings align with consumer contexts, where motivation and emotional resonance drive purchasing and brand loyalty.

Li et al. (2023) examined emotions in generative

AI, categorizing them into positive, negative, and ambiguous dimensions. Their study facilitates to understanding how consumers perceive emotional outputs of AI systems, which directly relates to trust and acceptance in marketing contexts.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative secondary research approach to analyze Emotional AI and consumer behavior. Data was drawn from existing literature including journal articles, dissertations, systematic reviews, book chapters, and industry reports. A thematic analysis was applied to structure insights into four key areas: (1) framework of Emotional AI, (2) consumer engagement, (3) psychological and behavioral impacts, and (4) ethical considerations. By comparing perspectives across disciplines such as psychology, marketing, and AI, the study assures reliability and provides a balanced understanding of the topic.

Analysis and Findings

The literature suggests several key findings:

1. Emotion AI enhances consumer research: Tools such as facial coding, eye tracking, and sentiment study provide real-time, aim insights into consumer emotions (Kumar, 2021; Del Prete, 2021).

2. Emotional resonance drives engagement: Emotion-aware systems can enhance consumer loyalty and engagement through personalization and storytelling (Mehta & Dwivedi, 2023; Manoharan, 2024).

3. Ethical risks are significant: Scholars advise that emotion detection can be manipulative or invasive, particularly when applied in psychiatry or consumer marketing (Monteith et al., 2022;

Yadav, 2025).

4. Consumer acceptance is complex: Attitudes toward Emotion AI rely on cultural, psychological, and contextual factors (Ho et al., 2023).

5. Broader implications extend beyond marketing: Insights from education and psychiatry show parallels that inform consumer research (Lin et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024).

Discussion

The integration of Emotion AI into consumer research and marketing has profound implications. On one hand, it enables brands to produce emotionally resonant experiences that feel personalized and empathetic. On the other hand, it boosts ethical questions about manipulation, autonomy, and digital identity.

Emotion AI's role in molding consumer behavior is not passive. By influencing emotional memory and identity (Yadav, 2025), AI systems may proactively reshape consumer choices, creating new forms of dependency between humans and machines. The evolution about cognitive AI (Zhao et al., 2022) suggests that future systems will not only detect emotions but also predict and influence them in real time, potentially transforming markets.

Conclusion

Emotion AI represents a significant step in both technology and consumer behavior research. By bridging the gap between cognitive intelligence and emotional influence, it allows machines to "read minds" in ways that were once the domain of psychology. While its applications in marketing, education, and psychiatry offer extensive opportunities, the ethical risks cannot be overlooked.

The future of Emotion AI will be based on how researchers, policymakers, and businesses navigate the balance between innovation and ethics. Consumer behavior, as shaped by machines capable of reading and influencing emotions, will likely evolve into new models where emotional authenticity, trust, and digital identity are central.

Limitations and Future Research

This paper is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and does not include primary empirical research. Additionally, the references provided, while diverse, do not cover all perspectives on Emotion AI, such as biometric engineering or cross-cultural comparisons.

Future research should include empirical studies that measure real-world consumer reactions to Emotion AI, cross-cultural analyses of consumer acceptance, and deeper exploration of ethical frameworks.

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