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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS ON THE BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION TO USE CHATBOTS OF SYSTEMATICALLY IMPORTANT BANKS IN SRI LANKA: PERCEIVED TRUST IN TECHNOLOGY AS A MEDIATOR

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the influence of socio-psychological variables like Perceived Social Presence (PSP), perceived emotional awareness of chatbot (PEA) and explores the mediating role of Perceived trust in technology (PTT) on the Behavioral intention to use Chatbots (BIUC) in systematically important Sri Lankan banks. A deductive approach, within the positivist paradigm, was employed to collect cross-sectional data through a structured survey questionnaire. Data was collected through a survey questionnaire and analyzed through SPSS and Smart PLS. The findings suggested perceived social presence, perceived emotional awareness of chatbot as positive predictors of behavioral intention to use Chatbots. The findings help banks to develop more socially present and emotionally aware chatbots to serve their customers. The research examines how Perceived trust in technology mediates between socio-physiological and behavioral intention to use chatbots based on the theoretical model, Social Presence Theory, Theory of Mind as theories, and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as the basis for our study. These findings can assist app developers, marketers, and strategists in increasing behavioral intention to use Chatbots through Socio-Psychological factors with Perceived trust in technology.

Keywords: Perceived Social Presence (PSP), Perceived Emotional Awareness of Chatbot (PEA), Perceived Trust in Technology (PTT), Behavioral Intention to Use Chatbots (BIUC)

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has come to serve as a principal source of

innovation in banking, and chatbots have come to serve as principal means to enhance customer service and efficiency. There have been several new advantages brought about by the application of AI technology, particularly in the banking and financial sector. Some of the applications of AI technology include chatbots. The worldwide AI banking market, as per a projection in 2023, will be US\$20.87 billion. By 2033, it will be US\$310.79 billion (Ma et al., 2025). Chatbots are utilized in 63.1% of banking systems worldwide, and less than 40% of banks are still yet to implement them. AI-powered chatbots can perform a range of tasks including responding to routine banking queries, offering 24/7 support, interpreting natural language, facilitating transactions, and communicating through trending social media platforms (CBSL, 2025). In Sri Lanka, systematically important banks such as Commercial Bank and People's Bank introduced chatbots on their websites and social media channels like WhatsApp and Messenger, offering services in Tamil, Sinhala, and English languages (Peoples Bank, 2023). These launches are included in the digital transformation initiative of Sri Lankan banks to simplify customer procedures such as viewing account balances, obtaining a checkbook request, and opening new accounts. (Commercial Bank | WhatsApp Banking, n.d.).

While banking chatbots have been widely deployed, in-ground customer take-up has not consistently matched the technological capability offered. This illustrates a performance gap between user intentions to utilize digital aids and their presence in chatbots. While chatbot technology is increasing, there is less understanding of socio-psychological factors that influence customers' intentions to utilize them. Previous research has focused on technological factors and general acceptance, bypassing how perceived social presence, that is, a feeling that a chatbot is "real" or "there," and perceived emotional awareness of Chatbot, the extent to which a chatbot can understand and respond to users' emotions, influence customers' behavior (Moussawi & Koufaris, 2019). This suggests a gap in knowledge regarding the socio-psychological aspects of Behavioral intention to use Chatbots (BIUC).

Additionally, although extensive research on chatbot acceptance has taken place internationally, there is limited empirical data available from Sri Lanka, particularly from systematically important banks that play a vital role in the national economy. This creates room for empirical emptiness regarding understanding local users' views and reactions toward Behavioral intention to use Chatbots. Furthermore, previous research does not account for the perceived trust in technology (PTT) as a mediating variable between social-psychological characteristics and behavioral intention to use chatbots. This theory gap serves to limit a complete explanation of factors leading customers to adopt or reject

chatbots. The primary concern addressed by this study is that there is limited knowledge regarding how perceived social presence and Perceived Emotional Awareness of Chatbot influence behavioral intention to use chatbots within Sri Lankan systematically important banks, and to what extent perceived trust in technology mediates these kinds of relationships. Addressing this concern is essential for theoretical and practical reasons in digital banking.

This paper will investigate intricate interactions among social-psychological determinants, perceived trust in technology, and Behavioral intention to use Chatbots (BIUC) use banking chatbots. More specifically, the current research endeavors to explore how perceived social presence (PSP) and perceived emotional awareness of chatbot (PEA) influence behavioral intention to use chatbots (BIUC). Besides, this research explores if Perceived trust in technology (PTT) can serve as a mediator for the effects of the aforementioned socio-psychological variables towards behavioral intention to use chatbots (BIUC). Research questions to guide the current study are: (1) Is there an existence of a significant association between socio-physiological factors (Perceived Social Presence (PSP), Perceived Emotional Awareness of Chatbot (PEA) and Behavioral intention to use Chatbots (BIUC)? (2) Does Perceived trust in technology (PTT) mediate the relationship between socio-physiological factors (Perceived Social Presence (PSP), Perceived Emotional Awareness of Chatbot (PEA)) and Behavioral intention to use Chatbots (BIUC)?

The contribution of this research is its ability to inform both practitioners in the banking industry and research scholars. For bankers, knowing the way customers view and interact with chatbots provides the ability to create more interactive, secure, and user-friendly online services for increased uptake. For scholars, the research helps to bridge empirical and theoretical gaps by presenting evidence from the Sri Lankan market and underlining the significant mediating role of trust in technology in chatbot acceptance models. The paper begins with the background of the study, Problem statement, research Questions, Objectives of the study, significance of the study, and research gaps. It then reviews existing literature on social-psychological factors and perceives trust in technology. After presenting the conceptual framework and hypotheses. Finally, the paper details the research method including data collection and analysis techniques.

2. Literature Review

Two theories serve as the foundation for this investigation. They are the Social Presence Theory (SPT) and the Theory of Mind (TOM). With an

emphasis on the social, emotional, and perceived variables that affect engagement, trust, and satisfaction, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens through which to view how consumers perceive and interact with chatbots.

According to social presence theory (SPT), even in the absence of human interaction, chatbots can offer consumers social support. It emphasizes how chatbots may converse like people, meeting social demands in emergencies. By emphasizing chatbots' capacity to offer social presence, particularly during periods of fear or loneliness, this broadens the scope of SPT (Dinh & Park, 2023). User trust, empathy, and pleasure with chatbot discussions are all increased by personification and a socially conscious communication style, which also improves perceived social presence.

The ability to comprehend and predict the feelings, thoughts, and intentions of others is known as the theory of mind (TOM). It offers a basis for examining, foreseeing, and responding to their Behavior. This is very similar to perceived emotional awareness. The development of TOM is essential for empathy because it makes individuals able to discern and respond to others' feelings and perspectives (Belhaouari et al., 2023).

Perceived trust in technology (PTT) is the mediator between behavioral intention to use chatbots (BIUC) and its perceived factors. Trust in AI-enabled services is crucial for sensitive tasks like online banking. The theory of mind is added to address the influence of emotional cues on user Behavior (Belhaouari et al., 2023).

2.1. Behavioural Intention to Use Chatbots (BIUC)

Chatbots are an indispensable tool which banks utilize everywhere in the world, particularly in developing countries. The authors stress that chatbots, whether written or spoken, meet all kinds of essential needs of bank customers, and that many banks are already using conversational banking as a means (Priya & Sharma, 2023). These technologies are utilized by banks to make waiting times and operational expenses more efficient by automating customer service tasks (e.g., loan assistance, financial advice, transaction reminders, customized banking, and balance check). In addition, chatbots facilitate 24/7 conversational banking by automating simple queries through AI-based interfaces, with the human agents taking care of more complex issues (Alrawad et al., 2025). Studies indicate that customers adore effective, goal-focused chatbot experiences in banking and that the most significant adopter of adoption intention is functional utility (usefulness) (Ramos et al., 2025).

show how AI-based chatbots are typically utilized to support customer service operations, interact with customers, and provide customized assistance (Jiang et al., 2025).

2.2. Perceived Social Presence (PSP)

Perceived Social presence refers to the degree to which the users perceive human-like presence or affective connection while interacting with chatbot. Perceived social presence explains the feeling of "being with the other" in an electronic setting and a feeling that the system is responsive, personal, and social (Alrawad et al., 2025; Mozafari et al., 2021). Utilizing Are Social Actors (CASA) theory and the pioneering work by Short et al. (1976), perceived social presence is applied to outline that people react to AI systems in response to social norms when the latter are seen to exhibit human-like attributes including responsiveness, warmth, and empathy (Priya & Sharma, 2023). Chatbots that induce perceived social presence through language, personality, and interactivity provide the impression that an actual perceived social presence and not a computer is being conversed with (Jin & Youn, 2023). This emotional connection influences utilitarian attitudes positively so that users find chatbot as a useful and credible tool, particularly in the banking sector (Alrawad et al., 2025). Increased perceived social presence allows for greater analytical satisfaction as well as lesser impersonality in interaction with others in cyberspace. It is also one of the key predictors of adopting and utilizing chatbots, particularly where there is no human representative available. Intention is provoked for designers to increase analytical cues for the benefits of users' increased engagement and receptivity (Priya & Sharma, 2023).

H1: There is a significant relationship between Perceived Social Presence and the Behavioural intention to use Chatbots.

2.3. Perceived Emotional Awareness of Chatbot (PEA)

Perceived emotional awareness describes the personality of an AI system's ability to perceive, understand, and respond to human emotions during interaction. It assists chatbot to recognize emotional signals, such as tone or facial expression, and respond emotionally, enhancing user experience quality (Jiang et al., 2025). Emotionally smart chatbots can recognize the emotional state of the customer (i.e., satisfaction or frustration) and respond more empathic and tailored. All this translates into higher customer satisfaction, trust, and long-term loyalty, especially in emotionally focused sectors such as banking (Jiang et al., 2025). Theory is derived from the general notion of emotional intelligence, whose aspects of self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, and relationship management (Mosleh et al., 2024) enable AI

systems not just to recognize user emotions but also to establish meaningful and empathetic interactions. (Mosleh et al., 2024). The article additionally emphasizes the importance of emotional awareness in enabling beyond normal customer care procedures to more empathetic and insightful interactions. Moreover, students and other customers can benefit from emotionally secure spaces facilitated by AI chatbots in enhancing communication skills, self-consciousness, and the management of emotions (Mosleh et al., 2024). Lastly, the key to developing AI systems that are both useful and emotional, and make the user feel heard, valued, and cared for, is emotional intelligence.

H2: There is a significant relationship between perceived emotional awareness of chatbots and the Behavioural intention to use Chatbots.

2.4. Perceived Trust in Technology as a Mediator (PTT)

Perceived trust in technology (PTT) means a user's belief in a chatbot's dependability, competence, and capacity to carry out tasks or deliver information. It guarantees correct responses and data protection by lowering uncertainty and increasing user comfort when interacting with the chatbot (Ding & Najaf, 2024). The study illustrates that PTT plays a key role in influencing user attitude toward chatbots, although social presence lacks a direct effect on attitude. Trust facilitates the transformation of perceived human-like features into positive user evaluations, suggesting the value of technological trust in overall acceptance models (Alrawad et al., 2025). PTT served as a key psychological mechanism linking the independent variable, perceived social presence (PSP), to the dependent variable, BIUC. The result indicated that PSP significantly increased PTT. In turn, PTT exerted a strong positive effect on BIUC. Mediation analysis using bootstrapping confirmed that PTT significantly transmitted the effects of PSP to behavioral intention to use Chatbots (BIUC). These findings provide clear empirical evidence that PTT operates as a mediator, meaning that the design features of chatbots enhance BIUC primarily by building PTT (Ding & Najaf, 2024). The study showed that trust moderates how chatbot attributes influence the usage of chatbots (Choudhury & Shamszare, 2023). The article illustrates that PTT plays a significant role in BIUC, as it is mediated by human-like characteristics and emotional awareness of chatbot. Recognition of user emotions and responding with emotions creates customer satisfaction, leading to AI chatbot usage within the banking sector. (Jiang et al., 2025).

H3: Perceived trust in technology mediates the relationship between perceived social presence and the behavioral intention to use Chatbots.

H4: Perceived trust in technology mediates the relationship between perceived emotional awareness of chatbot and the behavioral intention to use chatbots.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

The impact of sociopsychological factors (PEA, PSP), and the mediating role of PTT measures on behavioral intention to use chatbot (BIUC) in systematically important banks in Sri Lanka is outlined in this conceptual framework.

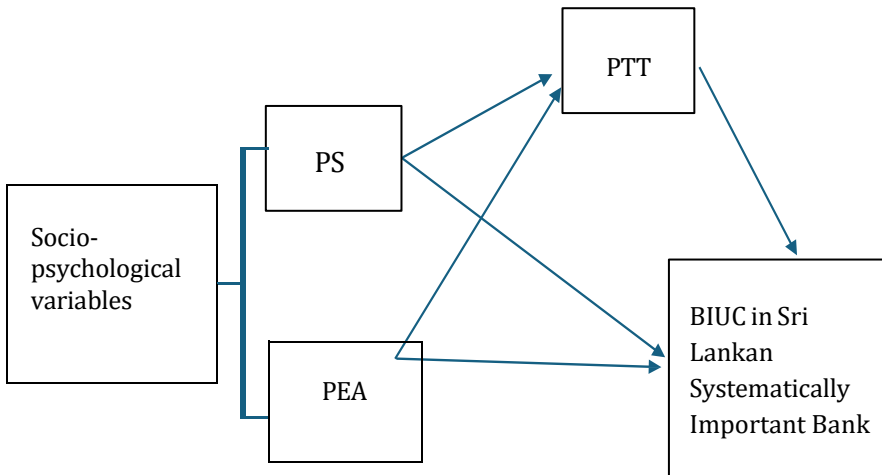


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model *(Source: The authors)*

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample

This study investigates the behavioral intention to use chatbots (BIUC) at systematically important banks in Sri Lanka, with a focus on the experiences of individual bank clients. Since user experience and BIUC are related, this study intends to investigate how individual-level perceptions affect behavioral intention to use chatbots (Alrawad et al., 2025). This study's population is customers of systemically important banks in Sri Lanka, Bank of Ceylon, Commercial Bank of Ceylon, People's Bank, Hatton National Bank, and Sampath Bank PLC (CBSL, 2025). As of 2024, these banks had 41.6 million clients overall. Morgan's criteria (Morgan & Krejcie, 2012), which required a minimum of 385 responses, were used to calculate the sample size. Google Form was used to develop an online questionnaire for the investigation. The data is suitable for the study because 403 respondents in total were gathered using the snowball sampling technique. 50 respondents from systemically important banks in Sri Lanka who have used chatbots participated in the pilot test process, which evaluated the reliability, quality, and comprehension of a questionnaire.

3.2. Measures

Perceived social presence (PSP) was measured using the 5-point Likert scale developed by (Alrawad et al., 2025). Perceived emotional awareness of chatbot (PEA) was measured using the 5-point Likert scale developed by (Jiang et al., 2025). Perceived trust in technological (PTT) was used on the 5-point Likert scale (Cheriyana, 2021). Lastly, behavioral intention to use chatbots (BIUC) is also used the standardized 5-point Likert scale (Choudhury & Shamszare, 2023). The study employed a systematic questionnaire with a standardized 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree," to measure the dimensions of interest. All the measuring scales' internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, and all the constructions had alpha values above 0.70, which indicates acceptable to high reliability.

3.3. Methods of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was done with SPSS. Assessment of common technique bias, and both univariate and multivariate model testing were all done with SmartPLS 4. Variance-based SEM was more suitable than variance-based techniques since the data did not support parametric hypotheses (Hair et al., 2021).

4. Data Analysis and Results

This part of the study combines discussion and analysis of empirical findings based on SPSS and SmartPLS 4. Here, we analyzed two steps in Smart PLS. In the first step, measurement models were estimated using the PLS algorithm to establish the reliability and validity of constructions such as Perceived social presence and perceived emotional awareness of chatbot (PEA) with Perceived trust in technology (PTT) serving as a mediator. In the second step, structural models were tested to establish hypothesized relationships. Bootstrapping was used to test the statistical significance of the path coefficients.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of the Survey Sample

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach α	AVE	PEA	PSP	PTT	BIUC
PEA	3.642	0.798	0.788	0.702				
SP	3.725	0.721	0.820	0.582	0.798			
PTT	3.654	0.653	0.786	0.533	0.958	0.972		
BIUC	3.691	0.760	0.775	0.689	0.810	0.894	0.922	

Table 1 shows the measurement of validity and reliability for all the

study's latent constructions. The mean scores ranged from 3.642 to 3.725, indicating moderate to high agreement among the respondents for the measured items. The standard deviation (SD) ranged between 0.653 and 0.798, indicating large variability in responses. As far as internal consistency is concerned, all the constructs generated Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of more than 0.7 (Kristiina Holm, 1978), further supporting reliability. The average variance extracted (AVE) values also comfortably exceeded the minimum cut-off of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2011). Specifically mentioned in this context is the maximum AVE (0.707) for Behavioral intention to use Chatbots. usage, indicating high common variance among items.

The next model computes the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Correlation Ratio) between the constructs, a modern and robust estimator for calculating and estimating discriminant validity. All HTMT values below 0.1 indicate that one construction is practically different from another, thus defining discriminant validity. This ensured that the evaluation model was sufficient to proceed to the next stage. Since information from each respondent was obtained through a survey questionnaire to evaluate each independent and dependent component (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Table 2: Path Coefficients

Hypo-thesis	Relatio- nship	Original sample (O)	Sample means (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T stat (O/ STDEV)	P values	Decision
H1	SP -> BIUC	0.322	0.321	0.069	4.682	0.000	Supported
H2	SP -> TT	0.441	0.441	0.042	10.518	0.000	Supported
H3	PEA -> BIUC	0.499	0.498	0.041	11.318	0.000	Supported
H4	PEA -> TT	0.525	0.526	0.040	13.155	0.000	Supported

Based on the results in Table 02, all four hypothesized relationships (H1, H2, H3, H4) have a p-value smaller than 0.05. Meanwhile, it indicates statistical significance. Therefore, H1, H2, H3, and H4 hold. Specifically, Perceived Social Presence (PSP) is found to have a significant and positive relationship with Perceived trust in technology (PTT) ($\beta = 0.441$, $p < 0.05$) and User Behavioral Intention to use chatbots (BIUC) ($\beta = 0.322$, $p < 0.05$). These results confirm that both PSP and PEA have

strong effects on increasing users' perceived trust in technology and Behavioral Intention to use of chatbot (BIUC)., this study shows that Perceived Emotional Awareness of chatbot (PEA) is a significant and positive predictor of Perceived Trust in Technological (PTT) ($\beta = 0.525$, $p < 0.001$) and User Behavioral Intention to use chatbots (BIUC) ($\beta = 0.499$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3: Regression Analysis

	R-square	R-square adjusted
PTT	0.767	0.765
UOC	0.533	0.530

The R-squared value for PTT is 0.767, and the Adjusted R-squared value is 0.765. It explains approximately 76.7% of the variance of PTT in its predictor variables, indicating a high explanatory power. The close similarity of the R-square with the adjusted R-square indicates model stability and low risk of overfitting. Similarly, the R-square of BIUC is 0.533 and the Adjusted R-square is 0.530, which explains 53.3% of the variance of BIUC through the model. Here, both PTT and BIUC show high predictive validity in the structural model.

5. Discussion of Findings with Implications for Theory and Practice

The study, which focused on Sri Lanka's systemically important banks, supported the theories that the behavioral intention to use chatbots (BIUC) is influenced by the chatbots' perceived social presence and perceived emotional awareness of chatbots, with perceived trust in technology (PTT) acting as a key mediating factor. The results validate the Social Presence Theory by showing that indicators that convey a human-like connection foster warmth in relationships, which in turn fosters trust. They also reinforce the Theory of Mind, which claims that customers' behavioral intention to use chatbots is increased when they feel that these machines can perceive emotional states. To improve trust, Sri Lankan banks should develop chatbots that demonstrate a high degree of emotional recognition, a natural conversation flow, and context-based responses. The employment of chatbots will also be strengthened by ongoing education of the public and users about their potential.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions of the Findings

By showing how perceived social presence (interpersonal and emotional cues) indirectly influences BIUC through PTT, the findings provide

credence to the Social Presence Theory. By confirming that the perceived emotional awareness of chatbots leads to a trust-based decision to adopt them in a high-stakes service scenario, they also contribute to the Theory of Mind.

5.2. Implications for Practice

To foster trust, chatbots must respond with contextually aware, forceful responses and use natural conversational patterns. Investments should be made in emotional recognition technologies and consistent, reliable performance rather than flimsy design. Additionally, banks should set up customer education programs and integrate chatbots into their current banking channels. To encourage long-term customer action, PTT should be built on openness, security assurances, and user feedback systems.

6. Conclusion

This study backs up the finding that BIUC in systemically important banks in Sri Lanka is impacted by PTT, and it acts as a mediator between perceived social presence and perceived emotional awareness of chatbots. Banks can create solutions that clients can trust by giving the chatbots the necessary emotional intelligence and trust-boosting characteristics.

6.1. Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Using a snowball sampling technique, the study only looked at a few Sri Lankan banks: People's Bank, Hatton National Bank, Bank of Ceylon, Commercial Bank, and Sampath Bank. The model's exclusive consideration of sociopsychological factors, such as perceived social presence (PSP) and perceived emotional awareness of the chatbot (PEA), is another limitation. Although it has important contributions, this work also opens new avenues for investigation. First, expand the sample size to include customers of non-systematically important banks or other financial institutions for improved generalizability. Second, to learn more about user experience, expectations, and barriers to using chatbot technologies, investigate qualitative methods (in-depth interviews).

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