

When buying online, customers prefer live chat to phonecall

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A new study from the U.S. published in the *International Journal of Business and Emerging Markets*, suggests that when people interact with non-domestic, i.e. foreign, e-commerce websites they prefer to use

online "live chat" channels rather than the telephone.

Daniel Brannon and Muhanad Manshad Monfort of the College of Business at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, Colorado, have looked at the benefits of computer-mediated environments and how they function in the context of cross-cultural services. The team points out that growth among [e-commerce sites](#) outside the U.S. and the English-speaking world, particularly in emerging markets is seeing enormous growth. "Several of the world's fastest-growing e-commerce retailers are located in emerging economies," they point out. "For instance, Chinese retailers JD dot com and Alibaba."

Despite this growth, the team reports that several non-domestic [e-commerce](#) sites have struggled to gain a foothold in the US markets. There may well be a perception that these companies are somehow culturally distant and many US consumers are therefore reluctant to encounter or deal with "foreign" customer [service](#) personnel. Of course, many non-domestic companies invest heavily in so-called cultural intelligence so that they can engage more authentically with non-native customers. This is thought to make any interaction between a US consumer and a foreign service agent smoother and more positive.

However, there is evidence that the inverse of that effort might work better in many instances. Depersonalizing the transactions by switching to computer-mediated live chat instead of [communication](#) via a telephone call, can have many advantages. The business can control more easily the characteristics of the interaction, especially where automated responses are utilized. When an operative is required to interject, there will be scripted responses and their training will be useful in ensuring communication smooth and polite communication with a lower risk of miscommunication through spoken-word language barriers.

"Given the recent global expansion of online retail, managers should be

aware of how foreign (vs. domestic) consumers using their websites prefer to communicate and interact with them," the team explains. As training of service staff in matters of non-native cultural etiquette as well as language skills is inevitably costly. Live chat can preclude ambiguity in communication to some degree as well as circumventing the need for the comprehensive training that a telephone operative would need.

More information: Daniel C. Brannon et al. Bridging the divide with a chat window: why consumers prefer using live chat support on foreign e-commerce sites, *International Journal of Business and Emerging Markets* (2020). [DOI: 10.1504/IJBEM.2019.105229](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBEM.2019.105229)

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