

LIVE CHAT: The Influence of Tone of Voice on Buyer Behaviour



Mini Poll suggests that 3 in 5 Live Chat users feel that tone of voice influences future brand loyalty and advocacy

Tone of voice shapes how customers think about a retail brand. It influences whether they want to continue to buy your products or use your services and it often determines whether they will share their experience with others.

We only really hear about tone of voice when someone has a negative retail or customer service experience. Family and friends are the first to hear about it along with all of those so-called 'friends' on social media. However, as our mini poll confirms, tone of voice runs much deeper than when someone feels they have been poorly treated. It is a reflection of how a business connects emotionally with customers and the commercial benefits this can provide.

A consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic is a rise in eCommerce, a trend that will only increase as more companies transition to digital or pivot to create an online store for the first time.

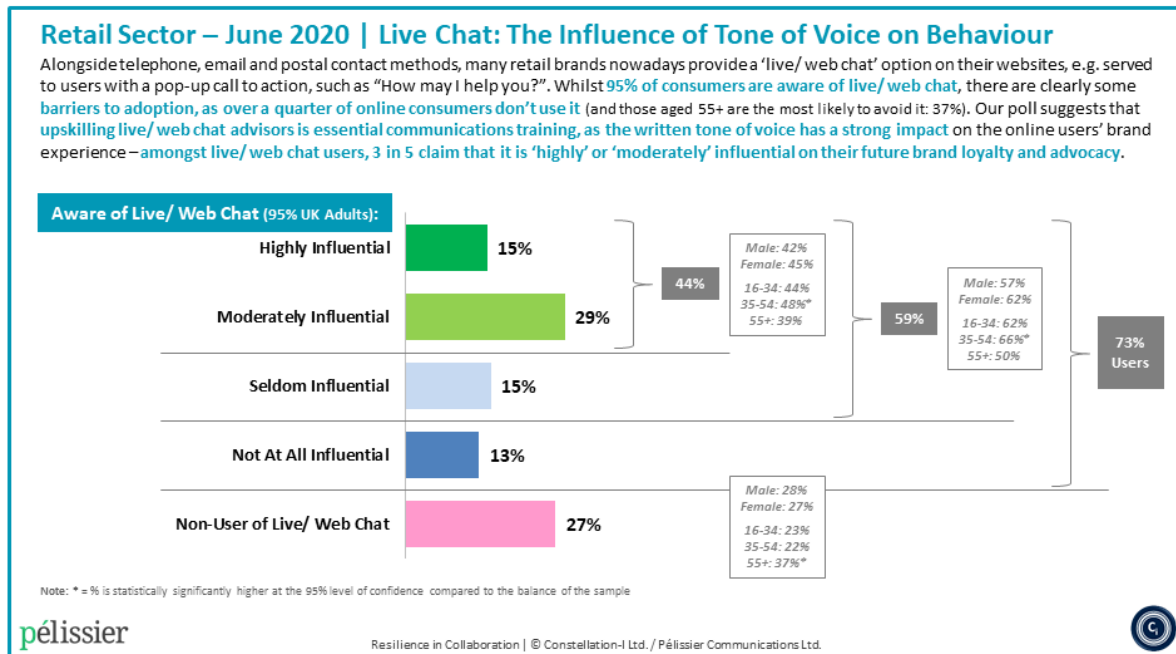
The Live Chat Tone of Voice Mini Poll

Live Chat is often one of the first customer service channels a retail brand sets up. They do so in the belief that it is a quick and easy way to meet the needs of customers knocking on its digital door. With this in mind we were curious to know if respondents consider tone of voice significant when dealing with a company via this channel.

We asked them:

‘How influential is the written tone of voice (e.g. factual, friendly, professional, etc.) used by an advisor in ‘live chat’ (or ‘web chat’) on a website, in determining whether you will continue to purchase from that brand or recommend it to others?’

The survey was conducted between 19th to 23rd June 2020 using Toluna UK’s proprietary UK Online Community Panel. Responses were given by 1,568 UK Adults aged 18+ weighted to nationally representative gender, age and region profiles.



As the graphic shows, **74%** of respondents were Live Chat users and **3 out of 5** of them felt that the tone of voice influences their future relationship with the brand.

Out of this group **29%** felt that it was ‘moderately influential’. This may not sound very significant but consider what happens when such a percentage is dissatisfied? It suddenly becomes a highly important number in relation to potential lost sales.

Up to **15%** felt that tone of voice was ‘highly influential’. That means **1 in 7** of your potential customers is going to be seriously mindful of how you communicate with them. Given that this 15% is likely to represent part of your profit margin, you start to appreciate why tone of voice can have serious business implications.

Whether you already use a Live Chat platform or are considering the use of one, your advisor’s tone of voice plays an important part in retaining customers and in encouraging advocacy of your brand.

One of the implications of this is the upskilling of advisors who use Live Chat. You need them to know how to use tone of voice that is congruent with your brand’s values and one that will have a positive impact on the overall brand experience. Ignore this and you risk possible revenue and advocacy opportunities.

Recommendations for implementing a better tone of voice

From the mini poll we can make the following recommendations:

1. Recognise that the way an advisor writes has a significant impact on how a customer remembers your brand
2. Appreciate that tone of voice influences both the short and the long-term relationship with customers and their willingness to recommend your brand
3. Train Live Chat advisors to use adapted writing techniques that reflect a tone of voice that is congruent with brand values
4. Develop a tone of voice that is distinct and memorable in order to differentiate your brand – it can then become a revenue generating and a relationship building tool
5. Encourage those over 55 to use it and make it an enjoyable experience.

Brands that invest in tone of voice have defined what it means to them as business. They have then implemented a process to ensure it is consistent across multiple channels, not just Live Chat.

The Mini Poll and UK Customer Service

The [UK Customer Satisfaction Index \(UKCSI\)](#), a report by The Institute of Customer Service published in January 2020, revealed that it was the 5th successive bi-annual survey in which customer satisfaction had fallen.

At the heart of this is a decline in trust, whether it is how brands build relationships with customers, handle their concerns or respond to them in a crisis. With more channels through which customers interact, many are struggling to get the balance right. It is no surprise that those who do establish trust, do so because they are able to offer a consistent experience - these are brands such as John Lewis, First Direct and Next.

The UKCSI reports that 17.3% of those surveyed will look to contact the organisation via its website and 4% via Live Chat, i.e. over a fifth expect to have some form of communication via the main website.

"The most effective organisations ... design experiences around their customers' needs; they demonstrate high ethical standards in their relationships with customers, employees, partners and suppliers; they combine technology and people to create experiences that work and feel personal. They are authentic and use customer service to build understanding and better relationships."

Joanna Causton, Chief Executive, The Institute of Customer Service

As online shopping increases as a result of Covid-19 we can expect this to continue. It is for good reason that the management consultancy, McKinsey, advocates the need for organisations to 'elevate customer experience to the next normal'. This is part of a call for better digital experiences, a safe and contactless payment journey and the anticipation of improved customer feedback.

Having the right tone of voice is integral to this because when used correctly it allows the customer to acknowledge positive feelings towards the brand they are dealing with. Tone of voice becomes a tactic by which to differentiate the brand and to deliver business profitability.

About the Authors

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Joe specialises in helping businesses to discover, define and deliver a tone of voice that is congruent with the values of the business and the expectations of prospective and existing customers. With over 25 years' experience of media and business communication, brands that have benefited from his expertise include Nespresso, Vente Privée, Louis Vuitton and Gucci.

What do we do? LuxuryTOV is a business communication skills consultancy that provides advice and mentoring for business leaders and training for sales, marketing and client service employees.

How do we do it? We follow a process that involves an in depth understanding of your brand, your communication weaknesses and the channels you use. From here we create guidelines and training as well as support tools to monitor and measure the quality of how you communicate.

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Phil believes you make better business decisions with evidence-based consumer and marketing insights. Drawing upon years of senior-level experience, gained at independent and international agencies, Phil is a specialist in the Automotive, Health & Well-being, Retail and Technology Sectors. Most recently, Phil has been delivering quality consultative insight advice for brands including Finsa Europe, Honda, The Institute of Osteopathy and Nominet.

What do we do? Constellation-I helps organisations to reduce the risk and increase the confidence in decision-making with expert independent evidence-based consumer and marketing insights.

How do we do it? By unlocking the value in understanding Consumer Motivations, Stakeholder Engagement and New Product & Service Ideas.

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