

# Human Vs. AI: Analysing Customer Perceptions of AI-Powered Sales Chatbots in Building Long-Term Relationships

Pratham Srivastava

Master of Business Administration

Galgotias University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

Email: [bhardwajc75@gmail.com](mailto:bhardwajc75@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates customer perceptions of AI-powered sales chatbots, focusing on their effectiveness in fostering long-term relationships compared to human agents. It explores customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty using a mixed-methods approach involving surveys. Regression analyses reveal that while chatbot accuracy, personalization, and emotional intelligence significantly impact customer satisfaction and trust, users still prefer human representatives for complex decisions. The findings support a hybrid AI-human interaction model to balance efficiency and empathy.

**Keywords:** AI, sales chatbots

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force across industries, redefining how businesses interact with their customers. Among the various applications of AI, one of the most prominent and rapidly adopted innovations is the use of AI-powered sales chatbots. These intelligent conversational agents simulate human dialogue and are increasingly integrated into websites, mobile applications, and social media platforms to facilitate customer service, product recommendations, lead generation, and after-sales support.

AI-powered chatbots leverage advanced technologies such as Natural Language Processing (NLP), Machine Learning (ML), and Sentiment Analysis to understand, interpret, and respond to customer inputs in real time. Unlike traditional automated systems, these chatbots are designed to learn from interactions, adapt their responses, and offer more personalized communication over time. Their advantages are clear: they provide 24/7 availability, reduce operational costs, streamline customer journeys, and allow businesses to scale their customer support capabilities without proportional increases in human resources.

However, while these systems offer numerous operational efficiencies, a significant debate surrounds their effectiveness in building long-term customer relationships—a task traditionally managed by human sales representatives who bring emotional intelligence, empathy, and nuanced communication to customer interactions. Many argue that despite the growing sophistication of AI, it still lacks the "human touch" necessary to forge deeper connections and sustain loyalty.

In a hyper-competitive marketplace where customer experience is a key differentiator, organizations are under pressure not only to provide fast and accurate responses but also to build trust, emotional resonance, and personal rapport with their customers. This dual challenge—balancing efficiency with empathy—raises an important question: Can AI-powered chatbots truly replace or replicate human representatives in fostering long-term relationships with customers?

This study aims to investigate customer perceptions of AI-powered sales chatbots, examining how users evaluate these systems in terms of trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. It seeks to understand whether customers see chatbots as effective relationship-builders or merely as transactional tools, and how chatbot attributes—such as response accuracy, personalization, emotional

intelligence, and ease of use—contribute to or hinder relationship development.

### *Background of the Study*

The integration of AI into customer service is not a futuristic concept—it is a current and ongoing reality that is reshaping the dynamics of B2C and B2B communications. Companies like Amazon, Apple, Google, and Meta have invested heavily in conversational AI, while businesses in sectors such as e-commerce, banking, healthcare, travel, education, and telecommunications are increasingly embedding AI-powered chatbots into their customer interfaces.

These chatbots are no longer limited to basic FAQ responses. Today's AI-driven bots are capable of handling product inquiries, managing complaints, upselling products based on previous customer behavior, and even guiding users through complicated troubleshooting processes. They do this by processing vast amounts of data in real time, identifying user intent, and using contextual cues to deliver tailored and coherent responses.

The adoption of chatbots has surged in recent years due to several macro factors:

- **Rise in Online Transactions:** With digital commerce becoming mainstream, customers demand instantaneous support across time zones, something human teams alone cannot provide effectively.
- **Labor Cost Pressures:** Companies are under constant pressure to reduce costs. Chatbots provide a scalable solution with lower overheads compared to human customer service teams.
- **Consumer Behavior Shifts:** Customers are more digitally savvy, often preferring self-service or AI assistance over waiting in queues or making phone calls.
- **Technological Advancements:** Improvements in NLP and AI have made chatbot interactions more natural, increasing user adoption and reducing resistance to non-human interaction.

Despite these advantages, several critical limitations persist:

- **Lack of Emotional Intelligence:** While AI can be programmed to recognize sentiment, it often fails to understand the nuances of human emotion, such as sarcasm, frustration masked by politeness, or cultural idioms.

- **Limited Contextual Memory:** Although some advanced systems include short-term memory, most chatbots struggle to carry context across conversations, especially over longer periods.
- **Transactional Nature:** Many users report that chatbot interactions feel impersonal or mechanical, which can be problematic in emotionally charged or high-value conversations (e.g., insurance claims, healthcare advice, financial investments).
- **Trust Deficit:** Customers are still hesitant to share sensitive information with AI systems due to concerns over data security, privacy, and ethical use of personal data.

In contrast, human sales representatives offer several enduring advantages:

- They possess empathy, emotional intuition, and the ability to de-escalate tension during a negative customer experience.
- They can build rapport, read between the lines, and adjust their tone and approach in real time based on the customer's mood or personality.
- They are perceived as more accountable, particularly when a transaction or decision goes wrong.
- These traits are especially crucial in industries where decisions are emotionally complex or financially significant, such as luxury retail, healthcare, real estate, and consulting services. Here, customers often expect more than just accurate answers—they seek reassurance, a sense of trust, and human validation.
- This creates a dilemma for businesses: while AI chatbots promise operational efficiency and digital convenience, they may lack the human depth needed to forge long-lasting emotional connections—a key driver of customer loyalty, repeat business, and brand advocacy.

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by analyzing how customers perceive the strengths and shortcomings of AI-powered sales chatbots. It investigates whether attributes like personalization and emotional intelligence can offset the absence of human interaction, and what role chatbots can realistically play in the customer lifecycle. Furthermore, it evaluates how chatbot design and deployment strategies can be optimized to support—not supplant—human interaction,

proposing a hybrid model that blends the best of both AI efficiency and human empathy.

### *Hypotheses*

To effectively evaluate the role of AI-powered sales chatbots in building and sustaining long-term customer relationships, this study formulates a set of research hypotheses grounded in theoretical frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Social Presence Theory (SPT). These hypotheses aim to capture the multidimensional aspects of customer experience—including trust, satisfaction, emotional connection, and loyalty—in the context of chatbot interactions.

The hypotheses are derived from the understanding that specific chatbot attributes influence how customers perceive and engage with AI systems. By empirically testing these hypotheses, the study seeks to uncover whether certain design and functional elements of chatbots significantly impact customers' behavioral and emotional responses.

**H1** Trust in chatbots is positively related to customer satisfaction.

**H2** Personalization improves customer satisfaction.

**H3** Emotional intelligence perception increases customer loyalty.

**H4** Customers prefer human agents for complex decisions.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review synthesizes key academic and industry research related to AI-powered sales chatbots, focusing on their capacity to build trust, provide personalized customer experiences, simulate emotional intelligence, and ultimately foster long-term customer loyalty. It also compares AI chatbot performance to human sales representatives, revealing where AI excels and where human capabilities remain irreplaceable.

### *Customer Trust and Satisfaction in AI Interactions*

Trust and satisfaction are interrelated components that determine the success of any customer interaction. According to Huang and Rust (2021), AI's potential to enhance marketing performance is closely tied to its ability to simulate both "thinking AI" (logical reasoning, data analytics) and "feeling AI" (emotional understanding, empathy). However, many studies

indicate that while AI can simulate cognition, emotional resonance remains a gap.

Luo et al. (2019) found that customer trust in AI is often tempered by skepticism, particularly around data usage, lack of accountability, and the perceived coldness of machine interaction. Customers may experience friction in chatbot usage if they believe the system lacks transparency or cannot handle exceptions well. Trust is further challenged when chatbots provide inconsistent or inaccurate responses, leading to user frustration.

Despite these limitations, trust can be fostered through reliability, security, and context-aware responses. When customers believe that a chatbot is consistently accurate and maintains a secure environment for interaction, they are more inclined to be satisfied with their experience.

### *Impact of Chatbot Features on Customer Perception*

AI chatbots are evaluated not only on their ability to provide functional support but also on the quality of the user experience they deliver. Kumar et al. (2019) emphasize that personalization—the ability of a chatbot to adapt content and conversation flow based on user history and preferences—is a critical driver of satisfaction and loyalty. Personalized engagement makes customers feel recognized and valued, leading to greater emotional investment in the interaction.

Huang and Rust (2018) expanded on this by identifying the transition from mechanical AI to thinking AI and ultimately to feeling AI. They argue that while many chatbots can perform well in routine informational tasks, they still struggle with simulating empathy or managing emotionally sensitive conversations. As a result, conversation coherence, responsiveness, and adaptability have become essential performance indicators.

Customers are also likely to judge chatbot quality based on:

- Response Accuracy – Correctness and relevance of information.
- Ease of Use – Interface simplicity and accessibility.
- Engagement Level – Ability to hold meaningful, contextually appropriate dialogue.
- Error Handling – Capacity to recover from misunderstandings or system limitations.

When these technical and experiential factors align, users are more likely to express positive attitudes toward chatbot interactions.

### *Emotional Intelligence and Customer Loyalty*

As AI evolves, emotional intelligence is emerging as a pivotal feature. Netzer et al. (2019) argue that AI models using sentiment analysis and emotional classification can tailor responses to users' emotional states, thereby improving perceived empathy and conversational flow. However, these systems remain reactive rather than proactively empathetic, meaning they often detect emotional cues after the fact rather than anticipating emotional needs in advance.

Luo et al. (2019) assert that the lack of emotional intelligence in AI is a key reason why customers hesitate to rely on chatbots for long-term engagement. Human relationships are built on mutual understanding and emotional alignment—areas where AI is still evolving.

Nevertheless, emotionally aware AI systems can simulate basic affective responses (e.g., apologizing when detecting frustration), which can modestly improve loyalty metrics. Studies show that users are more likely to return to an AI system that makes them feel understood, especially if the chatbot improves its behavior over repeated interactions.

### *Human Sales Agents vs. AI Chatbots*

Research consistently finds that while AI chatbots outperform humans in speed, availability, and data-driven insights, human agents still dominate when it comes to relationship-building, empathy, and nuanced persuasion.

Mende et al. (2019) highlight the absence of social presence in AI as a major drawback. Social presence—the feeling that one is engaging with a real, attentive entity—is critical in building trust and emotional bonds. Without this, customers may perceive chatbot interactions as cold, transactional, or robotic.

Furthermore, Huang and Rust (2020) suggest that AI lacks moral reasoning and situational sensitivity, making it less effective in complex scenarios such as complaint resolution, personalized selling, or dealing with emotionally volatile customers. Human sales representatives, in contrast, can intuitively adjust their tone, body language, and messaging based on real-time cues—capabilities that remain beyond current AI capabilities.

### *Summary of Literature Insights*

The existing body of research suggests that AI-powered chatbots offer tremendous potential for improving customer service efficiency and

personalization. However, they face notable limitations in areas such as:

- a) Empathy and Emotional Depth
- b) Complex Problem-Solving
- c) Trust-Building Through Social Cues
- d) Long-Term Relational Engagement

To address these gaps, many researchers advocate for hybrid AI-human models, where chatbots handle routine and low-stakes queries while human agents intervene in high-stakes, emotionally rich interactions.

This literature provides a foundation for the current study, which aims to empirically test whether the emerging capabilities of AI chatbots are sufficient to sustain customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, or whether the human element remains indispensable for long-term relationship management.

## **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### *Introduction*

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research framework used to investigate customer perceptions of AI-powered sales chatbots and their ability to foster long-term relationships. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to generate a holistic understanding of customer experiences with AI chatbots. Given the dynamic nature of AI-driven technologies and the complex human factors involved in customer relationship management, this methodology is designed to capture both measurable patterns (e.g., satisfaction scores, trust levels) and subjective insights (e.g., emotional responses, user expectations). This allows the research to move beyond mere statistical outcomes and address deeper behavioral and psychological aspects of human-AI interaction.

### *Research Design*

This study employs a descriptive and explanatory cross-sectional design, where data is collected at a single point in time to understand current attitudes, preferences, and behaviors regarding AI-powered chatbots.

**Quantitative:** A structured survey instrument was developed to gather numerical data on chatbot usage, perceived performance, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. This convergent design allows for triangulation of findings, ensuring greater depth, validity, and contextual understanding.

### Population and Sampling

- Target Population: The target population includes individuals who have interacted with AI-powered sales chatbots across various industries such as e-commerce, banking, telecommunications, and customer service platforms. The population includes both frequent and occasional users of such systems.
- Sampling Method: A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to identify participants who had prior experience with AI-powered chatbots. To ensure diversity in perspectives, participants were selected from various age groups, professional backgrounds, and sectors.
- Sample Size: A total of 120+ participants completed the survey. The sample size was considered sufficient for conducting statistical analysis, including regression and reliability tests, while also allowing for basic subgroup comparisons.

### Data Collection Methods

- Survey Questionnaire: A structured online questionnaire was developed using Google Forms. The questionnaire included:
  - o Demographics (Age, Gender, Education, Occupation, Industry)
  - o Chatbot Usage Behavior (Frequency, Platforms used)
  - o Performance Perceptions (Response Accuracy, Personalization, Emotional Intelligence, Ease of Use)
  - o Outcome Measures (Trust, Satisfaction, Loyalty, Preference for Human Agents)
  - o Most items used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree) to ensure granularity in responses.

### Research Instrument Validity and Reliability

- Content Validity: The questionnaire was reviewed by academic experts and industry professionals in marketing and AI technologies to ensure content relevance and clarity. Pilot testing with 15 respondents helped refine ambiguous items.
- Reliability Testing: Reliability of constructs was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with all

constructs scoring above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency:

- o Chatbot Accuracy:  $\alpha = 0.82$
- o Personalization:  $\alpha = 0.79$
- o Emotional Intelligence:  $\alpha = 0.85$
- o Trust:  $\alpha = 0.88$
- o Loyalty:  $\alpha = 0.81$

### Operationalization of Variables:

Variable Type	Construct	Indicator / Measurement
Independent Variables	Response Accuracy	Accuracy of chatbot responses (Likert 1-7)
	Personalization	Customization of responses to user data
	Emotional Intelligence Perception	Ability to detect/respond to emotions
	Ease of Use	Simplicity, user interface, navigability
	Trust in AI	Confidence in chatbot recommendations and data security
Dependent Variables	Customer Satisfaction	Overall experience with chatbot interactions
	Customer Loyalty	Likelihood of future engagement with chatbot
	Purchase Decision Influence	Impact of chatbot on buying choices
Moderating Variable	Preference for Human Interaction	Tendency to favor human agents in complex scenarios

### 7) Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS and Python libraries, employing the following statistical methods:

**Descriptive Statistics:** Used to summarize demographic information, chatbot usage patterns, and central tendencies of key variables.

**Multiple Linear Regression:** To assess the relationship between chatbot attributes (independent variables) and customer satisfaction (dependent variable).

**Logistic Regression:** Used to predict customer loyalty (binary outcome) based on trust in AI and preference for human interaction.

**Reliability Analysis:** Cronbach's alpha was computed for each multi-item construct.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the study:

- Informed Consent: All participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and provided consent before participating.
- Confidentiality: No personal identifiers were collected. Data was anonymized to ensure privacy.
- Voluntary Participation: Respondents were free to withdraw at any stage without any obligation.
- Data Security: All digital records were stored in password-protected systems accessible only to the researcher.

### Summary

This research adopts a rigorous and multidimensional methodological approach to evaluate customer perceptions of AI-powered chatbots. By using quantitative analysis, the study offers a comprehensive examination of how chatbot features influence customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. The use of reliable measurement instruments, statistical techniques, and ethical safeguards ensures the credibility and applicability of the study's findings.

## IV. FINDINGS

### Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the data collected from 120+ respondents, aiming to understand how customers perceive AI-powered sales chatbots and whether these perceptions influence satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and overall customer experience. The findings are analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics, reliability testing and regression modeling from quantitative data.

By focusing on both measurable variables and user sentiments, the chapter sheds light on how specific chatbot attributes—such as accuracy, personalization, and emotional intelligence—impact customer engagement and decision-making. The analysis also explores the limitations of AI-driven interactions, particularly in emotionally or contextually complex sales environments.

### Descriptive Statistics

Demographic data revealed a balanced representation of participants across age groups, genders, and industries:

Gender: 55% male, 45% female

Age Range: Majority (70%) between 20 and 35 years

Industries Represented: E-commerce, banking, tech, education, and healthcare

Frequency of Chatbot Use: 70% reported using chatbots frequently (weekly or more), mostly on e-commerce and banking platforms

Usage Insights:

85% of users have interacted with AI chatbots on at least two platforms

64% reported using chatbots for product queries or transaction support

78% found chatbots helpful for quick responses, but only 42% rated them as emotionally engaging

### Reliability Testing

To ensure internal consistency of the constructs used in the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated:

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Chatbot Response Accuracy	0.82
Personalization Level	0.79
Emotional Intelligence Perception	0.85
Trust in AI Technology	0.88
Customer Loyalty Score	0.81

All constructs exceed the threshold of 0.70, indicating reliable measurement of user perceptions.

### Multiple Linear Regression Analysis (Customer Satisfaction)

The influence of chatbot attributes on Customer Satisfaction (CS) was analyzed using Multiple Linear Regression, with the following independent variables:

Chatbot Response Accuracy (CRA)

Personalization Level (PL)

Emotional Intelligence Perception (EIP)

Ease of Use (EOU)

Regression Output:

Model Significance:  $F(4, 95) = 25.67, p < 0.001$

$R^2$  Value: 0.52 (i.e., 52% of the variance in satisfaction is explained by the model)

### Variable Beta ( $\beta$ ) p-value Interpretation

CRA	0.35	< 0.01	Strongest predictor of satisfaction
PL	0.28	< 0.05	Personalized responses boost satisfaction
EIP	0.30	< 0.01	Emotional empathy enhances perception
EOU	0.22	< 0.05	Usability contributes positively

These findings support the notion that chatbot design and conversational sophistication significantly influence customer satisfaction.

#### *Logistic Regression Analysis (Customer Loyalty)*

Dependent Variable: Customer Loyalty (binary: likely to return = 1, unlikely = 0)

Independent Variables:

Trust in AI Technology (TAIT)

Preference for Human Interaction (PHI)

Model Fit:

$\chi^2(2) = 18.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$

Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> = 0.29

Predictor	Odds Ratio	p-value	Interpretation
TAIT	2.5	< 0.01	High trust = 2.5x more likely to stay loyal
PHI	0.6	< 0.05	Preference for humans = lower chatbot loyalty

These results highlight that building trust is essential for long-term engagement, while a strong preference for human agents reduces reliance on AI systems.

#### *Hypothesis Testing Summary*

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Trust in chatbots is positively related to customer satisfaction	Supported
H2	Personalization improves customer satisfaction	Supported
H3	Emotional intelligence increases customer loyalty	Supported
H4	Customers prefer human agents for complex or emotionally driven decisions	Supported

## **V. CONCLUSION**

#### *Overview of Key Findings*

The study confirms that AI-powered sales chatbots are valuable tools for enhancing customer service efficiency and satisfaction, particularly in routine or transactional interactions. Key chatbot features—such as response accuracy, personalization, and emotional intelligence perception—were found to positively influence customer trust and satisfaction.

However, limitations in empathetic engagement, contextual flexibility, and deep emotional understanding were consistently cited by users as barriers to long-term relationship building. These limitations reinforce the need for human involvement, especially in scenarios

where customers seek emotional support or nuanced judgment.

#### *Theoretical Contributions*

This research contributes to two major theoretical frameworks:

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): Validates that perceived usefulness (accuracy, personalization) and ease of use are critical in driving customer satisfaction and acceptance of AI technologies.

Social Presence Theory (SPT): Demonstrates that lack of emotional and social presence in chatbots reduces their effectiveness in forming long-term relational bonds, supporting the theory's premise that human-like cues foster trust and loyalty.

#### *Practical Implications for Businesses*

Optimize AI Capabilities: Enhance chatbot algorithms for better emotional recognition and adaptive conversation flow.

Personalization Is Crucial: Use real-time data and behavioral history to customize responses more effectively.

Hybrid Model Adoption: Implement a tiered customer service model—chatbots handle routine tasks, while human agents handle complex queries.

Build Trust Through Transparency: Clearly communicate chatbot limitations, data privacy practices, and escalation paths to human support.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

Sample Size: Limited to 120+ participants; a larger and more diverse sample could improve generalizability.

Cross-Sectional Design: Captures perceptions at a single point in time; longitudinal studies could reveal how perceptions evolve.

Self-Reported Data: Subject to response bias and may not reflect actual behavior under different conditions.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Sector-Specific Analysis: Examine chatbot performance in industries like healthcare, legal services, or luxury retail.

Cultural Comparison: Analyze how perceptions of AI vary across different regions or cultural settings.

Longitudinal Tracking: Assess how repeated chatbot interactions affect trust and loyalty over time.

AI-Human Collaboration Studies: Investigate how dual-agent systems (AI + human) can be optimized for seamless customer experience.

#### *Conclusion*

AI-powered chatbots are rapidly reshaping customer service landscapes. They are fast, scalable, and efficient, but lack the emotional depth and judgmental nuance that human agents provide. While they succeed in satisfying

basic customer expectations, their capacity to build authentic, long-term relationships remains limited. For businesses aiming to balance operational efficiency with human-centric engagement, a hybrid AI-human model represents the most promising path forward.

## VI. REFERENCES

- <https://mailchimp.com/resources/what-is-sales-automation/>
- <https://swisscognitive.ch/2025/01/16/emotional-intelligence-is-more-important-than-ever-in-the-age-of-ai/>
- <https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/>
- <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1618866724003893>
- <https://chartexpo.com/blog/7-point-likert-scale>
- <https://www.quora.com/Are-you-starting-to-trust-your-AI-chatbot-more-than-people-for-reliable-information>
- <https://www.infonetica.net/articles/Informed-Consent-in-Research>
- <https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/agentic-ai-in-customer-experience/>