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Artificial Intelligence Chatbots and the Future of Emotion Research

Bala Salisu[1]*

[1] *School of Management Studies, The Federal Polytechnic Damaturu, 620001 Damaturu, Nigeria*

* Corresponding author: bs.bala.ng@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper explores the transformative impact of AI chatbots on emotion research, offering a preview into the advantages, challenges, and ethical considerations surrounding their integration. AI chatbots have revolutionised emotion research by enabling real-time data collection, enhancing ecological validity, minimising self-report bias, and enabling multimodal emotional analysis. However, their use raises concerns related to bias, privacy, and ethical guidelines. The future of emotion research with AI chatbots is promising, with the potential for personalised emotional support, integration with virtual reality, and ground-breaking insights in clinical and human-robot interaction contexts. Thus, AI chatbots promise a future where researchers can gain deeper understanding of human emotions.

Keywords: *AI Chatbots, Emotion Research, Ethical Considerations, Virtual Reality Integration, Human-Chatbot Interaction.*

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Introduction

In an era where technology is advancing at an unprecedented pace, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force, reshaping the way we interact, communicate, and understand human emotion (Minsky, 2006; Prentice, 2023). It has permeated an increasing number of functional areas of life and management (see: Hemachandran and Rodriguez, 2024, for areas of AI chabot applications). Interacting, communicating, and understanding one another are essentially emotional episodes shaping the outcomes of such engagement (Vuori, 2023). As we increasingly use AI technologoies both as mediators and interlocutors in our interactional and communicative engagements, the abilities of these non-human "others" to appreciate our emotional drives and respond accordingly became increasingly felt (Bimber *et al.*, 2012; Rese and Tränkner, 2024). It is therefore not surprising that AI chatbots, often regarded as the forefront of this digital revolution (Brooks, 2021; Elliott, 2023), are fundamentally changing the landscape of emotion research (Minnaert, 2024). In this paper, I explore the fascinating intersection of AI chatbots and emotion research, highlighting the potential they hold for a more indepth exploration of human emotions and the transformative role they are destined to play in the not-so-distant future.

AI chatbots are computer programs imbued with the capacity to engage in human-like conversations (Dhotre *et al.*, 2024). They utilise machine learning, natural language processing, and vast datasets to simulate human interactions (Dhotre *et al.*, 2024). The underlying principle driving these AI entities is the quest to imitate, and in some cases, surpass, the conversational abilities of humans (Rapp *et al.*, 2021). Emotions, on the other hand, represent the complex, subjective, and multifacetted psychological experiences of people arising in response to internal or external stimuli and influencing one's overall subjective well-being and decision-making (Frenzel *et al.*, 2024). They encompass a wide spectrum of feelings, ranging from joy to sorrow, anger to contentment, and anxiety to serenity (Scribano, 2023). Emotions play an integral role in people's life, influencing their decisions, relationships, and overall well-being (Elliott *et al.*, 2022). They serve as the connective tissue of human interaction, revealing people's innermost thoughts and responses to the world around them (Scribano, 2023). The study of emotions, thus, is pivotal in deciphering the human psyche and improving people's interactions with technology and each other.

Why is the fusion of AI chatbots and emotion research such a compelling area of exploration? The answer lies in the relationship between emotions and communication. Emotions are at the heart of how people convey and interpret meaning (Falconier *et al.*, 2023). When people converse, their tone, choice of words, and even non-verbal cues reflect their emotional state. AI chatbots, with their ability to understand and respond to these nuances, hold the promise of revolutionising the way people perceive and interact with technology. Also, emotions themselves are a subject of relentless fascination. They are central to numerous fields, including psychology, sociology, neuroscience, and even economics (Kappas, 2002). From understanding consumer behaviour and mental health to enhancing customer experiences and educational outcomes, emotions are a pivotal factor. Hence, exploring the role of AI chatbots in unraveling the mysteries of emotions is not merely a technological endeavour but a multidisciplinary pursuit with far-reaching implications.

In light of these considerations, my thesis emerges: AI chatbots are revolutionising emotion research by offering new opportunities for studying and understanding human emotions. In this paper, I examined the evolution of AI chatbots and the role they have played in emotion research. I highlighted the applications that showcase the real-world impact of this intersection. Additionally, I pointed out the advantages and challenges posed by AI chatbots in emotion research. Ethical considerations underlining the importance of responsible AI use (Niu and Mvondo, 2024) were also mentioned. Finally, I contemplated the future and the exciting prospects that AI chatbots offer for the field of emotion research. It is becoming clear that the synergy between AI chatbots and the exploration of human emotions is a

research frontier ripe for discovery, innovation, and enlightenment. This paper highlights this exciting terrain, shedding light on the transformative potential that lies ahead.

Historical Perspective

To grasp the significance of AI chatbots in the field of emotion research, it is essential to trace their evolution and the early endeavours in understanding emotions. Such historical context provides the foundation upon which we can appreciate the revolutionary impact AI chatbots have had on emotion research.

Evolution of AI Chatbots

The evolution of AI chatbots begins with rule-based chatbots, also known as scripted or decision-tree chatbots (Adamopoulou and Moussiades, 2020). These are a type of AI chatbot that operate on a predefined set of rules and instructions (Farah *et al.*, 2023). They are programmed with a specific set of responses based on keywords or patterns in user inputs. However, rule-based chatbots lack the ability to learn or adapt to new information and can only provide responses within the boundaries of their programmed rules (Farah *et al.*, 2023). Rule-based chatbots were prominent in the early stages of chatbot development and are characterised by their limited understanding of context and inability to engage in natural, dynamic conversations (Adamopoulou and Moussiades, 2020). Examples of rule-based chatbots include ELIZA (Shum *et al.*, 2018), one of the earliest chatbots designed to simulate a Rogerian psychotherapist (Holohan, 2023), and ALICE (Artificial Linguistic Internet Computer Entity), which was developed for general conversations but relied on predefined scripts for responses (AbuShawar and Atwell, 2015). While they could handle basic conversations, the interactions of these chatbots were often limited, lacking the true understanding of context.

Alan Turing's influence on the emergence of AI chatbots is alos noteworthy. In the 1950s, Turing introduced Turing Test, which served as a theoretical benchmark, pushing the boundaries of a machine's ability to exhibit intelligent behaviour indistinguishable from that of a human (Turing, 1950). Turing's proposition ignited the quest for creating conversational agents that could pass this test, thereby demonstrating human-like conversational capabilities. The Turing Test became a pivotal touchstone for evaluating the conversational abilities of AI chatbots and set in motion a relentless pursuit of simulating human conversation, propelling the development and innovation of chatbot technology (Nov *et al.*, 2023). Turing's visionary ideas laid the theoretical foundation for the entire field of AI chatbots, steering it towards creating digital entities that could engage in conversations that were virtually indistinguishable from those between humans (McTear, 2022).

However, it was the advancements in Machine Learning (ML) (Suta *et al.*, 2020) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) (Ramsay and Ahmad, 2023) that truly represented a profound shift in the evolution of AI chatbots. These technologies, coupled with the power of neural networks, bestowed chatbots with the capability to understand and respond to human language in a more sophisticated and context-aware manner (Chang and Hsing, 2021). Their ability to learn and adapt from data marked a significant milestone, propelling them towards more human-like conversational interactions and making them indispensable in various domains, from customer service to virtual assistants and beyond (Caruccio *et al.*, 2024). This technological leap laid the foundation for the integration of AI chatbots into our daily lives and continues to drive their growth and potential in the modern technological landscape.

Mainstreaming chatbots in people's daily lives marked another epochal watershed in the evolution of these technologies. In the past decade, AI chatbots, notably represented by virtual assistants like Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant, have achieved mainstream adoption, integrated seamlessly into our daily lives (Skjuve *et al.*, 2023). These chatbots are empowered by sophisticated NLP models, vast datasets, and a capacity for continuous learning. Their pervasive presence extends beyond virtual assistants, as they have also found a place within messaging platforms and websites (Nasution *et al.*, 2023; Sadiku *et al.*, 2021). The cornerstone of their capabilities lies in NLP, allowing them to comprehend and generate human language with precision. Extensive datasets serve as reservoirs of language patterns and context, while continuous learning ensures their adaptability and relevance over time (Sheth *et al.*, 2019). As a result, these chatbots engage users across a wide spectrum of conversations, reflecting their evolving importance in enhancing user experiences, streamlining information retrieval, and transforming the way we interact with technology.

Building on the foregoing developmnts, AI chatbots then underwent remarkable diversification into specialised domains, including customer service (Misischia *et al.*, 2022), healthcare (Javaid *et al.*, 2023), and finance (Anshari *et al.*, 2022; Okuda and Shoda, 2018), tailored to offer expert-level assistance and information within their designated sectors. In customer service, they efficiently handle user inquiries and troubleshooting, providing round-the-clock support. Healthcare chatbots offer medical advice and mental health support (Al-Abyadh and Hoang, 2024), while financial chatbots assist with investment queries and financial planning (Anshari *et al.*, 2022; Bonelli and Döngül, 2023; Ramjattan *et al.*, 2021). The adaptability of these specialised chatbots is a key strength, streamlining industry-specific knowledge dissemination and enhancing decision-making processes. Their transformational role lies in making expert-level information and assistance easily accessible, bridging the gap between users and often domains, thereby significantly elevating the quality of support and guidance across diverse industries.

The emergence of conversational AI stands the current milestone in the development of AI chatbots, reflecting a quantum leap in their capabilities (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023; McTear, 2022). By seamlessly amalgamating AI chatbots with the broader artificial intelligence technologies, conversational AI is truly multifaceted. Conversational AI not only understands and generates natural language but can also process context, recognise emotions, and provide more personalised and engaging interactions, reflecting the evolving sophistication of these digital conversational agents (Chatterjee and Dethlefs, 2023). This amalgamation signifies an advanced level of sophistication, enabling conversational AI to comprehend human language intricacies, maintain context in conversations, respond empathetically to emotions, and provide tailored interactions. This transformative evolution is redefining digital conversational agents, making them more human-like and adept in various fields, including healthcare and e-commerce, thus reshaping human-computer interaction and enhancing user experiences significantly (Chatterjee and Dethlefs, 2023).

As we look towards the future, the potential of AI chatbots appears boundless. Ongoing research in areas like deep reinforcement learning and neuro-linguistic programming aims to make chatbots even more sophisticated, enabling them to understand the intricacies of human emotions and context. These developments prime them for the transformative role they are destined to play in the future, especially in the context of emotion research and human-computer interaction.

Early Use of AI in Emotion Research

The early adoption of AI in emotion research represents a pioneering chapter in the exploration of human emotions and their interaction with technology (Ramsay and Ahmad, 2023). This era, which spans from the late 20th century into the early 21st century, witnessed the integration of artificial intelligence tools and techniques to unravel human emotions (Bosse *et al.*,

2014). First, early researchers recognised the potential of AI in understanding emotions through textual data (Muhali, 2024). They utilised natural language processing techniques to analyse written text, such as emails, online chats, and social media interactions (Muhali, 2024). These studies aimed to detect emotional cues in language, identify sentiment, and even pinpoint specific emotions expressed in text. The pioneering work of researchers like Rosalind Picard in affective computing (Picard, 2000) and in sentiment analysis (Liu, 2010) laid the foundation for text-based emotion analysis, which continues to be instrumental in understanding the emotional content of digital communications. Concurrently, AI researchers turned their attention to visual cues for emotion recognition (Abubakar *et al.*, 2023). They developed algorithms capable of analysing facial expressions to infer emotions. These early facial recognition systems identified patterns in facial features, such as the configuration of eyebrows, mouth, and eyes, to classify emotional states (Davis *et al.*, 2021). This marked the inception of a subfield known as facial expression analysis, contributing to the understanding of emotions in contexts like human-computer interaction, market research, and psychology.

Another facet of early AI applications in emotion research involved the development of emotion-driven interactive systems (Binz *et al.*, 2023). These systems aimed to imbue machines with the ability to perceive and respond to human emotions. For instance, in the field of human-computer interaction, researchers explored the creation of virtual agents and avatars that could detect user emotions through speech, facial expressions, or physiological signals (Crowder *et al.*, 2020). The goal was to design systems that could adapt their responses based on user emotions, enhancing user experiences in various applications. AI also made inroads into neuroscience, aiding researchers in understanding the neural basis of emotions (DiGangi, 2023). Advanced neuroimaging techniques, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalography (EEG), were combined with machine learning algorithms to map and analyse brain activity associated with different emotional states (Jung *et al.*, 2022; Portugal *et al.*, 2023). This fusion of AI and neuroscience opened up new avenues for studying emotions at a neurological level, shedding light on the underlying mechanisms and brain regions involved in emotional processing (Liu *et al.*, 2024).

While early use of AI in emotion research offered promising insights, it was not without its challenges. The detection and interpretation of emotions, whether through text, facial expressions, or physiological signals, were prone to errors and misinterpretations (Ahuja, 2024; Hazime and Fakhoury, 2024). Additionally, the accuracy of emotion recognition systems was influenced by cultural and individual differences (Liu *et al.*, 2022), making it a complex and evolving field. Overall, the early integration of AI into emotion research represented a pioneering phase, exploring various facets of human emotions. From text-based analysis to facial expression recognition and emotion-driven interactive systems, AI laid the groundwork for a multidisciplinary approach to understanding emotions. While challenges existed, these early forays set the stage for the future, where AI continues to play an increasingly significant role in advancing our comprehension of human emotions, bridging the gap between technology and the intricacies of the human psyche.

Limitations of Traditional Emotion Research Methods

Traditional methods of emotion research, though valuable in their own right (Ashkanasy and Humphrey, 2011; Gooty *et al.*, 2009), bear inherent limitations that have spurred the integration of artificial intelligence and technology to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate landscape of human emotions (Scribano, 2023). One of the primary constraints lies in the subjectivity and self-report bias inherent in these methods (Kisfalvi, 2006; Kochan, 2013). Emotions are deeply personal and often elude precise verbal expression, making self-reporting susceptible to inaccuracies and individuals' varying abilities to articulate their feelings. This subjectivity can introduce biases into the research, potentially skewing results and hindering a holistic view of emotional experiences (Kisfalvi, 2006; Kochan, 2013). Also, traditional emotion research predominantly unfolds within controlled laboratory environments, which, while offering a degree of control over variables, do not always mirror real-world emotional dynamics (Herbert, 2020). The contextual dependencies of emotions can lead to differences in individuals' responses in artificial settings compared to their reactions in daily life, thus challenging the ecological validity of the findings. This limitation necessitates a transition towards more ecologically valid and naturalistic settings for a deeper understanding of emotions.

Another notable restriction of traditional research methods is their reliance on observable behaviours and limited emotional expressions, such as facial cues and physiological responses (Cardello and Jaeger, 2021). These methods often miss subtle emotional nuances, non-verbal cues, and cultural variations, which are essential for a comprehensive examination of human emotions (Clément and Sangar, 2018). This limitation restricts the depth of understanding and the capacity to encompass the full spectrum of emotional experiences. Also, the temporal dimension poses a challenge, as traditional research often relies on retrospective data, requiring participants to recall and report their past emotional states (Tag *et al.*, 2022). Memory biases and inaccuracies can impede the precision and timeliness of emotion research. Real-time assessment of emotions is crucial, considering the dynamic nature of emotional experiences (Gill and Singh, 2021; Villanueva *et al.*, 2019). On another dimension, research that involves human observers for emotion recognition or data coding can introduce observer-related biases, as interpretations of emotional expressions may vary between individuals, influenced by their personal experiences and biases (Black and Lebow, 2013). This variability in human observation can undermine the reliability of research outcomes. Furthermore, traditional emotion research often involves small sample sizes, especially in controlled laboratory settings, limiting the ability to represent the diversity of emotions experienced in daily life (Kim *et al.*, 2011). Focusing on specific emotional states may restrict the exploration of more nuanced and complex emotional experiences that require a more comprehensive approach.

The integration of AI and technology into emotion research addresses many of these limitations by offering real-time data collection, reducing subjectivity through machine learning algorithms, expanding the scope of emotional analysis to include non-verbal cues, and ensuring a more ecologically valid and broader representation of emotional experiences. This evolution in research methods opens new horizons in understanding the multifaceted world of human emotions, bridging the gaps left by traditional approaches.

Role of AI Chatbots in Emotion Research

The infusion of AI chatbots into the domain of emotion research has ushered in a transformative era, revolutionising the way we perceive, understand, and investigate human emotions (Freed, 2020). These digital conversational agents have emerged as invaluable tools that transcend the limitations of traditional research methods and offer new avenues for exploring the intricate facets of human emotional experiences. Their introduction into the fieeld of emotion research has thus precipitated a paradigm shift in data collection methods by facilitating real-time emotional data acquisition (Gill and Singh, 2021; Villanueva *et al.*, 2019). Unlike conventional approaches that heavily lean on retrospective self-reports or observations, AI chatbots enable the capture of emotional states as they organically occur. This revolutionary capability allows researchers to obtain immediate

insights into the dynamic flux of emotions experienced by individuals in their daily lives. The significance of real-time data collection lies in its ability to grasp the intricacies of emotional experiences at the precise moment they occur, offering a level of accuracy, immediacy, and depth of understanding that traditional methods struggle to achieve (Gill and Singh, 2021; Villanueva *et al.*, 2019). This departure from relying on memory-dependent or past-based assessments presents an opportunity for researchers to explore the genuine, unfiltered expressions of human emotions, providing a more detailed understanding of emotional fluctuations as they happen, leading to a more accurate and nuanced comprehension of emotional experiences in various contexts. The timely access to emotional states through AI chatbots holds great potential in transforming how we understand, perceive, and respond to emotions, thereby shaping a new era in emotion research that transcends the constraints of traditional retrospective methodologies.

The integration of AI chatbots into emotion research also signifies a substantial enhancement in ecological validity and the exploration of emotions within naturalistic settings (Bosma, 2021). Traditional laboratory conditions, while valuable for controlled experiments, often fall short in capturing the complexity of real-world emotional experiences (Zarouali *et al.*, 2023). In stark contrast, AI chatbots empower researchers to collect data in genuine, everyday contexts, mirroring the diversity of emotional encounters individuals face in their lives (Leung and Wen, 2021). This approach not only fosters a more representative understanding of emotions as they naturally manifest but also acknowledges their inherent context-dependent nature (Greenaway *et al.*, 2018), permitting a deeper exploration of the interplay between emotions and external influences, be they cultural, social, or environmental (Kim *et al.*, 2011; Parrott and Hertel, 1999; Wilson-Mendenhall *et al.*, 2013). In essence, the integration of AI chatbots in emotion research enriches our comprehension of the intricate landscape of human emotions, ultimately paving the way for a more holistic and insightful exploration of this fundamental aspect of human existence.

Still on data collection, AI chatbots offer a remarkable advantage in emotion research by mitigating self-report bias (Donaldson and Donaldson, 2021). Traditional methods often rely on individuals to report their emotions, which can be influenced by memory inaccuracies, social desirability biases, and difficulties in expressing feelings (Zarouali *et al.*, 2023). In contrast, AI chatbots create a non-judgmental and unobtrusive environment, encouraging more honest and spontaneous emotional responses (Alkoudmani *et al.*, 2023; Beam, 2023). This minimizes the potential for self-reporting distortions, enabling researchers to access a more authentic emotional narrative, ultimately enhancing the accuracy and depth of emotion research. Thus, AI chatbots permit researchers to dig deeper into the genuine emotional experiences of individuals, unearthing their true sentiments without the influence of memory lapses or social conformity (Franciscatto *et al.*, 2022). This results in more accurate and reliable data, ultimately enhancing the fidelity of emotion research findings. It also paves the way for a more comprehensive exploration of emotions, unburdened by the limitations of self-reporting, thereby offering a more genuine and candid glimpse into the intricacies of human emotional experiences in various contexts and settings.

AI chatbots also introduce a revolutionary dimension to emotion research through their capacity for multimodal emotional analysis (Franciscatto *et al.*, 2022). These digital conversational agents have the unique ability to simultaneously process diverse forms of data (Kouamé and Liu, 2020), including text, audio, visual cues, and physiological signals, offering a comprehensive perspective on emotional states. For example, they can scrutinize text for linguistic patterns and sentiment (Machova *et al.*, 2023), assess voice tone and inflection in spoken communication, analyse facial expressions and body language for visual cues, and even monitor physiological indicators like heart rate and skin conductance. This multi-dimensional approach enriches our understanding of emotions by providing a nuanced and holistic assessment that delves into the subtleties, contradictions, and interplay between various facets of emotional expression and experience, transcending the limitations of traditional unimodal research methods and advancing the field of emotion research significantly (Franciscatto *et al.*, 2022; Kooli, 2023).

AI chatbots also play significant role in large-scale data handling and machine learning in emotion research (Lee *et al.*, 2023). Emotion studies often necessitate extensive data for robust findings. AI chatbots, adept at managing vast datasets, and equipped with machine learning algorithms, efficiently navigate and analyse this large-scale information (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Through machine learning, these chatbots uncover patterns and correlations in emotional responses, unveiling previously concealed insights (Lehmann *et al.*, 2018). This data-driven approach empowers researchers to attain a more profound and comprehensive understanding of emotions, transcending the limitations of human data processing (Lee *et al.*, 2023). In essence, the synergy between chatbots, extensive data, and machine learning represents a groundbreaking advancement in emotion research, enriching our comprehension of the complex landscape of human emotions.

Another important role AI chatbots play in emotion research hinges on their adaptive learning capabilities (Kazoun *et al.*, 2022). Indeed, the unique attribute of continuous learning and adaptation distinguishes AI chatbots in emotion research. These chatbots possess the exceptional capability to evolve and enhance their emotional recognition skills over time (Abdul-Mageed and Ungar, 2017). Powered by machine learning, they accumulate knowledge from interactions and data, progressively refining their ability to discern subtle human emotions. With each engagement and expanding dataset, they become more proficient in recognising nuanced emotional states, offering advanced emotional insights and a deeper understanding of human emotional experiences. This dynamic feature positions AI chatbots as valuable tools in unlocking the complexities of emotions, enriching the field of emotion research and its potential applications.

Finally, AI chatbots are increasingly finding vital applications in clinical and mental health research by offering emotional support and assessments to individuals grappling with mental health issues (Al-Abyadh and Hoang, 2024; Meng and Dai, 2021). Leveraging their capacity to analyse language and emotional cues (Zhao *et al.*, 2023), they excel at early detection of emotional distress (Abdul-Mageed and Ungar, 2017), potentially reducing the burden of mental health conditions. Their ability to provide immediate and personalised interventions tailored to the individual's emotional state, offering timely support and resources, are crucial in mental health crisis situations (Javaid *et al.*, 2023). Bridging the gap between detection and intervention enhances the potential of AI chatbots to significantly enhance mental health outcomes and extend the reach of mental health support, though ethical considerations must be paramount in their application in this sensitive domain (Niu and Mvondo, 2024).

Application of AI Chatbots

The integration of AI chatbots into emotion research has not only broadened the scope of understanding emotions but has also found diverse applications across multiple domains, from healthcare to education and beyond (Adamopoulou and Moussiades, 2020). The versatility and adaptability of AI chatbots make them invaluable tools in a variety of settings (Weber, 2023). For instance, AI chatbots are employed in emotion

research based upon their demonstrable ability to contribute to our understanding of human emotions (Ahuja, 2024). Rather than being passive subjects of research, chatbots have become active participants in the process, engaging with users to collect real-time data on emotional experiences and behaviours (Gill and Singh, 2021; Villanueva *et al.*, 2019). Researchers harness the analytical capabilities of chatbots to glean insights into the intricate fabric of human emotions as they naturally unfold in various contexts. One of the significant advantages of this approach is the ability to gather data in real-time. Traditional emotion research methods often rely on retrospective self-reports or observations, which can introduce memory biases and limitations in capturing the dynamic nature of emotions. AI chatbots overcome these constraints by capturing emotional states as they naturally occur, offering immediate insights into the ebb and flow of emotions. This real-time assessment provides a level of precision and timeliness that was previously unattainable in emotion research, offering a fresh perspective on the temporal aspects of emotional experiences (Gill and Singh, 2021; Villanueva *et al.*, 2019). The insights derived from these chatbot interactions have a transformative impact on emotion research (Ahuja, 2024). The data collected is not only extensive but also rich in contextual information, enabling researchers to examine emotions in various situations and settings. Studies can explore how emotional responses may vary across different demographics, cultural contexts, or specific environments. This data-rich approach contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of human emotions, providing a wealth of information that enriches the field of emotion research (Gkinko and Elbanna, 2023). Furthermore, chatbots facilitate the examination of the interplay between emotions and other variables, such as external factors, contextual influences, and individual differences. Researchers can uncover intricate relationships and patterns within the data that might remain concealed using traditional research methods. This analytical depth enhances our comprehension of the complexities and subtleties of human emotional experiences.

In addition to the field of emotion research, AI chatbots AI chatbots are also used in various fields. For instance, they are used in providing mental health support (Ahuja, 2024), due to their remarkable effectiveness in providing immediate assistance and conducting assessments for individuals facing mental health challenges (Al-Abyadh and Hoang, 2024). These chatbots employ advanced linguistic and emotional analysis to detect signs of distress and offer personalised interventions, bridging the gap between early detection and timely support (Ahuja, 2024). A notable example is the Woebot chatbot, which delivers cognitive-behavioural therapy and emotional support to users (Meng and Dai, 2021), underscoring the transformative potential of chatbots in mental health treatment (Sheth *et al.*, 2024). Their non-judgmental and accessible nature makes them an increasingly important component of mental health care, reducing stigma and improving the well-being of individuals experiencing emotional difficulties.

Similarly, the adoption of AI chatbots in the healthcare industry has resulted in a remarkable transformation by ushering in a new era of patient interaction and support . These digital companions play diverse and pivotal roles, from monitoring patients' well-being in real-time to delivering crucial medication reminders and providing emotional support to those managing chronic health conditions (Gill and Singh, 2021; Villanueva *et al.*, 2019). In particular, chatbots offer a lifeline to individuals dealing with long-term illnesses, helping them navigate the emotional aspects of their conditions. Furthermore, the integration of chatbots into telemedicine has revolutionised healthcare accessibility and convenience, enabling patients to access medical consultations and advice from the comfort of their homes (Vasileiou *et al.*, 2022). This not only benefits those in remote areas but also simplifies the healthcare journey for individuals with busy schedules, ultimately enhancing healthcare access and quality for all (Swick, 2021). The adaptability and transformative potential of AI chatbots in the healthcare sector underscore their growing significance as invaluable allies in the pursuit of patient well-being and accessible healthcare.

AI chatbots have also become integral to education by offering vital support to students' emotional well-being and academic needs (Gupta *et al.*, 2024; Sok and Heng, 2023). In addition to proving access to need learning resources (Ahillon and Aquino, 2024), these versatile digital companions engage with students effectively, identifying academic and emotional challenges. A compelling case was the impact of chatbots during the swift transition to remote learning, where they played a pivotal role in providing students with essential resources and guidance (Gupta *et al.*, 2024). By analysing language and understanding students' concerns, chatbots addressed emotional stressors brought on by the shift, offering empathetic responses and emotional support (Meng and Dai, 2021). Simultaneously, they provided timely academic assistance, responding to coursework queries and helping students navigate the complexities of remote learning (Kazoun *et al.*, 2022). This dual role as emotional supporters and academic advisors highlights the adaptability and transformative potential of AI chatbots in education, promising to enhance both the emotional well-being and learning experiences of students.

One visible and ubiquitous application AI chatbots is in the area of customer service (Misischia *et al.*, 2022). They have ignited a revolution in this sphere, pioneering instantaneous and responsive support that transcends traditional customer interactions. The unique prowess of AI chatbots here lies in their capacity to gauge customer emotions through advanced text analysis, enabling them to adapt their responses in real-time with a blend of efficiency and empathy (Huang *et al.*, 2024). Businesses have harnessed chatbots to continuously measure customer satisfaction, analysing customer feedback and emotions to offer immediate insights into customer sentiment. This real-time data empowers companies to take swift actions to improve the overall customer experience, addressing issues promptly and ensuring customer satisfaction remains a top priority (Gill and Singh, 2021; Villanueva *et al.*, 2019; Xu *et al.*, 2023). In essence, AI chatbots have not only streamlined customer service but have also redefined the customer-company relationship by introducing an emotionally intelligent and personalised approach that fosters empathy, strengthens customer relationships, and drives customer loyalty (Xie *et al.*, 2024).

AI chatbots have also been deployed in crisis intervention scenarios, notably suicide prevention hotlines, where their capacity to provide immediate and potentially life-saving emotional support shines (Jiang *et al.*, 2022). As first points of contact for individuals in distress, these chatbots offer non-judgmental and empathetic companionship during critical moments. Their unobtrusive, non-human presence encourages individuals to open up and share their feelings, bridging the emotional gap in crisis situations. Beyond emotional support, chatbots play a vital role in guiding individuals towards professional help, providing information on local crisis resources and initiating emergency protocols if high-risk behaviour is detected (García Mena *et al.*, 2023). This prompt and appropriate action ensures individuals receive the professional intervention they urgently require, potentially saving lives. In an era where technology plays an increasingly important role in mental health support (Al-Abyadh and Hoang, 2024), chatbots extend the reach and accessibility of crisis hotlines, addressing stigma and contributing to the well-being and safety of individuals facing emotional crises.

Further, AI chatbots play an integral role in breaking down cultural and linguistic barriers in emotion research, offering a global and multi-dimensional perspective that transcends linguistic constraints (Roumeliotis and Tselikas, 2023). Their

unique capability to analyse emotional expressions in numerous languages and cultural contexts makes them powerful instruments in understanding the universal aspects of human emotions. These digital agents operate seamlessly across languages, enabling researchers to investigate the impact of linguistic diversity on emotional expression and perception (Vaz, 2023). Additionally, chatbots facilitate cross-cultural interactions, providing a platform to explore the influence of cultural norms, values, and practices on emotional experiences (Karakas, 2023). This comprehensive and inclusive approach broadens our insights into the intricate interplay between culture and emotions, fostering a more holistic understanding of human emotional experiences on a global scale. By embracing diversity, AI chatbots contribute to a deeper appreciation of the complex and multifaceted field of emotions that transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Finally, the convergence of AI chatbots with emotionally intelligent robots heralds a remarkable advancement in the domain of human-robot interaction (Xu *et al.*, 2023), ushering in an era where robots can recognise and respond to human emotions (Freed, 2020). These emotionally intelligent robots find diverse applications in caregiving, companionship, and therapeutic roles, redefining their roles as empathetic and effective partners in human life. In caregiving, they offer a higher level of personalised care by detecting and addressing the emotional needs of individuals, enhancing the overall care experience (Freed, 2020; Minsky, 2006). Also, emotionally intelligent robots serve as companions, alleviating social isolation and providing emotional support through engaging conversations and responsive interactions (Meng and Dai, 2021). In therapeutic settings, they aid therapists in delivering more targeted interventions and offer individuals a safe space to practice and enhance their emotional and social skills (Hizli, 2023). This transformative integration signifies a profound shift in human-robot relationships, where machines equipped with emotional intelligence become invaluable allies capable of enriching the lives of those they interact with in numerous meaningful ways.

Advantages and Challenges

Advantages of Using AI Chatbots in Emotion Research

The incorporation of AI chatbots into emotion research brings forth a multitude of advantages that significantly augment the field. AI chatbots enable real-time emotion data collection, a fundamental departure from traditional methods that often rely on retrospective self-reports or observations (Gill and Singh, 2021; Villanueva *et al.*, 2019; Xu *et al.*, 2023). This real-time assessment provides immediate insights into the dynamics and temporal aspects of emotions, allowing researchers to capture the nuances of emotional experiences as they unfold. Secondly, chatbots enhance the ecological validity of emotion research by facilitating data collection in naturalistic settings. Traditional laboratory environments can be artificial and may not fully represent real-world emotional experiences. AI chatbots, on the other hand, collect data in diverse contexts, reflecting the various circumstances in which emotions are encountered (Gkinko and Elbanna, 2023). This approach offers a richer and more nuanced understanding of emotions as they manifest in daily life.

AI chatbots minimise self-report bias, a common limitation in emotion research (Donaldson and Donaldson, 2021; Kisfalvi, 2006; Kochan, 2013). Human self-reports of emotions can be influenced by memory inaccuracies, social desirability biases, and difficulty in articulating feelings. Chatbots, being unobtrusive and non-judgmental, encourage more honest and spontaneous emotional responses, reducing the potential for self-reporting distortions and providing researchers with a more authentic emotional narrative. Also, chatbots excel in multimodal emotional analysis, capable of examining various dimensions of emotional expression (Franciscatto *et al.*, 2022). They can process not only textual data but also audio, visual, and physiological signals to discern emotional states. This multidimensional approach contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of emotional experiences, shedding light on the intricate facets of human emotions (Franciscatto *et al.*, 2022; Kooli, 2023).

In addition, AI chatbots are adept at handling large-scale data, a necessity for robust emotion research. Equipped with machine learning algorithms, these chatbots can sift through vast datasets to detect patterns and correlations in emotional responses. This data-driven approach empowers researchers to uncover hidden insights and associations that might have otherwise gone unnoticed, ultimately advancing the understanding of emotions (Lee *et al.*, 2023; Lehmann *et al.*, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Finally, chatbots have the unique ability to continuously learn and adapt over time. Through machine learning, they refine their emotional recognition capabilities, enhancing their accuracy and effectiveness (Chang and Hsing, 2021; Sheth *et al.*, 2019). As they engage with more users and data, they become increasingly proficient in understanding the subtleties of human emotions, facilitating more advanced emotional analysis.

Challenges and Limitations in Using AI Chatbots

Despite their myriad advantages, the integration of AI chatbots in emotion research is not without its challenges and limitations. Firstly, chatbots, while proficient, may not fully replicate the complexity of human emotional understanding (Clément and Sangar, 2018; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023; Shum *et al.*, 2018). Human emotions are multifaceted and often layered with nuance and context that chatbots may struggle to comprehend fully. This limitation underscores the importance of recognising the complementary role of chatbots in emotion research alongside human researchers. Another challenge is the potential for technology bias (Hazime and Fakhoury, 2024). AI chatbots learn from data, and if the data they are trained on contains biases or prejudices, the chatbots may inadvertently perpetuate these biases in their emotional analysis. This could lead to skewed or inaccurate results, particularly when studying emotions in diverse populations. Researchers need to be vigilant in addressing and mitigating bias in their chatbot models. Furthermore, there are concerns about privacy and data security when using AI chatbots in emotion research (Kanter and Packel, 2023; Marks and Haupt, 2023; Yang *et al.*, 2023). Collecting personal emotional data raises ethical questions about data storage, consent, and protection (Niu and Mvondo, 2024). Researchers must implement robust data security measures and ensure that participants' emotional data is handled with care and respect for their privacy.

Need for Ethical Guidelines and Responsible AI Use

Given the potential advantages and challenges of using AI chatbots in emotion research, the development and adherence to ethical guidelines are imperative, especially in education (Kooli, 2023) and healthcare (Sheth *et al.*, 2024). Scholars, developers, and organisations should work collaboratively to establish robust ethical standards for the use of AI chatbots in emotion research. These guidelines should encompass issues related to informed consent, privacy, data security, and bias mitigation. Informed consent is paramount when collecting emotional data from participants (Niu and Mvondo, 2024). Researchers should transparently communicate the purpose and scope of data collection, ensuring that participants understand how their emotional data will be used and stored (Sheth *et al.*, 2024). Participants should have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Protecting the privacy of emotional data is essential. Researchers must implement encryption and secure storage practices to safeguard participants' data. Data should be anony-

mised and aggregated whenever possible to minimise the risk of data breaches (Marks and Haupt, 2023). Bias mitigation is critical to ensure that AI chatbots do not perpetuate existing biases (Donaldson and Donaldson, 2021). Researchers should regularly evaluate and audit their chatbot models to identify and rectify bias. Data sources for training chatbots should be diverse and representative of various demographic groups.

Future Trends and Possibilities

AI Chatbots and Personalised Emotional Support:

The future of AI chatbots in emotion research holds exciting possibilities, particularly in the field of personalised emotional support (Caruccio *et al.*, 2024; Skjuve *et al.*, 2023). As technology continues to advance, chatbots are poised to become more sophisticated in recognising and responding to individual emotional states. These chatbots will be capable of tailoring their interactions to the unique emotional needs and preferences of each user (Jung *et al.*, 2022; Xu *et al.*, 2023). Through the integration of personalised emotional support (Meng and Dai, 2021), chatbots could serve as virtual emotional companions, offering guidance, comfort, and understanding that is precisely attuned to an individual's emotional journey.

The application of personalised emotional support extends beyond therapy and mental health. It can be utilised in contexts such as education, where chatbots can adapt their approach to students' emotional states, offering encouragement when needed and recognising when additional support is necessary (Gupta *et al.*, 2024; Kooli, 2023; Sok and Heng, 2023). In healthcare, chatbots can provide personalised emotional support to patients dealing with chronic conditions or those facing difficult medical decisions, offering reassurance and information tailored to the patient's emotional state (Ahuja, 2024; Al-Abyadh and Hoang, 2024). Moreover, AI chatbots can contribute to personalised emotional support by leveraging their continuous learning capabilities. Over time, these chatbots can become better attuned to an individual's emotional patterns, allowing them to offer increasingly accurate and relevant emotional support (Joshi and Kanoongo, 2022; Vasileiou *et al.*, 2022). This could be especially valuable for individuals facing emotional challenges, such as depression or anxiety, where consistent and personalised support can make a significant difference in their well-being.

Integration of AI Chatbots with Virtual Reality

The integration of AI chatbots with virtual reality (VR) technology opens up an innovative frontier in emotion research (Jung *et al.*, 2022). VR can provide immersive environments and simulations that elicit emotional responses, and AI chatbots can serve as guides and companions within these virtual worlds (Brooks, 2021). This convergence of technologies could be utilised for therapeutic purposes (Ren, 2020), such as exposure therapy for phobias, where chatbots offer emotional support and guidance to individuals as they navigate their fears in a controlled VR environment (Le *et al.*, 2023; Meng and Dai, 2021). Also, the integration of chatbots with VR has the potential to revolutionise the way we study emotions in various contexts. Researchers could create virtual scenarios that elicit specific emotional responses, and chatbots could interact with participants within these simulations, gathering real-time emotional data in highly controlled and repeatable settings. This combination of AI chatbots and VR technology can provide a deeper understanding of the interplay between emotions and immersive environments, advancing emotion research in diverse fields, including psychology, marketing, and entertainment (Cao and Jian, 2023).

Potential Breakthroughs in Emotion Research

The future of emotion research, propelled by AI chatbots, holds the promise of significant breakthroughs. One area of potential advancement is in the study of emotions in clinical and healthcare contexts. AI chatbots could aid in early detection and intervention for mental health conditions by continuously monitoring and analysing patients' emotional states (Abdul-Mageed and Ungar, 2017). This proactive approach could lead to more effective mental health treatments and improved patient outcomes. Additionally, the integration of AI chatbots with advanced machine learning algorithms may unlock new dimensions of emotional understanding. These chatbots could discern subtle emotional cues and patterns that are currently imperceptible to human researchers (Zhao *et al.*, 2023). Such insights could deepen our understanding of complex emotional states, such as those associated with trauma, grief, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, AI chatbots have the potential to contribute to emotion research in the context of human-robot interaction. As emotionally intelligent robots become more prevalent, they can serve as subjects in studies exploring the dynamics of human-robot emotional relationships. This research could offer insights into how humans form emotional bonds with machines and the implications for areas like therapy, caregiving, and companionship.

The future of AI chatbots in emotion research is teeming with potential. The integration of personalised emotional support, the combination of chatbots with virtual reality, and the possibility of breakthroughs in clinical contexts all point to a future where emotion research becomes more nuanced, precise, and influential. AI chatbots are poised to drive innovation in the field, offering new tools and methodologies that expand our understanding of human emotions and their diverse manifestations.

Conclusion

The integration of AI chatbots into emotion research has profoundly impacted the field, offering advantages such as real-time data collection, ecological validity, minimised self-report bias, multimodal emotional analysis, large-scale data handling, and continuous learning. However, ethical and responsible use of AI chatbots is imperative, emphasising the need for transparent informed consent, stringent data security measures, and bias mitigation strategies to safeguard participants' rights and privacy. Looking to the future, the prospects for emotion research with AI chatbots are exciting, with potential for personalised emotional support, integration with virtual reality, and groundbreaking insights in clinical contexts and human-robot interaction. This dynamic journey combines innovation with ethical responsibility, promising a future where we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of human emotions in new and remarkable ways.

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