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THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CHATBOTS AND VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS FOR SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS

Introduction. *Modern legal systems face a chronic problem of limited access to justice, particularly for vulnerable populations and self-represented litigants (SRLs). Significant barriers are created by the high cost of legal services, the complexity of legal procedures, and information asymmetry.*

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, especially legal chatbots and virtual assistants, are viewed as a potential tool to overcome these obstacles. However, their implementation is not without risks, ranging from the inaccuracy of the information provided and algorithmic bias to the creation of a two-tiered system of justice. This issue is particularly relevant for Ukraine, which is undergoing active digital transformation and European integration, requiring the alignment of national innovations with European standards, particularly the provisions of the EU AI Act. Studying the effectiveness and risks of these tools is critically important for shaping a balanced state policy aimed at genuinely expanding access to justice, rather than creating an illusion of it.

Purpose. *The purpose of this article is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the impact of AI tools, such as chatbots and virtual assistants, on access to justice for self-represented litigants. The research aims to assess the real potential of these technologies to overcome existing barriers, identify key risks and ethical challenges, and develop a scientifically grounded hypothesis regarding the optimal model for their implementation into the Ukrainian legal system, taking into account international experience and European regulatory frameworks.*

Methods. *The research is based on a combination of general scientific and special methods. System analysis was applied to study the relationships between technological innovations, legal institutions, and social needs. The comparative-legal method was used to compare the experience of implementing legal technologies in the USA, the EU, and Ukraine. The formal-dogmatic method allowed for the analysis of regulatory acts, particularly the EU AI Act, which governs the use of AI. The case study method was used for a detailed examination of specific examples of AI tools (DoNotPay, A2J Author, "Pryntsyp", "Natalka"), which helped to identify their strengths and weaknesses.*

Synthesis and generalization enabled the formulation of conclusions and the development of the author's hypothesis.

Results. *The article proves that AI has a significant but ambiguous potential for expanding access to justice. The case studies showed that narrowly specialized, task-oriented tools (e.g., document generators like A2J Author) are significantly more effective and safer for SRLs than universal "robot lawyers" (like DoNotPay), which are prone to errors and create inflated expectations.*

Analysis of the US experience (LSC reports) indicates the effectiveness of the integrated "statewide portals" model. The EU's regulatory approach (AI Act) classifies AI in justice as "high-risk", requiring strict control. In Ukraine, there is a development of both civic (chatbot "Pryntsyp") and state (chatbot "Natalka" in "Diia") initiatives, but they are fragmented. A hypothesis is formulated that the optimal path for Ukraine is not the pursuit of creating a universal "AI judge", but the construction of a state ecosystem of integrated, narrowly specialized, and verified AI tools operating on a "single window" principle based on existing digital infrastructure.

Conclusion. *Artificial intelligence is not a panacea, but it can become a powerful tool for democratizing access to justice if approached correctly.*

Instead of the risky model of universal "AI lawyers", it is proposed to focus efforts on creating a national legal aid platform in Ukraine. This platform should unite narrowly specialized, verified AI modules (for generating lawsuits, checking documents, providing reference information) under state control and in accordance with EU AI Act standards. Such an approach, combining the proven effectiveness of tools like A2J Author with the integrated model of the LSC's "statewide portal", will provide real assistance to self-represented litigants, minimize risks, and ensure the responsible implementation of technology in the sensitive sphere of justice.

Keywords: *access to justice, artificial intelligence, chatbots, virtual legal assistants, self-represented litigants, legal tech, EU AI Act, digitalization of justice.*

Problem statement. The problem of access to justice is one of the most fundamental for any democratic state governed by the rule of law. It consists not only in guaranteeing the formal right to go to court but also in ensuring a real opportunity for a person to protect their rights and interests effectively and in a timely manner. However, for millions of people around the world, and in Ukraine in particular, this opportunity remains limited due to a set of barriers: the high cost of qualified lawyers' services, the complexity of procedural legislation, the geographical remoteness of courts, and a lack of basic legal information. This problem is particularly acute for so-called self-represented litigants (SRLs) individuals who are forced to defend themselves in court on their own.

In the last decade, a new powerful factor has emerged that could radically change the situation - artificial intelligence (AI). The emergence and rapid development of large language models and the tools based on them, such as chatbots and virtual assistants, have opened up prospects for automating the provision of legal information, assisting in the preparation of documents, and even developing legal strategies. These technologies promise to cheapen and democratize legal services, making them available 24/7 from any smartphone.

At the same time, their implementation in such a sensitive area as justice is associated with serious risks: from providing inaccurate or harmful advice to deepening digital inequality and creating a "second-class justice" for those who cannot afford the services of a human lawyer [1].

For Ukraine, this issue is of particular importance. The country is on the path of active digital transformation, a prime example of which is the "Dia" ecosystem of public services. In parallel, as part of its European integration processes, Ukraine is obliged to implement European standards, including in the field of regulating high technologies. The recently adopted EU Artificial Intelligence Act (EU AI Act) directly classifies AI systems used in the justice system as "high-risk" [2]. This creates an urgent need for a scientific understanding of how Ukraine can use the potential of AI to improve access to justice while avoiding risks and adhering to high European standards.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The topic of AI's impact on law and justice is being actively developed in the international academic community. Scholars from Stanford Law School, in their study on generative AI and legal aid, emphasize the potential of these technologies to automate routine tasks but also point to serious risks associated with AI "hallucinations" (generating false information) and maintaining client data confidentiality [3]. They warn against the hasty implementation of tools that have not undergone thorough verification.

D. Simshaw of Yale Law School proposes the concept of "interoperable legal AI", which involves creating a single ecosystem where different AI tools (public and private) can exchange data and work in a coordinated manner to provide comprehensive assistance to citizens [4]. This idea resonates with the recommendations of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in the US, which, in its report following the Summit on the Use of Technology even before the era of generative AI, called for the creation of "statewide legal portals" to serve as a single point of entry for citizens seeking legal assistance [5].

The American Bar Association (ABA) pays considerable attention to the problem, emphasizing that AI can both expand access to justice and exacerbate existing inequality by creating a two-tiered system: high-quality services from human lawyers for wealthy clients and potentially lower-quality automated services for the poor [6].

This topic is also beginning to gain momentum in the Ukrainian scientific discourse. Some researchers are analyzing the legal and procedural prerequisites for introducing AI into Ukraine's justice system, focusing on the need to adapt legislation and develop ethical standards [7]. Reviews of the Ukrainian Legal Tech market indicate its resilience and innovative potential even in the conditions of a full-scale war, highlighting projects such as Opendatabot and YouControl, which have already become part of the legal infrastructure [8]. At the same time, the analysis shows that most existing tools are focused on business or on facilitating the work of lawyers, rather than on providing direct assistance to citizens.

Despite the existence of a significant number of publications, a part of the problem remains unresolved, concerning the development of a specific, scientifically-based model for implementing AI assistants for self-represented litigants specifically in the Ukrainian context. Most studies either state general risks and benefits or focus on individual aspects (e.g., the use

of AI in court proceedings). The question remains open: what is the optimal path for Ukraine to encourage the development of universal "robot lawyers" following the example of Western startups, or to build a centralized state system of verified and narrowly specialized tools? This article aims to fill this very gap.

Formulation of the article's goals. The main purpose of this article is to develop and substantiate a hypothesis regarding the optimal strategy for using chatbots and virtual assistants to increase access to justice for self-represented litigants in Ukraine.

To achieve this purpose, the following tasks are set:

1. To systematize the main barriers to access to justice that can potentially be eliminated with the help of AI.
2. Based on case studies (DoNotPay and A2J Author), to determine the advantages and disadvantages of two fundamentally different models of AI assistants: universal and narrowly specialized.
3. To analyze the relevant experience of the US (the LSC's "single portal" concept) and the regulatory framework of the EU (AI Act) as a basis for developing a Ukrainian model.
4. To assess the current state and specifics of the development of legal AI tools in Ukraine, including state ("Natalka") and civic ("Pryntsyp") initiatives.
5. To formulate and justify a proposal for the creation of a national ecosystem of integrated, narrowly specialized AI legal aid tools as the most effective and safest path for Ukraine.

Presentation of the main research material. The path to expanding access to justice with the help of AI lies through a complex landscape of opportunities and dangers. To determine the optimal route for Ukraine, it is necessary to examine in detail two diametrically opposed approaches that have already taken shape in the international arena and to project them onto Ukrainian realities, taking into account the European regulatory vector.

Model 1: The universal "Robot lawyer" – temptation and risks on the example of DoNotPay

The startup DoNotPay, which positioned itself as "the world's first robot lawyer", is a textbook example of the "all at once" approach. The platform promised users help with a wide range of issues: from appealing parking tickets to filing lawsuits in consumer protection cases. The company's founder actively promoted the idea that AI could completely replace lawyers, making justice free and accessible to all [9].

However, the reality turned out to be much more complicated. Lawsuits were filed against the company, and the US Federal Trade Commission launched an investigation into allegations of misleading consumers. Critics pointed out that the tool generated legally incorrect documents, cited non-existent legal norms ("hallucinated"), and lacked proper verification by qualified lawyers. For a self-represented litigant who relies entirely on such a tool, the consequences can be catastrophic: missing procedural deadlines, filing an unfounded lawsuit, disclosing confidential information. The DoNotPay case vividly illustrates the fundamental problem of universal AI assistants: they create an illusion of competence that is not backed by real reliability. This is especially dangerous in jurisprudence, where the price of a mistake is extremely high.

Model 2: The narrowly specialized assistant effectiveness and safety on the example of A2J Author

In contrast to DoNotPay, there is another, less-publicized but much more successful and sustainable model. The A2J Author (Access to Justice Author) project, developed jointly by the Chicago-Kent College of Law and the CALI Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction, is a platform that does not try to replace a lawyer. Its goal is much more modest and specific: to help self-represented litigants correctly fill out complex court forms [10].

The system works on the principle of a guided interview. The user answers simple questions formulated in plain language, and the program automatically enters the answers into the appropriate fields of the official legal document. This approach has several key advantages. First, it minimizes the risk of error, as the AI operates within a strictly defined template rather than generating text "from scratch". Second, it does not create a false impression in the user that they are receiving a full-fledged legal consultation. A2J Author is a tool, not an advisor. Third, thanks to its reliability and narrow specialization, the project has gained the trust of the legal community and is integrated into the justice systems of 40 US states. This success proves that real help for SRLs lies not in promises to "win in court", but in solving their specific, urgent tasks, such as the correct preparation of documents.

International experience and regulatory frameworks: Lessons for Ukraine

The experience of the US and the EU offers two important benchmarks for Ukraine. On the one hand, there is the concept of "statewide legal portals" promoted by the LSC. The idea is to create a single online platform ("single window") that would unite various resources for SRLs: from reference information and document templates to tools like A2] Author and contacts of organizations providing free legal aid [5]. Such an integrated approach is much more effective than the existence of dozens of disparate websites and chatbots.

On the other hand, the European AI Act establishes strict requirements for AI systems used in the administration of justice. They are classified as "high-risk", which means a mandatory prior conformity assessment, registration in an EU database, and requirements for transparency, cybersecurity, and human oversight [2]. This approach reflects the understanding that in justice, efficiency cannot be achieved at the expense of fundamental rights.

The Ukrainian context and formulation of a hypothesis. In Ukraine, we are witnessing the emergence of both trends, but in a fragmented form. There are successful civic initiatives, such as the "Pryntsyp" chatbot, which provides narrowly specialized assistance to military personnel and their families on specific legal issues [11]. This is an example of a model close to A2] Author in its philosophy. At the same time, the state is taking steps to integrate AI into its services, as evidenced by the launch of the "Natalka" chatbot for consultations on the "Diia" portal [12]. The academic community and judicial governance bodies also recognize the inevitability of AI implementation, which is confirmed by amendments to the Code of Judicial Ethics and the development of concepts for the use of AI in the Supreme Court [7].

However, these initiatives do not yet form a unified strategy. There is a risk that the legal technology market will follow a path of spontaneous development, where, alongside useful specialized tools, Ukrainian analogues of DoNotPay will appear, misleading already vulnerable self-represented litigants.

In view of the above, the following hypothesis is proposed: the most effective and ethically sound path for Ukraine is to abandon the idea of creating universal "AI lawyers" and instead build a national, state-supported ecosystem of integrated and narrowly specialized AI legal aid tools.

This model should be based on three pillars:

1. A Centralized Platform: The creation of a single point of access ("Ukraine's legal portal") on the basis of "Diia" or a separate portal, consolidating all verified tools and resources. This would implement the LSC's concept.

2. Narrowly Specialized Modules: Instead of one large AI, a set of certified, reliable modules based on the A2J Author model: a "Statement of Claim Builder", a "Contract Correctness Checker", an "Inheritance Application Assistant", etc. Each module should solve one specific task.

3. Compliance with the EU AI Act: Each module allowed on the platform must undergo mandatory certification for compliance with the requirements for "high-risk" systems, ensuring transparency, accuracy, and the presence of human oversight.

Such an approach will allow the power of AI to be used to solve the real problems of citizens, minimize the risks demonstrated by the DoNotPay case, and ensure the development of legal technologies in Ukraine in accordance with the best world practices and European standards.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. This research confirms that artificial intelligence carries both significant potential for democratizing access to justice and serious risks capable of deepening existing inequality. An analysis of international experience and specific case studies allows us to conclude that the success of implementing these technologies depends not so much on their technical complexity as on a correctly chosen philosophy and strategy.

The main conclusion is that the race to create a universal "robot lawyer" capable of replacing a human lawyer is, at the current stage of technological development, a flawed and dangerous path for self-represented litigants. Such systems create the illusion of legal aid but do not guarantee its quality and reliability, which can lead to fatal legal consequences for the user.

Instead, a much more productive and safer model is one that focuses on creating narrowly specialized, task-oriented tools. Tools for automated document completion, checking the completeness of a document package for court submission, or providing reference information on a clearly defined topic have proven their effectiveness and gained trust among both users and the professional community.

For Ukraine, which is actively digitalizing public services and striving for integration into the European legal space, this opens up a unique opportunity to avoid the mistakes of other countries. Instead of a spontaneous and unregulated development of the legal chatbot market, the state can play a key role in shaping a responsible and effective ecosystem.

The hypothesis proposed in the article about creating a national platform of integrated, narrowly specialized, and verified AI modules is a concrete proposal for implementing such a strategy. Building such a system on the basis of the existing "Diia" infrastructure will

combine the proven effectiveness of the A2J Author approach, the strategic vision of the LSC regarding a "single portal", and the high standards of security and transparency laid down in the EU AI Act. This will provide real, not imaginary, assistance to millions of Ukrainians who today cannot afford professional legal help.

Prospects for further research in this area include:

- Developing a detailed technical and legal concept for a national legal aid portal, including the platform's architecture and mechanisms for module interaction.
- Studying the sociological aspects: the readiness of citizens to trust AI assistants in solving legal issues and their level of digital literacy.
- Developing criteria and procedures for the certification of legal AI tools I in accordance with the requirements of the EU AI Act and national legislation.
- Analyzing issues of liability for damage caused by the use of a low-quality AI assistant: who should be held responsible the developer, the state that certified the tool, or the user themself.

Resolving these issues will allow for a transition from general discussions to the practical implementation of a safe and effective system of access to justice in the age of artificial intelligence.

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О. А. Шамов. ВПЛИВ ШТУЧНОГО ІНТЕЛЕКТУ НА ДОСТУП ДО ПРАВОСУДДЯ: ЕФЕКТИВНІСТЬ ЧАТ-БОТІВ ТА ВІРТУАЛЬНИХ АСИСТЕНТІВ ДЛЯ САМОПРЕДСТАВНИКІВ

Проблема. *Сучасні правові системи стикаються з хронічною проблемою обмеженого доступу до правосуддя, особливо для незахищених верств населення та осіб, що виступають у суді без адвоката (self-represented litigants, SRLs). Висока вартість юридичних послуг, складність правових процедур та інформаційна асиметрія створюють значні бар'єри. Технології штучного інтелекту (далі – ШІ), зокрема юридичні чат-боти та віртуальні асистенти, розглядаються як потенційний інструмент для подолання цих перешкод. Однак їх впровадження не є позбавленим ризиків, що варіюються від неточності наданої інформації та алгоритмічної упередженості до створення дворівневої системи правосуддя. Особливої актуальності це питання набуває для України, яка перебуває в процесі активної цифрової трансформації та євроінтеграції, що вимагає узгодження національних інновацій із європейськими стандартами, зокрема з положеннями Акта про ШІ (EU AI Act). Дослідження ефективності та ризиків цих інструментів є критично важливим для формування збалансованої державної політики, спрямованої на реальне розширення доступу до правосуддя, а не на створення ілюзії такого доступу.*

Мета. *Метою статті є комплексний аналіз впливу ШІ-інструментів, як-от чат-боти та віртуальні асистенти, на доступ до правосуддя для самопредставників. Дослідження спрямоване на оцінювання реального потенціалу цих технологій для подолання існуючих бар'єрів, ідентифікацію ключових ризиків та етичних викликів, а також розробку науково обґрунтованої гіпотези щодо оптимальної моделі їх впровадження в українську правову систему з урахуванням міжнародного досвіду та європейських регуляторних рамок.*

Методи дослідження. *Дослідження базується на сукупності загальнонаукових і спеціальних методів. Системний аналіз був застосований для вивчення взаємозв'язків між технологічними інноваціями, правовими інститутами та соціальними потребами. Порівняльно-правовий метод використовувався для зіставлення досвіду впровадження правових технологій у США, ЄС та Україні. Формально-догматичний метод дав змогу проаналізувати нормативні акти, зокрема EU AI Act, що регулюють використання ШІ. Метод кейс-стаді був використаний для детального розгляду конкретних прикладів ШІ-інструментів (DoNotPay, A2] Author, «Принцип», «Наталка»), що дало нагоду виявити їхні сильні й слабкі сторони. Синтез та узагальнення дали змогу сформулювати висновки й розробити авторську гіпотезу*

Основні результати дослідження. *У статті доведено, що ШІ має значний, але неоднозначний потенціал для розширення доступу до правосуддя. Дослідження кейсів показало, що вузькоспеціалізовані, орієнтовані на конкретні завдання інструменти (наприклад, генератори документів, як A2J Author) є значно ефективнішими та безпечнішими для SRLs, ніж універсальні «роботи-юристи» (як DoNotPay), які схильні до помилок і створюють завищені очікування. Аналіз досвіду США (звіти LSC) вказує на ефективність моделі інтегрованих «загальнодержавних порталів». Регуляторний підхід ЄС (AI Act) класифікує ШІ в правосудді як «високоризиковий», що вимагає чіткого контролю. В Україні спостерігається розвиток як громадських (чат-бот «Принцип»), так і державних (чат-бот «Наталка» в «Дії») ініціатив, проте вони є фрагментарними. Сформульовано гіпотезу, що оптимальним методом для України є не гонитва за створенням універсального «ШІ-судді», а побудова державної екосистеми інтегрованих, вузькоспеціалізованих верифікованих ШІ-інструментів, які діють за принципом «єдиного вікна»на базі існуючої цифрової інфраструктури.*

Висновки та конкретні пропозиції. *Штучний інтелект не є панацеєю, але може стати потужним інструментом для демократизації доступу до правосуддя за умови правильного підходу. Замість ризикованої моделі універсальних «ШІ-адвокатів» пропонується зосередити зусилля на створенні в Україні національної платформи правової допомоги. Ця платформа має об'єднати вузькоспеціалізовані, верифіковані ШІ-модулі (для генерації позовів, перевірки документів, надання довідкової інформації) під державним контролем та відповідно до стандартів EU AI Act. Такий підхід, що поєднує доведену ефективність інструментів на кшталт A2J Author з інтегрованою моделлю «загальнодержавного порталу» LSC, дасть змогу надати реальну допомогу самопредставникам, мінімізувати ризики й забезпечити відповідальне впровадження технологій у чутливу сферу правосуддя.*

Ключові слова: *доступ до правосуддя, штучний інтелект, чат-боти, віртуальні правові асистенти, самопредставники, legal tech, EU AI Act, цифровізація правосуддя.*

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