POSSIBILITIES OF USING CHATBOTS IN DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY OF LATVIAN COMPANIES

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Abstract: Companies are willing to retain the gained consumers' attention, and the ways to achieve it include, for example, improving consumers' experience and increasing their engagement. In a competitive environment, the companies need to think about how to effectively develop a digital marketing strategy that meets the requirements of a digital consumer. A chatbot is a computer program that can be created with artificial intelligence and gives organizations the opportunity to create new points of contact with the audience, keep their attention, and promote sales.

The objective of the research is to study the possibilities of using chatbots in digital marketing strategy of Latvian companies. In order to obtain data and to analyse the possibilities of using chatbots in digital marketing strategy of Latvian companies, a survey of Internet users and expert interviews have been conducted.

Methodology/methods: In order to achieve the objective of the research, the method of qualitative and quantitative research has been used: referential analysis, expert interview, and interrogation of Internet users.

Findings: The study provides recommendations to digital marketing specialists and company managers pertaining to the possibilities of using chatbots in digital marketing strategy, based on the wishes of Internet users and expert opinions. People are ready to use chatbots in future. Most of respondents want to use chatbot in company's homepage and communicate with chatbot freely writing its question/request. Respondents want to use chatbot to get information on the company/product/service and get answers to their questions.

Keywords: *digital marketing, digital marketing strategy, chatbots, improvement of digital marketing strategy.*

JEL code: M31

Introduction

Digital marketing allows companies to capture and attract online prospective by providing value-adding content and customers to the brand. Through an interactive approach, digital marketing allows to connect with a wider audience, while at same time it allows a precision targeting of specific niche segments with valuable content (Matidza, Ping, Nyasulu, 2020). Digital consumer is mobile, well-informed and superbly functions in multichannel space while showing a high level of competence and skills connected with new technologies. They place stronger requirements on enterprises/brands while expecting openness, transparency and authenticity. They want to remain in contact with them and to have a choice of used channels, methods and tools of establishing and keeping that contact. This consumer became a native consumer: very active in hypermedia space, intensely buys online, spends a lot of time online (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2019).

As different technologies evolve, the issue of how people can use them to improve their daily lives and companies – to speed up or automate processes and provide the best service to consumers, while reducing resource consumption and building the company's image in the long run, is becoming increasingly important. Research problem – need to develop a digital marketing strategy according to consumer requirements using chatbot. Barış (2020) states chatbot as a means for customer communication is a commercial tactic that can be situated among the recent technological innovations in terms of artificial intelligence.

The objective of the research: based on theoretical knowledge on digital marketing and chatbots and the authors' study, to investigate the possibilities of using chatbots in digital marketing strategy of Latvian companies.

Research tasks:

1. To analyze the theoretical aspects of the essence and significance of digital marketing and digital marketing strategy;
2. To analyze the theoretical aspects of the nature of chatbots and the possibilities of their use;
3. Conduct an interview of digital marketing experts on the possibilities of using chatbots in the Latvian market;
4. Conduct a consumer survey on the usage habits of chatbots and potential use possibilities in the future;

The study shows that Internet users have used chatbots and will wish to do so in the future, however, consumers wish to use them only in certain cases, but the experts believe that in the future chatbots in Latvian companies will develop and it will be a tool to improve communication with the customer.

The current interest in chatbots is likely related to substantial advances in computing technology and the wide adoption of mobile messaging applications. (Brandtzæg, Følstad, 2017) Van den Broecka, Zaroualia, Poels (2019) states chatbots can be perceived as one of the most advanced forms of social cues in human computer interaction.

Chatbot is required to have the same tone, sensitivity and behaviour than a human but at the same time users expect it to process much more information than the human. It is also expected to deliver useful and required information, just as a search engine does. The information needs to be delivered in a way which enables the user to extract a simple answer as well as having the opportunity to "drill down" if necessary (Jenkins et al., 2007).

Literature Review

Nowadays the research of chatbots covers a wide range of issues, which are reflected from different angles in studies and publications by world scientists. To substantiate the problem of this study, the authors have explored the arguments for the nature, functions, advantages and disadvantages of chatbots, using internationally recognized sources, for example, for the research of chatbots essence and integration aspects in overall marketing strategy the findings of the articles in magazines in other publications have been used: *E-Learning and Digital Media*; *ITIHAS - The Journal of Indian Management*, *2017 International Conference on I-SMAC (IoT in Social, Mobile, Analytics and Cloud) (I-SMAC)*, Business Communication Research and Practice; to identify the advantages and disadvantages, the articles in *CroDim International Journal of Marketing Science, Issues in Information Systems*, *Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies, IADIS International Journal* have been analysed*; to explore the functions, the studies in *Periodicals of Engineering and Natural Sciences*, *Cultures of Participation in the Digital Age* AVI 2018, *ICIC, International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology, Smart Computing and Technology: A Roadmap Ahead* and others have been analysed. The authors draw attention to the aspects of using chatbots in digital marketing.

Chatbot is a computer program that is designed to simulate conversation with human users. The Chatbot can be AI based or non-AI based i.e. depending on use-cases you can build a bot which is truly conversational in nature or just create a Chatbot with rich content-carousels, photos, videos, buttons, etc (Chopra, 2017). Chatbot is quick and easy to handle, which makes increases customer satisfaction. It is now becoming a new business communication channel to attract new customers. In addition, the proper automation of business communication is increasing efficiency and reducing the costs of businesses (Heo, Lee 2018). Chat bots are applying in areas where purposes are typically limited to conversations regarding a specialized purpose and not for the entire range of human communication (D'silva et at., 2017).

Well formulated and coherent digital marketing strategy is necessary for achieving business goals, making the right decisions and focusing on the right element. Therefore, digital marketing strategy implies the use of digital marketing tools to a well-defined strategy with the aim of reaching the company objectives. Organizations having effective digital marketing strategies are able to filter out and prioritizes' most important and relevant marketing tools, hence a successful digital marketing strategy defines how the digital communication tools can be used and applied effectively for digital communications (Matidza, Ping, Nyasulu, 2020). The use of chatbots should be consistent with the company's overall digital marketing strategy.

Most digital marketers see chatbots as a tool to provide customized customer service by gathering data and personal information. However, chatbots also can guide users through the customer's journey to sales. From a digital marketing perspective, chatbots provide the possibility to engage with an audience that is targeted at a personal level (Bayoude et al., 2018).

Chatbots can be used to perform tasks such as, providing reminders, introducing new concepts, FAQ or customer service support, and new employee's training (Sandoval, 2018). Through chatbots companies can personalize and support the relationship building with consumers/users, exploiting personal information obtained by previous interactions (Valtolina et al., 2018). Marketers can use wide variety of bots and increase consumer experience (Chopra, 2017). Besides providing a friendly interface between users and companies, chatbots allow corporations to mine data obtained in conversations with users with respect to information about service quality and client sentiment (i.e. their feelings towards the service provided) (Castro et al., 2018). Chatbots can also prove useful in internal marketing, especially in recruitment or training processes as well as support for specific marketing goals, tools and strategies. They are able to provide necessary information about activities of competitive companies, consumer preferences or key market trends (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2019). Chatbots can be used for teaching and learning tasks at the digital workplace. Chatbots can teach learning content in a natural language dialog in such a way that employees can for example demand content for training at the workplace (Meyer von Wolff, Hobert, Schumann, 2019). Chatbots are also actively used by financial institutions. Chatbots are one

of the dimensions of Fintech sector development. The development of Fintech sector has been studied by the authors I.Kuzmina-Merlino and S.Saksonova (Kuzmina-Merlino, Saksonova, 2018).

Although traditional human interviewing method is accepted worldwide, it can be replaced to some extent by using AI powered chatbot (Yakkundi, Vanjare, Wavhal, Patankar, 2019). With more interaction with customer, chatbots will also get improved to recommend products to customers based on customer's search and purchase history (Shafi et al., 2020).

The benefits of this artificial intelligence tool include its 24/7 availability, savings in personnel costs in customer service, the ability to collect and store relevant customer information, and the greatest advantage of all - one-to-one communication (Zečević, Hunjet, Vuković, 2020). Chatbot responses are limited by the variables included on their development and that, although many chatbots exist, not all of them are useful (Sandoval, 2018). They make possible the multitask, allowing to attend several customers at the same time, create instant leads, the starting of a conversation and the creation of customer–brand relationships, and allows for a better first impression, since it provides an instantaneous response by reducing the waiting time (Araújo, Casais, 2020).

Chatbots allow customers to get in contact with companies whenever they want so, without paying attention to time zones, opening times and waiting loops of call and service centres. Chatbots are very promising for international and digital companies like online retailers or web shops (Zumstein, Hundertmark, 2017).

Chatbot spread is due to a bigger change in the communication between companies and users. Companies indeed are adapting their channels of communication, basically their websites, to different devices, first of all mobile devices. Given the complexity of the websites, many companies developed mobile applications in order to exploit the potentials of new tools. Today, given the saturation of the mobile application market, competition is high. Easy and intuitive interfaces are preferred, and companies are creating new channels of communication in order to involve users in building direct relationships. Relationship between companies and costumers has changed over the time, in parallel with the evolution of market. In particular, focus of marketing strategies changed (Valtolina et al., 2018).

The introduction and use of chatbots in a company is associated with the need for adequate financial resources. But in the long run, the use of chatbots in combination with other factors has a positive effect on the company's value, which has been studied by the authors S.Saksonova and I.Kantane (Saksonova, Kantane, 2016).

Based on the findings of scientific and theoretical research, which has been used as a basis for further research, as confirming the argumentation related to the wish to use, objectives, functions, advantages and disadvantages, the authors have conducted a practical study, in scope of which Latvian consumers' wish to use chatbots have been found out.

1. A Chatbot and Possibilities to Use Them

The method of qualitative and quantitative research was used to achieve the objective of the research. In the study conducted by the authors, a survey of Internet users has been conducted with a participation of 385 Internet users, the residents of Latvia, of which 266 respondents (69,09%) answered that they have used a chatbot at least once. A random sample was taken. It is the opinion of these respondents that has been taken into account in the analysis of the results of the study, as these users know what a chatbot is and have an opinion on what kind of chatbot they wish to use.

An expert interview has been used as a qualitative research method, during which 7 Latvian digital marketing experts have been interviewed: Agris Magons, Edgars Koroņevskis, Elvijs Gulbis, Gundars Grāpis, Kristiāna Vuškāne, Kaspars Elcis, and Matīss Miezis. The experts have been chosen in accordance with their education and work experience.
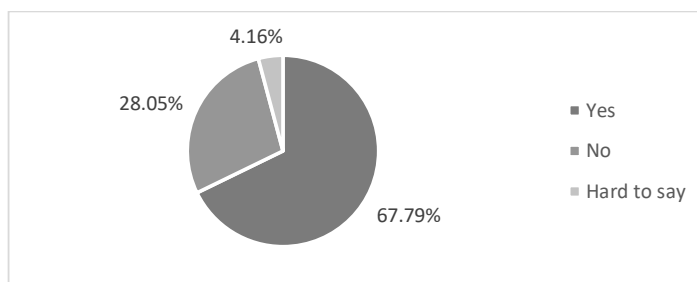
Source: author's construction based on survey, n = 385

Fig. 1. **Consumers' wish to use a chatbot in the future**

According to Fig. 1., the majority of respondents (67.79%) wish to use a chatbot in the future. 28.05% of respondents have answered "No", but 4.16% answered "Hard to say", which means that companies in Latvia have prospects to develop a digital marketing strategy with the help of chatbot.
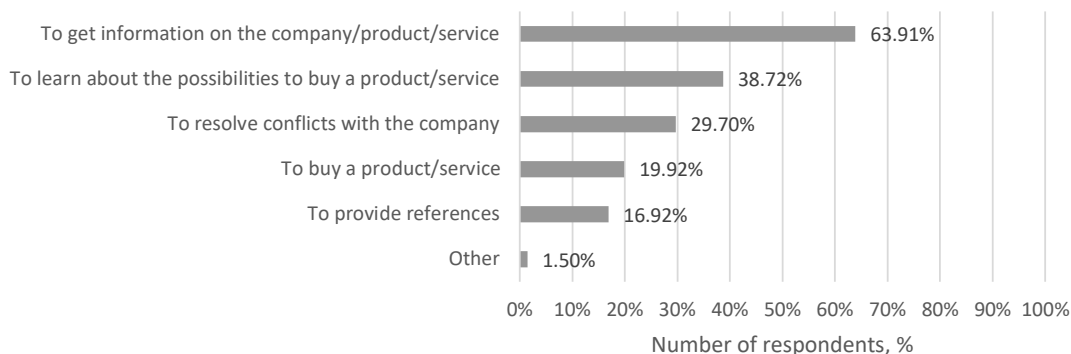
Source: author's construction based on survey, n = 266

Fig. 2. **Purposes for which Internet users wish to use chatbots**

Based on the data, generalized by the authors in Fig. 2., the majority of respondents (63.91%) wish to use a chatbot to get information on a company/product/service, and this corresponds to the stage of understanding the consumer's path. 38.72% have answered "To learn about the possibilities to buy a product/service", this corresponds to the stage of consideration at which the consumer wishes to obtain additional information on the product in order to assess which of the products to buy if there are several options, including comparison with the competitors. 29.70% have answered - "To resolve conflicts with the company", which corresponds to the servicing phase, when the consumer has already purchased the product. 19.92% have given the answer "To buy a product/service", which corresponds to the purchase phase of the consumers' path, where consumers would be able to buy a product/service through a chatbot. 16.92% of respondents have marked the option "To provide references", which corresponds to the advocacy phase, in which the consumer has bought a product/service, resolved conflicts or has been served and is ready to provide a feedback on its experience. 1.50% of respondents have marked the option "Other", specifying that they would like to use a chatbot for such purposes as learning how the chatbot works and contacting the company immediately, without waiting, or that it was the only way to communicate with the company.
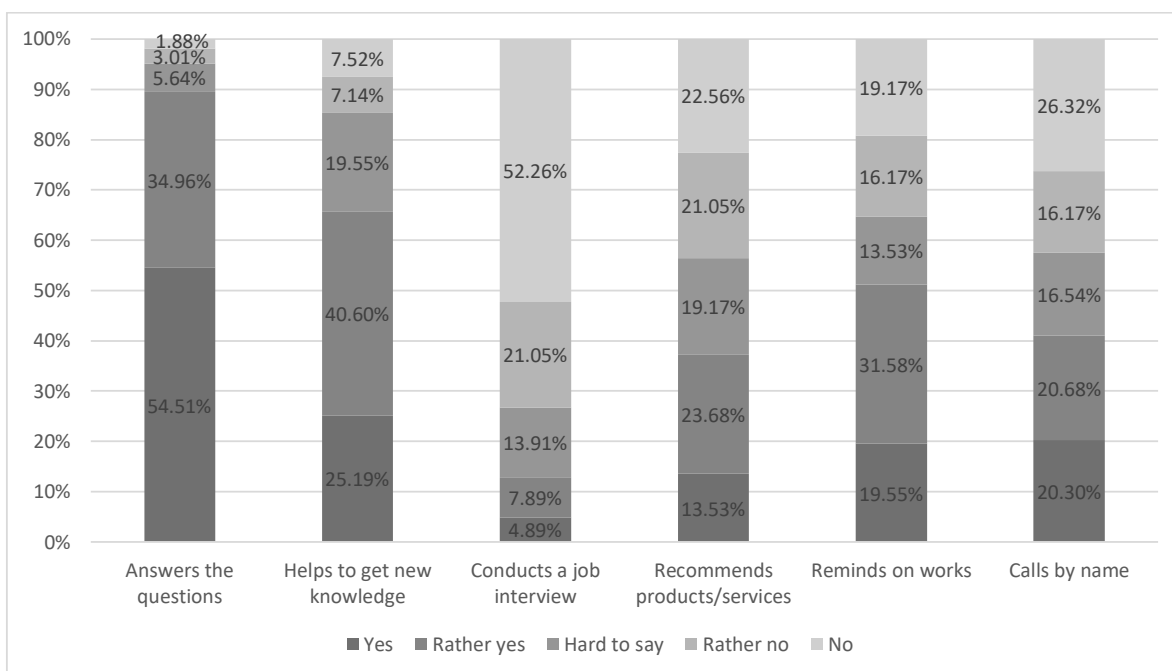
Source: author's construction based on survey, n = 266

Fig. 3. **Functions the users wish to use**

Finding out the functions that the users wish to use, as shown in Fig.3., the results have been obtained, showing that most of the respondents wish the chatbot to "Answer its questions". Answer "Yes" (54.51%) - wish to use the function. This means that companies can use chatbots in their digital marketing strategy to answer consumers' questions.

Most of the respondents (40.60%) answered "Rather yes" to the question whether they would like to use the function "Helps one to get new knowledge". 25.19% answered "Yes" - they would like the chatbot to help them to get new knowledge. Companies can use chatbots in a digital marketing strategy with the function to help to get new knowledge, thus offering added value to their audience or even building a business idea.

The majority of respondents (52.26%) answered that they did not want the chatbot to conduct a job interview. This means that a chatbot should not be used in personnel screening.

13.53% answered "Yes" stating they wish to use the "Recommends products/service" function. 23.68% answered "Rather yes". 19.17% of respondents found it hard to say. 21.05% - rather no. 22.56% of respondents would not want a chatbot to recommend products or services. Overall, 37.21% answered that they would like or rather would like to receive recommendations from a chatbot. 43.61% of respondents would not like or rather would not like to receive recommendations from a chatbot about products or services.

"Reminds me of the work to be done." 19.55% answered "Yes". 31.58% - "Rather yes". 13.53% - "Hard to say". 16.17% - "Rather no". 19.17% of respondents answered "No". In comparison, 51.13% answered that they would like or rather would like to receive reminders from the chatbot, and 35.34% would not like or rather would not like to receive reminders about the work to be done from the chatbot. Companies can include in their digital marketing strategy a chatbot that interacts with the user in the long run and reminds it of the work to be done.

20.30% answered "Yes" stating that they would like to use the function of the chatbot to call them by name. 20.68% - "Rather yes". 16.54% - "Hard to say" 16.17% answered "Rather no", 26.32% answered "No", which is the most common answer. Comparing the answers, 40.98% of respondents would like or rather would like the chatbot to call them by name, and 42.49% would not want or rather would not want such a function. The distribution of answers is very similar, which means that it would seem acceptable to some respondents that the chatbot knows the user's name and uses it in communication.

Based on the opinions of digital marketing experts, companies deploy chatbots to answer consumers' questions around the clock, to create a modern/innovative company image, to provide new and fast communication opportunities for customers, to facilitate work for employees, to automate sales promotion and to create more personal marketing information.

2.   Advantages and Disadvantages of Chatbots

Evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of chatbots, the authors have come to the conclusion that some experts believe that the advantages obtained by the company are also the same that motivate the company to introduce a chatbot. Other advantages of chatbots mentioned by experts are: round-the-clock availability, increased sales opportunity, increased competitiveness compared to competitors, cost reduction, time saved that can be used for other purposes, a qualitative customer service, and website optimization.

The factors that impede companies to introduce chatbots, mentioned by experts, include lack of knowledge and experience pertaining to the operation and application of this tool, technical barriers (unavailability of prototypes in Latvian language) to implementation and servicing, reluctance to change processes, as chatbots need to be trained and improved, as well as lack of resources (money, time and staff).
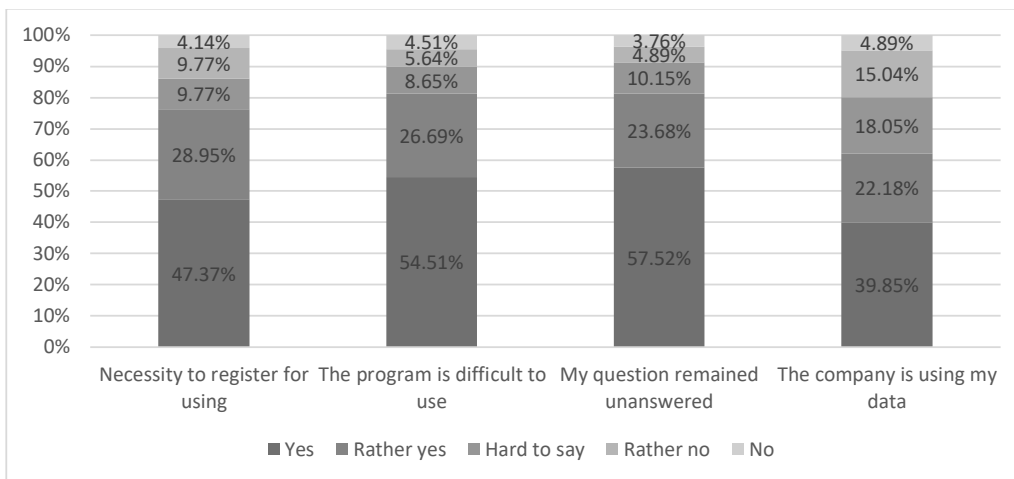
Fig. 4. **Disadvantages that would deter the user from using the chatbot**

It is significant to find out what arguments could deter the user from using the chatbot, as in the future, when developing this tool, it would enable to eliminate possible contradictions between the choice of the tool and the practical reaction of the user. As shown in Fig.4., 57.52% of respondents would be deterred from using a chatbot if "My question remained unanswered", so it is very important to invest in the development of a chatbot so that the chatbot is able to answer a large number of questions from the very beginning. 54.51% of respondents would be discouraged by the fact that "The program is difficult to use", which means that one should work on the interface so that the interaction with the chatbot is intuitive and easy for the user to understand, which would lead to a positive experience. 47.37% of users would not use the chatbot in case of "Necessity to register for using", which means that a chatbot should be set up to interact with the user without registration. 39.85% of users would not use a chatbot, knowing that "The company is using my data". The answers show that the shortcomings of chatbots would deter the user from using the chatbot.
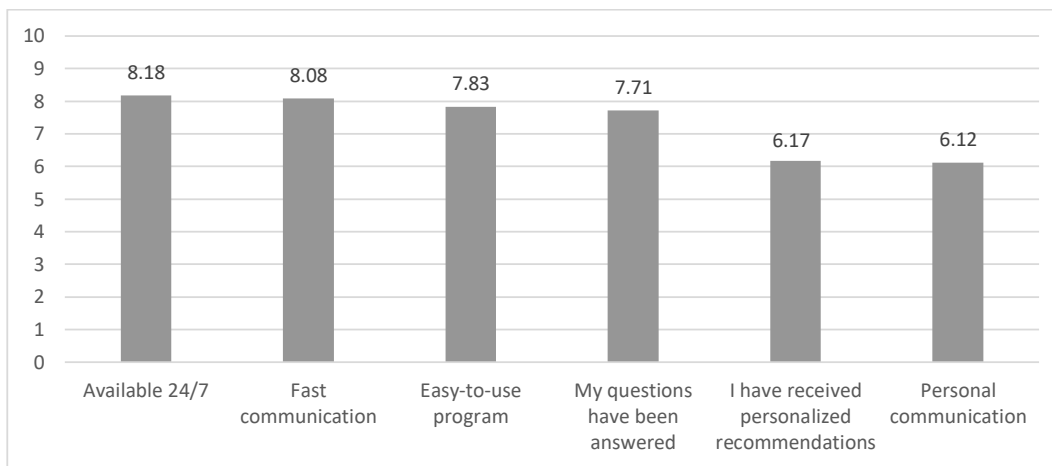
Fig. 5. **Respondents' assessment of the advantages of chatbots on a 10-point scale**

In the context of evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of chatbots, the authors of the article have obtained an overall assessment of the respondents about the advantages of chatbots. The advantage of chatbots "Available 24/7" has been rated the highest by consumers at 8.18/10. Consumers value the availability of a chatbot at any time, so companies can incorporate a chatbot into their digital marketing strategy to give the consumer a sense that the company is available at all times.

The advantage of "Fast communication" is rated 8.08/10. Respondents appreciate this feature, so the developer needs to ensure that the chatbot responds quickly.

"Easy-to-use program" has been rated 7.83/10. It is important for the respondents that the program is easy to use.

"My questions have been answered" has been rated 7.71/10. The assessment is relatively lower compared to the other benefits (available 24/7, fast communication, easy-to-use program), which means that it is less important for the respondents to get an answer than the availability of the chatbot, its ability to communicate quickly and being an easy-to-use program.

"I have received personalized recommendations" has been rated 6.17/10. The advantage of being able to receive personalized recommendations from a chatbot has a lower assessment, which means that it is less important for respondents than the ones mentioned above.

"Personal communication" has been rated 6.12/10. This advantage has the lowest assessment of all the mentioned advantages. The author concludes that some consumers do not wish to receive personal communication from chatbots.

3. Latvian Consumers' Wish to Use Chatbots

In the summary part of the study, the authors wished to find out how the will to use chatbots develops among Latvian consumers. In the context of the experts' answers, the authors conclude that consumers use chatbots because they are interested in trying them out to get accurate information quickly; consumers are willing to communicate in writing; and there has been a positive experience in the past. However, there are also factors that discourage consumers from using chatbots; according to experts, these are lack of information and experience, distrust, willingness to communicate with people, poor past experience, poorly designed interfaces; as well as some consumers are reluctant to use digital technologies in general.

This issue has been actualized also in terms of science. While the term chatbots typically is applied for text-based interaction, it may also encompass voice-based conversational agents (Følstad, Skjuve, Brandtzæg, 2018).
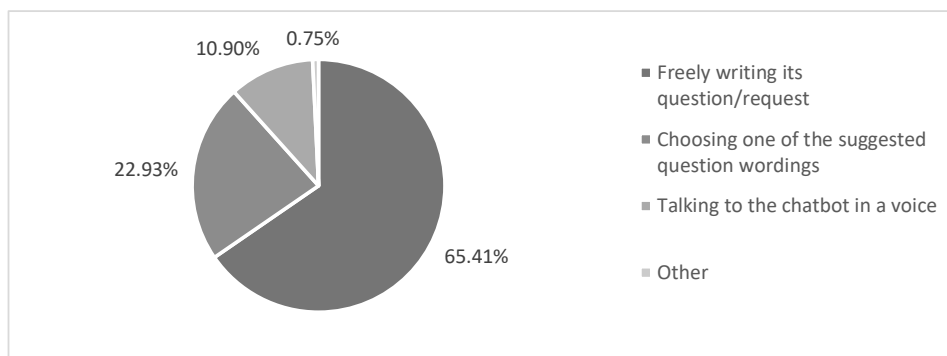
Source: author's construction based on survey, n = 266

Fig. 6. **Input form that respondents would like to use**

In turn, the quantitative research has revealed that the majority of respondents (65.41%) choose to contact the chatbot by freely writing their question/request. 22.93% of respondents would like to communicate by choosing one of the suggested wordings. 10.90% would like to talk to chatbot by voice. 0.75% of respondents have marked the option "Other", specifying that they would not like to contact a chatbot if there was such an opportunity. Fig. 6.
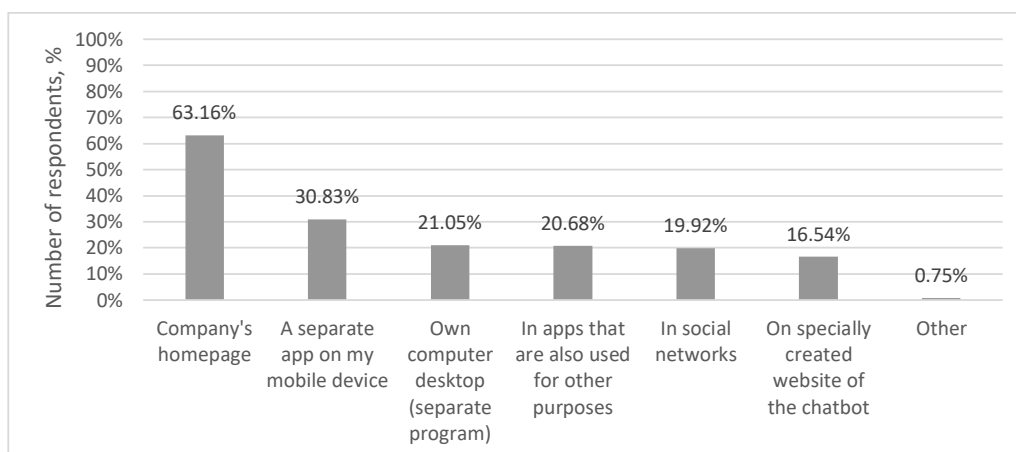
Source: author's construction based on survey, n = 266

Fig. 7. **Sites where respondents wish to use a chatbot**

By finding out on which sites the respondents would like to use chatbots, the authors have got the answers in percentage terms, where the homepages dominate. Fig. 7. It was possible to mark several answers in the question. 63.16% of respondents noted that they wish to use the chatbot

on the company's homepage, which is probably due to the fact that currently organizations in Latvia often integrate chatbots into the website and users are familiar with such a solution. 30.83% of respondents answered that they wish to use the chatbot in a separate application on their mobile device. 21.05% answered that they want to use the chatbot on their computer desktop as a separate program. 20.68% of respondents wish to use it in other apps on their mobile device that are also used for other purposes. 19.92% would like to use chatbots in social networks. 16.54% would use a separate website to contact a chatbot. 0.75% of the answers were "Elsewhere", where the respondents indicated that it did not matter to them where to use the chatbot.

Conclusions

1. A chatbot is a computer program that can interact with a person using voice or text methods and can be created with or without artificial intelligence. In digital marketing, a chatbot is a current tool that allows a company to attract and retain consumers, increase consumers' engagement, guide consumers through the consumer path, promote sales, improve the overall user experience, obtain data and enable consumers to communicate one-to-one with the company.

2. The study is the evidence that the majority of respondents (67.8%) will wish to use chatbots in the future. 63.9% of respondents would use it to find out information on the company/product/service that corresponds to the consumer path awareness stage or consumer path awareness stage.

3. In turn, a part (65.4%) of the respondents would communicate with the chatbot by freely writing their question/request freely, while 63.2% of the respondents would like the chatbot to be available for communication with the user on the company's homepage. An opinion has been expressed on the wish to use such chatbot functions as to receive answers to questions (54.7%) and a reminder about the work to be done (51.1%).

4. Based on the results of the survey, it has been concluded that respondents appreciate the following benefits of chatbots: available 24/7 (average 8.18 out of 10 points), fast communication (8.08/10), easy-to-use program and questions have been answered; such benefits as the ability to receive personalized recommendations and personal communication have got a lower assessment.

5. Chatbot is an important tool for developing a digital marketing strategy, as consumers wish to use it to communicate with the company, to gain added value and appreciate the benefits of chatbots, as well as the companies gain a number of benefits: creation of contact points, sales promotion, retention of consumers' attention and opportunities to build the company's image.

Proposals, Recommendations

1. Company managers and digital marketing professionals should assess the opportunity of introducing this hitherto little-used tool, the chatbot, as consumers will want to use the chatbot in the future, giving the company the opportunity to increase competitiveness, to reduce costs, to improve customer service, to be available around the clock, to increase sales , to obtain additional consumer data and build the image of an innovative company, as well as use it for other digital marketing purposes of the company.

2. Digital marketing specialists should create a chatbot on the company's homepage, because the consumers that have used the chatbot wish want to use it on the homepage, and thus the company provides the consumer with the opportunity to use the chatbot in the user's desired environment and to improve the consumer experience.

3. Chatbot developers and digital marketing specialists should provide the chatbot with a wide information from the very beginning, as the users are deterred from using the chatbot by not receiving answers to questions, and extensive information will ensure that consumers have a positive user experience.

4. Chatbot developers should create user-friendly interfaces, as the users would be deterred from using the chatbot in case of the need to register and in case this turns to be a difficult-to-use program. Understandable interfaces will encourage the consumer to repeatedly use the chatbot and create a positive user experience.

5. When creating a chatbot, the chatbot developer should ensure that it is available 24/7, that fast communication is possible, that the program is easy to use and that the user receives answers to its questions, as these benefits are important to users.

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