

# The Impact of Emotional Transfer from Virtual Spokespersons on Hotel Customers' Repurchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Positive Emotions and Customer Satisfaction

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## Abstract

As digital marketing evolves, virtual spokespersons have become pivotal in hospitality brand communication. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, this study investigates how emotional transmission from virtual spokespersons influences customers' repurchase intention, focusing on the mediating roles of positive emotion and customer satisfaction. A total of 252 valid responses were obtained from consumers aged 20–59 who had stayed at branded hotels in Nanning, China. Structural equation modeling was conducted using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 27.0. Results reveal that emotional transmission significantly enhances repurchase intention through a sequential mediation pathway: positive emotion first, followed by customer satisfaction. This study contributes theoretically by extending the applicability of the S-O-R model to digital service scenarios and revealing the dual mediating mechanism through which emotional marketing affects consumer behavior. Practically, the findings suggest that hospitality brands should prioritize the emotional design and interactivity of virtual spokespersons to foster stronger customer engagement and brand loyalty.

**Keywords:** customer satisfaction, emotional transmission, positive emotion, repurchase intention, virtual spokesperson

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## The Impact of Emotional Transfer from Virtual Spokespersons on Hotel Customers' Repurchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Positive Emotions and Customer Satisfaction

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### บทคัดย่อ

ในบริบทของการตลาดดิจิทัลที่พัฒนาอย่างต่อเนื่อง ฟรีเซนเตอร์เสมือนได้กลายเป็นเครื่องมือทางการตลาดที่สำคัญของอุตสาหกรรมโรงแรม งานวิจัยนี้อิงตามทฤษฎี “กระตุ้น-สิ่งมีชีวิต-การตอบสนอง” (S-O-R) เพื่อศึกษากลไกที่การถ่ายทอดอารมณ์ของฟรีเซนเตอร์เสมือนมีผลต่อความตั้งใจซื้อซ้ำของลูกค้า โดยให้ความสำคัญกับบทบาทการเป็นตัวกลางของอารมณ์เชิงบวกและความพึงพอใจของลูกค้า กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือผู้บริโภคในเมืองหนานหนิง อายุระหว่าง 20 ถึง 59 ปี ที่เคยเข้าพักในโรงแรมแบรนด์ โดยใช้ในการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบสุ่ม และรวบรวมได้ 252 แบบสอบถามที่สมบูรณ์ ใช้แบบประเมินแบบไลเคิร์ต 5 ระดับ และวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยโปรแกรม SPSS 26.0 และ AMOS 27.0 ผลการวิจัยพบว่า การถ่ายทอดอารมณ์ของฟรีเซนเตอร์เสมือนสามารถเพิ่มความตั้งใจซื้อซ้ำของลูกค้าได้อย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางอ้อม ผ่านกลไกการเป็นตัวกลางแบบลูกโซ่ของอารมณ์เชิงบวกและความพึงพอใจของลูกค้า งานวิจัยนี้มีส่วนช่วยขยายขอบเขตของทฤษฎี S-O-R ให้ครอบคลุมบริบทของการตลาดเสมือน และเผยให้เห็นกลไกภายในของการถ่ายทอดอารมณ์ในพฤติกรรมผู้บริโภค ด้านการปฏิบัติ แนะนำให้องค์กรโรงแรมให้ความสำคัญกับการออกแบบการแสดงอารมณ์และปฏิสัมพันธ์ของฟรีเซนเตอร์เสมือน เพื่อเสริมสร้างประสบการณ์ทางอารมณ์ของผู้ใช้และความภักดีต่อแบรนด์

**คำสำคัญ:** ความพึงพอใจของลูกค้า การถ่ายทอดอารมณ์ อารมณ์เชิงบวก ความตั้งใจซื้อซ้ำ ฟรีเซนเตอร์เสมือน

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## Introduction

Amid the rapid advancement of digitalization and intelligent technologies, competition within the hotel industry has intensified, making customer repurchase intention a key factor for achieving sustainable growth (Amoako et al., 2023). To enhance their market competitiveness, hotel brands are actively exploring innovative marketing approaches. Compared to human endorsers, virtual spokespersons offer greater controllability, flexibility, and consistency, while avoiding high costs and complex management processes. As a result, they are increasingly becoming a preferred tool for brand communication (Zhu, 2024). Existing studies have shown that emotional factors play a crucial role in consumer decision-making. Positive emotions contribute to greater consumer affection and loyalty, while customer satisfaction serves as a vital bridge between consumption experience and repurchase behavior (Li & Zhang, 2020; Polucharla & Gulati, 2024). Theoretical frameworks such as emotional contagion theory (Hatfield et al., 1994), parasocial interaction theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956), and the source characteristics model (Ohanian, 1990) offer valuable insights into how virtual spokespersons influence consumer behavior. However, most existing research focuses on visual design and technological implementation, with limited attention to the underlying emotional mechanisms.

Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theoretical framework, this study examines consumers of branded hotels in Nanning, China, and constructs a chained mediation model. The model treats emotional transmission from virtual spokespersons as the stimulus, positive emotions and customer satisfaction as organismic responses, and repurchase intention as the behavioral response. The study seeks to address two key questions: How does emotional transmission from virtual spokespersons sequentially trigger consumers' positive emotions and satisfaction? And what mediating roles do positive emotions and customer satisfaction play in shaping repurchase intention? Employing structural equation modeling for empirical analysis, this research contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of emotional mechanisms in digital marketing contexts. This research also offers practical guidance for hotel enterprises aiming to optimize their use of virtual spokespersons, strengthen emotional connections, and enhance customer repurchase intentions.

## Research Objectives

This study, grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, aims to examine how the emotional transmission of virtual spokespersons influences consumers' repurchase intention through a chain mediation of positive emotion and customer satisfaction. By employing structural equation modeling, the research tests both the individual and sequential mediating effects, offering theoretical insight and practical guidance for enhancing emotional interaction design in the hospitality industry.

## Literature Review

### 1) Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response model, proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), posits that external stimuli influence individuals' internal psychological states (organism), which in turn lead to behavioral responses. This framework has been widely applied in research on service marketing and consumer behavior (Song et al., 2022). In the context of this study, the emotional transmission of virtual spokespersons serves as the external stimulus (S), which triggers consumers' positive emotions and satisfaction (O), ultimately influencing their repurchase intention (R). The organism component plays a critical mediating role between emotional cognition and behavioral responses. In recent years, the applicability of the S-O-R model in digital service environments has gained increasing attention. For example, Nazir et al. (2023) found that AI services can enhance customer satisfaction and repurchase intention through emotional perception. Similarly, Guo and Li (2022) highlighted that the interactivity of social e-commerce can enhance perceived value, thereby fostering continued purchase behavior.

In the hotel service context, virtual spokespersons convey emotions through concrete and expressive means that effectively stimulate user emotions, aligning with the S-O-R model's logic of stimulus- organism- response. Therefore, the S-O-R framework provides a solid theoretical foundation for this study, which proposes a chained mediation model where emotional transmission (stimulus) influences repurchase intention (response) via positive emotion and customer satisfaction (organism).

### 2) Affect Infusion Model (AIM)

The Affect Infusion Model (AIM), introduced by Forgas (1995), explains how emotions influence judgments during information processing, particularly in complex or

open-ended tasks such as purchase decisions. Among the four processing strategies-direct access, motivated, heuristic, and systematic-heuristic and systematic processing are most susceptible to emotional influence.

AIM has been widely applied in consumer research to examine how emotions shape satisfaction and behavioral intention. For instance, Makkonen et al. (2019) showed that positive emotions in online shopping enhance satisfaction and repurchase intention. Similarly, Chen et al. (2022) and Wei et al. (2023) found that emotions indirectly influence revisit and repurchase intentions through satisfaction in tourism and service recovery contexts.

In this study, AIM provides the theoretical foundation for examining how virtual spokespersons influence consumer behavior. Through facial expressions, vocal tone, and interaction, these spokespersons evoke positive emotions that enhance satisfaction and ultimately increase repurchase intention. Accordingly, a chained mediation model is constructed: emotional transmission (stimulus) affects repurchase intention (response) via positive emotion and customer satisfaction (organism), shedding light on the underlying mechanism of emotional influence in virtual marketing.

### **3) China Customer Satisfaction Index (CCSI) Model**

The CCSI model, proposed by Li (2016) based on the integration of international customer satisfaction models such as ACSI and ECSI, emphasizes a multidimensional evaluation of overall customer satisfaction, including product quality, service quality, perceived value, corporate image, and customer expectations. Satisfaction is regarded both as an outcome variable and as a mediating factor influencing behavioral intentions (e.g., repurchase intention). This model has been widely applied in the hotel service context to assess customers' overall experience perceptions. Research has shown that satisfaction plays a critical role between service experience and behavioral intention. For instance, Putri and Yasa (2022) found that service quality significantly enhances repurchase intention through satisfaction. Similarly, Polucharla and Gulati (2024) indicated that satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between customer experience and repeat visit intention.

Therefore, the CCSI model provides a theoretical foundation for measuring satisfaction and its mediating role, supporting the construction of a chain mediation path

in which virtual endorsers' emotional delivery influences repurchase intention through positive emotion and customer satisfaction.

### **Research Hypotheses**

Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the Affect Infusion Model (AIM), and the China Customer Satisfaction Index (CCSI) model, this study develops the following research hypotheses.

In recent years, emotional transmission has emerged as a key psychological mechanism widely applied in research on service interactions and digital communication. Empirical studies have shown that emotional expression in brand marketing and virtual interactions can effectively stimulate consumers' positive emotions (Hofmann et al., 2024; Oliveira et al., 2022), thereby enhancing their satisfaction and repurchase intentions. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1: Emotional transmission from a virtual spokesperson has a significant positive effect on consumers' positive emotion.**

Positive emotion is receiving increasing attention as a determinant of behavioral intention. Empirical evidence indicates that positive emotions, such as joy or satisfaction experienced by consumers during service interactions, can lead to repurchase intentions (Zang et al., 2022; Sofyan & Praswati, 2023). From this, we suggest:

**H2: Positive emotion has a significant positive effect on repurchase intention.**

Emotional experience also plays a crucial role in customer satisfaction. Studies have shown that positive emotions experienced by customers during the service process, such as trust and pleasure, contribute to enhancing overall satisfaction (Demirel, 2022; Sottolichio et al., 2025). Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H3: Positive emotion has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction.**

Customer satisfaction is widely recognized as a key factor influencing consumers' subsequent behaviors. Empirical studies have shown that customers with higher satisfaction levels are more likely to engage in continuous and repeat purchases (Majeed et al., 2022; Abdelaziz et al., 2024). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H4: Customer satisfaction has a significant positive effect on repurchase intention.**

Emotional transmission not only directly triggers emotional responses but may also indirectly influence customer behavioral decisions through positive emotions. Empirical

evidence supporting this mechanism has been found in live streaming and online shopping contexts (Feng et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H5: Emotional transmission indirectly affects repurchase intention through positive emotion.**

Previous studies have supported the chain mediation path in which positive emotions enhance satisfaction, thereby influencing consumer behavior. This mechanism has been validated across various service contexts (Miao et al., 2022; Luan et al., 2022). Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

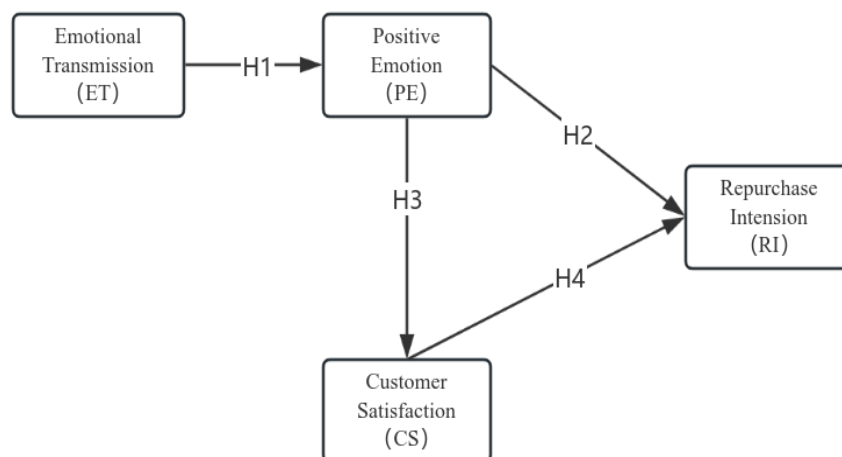
**H6: Positive emotion indirectly influences repurchase intention through customer satisfaction.**

Building on this, emotional transmission may indirectly promote repurchase intention through a chain mediation mechanism involving positive emotions and customer satisfaction. Relevant studies also support this pathway (Natalia & Suparna, 2023; Sharma & Singh, 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H7: Emotional transmission indirectly affects repurchase intention through a sequential mediation of positive emotion and customer satisfaction.**

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study is grounded in the (S-O-R) theory, which posits that external stimuli influence behavioral decisions through emotional and cognitive responses. The emotional transmission of virtual spokespersons serves as the stimulus, triggering consumers' positive emotions and enhancing customer satisfaction, both of which jointly affect repurchase intention. Positive emotions represent the emotional response, enriching consumer experience; customer satisfaction, as the cognitive response, is a key driver of repurchase intention (Forgas, 1995; Li & Zhang, 2020; Oliver, 1997). Positive emotions and customer satisfaction function as independent mediators, reflecting the dual influence of emotion and cognition on behavior. This framework is logically coherent and theoretically robust, providing strong support for empirical analysis.



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## Research Methodology

### Population and Sample

The study surveyed consumers from four categories of branded hotels in Nanning- namely, high-end, mid-range, budget, and boutique hotels- using a random sampling method. A total of 252 valid responses were collected, yielding a response rate of 84%. According to Hair et al. (2010), the recommended sample size for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is 5 to 10 times the number of measurement items, and the sample size in this study meets the basic requirements for SEM analysis. The sample includes customers from various types of hotels and demonstrates a reasonable distribution across demographic variables such as gender, age, and education level, thereby enhancing the external validity and generalizability of the research findings.

### Research Instrument

This study employed a structured questionnaire comprising five sections: respondent demographics, emotional transmission, positive emotions, customer satisfaction, and repurchase intention. The questionnaire items were adapted from existing literature and tailored to the context of virtual brand ambassadors in the hotel industry. The emotional transmission scale was based on Schmitt (1999) and Brakus et al. (2009); the positive emotions scale drew from Makkonen et al. (2019) and Pappas et al. (2017); customer satisfaction items were derived from Oliver (1997); and repurchase intention was measured

with reference to Utomo & Listyorini, (2021) and Riaz et al. (2022) All items were rated using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

### **Instrument Development**

Prior to formal data collection, this study conducted expert review, a pilot test, and semantic refinement. Three senior managers from branded hotels in Nanning and two hospitality management professors from local universities were invited to evaluate the content validity of the questionnaire using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). All items scored an IOC of  $\geq 0.50$ , and items failing to meet this threshold were removed. A pilot test was then conducted with a random sample of 75 target respondents. SPSS 26 analysis indicated strong reliability for all scales, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.80. Based on expert feedback and pilot test results, several items were revised to enhance semantic clarity and comprehensibility.

To assess non-response bias, the time-trend extrapolation method was applied by comparing the first 30% and last 30% of responses, treated as early and late respondents, respectively. Independent-sample t-tests on key variables revealed no significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting that non-response bias was minimal.

### **Data Analysis**

The descriptive statistics were carried out and the sample was characterized by three variables; gender, age, and education. The Pearson correlation coefficients were computed for the linear relationships between major variables. In order to determine the reliability and validity of measurement models, we evaluated with Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted AVE and Discriminant Validity By Fornell-Larcker Criterion. We then used structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS 27.0 to test the hypothesized relationships among variables and examined mediating effects of positive emotions or customer satisfaction by bootstrapping analysis.

## **Research Results**

### **Descriptive Analysis**

A total of 252 valid responses were obtained from individuals who had stayed at one of four types of brand hotels in Nanning and had interacted with a virtual spokesperson. Among them, 55.56% were male and 44.44% female; over 75% were aged 20–39. About 41.27% held a bachelor's degree or above, and 43.25% worked in corporate

or business roles. Monthly household income most commonly ranged from RMB 6,000 to 8,000 (27.38%). All variables met normality assumptions, with acceptable values for mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that all factor loadings were over 0.50 and significant at  $p < 0.05$  level, as C.R. surpassed the recommended cut-off value of a satisfactory model fit presented by Hair et al. (2010) or Byrne (2010), equaled over 1.96. The  $R^2$  values were mostly above 0.50, which indicates an acceptable level of determining the explanatory power for each latent construct. The average variance extracted (AVE) was above 0.50, and all constructs achieved a composite reliability (CR) of more than 0.70- supporting adequate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In conclusion, the findings confirm this measurement model's reliability. This is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Results

latent	observed	Std.	S.E.	z(CR)	p	$R^2$	CR	AVE
ET	ET4	0.704	-	-	-	0.496	0.826	0.486
	ET5	0.702	0.095	10.293	0.000	0.493		
	ET3	0.683	0.094	10.029	0.000	0.467		
	ET2	0.692	0.091	10.161	0.000	0.479		
	ET1	0.705	0.095	10.339	0.000	0.497		
PE	PE1	0.766	-	-	-	0.587	0.860	0.605
	PE2	0.791	0.085	12.568	0.000	0.626		
	PE3	0.790	0.082	12.540	0.000	0.624		
	PE4	0.764	0.082	12.108	0.000	0.584		
CS	CS1	0.804	-	-	-	0.646	0.877	0.641
	CS2	0.816	0.073	13.989	0.000	0.666		
	CS3	0.799	0.075	13.638	0.000	0.638		
	CS4	0.784	0.073	13.321	0.000	0.614		
RI	RI1	0.776	-	-	-	0.603	0.860	0.605
	RI2	0.781	0.081	12.535	0.000	0.610		
	RI3	0.771	0.082	12.366	0.000	0.595		
	RI4	0.783	0.080	12.575	0.000	0.614		

### Discriminant Validity

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was utilized to evaluate discriminant validity. Table 2 shows that the square root of AVE for all constructs is greater than its inter-correlations. This shows that discriminant validity was achieved successfully and constructs are sufficiently different.

**Table 2** Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker)

construct	RI	ET	PE	CS
RI	<b>0.778</b>			
ET	0.660	<b>0.697</b>		
PE	0.537	0.662	<b>0.778</b>	
CS	0.535	0.653	0.518	<b>0.800</b>

### Correlation Analysis

As shown in Table 3, repurchase intention (RI) was significantly and positively correlated with emotional transmission (ET), positive emotion (PE), and customer satisfaction (CS), with correlation coefficients of 0.660, 0.537, and 0.535, respectively. All correlations were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. These findings suggest strong linear relationships among the key variables and provide empirical support for proceeding with structural equation modeling.

**Table 3** Results of Correlation Analysis

construct	RI	ET	PE	CS
RI	1			
ET	0.660**	1		
PE	0.537**	0.662**	1	
CS	0.535**	0.653**	0.518**	1

\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01

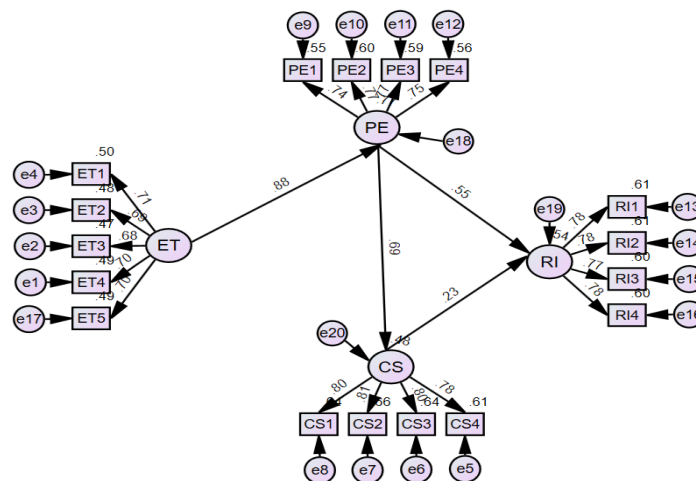
### Model Fit Assessment (SEM)

Table 4 reports the model fit indices, all of which fall within acceptable SEM thresholds: GFI, IFI, CFI, NFI, and AGFI are above 0.90; CMIN/df is below 3.00; SRMR and

RMSEA are both under 0.08 (Hair et al., 2010; Hu & Bentler, 1999). These results indicate a satisfactory overall model fit.

**Table 4** SEM Model Fit Indices

Goodness of Fit Indices	Criteria	After Modification	Results
CMIN/df	< 3.00	1.368	Pass
GFI	> 0.90	0.931	Pass
SRMR	< 0.08	0.054	Pass
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.038	Pass
IFI	> 0.90	0.981	Pass
CFI	> 0.90	0.981	Pass
NFI	> 0.90	0.933	Pass
AGFI	> 0.90	0.908	Pass



**Figure 2** Standardized SEM Path Diagram

## Hypothesis Testing

### 1) Direct Hypothesis Testing and Results

Table 5 presents the path coefficients and significance tests of the structural model. Hypotheses H1 through H4 are all supported: emotional transfer has a significant positive effect on positive emotions; positive emotions significantly enhance both repurchase intention and customer satisfaction; and customer satisfaction also positively influences repurchase intention. These results confirm that emotional transfer by virtual

endorsers promotes repurchase intention through both positive emotions and satisfaction. Notably, the effect of satisfaction on repurchase intention is relatively weak, which may be attributed to the long-term decision-making nature of hotel consumption and the emotional substitution effect of virtual endorsers. Future research may further differentiate types of satisfaction and adopt longitudinal designs for deeper investigation.

**Table 5** Results of Direct Effect Analysis

Hypothesis	Path	Estimated	S.E.	C.R.	p-value	Results
H1	ET→PE	0.879	0.113	9.996	***	Supported
H2	PE→ RI	0.551	0.090	5.887	***	Supported
H3	PE→ CS	0.692	0.076	9.327	***	Supported
H4	CS→ RI	0.234	0.081	2.709	0.007	Supported

Note: \*\*\* statistically significant level at 0.001 (p-value < 0.001)

## 2) Indirect (Mediating) Hypothesis Testing and Results

This study employed the Bootstrap resampling method (Bootstrap sample size= 5000) and used SPSS 26.0 to test the mediating effects. A 95% confidence interval (CI) was calculated using the percentile method, and the mediation effect was considered significant if the CI did not include zero. The direct effects, indirect effects, and the chain mediation paths were all examined using standardized coefficients and bias-corrected confidence intervals.

### H5: Emotional Transmission Influences Repurchase Intention through Positive Emotion

The total effect of emotional transmission (ET) on repurchase intention (RI) was significant ( $c = 0.821$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The mediating effect of positive emotion (PE) was 0.146 (95% CI [0.047, 0.232]), with a direct effect of 0.675 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The mediating effect accounted for 17.77% of the total effect, supporting a partial mediation role ( $z = 3.061$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). Thus, the hypothesis was validated.

**Table 6** Mediation Effect of Emotional Transmission (Bootstrap Method)

Hypothesis	Path	Total Effect (c)	Direct Effect (c')	Mediation Effect (a*b)	Boot SE	95% Boot CI	*z*	*p*	Effect Proportion
H5	ET→P	0.821	0.675	0.146	0.048	[0.047, 0.232]	3.061	0.002	17.77%
	E→RI	**	**						

Note: \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05

**H6: Positive emotion indirectly influences repurchase intention through customer satisfaction.**

The total effect of positive emotion on repurchase intention was significant ( $c = 0.510$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The indirect effect via customer satisfaction was 0.173 (95% CI [0.088, 0.301]), while the direct effect remained significant at 0.337 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The mediating effect accounted for 33.88 % of the total effect ( $z = 3.206$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), indicating a partial mediation. Therefore, Hypothesis H6 was supported.

**Table 7** Mediation Analysis of Positive Emotion Using Bootstrap Method

Hypothesis	Path	Total Effect (c)	Direct Effect (c')	Mediation Effect (a*b)	Boot SE	95% Boot CI	*z*	*p*	Effect Proportion
H6	PE→CS	0.510	0.337	0.173	0.054	[0.08, 0.301]	3.206	0.001	33.88%
	→RI	**	**						

Note: \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05

#### H7: Serial Mediation Path

The chain mediation analysis revealed that the three-step indirect effect of emotional transfer on repurchase intention through positive emotions and customer satisfaction was 0.020, which was marginally significant (95% CI [0.003, 0.043],  $p = 0.053$ ). In addition, the two parallel mediation paths were both significant: one through positive emotions (effect size = 0.126,  $p = 0.004$ ) and the other through customer satisfaction (effect size = 0.108,  $p = 0.013$ ). These results indicate that positive emotions and customer satisfaction independently mediate the relationship between emotional transfer and repurchase intention.

**Table 8** Serial Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis	Path	Effect Size	Boot SE	95% BootCI	*z*	*p*
	ET→PE→RI	0.126	0.043	[0.035, 0.205]	2.909	0.004
	ET→CS→RI	0.108	0.043	[0.028, 0.197]	2.490	0.013
H7	ET→PE→CS →RI	0.020	0.010	[0.003, 0.043]	1.932	0.053

Note: p = 0.053 indicates marginal significance.

## Discussions

This study, grounded in the S-O-R theory, reveals the mechanism by which emotional transfer from virtual spokespersons influences consumers' repurchase intention through the mediating roles of positive emotions and customer satisfaction.

### 1) The Impact of Emotional Transmission on Positive Emotion

The results indicate that the emotional transmission of virtual spokespersons significantly enhances consumers' positive emotions, thereby validating the S-O-R model's mechanism of stimulus impacting the organism (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). By employing anthropomorphic tone and facial expressions, virtual spokespersons evoke emotional responses that facilitate the formation of behavioral intentions. This finding supports Nazir et al. (2023) assertion that AI-driven emotional perception promotes consumer behavior and corroborates Guo and Li (2022) conclusion that emotional cues in digital interactions stimulate users' psychological reactions, further enriching the application of the S-O-R model in virtual marketing contexts.

### 2) The Pathways of Positive Emotion and Customer Satisfaction

The findings reveal that positive emotions significantly promote repurchase intention, supporting the Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 1995), which emphasizes emotional influence on judgment. Emotional cues from virtual spokespersons elicit pleasurable feelings that directly drive repeat purchases, consistent with Makkonen et al. (2019). Additionally, positive emotions enhance customer satisfaction, which indirectly affects repurchase intention, aligning with the cognitive-behavioral pathway of satisfaction theory (Li & Zhang, 2020). The weaker direct effect of satisfaction may stem from the

emotional nature of hotel services (Polucharla & Gulati, 2024) and the limitations of the study's cross-sectional design in capturing long-term effects.

### **3) Boundary Effects of the Chain Mediation**

The chain mediation effect of emotional transmission on repurchase intention via positive emotion and customer satisfaction was only marginally significant ( $p = 0.053$ ), suggesting a possible temporal mismatch between emotional and cognitive responses. This supports Song et al. (2022), who noted that such responses may occur asynchronously. Additionally, cultural factors may moderate this process. As Zeng et al. (2023) pointed out, variations in cultural acceptance of virtual spokespersons could influence emotional transmission, offering a direction for future cross-cultural research.

### **4) Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications**

This study proposes a dual-path model integrating the S-O-R framework, the Affect Infusion Model (AIM), and customer satisfaction theory to elucidate how virtual spokespersons influence consumer behavior in the hotel context. It responds to the research calls by Zhu (2024) and Wei et al. (2023) concerning the emotional impact of virtual characters on customers. Practically, hotels are advised to enhance emotional expressiveness in virtual spokesperson design (e.g., facial expressions, tone of voice) and adopt segment-based strategies: for new customers, focus on eliciting positive emotions to enhance experience; for repeat customers, prioritize satisfaction to strengthen loyalty (Amoako et al., 2023; Majeed et al., 2022).

## **Conclusion**

Guided by the S-O-R theory, this study explores the influence mechanism of emotional transmission from virtual spokespersons on hotel consumers' repurchase intention. The results show that the emotional expressions of virtual spokespersons can significantly evoke positive emotions, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and ultimately strengthening repurchase intention. Although the chained mediation pathway—where emotional transmission triggers emotional responses and customer satisfaction, which in turn influence repurchase intention—is only marginally significant, it still reveals the mechanism by which emotional and cognitive factors jointly affect consumer behavior, further validating the applicability of the S-O-R model in the context of virtual services. Theoretically, this study expands the research boundaries of emotional transmission in AI-

driven marketing and enriches the understanding of emotional pathways in virtual interactions. Practically, it offers hotel enterprises valuable recommendations for optimizing the emotional expression design of virtual spokespersons. Future research could further verify the robustness and generalizability of this mechanism through experimental designs and larger, more diverse samples.

## **Suggestions**

### **1) Theoretical Implications**

Future studies could adopt interdisciplinary perspectives-such as computational communication and human-computer interaction- to better understand how virtual spokespersons develop emotional intelligence and engage with users. Expanding the S-O-R model by including factors like brand trust, perceived interactivity, and immersion could offer a more nuanced view of how emotional and cognitive responses jointly shape consumer behavior in virtual service environments. Cross-cultural comparisons are also recommended to examine how cultural differences influence emotional expression and user reactions, thereby improving the model's generalizability and external validity.

### **2) Practical Implications**

For practitioners, enhancing the emotional expressiveness of virtual spokespersons-through voice tone, facial cues, and gesture alignment-can foster more authentic and emotionally engaging customer interactions. Creating emotionally supportive content and service environments may further enrich user experiences. Leveraging emotional data for personalized marketing could also boost customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Finally, integrating virtual spokespersons with human service teams may not only improve operational efficiency but also enhance emotional value delivery, contributing to a more holistic customer experience.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

While this study offers a structured examination of how emotional transmission by virtual spokespersons influences consumer behavior, several limitations should be noted. 1) The sample was drawn mainly from brand hotels in the Nanning area, which may limit the generalizability of the findings due to regional cultural and market-specific factors. Future research should test the model in broader or cross-cultural settings to improve

external validity. 2) The use of a cross-sectional design, while useful for identifying relationships among variables, restricts the ability to observe causal sequences over time. Longitudinal or experimental approaches are recommended for future studies to address this issue. 3) Emotional transmission was assessed primarily through self-reported measures, which are susceptible to individual biases and contextual influences. Incorporating objective metrics or multiple data sources could enhance the reliability of the results. 4) Although the study supports the relevance of the S-O-R framework in virtual service contexts, it offers limited insight into moderating factors. Future research could enrich the model by including variables such as trust, interaction quality, or user traits to deepen theoretical understanding and explanatory scope.

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