
Citizens in Dialogue with Local Government: Communication Channels Preferences, Bots Readiness and Barriers of Acceptance

Submitted 15/08/25, 1st revision 29/08/25, 2nd revision 11/09/25, accepted 30/09/25

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Abstract:

Purpose: This article aims to identify residents' preferences regarding communication channels with local governments, assess their willingness to use chatbots and voicebots in interactions with local governments, and identify the main barriers to accepting these tools. The analysis aims to identify areas in which new communication technologies can support the implementation of local government tasks. The study also allows us to determine citizens' expectations and concerns regarding automated forms of contact with local government.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article is theoretical and empirical in nature. The theoretical section reviews the literature primarily concerning local government communication and the use of bots in the public sector. The empirical section is based primarily on the results of a survey conducted among residents of Polish municipalities. The survey was conducted between June and September 2025 on a sample of 854 Poles aged 18 and over. The sample was randomly selected. The analysis primarily utilised descriptive statistics and correlation analyses.

Findings: The results of the study indicate that residents' communication with local government remains strongly rooted in traditional channels; The most frequently chosen and most convenient forms of communication are in-person at the office and by phone, with digital channels serving a complementary role. Residents expect full online service, especially for repetitive and well-structured matters (e.g., submitting applications, checking status, local payments), while for more complex tasks, they prefer face-to-face contact. The office's chatbot is perceived primarily as a tool for providing simple information and sharing the status of a case, while a significant group of people declares a lack of interest in using it; the voicebot is met with even greater reservations. Reported barriers to the acceptance of new communication technologies primarily concern the quality and accuracy of responses, personal data security, and fear of losing contact with an office employee.

Practical Implications: The results suggest that local governments should plan the development of digital tools within a multi-channel strategy, combining rather than replacing traditional channels with electronic ones, especially for matters requiring complex handling. Implementing chatbots and voicebots should primarily focus on simple information tasks and monitoring the status of issues, while ensuring an easily accessible path to contacting a staff member. Activities that build trust in new solutions and systematically evaluate the quality of responses and user experience are crucial.

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Originality/Value: *The originality/value of this article lies in its empirical analysis of residents' preferences for communicating with local government, while also considering traditional communication channels and modern AI-based tools such as chatbots and voicebots. It also highlights perceived barriers to the acceptance of these tools in the context of local government. An additional value is the contextualization of the analyses in the context of local government in Central and Eastern Europe, which is relatively less represented in the literature. The obtained results can serve as a reference point for further research.*

Keywords: *Communication, communication channels, chatbot, voicebot, resident preferences, local government, AI, technology.*

JEL codes: *Q33, H75, D83, H83, M39.*

Paper type: *Research article.*

Acknowledgement: *This research was co-financed by the Minister of Science under the "Regional Excellence Initiative.*



Ministerstwo Nauki
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

1. Introduction

The ongoing digitisation of public administration is transforming communication between citizens and local government. Alongside traditional forms of contact, such as office visits or phone calls, electronic channels are gaining increasing importance: websites, e-service portals, social media, mobile applications, and, in recent years, conversational tools based on artificial intelligence, such as chatbots and voicebots.

With growing expectations for service availability, office responsiveness, and the ability to handle matters remotely, the design and selection of communication channels is becoming one of the key challenges facing modern local government.

At the same time, the development of new communication tools does not automatically translate into widespread use by residents. The adoption of new communication solutions depends, among other things, on their adaptation to citizens' actual needs, the level of digital literacy, previous experience with public e-services, as well as the level of trust in the institution and the technologies used.

Conversational tools, designed to reduce the workload of office staff and facilitate the provision of information, receipt of requests, and the implementation of simple

procedures, are particularly important in this context. At the same time, they raise concerns among some members of the public about the quality and accuracy of responses, the protection of personal data, and the possibility of losing contact with a "live person."

The literature on the subject increasingly highlights the diversity of channel preferences and the tension between the government's desire to increase the share of electronic channels and citizens' persistent preference for face-to-face communication.

Analyses from the perspective of institutions implementing new solutions are emerging, but residents' perspectives on the configuration of communication channels, including the role of bots in contacts with local government, are still relatively rarely considered.

This background raises the fundamental research question of this article: how do residents perceive and prioritise available channels of communication with local government, and what factors facilitate and hinder the acceptance of digital tools such as chatbots and voicebots?

In particular, the analysis covered: preferred forms of contact with the municipal/city office in various situations, expectations regarding the scope of matters that should be fully supported online, declared willingness to use chatbots and voicebots for specific purposes, and concerns and barriers that may prevent residents from using new communication technologies.

The main aim of the article is to identify residents' communication channel preferences with local government, assess their willingness to use bots in contact with the office, and identify the main barriers to accepting these solutions. The main objective is further refined through additional research questions.

The article is theoretical and empirical in nature. It includes an introduction, a literature review, methodology, and the results of the conducted primary research. Finally, a discussion stemming from the conducted research and literature studies is presented, and conclusions are drawn. The article draws on literature analysis, online sources, and primary research conducted among municipal residents.

The article focuses solely on the citizen perspective – the perspective of local governments, their motivations, organisational and technical constraints, and how to define the success of implementing new communication tools are the subject of separate analyses.

This delimitation allows for an in-depth presentation of the expectations and concerns of residents, which creates a reference point for further comparative research comparing the positions of both sides of the dialogue.

2. Literatura Review

The literature on communication between residents and local governments and the use of conversational tools in public services is developing primarily in complementary areas, such as managing multi-channel communication in e-government, citizen attitudes towards e-government and artificial intelligence-based solutions, and research on trust in public administration chatbots and communication methods.

It is noticeable that the authors emphasise that the success of digitising public services depends not only on the availability of electronic channels, but also on how they are combined with traditional channels (Ebbbers, Pieterston, and Noordman, 2008; Madsen and Hofmann, 2019). However, there is a clear gap between the channels preferred by the administration (often motivated by cost-effectiveness) and the channels chosen by citizens, who are guided by factors such as the nature of the task, their own competencies, and their personal circumstances.

In the context of interactions/channels between citizens and government and channel selection, a popular model is the so-called Media Richness Theory (MRT). According to this theory, communication tasks that convey messages with a high degree of ambiguity, uncertainty, and complexity require communication channels with a high degree of "richness" (e.g., direct, face-to-face communication).

Four factors determine the richness of communication through a given medium: direct response, language diversity, personalisation, and the number of cues provided. Multichannel communication theory, in the context of local government communication with residents, emphasises the importance of diverse communication methods for increasing engagement, transparency, and effectiveness in management.

Digital platforms, especially social media, have become key tools enabling local governments to connect with citizens. Bonsón *et al.* (2015) emphasise the need for local governments to use platforms such as Facebook to support citizen participation and transparency in communication. This is consistent with the findings of Bego and Ymeraj (2021), who note that social media strengthens interactions with government and citizen accountability and can build trust between governments and communities.

Furthermore, Esposito *et al.* (2023) argue that digital governance, encompassing these communication platforms, enhances local governments' ability to collaboratively address social issues, thus promoting effective citizen engagement. Local governments are increasingly adopting multi-channel strategies to effectively communicate with diverse populations.

Studies (Ho and Cho, 2016; Kwon and Jeon, 2017; Damurski, 2025) emphasise that effective communication significantly contributes to public satisfaction with local

government activities; officials must tailor communication channels to the specific needs and preferences of their residents. The hybrid nature of communication necessary to meet community needs is crucial. This is particularly important because community heterogeneity can create communication and understanding challenges.

Local governments often focus solely on disseminating information rather than fostering meaningful dialogue. Omnichannel communication theory relies on two-way communication to strengthen relationships with citizens, ensuring inclusiveness and engagement (Epstein *et al.*, 2021; Wu, 2017; Buyannemekh *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, mobile instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp are transforming the way local governments communicate with residents, enabling fast and direct communication (Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés, 2022). By engaging with citizens through a variety of channels, both traditional and digital, such as social media and mobile messaging, local governments can foster greater transparency, increase citizen participation, and ultimately strengthen public trust.

A review of empirical studies from 2019 to 2025 on citizen attitudes toward AI-enabled e-government services was conducted by, among others, Savveli, Rigou, and Balaskas. The most frequently studied AI applications in e-government are virtual assistants and chatbots. The main outcome variables are behavioural intentions and service satisfaction, while the key determinants of positive attitudes are perceived usefulness, ease of use, trust, and perceived risk. At the same time, privacy, data security, and interface usability emerge as persistent sources of concern.

As the authors emphasise, the complexity of the user interface can lead to frustration and a decrease in the willingness to use these technologies, especially among less tech-savvy residents. Chatbots can genuinely improve access to public services and relieve the burden on traditional channels. Still, their impact on public values—such as equal access, transparency, and the ability to explain decisions—is ambivalent and depends on how they are integrated into the broader service ecosystem (Larsen and Følstad, 2024; Li and Wang, 2024; Pashchenko *et al.*, 2023; Mazmi, 2025). It is also important to emphasise that research findings (although few) indicate that the chatbot's communication style is important; politeness and proactivity increase the perceived "warmth-competence" of the bot, while overly rigid, task-oriented language reduces it.

3. Methodology

The research methodology is subordinated to the study's objective, which is to identify residents' preferences regarding communication channels with local government, their willingness to use conversational bots (chatbots and voicebots), and to identify barriers to the acceptance of these tools.

A quantitative approach was adopted, based on a survey conducted using the CAWI method on a group of 854 respondents, supplemented by a literature review. The study utilised an online survey, allowing for reaching a relatively large number of people in a relatively short time. However, this method has certain limitations, including the ease of opting out and the fact that only those with internet access can participate.

The survey, based on a self-developed questionnaire, was conducted between June and September 2025. Random sampling was employed. Due to the limited space in the article, only selected results are discussed.

4. Research Results and Discussion

Analysis of the results of a survey on preferred forms of contact with municipal offices indicates that traditional channels remain strong among the surveyed population. Respondents most frequently cited in-person visits to the office (54% of responses) and telephone contact (42%) as the preferred form of contact and the form perceived as most convenient.

These channels received significantly higher rates of indication than digital tools such as email (28%), the ePUAP platform (19%), or the contact form (12%) on the office's website. Solutions requiring more advanced digital skills – instant messaging, online chat, social media, and mobile apps – were relatively rarely mentioned. These results confirm that, despite the development of e-services, residents still perceive physical presence at the office and direct telephone conversations as the primary and most reliable forms of contact for official matters.

Regarding how local authorities should inform residents about their activities, the responses indicate the need to maintain a diverse set of tools. Respondents considered the official website and social media profiles to be the most important forms of communication, but they also attributed significant importance to traditional local information channels and face-to-face meetings with residents.

Comparing these results with statements regarding actual sources of information about events in the municipality shows that residents actually use both official channels, local media, and community media. Therefore, local government operates in a multi-channel information environment, where its messages compete for attention with other broadcasters.

The results were particularly clear in the area of crisis communication. When asked about their preferred method of receiving alerts regarding emergencies or threats, the vast majority of respondents (77%) indicated short text messages (SMS). Other channels – such as messages on social media, the website, or via a mobile app – were chosen significantly less frequently.

Interpreting these results, it can be assumed that in high-risk situations, residents prioritise the simplicity, directness, and widespread availability of a channel over the attractiveness of a technological solution.

SMS is perceived as a tool for reaching a broad audience, including those with lower digital literacy and those who don't use social media.

Respondents were also asked to rate which types of matters should receive full online support first. The highest percentages of responses concerned submitting and processing applications (63%), checking the status of submitted matters (43%), and processing payments and other simple financial activities (42%). These matters are repetitive, well-structured, and based on clearly defined procedures, which favours their digitalisation.

Matters requiring a more complex analysis of the resident's situation or consultation were mentioned less frequently. This data confirms that residents primarily expect improvements in those aspects of contact with the administration that can be relatively easily automated, while in more complex matters, they still prefer direct contact with a staff member.

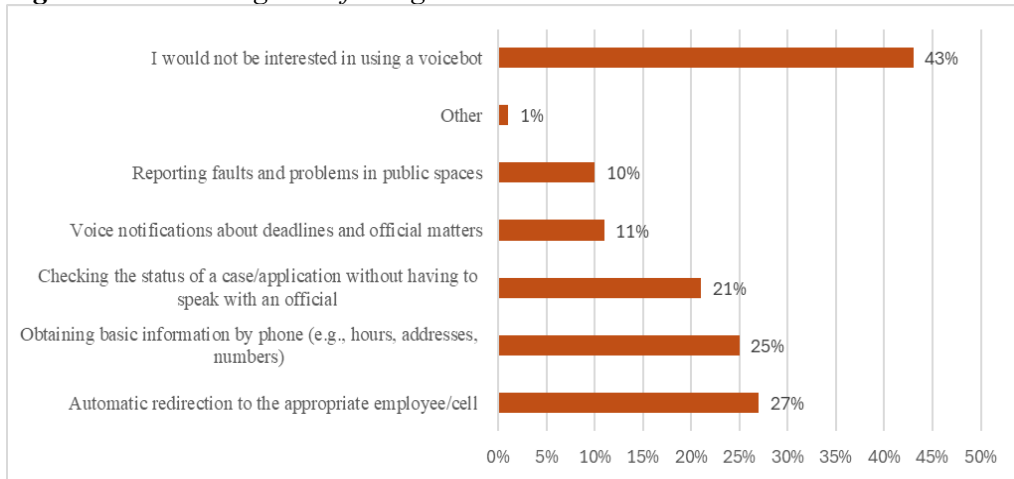
An analysis of responses regarding the chatbot provided by the municipal/city office shows that respondents see its potential primarily as a first-contact tool (Figure 1). The most frequently reported uses included obtaining basic information, such as office opening hours or contact details, and checking the status of a submitted case.

Next in line was the ability to obtain answers to frequently asked questions or report simple problems. A small number of people associated the chatbot's functionality with handling more complex processes, including scheduling office visits or providing updates. At the same time, a significant percentage of respondents – approximately one-third – declared they would not be interested in using a chatbot at all. This suggests that there is significant variation in the acceptance of this type of tool within the study population.

In the case of a voicebot, understood as an automated voice hotline, the level of declared willingness to use was even lower (Figure 2). The uses that respondents considered most likely (obtaining simple information, automatic telephone notifications, checking the status of a case) received lower scores than similar uses of a chatbot, and the percentage of people declaring a lack of interest in a voicebot was significantly higher.

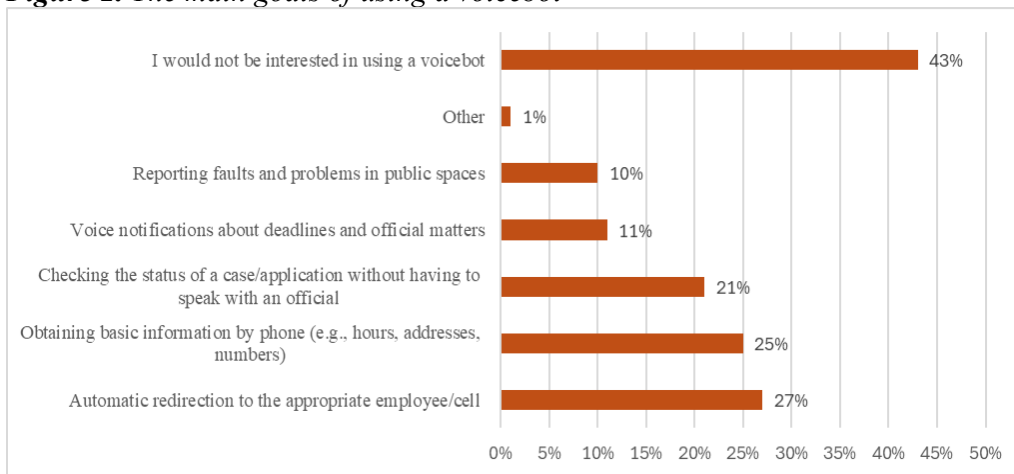
These results suggest that voice tools are perceived more skeptically, likely due to previous experience with automated hotlines and concerns about the accuracy of speech recognition and limited user influence on the conversation. It should be emphasised that younger people, primarily from urban communities, demonstrate a greater willingness to engage with artificial intelligence tools.

Figure 1. *The main goals of using a chatbot*



Source: *Own research.*

Figure 2. *The main goals of using a voicebot*



Source: *Own research.*

The survey also addressed concerns that could prevent residents from using new communication technologies with public offices, including chatbots, voicebots, and mobile applications. Concerns about the security and protection of personal data (46%) and the quality and accuracy of responses (42%) were most frequently cited.

Some respondents also expressed concern about the possibility of losing contact with an official in problematic situations (25%) and technical difficulties (10%). The structure of these responses indicates that acceptance barriers are largely trust-based: they concern the reliability of information, the transparency of system operation, and the certainty that human intervention will be available if necessary.

The results confirm the findings of the literature indicating the enduring nature of multi-channel communication between citizens and public administration. Research on the management of communication channels in e-government highlights that public administrations strive to increase the use of digital channels for efficiency reasons, while citizens consistently maintain a preference for traditional forms, especially in more complex and risky matters.

Residents' willingness to use automated communication tools, such as chatbots, in their interactions with local government is a multifaceted issue that is crucial for increasing citizen engagement and streamlining public service delivery. Local governments are increasingly integrating artificial intelligence (AI) tools to facilitate communication and enhance citizen engagement.

According to Veerraghava (2025), implementing AI-based communication tools significantly improves interactions between citizens and local government via social media, helping to alleviate issues such as language barriers and information overload that traditionally hinder effective communication. AI technologies optimise city management and enable local governments to proactively respond to community needs, suggesting the readiness of both residents and officials for this digital transformation (Smalec *et al.*, 2025).

However, residents' willingness to implement these technologies does not depend solely on local government initiatives; it also encompasses public attitudes and digital literacy, as highlighted in both the literature (Alshahrani, 2025; Indah *et al.*, 2025) and our own research. Residents must feel competent in navigating these technologies; trust is key.

Residents' willingness to use new channels of communication with local government, including interactions with bots, is strongly dependent on digital literacy, trust in technology and public administration, and the dynamics of community engagement. Local governments wishing to implement these technologies must prioritise building trust and improving digital skills among their constituents, thus creating an environment conducive to effective communication and public participation.

Communication between local governments and residents remains an area where technological innovation must coexist with expectations for direct contact, operational transparency, and the ability to obtain human assistance. Residents seek assurances that, in case of doubt, they will have access to the official responsible, and that their data will be processed securely and legally.

5. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

The results of our own research and a literature review suggest that residents' communication with local government remains largely rooted in traditional

channels, primarily in-person and telephone contacts, which are perceived as the most convenient and reliable.

Digital channels – email, online forms, and, to a lesser extent, social media – serve a complementary function, and their growing role does not translate into a shift away from direct contact with officials.

Residents' expectations for full online service focus on repetitive and well-structured matters, such as submitting applications, checking the status of a case, or making payments, which corresponds to the perception that these procedures are most susceptible to digitalisation.

From the citizens' perspective, maintaining multi-channel access and the ability to use traditional and digital channels simultaneously are crucial. They expect channels to be configured, not replaced – a combination of traditional and digital forms, tailored to the type of case, digital competencies, trust in the sender, and user preferences.

The acceptance of chatbots in public services is conditional, as it depends primarily on perceived usefulness, ease of use, trust, and perceived risk. Concerns about privacy and the loss of human contact are often highlighted.

Communication style and chatbot design are important, as empathy, courtesy, and the ability to clearly communicate the implementation goal can increase trust and satisfaction, while overly rigid, task-oriented language and a lack of transparency can have the opposite effect.

When planning the development of digital tools, local authorities should adopt a multi-channel strategy, assuming the parallel operation of traditional and electronic channels. However, efforts to increase the share of online channels should not lead to limiting the availability of in-person and telephone contact, particularly in relation to more complex matters and groups of residents with lower digital literacy.

Implementation of chatbots and voicebots should begin with informational and routine applications, such as answering frequently asked questions or presenting case status, and only then expand to more complex procedures. It is also essential to provide a clear way to connect with an office employee, which can mitigate concerns about "dehumanising" communication.

Local governments must conduct informational and educational activities explaining how new tools work, the principles of data processing, and the scope of institutional responsibilities, which helps build trust and reduce residents' concerns. It is also important to remember that implementing new communication channels requires systematic evaluation.

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