

Emotional Manipulation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract:

The increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in consumer-machine interaction has raised critical questions about the influence of AI on consumer emotions. While AI has the potential to enhance consumer experiences and improve emotional well-being, it also poses significant risks of emotional manipulation and exploitation. The present study is an attempt to provide a critical examination of the influence of AI on consumer emotions, focusing on how AI-powered technologies can influence emotional states, manipulate emotional responses, and exploit emotional vulnerabilities. Using a mixed-methods approach combining survey research, interviews, and content analysis, this study investigates the emotional consequences of AI-driven consumer interactions, including the effects of AI-powered advertising, social media, and customer service on consumer emotional experiences. The findings of this study highlight the need for greater awareness and regulation of AI-powered emotional manipulation and provide insights for consumers, marketers, and policymakers seeking to promote more ethical and responsible uses of AI in consumer-facing contexts. It is essential to have transparency over systems and algorithms, rules and public awareness to know the ill effects of AI. Overall, the study will contribute to the overall work of the research on the manipulation of AI and its impact on human beings.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Consumer Emotions, Emotional Manipulation, Emotional Exploitation, AI Ethics, Consumer Well-being

Introduction

Industry across the domains and disciplines is impacted by the continuous advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI), highlighting human interaction with technology. Human emotions are traced with the help of AI and subsequently influence decision-making. This provides a scope to enter consumer autonomy and to break ethical boundaries for harnessing business at large. Skinner's (1938) behaviourism tells us how positive and negative reinforcement influence user interaction through reward and feedback. Tversky and Kahneman's (1974) cognitive bias theory points out how AI uses confirmation and availability biases to impact decision-making. Hatfield et al.'s (1994) emotional contagion theory explains how emotionally charged content evokes similar emotional reactions in users. Friestad and Wright's (1994) model of persuasion knowledge predicts that users are more likely to be manipulated when they are not aware of persuasive intent. Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) nudge theory describes how AI shapes decisions through subtle nudges such as urgency and scarcity. Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory illustrates the way AI systems create emotional connections and build trust through human-like interactions. Social media, e-commerce, and customer service segments of industries are victims of Emotional Manipulation. Algorithms to maximize user engagement tend to play on emotional vulnerabilities by selecting emotionally provocative content, amplifying cognitive biases, and inducing psychological reactions like fear, excitement, and trust. Zuboff (2019) points to how AI manipulates emotional and cognitive vulnerabilities for financial gain, compromising user integrity. Kosinski et al. (2017) and Wang and Kosinski (2018) illustrate how AI-facilitated psychographic profiling and emotional inference skew decision-making and entrench psychological dependencies. Grosz et al. (2019) highlight the need for transparency and user control in countering AI's emotional impact. Calvo et al. (2020) discuss how AI's capacity to recognize and react to emotional states presents opportunities for improved user experience as well as threats of emotional reliance. Napoli and Caplan (2019) expose the way algorithmic bias within content curation amplifies cognitive and emotional distortion, highlighting the necessity of strong regulatory safeguards and ethical standards. These Studies highlight the deep ethical

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significance of AI-facilitated emotional manipulation, with its twofold effect of improving user engagement while undermining psychological autonomy and informed consent. This research will explore the means by which AI systems undertake emotional manipulation and the following effects on consumer behavior. The research study will help marketers to understand the balance between emotional engagement and manipulation is central to safeguarding consumer autonomy. The research will offer valuable insights to marketers, AI developers, and policymakers, providing a base for the responsible design and regulation of emotionally aware AI systems.

2. Review of Literature

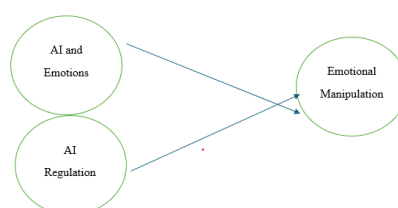
a) **AI and Emotions lead to Emotional Manipulation:**

Artificial Intelligence has shown the ability to deceive people by taking advantage of their emotions, especially chatbots and emotionally intelligent conversational agents (EICA's). Chatbot that mimics human emotions with emojis or facial expressions may mislead consumers about their artificial origin. (Carroll et al., 2023) (Véliz, 2023). Furthermore, addiction, loneliness, and personality changes can result from emotionally aware conversational agents (Martino Mensio et al., 2018). Emotional AI can affect people's decision-making through choice architecture and subtle manipulation techniques, its increasing omnipresence creates serious issues. (Daniel Susser et al., 2019; Susser, 2019). Public opinions are greatly influenced by emotional AI, frequently via digital platforms and social media. The dissemination of political propaganda and misinformation has been connected to the emotionalisation of digital media where AI-powered tools maximize the dissemination of certain messages to sway public opinion (Vian Bakir & Andrew McStay, 2020). By gathering behavioral data, developing psychological profiles and exploiting them to influence voters, AI poses a serious threat to democracy (Karl Manheim & Lyric Kaplan, 2019). People are more vulnerable to manipulation without knowledge due to the opacity of AI-driven decision-making systems (Daniel Susser et al., 2019). Finally, deepfake technology is a type of AI that is used to create realistic fake images, videos, and audio recordings that appear to be genuine (Westerlund, 2019). Deep fake technology works by using machine learning algorithms to analyze and manipulate data, such as photographs, videos, and audio recordings, in order to create new, synthetic content. (Ienca, 2023)

b) **AI regulations lead to Emotional Manipulation:**

The effect of emotional AI on autonomy and privacy is one of the main problems. Digital technologies driven by AI frequently, automatically, and opaquely take advantage of people's emotions, creating moral dilemma (Marcello Ienca, 2023a). The employment of AI in toys and gadgets for kids is especially contentious since the parents may unintentionally subject their kids to emotional manipulation because they lack data literacy (Andrew McStay & Gilad Rosner, 2021). Stronger governance and ethical standards are required to stop the abuse of AI in marketing, advertising, and social interactions, as evidenced by the emergence of an emotion recognition system (Réka Pusztahelyi, 2020). Further, AI's real-time emotional detection and response capabilities may raise worries about non-consensual data collection, particularly among the young generation. (Ho et al., 2022). Depending on familiarity and trust, different people will take emotional AI differently. Research shows that people who are familiar with AI and its uses are likely to feel intimidated by data harvesting and are more cautious on social media ((Peter Mantello et al., 2023). But the absence of precise methods for AI-driven emotional manipulation prompts worries about its unforeseen repercussions, which could endanger human reasoning and judgement (Carroll et al., 2023). Because human emotion-sensing devices and social robots can affect human emotional and behavioral reactions through data collection and algorithmic regulation, their ethical implications must also be carefully considered (Lynch, 2021).

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model



Author's Bird Point View regarding the above model:

While the use of AI is on an increasing trend, emotional manipulation by AI also depicts an increasing trend. The model highlights two major reasons that cause Emotional Manipulation.

- a) AI and Emotions
- b) AI Regulations

Human beings are social animals with deep emotional values. Many actions of human beings are closely associated with emotions. A major chunk of human decisions are emotional decisions. A decision though seems irrational at face value, has a deep emotional connection that proves the rationale of the decision taken. If the history of the civilization of Indian history is dugged up, huge decisions taken by kings of yesteryears were purely based on Emotional Quotient. Human wars like Mahabharata are a classic example of decision-making based purely on emotional values rather than any other factor. Artificial Intelligence created by human beings targets these emotional points commercially and induces them to arrive at a decision. For this purpose, AI uses Chatbots and Emotionally Intelligent Conversational Agents (EICA's) to help customers and consumers reach to decisions. AI creates an emotional bond subtly thereby influencing user behavior and decision making. In this entire situation, though decision-making skills have been enhanced, the AI has smartly manipulated the decisions to its advantage. Another major area where AI has manipulated human thoughts is politics and societal norms. AI uses Misinformation and Propaganda to enhance Social and Political exploitation. The content shared by AI also points out only the major problems of confidence, as deepfake videos that emerge are difficult to single out. In mainstream social media, deepfake videos move hand in hand with real videos making the lives of a common man very complicated. The trust factor of the common person is shaken to the extent that the belief in AI content has taken a reverse count.

The manipulative power of AI is beyond the expectations of all generations. The older generation gets manipulated due to a lack of exposure to AI content while the younger generation gets manipulated due to over-exposure to the AI. AI smartly adapts to the person based on the initial few responses from the user and plays with the emotional quotient. Hence, the decision-making and thought processes of individuals are affected. Though it may be said that the role of AI in decision-making at the individual level is acceptable to a certain extent, its impact on mass thought processes can eventually be harmful to the entire society.

It has been proven that the power of AI extends to the societal level as well, through misinformation and propaganda that reinforce ideological divisions and manipulative political narratives. This is alarming as society is disturbed largely due to the intervention of AI.

The interconnected model depicts how personal AI interactions scale up to influence society, making ethical concerns like AI regulation require special attention. In the world of AI, it is very difficult to reach the source of information that is widespread in social media. The various laws introduced at different times in different countries are unable to curb the problems effectively. It has been noticed that contrarily, AI lends an extended arm to the increasing cyber-crimes and reaching to cyber criminals located in remote locations is a task of different levels. There is an emotional drain as far as human beings are concerned with the intervention of AI in normal life. The Emotional Manipulations are seldom recorded and quantified to be proven. Though steps have been initiated to value the loss due to emotional manipulation, the actual quantification of the manipulation is not yet determined authoritatively.

It can be concluded that though AI enhances human-computer interaction to the next level, unchecked emotional manipulation poses risks that affect the mental health of humans in the long run triggering a requirement for proper AI governance to balance the use of AI in the daily life of a human being.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the role of A.I. towards Emotional Manipulation
2. To analyze the potential power of A.I., and its role in influencing Emotions.

Hypotheses of the Study

H₀ : There is no significant difference between Age and Emotional Manipulation by different interventions of AI in day-to-day life

H₁ : There is a significant difference between Age and Emotional Manipulation by different interventions of AI in day-to-day life

H₀ : There is no significant difference between Gender and Emotional Manipulation by different interventions of AI in day-to-day life

H₁ : There is a significant difference between Gender and Emotional Manipulation by different interventions of AI in day-to-day life

H₀ : There is no significant difference between Occupation and Emotional Manipulation by different interventions of AI in day-to-day life

H₁ : There is a significant difference between Occupation and Emotional Manipulation by different interventions of AI in day-to-day life.

3. Research Methodology

The present research towards the chapter is Descriptive and analytical. Data for the study were collected using both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data for the study was collected through a detailed study of different research papers accessed through Scopus and Google Scholar as a database, Blogs and news articles in connection towards the topic were also referred. Primary data towards the study was collected using a structured questionnaire collected across 7 7-point Likert scales ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The data collection for the study was executed in February-March 2025. The study was spread across two major phases. A pilot study was conducted on 55 respondents to check the basic understanding of the questionnaire among the respondents and on receipt of feedback towards the pilot analysis, changes were made in the questionnaire, and the questionnaire was floated across the target set of respondents towards data collection, keeping in mind the widespread sample size. Data was collected using non-probability sampling. To ensure data is collected genuinely, a total of 352 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 235 people responded to our questionnaire and after data cleaning and deleting unengaged respondents, a total of 185 was taken as the final sample size. All items in the questionnaire were marked as compulsory, thereby ensuring there was no problem with missing values.

4.Data Analysis

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Sr.No.	Variable	Categories	Frequency	%
1	Age	Less than 25	118	63.8
		26-40	41	22.2
		Above 40	26	14.1
		Total	185	100
2	Gender	Male	92	49.7
		Female	93	50.3
		Total	185	100
3	Occupation	Student	115	62.2

		Self-Employed	8	4.3
		Employed	58	31.4
		Unemployed	4	2.2
		Total	185	100
4	AI Intervention used: Voice Assistance	Yes	127	68.6
		No	58	31.4
		Total	185	100
5	AI Intervention used: Chatbots	Yes	122	65.9
		No	63	34.1
		Total	185	100
6	AI Intervention used: Image recognition through Google Lens	Yes	122	65.9
		No	63	34.1
		Total	185	100
7	AI Intervention used: Smart Input on Mobile keyboard	Yes	142	76.8
		No	43	23.2
		Total	185	100
8	AI Intervention used: Google Maps	Yes	176	95.1
		No	9	4.9
		Total	185	100
9	AI Intervention used: Smartwatch and other Devices	Yes	128	69.2
		No	57	30.8
		Total	185	100
10	AI Intervention used: Facial Recognition Technologies	Yes	129	69.7
		No	56	30.3

		Total	185	100
11	AI intervention used: AI-driven speech recognition	Yes	84	45.4
		No	101	54.6
		Total	185	100
12	AI intervention used: E-mail Filtering	Yes	93	50.3
		No	92	49.7
		Total	185	100
13	Responsibility towards ensuring ethical AI use in consumer interactions: AI developers and tech companies	Yes	96	51.9
		No	89	48.1
		Total	185	100
14	Responsibility towards ensuring ethical AI use in consumer interactions: Government agencies	Yes	97	52.4
		No	88	47.6
		Total	185	100
15	Responsibility towards ensuring ethical AI use in consumer interactions: AI developers and tech companies	Yes	96	51.9
		No	89	48.1
		Total	185	100
16	Responsibility towards ensuring ethical AI use in consumer interactions: Consumer protection organizations	Yes	83	44.9
		No	102	55.1
		Total	185	100

Source: Primary data

The demographic distribution of the respondents reveals a predominantly young sample, with 63.8% under the age of 25, followed by 22.2% in the 26–40 age range, and just 14.1% over 40. The representation of genders is

almost equal, with 49.7% identifying as male and 50.3% as female. It is noteworthy that students constitute the majority of the sample at 62.2%, followed by employed individuals at 31.4%. Meanwhile, self-employed and unemployed respondents represent 4.3% and 2.2%, respectively.

The integration of AI-driven tools into everyday tasks uncovers fascinating insights. Google Maps stands out as the leading AI tool, boasting an impressive 95.1% adoption rate, underscoring its essential role in navigation. Intelligent input on mobile keyboards is prominently utilised, with 76.8% of respondents indicating its use. The adoption rates of AI-powered voice assistants (68.6%), chatbots (65.9%), image recognition via Google Lens (65.9%), and facial recognition technologies (69.7%) highlight the substantial integration of AI into daily digital interactions. Nonetheless, the acceptance of AI-driven speech recognition (45.4%) and email filtering (50.3%) appears to be more divided, indicating differing levels of perceived utility or trust among users.

The ethical responsibility in AI governance remains a topic of considerable debate. While 52.4% of individuals assert that government agencies must guarantee the ethical use of AI, 51.9% place this obligation on AI developers and technology firms. It is noteworthy that merely 44.9% view consumer protection organisations as essential stakeholders in the oversight of ethical AI, suggesting a degree of scepticism regarding their effectiveness in regulating AI ethics.

This data presents a persuasive account of AI's profound incorporation into consumer behaviours, while also uncovering intricate viewpoints on governance and accountability in the realm of AI ethics.

The Below given table below presents a chi-square test between Demographic variables and the type of A.I. intervention used. The results of the same are presented below in the form of a table.

Table 2: Chi-square testing

	Age	Gender	Occupation
Voice Assistance	0.573	0.960	0.812
Chatbots	0.290	0.919	0.325
Image Recognition	0.206	0.147	0.717
Smart Input on Mobile Keyboards	0.127	0.208	0.134
Google Maps	0.392	0.297	0.420
Smart Watches and other devices	0.458	0.287	0.764
Facial recognition technology	0.617	0.554	0.170
AI-driven Speech Recognition	0.000	0.000	0.002
E-mail Filtering	0.439	0.211	0.468

Source: Calculated through SPSS

It can be interpreted from that table-2, the association was absent between the demographic variables and the different AI interventions used to exclude the variable of AI-driven speech recognition; however, the same was found to be present with all the stated demographic variables. On further testing, it was found that the association was quite strong for the variable of Gender, and for the other variables like Age and Occupation, the association was found to be weak.

The below given table represents normality testing towards the dependent variable of Emotional Manipulation for the independent variables of Age, Gender and Occupation.

Table 3: Normality Testing

Particulars	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	d.f.	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Emotional Manipulation	.087	185	.002	.980	185	.009

Source: Primary Data

It can be interpreted from Table 3 that the results of normality testing confirmed the data failing to match normality; hence, for hypothesis testing, we will be using non-parametric testing, which does not require the basic assumption of data to be normally distributed towards Hypotheses testing.

The table below given table presents the result of hypothesis testing towards the Dependent variable and other independent demographic variables of Age, Gender and Occupation.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing

Particulars	Age	Gender	Occupation
Emotional Manipulation	0.148	0.000	0.125

Source: Calculated through SPSS

It can be interpreted through Table-4, towards Hypotheses testing involving our independent variables of Age, Gender and Occupation along with the dependent variable of Emotional manipulation, the results were found to be insignificant for Age and Occupation, however, for the variable of Gender the result was found to be significant, on further execution it was found Females displayed a higher level of Emotional Manipulation as compared to their counterpart of Male.

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.701 ^a	.865	.712	.72167	1.948
a. Predictors: (Constant), Influence of AI on Emotions, Regulations with the use of AI					
b. Dependent Variable: Emotional Manipulation					

Source: Calculated through SPSS

It can be interpreted from the table that the R² value is 0.865, which indicates the dependent variable of Emotional Manipulation covers more than 80% of the independent variables. The corresponding Durbin Watson value is 1.948, which is between the standard value of 1 and 3, indicating independence of observation across the data, thereby fulfilling the basic assumptions towards executing Multiple Regression analysis.

Table 6: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2584.872	2	1292.436	38.809	.000 ^b
	Residual	6061.042	182	33.302		
	Total	8645.914	184			
a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Manipulation						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Regulations with the use of AI, Influence of AI on Emotions						

Source: Calculated through SPSS

It can be interpreted from the table that the significant value is 0.00, which is less than 0.05, thereby indicating the regression equation can be established across the variables.

Table 7: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	9.218	1.802		5.116	.000		
	Influence of AI on Emotions	.388	.048	.543	8.137	.000	.866	1.155
	Regulations with the use of AI	.016	.102	.011	.162	.871	.866	1.155
a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Manipulation								

Source: Calculated through SPSS

It can be interpreted from the Table-7 the regression equation from the table can be drafted as Emotional Manipulation (Y) = 9.218 + .388 (Influence of AI on Emotions), while the independent variable of Regulations with the use of AI is not taken into consideration as the significant value is greater than 0.05. It can be further interpreted from the equation that the minimum value towards Emotional Manipulation will be 9.218, even if the independent variable of Influence of AI on Emotions has a zero value, while a one-unit increase in the influence of AI on emotions increases emotional manipulation by 0.388 units, holding other factors constant. The Standardised Coefficient (Beta = 0.543) suggests a strong positive relationship between AI's influence on emotions and emotional manipulation. The Collinearity Statistics (Tolerance = 0.866, VIF = 1.155) value further indicates no issue of Multicollinearity in the data.

5.Suggestions and Recommendations

A current study explores Emotional manipulation by various AI interventions. In future, an in-depth study can be conducted on individual variables, like the Impact of AI interventions on Mental Health or human behaviour. Another study can explore the bias of AI in the day-to-day life of a human.

Ienca (2023) has listed multiple concerns about social media manipulations like filter bubbles, fake accounts, bots, moderation in published content, and the creation of misinformation. Functions like notification, scrolling, and auto-play plugins lead you to spend more time on various social media platforms. The recommendations are divided into three categories: social, technical, and government, which can control the mitigation of AI interventions.

Social - The impact of AI is seen in various sections of society. It's important to offer, formal training for all demographics to create a harmful impact of AI on mental health should be incorporated by various institutions. We need to have an AI that is trained to be pro-social, where they study every different geographical, gender and age-wise data to generate the output.AI should be in a position to help in case of emergency when immediate help is unable to reach, like maybe a helpline for admission in an educational institute.

Technical - The need to develop a technology that can alert humans should be developed by every AI company that can warn about excess usage. AI needs to work on grave issues that are faced globally, like the reduction of carbon emissions, and predicting climate change can help society.

Government - To reduce the manipulation, government regulation can be introduced, like introducing Digital Literacy, which can be incorporated in the early-year syllabus in schools and later in colleges. A medical

intervention needs to be mapped to create long-term physical and mental health. Rigorous testing and continual audits can be conducted to encourage equality and align with social values.

6. Significance of the Study

The conducted research has significant implications for various aspects of human life. The research studies the impact of AI on the decision-making of humans. The AI is persuasive in changing moods by making emotional appeals. The AI-driven advertisement helps create a good number of impulsive buyers by increasing engagement on various Digital Platforms. The convincing ability of AI Service Agents to help you think that the AI Interventions understand you well. The study is also highlighting the need for tighter regulations and ethical guidelines. The accountability mechanisms to prevent the misuse of AI for emotional manipulation should be introduced on a priority basis. The research emphasizes the need for responsible AI development with consideration of ethics and public awareness in mitigating the negative effects of emotional intelligence manipulation.

7. Future Scope of the Study

The current study is conducted in a Tier 1 city in India and studies the impact of AI on emotional well-being. Future studies can be undertaken in Tier 2 or 3 cities where the usage of digital platforms is equally high. A researcher can focus on the impact of AI on the physical ability of a human. An interesting interdisciplinary study in collaboration with physiologists can help AI researchers get valuable insights. Investigating the impact of AI on children should be considered by undertaking an observation method.

8. Conclusion

The AI has been taking over multiple assignments done in different domains. The various AI interventions have made our lives comfortable and reshaped the world. This study discovered the complex and multi-layered phenomenon of emotional manipulation in the age of artificial intelligence. The research has highlighted the way AI systems are used to manipulate human emotions and the potential impact of the same on human decision-making. The findings suggest that emotional manipulation due to AI is a growing concern. The study's results also highlight the need for greater awareness and understanding of the manipulation of AI interventions.

It's important to have a line drawn on how much use of AI is acceptable for the healthy growth of a being. The real danger is not in the use of AI, but it is in the uncontrolled use of it.

9. Source of Funding

None

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