

# Poster: “*Learning Too Much About Me*”: A User Study on the Security and Privacy of Generative AI Chatbots

Pradyumna Shome  
*Georgia Institute of Technology*

Miuyin Marie Yong Wong  
*Georgia Institute of Technology*

## 1 Introduction

Generative AI has burgeoned in the past few years, leading to highly interactive and human-like chatbots. Trained on billions of parameters and a vast corpus spanning gigabytes of the public Internet, tools like ChatGPT, Copilot, and Bard (which we refer to as generative AI chatbots) write code, draft emails, provide mental health counseling, teach us about the world, and act as mentors to help people advance their careers.

On the other hand, many communities have expressed reservations about widespread usage of such technology. Artists and writers are concerned about loss of their intellectual property rights and the potential for their work to be plagiarized [1, 4]. Educators are concerned about the potential for students to cheat on assignments, for bias in automated grading platforms, and for the chatbots to provide incorrect information [2, 5, 8]. Medical professionals are concerned about the potential for chatbots to misdiagnose patients, and for patients to rely on inappropriate advice [9]. There is fear of the unknown, justified concerns about the potential for misuse, and worry about societal harm. As with other revolutionary advancements in society, there is pressure to adopt these tools to keep up with technology and remain competitive. Before we can bridge this gap, we must understand the *status quo*.

Students are likely to be early adopters of new technology. By examining their initial experiences, we can gain insights into concerns faced by young adults about to enter an AI-integrated workplace. We perform an online survey of 86 students, faculty, and staff at our university, focused on security and privacy concerns affecting chatbot use. We found that participants are well aware of the risks of data harvesting and inaccurate responses, and remain cautious in their use of AI in sensitive contexts, which we unpack in later sections.

### Research Question

*What security and privacy concerns do students at a large public US university have with adopting generative AI, and how can we overcome them?*

## 2 Methodology

In April 2024, we conducted an IRB-approved online survey with  $N = 86$  students, faculty, and staff at Georgia Institute of Technology. The survey was distributed via email to mailing lists of people in various departments. The survey consisted of 28 questions and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The questions covered a wide range of topics, including the tasks that students use chatbots for, their attitudes towards sensitive queries (medical inquiries, personal and emotional issues, and academics), and their security and privacy concerns. The survey questionnaire is included in the appendices.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Demographics

The median participant was a female-identifying graduate student between 25-34 years of age, with a self-reported proficiency level with technology of 4 out of 5 ("Advanced"), who was moderately concerned about digital privacy.

The majority of respondents were graduate students. 27 participants majored in Computing, 4 in Design, 23 in Engineering, 10 in the Sciences, 4 in Liberal Arts, and 11 in Business. Participants indicated their level of privacy concern in general and with Generative AI chatbots on a scale of 1 (Very Unconcerned) to 5 (Very Concerned). The mean privacy concern was 3.67 and generative AI privacy concern was 3.56 for graduate students, and 3.40 and 3.08 for undergraduates respectively.

Computing students had the highest mean score for privacy concern, followed by students majoring in Design, Liberal Arts, or Business. Engineering and Sciences students were the least privacy conscious. Data indicates that expert knowledge is correlated with increased concerns, while some technical knowledge correlates with decreased concerns, and presumably lack of detailed knowledge on AI product deployment correlates with increased concerns, although not as much as those with expert knowledge. See the Appendices for graphs

of the distribution for several demographics.



Figure 1: Participant use cases of Generative AI chatbots

### 3.2 Concerns

Several themes emerged from concerns expressed by students: general concerns regarding data processing practices and accuracy, and domain-specific ones related to medical advice, personal and emotional issues, and plagiarism.

**Data Processing** Over 73% of participants are worried about their queries being used to build a profile that could be linked back to them, and the potential for this information to be used against them in the future. For example, they did not want insurance rates to be affected by their search history, or for their data to be sold to advertisers.

**Accuracy** Chatbots are prone to responding with incorrect information and generally do not furnish sources of information. When they do not know an answer, they tend to produce an answer that matches the format to the question instead of admit their lack of knowledge, because they are akin to sophisticated text predictors, and incapable of general cognition [3]. Over 18% of participants considered accuracy of responses not only to decide which AI product to use, but also to justify why they did not use a product for some specific types of queries including medical advice and academic assistance.

**Medical Advice** 50% of participants reported that they would not rely on a chatbot for routine health-related inquiries, whereas 36% expressed ambiguity. People were concerned about compliance with the US Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) [6], and the potential for data collection, storage, and misuse. On the other hand, others mentioned the chatbot’s lack of information about existing medical history, potential for misdiagnosis, and possibility of being trained on their inputs, leading to loss of control over private data. There was a strong theme of lack of trust of companies behind the chatbots.

Participants prefer talking to a registered medical practitioner for problems involving reproductive health, chronic

conditions, mental health concerns, concerns for which tests or scans need to be performed, and for anything requiring a diagnosis. Users generally restricted their use in this domain to that of a reference that could help them interpret medical jargon, provide general information about a condition, or explain advice given by a doctor.

**Personal and Emotional Issues** 64% of participants reported their unwillingness with discussing personal and emotional issues with a chatbot. Many people circumvent privacy leakage by asking general questions and treating it as a reference, whereas others ask detailed questions about personal situations without revealing identifying information.

**Plagiarism** 38% of participants reported using chatbots for help with coursework out of whom 27% were concerned about their work being considered plagiarized. Most reported using chatbots to help them when they get stuck on questions, produce concept explanations, and least frequently, verify their own solution.

Fact-checking behavior varies considerably, with 3-9 people in every bucket from "Always", "75-100% of the time", "50-75% of the time", and "Less than 25% of the time" to "Never". Students mentioned they fact-checked when querying about a topic they were not familiar with, when the response seemed redundant, inauthentic, conflicting with pre-existing knowledge, or when there were clear errors, such as in mathematics or programming-related tasks.

## 4 Design Recommendations

We propose several techniques that chatbot users and developers could implement to mitigate security and privacy concerns.

**Privacy Labels** User interfaces should include privacy labels [7], standard icons and data fields that clearly and unambiguously detail the chatbot’s data handling policy.

**Privacy-Enhancing Technologies** Chatbots could be trained using privacy-enhancing technologies such as differential privacy, secure multi-party computation, and trusted execution environments, to prevent leakage of user data.

**Prompt Engineering Education** Users must be taught to craft prompts that do not reveal personal information, improve response accuracy, and increase trust in responses. Some methods to accomplish this include providing users with a set of best practices for creating prompts, and feedback on the quality of their prompts.

**Customizable Language Models** Users would benefit from interface affordances that allow them to create workflow-bespoke chatbots, and have fine-grained control over the datasets they rely on. For example, a city government could create a chatbot that answers questions about city services, and have it trained on a dataset of frequently asked questions and city ordinances. This would allow the city to provide accurate, up-to-date information to its residents, without having to worry about the chatbot leaking sensitive information.

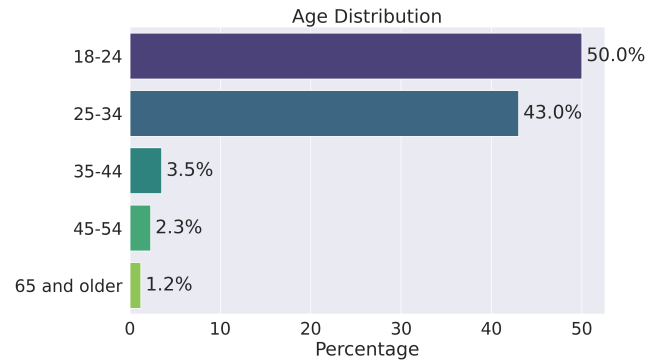
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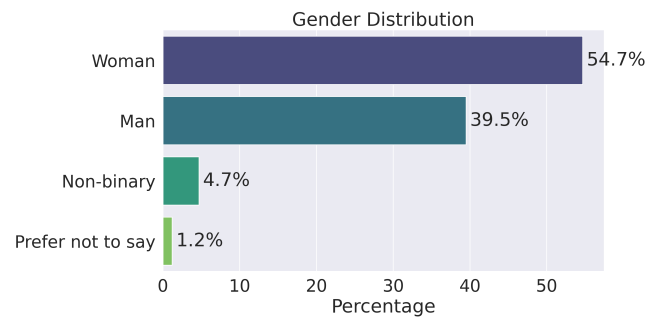
## A Appendices

### A.1 Demographics

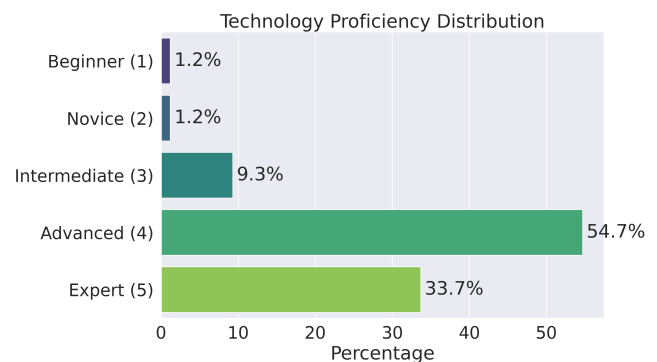
#### A.1.1 Age



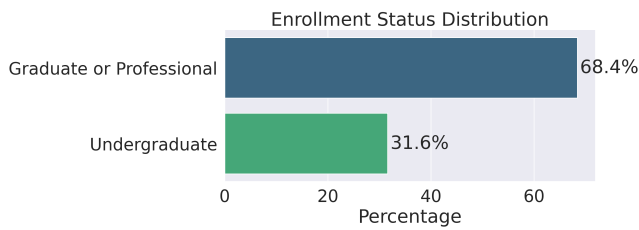
#### A.1.2 Gender



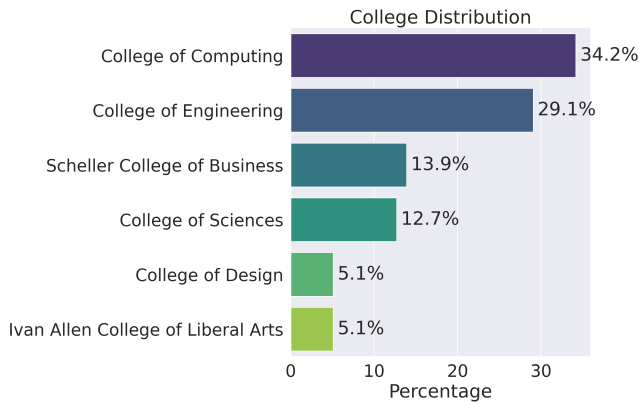
#### A.1.3 Proficiency Level with Technology



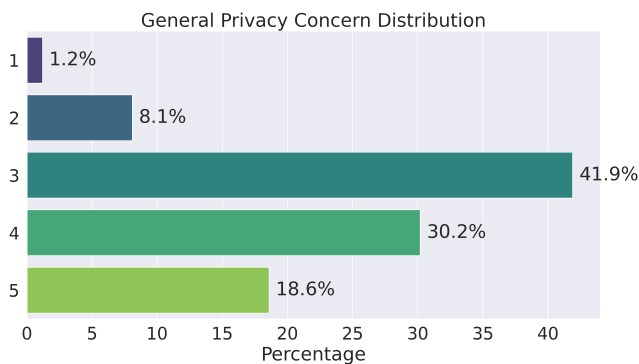
### A.1.4 Enrollment Status



### A.1.5 College

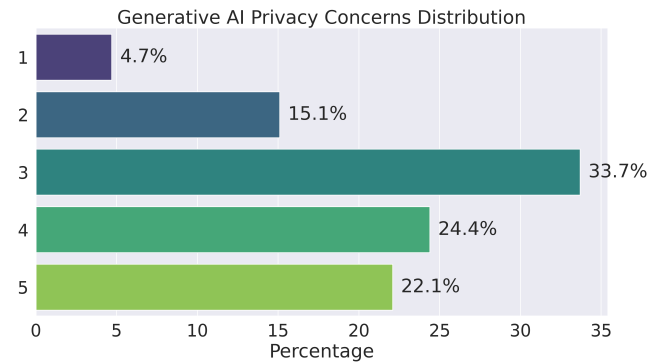


### A.1.6 Privacy Concerns



General Privacy Concerns. 1: Very Unconcerned, 5: Very Concerned.

### A.1.7 Generative AI Privacy Concerns



Generative AI Privacy Concerns. 1: Very Unconcerned, 5: Very Concerned.

## A.2 Survey Questionnaire

Questions marked with an asterisk (\*) were required. The survey text has been edited to remove personally identifying information.

### A.2.1 Background

I am conducting a study about the experiences of the Georgia Tech community (students, faculty, and staff) with Generative AI chatbots. The survey is aimed at gathering insights into how members of our community interact with and perceive generative AI chatbots, with a particular emphasis on aspects related to security and privacy. The survey is designed to capture diverse perspectives from students (undergrad through PhD), faculty, and staff across various departments. While I cannot instruct participants on what to write, I encourage individuals to share their genuine experiences, thoughts, and concerns regarding their interactions with AI chatbots. Questions center around the varying use cases people consider chatbots for, their usage in the classroom for students and faculty alike, in the medical domain and for personal and emotional issues, and what security and privacy concerns guide their adoption of the technology. This should take about 15 minutes, and not more than 30 minutes.

### A.2.2 Study Title

Generative AI Chatbot Experiences

### A.2.3 Sweepstakes

- Completing this survey will automatically enter you in the sweepstakes. After the survey and sweepstakes are closed, I will select 10 people at random and send them \$10 Amazon.com Gift Cards.

- Note that you don't need to complete the survey to be entered into the sweepstakes. If you would like to enter the sweepstakes without filling out the survey, please submit the form located at SWEEPSTAKES LINK.
- Email addresses collected will be deleted after I send the gift cards and will not be used for any other purposes in the study.

#### A.2.4 Eligibility

At the time of completing this survey, participants meet all of the following requirements:

- Be 18 years of age or older
- Be located in the United States

#### A.2.5 Consent

By completing the online survey, you indicate your consent to be in the study. You are free to navigate away from this page at any point should you wish to no longer participate, and your data will not be saved.

#### A.2.6 Benefits

There is no immediate benefit to subjects besides the sweepstakes. It will improve public awareness of privacy concerns a diverse set of people at a large public university in the US have with Generative AI, which could influence their development.

#### A.2.7 Risks

The risks involved are no greater than those involved in daily activities. You will not benefit for joining this study (unless you are selected in the sweepstakes). We will comply with any applicable laws and regulations regarding confidentiality. To make sure that this research is being carried out in the proper way, the Georgia Institute of Technology IRB may review study records. The Office of Human Research Protections may also look at study records. If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the Principal Investigator by email. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Georgia Institute of Technology Office of Research Integrity Assurance. Thank you for participating in this study.

#### A.2.8 Demographics

##### 1. How old are you? \*

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34

- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 and older
- Prefer not to say

##### 2. How would you describe your gender identity? \*

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

##### 3. How would you describe your proficiency level with technology? \*

- Beginner (e.g. experience of less than 6 months with computers or smartphones, regularly need help from more experienced others to complete tasks)
- Novice (6 months or more of experience with smartphones and computers, might frequently ask others for technology related advice)
- Intermediate (a degree of independence using computers without need of regular assistance, may need help troubleshooting problems or performing complex tasks; using computers/smartphones may be small but limited part of your life)
- Advanced (high level of independence using smartphones and computers, can troubleshoot most problems; using computers/smartphones is/was a big part of your life)
- Expert (have degree in computer science or related field, employed in the technology related role such as development/services/administration; comfortable with multiple operating systems; can use command line interfaces)

##### 4. On a scale of 1-5, how concerned are you about your privacy? \* (1: Very unconcerned, 5: Very concerned)

#### A.2.9 Basics

Chatbots are computer programs designed to simulate conversation with human users. These have existed for many years in roles such as customer support, but usually had limited options you could select to move the conversation forward. With the advent of ChatGPT, the first chatbot based on Generative AI, in November 2022, chatbots are much more flexible in the manners in which they accept input and how they respond. For example, they can comprehend natural language input in

multiple languages, work around typos, and can produce text in various formats, source code for programs, images, and videos.

**5. Have you ever used a Generative AI chatbot? \***

- Yes
- No
- Yes, ChatGPT 3.5 (OpenAI)
- Yes, ChatGPT Plus (OpenAI)
- Yes, DALL-E (OpenAI)
- Yes, Claude (Anthropic)
- Yes, Bard / Gemini (Google)
- Yes, Stable Diffusion (Stability AI)
- Yes, Poe (Quora)
- Yes, Bing / Copilot (Microsoft)
- Yes, Perplexity AI (Perplexity Labs)
- Other

**6. If you haven't used such a chatbot, why not? (select all that apply)**

- I was not aware of them before this survey.
- I did not want to pay.
- I had security and privacy concerns.
- I didn't know how to use them.
- I didn't think it was relevant.
- Other

**7. What makes you choose one chatbot product over another, for a given conversation? (Be brief, but specific) (free response)**

**8. Select all purposes for which you have used a Generative AI chatbot. \***

- Searching for facts and information
- Brainstorm ideas
- Help with coursework
- Learn a new skill
- Mental health counseling
- Legal advice
- Career advice

- Generating images / videos / art
- Sales and marketing
- Financial advice
- Other

**9. What is your role at Georgia Tech? \* (Select one)**

- Student
- Faculty
- Staff
- Other

**A.2.10 Students**

Only shown to people who select Student in the previous question.

**10. Which of the following best describes your current enrollment status? \***

- Undergraduate
- Graduate or Professional
- Non-degree seeking
- Other

**11. What college represents your primary affiliation? \***

- College of Computing
- College of Design
- College of Engineering
- College of Sciences
- Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts
- Scheller College of Business

**12. Have you used Generative AI in work you have submitted for a class? \***

- Yes
- No

**13. If yes, how concerned are you of your work being considered plagiarized? \***

- Very concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Neither concerned nor unconcerned
- Somewhat unconcerned

- Very unconcerned

**14. How would you describe the level of abstraction used when using Generative AI chatbots in your assignments? \***

- I prompt it with the entire description of the task (e.g. the topic of an essay, the description of a program, the problem statement directly).
- I use it to help me when I get stuck on a part of a problem. E.g. a convincing example for an essay, a helper function or new test case in a program, or subproblem encountered while responding to a question.
- I use it to produce concept explanations.
- I use it to verify my work after I have produced my entire response.
- Other

**15. How often do you fact-check responses provided via external reliable sources? \***

- All the time
- 75-100% of the time
- 50-75% of the time
- 25-50% of the time
- Less than 25% of the time
- Never

**16. In what situations do you feel the need to fact-check a response? (free response) \***

#### A.2.11 Faculty

Only shown to people who select Faculty in the previous question.

**17. What college best represents your primary affiliation? \***

- College of Computing
- College of Design
- College of Engineering
- College of Sciences
- Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts
- Scheller College of Business

**18. As a faculty member, what are your practices relevant to Generative AI in your teaching? (This could include information about its applications in improving teaching and creating course content, attitudes on student usage of Generative AI in assignments, and more) (free response)**

#### A.2.12 Social

**19. Would you feel comfortable discussing personal or emotional issues with a chatbot? \***

- Yes
- No

**20. What boundaries would you set when seeking personal advice from a chatbot? (Personal advice includes but is not limited to topics such as interpersonal conflicts, mental health counseling, and personal development) (free response)**

#### A.2.13 Medical

**21. Would you be comfortable relying on a chatbot for routine health-related queries? \***

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

**22. What types of concerns would you prefer discussing with a registered medical practitioner instead? (free response) \***

**23. When you do ask for medical advice, which of the following types of data do you provide? \***

- Lifestyle (diet, physical / mental / emotional health practices, etc.)
- Symptoms
- Prior medical history
- Other

**24. What privacy concerns do you have when discussing health matters with a chatbot? (free response) \***

#### A.2.14 General

**25. Overall, how concerned are you about the privacy implications of using Generative AI chatbots? \* (1: Not at all concerned, 5: Strongly concerned)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

**26. What privacy concerns do you have about Generative AI chatbots? (free response) \***

**27. Comment on any pressure you feel to use Generative AI in your personal or professional life. (free response) \***