

Artificial intelligence adoption in the service industry: investigating the role of perceived usefulness and ease of use

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Abstract

Purpose – To investigate the complexities and benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) to ensure its proper adoption in the service industry, especially among front-line employees. The study explores public sector employees' perceptions of the usefulness and ease of using AI-based devices in everyday tasks.

Design/methodology/approach – This cross-sectional study surveyed 700 public sector employees in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and employed structural equation modeling to test the proposed hypotheses. It used the value-based adoption and technology acceptance models as a framework to help public service organizations facilitate AI adoption by front-line employees. The research explored employees' concerns about performance, privacy, trust, biases and communication barriers while assessing the impact of ease of use, perceived usefulness, and leadership support on promoting effective AI integration.

Findings – There were positive, significant associations between perceived usefulness, ease of use, and adoption of AI in the public sector. However, perceived performance anxiety, privacy concerns and leadership support were insignificant. Prior experience with AI and age were important predictors of AI adoption. Intuitive communication is instrumental in adopting AI, with trust and social acceptance being important.

Originality/value – The research provides empirical evidence to help decision-makers develop ethical AI adoption strategies. The study will also contribute to the global discourse on the effective and responsible use of AI.

Keywords Artificial intelligence (AI), Information technology (IT), Perceived usefulness, Perceived ease of use, Leadership support, Public sector, Service industry, United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology has made providing services more efficient and accurate than was previously possible, as well as saving effort and money (Sharma *et al.*, 2023). Government institutions rely heavily on routine processes such as daily document handling. AI has automated these processes and simplified their management, especially in service provision, and has also simplified community engagement through dedicated digital platforms (Shehzad *et al.*, 2024). This has provided a noticeable increase in government



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efficiency (Criado and Gil-Garcia, 2019; He *et al.*, 2019). AI has therefore facilitated the effective use of limited resources (Khan *et al.*, 2023), allowing public institutions to provide better services and longer work continuity, against a background of rising demand and expectations from citizens (Müller *et al.*, 2018).

However, unlike private companies, where business decisions are driven by innovation, public institutions prioritize social benefits, equity, and transparency. This means that implementing AI presents considerable challenges (Androutsopoulou *et al.*, 2019). The adoption of AI in public sector agencies largely relies on frontline workers, the first point of contact between AI machines and users. The degree to which they are open to adopting AI and whether they believe it will be trustworthy, secure, and useful also determines the outcomes of implementation (Sharma *et al.*, 2023; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021). These challenges are particularly acute in new markets like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where initiatives such as the Smart Dubai strategy and AI-driven healthcare services rely heavily on effective AI integration across organizational hierarchies (Sharma *et al.*, 2023; UAE gov, 2020). This study therefore addresses the antecedents of AI adoption in service organizations.

The term “frontline employees” is used in this study for public service employees who interact directly with the public and provide essential services such as healthcare, telecommunications and municipal administration. These roles are the interface between citizens and AI-enabled platforms, making them important for the success of AI adoption. It is also important for this study to note that leadership support in the UAE public sector typically follows a top-down model. Strategic planning is carried out at the executive level and compliance is expected across departments (Almezaini, 2012). These institutional dynamics shape the way in which modern technologies are introduced and adopted.

Previous studies on AI implementation have largely focused on technological and organizational readiness, and few have explored employees’ perceptions and behaviors, even though these critically influence AI adoption outcomes (Androutsopoulou *et al.*, 2019; Santoro *et al.*, 2024; Sohn and Kwon, 2020; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021). More studies are therefore needed on the relationships between perceived usefulness, trust, communication barriers, privacy issues, and social biases in AI adoption.

There are already many smart services in the UAE’s public sector: 90% of government services are now provided through a web browser or smart mobile phone apps (Ahmat *et al.*, 2024). The huge number of smart services has made the UAE’s rate of digital transformation among the fastest in the world (UAE gov, 2020). This shift has encouraged the government to use AI systems in various public domains, making it an ideal place to study AI adoption. However, the public sometimes finds it hard to manage user interfaces or the technical learning associated with operating these, which constitutes an obstacle to adopting this technology. Studies have shown that these difficulties often result from systems that are not intuitive and difficult to understand or where insufficient training was provided (Davis, 1989; Sohn and Kwon, 2020). These problems are likely to make the public unwilling to deal with this technology or even reject it altogether (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003).

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was used in this study to understand user adoption of AI systems. However, there are also other factors that play a pivotal role in the acceptance of new systems. This study therefore also drew on the Value-Based Adoption Model (VAM), which is based on influences affecting user views and motives. Using both theories, the study aimed to paint a complete picture of AI adoption among frontline employees in the public sector. Previous studies (Tursunbayeva and Chalutz-Ben Gal, 2024) have shown that the influence of leadership is a key factor in AI adoption, and even the most important factor in the adoption of modern technological systems in the public sector (Grimmelikhuijsen and Tangi, 2024). This study therefore explored the idea that effective leadership creates a strategy through which it supports practices compatible with AI systems, which serves the goals of these institutions. Leadership support also provides necessary resources and expertise and cultivates a change-ready organizational culture, which leads to effective AI implementation in service delivery and operations (Grimmelikhuijsen and Tangi, 2024).

The study aimed to shed light on the factors that may influence AI adoption at both individual and corporate levels. The results should be useful to policymakers and executives wanting to optimize AI implementation in nations such as the UAE, where there is considerable digital innovation. The study expands knowledge of the human dimension of AI adoption and the alignment of technologies with user-centered practices in the context of successful adoption and long-term sustainable usage.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section Two explores the theoretical background of the VAM–TAM model and the implementation of AI. Section Three describes how the research was conducted, including the survey and data collection. Section Four and Section Five present and discuss the results. The paper ends with applications, limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

Literature review

Governmental use of AI is gaining momentum because it can increase efficiency, quality of services, and citizen satisfaction (Huang and Rust, 2018; Wirtz and Müller, 2019). However, frontline workers may not be convinced about the benefits. This is potentially a problem because they will be required to connect the deployment of AI systems and their successful application to the delivery of services (Androutsopoulou *et al.*, 2019; Sharma *et al.*, 2023). These workers may not always be technically very literate, and may be anxious about the performance, trustworthiness, and security of AI-based systems. However, previous studies have not considered these issues (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Singeh *et al.*, 2020). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is the primary framework used in AI adoption research to measure perceived usefulness and ease of use across different applications (Liu *et al.*, 2024; Ma *et al.*, 2025; Shao *et al.*, 2024), including the UAE public sector.

The adoption of AI and the motives behind it, especially in the public sector, has been studied by many researchers, both individually and organizationally. For example, one study (Androutsopoulou *et al.*, 2019) talked about the importance of trust and communication in government institutions when adopting AI. Another study (Sharma *et al.*, 2023) called for more research on issues of trust and privacy when adopting new technological systems, especially in a multicultural environment within the public sector. Other research (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003) used the TAM theory to study user behavior in public services across industries. Zhuo *et al.* (2021) focused on the importance of studying employee expectations as well as organizational readiness. Mitchell (2019) called for additional studies focusing on system usefulness, and the importance of reducing communication barriers when adopting AI. Singeh *et al.* (2020) pointed out that leadership has a major influence in the adoption of new technological systems. Lastly, Huang and Rust (2018) focused on the importance of clarity on the benefits of AI in supporting and delivering services, as well as interacting with employee concerns. All these studies emphasize the need to research the relationships among factors affecting adoption of AI in the public sector, especially trust, privacy concerns, effective communication and leadership.

Theoretical background

The VAM focuses on the impact of new technological systems on user views about the benefits of the system, and the influence of this on intention to adopt (Kim *et al.*, 2007). It also focuses on human interactions that support adoption. It is therefore based on a balance between technology and users, and the extent to which users benefit or are affected by the technology (Kim *et al.*, 2007; Lin *et al.*, 2012). However, there are additional factors that had to be considered holistically such as leadership support and users' demographic backgrounds (Maamari and Saheb, 2018), especially among frontline employees (Frenkenberg and Hochman, 2025; Gerlich, 2025).

The TAM emphasizes that there are two main reasons for users to adopt any new technological system (Davis, 1989), ease of use and usefulness. This theory has been used by many researchers to study the adoption of new technology (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). It can often

successfully explain adoption, but it is limited when viewed in a broader context. For example, it does not consider emotional and social factors that may be a major reason for users' decisions to adopt or reject technology. These may include anxiety, social bias, and communication barriers (Sharma *et al.*, 2023; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021).

Leadership support is addressed in this paper as an influential variable in establishing a suitable environment for technology adoption. Employees are influenced by their managers when making decisions within the workplace, especially when adopting new systems (Grimmelikhuijsen and Tangi, 2024; Zaitouni and Ouakouak, 2018). Including this factor in the framework for this research should therefore increase understanding of the ability of frontline employees to deal with AI, especially when used in a specific organizational context. This holistic view provides a better understanding of the AI adoption mechanism in the public sector and will provide deeper and broader information, supporting the adoption of AI by government institutions (Zhuo *et al.*, 2021).

Hypothesis development

The TAM states that adoption of any new technology depends on its perceived usefulness and ease of use, especially in the public sector, which is starting to see the benefit of using AI systems. Perceived usefulness means the extent to which people believe this new system will improve their ability to work (Davis, 1989). Public sector employees generally prefer technology that they believe will increase their job efficiency and productivity and encourage better decision-making (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). The perceived ease of use is about what users, whether employees or customers, expect when dealing with the technology. Previous research (Lee *et al.*, 2003) suggests that perceived ease of use is a key variable influencing perceived usefulness, and employees are more likely to view new technological systems as useful when they expect them to be easy to use.

The complexity of modern technological systems may mean that frontline employees are worried about how well these systems will perform, especially in the public sector (Bhattacharyya, 2024). This view hinders their confidence that these systems will help improve workflow (Yang *et al.*, 2015). The concern may over time be compounded by the level of responsibility engendered by providing public services. If this anxiety is not addressed, it will affect the level of service provided to the user. This study therefore hypothesized.

- H1. Perceived performance anxiety of AI is negatively correlated with perceived usefulness.
- H2. Perceived performance anxiety of AI is negatively correlated with perceived ease of use.

One of the biggest barriers to using new technology is the fear of violating privacy. The confidentiality and security of information have become pillars of modern technology because citizens recognize the sensitivity of information held by public services (Bart *et al.*, 2018; He *et al.*, 2019). Institutions must therefore deal very sensitively with the information they hold, especially data about individual citizens. Frontline employees may be concerned about this issue when new systems are introduced, and this may make them reluctant to use and deal with these systems (He *et al.*, 2019). It is therefore important to address these concerns to ensure that both employees and customers have confidence in public institutions. The study therefore hypothesized.

- H3. Perceived privacy concerns are negatively correlated with perceived usefulness.
- H4. Perceived privacy concerns are negatively correlated with perceived ease of use.

Trust is one of the most important factors in the adoption of new technology systems among frontline employees in the public sector. These employees deal directly with the public and rely on transparency and trust in the systems to deliver the operational processes at the expected level (Bart *et al.*, 2018; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021). Uncertainty about the technologies results in a lack of trust

between employees and systems and a fear for transparency and job accountability. Once that takes effect, employees may feel reluctant or embarrassed to deal with the public. However, if trust in the new system is established among frontline employees, they will be able to use the system effectively and efficiently (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021). It is therefore important for employees to trust AI systems, which in turn leads to positive perceptions of these systems and is likely to lead to more positive opinions of their usefulness and ease of use.

The study hypothesized.

H5. Perceived trust in AI technologies is positively associated with perceived usefulness.

H6. Perceived trust in AI technologies is positively associated with perceived ease of use.

A previous study (Mitchell, 2019) on the adoption of smart systems discussed social perceptions, fairness and inclusivity and their impact on adoption, especially in government institutions, which are often culturally diverse (Singeh *et al.*, 2020). People are naturally affected by the surrounding environment, including their colleagues at work, managers and the surrounding community. Understanding these relationships and their impact on workers will help to understand factors influencing adoption, especially in matters of trust, equity and social perceptions. All these factors influence employees' perception of the usefulness and ease of use of the system. This is likely to be particularly true for frontline employees because they deal directly with the public.

The study hypothesized.

H7. Perceived social biases are positively associated with perceived usefulness.

H8. Perceived social biases are positively associated with perceived ease of use.

Effective communication in the provision of public sector services is one of the most important factors for success in all systems. However, many modern technological systems are complex to use, with user interfaces that are difficult to understand. This creates a potential obstacle to their adoption (Kaur and Kaur, 2022; Sharma *et al.*, 2023). These communication barriers make it difficult to interact with AI systems, hindering users, and therefore reducing these systems' perceived usefulness and ease of use. The study hypothesized.

H9. Perceived communication barriers are negatively associated with perceived usefulness.

H10. Perceived communication barriers are negatively associated with perceived ease of use.

Quality and efficiency are among the most important objectives of public sector services. It is therefore important to examine the relationship between perceived ease of use and usefulness when analyzing why frontline employees may adopt AI systems. Public services adopt new systems to improve the service provision to customers (Kaur and Kaur, 2022). Employee acceptance of new technology is likely to be linked to their perceptions of the practical value of those systems and whether they find them easy to use. The study hypothesized.

H11. Perceived ease of use is positively associated with perceived usefulness.

Perceived usefulness is a key element of AI adoption, especially in the public sector, because employees want these AI systems to reduce their workload, enhance efficiency, and provide better customer service (Lee *et al.*, 2003). Employees' perceptions of the usefulness of AI systems therefore directly affect their intention to adopt, especially in the context of the level of service provided. The study hypothesized.

H12. Perceived usefulness is positively associated with the intention to adopt AI.

Frontline employees in the public sector prefer technology systems that are simple and easy to integrate into their daily work. The ease of use therefore affects intention to adopt any new

system, even when it is already perceived as useful. When the design of AI systems is more intuitive, acceptance is more likely (Yousafzai *et al.*, 2007). The study hypothesized.

H13. Perceived ease of use is positively associated with intention to adopt AI.

The status quo bias theory (Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988) suggests that public sector employees often refuse to adopt smart systems because of a lack of familiarity, especially if these new systems require organizational changes. This theory is based on dislike of loss, so leadership support has a significant impact on employee acceptance of those systems, and training is necessary to overcome lack of familiarity and change the idea of loss (Lin *et al.*, 2020). Supportive leaders must therefore establish effective AI training programs for employees (Chatterjee and Nguyen, 2021; Thakur *et al.*, 2016). However, leaders can also assist employees in adapting to the organization's strategic decisions about AI implementation by removing common obstacles to early adoption (Youssef *et al.*, 2018). When leaders exhibit moral qualities such as trustworthiness and lack of bias, they foster a positive environment that encourages employees to engage in creative work (Asif *et al.*, 2020). Business benefits arise from supportive leadership in the development of a ubiquitous system (Chatterjee and Kumar Kar, 2020). However, insights from public sector reforms suggest that leadership must be complemented by employee involvement and inter-organizational cooperation to embed change successfully (Higgs *et al.*, 2023). Supportive leadership can moderate the relationships between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and adoption intention by fostering an environment that encourages experimentation and reduces resistance to AI (Aldhaheeri and Ahmad, 2024). Leadership can therefore enhance frontline employees' readiness to embrace AI technologies. This study hypothesized.

H14. Leadership support moderates the relationship between perceived usefulness and intention to adopt AI.

H15. Leadership support moderates the relationship between perceived ease of use and intention to adopt AI.

These hypotheses and the relationships between study variables are shown in Figure 1.

Methods

Survey instrument and measurement scales

This study used a quantitative approach because this allowed empirical measurement and statistical analysis of key factors influencing AI adoption in the UAE public sector. The research employed a structured survey questionnaire to examine key factors influencing AI adoption in the public sector (see Table 1). A five-point Likert-type scale was used for all items, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The survey included validated measurement scales from previous studies to ensure reliability and accuracy. Perceived performance anxiety of AI was assessed using items from Kenesei *et al.* (2022), focusing on concerns about AI malfunctions, performance risks, and uncertainty about AI reliability. This research also used items from previous studies (Dhagarra *et al.*, 2020; Xu *et al.*, 2008) to measure perceived privacy concerns, especially in personal information, data collection, leakage, or unauthorized access. Items on perceived social biases were drawn from another study (Yang and Jolly, 2009). Examples include being influenced by co-workers, managers, and the social environment. The items for communication barriers were taken from a further study (Ivkov *et al.*, 2020). These questions enabled the research to evaluate employee interaction with AI systems and its ease of use in comparison to human interaction.

When installing new systems, organizations must first study the factors that help adoption, support and maintenance of these systems. This study therefore focused on the two most important factors in the adoption of AI, perceived ease of use (Choung *et al.*, 2023) and perceived usefulness (Pal *et al.*, 2020).

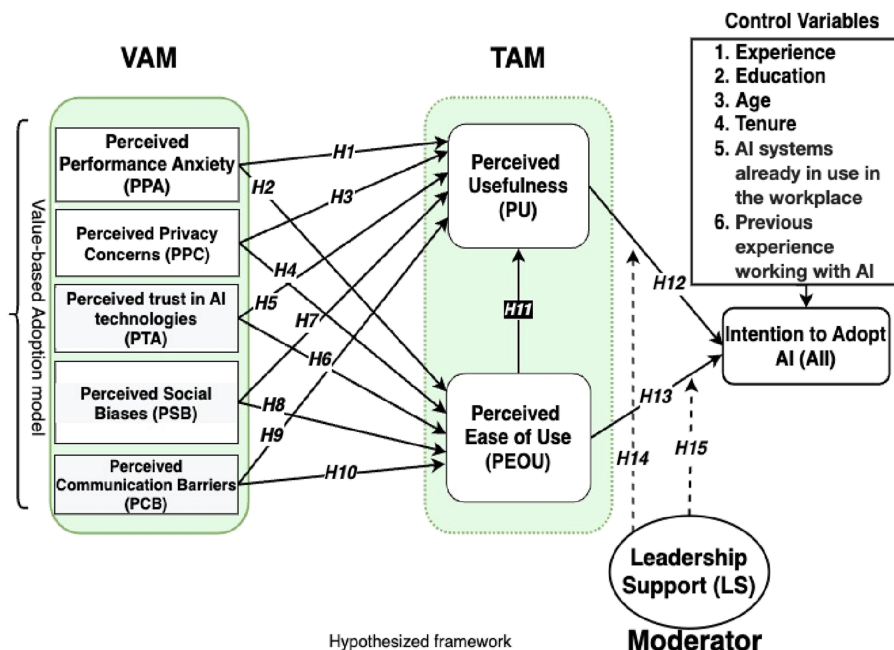


Figure 1. Hypothesized framework. Source: Authors

Perceived trust items were taken from [Kalinić et al. \(2020\)](#) and leadership support elements from [Maroufkhani et al. \(2020\)](#). Finally, items on intention to adopt AI were taken from [Sohn and Kwon \(2020\)](#). Intention to adopt AI measures the desire of employees to use AI in their everyday work and even recommend it to others.

The survey also collected sociodemographic data, including age, gender, and previous experience working with AI, including its use within the organization (see [Table 2](#)). The data collection followed a structured process to ensure reliability and representativeness. A bilingual (Arabic and English) online survey was distributed in June 2023, and responses were collected over two months, concluding in August 2023. The survey was issued via Google Forms to employees in the UAE public sector, in organizations delivering healthcare, media, and telecommunications. Online surveys were chosen over field surveys because they offer geographic representation, logistical flexibility, and prompt data collection when in-person contact is limited, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Delnevo and Singh, 2021](#); [Geldsetzer, 2020](#)). A pilot study with 30 participants confirmed the clarity of the questions before full deployment.

To ensure the cultural and institutional relevance within the UAE, terms such as “social biases” and “trust in AI” have been considered in the context of public sector structures. For example, in this study, “social biases” means perceptions of justice across diverse linguistic and national backgrounds, and trust reflects attitudes to government-led initiatives. These contextual differences were considered in the design of the survey and in the process of validating the research data, to ensure that the study was relevant to the target population.

Stratified sampling was used to ensure that the sample represented the target population. The research included people in different job roles and industries involving or influenced by AI systems. The study focused on reducing bias and ensuring a range of demographic and professional representation. Initially, the questionnaire was tested on a small group of participants to ensure its suitability, clarity, and compatibility with the study’s objectives. Clear

Table 1. Study measures and factor loading for measurement and structural model

Study measures (Reference)	Measurement items	CFA	SEM
Perceived performance Anxiety (PPA) (Kenesei et al., 2022)	PPA1: There is a high chance that something will go wrong when using AI	0.781	0.743
	PPA2: AI may not perform well, and problems may occur when using it	0.832	0.778
	PPA3: Considering the potential future performance of AI, its use could be risky for me	0.819	0.772
	PPA4: I am worried that the failure or malfunctions of the AI system may cause problems	0.689	0.680
Perceived privacy concerns (PPC) (Dhagarra et al., 2020 ; Xu et al., 2008)	PPC1: It bothers me when AI asks me for this much personal information	0.762	0.724
	PPC2: I am concerned that AI collects too much personal information about me	0.845	0.824
	PPC3: I am concerned that unauthorized people may access my personal information	0.773	0.724
	PPC4: I am concerned that AI may keep my personal information in a non-accurate manner	0.777	0.758
	PPC5: I am concerned about submitting information to AI	0.779	0.758
Perceived social biases (PSB) (Yang and Jolly, 2009)	PSB1: I feel that the important people in my life want me to use AI services	0.728	0.737
	PSB2: People who influence my behavior think that I should use AI services	0.782	0.737
	PSB3: Most people who are important to me probably consider AI services useful	0.803	0.825
	PSB4: People who are important to me think that I should use AI services	0.828	0.852
	PSB5: Most people who are important to me probably consider my use of AI services to be wise	0.776	0.839
	PSB6: Most people who are important to me probably consider using AI services as valuable	0.767	0.855
Perceived communication barriers (PCB) (Ivkov et al., 2020)	PCB1: Sharing information with AI in a service environment is easy	0.614	0.665
	PCB2: It is comfortable interacting with AI systems in a service environment	0.691	0.762
	PCB3: It is more comfortable interacting with AI systems than humans in a service environment	0.852	0.862
	PCB4: It is easier to interact with AI systems than humans in a service environment	0.821	0.823
Perceived ease of use (PEOU) (Choung et al., 2023)	PEOU1: Learning to use AI products would be easy	0.732	0.660
	PEOU2: I would find it easy to get the AI technologies to do what I want	0.714	0.707
	PEOU3: My interaction with AI is clear and understandable	0.738	0.741
	PEOU4: It would be easy for me to become skillful at using AI technologies	0.783	0.808
	PEOU5: We would find AI technologies easy to use	0.756	0.856
(continued)			

Table 1. Continued

Study measures (Reference)	Measurement items	CFA	SEM
Perceived usefulness (PU) (Pal <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	PU1: Using AI in my daily work would enable me to accomplish tasks more quickly	0.733	0.847
	PU2: Using AI would improve my work performance	0.801	0.936
	PU3: Using AI would help in my daily work	0.794	0.919
	PU4: Using AI in my daily life would increase my productivity	0.759	0.879
	PU5: Using AI would enhance my effectiveness in my daily work	0.789	0.921
Perceived trust in AI (PTA) (Kalinic <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	PTA1: I think that AI-enabled technology will keep the promises and commitments that it makes	0.723	0.713
	PTA2: AI-enabled technology is trustworthy	0.781	0.785
	PTA3: AI-enabled technology offers access to sincere and genuine services	0.782	0.828
	PTA4: AI-enabled technology performs its role of providing services well	0.645	0.733
	PTA5: In general, I trust AI-enabled technology	0.588	0.734
Leadership support (LS) (Maroufkhani <i>et al.</i> , 2020)	LS1: Our top management promotes the use of AI in the organization	0.865	0.869
	LS2: Our top management creates support for AI initiatives within the organization	0.891	0.909
	LS3: Our top management promotes AI as a strategic priority within the organization	0.891	0.924
	LS4: Our top management is interested in the news about AI technology	0.833	0.834
	LS5: Our top management encourages AI use	0.891	0.909
Intention to adopt (Sohn and Kwon, 2020)	AII1: I intend to use AI services in the future	0.759	0.849
	AII2: I intend to continue using AI services	0.773	0.886
	AII3: I intend to recommend that other people use AI services	0.682	0.799

Note(s): PPA, Perceived performance Anxiety; PPC, perceived privacy concerns; PSB, perceived social biases; PCB, perceived communication barriers; PEOU, perceived ease of use; PU, perceived usefulness; PTA, perceived trust in AI technologies; LS, leadership support; AII, intention to adopt AI technologies

Source(s): Authors

instructions were used to minimize or eliminate bias in the data. Any incomplete or anonymous responses were deleted to maintain the validity of the data. The study also tried to cover a wide range of public sector workers in the UAE. The data obtained were validated and cleaned, giving 700 analyzable responses. Structured equation modeling (SEM) was used, with SPSS 29 and AMOS 26. These measures ensured that data analysis followed a robust and ethical approach.

Data collection and research context

Frontline employees in public service institutions in the UAE were the main target of this research. With considerable amounts of digital transformation taking place there, and especially the use of AI systems to transform government services into smart services with a focus on efficiency and speed (Goher, 2025), the UAE has developed policies to encourage this process. However, there is a lack of empirical research on public sector employees' perceptions about adopting AI systems (Akhoirshieda *et al.*, 2024). This research therefore focused on the factors that influence the adoption of AI, to support this transformation. It focused especially on perceived usefulness and ease of use, as well as leadership support, and then considered how to deal with trust, privacy, and anxiety about perceived performance of AI.

Table 2. Demographic profile of survey respondents

Sample characteristics	Frequency (<i>n</i> = 700)	Percent (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	540	77.1%
Female	160	22.9%
<i>Age (years)</i>		
18–29	91	13.0%
30–39	309	44.1%
40–49	223	31.9%
50–59	71	10.1%
60 or older	6	0.9%
<i>Education</i>		
Less than high school	1	0.1%
High school graduate	10	1.4%
Some college	10	1.4%
2-year degree	20	2.9%
Bachelor's degree	385	55.0%
Master's degree	241	34.4%
Doctorate	33	4.7%
<i>Overall experience</i>		
Under 1 year	32	4.6%
1–3 years	34	4.9%
4–6 years	53	7.6%
More than 6 years	581	83.0%
<i>Tenure</i>		
Under 1 year	99	14.1%
1–3 years	158	22.6%
4–6 years	124	17.7%
More than 6 years	319	45.6%
<i>AI already in workplace</i>		
No	191	27.3%
Not sure	115	16.4%
Yes	394	56.3%
Note(s): <i>n</i> = 700		
Source(s): Authors		

Some of the most important sectors for digital transformation in the UAE are health, media, and communications. The UAE government considers the health sector to play a pivotal role in improving the health of citizens and has therefore attached great importance to its digital transformation, especially in the use of AI systems. Improving services, conserving resources, and speedy handling of patients are key government objectives in the healthcare sector (He et al., 2019). Many governments also support digital transformation in the media sector because of its importance as a point of contact between government and the masses (Sharma et al., 2023). The UAE government also views the telecommunications sector as an important route for communicating with the public (UAE gov, 2020).

Statistical analysis

Using the VAM–TAM framework, this study analyzed the basic variables and the additional influences affecting adoption of AI systems using structural equation modeling (SEM) software. The following equation is perceived utility (PU) as a function of perceived ease of

use (PEOU), perceived trust (PTA), perceived social biases (PSB), and perceived communication barriers (PCB):

$$PU = \beta_0 + \beta_1PEOU + \beta_2PTA + \beta_3PSB + \beta_4PCB + \varepsilon$$

Perceived ease of use (PEOU) was formulated as a function of perceived performance anxiety (PPA), perceived privacy concerns (PPC), perceived trust (PTA), perceived social biases (PSB), and perceived communication barriers (PCB):

$$PEOU = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1PPA + \gamma_2PPC + \gamma_3PTA + \gamma_4PSB + \gamma_5PCB + \varepsilon$$

The intention to adopt AI (AII) was analyzed as a function of perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEOU), leadership support (LS), age, and previous experience working with AI-based systems (ExpAI):

$$AII = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1PU + \alpha_2PEOU + \alpha_3LS + \alpha_4Age + \alpha_5ExpAI + \varepsilon$$

Finally, the study tested the moderating effect of leadership support (LS) on AI adoption by introducing interaction terms for $PU \times LS$ and $PEOU \times LS$:

$$AII = \delta_0 + \delta_1PU + \delta_2PEOU + \delta_3LS + \delta_4(PU \times LS) + \delta_5(PEOU \times LS) + \varepsilon$$

The data were also examined for normality, skewness and kurtosis. Harman's single-factor test was used to evaluate common method bias.

Results

Data normality

The dataset had no missing or inactive responses. The skewness was symmetrical, and the kurtosis was moderate (Veljkovic, 2024). Descriptive data for the research constructs are shown in Table 3. The multicollinearity test showed that tolerance values for both predictors exceeded the suggested threshold of 0.1, at 0.649. The independent variables' variance inflation factor (VIF) was less than 10 for both, at 1.54. The data were therefore considered appropriate for additional analysis because there were no non-response problems. The full 700-respondent sample was retained to evaluate the proposed research model.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of study constructs

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
PPA	4	3.52	0.85	-0.20	-0.06
PPC	5	3.57	0.98	-0.50	-0.28
PSB	6	3.33	0.84	-0.22	0.00
PCB	4	3.14	0.95	-0.14	-0.32
PEOU	5	3.73	0.79	-0.45	0.14
PU	5	4.00	0.91	-0.84	0.47
PTA	5	3.43	0.76	-0.31	0.52
LS	4	3.56	1.02	-0.58	-0.08
AII	3	4.05	0.90	-0.93	0.90

Note(s): PPA, Perceived performance Anxiety; PPC, perceived privacy concerns; PSB, perceived social biases; PCB, perceived communication barriers; PEOU, perceived ease of use; PU, perceived usefulness; PTA, perceived trust in AI technologies; LS, leadership support; AII, intention to adopt AI technologies

Source(s): Authors

Common method bias

The greatest percentage of variance in the research variables that was explained by the results was 10.8%. This is well below the suggested threshold of 50% (Howard *et al.*, 2024) and suggests that common method bias was not a concern.

Validity and reliability analysis

The validity and reliability of the study constructs were evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis. The study measures had composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.70, indicating good reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The mean of more than 4 for intention to adopt indicates a strong preference for adopting AI in public organizations.

Convergent validity was also verified (Table 4), because the average variance explained (AVE) for each construct was more than 0.5. The correlations between the constructs were smaller than the square root of their AVE values, and the AVE values were smaller than the corresponding composite reliability values. Every Cronbach's alpha value exceeded the significance level of 0.7. AVE values exceeded maximum squared variance (MSV) levels. Every maximum reliability MaxR(H) value was also higher than 0.8. These results suggest that discriminant validity existed.

Finally, the model fit indices for the model were within the suggested threshold values: relative Chi-square (χ^2/df) = 2.67, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.94, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.93, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Tables 1 and 3 show the study constructs' loadings, validity, and reliability.

Hypothesis testing

SEM, used to test the study hypotheses, showed good model fit. The results did not support H1 and H2, that perceived performance anxiety of AI would be negatively associated with perceived usefulness (H1: $b = 0.0$; $p > 0.05$) and ease of use (H2: $b = 0.0$; $p > 0.05$). They also did not support H3 and H4, that perceived privacy concerns would be negatively associated with both perceived usefulness (H3: $b = 0$; $p > 0.05$) and ease of use (H4: $b = -0.04$; $p > 0.05$). However, H5 and H6 were both supported, and perceived trust in AI was positively correlated with both perceived usefulness (H5: $b = 0.19$; $p < 0.001$) and ease of use (H6: $b = 0.27$; $p < 0.001$). A significant association was also found between perceived social biases and both perceived usefulness (H7: $b = 0.23$; $p < 0.001$) and ease of use (H8: $b = 0.15$; $p < 0.001$). Perceived communication barriers were also negatively correlated with perceived usefulness (H9: $b = -0.08$; $p < 0.01$). Perceived ease of use was positively correlated with perceived usefulness (H11: $b = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$). Both perceived usefulness (H12: $b = 0.66$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived ease of use (H13: $b = 0.09$, $p > 0.05$) were positively correlated with AI adoption. The structural model accounted for 60% of the variance in perceived usefulness, 37% in perceived ease of use, and 66% in intention to adopt AI (Figure 2 and Table 5).

Moderation analysis

The study also examined the role of leadership support as a moderating variable in the relationship between perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and intention to adopt AI. Using Amos and SPSS for moderation analysis, the study found that leadership support did not significantly affect these relationships, and hypotheses H14 and H15 were therefore rejected (Table 5).

Demographic information as control variables

The multiple regression analysis used six demographic factors as potential predictors. These were experience, education, age, tenure, AI systems already in use in the workplace, and previous experience working with AI. Only previous experience with AI ($B = 0.098$, $p = 0.004$) and age ($B = -0.113$, $p = 0.026$) were statistically significant. A unit increase in

Table 4. Convergent and discriminant validity

Construct	α	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	PU	PSB	PEOU	PPC	LS	PTA	PCB	PPA	AII
PU	0.955	0.956	0.812	0.582	0.96	0.901								
PSB	0.918	0.919	0.655	0.319	0.925	0.564	0.809							
PEOU	0.868	0.87	0.574	0.424	0.884	0.651	0.451	0.758						
PPC	0.870	0.871	0.575	0.237	0.875	−0.188	−0.139	−0.208	0.759					
LS	0.934	0.935	0.783	0.207	0.941	0.396	0.455	0.320	−0.090	0.885				
PTA	0.870	0.872	0.577	0.404	0.877	0.559	0.526	0.508	−0.339	0.350	0.760			
PCB	0.857	0.861	0.611	0.404	0.877	0.480	0.472	0.405	−0.212	0.267	0.6	0.781		
PPA	0.830	0.832	0.554	0.237	0.836	−0.150	−0.096	−0.134	0.486	−0.024	−0.282	−0.168	0.744	
AII	0.878	0.882	0.714	0.582	0.889	0.763	0.434	0.539	−0.152	0.312	0.447	0.376	−0.105	0.845

Note(s): α , Cronbach's alpha; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted; MSV, maximum shared variance; MaxR(H), maximum reliability; PSB, perceived social biases; PU, perceived usefulness; PEOU, perceived ease of use; PTA, perceived trust in AI technologies; LS, leadership support; PPC, perceived privacy concerns; PPA, Perceived performance Anxiety; PCB, perceived communication barriers; AII, intention to adopt AI technologies

Source(s): Authors

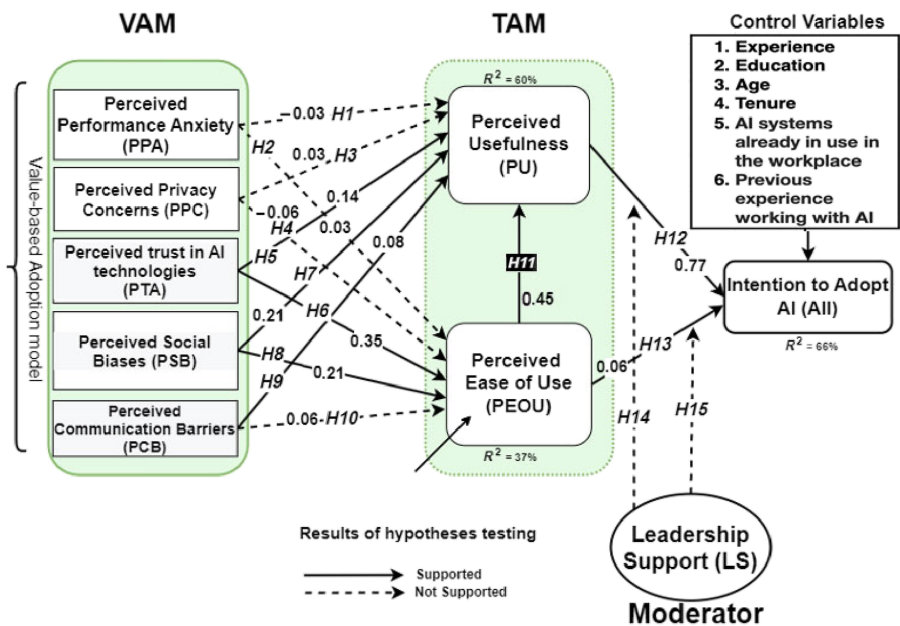


Figure 2. Results of hypotheses testing. Source: Authors

Table 5. Confirmation of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Path	β	p	Supported (Yes/No)
H1	PPA → PU	−0.030	0.383	No
H2	PPA → PEOU	0.034	0.443	No
H3	PPC → PU	0.026	0.361	No
H4	PPC → PEOU	−0.045	0.114	No
H5	PTA → PU	0.171	***	Yes
H6	PTA → PEOU	0.195	***	Yes
H7	PSB → PU	0.221	***	Yes
H8	PSB → PEOU	0.380	***	Yes
H9	PCB → PU	−0.078	0.014	Yes
H10	PCB → PEOU	−0.002	0.135	No
H11	PEOU → PU	0.556	***	Yes
H12	PU → AII	0.769	***	Yes
H13	PEOU → AII	0.061	0.049	Yes
H14	PU (LS) → AII	0.037	0.179	No
H15	PEOU (LS) → AII	−0.038	0.180	No

Note(s): *** = $p < 0.001$. PPA, Perceived performance Anxiety; PPC, perceived privacy concerns; PTA, perceived trust in AI technology; PSB, perceived social biases; PCB, perceived communication barriers; PU, perceived usefulness; AII, intention to adopt AI technologies; PEOU, perceived ease of use; LS, leadership support

Source(s): Authors

experience of AI was associated with a 0.098-unit increase in AI adoption, controlling for all other variables in the model. Conversely, a unit increase in age was linked to a 0.113-unit decrease in AI adoption when all other factors were constant.

Discussion

This study explored the factors influencing AI adoption among frontline employees in the public sector, building on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) and the Value-Based Adoption Model (VAM) (Kim *et al.*, 2007). The results suggest that trust in AI and social biases had a positive impact on perceived usefulness and ease of use (H5, H6, H7, H8). This highlights the importance of trust in technology and social influence in shaping user perceptions. Communication barriers negatively affected perceived usefulness (H9), but the impact on ease of use was minimal (H10). Perceived ease of use greatly increased the significance of perceived usefulness (H11) as well as the intention to adopt (H13). However, Perceived usefulness had the strongest association with AI adoption (H12). Of the demographic variables, only previous experience had a positive effect on adoption. However, older age had a negative effect. Overall, the model demonstrated strong explanatory power, accounting for 60% of the variance in perceived usefulness, 37% in ease of use, and 66% in adoption intention.

Key determinants of AI adoption

The results of this study show that the two most important factors in the adoption of AI are perceived ease of use and usefulness. These results are in line with previous studies using the TAM theory (Chatterjee and Kumar Kar, 2020; Higgs *et al.*, 2023; Sohn and Kwon, 2020; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003).

The findings show that perceived trust and social biases had a major influence on adoption. Previous studies (Eastlick *et al.*, 2006; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021) also found that trust in AI systems is the main reason for users adopting it, as this trust helped them to view the new system as easy to use and useful. This study also confirms that employees were influenced by the positive perceptions of those around them to believe that these systems would be useful. Other previous studies (Mitchell, 2019; Singeh *et al.*, 2020) have indicated that fear and anxiety about these new systems could prevent uptake, but this study did not find that. In summary, the results of this study were in line with the UAE government's view that smart systems will be a catalyst for the completion of various transactions in a fast, easy and fair manner.

The study confirmed many of the hypotheses proposed but there were also several that were not supported by the data. Let us discuss the possible reasons why these hypotheses were not supported, drawing on the literature and cultural context of the UAE.

Previous studies have shown that performance anxiety can hinder perceived usefulness and ease of use (Bhattacharyya, 2024; Yang *et al.*, 2015). However, we did not find this in practice (H1 and H2). This may be explained by the high degree of digital integration in the UAE public sector. Many of the frontline employees surveyed work in digitally mature organizations and already use AI systems. They are also likely to have received training in using these systems. This environment is therefore likely to reduce the level of stress and uncertainty associated with performance.

Previous studies have suggested that privacy concerns were an important barrier to AI adoption (Bart *et al.*, 2018; He *et al.*, 2019). However, we found no impact on public sector employees in the UAE (H3 and H4). This could be because the country has a strict legal framework in data protection and digital governance (UAE gov, 2020). Employees may therefore have more trust in digital systems than in less stringent environments. This finding is consistent with previous studies that found that institutional trust can reduce or even eliminate data privacy concerns (Eastlick *et al.*, 2006; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021).

Previous studies have found that counter-intuitive interfaces and technical terminology are a barrier to ease of use of new systems (Kaur and Kaur, 2022; Sharma *et al.*, 2023). However, we found the relationship between perceived communication barriers and perceived ease of use (H10) not supported. This may show the flexibility of public sector employees in the UAE in adapting to these barriers, perhaps because of frequent exposure to new digital platforms. The prospect of internal support mechanisms, such as training materials and help desks, may also have significantly reduced the negative impact of communication barriers.

We were surprised to find that leadership support had no significant moderating effect on the relationship between ease of use and usefulness, and AI adoption (H14 and H15). Previous studies have all found that leadership plays an important role in the adoption of technology by encouraging and developing the required strategic and cultural plans (Chatterjee and Nguyen, 2021; Singeh *et al.*, 2020). This finding may be the result of the prevailing organizational culture in the UAE public sector. It has become customary there to implement technology initiatives continuously, as part of the national digital strategy. Leadership therefore has an enabling role rather than an administrative one, weakening its impact on individual employees. The structural role of leaders, exercised through policy and regulations, may also limit the direct impact of leadership support on perceived ease of use or usefulness.

Contribution of this study

This research focused on public services in government institutions, using a framework combining the VAM and TAM to provide a broader picture of the antecedents of the acceptance of AI systems. Several previous studies have shed light on adopting AI, focusing on corporations and consumer services (Sohn and Kwon, 2020; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). This study's findings show that public sector employees in the UAE are not fundamentally affected by a vision set out by leaders. This may be because of the government's focus on integrity and trust, which has affected employees' technology adoption. The study also indicates that public sector employees generally believe that AI systems are fair and therefore acceptable. This acceptance is because transparency and richness in these systems play an important role in public sector governance (Criado and Gil-Garcia, 2019).

This study underscores the importance of perceived usefulness, trust, and fairness in AI adoption. It therefore focuses on what employees want rather than managers: a user-centric rather than leadership approach. The findings suggest some practical recommendations for decision-makers, particularly highlighting the importance of transparency and ease of use, which are priorities of public services.

Conclusion

This study focused on factors affecting frontline public sector employees' adoption of AI systems. The study collected data via a survey, and analyzed the data received using SEM software. Questions asked about factors including previous experience working with AI, perceived benefit, trust, and privacy concerns, and assessed the impact of these factors on adoption intent. The research outcomes should therefore be useful in helping public institutions adopt AI systems.

The results of this study indicate that perceived usefulness and ease of use are the two most important elements in AI system adoption, which is consistent with previous studies (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003) using the TAM theory. Trust and social bias were second in importance, indicating that issues of transparency and fairness make employees and users favor AI adoption (Criado and Gil-Garcia, 2019; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021). Unlike several previous studies (Chatterjee and Kumar Kar, 2020; He *et al.*, 2019), this study found that security or privacy concerns and leadership did not have a significant impact.

The research also included control variables that affect the adoption of AI systems by frontline employees such as previous experience, if any, in dealing with AI systems, and demographic background. The research model was found to be valid using structural equation modeling (SEM). The results suggest that the adoption of AI among employees depends on what they see as beneficial, rather than the views of their organization. Ultimately, these findings may help the designers of AI-based public services to develop systems that are more likely to be adopted.

In future, researchers should conduct longitudinal studies to track AI adoption trends and explore qualitative perspectives to complement these quantitative insights. By focusing on

user experience and trust, governments can foster effective, ethical, and widely accepted AI adoption in public services.

Theoretical implications

Digitalization transforms business operations by converging human-centered technologies (Bansal *et al.*, 2023) with automation and AI, including machine learning (Coelho *et al.*, 2023). The concept shifts the emphasis from simple automation (or digitization) to a more balanced approach, where AI supports workers, enhances well-being, and promotes sustainable technological adoption (Nahavandi, 2019). This study looked at the best ways to encourage adoption of AI systems among frontline employees, with a focus on people and sustainable principles. It assumed that AI systems would be part of the future of service delivery in the public sector, as an enabler to improve the efficiency of people. Using the combined VAM–TAM, the research tried to give a complete picture of adoption, using the VAM theory to examine the human factors and emotional aspects (Sohn and Kwon, 2020), and the TAM to focus on the technical aspects, especially perceived ease of use and usefulness. This provided broader and clearer results about the adoption of AI systems by frontline staff (Chander *et al.*, 2022).

For academics, this research introduces a new idea by integrating the VAM and TAM to allow research into intentions behind adoption of AI systems (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). It also provides a fresh concept for adoption by analyzing trust and fairness, especially in the public sector (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; UAE gov, 2020). The study helps advance academic research by analyzing employee perceptions and behaviors that directly affect the adoption of AI. All these will undoubtedly contribute to the enrichment of theoretical and applied knowledge. Promoting trust and inclusivity in AI adoption should enhance public attitudes toward technology, improving quality of life through efficient public services, reduced operational costs, and personalized citizen interactions, ultimately fostering greater acceptance of AI (Mitchell, 2019; Singeh *et al.*, 2020; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021).

Practical implications

This study analyzed the technical and behavioral factors affecting the adoption of smart systems among frontline employees in the public sector. This is based on calls in previous studies (Androutsopoulou *et al.*, 2019; Sharma *et al.*, 2023; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021) to ensure the success of adoption. This study also drew on other useful suggestions such as developing appropriate strategies, training employees on the benefits and ease of use, and enhancing trust and transparency (Davis, 1989; Sohn and Kwon, 2020; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). The role of societal influence was one of the most important factors discussed (Criado and Gil-Garcia, 2019; Huang and Rust, 2018). The fact that this research combined more than one theory (VAM and TAM) made the results more comprehensive. Public sector organizations can therefore benefit from these results when planning the adoption of AI systems, especially in the UAE or neighboring countries. Implementation designers will also find this research useful when adopting new AI systems, because it can support development of appropriate training programs (Lages *et al.*, 2020; Sohn and Kwon, 2020; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021). Organizations of various types will therefore find this research useful, particularly in helping them to design easy-to-use AI systems, and encouraging a focus on productivity, efficiency, and employee satisfaction (Mitchell, 2019; Sharma *et al.*, 2023).

Practical ways in which public sector organizations could draw on our findings cover three main areas. First, workshops to enhance AI literacy will improve employee readiness and reduce resistance. Second, acceptance will be improved by prioritizing the development of easy-to-use interfaces. Third, support channels should be designed to help employees, and the public solve common problems, which should improve their trust in AI systems. These strategies can be used in collaboration with organizational performance metrics such as responsiveness, service accuracy and public satisfaction to ensure successful implementation of smart systems.

These interventions should have measurable impacts on transaction processing speed as well as public satisfaction and employee productivity. For example, improving automation in healthcare appointments will save a lot of time. One study found a 57% reduction in the likelihood of not showing up for appointments and a 50% reduction in waiting times following the introduction of automation (AISerkal *et al.*, 2025). This therefore supports the UAE government's digital transformation agenda and will increase public confidence in public institutions (Goher, 2025; UAE gov, 2020), as well as increasing operational efficiency.

Limitations and future scope

This study had some limitations. It focused on the public sector in the UAE, and the findings should therefore be generalized with care. This social and institutional context is characterized by a central management structure, strong government oversight, and widespread trust in institutional processes (Grimmelikhuijsen and Tangi, 2024; Zhuo *et al.*, 2021). Government initiatives such as the National AI Strategy and the Smart Government Initiative have led to the normalization of the digital transformation of public services (Goher, 2025; UAE gov, 2020). Employees may therefore adopt new technologies because of corporate responsibilities rather than their personal opinions or leadership influence. The UAE government also takes information security seriously, which in turn has reduced users' concern about privacy and increased their confidence in the security of systems (Bart *et al.*, 2018; He *et al.*, 2019). Caution is therefore required when generalizing these findings to countries with different government models, levels of institutional trust or digital maturity.

The study also used cross-sectional data, limiting its scope to a snapshot in time and potentially overlooking the evolving dynamics of AI adoption. The sample size of 700 participants was sufficient for statistical relevance but may not have captured the complete diversity of frontline employees in the public sector service industry. The self-reported metrics used to gauge perceived usefulness and ease of use could introduce biases such as social desirability and recall bias.

The paper considered specific factors that are likely to influence the adoption of AI. However, other factors, such as organizational culture, technological literacy, and cost, may also be significant. There is an urgent need for similar studies in different places or involving other sectors. This will enhance the validity of these results and enrich data availability.

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- Distinguished Faculty Awards at Abu Dhabi University (multiple years)
- Emerald Literati Awards for Outstanding Papers (2018 and 2019)
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