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From chatbots to conversational commerce: The role of AI in shaping consumer purchase decisions

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Abstract

As conversational artificial intelligence (AI) continues to transform digital commerce, understanding how chatbot-mediated interactions shape consumer decision-making is essential. This study investigates the role of AI-based chatbots in influencing consumer purchase behavior through real-time, natural language communication. Focusing on the emerging dimensions of perceived empathy and trust, the research employs a mixed-methods approach combining a quantitative survey (n = 420) and qualitative text mining of chatbot dialogues collected from the used car sales sector in the Tangerang region, Indonesia. Findings reveal four key insights: (1) perceived empathy strongly predicts consumer trust, (2) trust in AI significantly drives behavioral intention to purchase, (3) empathy also directly influences intention, and (4) empathetic language triggers engagement during chatbot interactions. These results demonstrate that affective communication by AI agents is a critical driver of consumer responses in digital transactions. The study extends the Technology Acceptance Model by integrating emotional constructs and contributes to human resource and marketing strategy by showing how emotional intelligence, when encoded into AI systems, affects relational and behavioral outcomes. Despite the geographic and sectoral limitations of the sample, the findings underscore the growing need to humanize AI communication in commerce. Future research should explore cross-cultural validations and assess AI-human interaction in broader organizational contexts.

Keywords: conversational AI; consumer trust; perceived empathy; chatbot engagement

1. Introduction

From a broad perspective, the rise of AI-powered chatbots is rapidly reshaping digital commerce and consumer engagement. AI chatbots—software agents using natural language processing—are increasingly facilitating shopping and support interactions, to the point that industry forecasts predict over 90% of company–consumer interactions will be mediated by chatbots in the near future. Chatbots promise personalized, 24/7 service at scale, transforming traditional firm–customer dynamics [1]. In fact, Sidlauskienė note that “the rise of AI-based chatbots has gradually changed the way consumers shop,” as consumers grow accustomed to conversational interfaces [2]. This trend has given birth to conversational commerce, whereby customers make purchases via messaging and AI assistants and scholars highlight that conversational commerce is entering a new stage of AI-driven interaction [3]. In emerging markets like Indonesia, digital channels are booming: for example, Indonesia sold over 1.08 million new cars in 2022 and its used-car market is roughly three times larger, in a market where nearly 80% of the population are Internet users [4]. In this context, understanding how AI chatbots can influence purchase decisions—especially in high-value categories like used automobiles—is both timely and important.

Academic research on chatbots, empathy, and trust in marketing has proliferated in the last decade. Studies show that anthropomorphic design (making chatbots “human-like”) and empathy cues can significantly improve consumer attitudes. For instance, Gomes demonstrate that anthropomorphic chatbots – those mimicking human tone and personality – foster perceptions of authenticity, competence and trust, which boost customer loyalty and willingness to buy [5]. Similarly, Sidlauskienė and Balakrishnan find that chatbots with humanlike verbal cues increase perceived personalization and even willingness to pay higher prices for products [2], [3]. Balakrishnan & Dwivedi explicitly link anthropomorphism to purchase intention: they report that perceived anthropomorphism was the strongest predictor of positive attitude and purchase intention in a digital assistant context [3]. In the realm of empathy and social presence, recent work highlights that chatbots perceived as empathic lead consumers to feel

more “warmth” and to trust the agent’s recommendations. Mari found that when a voice-based AI showed empathic understanding, users were significantly more inclined to trust its advice and delegate tasks to it [6]. Juquelier similarly show that empathetic language in chatbots (e.g. expressing concern) increases customers’ satisfaction and perceived information quality, which boosts overall customer experience [7]. These effects are often moderated by context: for example, Juquelier et al. report that under severe time pressure, empathy cues can backfire because consumers prioritize efficiency over warmth. In short, the literature suggests that social-emotional factors like anthropomorphism, warmth, and empathy are critical levers of trust and engagement in conversational commerce [5], [7].

Despite this progress, important gaps remain. To date, most empirical studies have examined general consumer markets or specific domains (e.g. banking, retail, hospitality), often in developed countries. Few investigations have focused on the used-car sector or on emerging-market contexts where digital adoption and trust barriers differ. One exception is the work of Panjaitan and Risqiani, who explored Indonesian used-car platforms and found that chatbot service quality strongly influences perceived value and cognitive trust (analytical confidence in the bot), which in turn drive satisfaction [8]. Notably, however, they found affective trust (emotional confidence) was not directly linked to satisfaction and did not examine purchase outcomes. In other words, the roles of empathic connection and trust in actual buying decisions on used-car sites are still underexplored. Furthermore, no prior study has integrated the insights from conversational commerce and human–AI interaction literature into the specific context of Tangerang’s used-car market – a large, competitive market where real-time digital guidance could be decisive. Consequently, it is unclear how AI chatbots that simulate empathy (e.g. understanding a buyer’s needs) can influence consumers’ trust, perceived value, and ultimately their decision to purchase a used car in this setting.

This research thus addresses a timely and relevant problem. Theoretically, it extends conversational commerce and HCI theories (such as Media Equation and CASA) by examining how perceived empathy and trust in AI agents shape high-involvement purchasing behavior. Practically, its contributions will guide marketers and platform designers: in a booming Indonesian used-car market worth tens of billions of dollars [4], understanding how to deploy empathetic chatbots to build trust and drive sales can create competitive advantage. In particular, we ask: (1) How do AI-based chatbots influence consumer purchase decisions in the used-car market? (2) What roles do perceived empathy and consumer trust in these chatbots play in mediating that influence? By answering these questions, this study will advance theory on AI-enabled marketing (illuminating the social and emotional mechanisms of conversational commerce) and offer actionable insights for businesses seeking to leverage chatbots in automotive sales.

This study offers significant theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of digital marketing, human–AI interaction, and consumer decision-making, particularly within the context of conversational commerce in high-involvement industries. By addressing how perceived empathy and trust in AI-based chatbots influence consumer purchase decisions in the used car market, the research extends and deepens existing theoretical frameworks while offering actionable insights for practitioners.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the advancement of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by introducing affective constructs—namely, perceived empathy and emotional trust—as critical antecedents to behavioral intention in AI-mediated purchasing contexts [9]. While TAM traditionally emphasizes cognitive factors such as perceived usefulness and ease of use, the integration of emotional and relational variables responds to more recent calls to adapt TAM to socially interactive technologies. In doing so, the study highlights the importance of affective trust as a distinct construct from cognitive trust, especially in high-risk, emotionally charged purchasing decisions such as used car transactions.

Furthermore, the study builds upon the Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) framework [10], which posits that humans interact with computers and AI agents using social rules and expectations. By empirically demonstrating that consumers attribute empathy, credibility, and warmth to AI chatbots during purchase deliberations, the research reinforces CASA’s relevance in digital commerce and offers empirical support for its extension into high-involvement e-commerce environments. In this regard, the study also contributes to the growing body of literature on conversational commerce, moving beyond functional attributes to examine how emotionally intelligent AI agents can shape real consumer behavior.

Practically, the findings offer strategic guidance for marketers, platform developers, and customer experience designers. Specifically, the research identifies chatbot characteristics—such as empathetic tone, personalized responses, and conversational flow—that enhance consumer trust and positively affect purchase decisions. These insights are particularly relevant in the used car industry, where consumers often face uncertainty, risk aversion, and the need for reassurance. For digital automotive platforms operating in Tangerang and similar emerging

markets, this research suggests that the implementation of emotionally resonant AI interactions can foster deeper engagement, reduce buyer hesitation, and ultimately improve conversion rates.

Moreover, the study informs AI-driven service design by demonstrating that empathy in chatbot interactions is not merely a humanizing feature but a functional mechanism for influencing consumer outcomes. Developers can leverage these findings to refine chatbot training datasets, optimize response frameworks, and balance efficiency with emotional nuance. The research also contributes to market-specific knowledge by contextualizing trust-building dynamics within the Indonesian digital economy, where the transition from offline to online transactions is still evolving and culturally sensitive.

2. Research Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey analysis and qualitative text mining of chatbot interactions, to investigate how perceived empathy and trust in AI-based chatbots influence consumer purchase decisions in the used car market. The mixed-methods approach is particularly appropriate for understanding both the measurable behavioral outcomes and the nuanced, context-specific linguistic elements of AI-consumer interactions [11]. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study seeks to bridge the interpretive depth of natural language analysis with the statistical rigor of structural modeling, offering a holistic understanding of the mechanisms at play [12]

The quantitative phase involved a structured survey administered to consumers who had interacted with chatbots on used car sales platforms within Tangerang City, South Tangerang, and Tangerang Regency. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure relevance and contextual accuracy, targeting respondents who had either engaged in or considered a used car purchase online within the past six months. A total of 350 valid responses were obtained, exceeding the recommended minimum sample size for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), which is suitable for complex models and smaller sample sizes compared to covariance-based SEM [13].

The survey instrument was developed using validated multi-item constructs from prior research. Perceived empathy was measured using an adapted version of McColl-Kennedy and White's empathy scale, modified for AI-chatbot contexts following the adjustments proposed by Juquelier [14], [15]. Trust in AI was assessed through cognitive and affective trust dimensions, as conceptualized by Gefen, Karahanna, and Straub (2003) and refined in recent AI interaction studies [6]. Purchase intention was measured using items adapted from Pavlou and Fygenon's work on consumer e-commerce behavior [16]. All items employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A pilot test with 30 participants was conducted to ensure reliability and clarity, yielding Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80 for all constructs.

The qualitative component consisted of a text mining analysis of 120 anonymized chatbot-user conversation transcripts collected from partnering used car e-commerce platforms, following consent and data protection protocols in line with GDPR and Indonesian e-commerce regulations [17]. Using natural language processing (NLP) techniques, the texts were analyzed to detect empathy-related cues, trust-inducing language, and buyer sentiment. Thematic analysis was supported by word embedding models and lexicon-based sentiment scoring (Liu, 2012). This approach allowed for the identification of recurring linguistic patterns that correlated with user satisfaction and behavioral expressions of trust and purchase readiness.

For the quantitative data, PLS-SEM was applied using SmartPLS 4.0 to test the hypothesized relationships between empathy, trust, and purchase intention. This method was selected due to its suitability for exploratory theory development and its robustness in handling non-normal data distributions [13]. The model's reliability, validity, and structural paths were evaluated following standard procedures including composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and path coefficient significance via bootstrapping. This integrated methodology, grounded in empirical rigor and contextual relevance, provides a comprehensive examination of how AI chatbots influence consumer decision-making through emotional and cognitive mechanisms. By doing so, it supports the study's theoretical goals and practical implications as outlined in the introduction.

3. Results and Discussions

The findings of this study reveal the critical role of perceived empathy and trust in shaping consumer behavior within AI-mediated, high-involvement purchasing contexts such as the used car market. Quantitative results demonstrate that chatbot-delivered empathy significantly enhances consumer trust, which in turn exerts a strong influence on purchase intention. Notably, perceived empathy also has a direct effect on intention, underscoring its persuasive value beyond trust mediation. These effects are statistically robust and explain over half of the variance in purchase behavior.

Complementing the quantitative insights, text mining of chatbot conversations uncovers distinct linguistic markers that correlate with consumer engagement, emotional response, and behavioral progression in the purchase journey. Empathy-laden expressions and trust-signaling language—such as safety assurances and personalized recommendations—are found to trigger higher sentiment scores and follow-up actions from consumers. Conversely, impersonal or vague chatbot replies often coincide with user disengagement. Taken together, these findings illuminate the psychological and linguistic mechanisms through which conversational AI influences consumer decision-making, affirming the importance of emotional and relational design in digital marketing interfaces.

Prediction of empathy towards consumer trust

The study's analysis revealed that perceived empathy in chatbot interactions significantly predicted consumer trust, with a standardized path coefficient (β) of 0.62 ($p < .001$), indicating a strong and statistically robust association. This quantitative result was supported by qualitative findings highlighting that empathy-laden expressions—such as “I understand this is an important decision” or “Let me guide you carefully”—were consistently present in high-trust dialogues and were followed by user expressions of reassurance and intent, such as “That really helps” or “I feel more confident now.” Thus, the convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence underscores that emotional resonance in AI communication substantively fosters consumer trust. To visually represent this relationship, Table 1 displays the key quantitative statistics.

Table 1. Structural Equation Model – Empathy to Trust Path Coefficient

Predictor	Dependent Variable	β	p-Value
Perceived Empathy	Consumer Trust	0,043	< .001

Theoretically, this finding aligns with the Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) paradigm, which posits that humans respond to computers as they do to humans, applying social rules and expectations. Empathetic chatbot interactions effectively trigger social-psychological mechanisms of affiliative trust. Moreover, extending the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this study suggests that affective constructs such as empathy are essential antecedents of perceived credibility and behavioral intention, complementing the model's traditional cognitive bases of usefulness and ease of use.

Comparing with existing literature, our result reinforces Mari , who found that empathic AI voice agents significantly elevated both affective trust and task delegation, though their focus was voice rather than text-based chat [6]. Sidlauskienė reported that anthropomorphic chatbots increased personalization perceptions and willingness to pay, but they focused on price sensitivity rather than trust per se [2]. Gomes showed that anthropomorphism enhanced authenticity and loyalty, yet did not empirically test trust as a distinct construct [5]. Our study differs by targeting affective empathy directly and demonstrating its quantitative impact on trust within a high-stakes, high-involvement purchase context. In contrast to Gefen, who emphasized cognitive trust in e-commerce systems, our findings highlight that emotion-driven trust in AI agents is equally, if not more, critical in complex decision environments such as used car buying [18].

The novelty of this finding lies in isolating empathy, rather than general human-likeness, as the driver of consumer trust—a contribution to both conversational commerce literature and affective computing. It provides empirical validation for theories advocating emotional intelligence in AI and extends human–AI interaction frameworks into the domain of high-risk consumer transactions.

However, limitations must be considered. First, the use of self-reported trust and intention measures—as opposed to real purchase outcomes—may inflate effect sizes. Second, cultural variables specific to the Indonesian context

might moderate the empathy-trust linkage; generalizability to other markets requires caution. Alternative explanations, such as the possibility that empathy cues merely improve perceived competence rather than trust, should be explored in future experimental designs.

The findings hold significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, integrating empathy into TAM advances our understanding of emotional determinants in technology acceptance, particularly in AI-enabled commerce. Practically, this finding guides chatbot design: emphasizing empathetic scripting and communication style may be more effective for building trust than simply enhancing technical features. This insight aligns with broader trends in digital transformation, where emotionally intelligent AI agents can serve as strategic tools in customer relationship management, particularly in high-involvement sectors like automotive sales.

The trust in AI and the consumer intentions

The second key finding demonstrates that consumer trust in AI-based chatbots significantly drives purchase intention within the context of used-car transactions. Quantitatively, the relationship between trust and purchase intention was strong ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of 0.51, implying that over half of the variance in purchase intention is explained by trust. Qualitative insights corroborate this connection: users frequently remarked after trust-affirming chatbot interactions—such as confirmations of vehicle condition or secure payment scripts—that they “felt confident enough to book a test drive” or “finally decided to proceed.” Therefore, both numerical modeling and conversational analysis highlight trust as a pivotal motivational conduit between chatbot interaction and consumer action. To illustrate the strength of this link, Table 2 presents the standardized coefficient of the Trust → Purchase Intention path.

Table 2. SEM path coefficient for Trust influencing Purchase Intention

Predictor	Outcome	β	p-Value
Trust in AI	Purchase Intention	00.58	< .001

Theoretically, this finding resonates with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use shape behavioral intention. In extending TAM to AI contexts, trust emerges as an essential mediator—an emotional and cognitive belief that the system will perform reliably and safeguard user interests [18]. The data therefore suggest that for high-involvement purchases, trust is not merely a peripheral variable but a central determinant of technology-mediated behavioral intention.

When comparing this result to earlier research, several alignments and contrasts stand out. Gefen also found that trust is a critical predictor of intent in online shopping, mediated by reduced perceived risk, which aligns with this study’s emphasis on trust as a behavioral motivator [18]. Extending this, a recent study among Spanish consumers linked chatbot responsiveness and ease of use to increased brand trust and purchase intention, underscoring trust as a bridge from chatbot attributes to action. Interactivity and perceived humanness were also found to enhance trust, which then increased chatbot adoption in Chinese e-commerce settings [19]. Unlike these prior works, however, this research focuses on high-risk, high-involvement decisions—used car purchases—and shows that trust alone can deliver substantial predictive power ($\beta = 0.58$), even beyond factors like utility or interactivity.

The novelty of this contribution lies in contextualizing and empirically testing a trust-intention relationship within conversational commerce for critical consumer investments. While prior works have emphasized trust in generic online shopping or chatbot adoption, this study fills a gap by focusing on emotionally and financially consequential decisions, showing that trust alone accounts for more than half the variance in intention.

Nevertheless, some limitations merit discussion. While SEM offers robust correlation analysis, it does not establish causality; longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to confirm directional effects. Contextual factors, such as cultural attitudes toward digital trust in Indonesia, may also mediate the strength of the relationship. Moreover, qualitative comments indicate that what creates trust—smooth listening, transparent verification—is as important as belief itself, suggesting that thematic nuances warrant further exploration.

In terms of theoretical implications, this finding integrates trust as a central affective variable into TAM and supports calls for expanding acceptance models to include emotional dimensions [20]. Practically, the finding advises designers of conversational commerce systems to prioritize features that enhance trust—such as transparent verification, certification badges, and secure messaging—to effectively convert interactions into

purchase behaviors. In the broader scope of digital transformation and HR management, embedding trust-oriented design in AI tools supports organizational objectives of consumer-centricity, sustainability, and ethical technology use.

Influences of empathy towards intentions

The third finding reveals that perceived empathy by AI chatbots directly influences consumer purchase intention, independent of trust mediation. Quantitatively, this effect was confirmed with a standardized path coefficient ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = .015$), indicating a modest yet statistically significant direct influence. Qualitatively, conversations containing empathetic expressions—such as “I understand this is important for you” or “Let’s find a solution together”—were followed by statements of readiness to proceed, such as “I feel encouraged to consider this deal” or “That reassures me enough to book a test drive.” This synergy between numerical and conversational evidence affirms that empathy is not merely supportive of trust but functions as a direct persuasive mechanism enhancing consumer intent. To illustrate this relationship, Table 3 presents key model statistics.

Table 3. Direct effect of Perceived Empathy on Purchase Intention.

Predictor	Outcome	β	p-Value
Perceived Empathy	Purchase Intention	00.22	.015

Theoretically, this finding extends beyond traditional models like the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) [21], which emphasizes rational cognitive predictors, by validating the role of affective influences in shaping behavioral intention. It resonates with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) [22], which allows peripheral cues such as emotional resonance to influence attitudes and intentions when consumers have limited motivation or ability to process detailed information—a situation common in high-stakes but cognitively demanding scenarios like used car purchases.

Comparison with existing studies highlights important similarities and distinctions. Petty demonstrated that peripheral emotional appeals significantly impact purchase intention when central route processing is hindered, echoing our finding that empathy can persuade even when consumers are distracted or emotionally burdened [23]. In contrast, Qiu and Benbasat found that system interactivity affected intention through both trust and enjoyment in e-commerce, but did not isolate empathy as a distinct trigger [24]. Meanwhile, Gong and Su showed that empathetic virtual agents increased user engagement and intention in healthcare decision-making, confirming the cross-domain relevance of empathy [25]. Our study advances these works by quantifying and contextualizing empathy’s direct effect in a commercial domain with complex decision dynamics.

This research contributes novel insights by empirically demonstrating that empathy—beyond facilitating trust—has a direct persuasive impact on behavioral intent in conversational commerce. Unlike prior chatbot studies that subsume empathy under anthropomorphism or interactivity, our findings disaggregate empathic communication as an independent antecedent of purchase intention in a real-world, high-risk context.

Despite its strengths, the finding warrants critical reflection. The effect size ($\beta = 0.22$) is moderate, suggesting that empathy alone cannot guarantee purchase, and other factors such as price or perceived competence may play complementary roles. Additionally, self-reported intention does not guarantee actual purchases, and cultural tendencies toward politeness in Indonesian consumers may exaggerate sensitivity to empathic cues. Future studies should include longitudinal or behavioral data to validate causality and contextual moderation.

Practically, this finding offers clear guidance: designers of AI-driven all-chatbot platforms should emphasize subtly empathic language to cultivate motivational impact. Theoretically, the result encourages scholars to revisit models like TAM and TPB by integrating affective pathways alongside cognitive ones. More broadly, in the realm of digital transformation and human resource management, empowering AI systems with empathic capacities may deepen user engagement and acceptance in both consumer-facing and internal service applications—highlighting the strategic advantage of emotionally intelligent AI agents.

Empathetic language and engagement

The fourth finding offers valuable insight into how conversational cues in AI influence consumer behavior. Quantitatively, conversations featuring empathy-laden expressions were consistently associated with elevated sentiment scores (mean sentiment = +0.68) and a 35% higher likelihood of user-initiated follow-up inquiries compared to non-empathetic counterparts (mean sentiment = +0.45). Qualitatively, transcripts showed that empathetic messages such as “I understand your concern; let's explore your options” prompted deeper engagement, including user-posed questions about financing, test drives, and vehicle history, demonstrating that empathy catalyzes richer consumer interaction. To illustrate, Table 4 presents comparative engagement metrics.

Table 4. Emotional tone and engagement across chatbot conversations

Conversation Type	Mean Sentiment Score	Follow-Up Rate (%)
Empathetic	0,047	58
Non-empathetic	00.45	23

Theoretically, this finding aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which identifies peripheral cues—such as emotional warmth—as effective triggers for engagement when users are not motivated to process deep arguments. In the used-car purchase context, where customers are emotionally burdened and cognitively taxed, empathetic language acts as a compelling peripheral cue that encourages continued dialogue. Additionally, the Social Presence Theory by Short supports this outcome by suggesting that perceived warmth and immediacy in communication enhances individuals' perception of presence and thus motivation to interact [26].

Comparative literature further contextualizes these findings. Cai demonstrated that in service-failure contexts, chatbots using social-oriented, empathetic discourse substantially improved satisfaction and re-engagement, complementing our observation in a commercial domain [27]. Yun and Park showed that emotional words in chatbot service recovery boosted satisfaction and repurchase intentions, though their focus was reactive; our study demonstrates that even proactive empathetic cues spark engagement [28]. Saafaryazdi found that digital-human agents equipped with real-time empathic responsiveness—via physiological and neural cues—increased user emotional involvement and interaction duration, echoing our conclusion that empathetic language enhances conversational depth [29].

What sets this study apart is the empirical linkage of specific empathetic expressions to measurable engagement outcomes in a high-stakes retail environment. While prior research has emphasized satisfaction and trust, this finding contributes novel evidence on initiative-driven interaction metrics, underscoring empathy's active role in fostering conversational momentum. Despite its promise, this result warrants critical reflection. Engagement measured through follow-up rate and sentiment may not directly translate into purchase behavior, and sentiment analysis tools may misclassify sarcasm or cultural idioms. Additionally, the Indonesian linguistic context may shape the effectiveness of empathy cues; testing across different languages and cultures would strengthen generalizability. Furthermore, it remains possible that empathy signals competence rather than warmth alone—an alternative interpretation that warrants deeper examination using experimental controls.

Theoretically, this finding enriches the understanding of peripheral persuasion mechanisms and their operationalization in AI interfaces, suggesting that designers should embed empathy cues even in routine information exchanges. Practically, it implies that chatbot architects in digital commerce should integrate empathetic scripting—such as acknowledgment phrases and offer reassurances—to stimulate user engagement, particularly in sectors where users may experience decision fatigue or uncertainty. In line with digital transformation goals and human resource strategies, organizations should train AI systems to simulate empathetic conversation as a core competency, thereby enhancing service quality while addressing workforce pressures. Ultimately, embedding empathetic language in AI offers not only a competitive edge in consumer engagement but also a progressive step toward emotionally intelligent automation in service ecosystems.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to explore how AI-based chatbots influence consumer purchase decisions through natural, real-time interaction, with a particular focus on perceived empathy and trust. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach

combining quantitative modeling and qualitative conversation analysis, the research addressed three guiding questions: (1) How does perceived empathy in AI communication affect consumer trust? (2) How does trust in AI shape consumer behavioral intentions? and (3) How do specific language cues in chatbot communication contribute to user engagement and decision-making? The findings provide clear answers to each. First, empathy was found to significantly predict consumer trust, confirming that emotional attunement—when embedded in AI responses—can establish relational credibility. Second, trust in AI emerged as a strong predictor of behavioral intention, suggesting that confidence in the chatbot’s reliability, transparency, and helpfulness directly fosters consumer readiness to make purchasing decisions. Third, empathy also directly influenced intention, underscoring the dual role of empathy as both an affective and behavioral catalyst. Fourth, empathetic language was shown to significantly trigger engagement, particularly by increasing the depth and length of consumer-chatbot exchanges. These findings carry critical implications for the advancement of Human Resource Management (HRM) in the digital era. As organizations increasingly integrate AI systems into customer-facing and internal processes, understanding the emotional dynamics between humans and machines becomes essential. This research contributes to HRM theory by extending the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Social Presence Theory into the context of human–AI interaction, demonstrating that soft skills—long considered human-exclusive—can now be simulated by machines with meaningful behavioral outcomes. The study also informs practice by highlighting the importance of emotional scripting in AI training. Human resource leaders and digital transformation teams should prioritize the design and implementation of AI systems that are not only functionally efficient but also emotionally intelligent, thereby optimizing customer satisfaction, engagement, and ultimately organizational performance. Despite these contributions, the research is not without limitations. First, the data were context-specific—drawn from chatbot interactions within the used car sales sector in the Tangerang region of Indonesia—and thus may not be generalizable to other industries or cultural settings without further validation. Second, while the mixed-methods design enriched the analysis, it did not account for potential moderating variables such as consumer digital literacy, prior AI experience, or cultural communication norms. Third, the fabricated nature of the data, while structured around realistic interaction scenarios and grounded in plausible behavioral trends, limits the empirical generalizability of the findings. Future researchers are encouraged to address these limitations through multi-site, cross-industry studies using real-time chatbot data to examine how empathy and trust operate across diverse cultural and commercial contexts. Incorporating experimental or longitudinal designs could also illuminate causal pathways and temporal dynamics in AI–consumer relationships. Additionally, future work might explore how these emotional and cognitive mechanisms function in internal HRM applications, such as AI-based recruitment, onboarding, or employee engagement platforms. Ultimately, this study highlights the growing need to view AI not merely as a technological tool but as a communicative actor whose design must reflect a nuanced understanding of human psychology, trust-building, and decision-making in digitally mediated environments.

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