Feeling Machines: How Emotional Expression in AI-Generated Recommendations Shapes Consumer Responses

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Generative AI chatbots are increasingly used for product discovery and recommendations, yet prior research reports mixed findings regarding the effectiveness of emotional communication in chatbot interactions. Drawing on Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT), this study examines how emotional expression in AI-generated product recommendations influences consumer responses. This study investigates how emotional language interacts with consumers' expectations of AI emotionality and how its effectiveness depends on product type and product involvement. An online experiment employing a 2 (emotion: presence vs. absence) × 2 (product type: hedonic vs. utilitarian) × 2 (product involvement: high vs. low) design is conducted in a simulated travel recommendation context where participants interact with a GPT-based chatbot. Consumer responses are measured through behavioral engagement and self-reported evaluations, including satisfaction and purchase intention. The study extends EVT to AI-mediated recommendation environments and identifies boundary conditions for emotional AI communication, offering insights for firms designing conversational AI recommendation systems.

Keywords: Generative AI; AI chatbots; emotional expression; product recommendations; Expectancy Violation Theory; consumer responses