The Influence Mechanism of Hotel Virtual Spokesperson Emotional Transmission on Consumers' Positive Emotions: An Empirical Analysis Based on Nanning Brand Hotels, China

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Abstract

This study constructs and tests a multidimensional emotional transmission model of virtual spokespersons based on experiential marketing theory, exploring the direct effects of each dimension on the positive emotions of consumers at branded hotels in Nanning, China. Using a completely random sampling method, 252 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed through structural equation modeling (SEM). The constructed model encompasses five core dimensions: sensory experience, emotional resonance, cognitive processing, behavioral responses, and relational interactions. The results show that all five dimensions have significant positive effects on consumers' positive emotions. This study enriches the theoretical understanding of virtual spokespersons and provides practical implications for optimizing digital marketing strategies in the hotel industry.

Keywords: virtual spokesperson, emotional transmission, positive emotions, experiential marketing, hotel marketing

Introduction

With the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality

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(VR), virtual spokespersons have become widely integrated into service industries (Pantano & Scarpi, 2022). In hospitality, technologies like Amazon Alexa for Hospitality have increased customer satisfaction by 20%, while virtual assistants such as Velma can autonomously handle 75% of customer inquiries, improving both efficiency and guest experience (Morch, 2024). Despite these benefits, most implementations emphasize technical functionality, overlooking how virtual spokespersons contribute to customer satisfaction through emotional engagement. Although AI emotion recognition systems have shown to improve satisfaction by 12% (Morch, 2024), the mechanisms of emotional transmission remain unclear, limiting the development of emotion-based design strategies.

Current research primarily explores surface attributes of virtual spokespersons—such as visual realism and responsiveness (Shi, 2023)—with limited investigation into deeper experiential dimensions like emotional resonance, cognitive engagement, and relational interaction. While interest in customer experience research is growing, empirical studies in the hospitality sector lag behind fields such as e-commerce and food services (Souki et al., 2024). Moreover, Schmitt's (1999) five-dimensional experiential marketing framework including sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational experiences has not been systematically validated in the virtual spokesperson context, revealing a gap between theoretical models and digital service practice.

To bridge these gaps, this study focuses on branded hotels in Nanning, China a city with strong regional representativeness as the permanent host of the China–ASEAN Expo. Supported by digital tourism initiatives, Nanning's hospitality sector is undergoing rapid transformation. As of 2024, the "One-click Tour Guangxi" platform covers over 95% of tourist attractions and high-tier hotels, with more than 14.37 million registered users (Department of Culture & Tourism of Guangxi, 2024). Building on experiential marketing theory, this study develops and empirically tests a multidimensional emotional transmission model for virtual spokespersons,

aiming to clarify how these agents elicit positive emotional responses and to offer theoretical and practical guidance for digital innovation in the hospitality industry.

Objective

1. Based on experiential marketing theory, construct and empirically test a multidimensional emotional transmission theoretical model of virtual spokesperson.

2. Explore the direct impact and underlying mechanisms of different emotional transmission dimensions on the positive emotions of consumers in brand hotels in Nanning, China.

Literature Reviews

Experience of Marketing Theory and Consumer Emotions

Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing theory emphasizes a holistic view of consumer experience, extending beyond functional and price-based appeals. It outlines five core dimensions sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational that shape consumers' brand perceptions and emotional responses. Building on this framework, the present study develops a virtual spokesperson emotional transmission model and proposes corresponding hypotheses.

1. Sensory Experience and Consumer Positive Emotions

Sensory experience refers to the holistic perception that consumers form of a brand or product through their sensory systems, including sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch (Kothari & Sharma, 2024). Prior research has shown that well-crafted sensory elements such as visual presentation, background music, and ambient scents can positively influence consumers' emotional states, thus enhancing their purchase intentions and brand loyalty (Zha et al., 2023). Moreover, multisensory experiences have been found to significantly increase pleasurable emotions, which in turn promote behavioral responses such as a stronger intention

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to revisit or engage with a retail space (Pal et al., 2025). Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Sensory Experience (SE) has a significant positive impact on Consumer Positive Emotions (PE).

2. Emotional Resonance and Consumer Positive Emotions

Emotional resonance refers to the strength of the emotional bond established between consumers and a brand, which enhances consumers' perceptions, evaluations, and interactive behaviors toward the brand (Li et al., 2024). Awasthi et al. (2024) found that positive emotions such as pleasure, trust, and nostalgia can activate loyalty mechanisms, encouraging consumers to engage in repeat purchases and brand advocacy. Saeedi (2025) further emphasized that through storytelling, emotional resonance, and affective memory, brands can build deep emotional connections that foster long-term loyalty. Additionally, empirical research by Vrtana and Krizanova (2023) on social media advertising demonstrates that emotional experiences are a core driver of both brand loyalty and brand equity. Based on these insights, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Emotional Resonance (ER) has a significant positive impact on Consumer Positive Emotions (PE).

3. Cognitive Processing and Consumer Positive Emotions

Cognitive processing refers to the psychological activities involved when consumers engage with a brand, such as understanding information, solving problems, and constructing meaning—often stimulated through personalized recommendations, informational cues, and service design (Bujisic et al., 2025). Research indicates that enhancing cognitive experiences can strengthen both rational engagement and emotional responses, thereby increasing brand satisfaction and loyalty (Bujisic et al., 2025). Furthermore, neuroscientific experiments by Fici et al. (2024) have demonstrated that digital metaverse environments can simultaneously activate consumers' emotional and cognitive

systems, thereby enriching the overall shopping experience. Based on this, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Cognitive Processing (CP) has a significant positive impact on Consumer Positive Emotions (PE).

4. Behavioral Responses and Consumer Positive Emotions

Behavioral response refers to the tangible actions consumers exhibit during interactions with a brand, such as participating in events, using products, or engaging in experiential marketing activities (Shen, 2025). Studies have shown that the anthropomorphic features of virtual spokespersons and immersive brand experiences significantly enhance consumers' willingness to share, comment, and make purchases (Shen, 2025). Moreover, consumers' sense of identification with a brand is positively associated with experiential consumption, which can further stimulate positive behavioral intentions by enhancing perceived well-being (Sato et al., 2023). Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Behavioral Responses (BR) has a significant positive impact on Consumer Positive Emotions (PE).

5. Relational Interactions and Consumer Positive Emotions

Relational interaction refers to the deepening of emotional connections between a brand and consumers through channels such as social media engagement, community building, and brand storytelling (Jiang et al., 2023). Research indicates that when consumers establish emotional bonds during interactions, their positive emotions significantly increase, subsequently enhancing brand loyalty and purchase intention (Mandung, 2025). Specifically, social media interactions, value co-creation, and authentic brand narratives contribute to fostering emotional involvement and a sense of belonging (Santos et al., 2022). Therefore, this study proposes:

H5: Relational Interactions (RI) has a significant positive impact on Consumer Positive Emotions (PE).

Conceptual Model

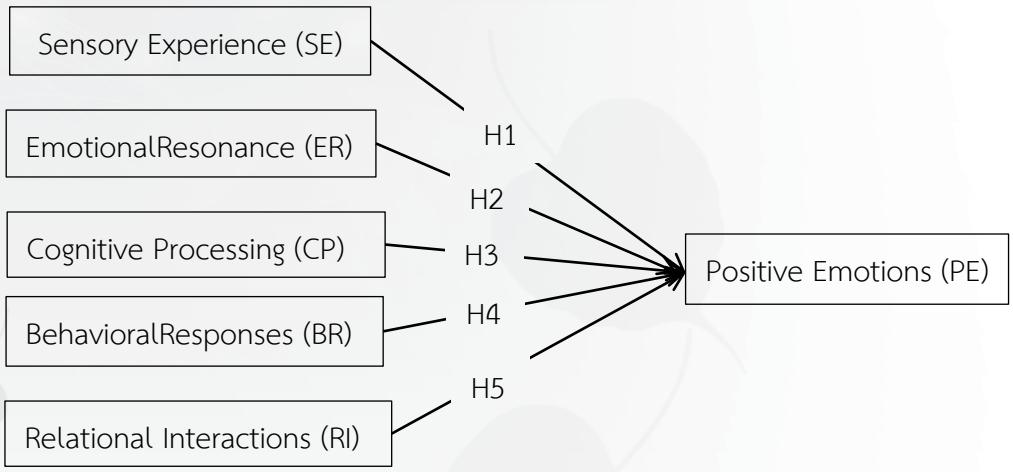


Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in experiential marketing theory (Schmitt, 1999) and develops a virtual spokesperson emotional transmission model comprising five dimensions. The study further empirically examines the model's impact on consumers' positive emotions.

Research methodology

Measurement of Positive Emotions

Although emotions are inherently subjective and challenging to assess with precision, this study employs the validated Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson et al. (1988) to measure customers' positive emotional responses during interactions with virtual spokespersons. The scale was appropriately adapted to fit the hotel service context and has demonstrated strong construct validity and reliability in capturing emotion-related data.

Research tool

Based on relevant theory and literature, this study constructed the relationships among variables and designed a measurement questionnaire. The initial draft was evaluated by six experts using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC)

index. Following the criteria of Polit and Beck (2006), items with IOC values ≤ 0.50 were removed. The revised questionnaire underwent a pilot survey, and its reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a value of 0.956 well above the recommended threshold of 0.70 by Nunnally (1978) indicating excellent internal consistency.

Sampling methods and data collection

This study employed a structured questionnaire survey using a simple random sampling technique to target customers of five branded hotels in Nanning that have implemented virtual spokesperson systems. Following Kline's (2015) rule of thumb requiring 5 to 10 samples per free parameter the model included 24 free parameters, necessitating a minimum sample size of 240. A total of 298 questionnaires were distributed, with 252 valid responses collected, yielding an effective response rate of 84.6%, which meets the sample size requirements for structural equation modeling (SEM).

To ensure balanced representation across hotels, a quota of 60 responses per hotel was set using the "Wenjuanxing" platform. The selected hotels covered diverse market segments, including luxury (Lanou Hotel), upper-midscale (Shangkeyoupin Hotel), midscale (Yayue Hotel), economy (Shangkeyou Hotel), and social e-sports (Jingjie Solo E-sports Hotel), providing a representative sample. As the permanent host city of the China–ASEAN Expo, Nanning's hotel industry faces diverse customer demands and benefits from active government support for smart service innovation, making it a representative and generalizable research setting. Based on preliminary fieldwork, five mid-to-upper-scale hotels with deployed virtual spokesperson systems were selected, encompassing various customer segments (business travelers, tourists, and young consumers) and management types (chain and independent hotels). Respondents were required to have stayed at the target hotels within the past six months and engaged in active interaction with the virtual spokesperson; screening questions in the questionnaire ensured

sample validity. All collected questionnaires were coded and tested for normality using SPSS 26.0, confirming that the data met the statistical assumptions for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and SEM.

Ethical Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Payap University Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. PYU_REC 67/066, dated 14 January 2025). All participants provided informed consent before data collection.

Data analysis

To ensure systematic and rigorous data analysis, this study employed SPSS 26.0 for descriptive statistics, reliability, and correlation analyses, and utilized AMOS 27.0 for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM). Both software packages are widely used in social science research and are well-suited for theory-driven path modeling as applied in this study. The analytical procedure included describing sample characteristics, validating the measurement model's reliability and validity, and testing hypothesized paths. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was adopted to ensure the robustness of the statistical results.

Hypothesis Testing

Confirmatory factor analysis

This study employed Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess the measurement model's fit. The results met the criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2010): chi-square test p-value = 0.185 (> 0.05), CMIN/df = 1.099 (< 3), GFI = 0.937, CFI and IFI both at 0.995 (> 0.90), SRMR = 0.031, and RMSEA = 0.020 (all < 0.08). These indicators demonstrate a good model fit and strong structural adequacy, providing robust support for subsequent structural model analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1 CFA Goodness of Fit Statistics

Goodness ofFit Indices	Criteria	After Modification	Results
p-value ofz2	> 0.05	0.185	Pass
CMIN/df	< 3.00	1.099	Pass
GFI	> 0.90	0.937	Pass
SRMR	< 0.08	0.031	Pass
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.020	Pass
IFI	> 0.90	0.995	Pass
CFI	> 0.90	0.995	Pass

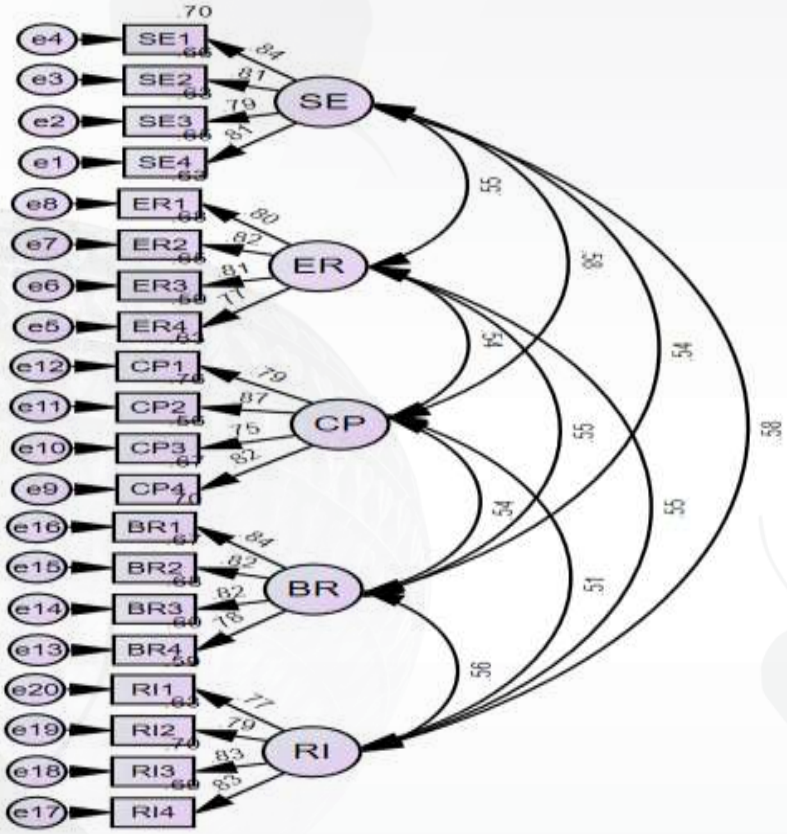


Figure 2 CFA Model of the Research Framework

Measurement model

The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) indicate that all standardized factor loadings (SFL) exceed 0.70, with significant regression weights ($p < 0.05$) and critical ratios (C.R.) above 1.96, demonstrating strong significance and reliability of the measurement items (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010). The R^2 values for all latent variables are above 0.50, indicating good explanatory power. Both composite reliability (CR > 0.70) and average variance extracted (AVE > 0.50) meet the recommended thresholds (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), confirming satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity. Overall, the measurement model is robust and reliable, providing a solid foundation for subsequent structural model analysis (see Table 2).

Table 2 Construct reliability and variance extracted

Ite	(1)	Latent	SFL	S.E.	C.R.	p-	R^2	CR	AVE
SE1	←	SE	0.835	-	-		0.698		
SE2	←	SE	0.816	0.067	14.861	***	0.666	0.886	0.661
SE3	←	SE	0.790	0.065	14.212	***	0.624		
SE4	←	SE	0.809	0.070	14.682	***	0.655		
ER1	←	AE	0.793	-	-		0.628		
ER2	←	AE	0.825	0.077	13.835	***	0.680	0.876	0.638
ER3	←	AE	0.811	0.080	13.584	***	0.658		
ER4	←	AE	0.764	0.076	12.673	***	0.584		
CP1	←	CE	0.794	-	-		0.631		
CP2	←	CE	0.870	0.071	15.008	***	0.757	0.884	0.656
CP3	←	CE	0.750	0.073	12.586	***	0.562		
CP4	←	CE	0.820	0.069	14.045	***	0.673		
BR1	←	BE	0.832	-	-		0.692	0.887	0.662
BR2	←	BE	0.819	0.064	14.853	***	0.671		

Table 2 Construct reliability and variance extracted (continued)

Ite	(1)	Latent	SFL	S.E.	C.R.	p-	R^2	CR	AVE
BR3	←	BE	0.825	0.065	14.99	***	0.681		
BR4	←	BE	0.778	0.065	13.862	***	0.606		
RI1	←	RE	0.769	-	-		0.592		
RI2	←	RE	0.791	0.088	12.862	***	0.626	0.882	0.651
RI3	←	RE	0.831	0.084	13.569	***	0.690		
RI4	←	RE	0.834	0.080	13.625	***	0.696		
PE1	←	PE	0.767	-	-		0.589		
PE2	←	PE	0.763	0.082	12.074	***	0.583	0.860	0.605
PE3	←	PE	0.789	0.085	12.503	***	0.622		
PE4	←	PE	0.792	0.082	12.561	***	0.628		

Note: statisticallysignificant level :***p < 0.001,**p < 0.01,*p< 0.05.

Discriminant Validity

This study assessed discriminant validity following the approach proposed by Hair et al. (2010). The results showed that all latent variables had AVE values greater than 0.50, and the square roots of the AVEs exceeded the inter-construct correlations, indicating good discriminant validity and the reliability of the measurement instrument (see Table 3).

Table 3 Results of Discriminant Validity Analysis

	SE	ER	CP	BR	RI	PE
SE	0.813					
ER	0.483	0.799				
CP	0.501	0.477	0.810			
BR	0.478	0.486	0.483	0.814		

Table 3 Results of Discriminant Validity Analysis (continued)

	SE	ER	CP	BR	RI	PE
RI	0.515	0.487	0.452	0.500	0.807	
PE	0.523	0.521	0.510	0.528	0.527	0.778

Note: The numbers on the diagonal represent the square roots of the AVE.

Structural equation modeling

This study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the effects of virtual spokespersons' emotional transmission dimensions on consumers' positive emotions. As shown in Table 4, all model fit indices met the criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2010), indicating a good overall model fit and strong consistency between theory and data: X^2 test p-value = 0.334 (> 0.05), suggesting no significant difference between the model and observed data; CMIN/df = 1.037 (< 3), reflecting good model parsimony; GFI = 0.926, CFI = 0.998, IFI = 0.998, NFI = 0.937, AGFI = 0.906 (all > 0.90), indicating excellent model fit; SRMR = 0.048 and RMSEA = 0.012 (both < 0.08), showing acceptable residual levels.

Table 4 Results of Structural Model Goodness of Fit

Goodness of Fit Indices	Criteria	After Modification	Results
p-value ofz2	> 0.05	0.334	Pass
CMIN/df	< 3.00	1.037	Pass
GFI	> 0.90	0.926	Pass
SRMR	< 0.08	0.048	Pass
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.012	Pass
IFI	> 0.90	0.998	Pass
CFI	> 0.90	0.998	Pass
NFI	> 0.90	0.937	Pass
AGFI	> 0.90	0.906	Pass

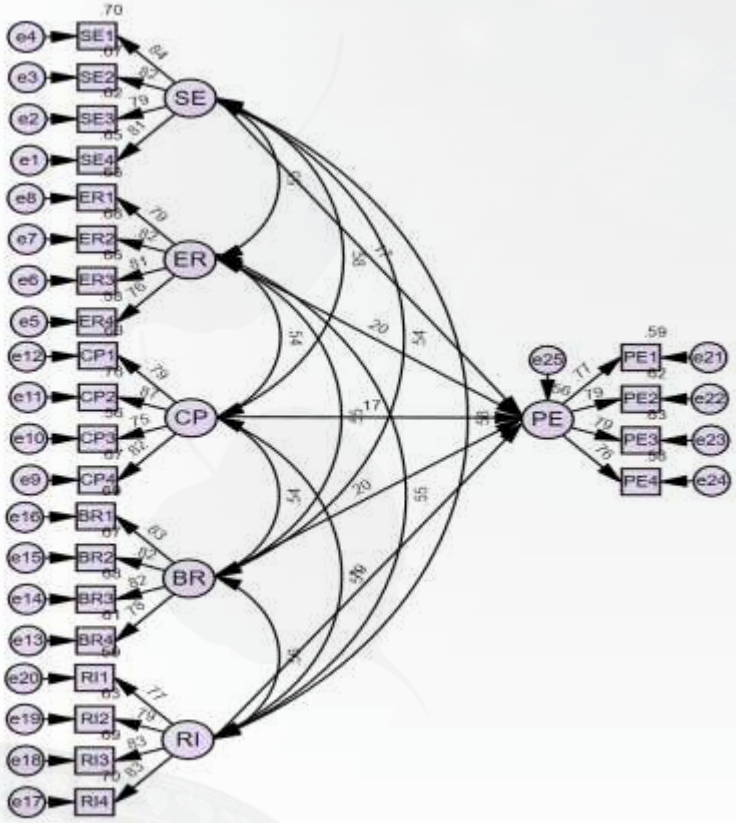


Figure 3 Structural Equation Model of the Research Framework

Research Results

This study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess the effects of virtual spokespersons' emotional transmission on consumers' positive emotions. The model demonstrated a good fit, with all five dimensions sensory experience, emotional resonance, cognitive processing, behavioral responses, and relational interactions showing significant positive effects ($p < 0.05$). These findings validate the proposed emotional transmission model and support its applicability in the context of hotel marketing.

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Estimated	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Results
H1	SE⟶ PE	0.153	0.072	2.126	0.034	Supported
H2	ER⟶ PE	0.213	0.081	2.618	0.009	Supported
H3	CP⟶ PE	0.166	0.074	2.245	0.025	Supported
H4	BR⟶ PE	0.193	0.076	2.543	0.011	Supported
H5	RI⟶ PE	0.181	0.073	2.468	0.014	Supported

Note: statisticallysignificant level : ***p < 0.001,**p < 0.01,*p< 0.05.

Conclusion

This study developed and validated a causal model exploring how virtual spokespersons influence consumers' positive emotions in branded hotel settings. Drawing on experiential marketing theory, emotional transmission was defined through five dimensions: sensory experience, emotional resonance, cognitive processing, behavioral responses, and relational interactions. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated strong construct validity (X^2/df = 1.099, RMSEA = 0.020, CFI = 0.995; factor loadings: 0.750–0.870; CR: 0.860–0.947; AVE: 0.605–0.662). Structural equation modeling confirmed all five dimensions significantly enhanced positive emotions ($p < 0.05$), with robust model fit (X^2 p = 0.334, CMIN/df = 1.037, GFI = 0.926, SRMR = 0.048, RMSEA = 0.012, CFI = 0.998).

These findings deepen theoretical insights into emotional engagement in digital branding and provide empirical guidance for designing effective virtual spokespersons. Practically, hotel managers should prioritize emotional resonance and interactivity to foster stronger guest connections, enhance satisfaction, and build brand loyalty. Despite challenges in measuring emotions, the results offer actionable strategies for advancing hotel digital transformation in the era of smart tourism.

Discussion

Grounded in experiential marketing theory, this study empirically demonstrates that virtual spokespersons significantly shape consumers' positive emotions through five dimensions—sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and relational ($p < 0.05$). These findings underscore their emotional mediation role and align with emerging evidence in digital consumer experience (e.g., Bujisic et al., 2025; Fici et al., 2024).

Despite significance across all dimensions, sensory experience ($\beta = 0.153$) showed a relatively weak effect, indicating limited impact on deep emotional arousal. This aligns with Leung et al. (2024), who found that emotional engagement in immersive marketing is more strongly driven by interactivity and co-creation than by sensory stimuli alone. Accordingly, emotional resonance and relational interaction emerge as key mechanisms for fostering emotional connections in service contexts like hospitality.

Emotion measurement is inherently complex due to its subjective and context-dependent nature (Shryock et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023). Even established scales like DERS can be influenced by demographic and physiological factors (Chan et al., 2023). To enhance measurement validity, future studies may integrate multimodal approaches—such as facial expression or vocal emotion analysis—with self-reports for triangulated emotional assessment.

Finally, consumer demographics moderate the effectiveness of emotional transmission. Younger consumers, for instance, show greater sensitivity to virtual emotional cues (Amorese et al., 2024) and higher engagement in immersive, co-creative settings (Leung et al., 2024). Future research is encouraged to apply multi-group SEM or moderation analysis to examine demographic variations and reinforce the model's external validity.

Recommendations

1. Practical Recommendations Based on Empirical Findings

Enhance Emotional Resonance (ER $\longrightarrow$ PE, $\beta = 0.213$, $p < 0.01$): Hotels

should strengthen consumers emotional connections by integrating brand storytelling, such as local cultural-themed animations, and contextual emotional feedback, like customized greetings for festivals or special occasions, to boost positive emotional experiences (see Saeedi, 2025).

Optimize Behavioral Interaction Mechanisms (BR ⟶ PE, β = 0.193, p < 0.01): Design interactive task systems, such as social media check-in rewards, and real-time feedback features, like emoticon responses, to stimulate user engagement, enhance emotional responses, and increase user retention (see Shen, 2025).

Improve Cognitive Processing and Relational Interaction: Cognitive Processing (CP ⟶ PE, β = 0.166, p < 0.05): Utilize AI-driven personalized recommendations based on user history to enhance information processing efficiency and user experience (see Bujisic et al., 2025). Relational Interaction (RI ⟶ PE, β = 0.181, p < 0.05): Develop virtual community ecosystems, such as spokesperson-hosted online events, to strengthen emotional bonds and sense of belonging among users (see Santos et al., 2022).

Adopt Lightweight Sensory Experience Design (SE ⟶ PE, β = 0.153, p < 0.05): Integrate sensory elements (e.g., audiovisual atmospheres) with interactive functions effectively, avoiding overreliance on single-sense stimulation to improve cost-effectiveness and overall user experience (see Leung et al., 2024).

2. Theoretical Contributions

Theoretical Extension of Experiential Marketing: This study extends Schmitt's (1999) experiential marketing framework to the context of hotel virtual spokespersons, demonstrating that relational interaction and behavioral responses exert greater influence on consumers' positive emotions than sensory stimuli in digital service settings (Pantano & Scarpi, 2022). These findings enhance the model's relevance in technology-mediated experiences.

Contribution to Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) Theory: By quantifying the relative impact of emotional transmission dimensions (ER > BR > RI

> CP > SE), the study identifies virtual spokespersons as key emotional mediators. This provides empirical support for Picard (1997) affective computing model in hospitality contexts (Fici et al., 2024).

3. Future Research Directions

Future research should apply multi-group structural equation modeling to explore the moderating effects of demographic factors (e.g., gender, age, education), extending Amorese et al.'s (2024) work on age-related differences in virtual emotional perception and enhancing the model's external validity.

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