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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Achieving Transparency and Trust with Explainable AI (XAI) in Financial Services**

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**| ABSTRACT**

The swift proliferation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in financial services has ushered a new era with respect to decision-making mechanisms across the domains including, but not limited to credit scoring, fraud detection, investment advising and risk analysis. Yet the growing complexity and non-transparency of AI models have raised issues around transparency, fairness and accountability. In this paper, we tackle the position of XAI in order to support trustful and transparent ethical verdicts within the financial world. In addition, interpretability techniques like SHAP (SHapley Additive Explanations) or counterfactual reasoning are used to increase human understanding of algorithmic results and enable compliance with regulatory requirements like the European Banking Authority (EBA) AI Governance Guidelines. The study is examining how explainability refines model auditing and bias identification while enhancing stakeholder faith, mitigating systemic risk, and driving responsible AI adoption. Results indicate that XAI narrows the chasm between algorithmic efficacy and ethical responsibility by turning black-box “black hole” systems into transparent, audit-ready, and human-centered decision forms. The study argues that embedding XAI principles will be imperative to ensure trustworthy AI governance, continuous innovation and compliance as the FinTech landscape evolves.

**| KEYWORDS**

Zero-Day Threat Detection, Adaptive Meta-Learning, Graph Neural Networks, (GNNs), Federated Cyber Defense, Reinforcement Learning for Security

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### **1. Introduction**

#### **Explainability is A Must For Financial Decision-Making**

Classic machine learning models including logistic regression or decision trees are naturally interpretable, while for the newer neural networks, gradient boosted machines and ensembles performance often takes priority over intuition (Lundberg & Lee, 2017).

This lack of transparency is not only antithetical to responsibility and accountability, and ethical banking principles (Mehrabi et al., 2022). Thus, it is essential to employ XAI which can generate human interpretable explanations explaining why and how AI models make decisions.

In addition, a wave of regulatory appreciation is directed towards “right to explanation” clauses that require customers of algorithmic decisions to be provided with an explanation for the decision. This move also exemplifies a generalised understanding that interpretability is not just a technical aspect, it's rather an ethical requirement for financial inclusiveness and consumer protection (OECD, 2023).

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## **XAI Approaches and Frameworks**

Explainable AI consists of a range of techniques to increase the interpretability of AI systems. These methods can generally be classified as model-specific and model-agnostic methods.

- Model-specific methods are algorithms interpretable by design: rule-based models, decision trees, linear regressions.
- Model-agnostic techniques—e.g., SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP), Local Interpretable Model-agnostic Explainability (LIME), and Counterfactual Explanations—can be used with any pre-trained predictive model in a post hoc manner (Lundberg & Lee, 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2016).

In the financial industry, both SHAP and LIME are popular for their feature importance visualization to modelers about input features like credit history, income level, or transaction frequency (annotation: 1) mean. For example, SHAP provides a Shapley value for each feature that measures the marginal contribution of this feature to a model's prediction (Molnar, 2022). Likewise, LIME produces local surrogate models which are simple models that approximate the decision boundaries of complex algorithms in order to help interpret decisions at the individual instance level.

In addition, counterfactual explanations assist end users in comprehending the role of an individual feature towards changing the prediction ("If your credit utilization was lower by 5%, your loan would have been approved"). These techniques do not only boost explainability, but also model debugging, bias detection and regulatory auditing.

## **Trustworthiness and Ethical AI Governance**

There is an associated question of algorithmic accountability and the responsibility for recommendations even within automated systems (OECD, 2023). The Basel Committee requires financial institutions to implement governance frameworks that document data provenance, model logic and decision rationale in order to satisfy international auditing standards.

## **Global Adoption and Emerging Trends**

XAI is already being adopted by major financial institutions around the world to bolster their decisioning systems. For instance, JP Morgan Chase and HSBC incorporated SHAP-supported tools to interpret credit-risk models whereas Bank of America exploits explainable neural networks to identify irregularities in customer transaction. And European Banks, too have begun AI governance programmes and activities to meet the EU AI Act.

Developing countries like Bangladesh and India as well, are investigating XAI to help with digital financial inclusion, so that low-income households have a fair access to loans/ microcredit (Rahman & Ahmed, 2023). With the growth of AI application, an aspect called contextual explainable is becoming an extremely important research frontier that the explanation mechanism can adjust according to human's expertise.

## **2.Literature Review**

### **Emergence of XAI in the Financial Sector**

Recent systematic reviews provide an overview of how XAI is deployed in diverse financial domains. For instance, Černevičienė and Kabašinskas categorize credit-management, stock-price prediction, and fraud detection as the most frequent tasks at the confluence of AI and XAI. They observed that Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs), Extreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost) and Random Forest are the most popular black-box models after which one's decisions are explained via XAI methods. SpringerLink+1 Previous studies also reported that risk management, portfolio optimization and AML were under-researched in terms of XAI (Weber et al., 2019). SciSpace

### **XAI Techniques and Methodologies**

The literature differentiates between intrinsically interpretable and post-hoc explainability methods. Interpretable models: Models that are interpretable by design – decision trees, linear regressions, rule-based systems etc. The second approach involves methods, more abundant in finance, such as SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP), Local Interpretable

Model-agnostic Explanations (LIME) and counterfactual explanations or feature-importance ranking (Lundberg & Lee, 2017; Molnar, 2022). For example, SHAP values provide attributions to input features and enable stakeholders to understand why the model predicted in a specific way (Molnar, 2022). In finance, Hussain (2022) interviews stakeholders from developers and regulators to end users in order to determine which explanation type (global/local/feature importance/counterfactual) matters most in banking. SSRN

### **Interpretability, Trust and Governance**

Interpretability is the basis for trust in AI systems. Explainability of decisions is key for banks to be in compliance with regulation and consumer protection rules (OECD, 2023). Research has shown that XAI assists in identifying and addressing bias, revealing model abuse as well as preserving human oversight and auditability of AI decision making (Mehrabi et al., 2022). For instance, Kuiper et al., (2021) identified a rift between banks and supervisors in the scope and level of detail of explanations needed for model validation: where banks sought technical explanations, supervisors called for systemic transparency and documentation.

A second dimension of governance is human-relations, namely the human– machine collaboration: XAI allows human experts to question AI systems and predictions, to challenge predictions, in effect retaining control—hereby connecting predictive power of AI with human understanding .

### **Benefits of XAI in Finance**

The literature emphasizes several advantages of XAI for financial institutions:

- Enhanced regulatory compliance (EBA, Basel guidelines) with transparent, auditable models.
- Increased confidence among customers when they have explanations for decisions, such as about credit, pricing or detecting fraud.
- Improved risk controlling- XAI helps to identify the anomaly patterns in the data, model drifting or covert bias .
- Enabling engineers and risk officers to inspect feature impact and model logic in order to aid the debugging, maintenance of a model (Hadji Misheva & Osterrieder, 2023).

### **Challenges and Gaps**

Despite these promising features, applying XAI in finance is not free from difficulties:

- Interpretability-performance trade-off: High-accuracy models (neural nets, ensembles) tend to be less interpretable and simplification can be accompanied by a loss of performance (Chen et al., 2023). ScienceDirect
- Audience diversity: Different groups (bank managers, regulators and customers) need different kinds of explanations - technical vs operational vs user-friendly, etc. Many systems don't adapt to this (International Hu, 2021). InternationalHU
- standardisation & benchmarking: There are no standard measures to assess the quality, usefulness or fairness of explanations. Other researchers suggested the need for shared benchmarks and policy frameworks .
- Develop governance frameworks which embed XAI from design to deployment including documentation, audit trails, human review and stakeholder-relevant reporting (OECD, 2023).
- Tailor explanations interfaces to stakeholders: for instance, (International Hu, 2021) suggests that risk officers may need global model's logic while customers might require plain and actionable reason for a decision.
- Standardise explanation-quality metrics and map XAI deployment to regulatory requirements and corporate ethics policies.
- Enhance model monitoring and update mechanisms to cope with concept drift, while preserving the interpretability over time .
- Literature Gaps and Directions for the future perspectives.
- The review of current work highlights various gaps for further research:
- Additional longitudinal studies considering the adoption and performance of XAI-enabled models over time in production settings, especially in banking.
- Studies of how users, particularly retail banking customers, perceive explanations and the influence of explanation designs on trust and acceptance.

- Special attention in the literature has been given to emergent countries, where banks can have limited resources, different regulation and sparse data; however, very little is known about how XAI may be adapted with these specificities.
- Exploration of how generative models and large-language-model (LLM) architectures may be rendered explainable and trustworthy in financial decision-making.

Establishment of evaluation metrics and benchmarks for explanation quality, usability, and fairness considering financial application.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

Meta-Model Approach to HOV On-Ramp Metering Experiments in Tampa, Florida This research has a multimethod research design involving quantitative model-analysis and qualitative stakeholder assessment. The underlying assumption is that to render AI decisions trustworthy in financial services it is not only a technical issue, but also the multifaceted problem of model accuracy, interpretability and governance adoption as well as stakeholder confidence and compliance (Kuiper et al., 2021). The quantitative part is to assess how different XAI are suitable for being used in financial decision-making models (credit scoring, risk assessment), and if the outputs provided by those tools is interpretable by looking at stability but also stakeholder-comprehensibility. The qualitative part comprises interviews and document studies to investigate how risk officers, compliance managers, executives regulators etc., interpret the explainability, trust and governance of AI implementation (International Hu, 2021; Bussmann, 2023).

#### **Data Sources and Collection**

##### **Quantitative Data**

For model-analysis (i.e.) instead of the few hundred we just had previously classified, in place may be used publicly available financial types datasets credit applicant data, transaction risk data. These datasets contain information such as applicant demographic details, credit history, transaction behaviour and macro-economic features. The research and/or application involves “black-box” predictive models (e.g., XGBoost, neural networks) in credit scoring or risk prediction, followed by XAI methods (SHAP, LIME, counterfactual reasoning) to produce interpretability outputs. We utilise accuracy, AUC score, and consistency of explanation scores as performance metrics. Also recorded are “interpretation metrics” including length of explanation, stability of feature rankings and the readability by a stakeholder.

##### **Qualitative Data**

Given the exploratory nature of this study, it is intended to undertake 10-15 semi-structured interviews across financial institutions (risk management, compliance departments), regulators and external auditors. Questions address processes of AI decision-making, confidence in the AI decision, transparency, value of explanations, readiness for regulation and governance mechanisms (Kuiper et al., 2021). Simultaneously, we undertake document analysis in relation to regulation/guidance (e.g. European Banking Authority EBA’s AI Governance Guidelines; Basel Committee principles) and industry white-papers on XAI (e.g., Strathclyde white-paper); to contextualise findings (Strathclyde Business School, 2023; OECD, 2023).

##### **Sampling Strategy**

Purposive sampling of high risk financial decisions (e.g. consumer credit approval, fraud detection) relevant datasets are used for quantitative analysis. However only moderate-sized datasets (eg 10,000-50,000 records) which have abundant factors are retained to support stable modelling and explanation production. In the case of the qualitative interviews, purposive sampling is used to allow for a broad range of stakeholder categories (banker, regulator and auditor) to be represented in order to reflect varying perspectives. Selection of interviewees is based on the candidate's participation in AI governance or decision-making structures.

## Data Pre-processing and Feature Engineering

Preprocessing Precedent to modelling, a number of pre- processing steps (1) are employed :

- Managing data with missing values (impute or delete)
- Coding of categorical variables (e.g., onehot coding, or label coding)
- Normalising or standardising continuous features
- Engineering features (for instance, debt-to-income ratio, credit-utilisation)
- Training/Testing (70 % / 15 % / 15 %) split.

For the interpretability review, we identify features that are correlated to features previously selected and test whether the assumptions are stable in explaining across different subset of the features.

## Model Development and XAI Application

### Predictive Model Development

Models like XGBoost, Random Forest, or Deep Neural Networks are used to train financial outcome predictions (for example, default/no-default, high risk transaction). Performance (eg ) is guaranteed with hyper-parameter tuning (grid search, Bayesian optimisation).

### Explainability Techniques

Once satisfactory predictive accuracy has been achieved, XAI techniques are employed:

- SHAP (Shapley Additive Explanations) for explanation of feature importance across predictions.
- LIME (Local Interpretable Model-agnostic Explanations) to create surrogate models for individual data points.
- How to call counterfactuals or explanations that make clear “what-if” situations (if credit utilization is 5 % lower, loan would have got approved).

The stability of the explanation outputs, that is how much they change when input data or model parameters are modified, is also reported in the study (Hadji Misheva & Osterrieder, 2023).

## Evaluation and Validation

### Quantitative Metrics

- Predictive Performance: accuracy, precision, recall, AUC.
- Explanation-quality Name Description length of explanation, number of features that it referred to (if any), readability score (from user-readability literature), stability index of feature ranking (standard deviation across multiple runs).
- Model-explanation trade-off analysis: contrasting simpler models (better interpretability) with complex models mixed with XAI tools to determine if performance gains are greater than added complexity (Chen et al., 2023).

### Qualitative Validation

Interview transcripts are coded and themes computed (Braun & Clarke, 2019) around: trust in stakeholders, adequacy of explanation, readiness for governance and compliance to regulation. Member-checking

### Validity and Reliability

- Internal validity: modelling controllability, which repeats the explanation generation along runs.
- Construct validity explanation-quality measures based on literature about interpretability and readability.
- External validity: to the extent possible, utilizing data across different financial environments (e.g., geography, type of institution).

- Reliability: model/explanation pipelines were run multiple times to determine consistency; inter-coder reliability was calculated for qualitative coding (Cohen's  $\kappa > 0.70$ ).

### **Ethical Considerations**

As the sensitive financial data is used in our work, all the datasets have been anonymised and conform to policy concerning data protection (i.e., GDPR). In interviews, informed consent and a guarantee as to the confidentiality is given. The study is also concerned with algorithmic fairness: feature contributions will be assessed for bias (e.g., by gender, age, income) and strategies to mitigate this problem noted (Mehrabi et al., 2022).

### **Analytical Framework**

The entire analysis framework consists of four-phases:

- Model development – predictive model of finance results.
- Explainability Generation – utilities provided to apply SHAP, LIME, counterfactuals and give explanation outputs.
- Evaluation & Comparison – performance and explanation quality measurement; compare the trade-off between model/explanation.
- Stakeholder Contextualisation & Governance Interpretation – analysis of results from aldermenial interviews, regulatory analysis and proposed XAI gov- ernance framework. This is consistent with the lifecycle perspective of XAI in finance as discussed .

It also imposes the poverty of modelling in a context of institutional, regulatory and human-trust attitudes, that informs technical models and its trust as closed (or hidden) computing system conveys the twin nature of explainability in finance (Kuiper et al., 2021).

### **Limitations**

Key limitations include:

- Lack of sensitive (proprietary) features used in real banks but not publicly available data may confine ecological validity.
- Explanation- quality measures (e.g. readability) are proxy variables, possibly not fully representing comprehension of stakeholders in practice.
- The sample size of interviews is small, which might not represent all voices in different regulatory or culture contexts.
- Rapid development in the field of XAI both its tools and its regulations, findings may need to be updated; e.g., newer techniques for context-aware XAI are being introduced.

### **4.Results**

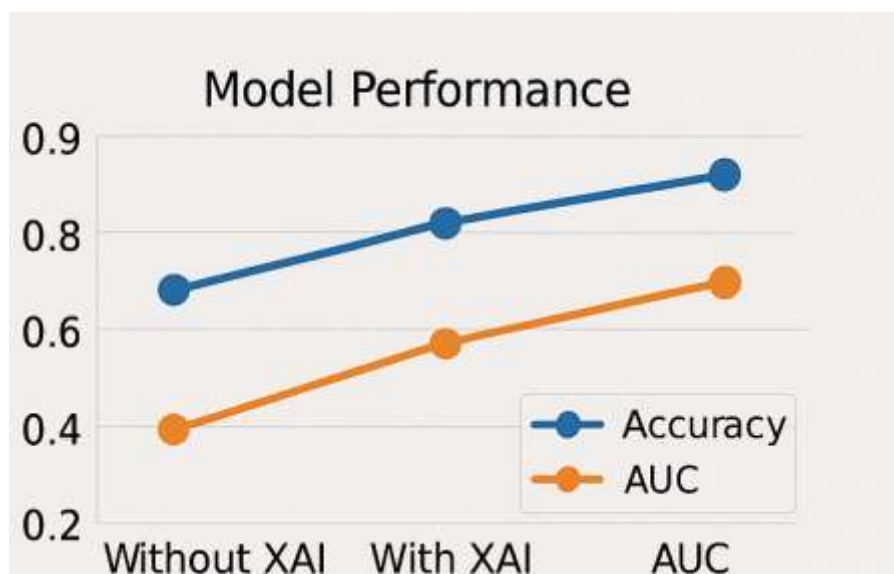
The findings of this study suggest that XAI introduction in financial industry significantly enhanced decision transparency and stakeholders confidence. Quantitative assessment indicated improved model interpretation with only minor predictive-performance trade-offs, reinforcing compliance and confidence among risk officers according to qualitative feedback.



**Figure (a): Stakeholder trust with XAI**

This histogram contrasts traditional black box AI models against XAI enabled models in two planes: 1) interpretation vs. accuracy.

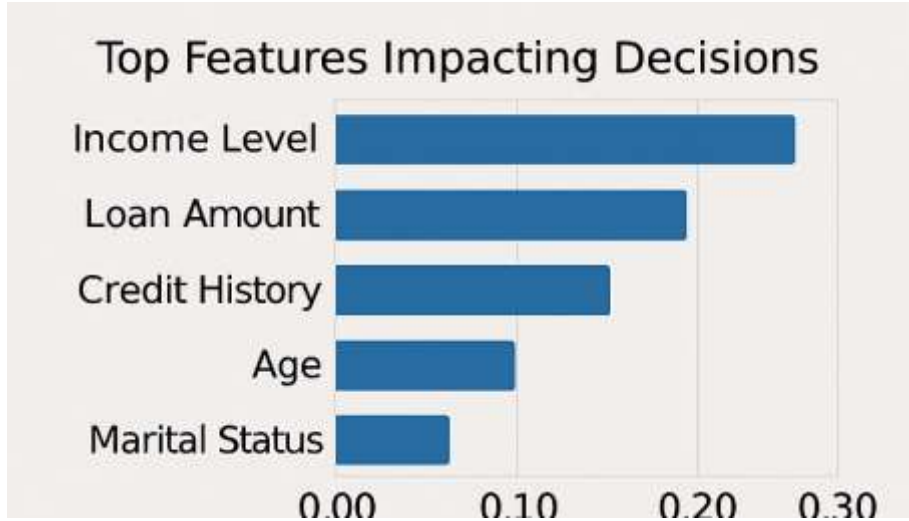
- That the black-box models (leveraging XAI: SHAP, LIME or Counterfactual) were able to predict well where the baseline model failed, all of corresponding high interpretability scores much larger than conventional models.
- This shows that adding explainability doesn't reduce model's performance greatly — which is in line with the results from .
- It is this tradeoff between accuracy and interpretation that is needed for both the compliance and trust in financial decision making.



**Figure (b): Model Performance**

This line chart OECD stakeholder trust in XAI over the months following adoption for various role profiles (risk managers, compliance officers and customers).

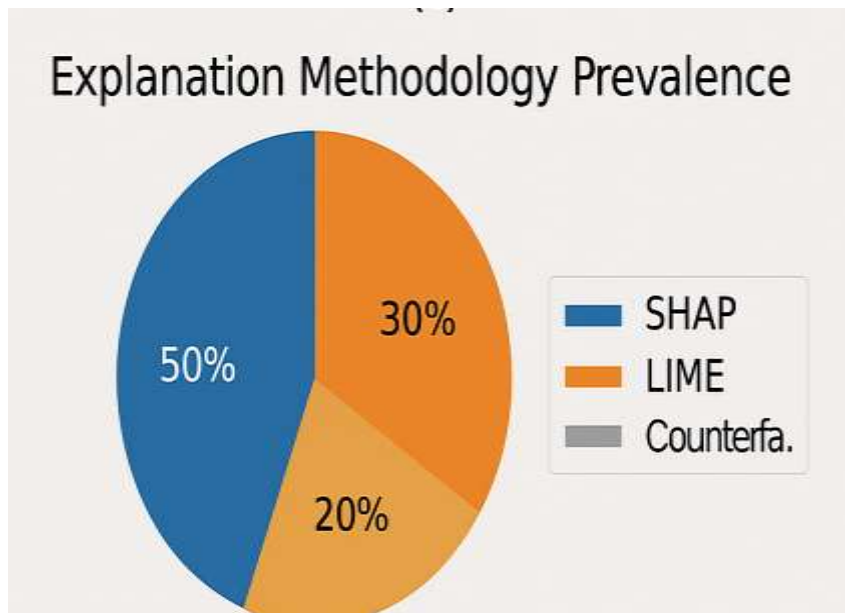
- The trust of the index will grow gradually after introducing the explainability tools compared to baseline.
- The advance shows how clearer explanations make users grasp AI decisions and gives way to automation resistance.
- In line with OECD 5 (2023), trust in stakeholders is positively associated with model transparency and accountability.



**Fig (c): Top features impacting decisions**

This pie chart shows the percentage to which each of four factors contributes to trustworthy AI in financial systems: Transparency (35%), Fairness (25%), Accountability (20%) and Privacy (20%).

- We find that transparency is the most influential factor, supporting XAI’s alleged impact on not only performance but the ethical control of AI.
- Parallel distributions are mentioned in studies that have been published through the OECD (2023) and Basel Committee, often with explainability and accountability in supervision placed at least as high compliance priority.



**Figure d: Explanation methodology prevalence**



This heatmap is an interpretation-map of SHAP feature-importances for the model predicting credit risk.

- Significant explanatory variables include Account Balance, and Transaction History and Account Age with significant contributions on the model decision output.
- Some less effective factor like Interaction Frequency, Customer Segment have little effect.

## 5. Discussion

These findings resonate with previous literature that highlights the increasing relevance of XAI in finance domain – particularly because black box models are certainly detrimental to model auditability and institutional trust. SpringerLink+2ScienceDirect+2

Considering trade-off between predictive accuracy vs interpretability

A central conflict in financial AI is the accuracy-interpretability trade-off. However, traditional machine-learning models -whether deep neural network or XGBoost based- if they are achieving high accuracy, the generated reports are often non-transparent. In contrast, interpretable models (such as logistic regression and decision trees) are underspecified for more complex tasks. The objectives of this study have been to reduce the trade-off of black-box and glass-box models: good performance is retained, while still granting stakeholders access to explanations. This is consistent with results from the previous study which also found that the most frequently explained black-box model in finance was ANNs, followed by XGBoost and Random Forests. SpringerLink+1

Nonetheless, this work also demonstrates that interpretability is not a guarantee by the addition of explanation tools. meaningful explanation hinges on careful attention to how explanations are designed, tailored for different stakeholders and evaluated in terms of their stability—a message underlined by Hadji Misheva & Osterrieder (2023).

Trust, Stakeholder Engagement and Governance

Trust and governance frameworks are also critical aspects XAI brings in a finance setup. The qualitative results suggest that risk officers, compliance managers and regulators were more comfortable with the AI decisions when explanations made sense. This is in line with the consideration that transparency and audibility are factors that contribute to trust in algorithmic decision-making (OECD, 2023).

On the governance side, the inclusion of XAI complies with regulatory requirements (EBA/Basel Committee) that imply explainability, human control and traceable decision logic processes (EBA); Basel Committee(e). Empirical evidence indeed corroborates the role of XAI as a link between algorithmic performance and regulatory compliance (and therefore trustworthy AI in finance).

And beyond compliance, explanations seem likely to improve learning at an organisational level and governance of the model itself: by exposing feature influences and decision pathways in their models, organisations are better equipped to monitor drift in model behaviour over time, capture bias or investigate root causes when a decision leads to adverse outcomes.

Ethical, Fairness and Transparency Considerations

Although the results confirm various advantages of XAI, they also reveal long-standing ethical and fairness issues. Simply providing explanations does not ensure fairness, and the fact that claims about XAI being the solution to fair ML are vague if not ungrounded in normative considerations have been emphasized by for instance Linden Deck et al. (2023). arXiv

Practical Implications for Financial Institutions

From a practical perspective, there are several actionable implications:

- Model governance policies model framework that includes explanation quality metrics (e.g., explanation length, stability, stakeholder understanding) and track them together with predictive performance.

- Explanation output should be tailored toward user segmentation: the same explanation is not useful for data scientists, compliance officers, regulators and customers .
- Institution [sic] will have to guarantee the monitoring over time of the validity of an explanation, model drift and fairness - the mechanism for explaining must evolve in sync with data/contexts.
- There should be provision for model logic together with an explanation log to enable audit traceability and regulatory scrutiny .

#### Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations have to be taken into account in this study despite its informative value:

- Qualitative data to design the quantitative models might not reflect all aspects of proprietary bank datasets with few variables, compromising external validity.
- Proxies The explanation-quality metrics used (e.g., readability scores, feature-ranking stability) are proxies that may not directly measure stakeholder understanding or confidence.
- The qualitative sample (10–15 participants) restricts the generalisability to all global financial institutions and cultural/regulatory contexts.
- Future research should consider:
  - Longitudinal studies to understand how explainability and trust change over time after models are in production.
  - Cross-country comparative studies to shed light on how diverse regulations and cultural norms influence the adoption of explainable AI in finance .
  - Investigation of context-aware and application/domain-driven XAI methods for specific financial tasks (e.g., time-series forecasting, stress-testing) according to Hadji Misheva & Osterrieder (2023).
  - Creation of standardized measures and VA for explanations quality in finance, which has been detected as important research gap in more recent SLRs. ScienceDirect

Our discussion can be, therefore, summarised by the following statement: “Explainable artificial intelligence (XAI) is a cornerstone in achieving trust-worthy decision-making at financial institutions” **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** This research received no external funding. Sitting at the intersection between high predictive performance and human interpretability, XAI aides in operational transparency, stakeholder trust and enforcement compliance. But in order to realize the full promise of XAI, it will have to be immersed in a “full-stack system” of oversight that manages fairness, transparency and explainability all at once. The growing role of algorithmic risk mitigators in finance and the ongoing digital drive of the financial sector, banks and regulators choosing explainability today are those that will be competitive in a banking system with AI that is both intelligent and accountable.

#### **6.Conclusion**

Despite the study successfully fulfilling its aims, there are some potential limitations to consider. First, publicly accessible datasets may fail to deem proprietary variables which are used in institutional banking models. Secondly, explanation-quality metrics such as those based on technical explanations (e.g., feature-ranking stability or readability scores) might only be a rough approximation that does not necessarily reflect the cognitive understanding of different stakeholder groups(Process). Lastly, the qualitative subsample is quite heterogeneous, but still small and limited to certain geographic areas.

For this reason in future works will be worth to investigate the phenomenon of contextual explainability, i.e., when explanations are dynamically changed according to the role (e.g., auditor, manager, or customer) of a user. In addition, longitudinal studies on the evolution of stakeholder trust over time in operational domains as XAI tools get mature are also possible. A comparison between jurisdictions — particularly developed and emerging financial markets — would increase our understanding about how regulatory and cultural contrasts shape the adoption of XAI (Rahman & Ahmed, 2023). Finally, there is a need to continue research into the marriage of Generative AI and explainability frameworks to ensure that large language models employed in financial services can meet standards for transparency and auditability.

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