

MIGRANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AI-DRIVEN CHATBOTS IN PUBLIC SERVICES: POTENTIALS AND CONCERNS FOR INCLUSION

This article examines migrants' perceptions of AI-driven chatbots in accessing public services in Finland. Based on interviews and group discussions, most respondents were either unaware of AI-driven chatbots in the public sector or had limited experience with them, often expressing scepticism about their use. By contrast, many were familiar with ChatGPT, which they used for a variety of tasks. Regular users developed skills to evaluate the accuracy of responses, though concerns about dehumanization and over-trusting persisted. The findings underline both opportunities and concerns of AI-mediated services and the need for inclusive, transparent, and culturally sensitive chatbot design to enhance migrants' inclusion.

Keywords: migrants, AI chatbots, ChatGPT, public services, inclusion

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Introduction

Chatbots are designed to simulate human conversational abilities by using either text or voice interfaces. A rule-based or pre-programmed system is often limited in the range of interactions it can have. Whereas AI-driven chatbots can provide different responses, learn from previous conversations, adjust to the given context, and offer a higher level of customization. These capabilities make them very useful in complex service areas (Ait Baha et al 2023; Javed et al 2023; Jones et al 2024).

In recent years, public sector organizations have started using chatbots to improve accessibility, efficiency, and responsiveness in service delivery. Research indicates that these chatbots can enhance citizens' access to information and ease administrative burdens, although they do not fundamentally transform service models (Makasi et al 2021; Dreyling et al 2024).

AI-driven chatbots like ChatGPT can support users with administrative tasks such as translation, form filling, and information retrieval, in addition to personal and professional tasks. Current public service chatbots often have very specific tasks, but compared to ChatGPT, which is an open generative AI with the flexibility to handle a wide range of requests. Nevertheless, concerns related to accuracy, trust, and data privacy remain (Aoki 2020; Kanter & Packel 2023; Loh 2023; Dreyling et al 2024; Dube 2024; Heinisuo et al 2025).

According to the Finland 2024 Digital Decade Country Report, Finland is ranked among the best-performing countries in Europe, with digital public services rated at the highest level. (European Commission 2024). Through strategic investments, Finland is leading the way in the creation of AI, which is focused on humans and is ethically sustainable. Cities like Oulu have deployed multilingual chatbots such as OuluBot, which is geared to improve the local services, while the national Virtanen chatbot is doing the work of about a dozen employees in the Finnish Tax Administration (Heinisuo et al 2025). These efforts go hand in hand with Finland's good digital governance, where citizens' extensive use of e-government services is a substantial support, such as AuroraAI, which personalizes interaction with public services (Wittka 2020; Jacob 2025).

The Trust-M project, funded by the Research Council of Finland, aims to understand how trust, inclusion, and equality are present in current digital public sector services from a migrant perspective. In collaboration with the City of Espoo, the project integrates perspectives from computer

science, social sciences, and design to create hybrid chatbot services that respect cultural diversity and strengthen trust. The author of this article, as part of the project team, contributes to the social science unit and focuses on migrants' perspectives, lived experiences and inclusion in digital service environments. Within this framework, the present study explores the potential of AI chatbots for migrants, with the specific aim of understanding how they perceive chatbot performance in relation to public services.

Methodology

This research was conducted employing a qualitative method, which engaged semi-structured interviews with eight Iranian immigrants living in Finland. The participants were purposely chosen to provide a varied representation of age (27-64 years), educational background, and professional field. Such a variety allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth insight into how individuals with different digital literacies and life contexts perceive AI chatbots.

The interview questions were designed to collect data on participants' experiences, feelings, and attitudes towards different types of chatbots, including AI chatbots like ChatGPT and automated chatbots, with a focus on public service use. Participants were asked to describe the purpose of using chatbots during their conversations with them, as well as their opinions and feelings about these interactions. All interviews were conducted in the participants' native language, Persian. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then carefully translated into English to preserve meaning and cultural nuances for analysis.

In addition to individual interviews, observations from a chat group with 32 migrants were recorded. Although not all members were actively involved, some of them shared their personal experiences with AI chatbots. These contributions were documented as supplementary data. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and their ethical rights under the approved consent protocol, and the transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings

Thematic analysis examines participants' experiences with AI chatbots in public services through interviews and discussions. Currently, AI chatbots are not widely used in Finnish public services, yet some participants sought ChatGPT for related in-

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quiries. They assessed chatbots based on competence, trust, and emotional comfort.

Competence

Competence relates to participants' perceptions of the practical usefulness, efficiency, and reliability of AI-driven chatbots in their interaction with public services.

Most participants had experience with public service chatbots but found them generally ineffective. For instance, Participant #A, a 28-year-old resident of Finland for nearly 20 years, mentioned that these systems often redirected users to human staff instead of resolving queries directly.

Participants who had experience with ChatGPT generally found it helpful, especially those using it frequently or for varied purposes. For example, P#P and P#D used it to clarify specific Finnish terms, and P#M, who did not speak Finnish, scanned official letters and bureaucratic procedures into ChatGPT to receive both translations and explanations. Similarly, although P#H is proficient in the Finnish language, she found ChatGPT valuable for clarifying complex laws and regulations:

I have used AI to get quick answers to everyday questions (for example, information about laws, how to do office work, or technical advice. Chatbots like ChatGPT are particularly beneficial for foreigners in Finland. This tool can help foreigners communicate with government agencies in Finnish at all stages.

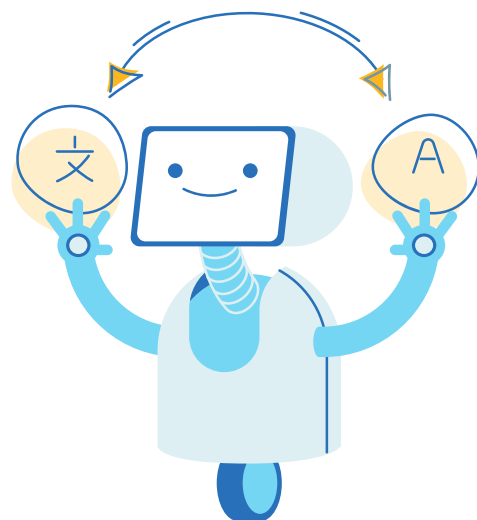
While chatbots often provided effective solutions for daily, work-related tasks and some rules and regulations in Finland, they emphasized the importance of supervising and verifying AI-generated outputs. Participant #H reflected on her experience: "ChatGPT made things easier for me in many ways. Of course, you should always make sure that the information provided by AI is accurate and reliable."

Similarly, P#L explained that he/she checks the answers of ChatGPT by googling them, and P#M, who uses multiple chatbots, described how he was checking the answer of one AI chatbot with another one.

Trust

Trust, understood here as credibility, safety, and the willingness to rely on AI chatbots, varied considerably among participants and was often

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shaped by their broader experiences with digitalization. Some expressed strong reservations about sharing personal information with AI systems. For example, P#L noted: "I do not have trust in my personal information, with so many hackers behind it. Who knows where our data goes, who uses it, and for which purpose?"

P#S had a negative experience with a public service employee, making her trust chatbots more than humans for sensitive matters due to their perceived lower bias. Similarly, P#M trusted AI chatbots like other digital services or humans while being cautious with sensitive information: "I trust chatbots like I trust other digitalization services or people, but I am always careful not to share risky information with any."

Several participants emphasized that trust in AI systems is higher when they are clearly linked to an official or credible source. As P#D explained: "If I know the AI comes from the same organization I need to contact, I trust it more and feel more positive."

Emotional Comfort

This dimension captures participants' feelings of ease and confusion or clarity when interacting with AI chatbots.

Participants used ChatGPT for assignments and inquiries but exhibited interest alongside scepticism. Participants who had used ChatGPT only occasionally, especially for personal questions, approached it with caution. In group discussions, they noted that similar inquiries sometimes yielded different responses, which raised concerns about AI bias and its adaptability to individual beliefs.

Some participants felt uncomfortable using ChatGPT due to concerns about its lack of humanity. P#A expressed feeling uneasy knowing she was chatting with a robot. Similarly, P#L described a more sceptical and even negative emotional response:

Digital systems are helpful, but they bring problems. I already see issues with my kid and students always on their phones, and I worry AI could lead to the same, or even stranger, changes in human life. It is scary.

In contrast, although P#R, a nurse, had not personally used AI chatbots, she shared the experiences of friends who valued them for sensitive situations: "Migrants often struggle to find help, as they may not share family issues with friends or doctors. Some friends have found using ChatGPT

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beneficial, as it provides a secure space for discussing private matters without judgment.”

Similarly, P#M preferred AI over human interaction, using a branch of ChatGPT for therapy and consultation: “I am not getting judged and don’t have to self-censor. Humans often have biases, sometimes to support you and sometimes against you, but AI is unbiased. ChatGPT is a bit softer than Gemini, but it still tells you your mistake.”

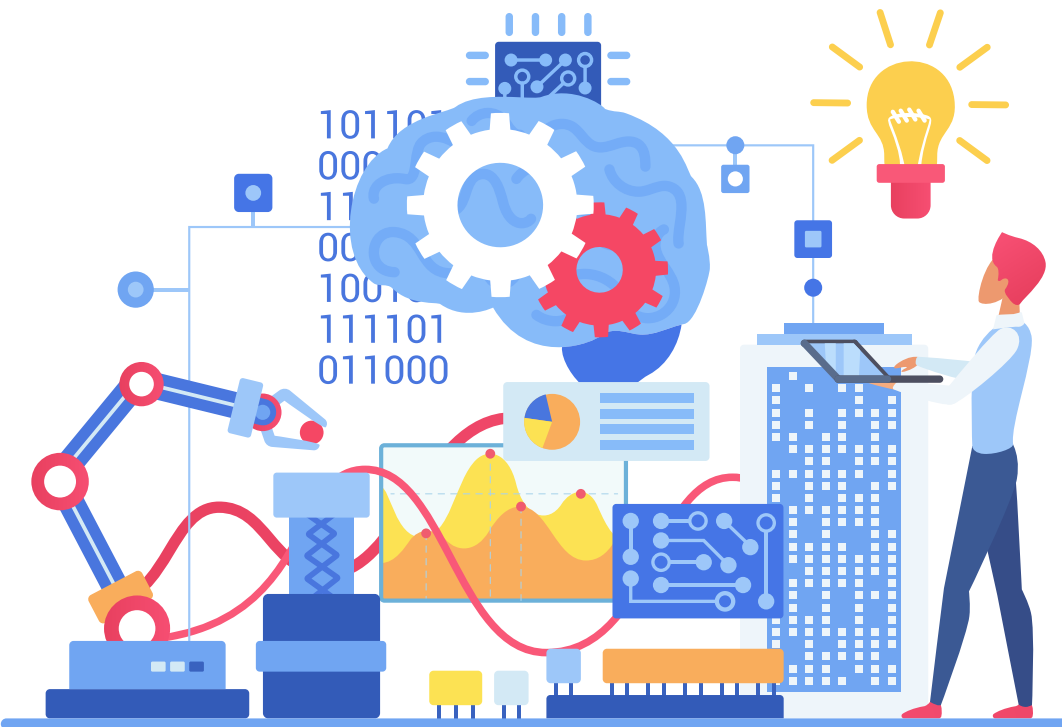
Discussion and Conclusion

Artificial intelligence, like previous technological innovations such as the internet and mobile phones, has fundamentally transformed many areas of people’s daily lives. This transition creates both opportunities and concerns and has therefore led to the emergence of new theories to understand the factors influencing their adoption, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis & Granić 2024). As technological innovations are integrated into everyday activities, researchers, policymakers, and developers must proactively manage the associated risks so that users can maximize the potential benefits of these technologies.

The results of research on the subject reveal the dual nature of AI adoption. On the one hand,

migrants found AI-driven chatbots (ChatGPT) useful, accessible, and easy to use, especially for coping with language barriers and navigating bureaucratic processes in official tasks, consistent with some previous studies (Tseng et al 2023; Garcia et al 2025; Lee et al 2025). On the other hand, some participants expressed skepticism and discomfort and even fear towards AI technology, viewing it as inhumane or potentially harmful if it replaces human interaction (Dang & Liu 2025; Kim & McGill 2025).

Perceptions of cultural inclusion intersect with migrants’ access to language support, bureaucratic guidance, and reliable information, which are vital for belonging and participation in society. Research in Finland emphasizes that language accessibility and digital equity are crucial for migrant inclusion, as the digitalization of welfare and health services can worsen exclusion without inclusive design (Buchert et al 2023; Kempainen 2023; Hosseini & Tupasela 2025; Hosseini & Mehdizadeh 2025). AI chatbots could help overcome these barriers by providing multilingual support and culturally responsive guidance, thus enhancing traditional integration measures. The findings suggest that culturally sensitive, multilingual AI chatbots can effectively address these issues if designed to build trust and support human interaction.



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