Case study about improving sales in AI based chatbots

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the potential of AI based chatbots in improving sales and customer engagement, with a specific focus on the electricity market in Finland. The study is conducted as a case study for Fortum Markets Oy, aiming to develop a roadmap for enhancing their chatbot to better serve as a sales tool. The research combines a literature review, benchmarking of chatbots used by electricity companies (n=70), and semi-structured interviews with potential customers (n=10).

The literature review highlights the evolving role of AI chatbots in business operations, emphasizing their ability to automate processes, enhance customer experience, and drive sales. The findings suggest that chatbots can play a crucial role in reducing purchase hesitation and converting hesitant customers into actual buyers.

Benchmarking shows limited chatbot adoption in the electricity industry, but there are significant improvement opportunities. The highest-performing chatbots are capable of delivering high-quality responses and engaging customers efficiently. However, many of them remain more focused on serving existing customers rather than attracting new ones. A chatbot's primary role in boosting sales is to reduce purchase hesitation.

Semi-structured interviews identify key factors influencing customer experience with chatbots, including the importance of quick and easy access to information, smooth handover to human agents, and personalized product recommendations. The interview findings corroborated the theoretical framework, revealing that hesitant customers often seek assistance from chatbots to gain a clearer understanding of product features and receive support before making a purchase decision.

Based on the research findings, a roadmap is developed for Fortum Markets Oy, prioritizing actions to improve product recommendations, enhance the handover process to human agents, and encourage customer conversations. The roadmap aims to make the chatbot an integral part of the sales funnel, ultimately improving customer engagement and driving sales.

This study provides valuable insights for electricity companies and other service providers looking to leverage AI chatbots to enhance their sales strategies and customer experience.

Keywords
Chatbot, sales, customer experience, sales improvement, artificial intelligence (AI)

Contents

1 Introduction

World is changing around us and companies need to adapt to the new way of interactions. More people are using real time communication instead of the traditional communication methods such as calls and emails. This is challenging our old ways of selling. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 18, 24) Chatbots are great tools for providing personalized user experience helping customers in their needs (Needle 2021). It is not only customer service that benefits from AI chatbots. AI-powered recommendation bots can help customers to find correct products for them. This is beneficial for both customer and business. (Newman & McDonald, 2018, 218)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is used in multiple organizations to improve operations (Haan 2024). Many people are using AI services even without knowing they are using AI technology (Needle 2021). AI is used mostly to make operations more efficient. Most common use case for AI based chatbots is in customer service (Haan 2024). Chatbots have been used to help customer service and answer FAQ type of questions. With the recent development of large language models chatbots have now more capabilities than before to help customers in their needs. (Lancaster 2023) It is seen that chatbots can also potentially help companies to drive sales. Companies looking for savings are getting help from AI tools which can automate repetitive tasks, improve efficiency, and save costs (Thompson 2024 Chapter 1). Consumers expect to get personalized offers and interactions from companies. Sales is traditionally seen as personal, so we need to consider if chatbot is able to give consumers the warmth and empathy needed in closing the sale. Chatbots can be anyhow implemented to have their own part in sales funnel. (Arora, Liu, Robinson, Stein, Ensslen, Fiedler & Schüler 2021) Most of the business owners expect AI to have positive impact on their business and drive them for growth (Haan 2024). The desired customer experience is enabled by technology, and improvements should focus on meeting customer expectations (Newman & McDonald, 2018, 17).

Fortum Markets Oy acts as the case company for this thesis. The case organization and its ways of working are familiar to the thesis writer, as the thesis writer has Sales Process Improvement Manager role in the case company. Now, the case company utilizes a chatbot to assist customers in resolving their issues. The chatbot is regarded as a crucial tool for customer service, enabling the efficient handling of customer inquiries. However, leveraging the chatbot for sales development has not been a primary focus. This thesis aims to offer new insights to the case company on how to effectively use the chatbot as a sales tool.

This thesis discusses how Fortum Markets Oy, the case organization of the study, should improve their chatbot to improve sales performance. This thesis presents development proposals and a

roadmap for chatbot development. Proposals will be based on literature review, benchmarking peer companies' chatbots and semi-structured interviews of potential customers.

The case organization is presented in Chapter 1.1, and the research objective and research questions are introduced in Chapter 1.2.

1.1 Presentation of the case organization

This thesis is made for Fortum Markets Oy. Fortum is a Nordic electricity company whose core business areas are CO2 free electricity production, electricity sales, district heating, and waste management and recycling services. Fortum is one of the cleanest electricity producers in the Europe. Biggest shareholder for Fortum is Finland's Prime Minister's Office which owns 51,26 % of Fortum's shares. (Fortum 2024a)

This study focuses on the Fortum Consumer Solutions unit, which provides energy solutions to consumers and small and medium-sized enterprises. As the largest electricity retailer in the Nordics, Fortum serves 2,4 million customers and holds a 15 % market share in the region. Fortum offers electricity, digital services, and other value-added services to its customers in the Nordics. (Fortum 2024b) In 2024 Fortum was recognized as the most trustworthy electricity provider in Finland according to a yearly consumer study. (Luotetuinmerkki 2024)

1.2 Research objective, methodology and research questions

The objective of this thesis is to determine how chatbots can meet the unique needs of electricity consumers and to gather ideas for improving chatbots as part of the sales funnel. In this thesis, we aim to understand how B2C consumers experience different chatbots and how these chatbots can be integrated into the company's sales strategy. Planned outcome this thesis is a roadmap for chatbot development.

The research approach in this thesis is a case study. The case company has a problem which is chatbot development to support sales and this case study is planned to offer the case company development proposals. Case study is a good method for gaining understanding of different aspects of the research problem. Usually in a case study more than one research method is utilized. (McCombes, 2019). This thesis utilizes two methods, benchmarking and semi-structured interviews to gather data to answer research questions.

This study answers to following research questions RQ1-RQ4.

> RQ1: What role can chatbots play in company's sales strategy and how to effectively utilize chatbots in sales?

RQ2: How other electricity companies present their offering in chatbots and what we can learn about that?

RQ3: Which user experience factors influence the effectiveness of AI chatbots in driving sales, considering both positive and negative drivers affecting customer experience and willingness to become a customer?

RQ4: How can the case company improve their chatbot as part of their sales funnel?

The research questions will be addressed through benchmarking, literature review, and semi-structured interviews. The literature review aims to explore the role of chatbots in a company's sales strategy. Benchmarking will provide valuable insights into how the case company's competitors operate today, although it does not cover customer experiences with chatbots. To fill this gap, potential customers are interviewed as part of the thesis. Prior to the interviews, the interviewees will be shown a brief demo of the case company's chatbot. The question set will focus on user experience and how the chatbot could support them in the purchasing process.

The goal of this thesis is to create a roadmap to enhance the role of chatbots in the company's B2C sales funnel. The roadmap will be based on research conducted during the thesis process.

1.2.1 Limitations of this thesis

Limitations of this thesis. This thesis focuses on B2C customers who use chatbots when buying electricity in Finland. The case company for this study operates in many different countries but this thesis will be limited to Finland. This due to the differences in electricity markets across carious countries. The specific features of the electricity market in each country would need to be understood to execute research in multiple countries.

Consumer segment is selected because benchmarking B2B chatbots would only give a limited amount of information. Due to the limited number of companies with B2B chatbots, benchmarking will provide only a restricted amount of information. Benchmarking focuses on new customers because some existing customer services require logging in as a customer, which would significantly limit the number of companies that can be tested. To fully understand user experience, this thesis includes interviews with potential customers about their experiences and preferences when using chatbots.

Focus on this thesis is in chatbots using text format. While voice chatbots may become more common in the future, they are currently not widely used in the electricity industry in Finland. Due to these limitations, the findings of this thesis are not scalable to other countries or industries beyond

electricity sales. However, some parts of the thesis may be relevant to the B2B segment, as there are similarities between B2C and B2B segments.

1.2.2 Terminology and the main concepts used in this thesis

In this thesis, several key terms and concepts are used to explain the impact of AI chatbots in business operations, customer experience, and sales.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): AI refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines that are programmed to think and learn like humans. In the context of this thesis, AI is primarily used in chatbots to automate customer interactions and improve efficiency. (Copeland, 2025)

Chatbot: A chatbot is a software application designed to simulate human conversation through text or voice interactions. Chatbots can be rule based or AI-driven. (Church 5 September 2023)

Natural language processing (NLP): AI branch that focuses on understanding human language. Computers are programmed to analyze text and spoken words to mimic human language. (Nadkarni, Ohno-Machado, & Chapman 2011).

Large language models (LLM): LLMs are advanced AI models that can understand and generate human-like text. They are used in chatbots to improve the quality and relevance of responses by learning from vast amounts of data. (Church 5 September 2023)

Customer experience (CX): Customer experience encompasses all interactions a customer has with a company, including feelings, brand image, and other factors. It is influenced by both logical and emotional elements and is crucial for customer loyalty and satisfaction. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 1.1)

Sales funnel: The sales funnel represents the journey a customer takes from initial awareness to final purchase. (Smith 2025)

Omnichannel approach: This approach focuses on providing a seamless and consistent customer experience across all channels, including online, in-store, and mobile. It prioritizes customer needs and ensures that all channels work together to deliver a unified experience. (Villani 2019, 116, 145)

2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis delves into several key themes that are crucial for understanding the impact of AI chatbots on business operations, customer experience, and sales. (Chapter 2) Recent development of artificial intelligence (AI) is fundamentally changing businesses. AI is not only automating many processes but also changing the nature of work. (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 1-2) The biggest change in customer service is happening in online channels. In the future customers might be interacting more with AI bots than with real workers (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 92-94). Customers often want to resolve problems themselves by exploring their options in internet and quite often when they end up calling to customer service their attempts to solve their problems in self-service channels have failed. (Villani 2019, 17)

Technology is affecting our behavior (Newman & McDonald, 2018, 81). Customers are expecting to have possibilities to choose how to interact with the company. Self-service is not preferred by every customer, but it is a way to use resources wisely. (Aarnikoivu 2005,18) Today's customers expect to be served via multiple channels. Seamless customer experience is especially important in mobile channels. Customers are looking for conversational capabilities from service channels. (Newman & McDonald, 2018, 77)

Customer expectations are evolving quickly. When customers experience innovation or get exceptional service from some company they begin to expect similar improvements from other companies as well. (Cleveland 2021, 4) When customers interact with one company, they are not only comparing this company to other companies in the same industry but to all the companies they have interacted with (Villani 2019, 4-5). Rather than technology it is about meeting customer needs and expectations (Cleveland 2021, 4). In a multichannel world the businesses are centered around channels when they should be around the customer (Newman & McDonald, 2018, 83). Customer needs to be placed in the center of the organization to ensure the solutions work for their needs (Villani 2019, 18).

2.1 Customer experience

For consumers, customer experience is a combination of all the experiences the customer has had with the company. It is not only about encounters, but also about feelings, brand image, and other factors. It is not always a rational thinking, and company can't completely control customer experience of a single person. However, companies can make decisions what kind of experiences and encounters they aim to build for their customers. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 1.1) Customer experience is not something that is only nice to have. Delighted and happy customers are more likely to be loyal to the brand and to re-purchase more often. (Villani 2019, 33) Customer

experience starts already before purchase. Customers will do searches about the company from different channels before making purchase decision and final commitment. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 23) It cannot be definitively stated what constitutes a great customer experience, as it evolves and changes over time. This is why staying connected to the world and being aware of current trends is essential. (Cleveland 2021, 4) Good customer experience can also differentiate between companies with similar offerings (Aarnikoivu 2005, 20). It is not only about delivering what is expected and meeting customer needs, but also about positive surprises. When something extra tailored to their needs is provided, customers will feel valued and appreciated. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 23)

Electricity sales in Finland contains around 50 companies which are selling electricity to consumers (Energiavirasto 2024). Intense competition has made companies to realize that it is crucial to keep existing customers happy, not just to focus on acquiring new ones. The services should prioritize meeting customer needs, rather than just being efficient from the company's perspective. (Villani 2019, 18) Customer experience is not formed in only one touchpoint or interaction with the customer. It is a combination of all the interactions with the company. Bad experience in one touchpoint can ruin an otherwise excellent experience somewhere else. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 23) Customer experience is related to every aspect of a company. In an ideal situation all the departments at the company collaborate freely to develop the best consistent experience for the customer. (Villani 2019, 27)

When selecting the appropriate technology for a company, it is essential to first determine the desired customer experience. Understanding the experience sought by core customer segments is crucial. (Newman & McDonald 2018, 17) Today’s technology should be seen as an enabler for a great customer experience (Villani 2019, 36). For a company, it is important to know the needs of their clients. Companies are collecting data to understand their customers’ needs, but important thing is how this collected data transfers into actions which improve customer experience. (Kumar & Kotler 2024, 44) Delivering great customer experience requires a company to understand that customer behavior is influenced by both logic and emotion. It matters a lot how customers feel about the service. Even when offered the cheapest product with good quality, customers may still not be loyal. This can happen if they feel the company is distant and does not evoke positive feelings and emotions. (Villani 2019, 27, 30-31) When customers are happy and delighted about their experience, they come for more. This is an important reason for companies to put effort to improve their customer experience. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 2.1)

2.1.1 Key factors of customer experience

There are multiple factors effecting B2C customer experience (McIntosh 2024a). Some of the customer expectations are personal and changing over time and some are more universal. Some of

the more universal customer expectations are for example personalization and easiness to use services on mobile phone. (Villani 2019, 8) Behind customer experience there are some psychological factors. Good customer experience supports customer's image of themselves. Customers want to feel that they made a good decision which is aligned with their self-image. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 2.1) Customer also wants to feel empowered to have correct information to make correct decisions for their personal needs (Villani 2019, 8). For example, if customers see themselves as environmentally conscious, they will be pleased when the products they purchase align with their self-image as sustainable consumers (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 2.1).

When making a purchase, customers are looking for value. Value is the combination of the benefits customers receives from a purchase; minus the sacrifices they make for that. Value can be derived from the experiences customers gain with the product or how well it meets their pre-existing needs. Sacrifices include the price paid for the product or service and the time spent acquiring it. Today, customers highly value their time and effort, and they are often willing to pay more for options that are easy and fast, rather than similar quality options that require more time and effort. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 1.1) Customers live in hectic world and they want to get timely service. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 7) McKinsey & Company did a survey asking first time customers about the importance of different factors in their purchasing experience. Top three factors were: "Make it easy for me to navigate in-store and online", "Give me relevant product/service recommendations", and "Tailor messaging to my needs". This shows that personalization and easy navigation plays important role in good customer experience. (Arora et al. 2021) Customers value their time and want to know what they can expect and when. Especially when it comes to customer enquiries, customers want to know what they can expect answer (McIntosh 2024a). Customers want to be able to finish their purchase in easy way, but if they need help, they want it to be available. Customers are humans and they expect to get empathy and understanding. If a customer has a complaint, they will complain. If it is made easy, they will do it straight to the company. Otherwise, they will complain to their friends and family or in social media. (Villani 2019, 8)

Key part of the customer experience is exceeding expectations. By exceeding customer expectations, a company can differentiate itself from its competitors. Customers want to feel enlightened about the encounter they had with the company. Positive surprises that make customers happy also help build a stronger connection to the company, especially if these positive experiences are remembered. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 2.1 & chapter 3.0) If a company is unique and trustworthy, it will be remembered by customers. It is important to ensure that high expectations are not built up if they cannot be met, as this would result in a poor customer experience. (Kortesoja & Gerdt, 2016, 79 & 108)

In addition to individual encounters, value is also created as the customer relationship endures and deepens. For example, trust usually develops during a longer period and increases the overall value of the customer relationship to the customer. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 2.3) It is important that a company is trustworthy in every encounter with their customers. Over time, customers may become reluctant to switch to competitors if they perceive the current company as irreplaceable. (Kortesoja & Gerdt, 2016, 79-80)

2.1.2 Omnichannel approach

Technology can enable a company's success when used in an intelligent way. Leading companies today prioritize the needs of the clients over their own. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 16) Omnichannel approach focuses on providing a seamless and consistent customer experience across all channels, including online, in-store, and mobile. It prioritizes customer needs and ensures that all channels work together to deliver a unified experience. Customer is the one selecting which channel they want to use, not the company. The difference between omnichannel and multichannel approaches is that in the multichannel approach focuses on different channels working together. In contrast, the omnichannel approach focuses on providing a unified and consistent experience for the customer, ensuring that the company message and customer experience remain the same regardless of the channel used. (Villani 2019, 116, 145) Consistency is an important factor in building a social relationship. (Adam, Wessel & Benlian 2020, 431) This also applies to sales. The company's tone of voice should remain consistent whether customers are purchasing products online, through telemarketing, or via chat. This doesn't mean that the salespersons shouldn't use their personality. In sales it is good to have personal touch, but it should however be aligned with wanted company experience. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 168-169) AI can help companies to maintain the same tone of voice and consistent customer experience in all the channels company is using. This can help the companies in building their omnichannel strategy. (Kumar & Kotler 2024, 91)

In many companies, marketing and sales teams have not been properly aligned. Often companies have allowed these departments to operate independently, leading to misaligned goals. This lack of coordination has resulted in an inconsistent buying experience for customers. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 63) Marketing and sales teams create expectations for customers. Companies need to fulfill these promises to ensure a positive customer experience. (Löytänä & Kortesuo, 2011, chapter 3.9) If different functions within a company are not working well together, it can result in a poor customer experience due to unclear processes. The company will fail to focus its resources in the right areas if, for example, the goals for marketing and sales are not aligned. Mismanagement of different channels and functions can lead to a loss of revenue. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 18)

Nowadays many consumers use multiple channels when they interact with companies. (McIntosh & Geller 2023) It is important that companies find the balance between using digital technology and maintaining human presence and empathy (Villani 2019, 20). Companies want to guide customers to use self-service channels, but Gartner survey results show that only 14 % of the cases can be completely solved through self-service (Moncus, Hedlin & Sladdin 2024). In recent years, number of phone calls to customer service has dropped as more people are using self-service channels. However, the calls that customer service representatives do receive are becoming increasingly complex. (Villani 2019, 18) Some customers don't prefer using phone if they have other options. Especially customers who are using online channels often prefer chat or other instant messaging service to solve their problem instead of calling customer service. (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, 138-139) When thinking about the phone channel, customers select it quite often. However, it is questionable if they do so because they prefer this channel or because they feel that other channels are so bad that it is their best option. The problem with e-mail channel is the delay in response. Customers don't want to wait for the answers. Sometimes phone call or chat is better because of the quicker response. Customers want to be able to do as much as possible by themselves. Customers don't want to wait for assistance and are happy to use self-service channels and AI assistants that are easily available. (Villani 2019, 15, 210)

In multichannel approach it is important to avoid customer pain points. Points of pain are moments of communication where customer feels frustrated or confused. This might happen if company is not transparent enough. It can also be because of poor management of customer expectations when the customer expects faster delivery than what is possible. Customer frustration might also be caused by poor processes or poor communication. (Villani 2019, 100) In real life, many customers appreciate that their expectations are met. Companies should therefore focus on the core customer experience, ensuring that things work as they should and that there are as few complaints and deviances as possible. (Löytänä & Kortesuo, 2011, chapter 3.1) Sometimes customers experience frustration when transferring from one channel to another. Most common transition for a customer from channel to another is changing from self-service to a phone call. Customers feel it is easier to transfer from website to using chat, but if chat can't meet customer expectations, they feel frustrated. The most frustrating experience for a customer is when a chat agent asks them to return to a website, they are having the trouble with. (McIntosh & Geller 2023) Customers expect service level consistency, no matter which channel they are using. No matter which channel they are using. They don't want to explain the same thing repeatedly when switching channels. (Villani 2019, 15) It is also important that customers know what to expect from different channels. For example, if there is a waiting time, the customer wants to know that and then in urgent matters they can choose another channel for communication. (McIntosh & Geller 2023) Sometimes customer faces a doom-loop. This is a situation which leaves the customer feeling stuck with their problem. For

example, when a chatbot can't answer their question and isn't able to direct them to a live agent or provide any other assistance. Doom-loop can involve even more channels. Customer can try first solve their problem in self-service, then chatbot which guides customer to email company and email tells customer to call. This situation is extremely frustrating for customers. (Sladdin, Alvord, Ross, Elliott, O'Sullivan, Weber & McIntosh 2024) Time is essential when customers are dealing with companies. Too long waiting times get customers frustrated and raise negative feelings towards the company. (Villani 2019, 103)

When customer is facing issues in online self-service, chat can improve their customer experience (McIntosh & Geller 2023). It is important to have smooth transitions from chat to other channels if the chat is not resolving the customer's issue. Chat is expected to be a fast and efficient channel, so if chatbot fails to help customers, they need to be transferred to human agent quickly. When interacting with a human agent, customers expect prompt answers. Sometimes this is not the case as human agent might have to deal with several open chat discussions at the same time. (Villani 2019, 126-127) When omnichannel processes are working correctly, they better meet customer expectations than using a single service channel. Customers prefer to be able to select which channels they use. Digital channels can also bring savings for the company, thus succeeding in omnichannel experience brings benefits both for the consumer and for the company. (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, 140-142)

2.2 Sales today

The buying process ultimately involves a discussion between the buyer and seller, which may result in the customer purchasing the company's products. (Cancel & Gerhard, 2019, 20) This process isn't always the same. Customers use different channels in different order (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 61). As the customers today have huge variety of suppliers to choose from and it is likely that customers are aware of the competitors' offerings and selections. Online services have made it easy for customers to search for options and switch suppliers. (Villani 2019, 5) Expectations towards salespeople have increased. Customers are used to search for product information from the internet and it is embarrassing for the company if a customer knows more than a sales agent. (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, 55-56) In real-time world customers want to be able to buy and get service when they need it. Customer has the power to select when they want to make purchase and from where they want to do it. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 7) Customers today are also less likely to be loyal to one company than before (Villani 2019, 5).

When customer makes the purchase decision, they are not solely purchasing the product. Furthermore, they are purchasing value that this product brings to them. Value is not the same for every customer. Some customers see more value in easiness and some customers are looking for

emotional value. They want to feel that they are making the world a better place or belonging to a group. However, the most common value the customers are looking for is cheap prices. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 93-94) Today's customers don't only care about the product itself and the company they buy it from, but they also care about the purchasing process. It matters how easy it is for them to buy and how good service they are getting. If buying process feels complicated, too slow or customer fails to get service on time, they will turn to competitors. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 15) When making a buying decision, customers consider their earlier experiences about the company and what they have heard about it from others or from other sources like social media. (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, 74-75) When selling value, it creates more loyalty than selling only with cheap prices. When selling value, the brand needs to have a value promise, such as driving for a fossil-free world. Next step is to find a segment that is interested in this value promise. Building brand value requires being active and systematic, ensuring the message is consistent throughout the company. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 97) Customers are also more likely to remember getting good service instead of a cheap offer (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, 105).

Customers expect companies to be present in social media. No matter the channel, the customers are expecting to get consistent service. Service level should maintain the same regardless how the customers interact with the company. (Villani 2019, 8) In a world where the customers have the power to find all the information by themselves and are easily able to turn to competitors if they are not happy with the service, old ways of selling are not working anymore. Instead of pushing for closing the deal, salesperson should guide customers kindly through the buying journey. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 167) Companies have noticed that it is not profitable only to acquire new customers. Additionally, companies need to consider the entire lifecycle value of the customer. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 18)

Customer experience is one of the driving factors for sales. In digital era, customers expect more from the companies. They want fast, flexible and personalized services across different channels and processes. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 18) Companies who want to make customers buy their products, should listen to them, find out their needs and present the company's product value to meet the specific needs (Löytänä & Kortesuo, 2011, chapter 3.7). Companies that excel in personalization are more likely to see increase in their revenue compared to those that do not tailor their offers. According to a survey conducted by McKinsey & Company, 71 % of customers expect personalization, and 76 % of them become frustrated when they do not receive it. Personalization is a key driver of loyalty and engagement. Over time, loyalty grows, and customers are more likely to repeat purchasing if the content they receive from a company is personalized. (Arora et al. 2021)

Sales today is focusing on understanding the customer's needs and providing solutions to fulfill them. This is done with an approach combining technology, such as data analytics and CRM system, to long term customer relationships building in social media and other platforms. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 23) Ensure that customers understand product and value of it by communicating it clearly. When customer knows what benefits they are getting from a product they will appreciate it more. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 3.3) Customers want to use self-service channels and they want to find transparent and accurate information about company's offering. It is easy to lose customer's trust after purchase, if they find out that product features weren't clearly stated to them before purchase decision. (Villani 2019, 18) Usually company brings value to customer with their product or service. However, sometimes customers can build up value by themselves with support of the company. For instance, different apps help customers to build up value by themselves. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 2.3)

It is good to understand that different customer segments have different preferences when they are making purchases. Millennials are doing more research about the company and its services on their own. When older generations trust more on the personal interactions with persons, millenials are more likely to use self-service channels like chatbots when they are searching for information. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 32) Digitalization sometimes makes older generation feel that they are not welcome when company only offers digital options for interactions. If customers include older generations, it might be wise to offer them an option to talk to real life salespersons who understands their needs. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 141) It is good to understand that first impression about customer segment is not always the correct one. For instance, older generations are increasingly using digital services. (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, 127) A company should acknowledge their ideal customer segment to focus on that and to understand better the segment's needs and preferences. This information can be used in product development. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 32)

2.2.1 Sales management in omnichannel world

Sales management is no longer just about leading sales agents. Nowadays it includes omnichannel management of all revenue-generating areas (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 15). Customers navigate between different channels based on customer needs and companies cannot control how the channels are selected (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, 47). Sales needs to be a central part of the company's strategy development. Without sales, there will be no revenue, and sales agents still play a significant role in generating that revenue for the company. Digitalization has transformed sales, and now it is not only the sales agents that is responsible for it. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 57, 62) Customer journey today is spread to many different channels managed by many different teams. This has contributed to working in silos which creates obstacles to achieving revenue

targets. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 18) Leading sales today is not leading individual teams but leading the whole customer journey including all the different channels. Sometimes companies which have poor strategy are creating problems by having different goals for sales and for other teams. Sales teams might be encouraged to overpromise to customers which is leading to problems when product is not as good as the sales assured it would be. This is a poor strategy and easily leads to friction between sales and other units. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 64) Sales agents will have their important part in the sales funnel but revenue is coming from many different sources, and it needs to be managed as a single entity (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 122).

Managing sales today is also managing data. Data is an enabler to great personalized customer experiences. Today companies have possibilities to use AI tools, for instance to go through all the company's previous interactions with its clients to understand when customer is looking for a personal contact with agent and when it is better for them to use a self-service. Today in many of the companies this is not reality yet, because there are silos in organizations. Different functions might be using different AI tools and have different goals and different data they use in their analysis. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 23) When using data, it is not about quantity of the data, it is about how to analyze and use it. For instance, in sales it can mean analyzing offers and finding reasons for customers accepting and declining the offers. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 99-100) For a company, it is important to understand different customer segments. Different types of customers value different things. Some customers prefer self-service, and some want to have a personal contact with a sales agent. Companies should make changes to their processes based on the data they have about the behavior of different customer segments. (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, 49-50)

Companies which succeed in personalization are often utilizing agile operating model. Which means that different functions such as product team, marketing, analytics and technology departments work test and learn together to achieve common goals. (Arora et al. 2021) Personalization is small things that make customer feel that their personal situation is understood. Personalization needs to be timely and clear to understand. A customer wants to know how a product they purchase is bringing benefits to the customers personal situation. (Löytänä & Kortesuo 2011, chapter 3.3)

Instead of having clear processes, some of the sales, marketing, and customer experience teams work in ad hoc way deciding inside their own team how things are handled. There are also cases where company has clear processes, but they are not integrated well together. Teams might not be aware of the processes in other teams. This leads to inconsistent customer experience. Today's AI technologies can also help in creating transparency by automating some of the communications. (Huusko-Viikilä 2024, 88) When developing processes, companies should focus on online

channels as customers are using them more than before. When talking with sales agents, customers are not looking for basic knowledge. They can get basic information from internet. They are looking for professionals guiding towards correct solutions. (Korkiakoski & Gerdt 2016, 130-131)

2.2.2 Specific features of electricity sales market in Finland

The electricity market in Finland is quite concentrated among the largest players. There are 52 electricity companies in the market, and the number of companies has decreased in recent years. Only six companies have a market share greater than 5 %, and the three largest electricity companies hold a combined market share of 52 %. Approximately 15-16 % of customers change their electricity supplier each year, and this number has remained quite stable in recent years. (Energiavirasto 2024) It is typical for customers to seek a new electricity contract when spot prices are high. During these times, a safe option from a fixed-term contract is often sought. In Finland, an electricity contract can be changed with a 14-day notice by contacting a new electricity supplier and signing a contract, provided there is no fixed-term contract in place. With fixed-term contracts, a supplier change is possible only once the fixed period has ended. Typically, fixed-term contracts are made for 12 or 24 months. (Panzar 2023) If customer is moving, they can terminate their old electricity contract even if they have a fixed-term electricity contract. (Kuluttajaliitto 2024)

Electricity companies offer similar types of electricity contracts. Most of the companies offer spot priced dynamic contracts where price changes hourly based on the electricity market prices. Fixed price contracts have fixed price and no possibility to change contract during fixed time. (Energiavirasto 2024) Now there are also new hybrid contracts which contain a fixed base price, but also a consumption element which is increasing or decreasing customer price depending on their usage. If customer uses electricity during cheap spot prices their price is cheaper and if they use it during expensive hours price will increase. Difficulty for consumers is that this kind of contracts are hard to compare as different companies' product pricing varies. It is not good for consumers if they don't understand how their product is working. (Hankaniemi & Räisänen 2024) The distribution of electricity contracts is as follows: fixed-term contracts account for 45 %, dynamic price spot contracts make up 31 %, and open-ended contracts constitute 24 %. In recent years number of dynamic price spot contracts has increased as only 8 % of the customers had dynamic price contracts in 2020. Many of the companies only sell spot priced dynamic contracts as it decreases price risk of the company. (Energiavirasto 2024)

Customers can use many price comparison tools when selecting their electricity provider. One of the tools is maintained by Energy Authority - Energiavirasto. There are also multiple private comparison sites the customers can use. (Energiavirasto 2024) Yearly EPSI rating measures satisfaction of electricity customers in Finland. In latest survey there are indications that digital services

and environmental friendliness are key factors when customers think about their electricity company. Other important factors are contract selection, value for money, preferring local company, and company offering modern solutions which are easy to use. (EPSI 2024) In research done to electricity clients in Finland, customers were asked to describe their electricity company in one word. Most of the most selective words were positive, such as ‘reliable’, ‘good’, and ‘local’. The only negative word in top 10 words selected was ‘expensive’. Net promoter score of the whole industry was 26 in this survey done by Energy Authority - Energiateollisuus. (Energiateollisuus 2024)

2.3 Understanding of AI chatbots and their use in customer interaction and sales

AI has been revolutionizing the way companies interact with their customers (Thompson 2024, Chapter 1). People don’t usually come to the company’s website just to hang around. They usually have problem to solve, or they are interested in the company’s offering, or they want to get connected with the company’s customer service. A chatbot is an excellent assistant on a company's website, helping customers feel welcome by greeting them as they enter the webpage. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 5 & 55) Companies are also looking for cost-effective solutions which chatbots can offer and do this without decreasing customer experience. Customers expect to get personalized service, which is easy to access, and chatbot can answer to this customer need. (Adam et al. 2020, 429) It will not be a case that employees are not going to be needed when AI tools take their place. Instead, some level of assisted service will always be needed. AI tools can enable employees to work in more efficient ways and instead AI can help to scale up operations without extra employees. (Potosky, Fletcher, Rendelman & Ross 2024)

Chatbot is a software designed to engage users in conversation (Shetty 4.8.2024). This conversational tool helps customers to get answers to their queries quickly simulating spoken or written human conversations (Church 5 September 2023). Organizations are interested in chatbots because they can get considerable cost savings by using chatbots. Chatbots enable companies to increase their performance by offering personalized customer service to endless number of clients. This can be done without increasing number of human agents. (BasuMallick 17 June 2022) Chatbots can’t only use text format. They can also use pictures and video to help customers to understand more complex issues. (Villani 2019, 128) It is important to think from customer perspective: what makes the customers worried and how the anxiety can be reduced. Sometimes visualization helps to reduce customer anxiety. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 81) Customers don’t want to read long texts and sometimes video format can help them to absorb information better than in written format. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 107)

There are different types of chatbots which utilize different technologies, and they have different functionalities (Shetty 4.8.2024). Chatbots can also have different type of personas depending on

their purpose. It is important that chatbot is using the same tone of voice as the other company's channels. (Thompson 2024, Chapter 2) There can be general customer service chatbots, but also more specific chatbots like onboarding or lead generation chatbot (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 221-222). Development of Large Language Models have helped chatbots to be able to generate real conversations instead of simply answering pre-defined questions (Thompson 2024, Chapter 1).

Until recently, chatbot have been seen more of the help for the customer service when customers are seeking answers to their questions. Use of chatbots in sales has been neglected. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 26) In sales, human-machine collaboration allows both the human and the chatbot to focus on what they do best. A machine can analyze customer data and recommend actions to humans, who can be more empathetic. AI can assist salespeople by sending personalized emails allowing human to focus on conversation. (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 90-92)

While chatbots offer great possibilities for companies, possible negative impacts of chatbots shouldn't be ignored (Mukherjee 2024). What customers are most worried about using AI is that it makes it harder to reach an actual human agent. Making it hard to reach human agent impacts customer satisfaction and their willingness to stay as a customer. Instead, good AI solution which make customers easy to navigate self-service with possibility to connect with human agent makes customers more likely to select self-service channel also next time when they need help. (McIntosh, 2024b)

2.3.1 What is an AI chatbot and how Large Language Models make them better

For a long time, companies have been helping their customers by chatting without groundbreaking results. This is mostly because those services have not been functioning perfectly. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 24-26) Reputation of chatbots is not great because of the legacy of old rule based chatbots which were sometimes frustrating for clients. When customers had questions which were not pre-defined chatbot was not able to answer. (Thompson 2024, Chapter 1) In many cases, after chat discussion, the customer needs to make a call to the company anyway. Things have improved over the years and now most of the customers appreciate chat and possibility to get their questions answered quickly. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 24-26)

Many older chatbots use menu-based selections, requiring users to choose from listed options, which limits the conversation to a specific flow (Batish 2018, subtitle Challenges and gasps in conversational UI). Another simple chatbot types are rule based and keyword based. Those chatbots react to pre-defined rules or keywords found in discussion. These chatbots are more basic and don't necessarily use that much AI. (Shetty 4.8.2024) Although this type of chatbots can be useful in answering repetitive customer questions, they are limited to pre-defined answers. This might

result user not finding answer to their questions if it’s not included as a pre-defined option. In this case the chatbot is useless to the customer. This type of chatbots is easy to build and maintain but are lacking capabilities to answer more complex customer questions. (Church 5 September 2023)

Chatbots can be simple rule based or utilize more advanced AI technologies like natural language processing (NLP) and large language models (LLM). Chatbots using large language models can generate human like responses and generate high-quality text. (Church 5 September 2023) AI chatbots are not smart in human way, but they are able to understand and generate human-like text (Thompson 2024, Chapter 1). Performance of chatbots which use natural language processing (NLP) is based on algorithms which make the chatbot to understand customer questions and to provide answers. Their effectiveness is a combination of machine learning from previous enquiries and existing available data. (Kiely 2024) When Gartner asked service leaders about the value of generative AI, they responded that chatbots are the technology where generative AI brings the most value. Generative AI chatbots are more flexible from the customer's point of view than the traditional ones. (Moncus et al. 2024)

There are also intellectual chatbots such as contextual chatbots which use AI to remember past discussions and can deliver personalized experiences (Shetty 4.8.2024). Contextual chatbots are often connected to centralized database of site or app and typically also have connection to customer relation management (CRM) system or customer data platform (CDP). This allows chatbot to use more data and personalize answers based on customer earlier interactions. (BasuMallick 17 June 2022) Positive thing is that collected data could be saved to CRM system automatically. For example, if we are collecting customer name and email for lead, these could be saved to CRM without manual work from an agent. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 163) Chatbots can use machine learning algorithm which allows them to self-learn from past conversations. With deep learning, the longer the chatbot has been operating, the better it gets in terms of response accuracy. Intellectual chatbots can also use conversational AI to remember past conversations. (Church 5 September 2023)

Hybrid chatbots are combinations of simple rule based chatbots and smart context-based AI. There are also voice enabled chatbots which have voice recognition technology behind them, and they are able to offer hands-free interactions through voice commands. (Shetty 4.8.2024) In many of the chatbots there is possibility to speak with human agent if chatbot can’t solve customer’s problem. (Church 5 September 2023) Some chatbots can also handle more complex workflow like scheduling appointments or creating cases to human workers (Kiely 2024). Rule based chatbots can only answer expected questions when AI based chatbots can answer large variety of questions. (Thompson 2024, Chapter 1)

Most AI use cases in customer service aim to automate simple interactions, allowing human workers to focus on more complex tasks. The goal is to save customer's time and effort with technical solutions while offering a more personalized experience. (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 86) A chatbot can, for example, be set to pop up for customers who open their app for the first time. This chatbot can guide them to get the most out of the product. Churn can also be prevented by chatbots. Many customers end up churning when they encounter a high-effort experience. Help can be offered by the chatbot 24/7, so answers to their troubles might be found quickly. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 221-222, 226). AI chatbot doesn't only improve speed of the service but also improve quality by offering relevant information for customers. Still most effective way of chat communication is to use both human and AI when needed. (Newman & McDonald 2018, 227)

Developing a good AI based chatbot is not easy (Batish 2018, subtitle Challenges and gasps in conversational UI). Value creation with AI technologies require more than just technology (Moncus et al. 2024). Even when chatbot is limited to a specific use case there are multiple ways users can describe their problem. Many of the requests are complex and the bot needs to understand which parameters to use in each case. (Batish 2018, subtitle Challenges and gasps in conversational UI) AI chatbot needs to be able to mimic human behavior and complexities of human communication. AI needs to be trained to have proper reaction when customers are for example frustrated. If chatbot can express empathy or compassion, the system can better assist people through their problem. (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 117, 118) When using chatbot, the users want to get their answers quickly with automated system and they are not willing to use a lot of time to explain their problem in multiple ways. Research shows that more than 70 % of the chatbot interactions fail. (Batish 2018, subtitle Challenges and gasps in conversational UI) Chatbot requires continuous training. A company using a chatbot should have chatbot trainers who are dedicated to follow up chatbot, recognize development areas and train chatbot to perform better. (Vuokko & Stenlund 2020) To have a good chatbot company needs a good governance model to understand who are responsible of chatbot development and chatbot needs to have a good database where it can search for answers (Moncus et al. 2024).

Because of the complexity AI solutions cannot be taken into use without proper groundwork (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 9). Chatbot needs to be planned and designed in a way that using it makes sense to customers (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 137). Humans are needed to train and develop AI based solutions like chatbots (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 117, 118). Monitoring chatbot is important to keep things running smoothly (Thompson 2024, Chapter 9). Key in AI chatbot training is to use expert employees in training as they know the system and can help the bot to correct action when it is not proper for the situation. For customer service chatbot that can express emotions

and react correctly to customer situations which can help standing out of the competitors. (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 117, 118)

2.3.2 How chatbots can influence customer experience

Study done by HubSpot shows that 71 % of customers say that they would be happy to use bot if it meant an improvement to customer experience (Needle 2021). The biggest advantage of chatbot to user is that it is always available. There is never queue to the chatbot and the bot is always happy to greed customers who visit company's website. (Kiely 2024) On the other hand chatbots don't always deliver customer expectations. Sometimes chatbot fails to answer customer's question. (Adam et al. 2020, 427) Customers prefer to know when they are interacting with a chatbot and when with a human agent. It is beneficial for customers to be aware that they are dealing with a chatbot, even if the chatbot's responses are human-like. (Adam et al. 2020, 248-249) In "customer rage" study done in the US, 60 % of the customers stated that the most annoying thing is to deal with companies which waste their time. (Villani, 2019, 16) With chatbot customers can get their questions answered quickly whenever they need service. Chatbots are reducing customer waiting time in a way that human service can never match. Chatbots are also great help in rush hours when they can answer simple customer questions. Human agents will still be needed to answer more complex questions. (Needle 2021)

In delivering great experiences, it is important to take customer perspective seriously and create positive emotional responses and avoid negative ones. (Villani 2019, 27) From chatbots, customers are looking for social interactions. It is important that it just doesn't answer questions, but it is also able to act human-like conforming in a real social interaction. To increase human-likeness of chatbot it could involve some small talk and empathy to conversations. Chatbot can for example ask questions from customer. (Adam et al. 2020, 430, 438) Generational AI can help a company to deliver individualized customer experiences (Paliwala 2024). One of the most important things customers values is easy navigation. (Arora et al. 2021) When connected to company's CRM, chatbot can look at customers purchase history and individual preferences to personalize discussions and offering (Thompson 2024, Chapter 1).

Chatbots are seen as social actors, and customers expect consistent behavior from them. Therefore, chatbot actions need to be aligned with previous conversations with the customer. (Adam et al. 2020, 432). A chatbot needs to understand customer's intention and the type of help the customer is seeking. Customers may use various expressions to describe similar problems, and the chatbot must comprehend the customer's intention regardless of how it is expressed. AI chatbots can learn from previous discussions, but they also require support from a chatbot trainer. The chatbot's replies initiate a dialogue flow with the customer, and this flow needs to be consistent to make

sense to the customer. (Vuokko & Stenlund 2020) If a customer has previously interacted with a chatbot to inquire about products and then speaks with a human agent, it enhances the experience if the agent can refer to the previous chatbot discussions and avoid repeating the same questions. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 77) A chatbot is also a valuable tool for collecting information about the challenges customers face. Data can be gathered on the most common questions, and this information can be used to identify the root causes of customer problems. This can help improve the customer experience beyond just using the chatbot. Additionally, insights can be gained on how customers talk about the products, including aspects they find difficult to understand. This information can be used to enhance product marketing materials and update FAQs (Needle 2021). Feedback can also be collected from customers through chatbots. By monitoring the types of questions asked in chat, areas where the company's offerings lack clarity can be identified. AI can categorize the feedback, and actions can be improved based on the most common feedback. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 214-215)

2.3.3 Limitations and risks of chatbot

AI tools also have risks to consider. Chatbot can give customers false information or there might be data breaches in AI tools. It would be beneficial to have a process of doing regular health checks to chatbots and other AI tools to ensure smooth operations and avoid problems. (Paliwala 2024) Customers using AI chatbots are worried about AI giving them wrong answers (McIntosh, 2024b). They can get frustrated if they can't find answers and fail to reach a human agent. Chatbots are not great at handling complex and unique customer questions, as they are better suited for common repetitive tasks. (Mukherjee 2024) In cases where customers are angry, chatbots may have negative effect to customer satisfaction (Hsu, Nguyen, Wang & Huang 2023, 2).

Chatbots can pose cybersecurity risks. Whenever a chatbot uses confidential data, there is a risk of that data being exposed to others. No company is immune to these risks. (Pesce 2023, Chapter 3) When an AI chatbot remembers earlier interactions, there is a risk of sensitive data breaches. For example, in 2023, ChatGPT experienced a data breach where users were able to see other people's discussions. (Thopson, 2024, Chapter 1) One thing to consider is that if decisions are made by a chatbot or other AI technology, the company needs to be able to explain the reasons behind those decisions. False information or information that violates data protection regulations cannot be provided by the chatbot. If complaints are received or a mistake is made by the AI chatbot, a human worker who understands the cause of that behavior is needed. Once the reasons behind the behavior are understood, corrections can be made, and the chatbot can be trained to perform better in the future. (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 124)

AI chatbot is only as good as it's training material. Older chatbots have been trained with old material and might not be able to answer all recent questions. It is important to keep material the chatbot uses updated, otherwise it will not be able to answer all the questions about current topics. (Thompson 2024, Chapter 1 & 9) If agents use rude language in chat or in training materials for the chatbot, it may result in the chatbot adopting and using rude language as it learns from the material. (Thompson, 2024, Chapter 9) Sometimes AI can present challenges, providing unanticipated responses and even causing risks. Allowing human employees to modify the outcomes of an AI system, it makes them feel involved in the process, fostering greater trust in AI. When AI systems achieve their goals under human supervision, it helps build confidence in the system and its decisions. It is natural for humans to trust human experience over machine decisions unless a human explains that machine decisions can be trusted. (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 172-173)

Advanced AI technologies can lack transparency in their decision-making processes, making it difficult to correct behavior. Techniques exist to explain AI decisions and correct mistakes. Companies would benefit from having a transparency analyst to maintain high levels of transparency and auditability. (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 124-125) Hallucinations are a concern for companies using Large Language Model based AI. When AI generates text that is inaccurate or irrelevant to the question asked, it is called a hallucination. These hallucinations can be misleading and provide false information. (Thompson 2024, Chapter 1) AI chatbots can be really convincing when they tell things that aren't correct. This is a challenge for people and companies using AI chatbots (Pesce 2023, Chapter 7). AI hallucinations can have significant consequences when they provide false or misleading answers to questions. These hallucinations are not based on the training data and occur when AI fails to accurately respond to customer inquiries. (IBM, 2024) Hallucinations can be controlled when chatbot is designed to make answers to questions more predictable. If hallucinations are not allowed and chatbot can't find answer to customer questions from its training materials, it will not be able to answer customers enquiry. (Thompson 2024, Chapter 4 & 9) On the other hand, sometimes user can get answer even about forbidden subjects when they rephrase the question differently. Chatbot is a tool, and it is preforming as it is programmed. Hence, there might be ways to get around of the rules. (Pesce 2023, Chapter 10) Chatbot needs to have human supervision. In cases of hallucinations human can correct the data and prevent the same thing happening again. (IBM, 2024)

2.3.4 Chatbots in sales

Today fewer people are using phone and email to communicate with their friends or family. More people are using real time communication in most interactions. This is a fact that is happening in the society right now. At the same time, less people are answering calls coming from unknown

numbers or opening marketing emails. Still the main channels the most companies use for sales are phone, email, and social media. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 18, 24) In online environments customers experience purchase hesitation which means they know the product but are still hesitant to make a purchase decision. In those situations, interaction with customers via agent or chatbot can reduce purchase hesitation. (Zhang, Wang, Majeed & Zhou, 2014) In e-commerce environments absence of social personal actions can lead to losing sales (Adam, et al. 2020, 429).

Sales in chatbot is different than in store where it is possible to see all the items available and ask help from the salesperson. Also, in online store it is easy to search for items and get recommendations based on browsing history. Presenting offering in text format in chatbot is extremely difficult as the nature of chatbot is very limited. (Batish 2018, subtitle Challenges and gasps in conversational UI) Although AI solutions bring great possibilities for sales and business development, timing is often seen as a critical factor in making the sales. Customer needs to get correct information at the correct time to close the deal. (Paliwala 2024) Waiting for five minutes to get respond, lead conversion rate decreases ten times. Customers are expecting to get responses quickly or they turn to the competitors. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 6) Great advantage with chatbot is that it is always available for customer. Chatbot is not dependent on business hours and can answer customer questions anytime (BasuMallick 17 June 2022) In chat customers are often looking for help and they might feel cheated if the chat is starting to offer products. The customer might then end up closing the chat without getting help to their problem. (Villani 2019, 127)

Many visitors browse company's webpages without ever truly engaging with the company. With the assistance of a chatbot, those casual browsers can be transformed into more engaged users. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 78) Sometimes people hesitate to make purchase decisions due to environmental factors like security or individual factors such as impulsive behavior or cognitive dissonance. Purchase hesitation may increase in interactions that feel distant and impersonal. Effective communication between a company and its consumers can positively influence customer purchase intentions. (Zhang et al. 2014) AI can help in predicting customer behavior and it can learn to understand when customer is hesitating their purchase. In those cases, it can try to offer something else or to collect customer feedback. (Kumar & Kotler 2024, 82) Chatbots have significant upselling potential. Customers are twice as likely to choose a more expensive option when it is recommended by a humanized chatbot. (Hildebrand & Bergner 2019)

Sales is traditionally seen as very personal; thus, it needs to be considered whether a chatbot can provide the warmth and empathy needed to close a sale. However, chatbots can still play a role in the sales funnel. (Arora et al. 2021) In the worst cases, a chatbot can alienate first-time customers if it immediately starts pushing products. This can make customers feel that the company is

desperate, which is a turnoff. (LeadDesk 2024) At its best, a chatbot can enhance the efforts of salespeople by quickly responding to leads and providing prompt service (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 7).

Chatbots can offer efficient shopping experience providing timely personalized support for the user. They can act as a guide through the shopping process (Babulak 2023, 16). Chatbots engage customers better than apps. Customers are more likely to share their shopping experiences with friends if they have used a chatbot. Additionally, chatbots can provide human-like responses, which help customers feel more engaged in the shopping experience. (Hsu et al. 2023, 2)

In sales, human agents excel at providing empathetic personal interactions that build trust. This trust can reduce purchase hesitation when customers are unsure about their decisions. While chatbot abilities to express emotions have improved with AI development, they still cannot offer the same warmth as a human in the sales process. (Zhang et al. 2014) A chatbot is an integral part of the sales team, complementing rather than replacing other members. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 41) In cases of purchase hesitation, it is important for the company to communicate with the customer. This can be done through a chatbot or a live agent, both of which can help reduce purchase hesitation. The advantage of a human agent lies in situations where stronger long-term relationships between the customer and the company are desired. While AI is more efficient than a human agent, the human agent still plays a crucial role in purchase decisions by building relationships and fostering trust. (Zhang et al. 2014)

Chatbots can also be used for trend analysis. By analyzing the questions people ask and the products they are currently interested in, valuable data can be gathered to predict the demand for certain types of products. Business units can use this information as inputs to their sales strategies. (Paliwala 2024) Chatbots can assist customers in understanding company’s products and pricing during the sales process. On a website, when customers proceed to the confirmation page where they see their order, they might sometimes get confused with the pricing or products and abandon their purchase. They may feel too embarrassed to contact customer service for clarification. A chatbot can pop up at this moment and ask if they need any clarifications about pricing or products. Additionally, chatbot can be presented on the product page, helping customers in selecting the right product for them. (LeadDesk 2024)

What customers want is easiness. When customer needs to put on extra effort, they will not appreciate their purchase as much as they would after an easy purchase event. (Villani 2019, 16) The biggest problems with traditional online sales experiences are that the site is often hard to navigate and fails to answer simple questions when customers can't find the information they are looking for. A chatbot can complement the online sales funnel by offering support and answering these

simple questions. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 42) For humans, using language is the most natural interface. This is why chatbots excel in sales compared to menu-based navigation, which is not always natural and easy to use. Chatbots can also be used as shopping platforms, as they are easy to use and reduce the time from click to purchase. However, they currently perform well in simple tasks but struggle with more complex offerings. Studies show that most people prefer using apps as shopping platforms instead of chatbots. (Hsu et al. 2023, 5-6, 8, 12)

2.3.5 Collecting leads by chatbot

One of the real problems AI chatbot can solve is lead collection. When potential customer is visiting company's website, they are clearly already interested in the company. This is the time to get them more engaged and help them to become company's customers. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 78, 138) A chatbot can be placed in various locations on the website based on the company's needs. If increased traffic is desired, it is advisable to place the chatbot in multiple locations to ensure maximum visibility to visitors. If less traffic is needed, the focus can be on pages that potential buyers are likely to visit, such as pricing pages. The welcoming message from the chatbot can vary across different pages. On product or pricing pages, the chatbot could ask customers: 'Hey there! Thanks for stopping by'. 'I'm here to help. What brought you here to check our products?' The chatbot can inquire if customers want to see a demo video of the products or if they would like to receive a call from a human agent. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 14-15, 32) Chatbot can make lead collection feel more personal. Customer can fill in their contact information as part of the conversation instead of filling them in on some generic form. This can be the starting point of the customer ship, and it is important that customer feels satisfied. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 52)

Lead collection can be costly and require lot of resources (Paliwala 2024). Chatbots are efficient in lead collection as they can have multiple conversations at the same time. This allows company to scale up their operations in a cost-effective way. (Kiely 2024) The volume of leads can also be managed by a chatbot when agents are busy and unable to connect with customers in a reasonable time. Leads that might not be obtained through other means can be generated by chatbots. Customers who are reluctant to fill out contact forms may still be interested when guided towards sales by a chatbot. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 12, 138) Leads created by chatbot are usually good quality. Through conversations with customers, they learn customer needs and can collect customer information for human agent to contact customers later. Study done by HubSpot shows that leads gained from AI conversational tools are higher quality than leads from traditional channels. (Needle 2021) A chatbot can engage customers by asking relevant questions and then request their contact information to provide an offer. Website visitors who fill out surveys or answer multiple-choice questions in a chatbot are more likely to share their contact information compared to

those who are simply presented with a form on the website. (LeadDesk 2024) A good lead is identified as a person who visits the product site, asks questions, and is willing to provide their contact details. These leads should be connected to the company's sales department. The most valuable leads are visitors who request to relate to the company's sales team, and they should be directed to the sales department as soon as possible. If the collected leads are not sufficient, more qualifying questions could be added to the chatbot before offering to connect customers to a sales agent. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 119, 132)

Leads can get even better if chatbot is connected to company's CRM system and have access to customer purchase history and previous conversations (Paliwala 2024). Chatbots can't only create leads they can also score them which would help sales teams to know how to prioritize leads and where to focus. Leads with the highest purchasing potential could be delivered directly to sales agent to contact customer immediately. (Kiely 2024) A chatbot can also ask customers when they prefer to be contacted and schedule a call with sales representatives during the chatbot discussion. It is important for the chatbot to be connected to the salesperson's calendar or phone system. This way, customers have a realistic view of when they will be contacted. The chatbot can also send confirmations to customers about what has been agreed upon regarding the agent's contact. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 16, 156-157)

In lead collection chatbot can ask lead qualifying questions from customer. For example: 'What brought you to our pages?', 'How are you planning to use our product', and 'Do you want our agent to contact you?'. This way not all the conversations end up being leads, but the ones that will are providing sales agent information about customers intentions. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 14-15) Chatbots can enhance sales support by offering essential information about the company's products and actively engaging customers with the company (Fichter & Anguelov 2024 10-20). Customers today are reluctant to fill out extensive forms to get in touch with sales representatives. Forcing potential buyers to provide a lot of personal information limits the number of customers willing to fill in the information. Instead of filling out forms and waiting for days to be contacted, customers expect to connect with the company quickly. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 9)

Lead collection is not traditionally very personal. In chatbot collecting lead can feel more personal. In chat discussion company can learn more about the potential customer in a natural way. This makes customer more likely to give their personal information for the company. Additionally, chatbots can be used in lead collection outside company's website. In newsletter there might be chatbot link provided and potential customer could book a meeting with company's sales representatives from chatbot. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 28-29, 157)

2.4 Future of AI technologies in chatbots

AI is changing rapidly, and companies need to adapt to constant change and update their strategy frequently to get all the benefits from new technologies (Moncus et al. 2024). Companies which have succeeded with AI technologies usually have a good AI strategy (Hamer & Bhati 2024). Only testing and piloting AI does not automatically bring business value. Companies that succeed with AI have a clear vision of their goals and they invest in AI solutions that align with their business strategy. (Hamer & Bhati 2024) AI is improving every day, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to discern whether discussions are being held with AI or a real human. A seamless customer experience is being provided by AI assistants, as they combine data with human-like empathy. (Villani 2019, 212)

AI today is known as 'narrow AI,' meaning it excels at specific tasks but cannot match human strengths such as understanding emotions. Even so, narrow AI is revolutionizing business by performing repetitive tasks that involve large amounts of data more cheaply, quickly, and accurately. (Newman & McDonald 2018, 229) In the future, chatbots might replace apps in mobile commerce due to their superior conversational capabilities compared to apps, which are typically designed for clicking and dragging. Additionally, chatbots could facilitate group buying experiences by managing sessions with multiple shoppers. (Hsu et al. 2023, 1-2)

Chatbots will increasingly express their personalities, which companies can leverage to maintain their brand identity and differentiate themselves from competitors. One of the emerging professions in the AI era is a chatbot personality trainer. This role requires creativity, making it suitable for individuals with a background in writing, such as novelists. As AI chatbots become the face of companies, it is crucial for businesses to invest time and resources into defining the personality of their chatbots. AI training does not necessarily need to be done in-house; there are external companies that offer AI development services. One advantage of using external companies is their access to larger datasets for training, which can enhance the chatbot's performance. (Daugherty & Wilson 2018, 118-121) Customers are expecting to get deeply personalized experiences through their customer journey (Newman & McDonald 2018, 87). Big data is a powerful tool that companies will increasingly use to anticipate future customer needs. This allows them to promote their services even before customers realize they need them. Leveraging big data can elevate personalization to the next level. (Villani 2019, 221)

The future will bring autonomous agents that not only answer questions but also perform actions. We already have voice-commanded helpers like Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa. In the future, tailored AI helper tools will be far more sophisticated, capable of assisting users with nearly human-like sensitivity. These autonomous agents could also be connected to elements outside the digital

world, expanding their range of possible uses. (Pesce 2023, Chapter 13) One of the future use cases might be an intelligent kiosk. This kiosk could be in public places like shopping centers and use advanced technology to gather information such as age and gender from the person entering the kiosk, providing services tailored to that individual. The material could be targeted and personalized. Additionally, this technology could detect customer feelings and emotions to tailor its responses accordingly. (Villani 2019, 219)

New technologies make gamification easier and even sales situation can be more fun for customer if it is gamified. Customers can be motivated to reach their goals by making company products more game-like. (Villani 2019, 219) One of the AI powered things we see rising is “digital humans” which are realistic virtual beings that interact in human way. Digital humans can’t only answer questions they can also express emotions. Digital human can for example act as a tutor. Digital humans can be better in empathy and in expressing other human-like emotions than normal AI chatbots. (Thompson 2024, Chapter 1) Chatbots can evolve towards more humanoid forms when integrated with physical robot bodies. With AI, these humanoids can become more human-like, including the ability to express emotions. (Babulak 2023, 13)

AI is also capable of creating Augmented Reality (AR) experiences. In the future, physical and virtual experiences will blend more seamlessly, allowing companies to provide ultra-personalized material to customers. Customers can immerse themselves in an AR world curated by the company, where the surroundings are tailored based on their historical behavior and usage patterns of the company's products. However, this requires more people to own VR (Virtual Reality) glasses and be willing to use them, or the development of other technologies to offer AR experiences. Otherwise, the audience for these new experiences will remain relatively small. (Kumar & Kotler 2024, 91, 161)

2.5 Summary of the theoretical framework

Reviewing literature has helped to explore the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on business particularly focusing on AI chatbots and their role in creating great customer experiences and increasing sales. AI is fundamentally transforming business operations by automating processes and reshaping workflows. Companies need to strike a balance between self-service and human-assisted service, as some customers still value human interaction. Staying ahead of competitors requires more than just technology; it is about meeting customer needs. Technology influences customer behavior, and modern customers expect a seamless omnichannel experience.

Customer experience is becoming increasingly important. Customers seek value that goes beyond monetary aspects, encompassing the entire experience a company offers. Customer experience is

influenced by both logical and emotional factors and companies should shape their customer experience towards not only meeting customer expectations but also providing positive surprises tailored to individual needs, although companies should avoid building up unrealistic expectations. Customers seek experiences that align with their self-image and empower them with the right information to make decisions. For example, eco-conscious consumers prefer products that match their sustainable values. When purchasing, customers seek value, which is a balance between the benefits they gain and the sacrifices they make, such as price and time spend. In a fast-paced worlds customers value their time and are willing to pay for easier options which save their time. Customers want a smooth purchasing process but also expect to get help when needed. Empathy is important to customers especially if something goes wrong. Customers expect to have timely service and clear communication about expectations.

The literature review emphasizes the importance to understand omnichannel approach. In omnichannel approach customer needs are prioritized over the company's needs, ensuring a seamless and consistent customer experience across all channels. Technology is enabler of great customer experiences instead of having value on its own. Omnichannel approach challenges company to align their operations. As today in many companies' different functions are not aligned which causes poor customer experiences and missed revenue generation opportunities. Companies need to find balance between channels as seamless transition from channel to another. Many people prefer self-service channels but get frustrated when they are not able to get help from the first channel they selected. To improve customer experience companies should focus to avoid customer pain points caused by poor communication and unclear processes.

There are some special features in electricity market in Finland. Market is dominated by a few large companies. Six biggest companies have market share of 52 % of all electricity sales in Finland. Around 15-16 % of customers switch their electricity contract annually. Companies get more traffic when electricity stock prices are high and then customers start seeking for fixed term contracts. Offering is quite similar between different companies. There are three types of electricity contracts which are spot price contract, fixed term contract and hybrid contract which is combination of fixed term and spot price contract. In recent years dynamic spot price contracts have become more popular making up 31 % of all contracts compared to just 8 % in 2020. There are indications that digital services and environmental friendliness are key factors for customer satisfaction.

When it comes to chatbots it's important to understand how significantly chatbots have evolved from rule-based systems to more sophisticated tools. Chatbots are changing the way companies are interacting with their clients. Chatbots simulate human conversations, and they can also use

visual factors like pictures or videos to simplify complex issues. Chatbot can be general customer service chatbot or more tailored to specific use like lead collection or helping customers in onboarding. Chatbots have been traditionally seen as a customer service tool but now potential of chatbots in sales have been understood better. With AI technologies chatbots can generate human-like responses and understand customer queries. Chatbots can deliver personalized experiences, especially when integrated with CRM systems and customer data platforms. Chatbots can improve over time by learning from their past interactions. Chatbots can be part of the team helping customers in simple actions leaving complex issues to service agents. Despite their benefits, creating an effective AI chatbot requires proper planning including continuous training. Poorly trained chatbots fail to meet customer needs. Even the best AI systems require human oversight to ensure they perform in optimal way. Customers are willing to use chatbots if they improve their customer experience. Chatbots are especially good in reducing customer waiting times. Good quality chatbots are also able to personalize customer experience which is highly valued by most of the customers

However, chatbots like any other tools, come with risks that need to be managed. One significant concern is that chatbots can provide false information, leading to negative customer experiences. The biggest worry for customers using chatbots is receiving incorrect answers. Those are caused by old or low-quality training material chatbot is using or chatbot hallucinations. Sometimes chatbots are hallucinating when they can’t find answer to customer’s question. Those hallucinations can be misleading and cause frustration to customers. Additionally, customer frustration can escalate if they are unable to reach a human agent. Studies indicate that chatbots tend to create negative customer experiences, especially when the customer is already annoyed. Those risks can be controlled by regular health checks to AI tools. Another big risk in chatbot is cybersecurity risks like data breaches and data accountability. Especially when chatbot is using confidential data it is important to manage data security risks well. If AI systems make decisions, companies must be able to explain the rationale behind those decisions. Human agents should be available to address mistakes and improve chatbot training. Transparency in AI-decision-making is critical.

Today, fewer people use phone and email for personal communication, shifting instead towards real-time methods. Despite this, many businesses still rely on phone, email, and social media for sales. In online environments, customers often experience purchasing hesitation, making interaction with potential customers crucial. Chatbots are effective tools for reducing this hesitation. Additionally, AI-powered tools, including chatbots, can guide customers to the right products, benefiting both customers and businesses. Timely information is essential for closing deals, and chatbots, with their constant availability, can help customers finalize purchases. However, chatbots should avoid immediately offering products, as this can deter customers. Personalized support is

appreciated by customers when they are hesitant to purchase. While chatbots can provide personalized support, human agents are still better at offering empathy and building trust, which is vital in sales. Chatbots can be part of the sales funnel by providing timely, personalized responses and identifying customer preferences, aiding businesses in their sales strategies. Although chatbots struggle with complex tasks, they can complement the sales funnel by offering quick responses and assisting with product selection. (Chapter 2.3.4)

One important part in sales is lead collection and chatbots are effective in lead collection. Especially when customers are already on company's website chatbot can be strategically placed on key pages, such as pricing or product pages, and ask questions from customer. If customers seem to be needing more information, chatbot can ask customer to provide their contact information for sales agent to contact them. Leads generated by chatbots tend to be high quality because the chatbot engages customers in conversations that reveals their needs and intentions, making it easier for sales teams to follow up leads effectively. Chatbots can also score leads based on customer interactions and prioritize high-potential leads from immediate sales contact. By interacting with CRM system chatbots can access customer data and history which can improve lead quality and prioritization further. Instead of requiring customers to fill out long forms, chatbots provide a more personal and conversational way to collect information, leading to higher engagement. Additionally, chatbots can be used outside of the website, such as through social media or in follow-up emails, to provide more information or connect customers directly with sales representatives. Ultimately, chatbots enhance lead collection by making the process faster, more personalized and more efficient. (Chapter 2.3.5)

AI is rapidly evolving, and companies need to adapt by frequently updating their strategies to leverage new technologies effectively. Successful businesses have a clear AI strategy which is aligned with their goals. Looking ahead, chatbots might replace apps in mobile commerce due their better conversional capabilities and ability to facilitate group buying experiences. The development of chatbot personalities will have even bigger role in the future where chatbots really maintain brand identity and there might be new roles like chatbot personality trainers. Companies will also increasingly use big data to offer personalized customer experiences and anticipate needs. Chatbots will in the future act more like autonomous agents not only answering questions but also preforming actions offering more human-like assistance. There might be intelligent kiosks which could immerse customer to company's world and offer personalized shopping experiences. Gamification, AR (augmented reality) experiences and blending physical and virtual world for hyper-personalized experiences might be our future. Chatbots will also improve in human skills like empathy and there might be "digital humans" in the future.

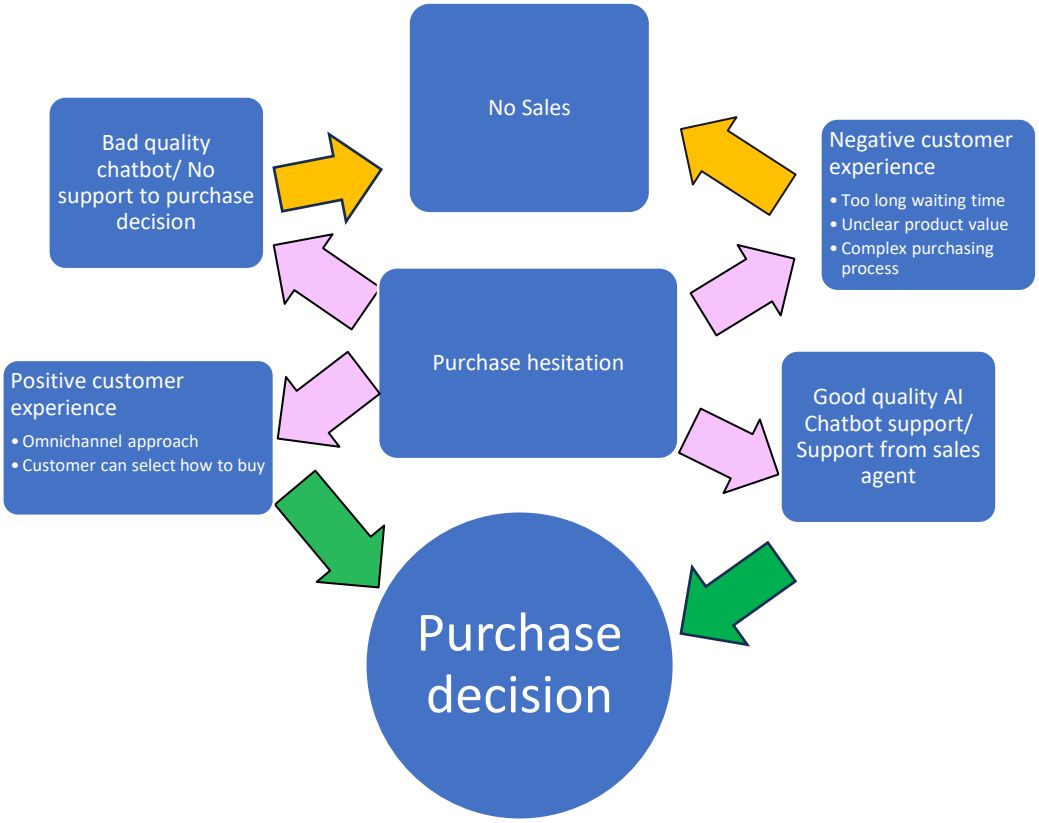

Figure 1. How customer experience and chatbot impact purchase decision when customer is expressing purchase hesitation

3 Methodology

Study part of this thesis is conducted with qualitative methods. Qualitative methods help researchers to understand the context where human decisions are made. In qualitative research the key is to understand people and how they act in context of the study. Qualitative research methods work when aim is to understand people's actions and their reasons behind their actions. (Myers 2025, 5-6) Typically in qualitative research one tries to understand the phenomena that is researched from the point of the researched persons (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 9).

Credibility, reliability, and ethics of the qualitative research are important. Reliability arises from the ability of researcher to convince the reader of their professional skills with arguments explaining the selections made when conducting the research. It is important that the reader trusts the researcher had the skills to choose the right approaches and conduct the research. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 175)

This thesis study is done with qualitative methods to explore human behavior when using chatbots. Aim is to find out in practical way how case organization could improve their chatbot to be part of their sales funnel. In this part of the thesis, the approach used, the study methods employed, and the analysis of the results will be explained

3.1 Research approach

There are different approaches to qualitative research. Approach of the study determinates in more specific way type of the study and how research questions are approached. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 9) The research approach in this thesis is a case study. The idea behind the case study is to conduct it in real-life circumstances to maximize practical benefits. The goal is to study human behavior and develop practices based on the insights gained. For companies, a case study is a good practice for developing future visions. The case study is conducted in different cycles, where an experiment based on the initial plan is followed by an improved plan based on the experiences from the first study. (Heikkinen, Ravio & Syrjälä, 2006, 9, 16-19) Case study is a research approach which uses various methods to observe a specific case. Case study is used to get in depth understanding of specific case. In case study many different methods like observation and interview can be used. (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 2011, chapter The Case Study: Differing Perspectives).

A case study is an effective method for implementing improvements in organizations. While some other research approaches require maintaining objectivity, a case study allows the researcher to actively drive change. (Heikkinen, Ravio & Syrjälä, 2006, 19-20) For this study, a case study is an

effective method as the aim is to create a roadmap for developing a chatbot within the company. The case study approach allows the researcher to refine their work during the research by incorporating findings from earlier phases into the ongoing research. Additionally, remaining objective during the research can be challenging when the researcher is actively working within the organization for which the research is being conducted.

This research was conducted in cycles. The first cycle involved studying literature to find answers to the research questions from written sources. The second cycle focused on benchmarking chatbots used by electricity companies. The questions asked from the chatbots were designed to address the research questions and were influenced by the findings from the literature review. After benchmarking, it became clear that additional data from potential customers was needed to verify their experiences using chatbots in sales situations. This data was collected through interviews with potential customers. The interview questions were planned based on the data collected during the benchmarking and literature review.

3.2 Methods and analyses

This part of the reveals how the research was conducted. In this thesis answers to research questions were collected by theoretical framework, conducting benchmarking research and semi-structured interviews. In the analysis of qualitative data, the researcher aims to deeply understand the material by reading it multiple times. By doing so, the researcher seeks clues about the themes, classes, or categories into which the material could be grouped. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 143) In qualitative research there is often some iterative analysis done also during the study. In qualitative research, a large amount of data is collected, and the analysis helps focus on the most important parts while ignoring irrelevant information. Key part of analyzing data is to transform it to into something meaningful for the audience of the study. (Myers 2025, 187-188)

In thematic analysis, the researcher identifies, examines and records themes within the data. The aim is to find patterns explaining certain phenomena. When analyzing data, the researcher codes the data and identifies recurring themes within the dataset. (Myers 2025, 191) Analysis of the data in this research is done with thematic analysis approach. More information about the analysis of the Benchmarking data will be explained in Chapter 3.2.1 and process of analyzing semi-structured interview data will be explained in Chapter 3.2.2.

3.2.1 Benchmarking

With benchmarking method a company can learn good practices from other companies. Product benchmarking focuses on one product and compares it to competitors. Idea is to compare

company’s product to competitor’s similar product and compare offering to other companies similar products. (Niva & Tuominen, 2005, 13, 33)

In this thesis benchmarking was used to test one specific product which is chatbot available in company’s website. Chatbots were tested by asking them pre-defined set of ten questions. (Appendix 2.) As the aim was to research how well chatbots can answer questions potential customer might ask all the questions were related to concerns new customers might have. First question was I would like to get an electricity offer for two-bed room apartment. This question asses the company’s ability to provide tailored electricity offers based on specific customer needs. In recent years spot contracts have become more popular in Finland (Energiavirasto 2024). For this reason, there were questions about how spot contracts work, how customer can follow up electricity consumption and where to find electricity spot prices. When customers are thinking about selecting electricity company one of the key factors is environmental friendliness of the company (Energiateollisuus 2024). This is why one of the benchmarking questions was: ‘I would like to get environmentally friendly electricity. How is your electricity produced’. Aim with this question was to test company’s ability to provide information on the environmental friendliness of their offering. Customers want to know what happens and be aware of possible waiting times (McIntosh 2024a). This is why one of the benchmarking questions was: ‘What happens if I make an electricity agreement with you?’ This question examines the company’s transparency in outlining the processes and being able to set correct expectations for customers. It is important that at the beginning of customer ship customer feels appreciated and knows that their questions will be answered. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 52) Chatbot can’t always answer customer enquiries and in those cases, it is important that customer can get connected to human worker in a smooth way (McIntosh, 2024b). In benchmarking chatbots were asked about possibility to leave a callback. With this question aim was to evaluate company’s ability to transfer customer between different channels.

Benchmarking questions were asked from chatbots used by all electricity sales companies operating in Finland and by selected electricity companies in Sweden, Norway and UK. Selection of benchmarked companies outside of Finland was based on their digital presence focusing on the industry leaders. Some of the benchmarked companies didn’t have chatbot in their websites. More information about findings of benchmarking can be found from Chapter 4.1. Benchmarking was mostly done during the weekends and evenings to avoid being transferred to human agent. This decision was done to keep focus on chatbot performance instead of live agent performance. Benchmarking was conducted during February and March 2025. Full list of benchmarked companies can be found from appendix 1.

In analyzing the benchmarking results, the researcher rated chatbot answers on a scale from 0 to 5 based on their outcomes. The lowest rating, 0, was given when the chatbot was unable to answer the question or did not understand it. Ratings of 2 to 3 were assigned when the chatbot was partially able to answer the questions or when it required multiple selections and clicks from different options to find the answer. The highest ratings, 4 to 5, were given to answers that were able to address the questions immediately and were of good quality. Additionally, during the benchmarking process, the researcher made some general observations about chatbots, including their personalities and how they collected feedback from customers. To gather more information on these subjects, the researcher added related questions to the semi-structured interview questions. The semi-structured interviews are described in Chapter 3.2.2.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Following the benchmarking phase, data collection continued with semi-structured interviews. Ten interviews were conducted for this thesis, with seven interviewees being female and three males. One interviewee was aged 20-25, while the remaining nine were in the 30-40 age group as it can be observed from figure 2. The interviews were conducted with individuals who had previously used chatbots. This limitation was set to ensure the best results, as those who were negative towards chatbots and unwilling to use them would not provide valuable information for this research. Many of the interviewees were acquaintances of the thesis writer, which may have positively impacted their willingness to participate. The interviewees represent a diverse group of individuals aged 20-40 years, working across various industries. Interviews were conducted one-on-one in Microsoft teams online meeting tool, each lasting approximately 30-40 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Finnish language and were recorded. The company's Co-pilot AI software was used to help transcribe the interviews for the analysis part of this thesis.

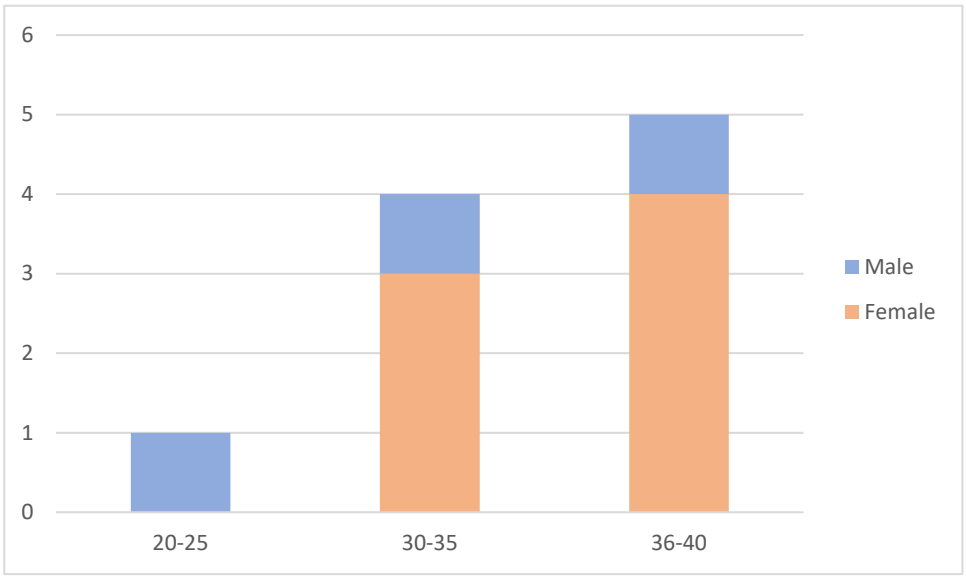

Figure 2. Age and gender of interviewees

Table 1 presents the interview participants and their basic information. Any information that could help to identify participants is hidden as interviews were executed in anonymous form. Later in this thesis the interviewees will be referred to according to the identification information found in this table. During the interviews, additional discussions were held regarding the interviewees' experiences with chatbots. As experiences using chatbots in sales situations are central to this thesis, Table 1 additionally presents information on whether the interviewee has used a chatbot in sales-related situations.

Table 1. List of interviewee participants

Participant number	Participant age	Participant gender	Has used chatbot in purchase situations
Participant 1. (P1)	32	Female	Yes
Participant 2. (P2)	32	Male	Yes
Participant 3. (P3)	37	Female	No
Participant 4. (P4)	38	Female	No
Participant 5. (P5)	35	Female	Yes
Participant 6. (P6)	39	Female	Yes
Participant 7. (P7)	21	Male	No
Participant 8. (P8)	35	Female	No
Participant 9. (P9)	40	Male	No
Participant 10. (P10)	37	Female	Yes

The semi-structured interview method was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of customer user experiences with the company's chatbot, identifying both positive and negative factors affecting user experience. Additionally, this study aimed to explore the potential support a chatbot could offer in the purchasing process, information that could only be obtained by interviewing potential chatbot users.

Involving customers in service development activities as early as possible is a great way to bring their perspective to the service development (Villani 2019, 61). Interview is a good method to collect information especially when researching how humans experience different things. Interview is interaction between interviewer and interviewed person. Most qualitative interviews are semi-structured as interviews always need to have some structure, but a lot of information will be lost if interview is fully structured with limited amount of answering options. Often questions in semi-structured interviews are open-ended in a way that the interviewed person cannot simply just answer yes or no. (Hyvärinen, Nikander & Ruusuvuori, 2017, Chapter 1, Haastattelun maailma)

This research is focused on developing company’s chatbot. Describing chatbot usage only through verbal interview might be a challenging task. Interesting details might be lost when interviewed persons are thinking certain aspects differently than the interviewing person. Restricting interview data generation only to oral conversation can be limiting and it is possible to use elicitation techniques in

companion paired with traditional semi-structured interviews. Those elicitation techniques can include photos, maps or other material which enriches conversation. Purpose of elicitation techniques is to enrich data that is collected. Interview can be facilitated and contextualized it to a certain event with elicitation techniques. (Kahlke, Maggio, Lee, Cristancho, LaDonna, Abdallah, Kherera, Kshatri, Horsley & Varpio 2024)

The aim of the semi-structured interviews in this thesis is to gain a better understanding of the factors that impact the potential customer user experience of the chatbot. To achieve this, elicitation techniques were employed to gather more detailed information about the chatbot being developed. The interviews were divided into three parts. The first part consisted of general questions about previous chatbot experiences and preferences. The second part focused specifically on the case company's chatbot, while the third part included more structured questions about case company's chatbot improvement.

During the interviews, participants viewed a short demo video of the chatbot and were asked follow-up questions related to the demo video. This was done as not all the interviewed persons were familiar with case company's chatbot. The demo video was recorded prior interviews by the thesis writer by booking a Microsoft Teams online meeting and sharing the screen during the meeting to capture the demo. The demo video is 1 minute and 50 seconds long and features the case company's chatbot answering three questions related to making an electricity agreement. Figure 3. Is showcasing demo video and chatbot presented in it. Additionally, interviewed participants were asked to imagine a scenario where they were considering making an electricity agreement and to think about what questions they might ask the chatbot. During the interview a small live demo was conducted by asking the chatbot one question per interview. This exercise helped the participants form more specific opinions about the case company's chatbot.

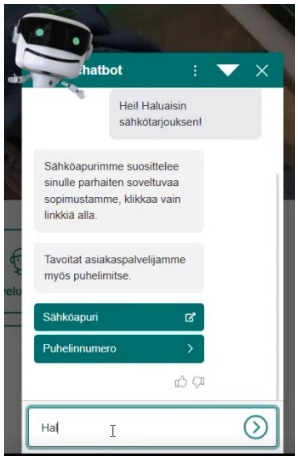

Figure 3. Screenshot from demo video

In the third part of the interview, the questions were more structured. In figure 4 it is presented what kind of picture examples were shown to the interviewees during the interview. Interviewed participants were shown pictures of benchmarked chatbots and asked to evaluate various development ideas.

Figure 4. Pictures showed to interview participants about feedback collection in different chatbots

First and second part of the interview were analyzed with thematic analysis methods. In thematic analysis, re-occurring themes and patterns are identified and analyzed. (Myers 2025, 191) In the third part of the interview, the questions were more structured, and the conversation was more guided to discuss about the potential development ideas. And that part of the interview is analyzed using quantitative research methods, which focus on numerical data and quantities. (Vilkka 2021, 141) In this section, interviewees rated different development ideas, and the results were analyzed by counting the results about developmental ideas importance.

4 Findings

The study aims to understand how chatbots can effectively support sales processes and improve customer engagement. This thesis explores the possibilities of sales through AI based chatbots, employing two distinct methods to validate the theoretical framework and to obtain research findings. The findings from these studies are explained in this chapter. Through benchmarking, the utilization of chatbots on competitors' webpages was explored, and insights about chatbot usage and preferences were gathered from potential customers through semi-structured interviews.

4.1 Findings of benchmarking

A benchmarking study of electricity companies revealed that chatbot adaptation in the industry is still limited. This can be observed from figure 5. Only 19 companies had chatbots and findings are focused on testing how those chatbots can answer electricity contract related questions. While some AI-powered chatbots performed better, many gave incorrect or unhelpful answers. Chatbots were generally more tailored for existing customers rather than helping potential new customers.

The benchmarking results regarding chatbots used by electricity companies revealed that chatbots are not yet widely adopted in the electricity industry. Many smaller companies did not have a chatbot at all, and even some larger companies had low-quality chatbots. The research involved visiting the websites of 70 different electricity companies. Five of these companies only had live chat with restricted working hours, while 19 had chatbots. Most companies with chatbots also offered live chat during working hours, primarily during weekdays, although some also had live chat available on weekends. One company had an FAQ article search instead of a chatbot. Six of the tested companies operated outside of Finland, with three in Sweden, two in Norway, and one in the United Kingdom. A full list of the benchmarked companies can be found in the appendix 1.

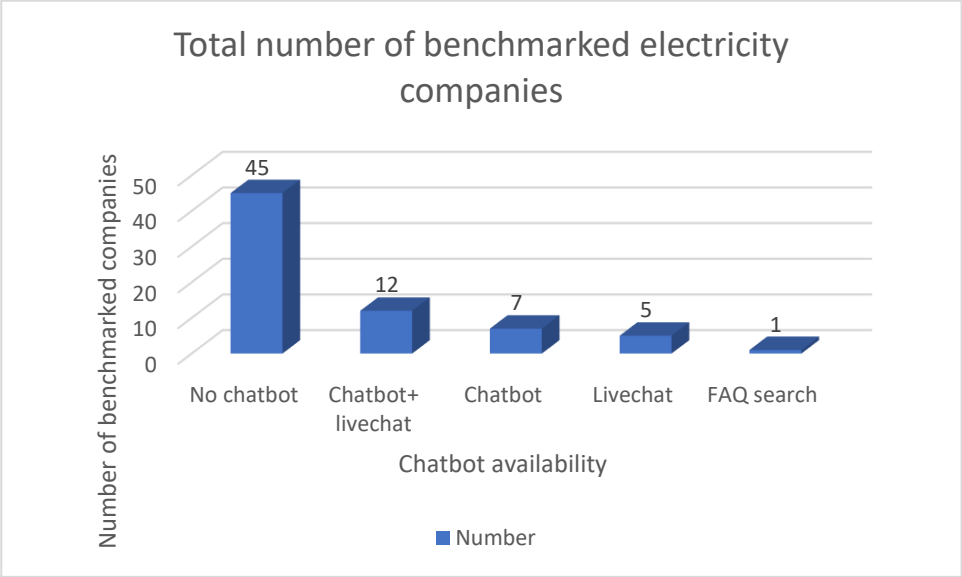

Figure 5. Number of benchmarked companies with itemized chat features

All of the companies that had a chatbot made it available on the front page when entered to their website. All chatbots, except for two, were also accessible on the product page, but only three were available during the purchase flow after selecting a product. This could not be verified for one company that required bank-ID as the first step of the purchase flow, making it impossible to test. Some chatbots popped up with a question, such as 'How can I help you?' or 'What are you looking for?', but most were available only after clicking the chatbot icon. All the benchmarked chatbots presented same questions, no matter if it was on the frontpage of the company or on the product page. When opening the chatbot, most of the bots greeted by asking how they can help and some also presented their names and live chat opening hours. Some chatbots were list based, presenting a list of different options when opened. Many chatbots were quite generic, but 13 of the tested chatbots had names and some provided instructions on using the chatbot, such as advising users to ask short and clear questions for better understanding.

One of the questions that was presented to the chatbots was to provide an offer for an electricity agreement for a two-bedroom apartment. Three of the chatbots failed to answer this relatively simple question. Some chatbots partially answered by directing user to a webpage with information about electricity contracts, and some pages even had a comparison tool to help select electricity contracts. Some list based chatbots required multiple selections to move forward, but eventually, user was able to find help. Only one chatbot was able to recommend a specific contract based on this question alone. When chatbots were asked for more detailed information about spot-priced contracts and how they work, five chatbots were able to answer, with two providing high-quality responses. Ten chatbots could not answer this question at all. Chatbots were also inquired about the meaning of a fixed-term electricity contract, and the responses were consistent with previous

questions, with most chatbots failing to answer and three providing good answers. As environmental friendliness is important to electricity customers in Finland (EPSI 2024), chatbots were presented a question about how to buy environmentally friendly electricity and how their electricity is produced. Quality of the answers was low. Four chatbots were able to fully answer the question and even those who answered failed to mention if there is extra fee on selecting environmentally friendly option. Only one chatbot was able to give good quality answer about environmentally friendly electricity. When asking about what will happen after making electricity agreement, only two companies were able to answer this question, and both of the answers were of low quality lacking some important information about the process.

One general observation is that most companies offer spot-priced electricity. In relation to this, chatbots were presented a question about how I can follow up on my electricity consumption. Six companies were able to answer this question, and four of those answers were of good quality. Chatbots were additionally asked a question about where I could find spot prices. Five chatbots were able to answer, but only one provided a high-quality response. Many of the answers directed users to find prices through an application, but as a consumer, the answers that offered different options, such as using an application or being directed to a webpage to see spot prices, were appreciated. Applications are usually requiring signing in and from user perspective it is positive experience to have options which don’t require signing in. None of the chatbots offered to show spot prices directly within the chatbot.

Chatbots were asked two invoicing-related questions: ‘how often will I receive an electricity invoice’, and ‘which payment methods are accepted’. The majority of the chatbots were unable to answer these questions, and some even became confused. Some chatbots asked if customer wanted to change invoicing rhythm or payment method, indicating that they are designed more to serve current customers rather than attract new ones. The most concerning response as a potential customer was when a chatbot started explaining what to do if customer failed pay invoice on time. Only two companies provided high-quality responses to both invoicing-related questions.

Handover to a human was mostly done by transferring the customer to live chat when the chatbot failed to answer. From the user's perspective, there were different ways of making this happen. Some chatbots directed users to a human worker without notice, which was a bit confusing as it was unclear whether conversation was happening with a chatbot or with a human. Testing live agents wasn't within the scope of this thesis, and most of the benchmarking was done outside of service hours. This is why, during benchmarking, there was a decision to ask the chatbot if there was a possibility to leave a callback. Most of the chatbots offered contact information for customer service and details about their opening hours. Some companies provided contact forms where

users could fill in their queries, and one company offered an easy option to leave a callback through the chatbot. The only downside was that there was no way to know when the callback would be answered. It seems that handover to human is seen as something that is mostly happening during working hours and benchmarked companies have put only a little effort into smooth transfer to human agent after working hours.

Most of the chatbots collected feedback about their performance. There were different ways to collect feedback. Some of them explained what feedback is used for and some of them just offered possibilities to rate the chatbot. Feedback was collected by giving star ratings, with different smiley faces, and with thumbs up or down.

The chatbots primarily cater to existing customers rather than attracting new ones. This was evident in list-based chatbots, where pre-defined questions focused on invoicing and topics relevant to current customers. This finding is noteworthy, as numerous website visitors may not yet have become customers of the company. An option for visitors seeking a new electricity contract could be added to chatbots, as some of the benchmarked companies have already implemented this feature.

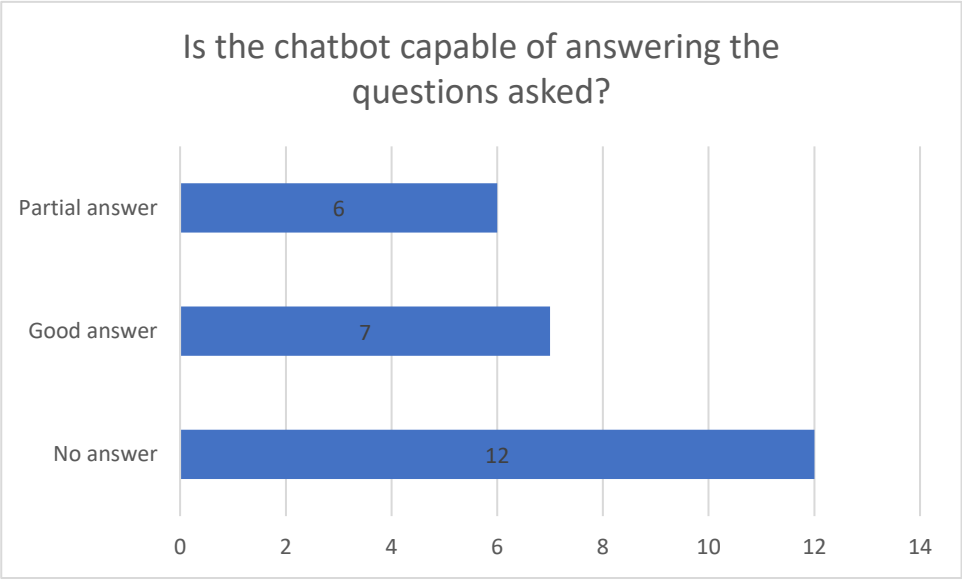

Figure 6. Chatbot's capability to answer questions

A general observation of the benchmarked chatbots is that they are not very advanced. None of the chatbots were able to answer all the questions presented. The worst chatbots failed to answer questions and sometimes gave incorrect information. Figure 6 shows that chatbots failed to answer most questions. Sometimes chatbots gave partial answers or directed customer to look for more information from website. When a chatbot gives customers a terrible experience, it makes one

question whether it is better not to have a chatbot on the webpage at all. Well-performing chatbots offer clear benefits to customers. The best chatbot was able to provide excellent quality answers to eight out of the ten questions presented. This shows that an AI-powered generative chatbot that is well-trained and implemented can really help potential customers find information and start interacting with the company. Interestingly, the best-performing chatbots were not from the largest electricity companies, indicating that smaller companies are also capable of creating well-performing chatbots. It has been noted that the implementation of artificial intelligence does not address all the challenges associated with chatbots. Certain list-based chatbots demonstrated considerable user-friendliness, facilitating the process of locating answers. Although some options needed to be navigated to reach the correct responses, these chatbots ensured ease of use. Although AI chatbots answered more questions than list-based ones, they sometimes gave misleading information or incorrect answers.

4.2 Findings of semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews revealed several common themes mentioned by multiple interviewees. Three main themes emerged from the interviews. The first theme is the rationale behind selecting a chatbot and the key features interviewees appreciated in chatbot user experience. The second theme focuses on the handover to a human agent. It is common for chatbots to be unable to answer all questions, and many interviewees viewed chatbots as a useful tool for connecting with a human agent. The third theme identified in the thematic analysis is the role of chatbots in sales. Interviewees discussed how they used chatbots when considering purchase decisions and how they would like to use chatbots in the purchasing process if the chatbots provided the desired user experience. As a background information interviewee age and gender was collected, but in this study no significant differences between genders were noted.

Additionally, development ideas for the case company’s chatbot will be addressed. It is important to note that this theme did not emerge independently from the data. Interviewees watched a demo video of the case company’s chatbot and were asked questions about it. Interviewees had possibility to give open-ended answers.

4.2.1 When chatbot is selected and why?

There seems to be some differences when it comes to chatbot usage and frequency of it. Some of the interviewees were selecting chatbot as their primary source when they needed assistance and were delighted if they found it from the webpage or application. That type of persons always used chatbot first before searching for answers elsewhere. Some interviewees mentioned that they only use chatbot when they can’t find information they are looking for from websites. There seems to be

differences in personalities weather chatbot is seen as a useful tool or if it is seen as un-necessary. One interviewee mentioned avoiding chatbots if it is possible to do so.

As a positive thing interviewee mentioned that chatbot usually is quick way to find information. It was also appreciated that chatbots can be used after working hours in weekends and evenings. For many interviewees it was important that they are not dependent on the opening hours of customer service. Chatbots were primarily used when looking for answers to simple questions. There were indicators that many interviewees were open to use chatbots even more, but previous bad chatbot experiences are not encouraging to use them for complex issues. One of the interviewees mentioned, “I know that chatbots are daily improving, but my own experience about average chatbot level is not extremely good. There are differences, but in average chatbots are not that good.” (P2) Sometimes people are hesitant to use chatbot if they know they have more difficult question. One interviewee noted, “If you ask very simple questions, which you might know you could find on the website anyway, then the experience is quite positive. But if the question is even slightly more challenging, then maybe not. You haven't received that information through the chat.” (P6)

Negative experiences about chatbot were linked to chatbot not being able to solve problem and not being able easily to connect to human worker if chatbot wasn’t able to solve problems. It was seen as a positive thing in case chatbot didn’t understand the question that it would ask some clarifying questions or offered some options. Although as chatbot is seen as a quick tool it is not positive experience if customer needs to read a long list of alternatives especially if they are all wrong. One of the interviewees mentioned, “Bad experience is when you ask a question, and you get answer: I don’t really understand you. Did you mean. and then there are 5million different options or look answers to your questions from here.” (P3) Previous negative chatbot user experiences are impacting willingness to use chatbot in the future.

Chatbots are mostly selected for their quick and easy usability. They were used both as customer service tools for inquiries to current suppliers and in situations where purchases were being planned. When chatbots are used, interviewees seek quick assistance, and they can be utilized during the workday, allowing users to stop using them if more important tasks arise.

4.2.2 Handover to human

Sometimes chatbot was selected also in situations where user was thinking chatbot will not be able to solve their problem. The reasoning behind this is that chatbot will be able to connect user to human, who can help in solving their problem. One interviewee stated that: “When I use chatbot, I don’t select that I want to use chatbot. I think it is a way to get connected to human worker to solve problem, if chatbot is not able to solve it.” (P1)

A negative user experience was mentioned by many interviewees when the chatbot was unable to answer their question and they were still unable to reach a human worker. One interviewee specifically highlighted this as a negative experience: “When you ask a question and then chatbot asks you clarifying question and then you just can’t move forward, and the end result is that you need to reach human. But when you ask for it, it is not possible.” (P6) A negative experience is created when an answer to a question is not provided, and correct information on how to find answers or contact a human worker is also not given.

A good experience was mentioned when a conversation was started with a chatbot, and upon the chatbot's inability to answer the question, a smooth transfer to a human worker was provided. It was also noted by several interviewed persons that knowing whether they are speaking to a chatbot, or a human is important. Smooth way to transfer to human worker is important. And when this is working it is not a problem that chatbot wasn’t able to answer questions. It is quite clear that important thing for interviewees is to get answers to their questions in an efficient way and for them it is more important to get answers quickly than if the answers are coming from chatbot or from a human.

There are many ways of doing the actual transfer from chatbot to human. Based on the interview data it seems to be likely that if person started conversation in chat, it is likely that they would like to continue conversation in chat as well. As an example of a smooth transfer to a human agent, it was mentioned that a notification should be given when the chatbot is unable to answer questions, followed by a transfer to a human worker. It was also wished by interviewees that the human agent is informed about the previous discussion. In an ideal situation, the same question and discussion previously had with the chatbot do not need to be repeated.

Many interviewees appreciated the chatbot's constant availability, mentioning that they often used it after working hours. They chose the chatbot to get quick answers, as long waiting times to connect with a human worker were seen as a negative customer experience. In some cases, live agents were not available now. In those instances, interviewees expressed a desire to be contacted later or to know their position in the queue. Some customers valued the option to leave a written question and receive a written answer later. Additionally, some interviewees appreciated the possibility of leaving a callback request, as it allowed them to read the response at their convenience. However, some interviewees did not favor callbacks because they were unsure when they would receive the call. They mentioned that they could not answer calls while working and disliked answering calls from unknown numbers. It was also noted that callbacks are not suitable for urgent cases, as the timing of the contact is uncertain. One interviewee mentioned: “I have left a callback…In this case they tell you we will get back to you as soon as possible within our service

times and I feel a bit like, when are they going to call me and who is going to call me. Maybe in ideal situation there would be follow-up question. Do you want to get a call 16-20 or like different time slots or something. Maybe this you will be contacted as soon as possible doesn't really tell that much." (P1) The possibility of being contacted afterwards is appreciated, but it would be better if the timing and method of contact could be selected by the individual.

4.2.3 Chatbot in sales

Half of the interviewees mentioned that they have used a chatbot either when purchasing a product or service or when considering a purchase. However, only one of those interactions resulted in a purchase. In that case, the customer had a brief discussion with the chatbot and was quickly connected to a human worker via chat after the chatbot was unable to answer their questions. The assisted chat personnel were able to provide the necessary answers and convince the customer to make the purchase. Additionally, individuals who hadn't used a chatbot for purchasing decisions were mostly open to the idea. The main limitation in using chatbots for purchasing decisions was previous experiences with low-quality chatbots and the belief that chatbots would not be able to help.

There are indicators that chatbots are used by interviewees in the purchase process when they are hesitant and unsure about what they need. This can occur when they are uncertain about which product would be best for them or when they don't fully understand certain product features. Also, industry language might not be so easy to understand. One interviewee mentioned, "There is a low bar to ask questions; I don't have to feel ashamed to ask questions." (P1) Another interviewee stated that they don't use chatbots when purchasing products or services because they usually know what they are looking for. This suggests that chatbots are a useful tool for people who are buying something unfamiliar. One interviewee said, "Product descriptions are usually quite long or if I'm looking for some specific information or product recommendation or something. I see it (chatbot) could help me to make decision." (P10) Another interviewee stated, "When I'm kind of considering between some products, I might ask chatbot questions and then believe if it can't answer, I will reach a human through the chatbot." (P1) The most common question when thinking about purchasing a product or service seems to be getting recommendations based on individual needs. It was mentioned that chatbots can help when there are similar products or services and customers are unsure which one would fit their needs. This indicates that chatbots are not only wanted for general answers but also for personalized experiences.

In cases where interviewees used a chatbot while considering a purchase but ultimately did not make a purchase decision, they were unable to get the help they needed from the chatbot. In one instance, there was an option to leave a callback, but the information indicated that callbacks

would be answered within a week. The interviewee chose not to leave a callback and instead visited the webpage of another company. It appears that the crucial factor for interviewees was receiving help quickly, regardless of whether it came from a chatbot or a human worker. Notably, none of the interviewees who used a chatbot while considering a purchase and did not receive help ended up buying from that company. This suggests that chatbots play an important role in the purchasing decision, even if the purchase itself is not completed through the chatbot.

When a purchase is being considered, questions are often asked from a chatbot online, with the expectation of receiving quick assistance. It was mentioned that if there is information indicating that answering questions will take a long time, customers would rather seek another supplier. One interviewee mentioned that they have chosen a company based on its chatbot. If a customer wants to take their time selecting a product, they might choose another channel instead of a chatbot. The main feature of a chatbot that is appreciated is its ability to provide quick answers.

4.2.4 Development ideas for case company’s chatbot

First impressions of the case company’s chatbot were generally positive or neutral. The chatbot resembled others that interviewees had seen before. It was clear and provided a good number of links and options when it couldn't answer a question directly. Interviewees appreciated that the chatbot indicated it would be available 24/7 and demonstrated good conversational capabilities. Additionally, it was valued that the chatbot easily offered contact information for customer service. Most interviewees mentioned that they could imagine themselves using this chatbot on some occasions.

Although the initial impressions of the chatbot were generally positive, there were areas that could be improved. The chatbot was helpful in directing users to the correct page on the website or to customer service. However, in many cases, it was unable to solve problems independently. Interviewees felt that they did not receive full value from the chatbot when it primarily redirected them to the website or customer service. Ideally, the chatbot should be able to solve problems independently. One interviewee commented, "I would have found the phone number for sales without the chatbot." (P2) Additionally, it was mentioned that users only received partial answers to their questions when the chatbot directed them to look for more information on the website. When asking to leave a callback, the chatbot directed users to send an email to the company, which interviewees found to be a complex way to request a callback.

When interviewees were asked to imagine they were thinking about changing electricity contract and going to company’s webpage to ask for help from the chatbot, all interviewees asked questions related to different electricity contracts. Some interviewees wanted directly to talk about what

kind of house they live in and ask for offer and some others wanted to know differences between spot priced contract or other types of contracts. One student wanted to know about student contracts. The chatbot was able to give full answer to one of the questions but in other cases answer was only partial as user was directed to webpage or to customer service. In some cases, the chatbot didn't even seem to understand what was wanted. One comment from interviewee was: "It could be convenient if (chatbot) would be able to give you some sort of offer and tell, hi from here helper tool you can get more help or to contact someone who can talk with you. That would be better from sales perspective." (P3) It was mentioned by many interviewees that they would like to get some kind of offer directly from chatbot before getting forwarded to elsewhere. It was mentioned that the chatbot could ask questions to find out customer's needs in electricity contract before making offer or recommendation.

Upon conclusion of the interview, participants were provided with five distinct development proposals. They had the opportunity to comment on these ideas and rank them in order of priority. The development ideas presented were:

1. Adding the possibility to leave a callback request in the chatbot.
2. Developing the chatbot's personality to make it more recognizable and distinct from other general chatbots.
3. Integrating the chatbot into the shopping basket, allowing users to ask questions after selecting a product and adding it to the basket.
4. Adding a QR code to marketing materials that would lead customers to the chatbot for more information about the advertisement.
5. Enhancing the chatbot's ability to provide product recommendations and descriptions.

From the development ideas presented, it was clear that number 5. product recommendations and descriptions should be a key capability of the chatbot. Most interviewees prioritized this as the first area for development, with some even expressing surprise that this feature wasn't already more advanced. They wanted the chatbot to provide personalized product recommendations and help users better understand different products.

Another widely supported idea was idea number 1 about lead collection and callback functionality. Interviewees were willing to leave their phone numbers for a callback if they couldn't get immediate assistance, such as when customer service is closed. However, it is important to note that users want to be able to choose when they will be contacted. There were requests for different options

and the ability to select a preferred callback time. Some people did not want to receive calls at all, so there should be alternative ways to get help when live chat is unavailable. In case of callback, it would be important that caller is familiar with the previous discussion with the chatbot.

Beyond the top two ideas, interviewees were less agreed on the next development, though two other concepts had some backing. Idea number 3. Adding the chatbot to the shopping cart was widely supported, as it should be universally available. However, numerous interviewees reported that they were unable to identify any circumstances in which they would utilize it. This raises the question of whether it's worth developing this feature if interviewees said they would not use it.

Another idea that received mixed feedback was idea number 4. about adding a chatbot behind a QR code on marketing materials. Some interviewees supported the idea, as customers could engage with the chatbot upon seeing a marketing message. However, others found it pointless and said they would never scan a QR code. The feedback indicated that if there is something behind the QR code, it needs to be well planned.

Developing a chatbot personality as mentioned in idea number 2. was seen as a risky thing, as it can easily become annoying. Most interviewees preferred the chatbot to remain neutral. While some interviewees mentioned that a brand-fitting personality could be nice, for most, the chatbot's personality didn't matter much if it could effectively answer questions. One interviewee suggested that it would be beneficial if, at the beginning of the conversation, users could choose the type of chatbot they want to interact with—whether more professional or more relaxed. Additionally, it was mentioned that it could be fun if users could select the dialect the chatbot uses, like the experience of talking with a salesperson who has a different dialect.

4.3 Summary of findings

This thesis focuses on improving sales in AI based chatbots and to verify theoretical framework two different methods were used to get research findings. The benchmarking study revealed that chatbot adaptation in the electricity industry is still limited. Only 19 companies had chatbots, and many gave incorrect or unhelpful answers. Chatbots were generally more tailored for existing customers than helping to attract potential new customers. The best preforming chatbots were able to provide good quality answers to most of the questions asked. Getting good answers quickly was helping in creating positive customer experience.

From semi-structured interviews three main themes were recognized. Those were rationale behind selecting chatbot, handover to human and chatbot in sales. Chatbot was selected as it is quick and easy to use and available also after working hours. However, previous bad experiences with low-quality chatbots have made some hesitant to use them for complex issues. Many interviewees

thought that chatbots are useful tool for connecting with human agent when chatbot is unable to solve their problem. Smooth transfer to human worker is important, and interviewees appreciated knowing whether they are speaking to a chatbot or to a human worker. Half of the interviewees mentioned using chatbot when considering a purchase. Chatbots are useful for people who are buying something unfamiliar and need recommendations based on individual needs.

Most interviewees wanted personalized product recommendations and better understanding of different products. Chatbot could independently help them to select correct product and understand how it is working. When interacting with chatbot after working hours interviewees were willing to leave their phone number for a callback if they couldn’t get help immediately. They also wanted to be able to select when they would be contacted. It was seen as interesting development idea to add chatbot to shopping basket, but it was questionable if it would bring much value to interviewees as they mentioned that they wouldn’t use it.

5 Conclusions

The objective of this thesis was to determine how chatbots can meet the unique needs of electricity consumers and to gather ideas for improving chatbots as part of the sales funnel. The thesis aimed to answer following four research questions:

> RQ1: What role can chatbots play in company's sales strategy and how can they be effectively utilized in sales?
>
> RQ2: How other electricity companies present their offering in chatbots and what we can learn about that?
>
> RQ3: Which user experience factors influence the effectiveness of AI chatbots in driving sales, considering both positive and negative drivers affecting customer experience and willingness to become a customer?
>
> RQ4: How can case company improve their chatbot as a part of the sales funnel?

The study started with literature review that covered chatbot being part of the company's sales strategy and how it can impact customer experience and sales. In the literature review, some of the unique needs of electricity consumers in Finland were also covered. As a summary of the literature review this thesis proposed chatbot being able to have important part in decreasing purchasing hesitation of customers.

Benchmarking was used as a research method to cover how other companies present their offering in chatbots and how well their chatbots were able to answer questions new customers might be asking from a chatbot. Benchmarking was also helping to understand what kind of user experience chatbot can create.

Another studying method that was used in this thesis was semi-structured interviews. Those interviews helped to deepen understanding about different positive and negative customer experience factors in chatbots and additionally created understanding when and why customers are selecting to use chatbots. This thesis presents a roadmap for the company about how case company's chatbot could be developed to be better part of the sales funnel and meet needs of the potential new customers.

5.1 Key outcomes

Research question **RQ1** focused on the company's strategy and effectiveness of chatbots as a part of the sales funnel. Figure 1 (page 34) illustrates how customer experience and chatbots can impact purchase decisions when customers express hesitation. Good quality AI chatbot or support from sales agent can turn hesitation to purchase decision. Additionally, positive customer experiences and customer possibility to select when and how they buy can turn hesitation into purchase decision. Literature overview suggested that chatbots are effective in releasing purchase hesitation.

Purchase hesitation can be caused by many different factors which can be personal or environmental. Sometimes company can feel impersonal and distant for user. In those cases, communication between company and consumer can positively influence customer purchase intentions. (Zhang et al. 2014) When customers visit a company's webpage without making a purchase, increasing interactions with the help of a chatbot can enhance their engagement with the company (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 78).

Findings from semi-structured interviews are in line with findings from literature review but bringing some extra information about what consumers are asking from a chatbot. Interviewees were willing to use chatbot when they were unsure about purchase decision or didn't really understand the product or its features. Questions asked from a chatbot are often related to product features and understanding of them. The industry language may not always be clear to users. A chatbot is selected for its quick and easy usability in finding answers to questions, particularly when purchasing something unfamiliar. One interviewee mentioned that there is no need to feel ashamed when asking seemingly simple questions to a chatbot. Purchase hesitation can be alleviated if the chatbot is capable of answering customer questions and fostering commitment to the company. In this way, the chatbot can assist the company in winning customers over.

When customer makes a purchase decision, they are not purchasing only the product they are getting value that this product is bringing to them. (Ojanperä, Pyyhtiä & Rehn, 2023, 93-94) Customers value a smooth and easy purchasing process. If the service is poor and the process feels too complicated, they are likely to turn to competitors. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 15) Customers today value personalization and if they feel like getting personal service, they are more likely to make repeat purchases. (Arora et al. 2021). One interviewee mentioned that they have selected company based on their chatbot. This is one comment from interview, but 50 % of interviewees had used chatbot when thinking about purchasing. Most of those situations were related to purchase need, but customer was unsure about the product selection and wanted to check some things before

making a purchase decision. In interviews it was mentioned that personalized product recommendations would help customers to make purchase decision.

One of the problems that can be solved by an AI chatbot is lead collection. When a potential customer is already on the website, it is time for them to be more connected to the company and assisted in making a purchase decision. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 78, 138) Leads generated by AI chatbots are usually good quality as chatbot can guide customer through conversation and collect information to support agent contacting customer later (Needle 2021). Chatbots can additionally qualify leads and recognize the most potential ones and prioritize them for sales agents to call (Kiely 2024). It is preferable that customers could book time when they want to be contacted. This can be done if chatbot is connected to salesperson calendar or to phone system. This way customer has realistic expectations about when they will be contacted. (Cancel & Gerthardt 2019, 16, 156-157)

In literature review lead collection was described to be effective way to get more conversion from digital sales. In semi-structured interviews interviewees were more hesitant towards leaving callback. Many stated that if they use digital channel like chatbot they would like to stay in digital channel if possible. Although in interviews it became evident that chatbots are often used commonly after working hours. For many companies it is not possible to have 24/7 human assistance in digital channel, hence a callback could be a good possibility for customers who are interacting with chatbot after hours. Some interviewees expressed that they would be willing to leave their details for callback if they knew when they will be contacted. Negativity towards callbacks was mostly related to getting a call in inconvenient time. Some interviewees didn't want to get any calls as they prefer doing business digitally, but for many callbacks would be a good option if they knew when they will be contacted. The findings from the literature and interviews were not entirely aligned, though they did not conflict. Therefore, careful planning is essential when improving lead collection to ensure a positive customer experience.

From business perspective chatbot is cheap way to collect leads and convert customers from hesitant customers to making purchase decision. However, chatbots still lack some of the human skills like empathy and ability to answer complex issues. Companies should find a balance between channels and secure seamless transition from channel to another also after opening hours.

Timing is often seen as a critical factor in making the sales. Customers need to get information they need at the correct time to close the deal. (Paliwala 2024) Great advantage with chatbot is that it is always available for customers and not dependent on working hours (BasuMallick 17 June 2022). Especially in sales, interactions are important and chatbots don't have the same skills as humans. However, chatbots can be available on the website 24/7 which is not possible for human

workers in most of the companies. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 33) Chatbots can offer efficient shopping experience by offering timely personalized support during purchasing process (Babulak 2023, 16). In interviews it was expressed that smooth and quick transfer to human agent is appreciated in cases where chatbot is unable to help customer. Benchmarking showed that this practice is not yet common in electricity industry.

When customer is hesitating AI can help to offer customer something else or offer possibility to leave a callback (Kumar & Kotler 2024, 82). Chatbots can engage better than apps with their human like interaction (Hsu et al. 2023). Biggest problems on traditional online sales experience is that site is hard to navigate, and it fails to answer simple questions when customer can't find information they were looking for. Chatbot can complement online sales funnel by offering support and answering simple questions. (Cancel & Gerhardt, 2019, 42) Interviews confirmed that chatbot is seen as a quick way to get answers to simple questions. Chatbots were often selected as primary contact with the new company, but challenge was that many of the chatbots lacked capabilities to answer complex questions. Sometimes when interviewees predicted that chatbot couldn't answer their questions they didn't even try.

From business perspective it would be important not to lose customers who are hesitating. This is why this thesis recommends to secure smooth transfer to human agent when chatbot fails to answer. This solution should be available also outside of the working hours. Possibility to leave callback and to select when to get it would make customer more engaged with the company than just giving a number to customer service. From company's perspective it makes sense to prioritize contacts from potential customers. Although during busy times this possibility should be turned off as both literature overview and semi-structured interviews showed that customers are not happy if they don't know when they will be contacted or if they know that it will take a long time to get contacted. Chatbot can help company's digital sales channel to be more effective and bring customer that extra value they are looking for.

When searching answer to research question **RQ2** this thesis used benchmarking as a research method. Aim was to find the best practices from other companies about presenting products and recommend them to customers. Surprising finding from this thesis was that overall, in electricity industry chatbot quality was not high and most of the chatbots were more suitable for serving existing customers than attracting new ones. In literature review this thesis found examples about chatbots which are active on attracting customers to interact with them by asking different questions from customers in different pages they are visiting. This doesn't seem to be the practice in electricity industry yet. But it was interesting to notice in semi-structured interviews that potential customers would be open to talk more about their needs in chatbot if they trusted chatbot being able to

answer their questions. Based on the semi-structured interviews customers are looking for help in product selection from chatbot and are willing to use it. Recommendation from this thesis is to secure that chatbot is well-suited to answer product related questions and give recommendations for customers. It would also be good if customer could get the first recommendations in chatbot and then smoothly be transferred to the sales flow to continue. As the overall chatbot quality in electricity industry is not yet great, it could bring advantage to the company against the competitors to have a high quality chatbot.

Research question **RQ3** was searching for answers to positive and negative user experiences when using chatbot. Answers to this research question were mostly found by semi-structured interviews which were in line with findings from literature review. One of the key findings is that for many interviewees chatbot was the primary channel they used when looking for help. This was interesting finding as most of the literature and articles used in this thesis is not from Finland and without interviews it was unsure if willingness to use chatbots also applies to electricity market customers in Finland.

Customers are willing to use chatbot if it means improvement to customer experience (Needle 2021). Although customers can get frustrated if chatbot is not able to answer their questions and fail to connect them with human agent. (Mukherjee 2024) Semi-structured interviewee findings were in line with theory findings. Negative factors impacting user experience were when chatbot couldn’t answer questions but also didn’t help to connect user to human assisted channels. Chatbot not being able to answer customer questions could even be positive customer experience if it was followed up by smooth transfer to human assisted channel. One finding was that there is a customer type who always select self-service channel when it is possible, and they can also select their service provider by comparing their digital services like chatbot and application. For this user group it is important that chatbot is helping them when becoming a customer otherwise they might turn to other company. Chatbot is selected because it is quick and easy to use and available after working hours. This is why transfers to human agent should be quick and easy also after working hours. Chatbot should be able to answer as many questions as possible independently and not forwarding customer to other places in webpage if it is not necessary to do so. Previous chatbot user experiences are having impact on people’s willingness to use chatbots. If previous experiences are good, customers are more likely to use chatbot also in the future. In semi-structured interviews it was clear that many interviewees had experiences about chatbots failing to help them with complex issues and this had impact on their willingness to use chatbot. Although one of the interesting findings was that all the interviewees experienced situations where chatbot was not able to answer their questions, but even after some bad experiences many still used chatbot as their primary way to contact company if they had questions.

As a conclusion it is recommended that chatbot abilities to answer questions which are important to new customers could be improved. This includes product recommendations and ability to answer product related questions in more detail. The key in planning improvements is to think about decreasing purchase hesitation. Chatbot is seen as a low bar channel when asking questions which means that chatbot should be able to explain products and their features and pricing in easy and detailed form.

Chatbot is a main channel for customers to ask questions after working hours, but it still lacks ability to smoothly transfer customer to assisted channel when live chat is not available. Giving customer service phone number is not good enough way to secure that customer is not turning around to another supplier. Recommendation from this thesis is to develop chatbot ability to transfer customer from chatbot to assisted channel also after working hours. Potential customers should be able to get personal help as a priority.

It is likely that chatbot usage is increasing in the future and long-term recommendations are improving chatbot as a sales tool including improving personalization and interaction capabilities. In chapter 2.4 this thesis dived into future AI technologies and developing virtual electricity assistant could be interesting future for case company's chatbot. It would be important to search also for other possible future scenarios like having intelligent kiosks in shopping centers or adding gamification to process of becoming a customer. Another longer-term project that was left out from this thesis was exploration of voice chatbots.

5.2 Roadmap for the case company

A roadmap has been designed to help the case company prioritize development actions and establish a concrete plan for moving forward in the desired direction. The roadmap outlines actions planned for the next 3 months, 6 months, and one year. It serves as a framework to facilitate the implementation of desired changes. (Villani 2019, 44)

When searching answer to research question **RQ4** this thesis used findings from all the research methods used. Those research methods were literature overview, benchmarking and semi-structured interviews. **RQ4** was searching for answer to question how chatbot could be better integrated into the case company's sales funnel. To illustrate the research findings and recommendations to the case company, a visual roadmap was created. This roadmap is divided into different sections. Figure 7 presents all product recommendation-related development ideas on a timeline. Figure 8 outlines the timeline for ideas related to the handover from chat to human. Figure 9 focuses on visualizing the timeline for developing ideas aimed at encouraging customer conversations. The objective of this research was to determine how chatbots can meet the unique needs of electricity

consumers and to gather ideas for enhancing chatbots as part of the sales funnel. The end result of this thesis will be a roadmap for chatbot development, focusing on making the chatbot an integral part of the sales funnel.

This roadmap focuses on the development of the chatbot as part of the sales funnel. Actions are prioritized based on their impact on sales. There are some dependencies related to improvement execution order ensuring that certain actions are completed before others to secure a smooth customer experience. Three main themes were identified as crucial for converting hesitant customers into actual customers when visiting the company's webpage. These themes are improving product recommendations, enhancing handover to human agents, and encouraging customer conversations. Improvement ideas related to the main findings of this thesis are placed on a timeline starting from Q3/2025 and extending until Q2/2027.

This thesis recommends omnichannel approach where customer can select which channel suits their needs the best. To ease customer hesitation, it is important to encourage customers to engage in conversation, whether it is with a chatbot or a human. From a business perspective, fostering these interactions can be beneficial. However, interviews with potential customers revealed that if a chatbot is not performing well and cannot answer questions, it can become annoying when it tries to initiate a conversation. Therefore, before encouraging customers to engage in conversation, it is crucial to improve product recommendations and the handover process to human agents.

When customers are hesitant about what to buy, they often seek help from chatbots, asking product-related questions and for recommendations. Improving product descriptions and the chatbot's understanding of products can yield quick benefits. Therefore, this thesis recommends improving product descriptions as the first action. This can be done without technical development and is easy to execute.

After updating product descriptions, the thesis recommends implementing personalized product recommendations. In this case, if a user asks for product recommendations, the chatbot could ask a few short questions about their preferences and housing type, and then recommend a product based on that information. For some customers, visual recommendations work better than verbal ones. Chatbots can use not only text but also pictures and videos to help customers understand more complex issues. This thesis later recommends using different elicitation techniques, such as videos in product recommendations, to help customers understand products and their various features.

In parallel with this development, this thesis recommends starting to plan the implementation of a callback or leaving written case feature in the chatbot. This needs to be well thought out before

implementation, as interviewees were not enthusiastic about receiving a call from unknown number at a time when they are not free to answer. In potential sales situations, users expect to receive a callback immediately. Therefore, before implementing the callback feature, it should be considered how to prioritize the most valuable leads for callbacks. If company is unable to contact the customer quickly, company needs to be able to turn off the callback feature. Additionally, it would be beneficial to have the capability for customers to select a timeslot from a calendar when they want to receive a callback. To enhance customer experience, it would be beneficial for customers to have the option to leave a written case in the chatbot after working hours. However, literature indicates that real-time conversation is more effective in persuading customers to choose a company than delayed responses. Therefore, this feature might be more valuable in customer service rather than in sales.

Once product recommendations are improved and customers can receive personalized product recommendations through the chatbot, this thesis recommends focusing on attracting more customers to engage in conversation with the chatbot. The first and simplest step would be for the chatbot to ask a different question on the product page, such as "Do you want to hear more about our products and pricing?" Following this, the thesis recommends conducting testing to determine the most effective ways to encourage customers to engage in conversation with the chatbot.

Benchmarking chatbots showed that chatbots need to be well trained and followed up. Bad customer experiences can be avoided by good planning and follow-up and future developments should be well planned and executed. This is why this thesis recommends focusing on the most effective ways for chatbot to be a part of the sales funnel and execute them carefully.

Most of the results in this thesis could be used by any electricity company operating in Finland. As many of the literature sources used were not from Finland conclusions from this thesis could be additionally used in similar countries as Finland. Outside of the electricity industry the results could be used in other consumers services as some of the interviewees were talking about their previous interactions with banks and insurance company chatbots. In this research there are many findings which could apply to B2B business, but more research would be needed before applying any changes to B2B companies. The consumer electricity market in Finland also has specific features that limit the applicability of the findings to other industries or countries.

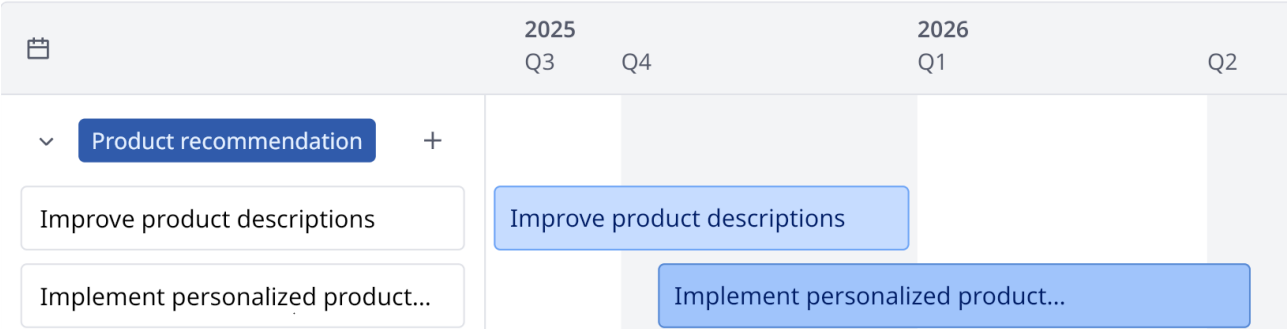

Figure 7. Roadmap including timeline for product recommendation development

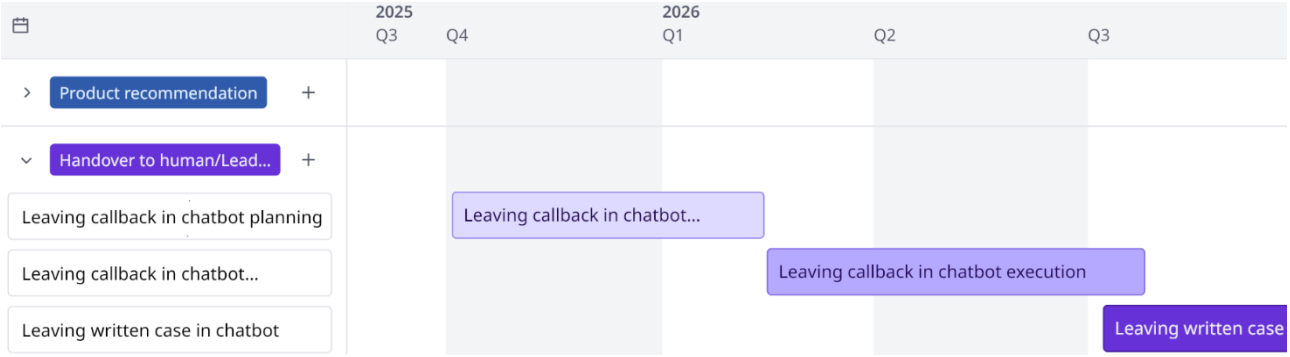

Figure 8. Roadmap about development related to handover to human development

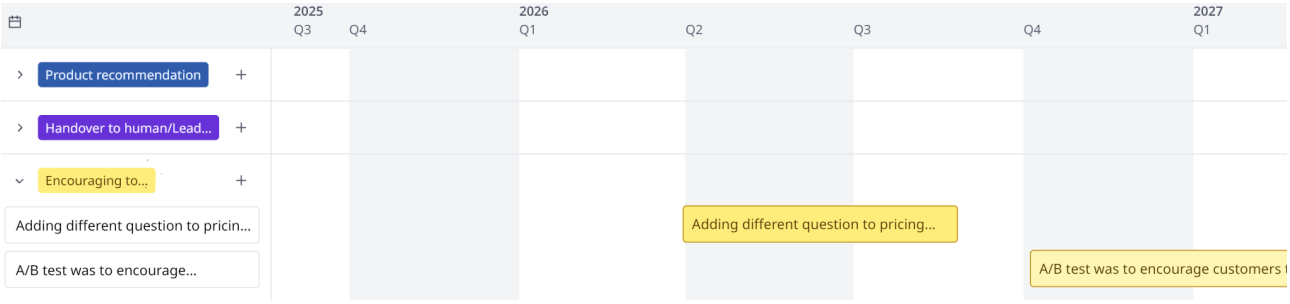

Figure 9. Roadmap timeline about encouraging customers to conversation development

Following the creation of the roadmap, discussions were held with internal stakeholders of the case company. During these discussions, the findings were deemed useful, although further conversations were necessary to align them with other ongoing initiatives. The roadmap requires updating and improvement before any changes can be implemented.

5.3 Validity, reliability and limitations of the study

This section of the thesis discusses the validity, reliability, ethics, and limitations of the study. The thesis writer evaluates the methods used and assesses how well the findings can be applied to

other use cases. Additionally, this section explores possibilities for future research on this topic and examines how AI was utilized in the study and its impact on the research's credibility.

The selected methodology for this thesis is a case study, which means that the study focuses on a specific case with the aim of providing benefits to the case company. This approach brings limitations on the extent to which the findings from this thesis can be applied to other companies. In the electricity industry in Finland, many of the findings could be relevant to the B2C sector. Additionally, other companies that make consumer contracts, such as insurance companies, could benefit from the findings of this study. However, this study was limited to the B2C sector, and its results cannot be directly applied to the B2B sector.

Benchmarking and semi-structured interviews were used as research methods in this study. All electricity supplier chatbots in Finland were benchmarked, along with some electricity provider chatbots outside of Finland. The answer quality of chatbots was rated by the researcher, which might have impacted the research's credibility. Benchmarking questions were additionally selected by the thesis writer, and personal thinking and industry knowledge might have influenced the selected questions. Findings might have been different if the rating of the benchmarking results was done by someone outside of the electricity industry, as knowledge about normal processes in the industry might have impacted the research results.

Another research method used in this thesis was semi-structured interviews. Many of the interviewees were acquaintances of the thesis writer, which may have positively impacted their willingness to participate. It was also presented at the beginning of the interview that the interviewer is employed by Fortum Markets Oy. Both of those factors might have created participant bias. This might have impacted the answers of interviewees. This might have been visible by participants giving more positive answers than if they did not know the interviewer previously or if they didn’t know who interviewee is working for. Although from ethical point of view it is necessary to tell interviewees who is doing interviews and why. Personal knowledge about the company and its processes and practices might have impacted the neutrality of the interviews. In future research to avoid researcher bias it would be interesting to do the same research by someone not working in the electricity industry. Interviews were additionally conducted in Finnish, and when the thesis is written in English, this might have impacted the accuracy of translating all the nuances from the interviews.

AI was used in making transcripts of interviews and in language guidance and spell check. Interviews were recorded using the co-pilot feature in Teams, allowing the co-pilot AI to transcribe the interviews. The thesis writer listened to the interviews again to ensure the transcripts were accurate, minimizing the possibility of mistakes made of using AI in the time-consuming transcription process. AI was additionally used in language guidance to find synonyms for single words and to

find improvement ideas for the thesis language and spelling to avoid repetition of the same words. This might have impacted the writing style of this thesis, but to minimize the impact, the writing was done by the thesis writer, and no structural changes to the thesis were made based on AI recommendations

Ethical considerations are crucial in conducting research. To ensure this study was carried out ethically, all interviewees were informed about the purpose of the interview and were made aware that the thesis writer is employed by the case company. They were also informed that participation in the interview is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. All interview materials were stored on the case company's computer and will be deleted once this thesis is accepted. Additionally, all interviews were anonymized, making it impossible to identify the interviewees in this study.

There were some limitations in the research. If this study was done again, it would be interesting to benchmark the very best chatbots in the world, regardless of the industry. This would potentially provide more new ideas, as chatbots in the electricity industry are generally not of high quality. Additionally, if this research was done again, the questions asked in benchmarking could be planned by a group of new customers to ensure that the tested questions would truly be important to potential customers.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted among 10 potential customers. Most of the interviewed individuals were in the age group of 30-40 years old, and the results might have differed if all age groups had been covered. Therefore, the sample of potential customers in this thesis is not representative of all potential customers, as older groups are completely missing from the sample, and only one person was younger than 30 years. If more research were to be conducted on this subject, it would be recommended to interview more individuals from the younger generation (20-30 years old) and older generations. Additionally, the interviewed individuals were selected based on their previous use of chatbots. Therefore, opinions from first-time chatbot users were not included in this study. It would also be interesting to interview individuals who do not use chatbots and determine which factors influence their decision not to do so.

This thesis intentionally focused on the B2C segment, but the literature review revealed that lead collection has an even more crucial role in the B2B segment than in the B2C segment. Future research could delve deeper into understanding B2B customers and what they would appreciate in a chatbot. Another theme intentionally left out was voice chatbots, which might become popular in the near future. All long-term future scenarios and technologies for chatbot development were only briefly covered in this thesis. It would be interesting to continue research on future possibilities, such as intelligent kiosks. A roadmap for the less important development ideas and for the future research suggestions was created and it's presented in Figure 10.

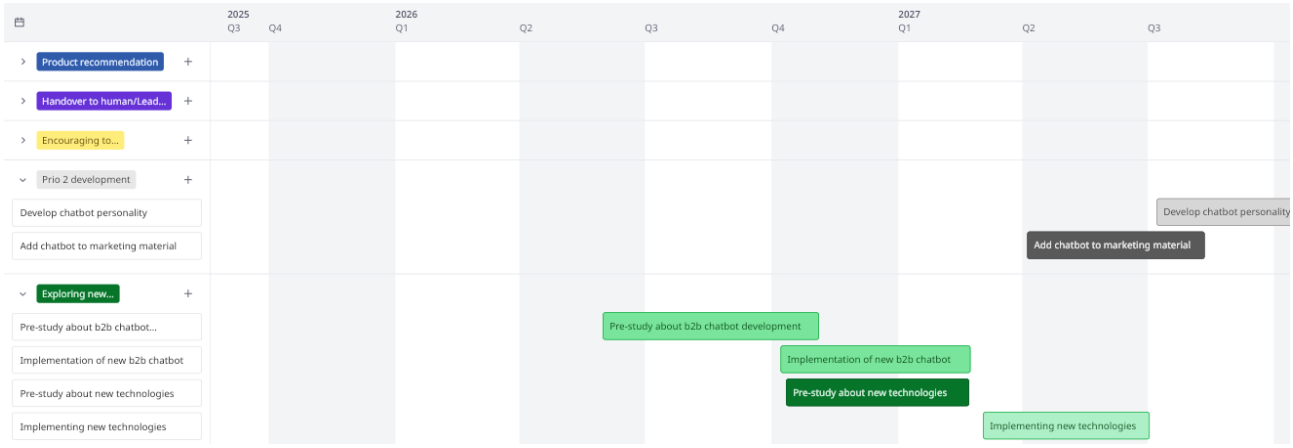

Figure 10. Timeline for secondary development and research about future scenarios

5.4 Learning outcomes

Conducting this research has significantly expanded the writer's understanding of chatbots and their impacts on customers and businesses. When developing a chatbot, it is essential to consider both user desires and business realities. Throughout this thesis project, the writer has also explored the potential of other AI technologies in sales.

Writing this thesis has been an interesting deep dive into the subject of chatbots as a sales tool. Undertaking this extensive research would not have been possible as part of daily work. As a learning process, it is crucial to have a subject that researcher find interesting. Initially, the writer started with a different subject, comparing various chatbot techniques. However, this topic was not clear and did not excite the writer. Changing the subject to improving sales in AI based chatbots was the right decision, as it felt more natural to research from the writer's perspective and aligned with the case company's strategy. The process was extended due to a long illness in the middle of the thesis project, but it was a valuable learning experience to continue making progress despite setbacks. It has been interesting to see that findings from literature review are mostly confirmed by semi-structured interviews. Interviews were correct method to select as opinions from real users get easily neglected. Biggest surprise has been low quality of chatbots used in electricity industry that was found out in benchmarking research. It was not possible to collect many best practices from different chatbots as only few of them were well-preforming. Using different research methods was good decision for this thesis as they helped to understand the subject from different viewpoints.

The case study about improving sales in AI-based chatbots contains a roadmap which is a practical tool for the case organization when developing their chatbot. Additionally, it opens opportunities

for future research in the chatbot area for the case organization, as well as for other organizations that provide services to their customers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of benchmarked companies

Name of the company who's chatbot is tested	Does company have chatbot or liv	Country
Omavoima Oy	Chabot + livechat	FI
Porvoon Energia Oy - Borgå Energi Ab	Chatbot	FI
Oy Herrfors Ab	Chatbot	FI
Tibber SE	Chatbot	SWE
Octobus energy	Chatbot	UK
Vipps NO	Chatbot	NO
Keravan Energia Oy	Chatbot	FI
GodEl	Chatbot	SWE
Väre Oy	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Oy Turku Energia-Åbo Energi Ab	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Fortum Markets Oy	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Kymenlaakson Sähkö Oy - Kymmenedalens El Ab	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Helen Oy	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Imatran Seudun Sähkö Oy	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Switch Nordic Green AB Filial Finland	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Vattenfall Oy	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Oomi Oy	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Bixia	Chatbot + livechat	SWE
Lumme Energia Oy	Chatbot + livechat	FI
Gasum Oy	Livechat	FI
Koillis-Satakunnan Sähkö Oy	Livechat	FI
Seinäjoen Energia Oy	Livechat	FI
Vibb NO	Livechat + article search	NO
Göteborg energi	Livechat. Not open on weekends.	SWE
Raseborgs Energi Ab	NO	FI
Volue Energy Market Services AS Filial Finland	NO	FI
Paneliankosken Voima Oy	NO	FI
Neova Oy	NO	FI
Sallila Energia Oy	NO	FI
Vaasan Sähkö Oy	NO	FI
Nykarleby Kraftverk Ab	NO	FI
Oy Linde Gas Ab	NO	FI
Parikkalan Valo Oy	NO	FI
Cheap Energy Finland Oy	NO	FI
Eletra energy Oy	NO	FI
Vihreä Älyenergia Oy	NO	FI
Äänekosken Energia Oy	NO	FI
Energia Myynti Suomi Oy	NO	FI
Esse Elektro-Kraft Ab	NO	FI
Statkraft Energi AS	NO	FI
Alajärven Sähkö Oy	NO	FI
Axpo Finland Oy	NO	FI
Aalto energia Oy	NO	FI
Ankkuri-Energia Oy	NO	FI
Entelios Oy	NO	FI
Vimpelin Voima Oy	NO	FI
Iin Energia Oy	NO	FI
Jeppo Kraft Andelslag	NO	FI
Jylhän Sähköosuuskunta	NO	FI
Kinect Energy AS - filial i Finland	NO	FI
Kokemäen Sähkö Oy	NO	FI
Korpelan Energia Oy	NO	FI
Kuoreveden Sähkö Oy	NO	FI
Keuruun Sähkö Oy	NO	FI

Hehku Energia Oy	NO	FI
KSS Energia Oy	NO	FI
Kronoby Elverk Ab	NO	FI
Kokkolan Energia Oy	NO	FI
Lankosken Sähkö Oy	NO	FI
Köyliön-Säkylän Sähkö Oy	NO	FI
Lehtimäen Sähkö Oy	NO	FI
Nurmijärven Sähkö Oy	NO	FI
Naantalin Energia Oy	NO	FI
Pohjois-Karjalan Sähkö Oy	NO	FI
Lammaisten Energia Oy	NO	FI
Tampereen Energia Oy	NO	FI
Sikamanni Oy	NO	FI
Vetelin Energia Oy	NO	FI
Oy Elkraft Finland Ab	NO. Web contact form	FI
Jämtkraft	Only FAQ search	SWE

Appendix 2. Benchmarking questions

Question in Finnish	Question in English
Haluaisin sähkötarjouksen kerrostalokaksioon?	I would like to get electricity offer to two bedroom apartment?
En ymmärrä miten pörssisähkö toimii oisitko selittää?	I don't understand how spot contract works. Can you explain?
Mitä tarkoittaa määräaikainen sähkösopimus?	What does fixed term contract mean?
Haluaisin ympäristöystävällistä sähköä. Miten sähkönne on tuotettu?	I would like to get environmental friendly electricity. How is your electricity produced?
Mitä tapahtuu, jos teen sähkösopimuksen kanssanne?	What happens if I make electricity agreement with you?
Miten voin seurata sähkönkulutustani?	How can I follow-up my electricity consumption?
Mistä näen pörssisähkön hinnat?	Where can I find electricity spot prices?
Miten usein saan sähkölaskun	How often will I get electricity invoice?
Mitä maksutapoja hyväksytte?	Which payment types do you accept?
Haluaisin jatkaa keskustelua puhelimitse. Voinko jättää soittopyynnön?	I would like to continue over phone. Can I leave a callback?

Appendix 3. Semi-structured interview questions

Question in Finnish	Question in English
Ikä	Age
Sukupuoli	Sex
Voisitko kertoa omin sanoin minkälaisia chatbot käyttökokomuksia sinulla on ollut?	Could you desribe in your own words what kind of experiences you have had with using chatbots?
Onko kokemuksissasi ollut jotain erityisen hyviä tai erityisen huonoja kokemuksia?	Have you had any particularly good or particularly bad experiences?
Minkälaisissa tilanteissa valitset chatbotin käyttämisen ja missä tilanteissa et halua chatbotia käyttää?	In what situations do you choose to use a chatbot and in what situations do you prefer not to use a chatbot?
Oletko joskus käyttänyt chatbottia tilanteessa, jossa olet ollut ostamassa jotain tai harkinnut jonkun tuotteen tai palvelun hankkimista?	Have you ever used a chatbot in a situation where you were purchasing something or considering acquiring a product or service?
Kuvaile miten chatbot voisi tukea sinua ostopäätöksen tekemisessä?	Describe how a chatbot could support you in making a purchase decision?
Missä vaiheessa ostokokemusta saattaisit käyttää chatbotia? Esimerkiksi tuotteiden vertailussa, tuotteen ominaisuuksien ymmärtämisessä tai ostoskorissa auttamassa ostoprosessin aikana	At what stage of the purchasing experience might you use a chatbot? For example, in comparing products, understanding product features, or assisting in the shopping cart during the purchasing process?
Questions related to demo video	
Kerro vapaasti omin sanoin mitkä ovat ensivaikutelmasi tästä chatbotista?	Feel free to describe in your own words what your first impressions of this chatbot are?
Mitä hyvää ja mitä huonoa havaitsit?	What good and bad did you notice?
Kuvittele olevasi etsimässä uutta sähkösopimusta. Minkä kysymyksen tässä tilanteessa saattaisit kysyä chatbotilta?	Imagine you are looking for a new electricity contract. What question might you ask a chatbot in this situation?
Mitä ajatuksia chatbotin antama vastaus herättää?	What thoughts does the chatbot's response evoke?
Voisitko kuvitella käyttäväsi tätä chatbotia jossain tilanteessa?	Could you imagine using this chatbot in some situation?
Questions related to case examples	
Onko chatbotin nimellä tai persoonalla merkitystä sinulle?	Does the name or personality of the chatbot matter to you?
Chatbot ei aina pysty vastaamaan kaikkiin kysymyksiin. Miten haluaisit siirtymisen chatbotista asiakaspalvelijalle sujuvan?	A chatbot cannot always answer all questions. How would you like the transition from the chatbot to a customer service representative to go?
Mikä näistä tavoista kerätä asiakaspalautetta chatbotin toiminnasta on mieluisin?	Which of these methods for collecting customer feedback on the chatbot's performance is the most preferred?
Järjestä nämä chatbotin kehitysideat tärkeysjärjestykseen niin, että 1 on tärkein ja 5 on vähiten tärkeä. Voit myös mainita mikäli jotain ideaa ei mielestäsi kannattaisi kehittää ollenkaan.	Arrange these chatbot development ideas in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important. You can also mention if you think any idea should not be developed at all.